

(Mobile pdf) Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path

Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path

Laura Engelstein

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Laura Engelstein : Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path:

Twentieth-century Russia, in all its political incarnations, lacked the basic features of the Western liberal model: the rule of law, civil society, and an uncensored public sphere. In Slavophile Empire, the leading historian Laura

Engelstein pays particular attention to the Slavophiles and their heirs, whose aversion to the secular individualism of the West and embrace of an idealized version of the native past established a pattern of thinking that had an enduring impact on Russian political life. Imperial Russia did not lack for partisans of Western-style liberalism, but they were outnumbered, to the right and to the left, by those who favored illiberal options. In the book's rigorously argued chapters, Engelstein asks how Russia's identity as a cultural nation at the core of an imperial state came to be defined in terms of this antiliberal consensus. She examines debates on religion and secularism, on the role of culture and the law under a traditional regime presiding over a modernizing society, on the status of the empire's ethnic peripheries, and on the spirit needed to mobilize a multinational empire in times of war. These debates, she argues, did not predetermine the kind of system that emerged after 1917, but they foreshadowed elements of a political culture that are still in evidence today.

"These concise and lucid essays by Laura Engelstein reveal the complex and straitened political culture of moderate and conservative Russia in the century before the 1917 revolution. Engelstein provides a compelling analysis of the futile quests of liberals and conservative thinkers and artists to find a basis for a viable Russian national identity either in civic ideals or in Orthodox religion while facing an unyielding autocracy and an increasingly intransigent revolutionary movement." Richard Wortman, Columbia University

"The tensions between nationalistic aspirations and imperial status and self perception in many ways defined Russia's search for identity for nearly two centuries and have not lost their relevance until the present day. In her fascinating book Laura Engelstein offers an erudite and sophisticated analysis of the dynamics of these tensions in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian culture from legal consciousness to religious thought and art criticism. I am sure that Slavophile Empire will become required reading for anyone interested in Russian cultural and intellectual history." Andrei Zorin, Professor of Russian, University of Oxford

"Slavophile Empire has a clear logic and coherence: the divisions of law, religion, and art all revolve around the central question of identity and relationship to the 'West.' I found the chapters on Slavophiles and art especially stimulating and original." Gregory Freeze, Victor and Gwendolyn Beinfield Professor of History, Brandeis University, author of *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia*

"Laura Engelstein's writing is always thoughtful and instructive. The essays in Slavophile Empire are a pleasure to read. They illuminate the battle that Russian thinkers and artists waged with one another and with the government to define the terms of Russia's encounter with modernity and indeed to define what it meant to be Russian in a modern world whose categories of thought derived primarily from Europe." David L. Ransel, Robert F. Byrnes Professor of History and Director of the Russian and East European Institute at Indiana University, Bloomington, author of *A Russian Merchant's Tale: The Life and Adventures of Ivan Alekseevich Tolchnov, Based on His Diary*

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About the Author Laura Engelstein is Henry S. McNeil Professor of Russian History at Yale University. She is the author of *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale*, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Sicle Russia*, both from Cornell, and *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict*. She is coeditor of *Self and Story in Russian History*, also from Cornell.