



Center for Urban History  
of East Central Europe

**Connecting (to) Histories: Engaging with the Urban Pasts and  
Displaying Jewish Heritage**

**8<sup>th</sup> Summer School  
July 10 – August 4, 2017**

**PROF. EUGENE M. AVRUTIN**

**SYLLABUS**

**"RUSSIAN JEWISH HISTORY"**

**LVIV 2017**

## Center for Urban History of East Central Europe

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### Russian Jewish History Syllabus

At the end of the eighteenth century the Russian Empire acquired the largest Jewish population in the world. Although Jews and Christians had lived side by side with one another for over three hundred years in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, their life-worlds were distinct. The Great War, the Russian Revolution, and the Holocaust radically transformed the Jews of Russia, however, and the distinct culture of Russian-Jewry remains a crucial part of Jewish heritage today. This course will make use of primary sources, scholarly essays, archival documents, literature, memoirs, and visual culture as a way of introducing students to modern Russian Jewish History, from the imperial period to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Special topics to be examined include: Jewish culture and history under the Tsars, the breakup of the Pale of Settlement during the Great War; the role of Jews in revolution and revolutionary culture; shtetl culture; antisemitism; everyday life; the purges of the 1930s; the Jewish experience in World War II; the Holocaust; and mass emigration.

#### 1. Imagining Russian Jewry

On the eve of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth comprised the largest Jewish population in the world. Jews lived in a highly heterogeneous society, among Poles, Germans, and Hungarians, yet they were different: in how they looked, in the language that they spoke, the religion that they practiced, and how they lived.

- Michael Stanislawski, “History of Jews in Russia,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.
- Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl, pp. 239-265

#### 2. Transformation and Integration

At the end of the eighteenth century, Russia acquired the largest Jewish population in the world with the three partitions of Poland. These policies can be best understood as a product of unresolved tensions between integration, on the one hand, and segregation, on the other, which persisted from the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796) to the Revolution of 1917.

- Eugene M. Avrutin, “The Politics of Jewish Legibility: Documentation Practices and Reform during the Reign of Nicholas I,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2005): 136-169.

- Sholem Aleichem, “Chava,” in Tevye the Dairyman

### 3. World War I and its Aftermath

After the outbreak of WWI, martial law granted state officials the right to deport civilian subjects from areas under military rule (a territory that covered large sections of the Pale of Settlement). All individuals who were deemed politically unreliable – Germans, Poles, and especially Jews – were subject to mass deportations. The wartime expulsions targeted all Jewish communities. As the mass emigration movement from the Pale of Settlement came to an end, tens of thousands of individuals took advantage of the temporary relaxation on Jewish residency rights and fled east.

- Nathaniel Deutsch, The Jewish Dark Continent (selections).

### 4. Becoming Soviet

What would culture be like under socialism? What was revolutionary culture? What was proletarian culture? The October Revolution made these once theoretical questions vitally important to a new order, faced with creating socialist consciousness in its citizens.

- Benjamin Harshav, Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative, selections

### 5. The Holocaust

The systematic, indiscriminate killing of entire Jewish populations that constitutes the defining feature of the Holocaust began and was carried out in each location at various points in the encounter and according to different scenarios. In late 1945, the Soviet leadership had reservations about emphasizing the special fate of Jews at the hands of the Nazis—testimony to a growing antisemitism from above. Attempts to underscore and document Jewish suffering were regarded as Jewish particularism.

- Vasily Grossman, A Writer at War: A Soviet Journalist with the Red Army, 1941-1945, pp. 247-61
- The Unknown Black Book (begin)

### 6. Postwar Reconstructions

Analysis of ethnic cleansing, renewed antisemitism, and renewed Jewish life in postwar period. Other topics to be discussed include the Jewish anti-Fascist Committee, the making of the Black Book, and the emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union.

- Omer Bartov, Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Life in Present-Day Galicia, pp. 3-41
- The Unknown Black Book (finish)