

A pathbreaker. Robert Conquest and Soviet Studies during the Cold War



The head of the Secret Police, Nikolai Ezhov (left) was awarded the Lenin Order in November 1937, at the height of the Great Purges. The nickel mines and the refinery plant in Norilsk, by the Arctic Ocean, were built by Gulag prisoners in the 1940s. The deposits are still among the richest in the world (top right). The industrial city Nizhnii Tagil in the Urals had several Gulag camps for new construction projects (bottom right).

THE BRITISH HISTORIAN Robert Conquest is without doubt among the most well-known and most often quoted specialists on Soviet history. His major works have been translated into dozens of languages. Since the 1960s, Conquest has written influential books on Stalin's terror against the party cadres and other groups in Soviet society in the late 1930s. Another book addressed the notorious Kolyma labor camps for gold production in the Soviet Far East. His monograph and documentary film on the 1932-33 famine in the Soviet Union had a deep impact in the 1980s on the public and politicians in Canada and the United States.¹

Several of his earlier works acquired a new and perhaps even more important role in Russia in the late 1980s. Under glasnost, Soviet publishing houses and television stations made his Stalin biographies and books on the

repression available for the first time to a wide, eager audience. The demand was great in Russia for Western accounts and new interpretations of Soviet history, which had been so falsified by Communist ideology and Party censorship.

Since the early 1990s, Conquest has been on the editorial board of several major research projects on Soviet history and an eager participant in the scholarly periodicals dealing with the changing research conditions in contemporary Russian history. Conquest is still an active scholar at the Hoover Institution for War, Peace and Revolution, and is writing an autobiography, and a book of poems.

For his 90th birthday, colleagues contributed articles to a *Festschrift* devoted to "The Poet, Writer, and Historian – A Man of Durable Accomplishments". These essays honoring Conquest all concern themes that have been central to his research fields, including state terror, ideological control of sciences, public opinion, and the wider issue of the responsibility of intellectuals in the modern world. In his introduction, Paul Hollander emphasizes, using concrete examples, the themes where Robert Conquest's scholarship was truly path-breaking. He also discusses the reper-

cussions of the research: the possible connections between the analyses of Communism and other ideologies that have spurred and legitimated the use of violence.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, "Soviet Communism", contains articles by Joshua Rubinstein, Norman Naimark, Stephen Cohen, Mark Kramer, John B. Dunlop, and Lee Edwards. In the second part, "Comparative Perspectives", we find articles on Mao's China, Castro's Cuba, Latin America, postcolonial Africa, and the use of research results from Soviet studies in explaining political Islamism. In each of these articles, there are explicit references to Conquest's books.

THE FESTSCHRIFT CONCLUDES with a biography and a short list of Conquest's many publications, mainly monographs, that have come out since the late 1950s. There are likely not many

Paul Hollander (ed.)
Political Violence:
Belief, Behavior, and
Legitimation

Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2008. 272 pages.



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Associate professor of economic history at the Stockholm School of Economics. His current research concerns the "atomic cities" in Russia during the Cold War. His monograph *Tankograd* (in Swedish, Stockholm 2007) on the formation of Cheliabinsk as a typical "Soviet company town" in the Urals will be published by Palgrave Macmillan, London and by Rosspen, Moscow. Together with Professor Vladimir Khaustov, he has recently concluded a basic research project: *Stalin, NKVD i represii, 1936-1938* (Moscow 2008), on the role of Stalin in the launching of the mass terror campaigns in the late 1930s. The English translation of this book will be published by Yale University Press in 2010.

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Soviet specialists who are familiar with Conquest's poetry and translations from Russian of poets such as Boris Pasternak and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Conquest has also written political pamphlets such as the following: *Where Do Marxists Go from Here?* (1958), *Where Marx Went Wrong* (1970), and *What to Do When the Russians Come: A Survivor's Guide* (1984).

Here, I shall discuss some matters that relate to the fields of Soviet research that are presented in the section "Soviet Communism". First, how did Robert Conquest make his own, particular career in the Sovietological establishment?

Second, what can we learn about the overall conditions of research into the Soviet period in Russia's history during the Cold War in the West? Third, which of Conquest's contributions to Soviet history are of lasting value, and which can be characterized as obsolete and out-dated in the new century?

Robert Conquest was born in 1917. In the 1930s, he studied at the universities in Grenoble and Oxford. As a member of the Communist Party group at Oxford, he traveled to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1937. He visited Leningrad, Moscow, and Odessa. At that time, he did not understand what was going on behind the façade of the propaganda machine. However, a few years later, he left the Communist Party. As an officer in the British army in the immediate postwar period, Conquest saw the Sovietization process in Eastern Europe, and this experience made him decidedly anti-communist.² Conquest never visited the Soviet Union between 1937 and its final year of existence, 1990, when the Communist regime was collapsing. It is not known whether he was a persona non grata who had been denied a visa, or whether his not having traveled there was a matter of his own choice.

IN THE LATE 1940S, Conquest started as an analyst at the Information Research Department (IRD). This organization was linked to the British Foreign Office. It had been set up to counter the growing communist propaganda that influenced Western public opinion to an alarming degree since the last years of the Second World War. The IRD

was linked both to the Foreign Office and to British embassies in order to provide exclusive information on events in the USSR and Eastern Europe. These facts were analyzed by IRD personnel and sometimes distributed within the ministry and the diplomatic corps of the United Kingdom. The IRD also prepared



Robert Conquest.

information materials for the BBC radio programs that were broadcasted within England, as well as to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in these countries' native languages.

Research on the IRD is hampered by the fact that its archives at the Public Records Office (PRO) in Kew have a declassification limit of at least 50 years. In other words, only the main outlines of IRD activities until the early 1950s are known from available documents, and the rest of our knowledge about the IRD must be inferred from interviews with

former collaborators.

Conquest wrote, for example, a memorandum on the show trials in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, addressing the intriguing question of what it was that made the defendants confess to all the accusations. His articles were circulated within the Foreign Office and commented upon within the East European and Soviet Russian departments of the ministry. Of course, this question was also hotly debated in the open press in Western Europe at the time. Not until the first survivors of the Slansky affair in Czechoslovakia were allowed to publish their memoirs in 1968 was it possible to get confirmation on some of the guesswork that had been done earlier on the nature of the Stalinist interrogation methods and show trials.

AN EVEN LESS WELL-KNOWN side of the IRD, and of Conquest's career, concerns the preparation of informational material for the press and other mass media in the West. In the early 1950s, Gunnar Heckscher, professor of political science at Uppsala University and later leader of the Swedish Conservative Party, visited the IRD on behalf of the Swedish Parliament, which had decided to set up a similar agency for civil defense and psychological warfare. Heckscher's visit was official yet very secretive, and little is known about additional connections that might exist between the two agencies. The British authorities were very well aware of the fact that Swedish newspapers need not be dependent on their IRD materials, but would probably not refuse to consider the kind of memoranda and secret press releases that its embassy personnel could distribute to trusted journalists in the NATO countries and the Commonwealth.

In 1947-1949, to take but one example, the IRD started to collect materials on the issue of forced labor in Stalin's Russia. Officially, it was for a debate at the United Nations on a resolution to prohibit the use of forced labor. Internally however, there was no doubt that the "slave labor in Russia" issue had a profound impact on public opinion in the West, particularly on Labour Party sympathizers. The IRD therefore

discussed not so much what was actually known or thought probable about the existing camp system in the Soviet Union. What was essential was to purvey information to important groups in Western Europe about a matter "where the Soviets have no good answer".

Jointly with their American colleagues, who were also engaged in political and psychological warfare, the IRD decided to publish pamphlets and prepare news articles and bulletins on the forced labor camps. It had been decided that no more than one or two names of Soviet camps should be hammered into the mind of the public, until these names were as clearly linked with Communist terror as the names "Auschwitz" and "Treblinka" were linked with Nazism. The Soviet camps chosen for the purpose was Karaganda and Vorkuta. Later, Kolyma in the Soviet Far East was added.

In this exclusive "think tank", Robert Conquest did not simply receive his training as a major specialist in Soviet affairs. In frank interviews, he would later admit that many other topics he wrote on in the 1960s and 1970s had actually been fairly thoroughly prepared earlier, during the IRD period. However, there is one point that we should emphasize, one that is important in assessing the lasting contributions made by Conquest and other forerunners in modern Soviet history. In contrast to academic think tanks, the IRD was also engaged in manipulating public opinion. Having learned the lessons of psychological warfare in the fight against Nazi propaganda, the British seldom distorted the facts or lied outright. However, in the Cold War period it was decided to support the most somber "class analysis" of Soviet society possible. In this version, the terror machine – which no serious observer denied existed – was presented as having condemned millions of prisoners to the Gulag camps every year. The terror campaigns in the 1930s were described in such a way that it appeared as if at least five, and possibly eight million persons had been arrested in a single year, the "year of the great purges, 1937". At the bottom of Stalin's society, some 10-14 million slaves dwelled under horrible conditions, condemned to premature deaths.

Informed military intelligence materials in the United States army and the recently created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), of course, had quite dif-

ferent data on the proportions of the terror and the camp system, but its information was reserved for a privileged few in government. The same is evidently true of the information levels in NATO countries in general. However, the image of the Stalinist terror system geared towards public opinion continued to make its more or less distorted appearance in the works that Conquest later published, notably in *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge in the 1930s* and in *Kolyma – The Arctic Death Camps*.

It is a remarkable figura umolchaniya, as Russian historians used to say – an intentional silencing – that none of the contributions to the essays in honor of Conquest delves into this IRD background and its effects on Soviet studies. Nor is this important aspect of Conquest's background sufficiently clarified in an excellent biographical article and in a research survey written by the Swedish historian Klas-Göran Karlsson for the Living History Forum by the Swedish Ministry of Culture.³ It is nevertheless vital to an evaluation of Conquest's contributions to Soviet history. Conquest himself has recognized the importance of the factual materials gathered by his associates and himself at the IRD, until his departure in 1957, for his later, more academic works on these topics.

Mark Kramer makes a most interesting comparison of Conquest's book *Power and Policy in the USSR: A Study of Soviet Dynamics* from 1961 with his own detailed analysis of the power struggle in the Kremlin after Stalin's death. Kramer has scrutinized recently published documents from the Presidential Archive and other Russian depositories relating to the arrest and prosecution of Lavrentii Beria. Kramer concludes that despite the lack of these kinds of primary sources, Conquest managed a fairly sound presentation of the main traits in the post-Stalin leadership. However, Kramer could have reached even more interesting historiographical conclusions if he had compared recent data with materials from the British Foreign Office and intelligence community of the mid-1950s. Obviously, even in this early book, Conquest to a large extent based his presentation on materials from the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office.

STEPHEN COHEN'S ESSAY "The Victims Return: Gulag Survivors under Khrush-

chev" provides an interesting background to the question of how former Gulag prisoners were assimilated into society when they returned from the camps, how the rehabilitation process in the 1950s focused on various segments of the prison population, and the piecemeal nature of attempts to reconstruct the fates of these people. Already as a student, Cohen had met Conquest in 1965, and at that time mentioned that it would be worthwhile to study the question of how many of these returnees from the Gulag managed to re-start their careers, and how they lived their lives. Cohen was a Ph.D. student, with Robert Tucker at Princeton as his advisor, and would some years later publish his classic biography of the Bolshevik theoretician and economist Nikolai Bukharin, who was sentenced to death in the last Moscow show trial in 1938.

The publication of his biography led to a deep and trusting relationship with Bukharin's widow and son. His contacts with other intellectuals and artists in Moscow resulted in many witnesses from the Stalin years coming forward. Stephen Cohen collected the stories of these witnesses for an article which, however, remained unpublished for many years. He has shared his interview material with the American historian Nanci Adler, who, in the late 1990s, enjoyed an entirely different situation when she did archival research on the broad theme of the return of prisoners from the Gulag. Cohen himself updated his article and rewrote it as an essay that was published in Russian (*Dolgoe vozvrashchenie. Zherty GULAGa posle Stalina* [The Long Return: The Fate of Gulag Prisoners after Stalin], Moscow 2008).

WE CAN ALSO NOTE that, in the 1960s, Robert Conquest and Stephen Cohen only had access to the official protocols from the Moscow trials, and to the propagandistic materials from *Pravda*, with minor additions from "the rumor mill". Since the time when they wrote on the Great Terror, conditions have changed fundamentally. Cohen has been allowed to do research in the former KGB archives, read the interrogation protocols from 1937, and also to publish all the prison notebooks that Bukharin filled with essays, philosophical articles, and an autobiography (*Uzник Lubianki. Tiuremnye rukopisi Nikolaia Bukharina* [The Prisoner at Lubianka. The Prison Manuscripts of Nikolai Bukharin], Moscow 2008). It goes without saying that these new documents have called for substantial alterations of the interpretations found in Conquest's *The Great Terror* and Cohen's *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*.

Joshua Rubinstein contributes an illuminating survey of how Conquest's *The Great Terror* was received in the late 1960s by reviewers writing in the prominent scholarly journals and leading intellectual publications. All reviewers were of the opinion that Conquest's book was a major contribution in updating existing knowledge in the West with what had become public knowledge thanks to articles in the Soviet press after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. However, critical voices such as that of historian David Joravsky and economist Alexander Gershenkron remarked that Conquest failed to explain the specific na-



ture of Stalin's dictatorship – compared to other tyrants in history. The dilemma for Conquest – as for any scholar who wants to explain the state terror and mass repression campaigns in the USSR in the 1930s – is how to separate the analyses of the system (Communist Party monopoly, ideological orthodoxy, and other phenomena) from the personal factor (Stalin's "evilness", possible paranoia, and other character traits).

In his book, Conquest described the functioning of the Party and also devoted a whole chapter to Stalin's personality. Many reviewers at the time were not impressed by his way of writing about the Great Terror, which was in the tradition of "great men who make history". Reviewers remarked that Conquest had devoted some 500 of the book's 600 pages to the quantitatively less important purges of the Communist Party cadres. Given that Conquest himself, in 1968, estimated that no fewer than 7-8 million people had been arrested during the Great Terror of

In 1936, NKVD chief Yagoda (top, far left) shows the Moscow-Volga Canal to Politburo members Voroshilov, Molotov and Mezhlauk. A year later, Yagoda was in prison and Yezhov (bottom, far left) greets the masses from the Lenin Mausoleum. Mezhlauk (second from left) was executed in 1938 – so his face on this archive photo was erased!

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1937-1938, it is testimony to the paucity of sources on common men and women that practically nothing substantial was known on them before the opening of the archives. This, of course, was not Conquest's fault, but the result of the unfortunate conditions under which he had to conduct his research. Furthermore, he had to counter unfounded accusations in the 1970s that his purpose was merely political and "anti-Soviet". At a conference on Communist regimes organized in June 2000 by the Swedish Research Council, Conquest mentioned that given all the new empirical evidence that has been made available, he wished that he could completely rewrite *The Great Terror*, the revised edition of which had come ten years too early in 1990. This was not to be, but in the foreword to his "40th Anniversary Edition" of *The Great Terror*, Conquest quite clearly sums up how much our understanding of Stalinism has changed since 1992. Conquest points to how he, in the old days, daringly but hesitantly used to quote from Soviet defectors, and that some of them did indeed turn out to be unreliable.

Rubinstein also notes the review of Conquest's book by the renowned British economist Alec Nove, then director of the prestigious research center at Glasgow University. Nove considered *The Great Terror* to be a major contribution on an important historical theme. However, Nove was equally skeptical over the way that Conquest ironically described how the left-wing intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s had praised the conditions in Stalin's Russia. The lack of a clear understanding among Western intellectuals of the nature of the Stalinist dictatorship has been a constant theme in the literature. Nove merely alluded to the fact that Conquest himself had been duped in the 1930s by the Soviet façades. It is a remarkable fact that not just Conquest, but also several other Soviet specialists have repeatedly insisted on repentance from these "fellow travelers". No similar regrets are shown for all those publicists and writers who, on the other end of the political scale, intentionally distorted the Soviet realities in their writings. With some hesitation, Nove, in 1969, resumed "the debate on the guilt of the Left":

**They were indeed wrong.
But the anti-Soviet Right was**

wrong too, and, paradoxically, for a similar reason. Both thought that Russia was a worker's state; the Left thought this was good and the Right was against it. Few saw what was really happening.

Nove was more critical than most reviewers of Conquest's lumping together of all different kinds of repression. It is necessary, Nove argued, to separate the hard, forced labor camps for political and criminal prisoners from labor colonies for petty thieves and minor criminals. Nove also underlined the wide differences between the labor settlements for exiled kulaks and deported people. As several economists had done before him, Nove completely refuted Conquest's attempts to estimate the number of prisoners in the Gulag, and showed Conquest's results to be unrealistic and faulty. We know that the IRD and American Cold War think tanks had arrived at a figure of 12-14 million prisoners in the Gulag as the number to use in propaganda. The economists thought that, at most, 3-4 million Soviet citizens might have been incarcerated. When the archives finally opened in 1992, the calculations made within the Western intelligence community in the 1950s, and by economic historians such as Naum Jasny and Alec Nove, turned out to correspond fairly well with Soviet realities in Stalin's time. What remains to be researched is no longer the actual extent of the Gulag, but the shaping of Western perceptions of the communist superpower.

NORMAN NAIMARK'S ESSAY "Stalin and the Question of Soviet Genocide" addressed books by Conquest which dealt with the question as to whether the Great Terror in the 1930s, the so-called "terror-famine in 1932-1933" or other repressive measure, could rightly be termed "genocide". Naimark's essay does not advance the discussion of this matter, which has been going on for many years. In brief: all specialists on international law seem to agree that "genocide", as defined by the United Nations' convention, is not strictly applicable to the aforementioned phenomena, nor to other aspects of Soviet terror. It can then of course be argued that certain original proposals to the UN Convention included more, broader categories, but that the Soviet delegates blocked them, thus perverting the definition. Be that as it may be, Naimark gives some background to the preparatory work on the convention that supports this version of the preparations for the genocide convention. However, scholars like Stephan Courtois in *The Black Book of Communism*, Andrea Graziosi, and Nicolas Werth in recent articles on the famine in the Ukraine in 1933, all have to apply their own definition of "genocide" as something different from that found in the Convention. In his essay, Naimark adds another personal definition to the plethora of meanings already in existence for the "genocide" concept. Needless to say, these scholastic debates hardly deepen our knowledge of the Soviet Union's recent past.

ON THE ONE HAND, these scholars seem to ignore the

existence of side-current in Soviet studies in which the term "genocide" has been applied to many aspects of Stalin's policy. As early as the 1950s, the well-known defector Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov, writing under the pseudonym Uralov, published "Narodoubijstvo v SSSR" – "The Genocide in the USSR" (Munich 1952). At many research institutes in Western Europe the genocide concept was reformulated to include such phenomena as "cultural genocide" and "social genocide".

In the 1970s and 1980s, Conquest spurred many intense debates in the scholarly community by the books on the forced labor camps in the gold fields in Kolyma, on the so-called Terror-Famine in the Ukraine in 1932-1933, and on the presumed murder, on orders from Stalin himself of Leningrad's party chief, Sergei Kirov, in December 1934. The first book was based on a plethora of memoirs and collected oral histories from former prisoners. However, Conquest also tried to calculate the extent of the Kolyma gold production and the number of prisoners who had died during the camps' existence. Using dubious methods, such as multiplying known number of ships (from *Jane's International Register*), the ships' tonnage and assumed number of prisoners on every ship, Conquest arrived at a figure of over three million prisoners sent to Kolyma in the period 1930-19< – and asserted that almost all of them died there. Research done in the 1990s by Russian historians has documented that for the whole period of the camps' existence slightly over 800,000 prisoners arrived in Kolyma. The death toll was frightfully high, especially in the war years, but there were nonetheless not more than circa 130,000 premature deaths among the camp internees. In other words, Kolyma was the most frightful of camps in the Gulag system, but it was not as described in Conquest's book: an extermination camp of the same type as several of the Nazi German labor camps.

WITH HIS BOOK on the famine of 1932-1933, *Harvest of Sorrow*, Conquest stimulated a number of research projects both in Russia as well as in Great Britain and the United States. Some of his theses have been refuted by new evidence, notably on the role of Stalin and the Communist Party leadership's role in intentionally causing mass starvation. It was not clear, as he had argued in the

book, that a distribution of the state grain reserves could have saved as many people from starvation as he calculated. It also turned out that help was actually being distributed fairly early to starving communities in 1933. Conquest himself did not explicitly argue that Stalin had planned genocide against the Ukrainian peasantry. However, interest groups in Canada and the USA used his data to promote this interpretation of events in 1933 Ukraine, and even held official memorial ceremonies of this genocide. In later debates with the British historians Robert W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, Conquest explicitly, in writing, denied that he ever regarded the 1932-1933 events in the Ukraine as premeditated “genocide”.

On the whole, the plethora of evidence on the 1932-1933 famine in the Soviet Union has now widened to such an extent that it is possible to sort out the better from the less reliable testimonies collected in Conquest’s book. The theme itself still has, no doubt, a high degree of relevance, since the Ukrainian political leadership has decided to legally formulate a certain interpretation of events, and to make it illegal to pronounce other interpretations in the Ukrainian republic.

TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, Robert Conquest and a whole cohort of Soviet specialists in Great Britain and the United States were themselves unwitting victims of the propaganda image of the Soviet Union that they had created in the early Cold War period. The perceived threat of further communist advances into Europe and Asia called forth an enormous information flow, directed both at the “captive peoples” under communist regimes and at their own citizens in the West. The dominant description of the Stalinist era showed 5-10 million peasants as victims of collectivization in 1930-1931 alone, followed by the famine in 1932-1933 and the Great Terror wave in 1937, all adding up to such astronomical figures that a rational analysis of the components could be dismissed as “Gulag-denying” just as horrendous “Holocaust-denying”. The Soviet police state’s attitude to and handling of the Stalin question in the 1970s continued to provide support for the dominant perspective on Soviet communism. Too much credence was then given to testimonies and assessments by the “dissidents”, the lucky few Soviet citizens

who dared to voice independent views on social questions and on history, or the exiled writers who were free to publish as they wished in the West.

The early Cold War descriptions evolved and took on a more sophisticated form with time. But even in the mid-1980s, most textbooks on Soviet history used at American universities were impregnated with clichés from Cold War propaganda. As a further consequence of the Cold War conditions of studies of the USSR, many of the agendas for research into the former Soviet Union that were formulated in the 1990s by Western scholars reflected their prejudiced images. We have had to wait another decade for a true, scholarly, more dispassionate attitude towards the grim historical realities that were indeed hidden for all, behind the Iron Curtain.

lennart samuelson

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- 2 Compare the introduction by Robert Conquest to Gwyneth Hughes & Simon Welfare, *Red Empire: The Forbidden History of the USSR*, London 1990, p 7-15, and his recollections in various episodes of the documentary film by the same name.
- 3 Klas-Göran Karlsson, “Robert Conquest. Den sovjetkommunistiska statsterrorns uttolkare” [Robert Conquest: The Interpreter of Soviet-Communist State Terror] in *I historiens skruvstäd* [In the Vice of Historia], Lennart Berntsson & Svante Nordin (eds.), Stockholm 2008, pp. 109-133; Klas-Göran Karlsson & Michael Schoenhals, *Brott mot mänskligheten under kommunistiska regimer: Forskningsöversikt* [Crimes against Humanity under Communist Regimes: A Research Overview], Stockholm 2008, p 22-27.

A sense of moral superiority. Russian intellectuals

**Laurie Manchester
Holy Fathers, Secular
Sons. Clergy,
Intelligentsia and
the Modern Self in
Revolutionary Russia.**

Northern Illinois University
Press 2008. 288 pages.



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THE RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTIA emerged historically as an outcome of the paradoxes of modernization. The *intelligenty* were “the offspring of the Petrine service nobility imbued with Western education and cultural values and dedicated to the service of the community’s welfare”, Marc Raeff claimed.¹ According to Raeff, they had no possibilities of expressing themselves freely and playing an active role in society, which turned them against the state that had created them. This highly regarded theory has been challenged – or rather broadened – by Laurie Manchester, an Arizona State University professor, in her latest book. In this work, the problem of the intelligentsia is seen from an entirely new perspective. The focal point is the emergence of the “modern self”, and Manchester takes *popovichi*, secular sons of the Orthodox priests, as role models of “self-made” modern men.

Manchester’s work is extremely interesting not only for the new definition of the intelligentsia offered, but also for the insights she gives into the closed clerical estate, and for her presentation of its little-known cultural heritage. The study itself is based on the personal writings of *popovichi*: autobiographies, unpublished diaries, correspondence with their families, even suicide notes. The scope of the research is quite impressive – Manchester analyzed the personal writings of 203 *popovichi* that were scattered across various Russian archives.

IN THE FIRST CHAPTER of the book, Manchester deconstructs myths and prejudices concerning the clergy and their offspring. The hostility toward them was reinforced by the closed character of their social estate. Most of the prejudices had to do with their alleged ignorance, depravity, greed, and drunkenness. The lack of knowledge about the clergy was an underlying cause of the tendency to turn them into the “proximate other”, argues Manchester. In contrast to reigning popular opinion, shared by Herzen and other famous Russian intellectuals of noble origin, Manchester depicts the clergy as the only social estate in Imperial Russia that enjoyed independent courts, as well as its own institutions and educational system.

The clergy’s view of other social