CULTURES IN FLUX
LOWER-CLASS VALUES, PRACTICES, AND RESISTANCE IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

Edited by Stephen P. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg
CONFRONTING THE DOMESTIC OTHER:
RURAL POPULAR CULTURE AND ITS ENEMIES IN FIN-DE-SIECLE RUSSIA

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IN AN 1889 REPORT on his field studies of Sarapu'l'skii district, Viarka province, the Russian ethnographer P. M. Bogaevsky noted that peasants who spent time working in cities served as pioneers of urban culture upon returning to their villages. Unfortunately, he added, repeating with dismay an already widespread observation, the rural population had interpreted this culture in the most undesirable manner, thereby allowing it to destroy ancient precepts and customs. Young peasants in particular now regarded with disdain the centuries-old traditions of their grandparents—traditions that had given the Russian peasantry its special form of communal life and shaped its worldview. In light of these developments, Bogaevsky perceived them, "the most cheerless picture emerges" of the Russian countryside. The family principle "weakens more and more with each passing year," leading to a noticeable decline of morals, diminishing respect toward elders, and the replacement of a native worldview by one alien to the peasantry. 1

Bogaevsky was but one among a growing number of educated Russians who, during the 1870s and 1880s, came to believe that the foundations (ustot) of peasant life were crumbling. In consequence, a dangerous cultural and moral vacuum had emerged, which, because "new foundations have not yet been created ... or molded into definite forms," threatened even greater corruption and deterioration of traditional vil-

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2 Markovskii, "Narodnaya shkola i derevenskaya molodezh," Narodnyy uchitel' 6, no. 6 (1911): 3. This view of a vacuum following the breakdown of "traditional" societies was especially popular among European social reformers, and it has been accepted by several historians of popular culture. See, e.g., R. W. Malcolmson, Popular Reckonings in English Society, 1780–1850 (London, 1973). For a contrasting view, see J. M. Galby and A. W. Purdie, The Construction of the Crowd (New York, 1984), 26–27.


5 "P'e'ma iz Lashevskogo uezda," Volzhskii vestnik, no. 235 (1901): 4–5; "P'yanyi terror v derev'ny," Trezzora zhizni, no. 11 (1910): 430; "K voprosu o prinichakh khuliganstva v derev'ne i bor'be s nim," Sel'skii vestnik, no. 91 (1913): 2; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (hereafter RGIA; formerly TsGIA), f. 1405, op. 532, d. 439.
This article examines the ways in which Russia’s educated public, clergy, and government perceived and responded to what they saw as a growing social and moral crisis that, by the first decades of the twentieth century, appeared capable of plunging the countryside into complete disorder, lawlessness, and decay. 6 I have focused on one prominent symbol of this crisis—leisure and its associated festivities. For here popular practices forcefully entered the world of educated society, where they not only intertwined and clashed with “higher” culture, but also influenced elite thinking and helped to shape an evolving public discourse over the condition of the lower classes and the most effective path to social reform. Itself the product of recent socioeconomic change, popular leisure became, during the 1890s, a complex and dynamic cultural arena in which educated Russians formulated notions of lower-class degeneration as a fundamental source of national crisis and subsequently sought to impose their own models of enlightenment, respectability, and moral improvement on the benighted masses. 7 In effect, they hoped to colonize the countryside using culture as their primary agent. Since it was thought to be irreparably corrupted and increasingly devoid of traditional modes of civility and deference, rural popular culture came under renewed assault in this period precisely because it conflicted so sharply with the new, Victorian sensibilities of an emerging but insecure bourgeois culture. Peasant festivity, in particular, seemed to express most clearly the terrible darkness besetting country dwellers and the nation. Through the prism of elite perception, it thus served as a symbolic representation of the primitiveness and savagery of peasant life and a stark depiction of rural disorder and degeneracy, reminding Russia’s middle and professional classes how tenuous the foundations of their “civilization” would remain until it took firm root among the peasantry. 8


7 However unconscious its application, an often simplified form of degeneration theory could be found in the ideologies of virtually all social-reform campaigns in late imperial Russia, the numerous publications of which are replete with images traceable to B. A. Morel’s Traité des dégénérescences (Paris, 1857) and subsequent elaborations on his work.

8 Cultural insecurity was a constant refrain in the Russian press—particularly in sketches of provincial town life, which openly acknowledged how thin and fragile was the veneer of their “civilization.” See, e.g., “Iz Livenskogo i Molochenskogo,” Orel’skii vestnik, no. 10 (1894); “Iz zhizni v Kol’e,” Severnyi krai, no. 191 (1899); “Chistota eto ne nashe slabost’?”, Povolzhskii vestnik, no. 20 (1902); “Pogovorim o skom g offer’e,” Riazanskii vestnik, no. 34 (1909); and “Sanitarne sostanov g. Riazhskaya,” Riazanskii vestnik, no. 140 (1909): 2.

9 For example, see Edward J. Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, eds., Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress (New York, 1985); Ruth Harris, Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin De Siécle (Cambridge, 1989); and Daniel Pick, Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848–1918 (Cambridge, 1989).


11 Frank, Criminality, chap. 1; “O merakh protiv narodnogo bezdny,” Za Svedenie glasnogo Selivanova, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Riazanskoi oblasti [hereafter GARO], f. 869, op. 1, d. 777, ll. 24–26b. The government newspaper Sel’skii vestnik published numerous articles on this same point.
visibility of rural culture; and a corresponding rise in elite fears over this newly mobile but “uncivilized” class all led to calls for direct and forceful intervention and sparked wide-ranging public discussions over how best to help the rural population.

Having long believed that the peasantry’s “backwardness” and “low level of culture” were the root causes of its present condition, many members of educated society felt popular enlightenment could provide the most effective remedy. But more recent images of social and cultural disintegration drawn from portraits of rural and urban lower-class life also suggested a need for innovative methods capable of initiating regeneration in the villages. If urban vices were accelerating a process of rural degeneration, it was argued, they should in all haste be supplanted by “rational” activities that would lead to a far-reaching transformation of peasant behavior. As anthropologist John Lubbock had concluded in his 1870 *Origin of Civilisation*, the “blessings of civilisation” must be extended to “countrymen of our own living, in our very midst, a life worse than that of a savage.”

Rural popular culture therefore proved an ideal target for reformers who, much like their Victorian counterparts, defined the peasant problem largely in cultural terms grounded in a unique mingling of traditional Russian paternalism and elite insecurity, guilt, and fear, together with European theories of rational self-improvement, social progress, and sociocultural evolution.

In their efforts to construct new cultural foundations for the village world, however, reformers would—whether consciously or not—create a sanitized vision of an ideal peasantry, reject the communalism and other features of peasant life whose demise they had earlier bemoaned, and ultimately embrace the very forces that had been implicated in the breakdown of traditional society.

Although the nature of peasant festivity was clearly changing in the second half of the nineteenth century, critics charged that such changes merely worsened the already disorderly character of these all-too-numerous communal assemblages. Mediated primarily by educated Russians, descriptions of rural fêtes published from the 1890s on thus focused more directly than ever before on the violence, drunkenness, promiscuity, and depravity that many believed had come to dominate village leisure as a direct result of corrupting urban influences and the fall of traditional moral authority within peasant communities. Early on, those concerned about the state of Russian agriculture had set the stage for later criticisms by linking the excessive number of rural holidays with low productivity, laziness, and a decline of peasant industriousness. By the 1890s, when the issue of popular recreation and leisure came before broad segments of educated society in conjunction with tentative experiments with the eight-hour workday, reformers drew from previous (and ongoing) clerical and official attacks on peasant celebrations to condemn not only the loss of work time, but also the squandering of money on liquor and food, the ruinous effects of drunkenness, and the immorality that accompanied it. Peasants, in short, celebrated too much and lost valuable hours, days, and even weeks that might be far better spent at material and moral improvement. Yet the often suggested imposition of labor discipline was not the entire answer to this problem; sober peasants, after all, knew very well the meaning of hard work. Even if peasant time could be colonized and work discipline imposed within the more controlled confines of a factory or estate, the sheer size of Russia’s rural population precluded any general assertion of the middle-class dichotomy between work and leisure, at least in the short term.

For educated outsiders, the real problem was that peasants had no meaningful alternatives to the coarseness, disorder, and vice of their degraded culture. “If the peasants would really devote their holidays to rest and to exchanging ideas,” wrote one critic, “there would be no talk about changing them.” Since outsiders felt such a scenario remained unlikely, however, it appeared that only sustained colonization of village culture would replace the demoralizing elements of rural fêtes with more rational pursuits.


12 “Narodnye prazdniki i predrasadki,” Obrazovanie 12, no. 4 (1903): 108. For local figures, see GARO, f. 7, op. 1, d. 97, l. 1-946b. The church disputed this direct linkage between the number of holidays and productivity. “O vlianii prazdnikov i prigulykh dni na obsheece ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii,” Vladimirske skupol’noye vedomostii, no. 7 (1863), p. 2: 399-407.


14 Novoe vremia, no. 875 (1903): 4. *Colonization* is used here to denote the processes by which outside agencies seek to impose specific norms, values, or ideologies on what is believed to be a more primitive or backward population. Whether overtly political or not, the ideology of colonialism came to pervade nineteenth-century European and Russian social-
Peasant festivity was, above all, antithetical to the goal of civilizing village manners. Teachers, for example, saw traditional holiday celebrations as undermining rural education—the centerpiece of elite hopes for peasant improvement and the fundamental tool for creating a national culture that would unify all classes. In Griaiovetskii district, Vologda province, a 1911 zemstvo-church survey estimated that because of the many local two- or three-day celebrations, pupils missed no less than 80 days in a 180-day school year.17 Young peasants who watched their parents participate in the debauch of these communal drinking binges learned lessons that set them on the wrong path later in life. Teachers complained because adults kept their children away from school during the long festivals, allowing them to witness the corrupting revelry and depravity of the streets and listen to senseless talk and cursing, and often left them at home alone “where they drink vodka as a joke.” Once the holiday ended in their own village, parents brought children to celebrations in neighboring parishes—a glaring example of “inexcusable simpleness.” Students returning to school appeared exhausted and listless from lack of sleep because “guests have been shouting in their homes the entire night.” In consequence, a rural teacher explained, “on the first day back at school [the pupils] understand nothing, as if they have forgotten all they knew, and only gradually do their heads become clear again.” They also took from the fête precisely those things that schools sought to eliminate in young peasant minds: “The other day a young girl, returning to school after the holidays, wrote on the blackboard extremely foul words, the meaning of which she, of course, did not even understand.”18 Such damage was extremely difficult to repair.

According to contemporary accounts, drunkenness was by far the most ruinous aspect of village festivities. Much like children or primitives, reformers argued, peasants did not understand restraint and rational self-control but “spend every bit of money they have saved, and even sell their property” in order to purchase vodka for an upcoming festival. Poorer villagers let their fields deteriorate while they performed several days of reform movements. See Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914 (Stanford, 1976), 485–96; Michelle Perrot, ed., A History of Private Life, vol. 4, From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), esp. 615–67; Harris, Murders and Madness, 76–79; and Nye, Crime, Madness, and Politics, esp. chap. 5.

17 V. F., “Anketa o prazdnovani razlichnykh prazdnikov v Griaiovetskem uzele, Vologodskoi gubernii,” Izvestia Arkhangel’skogo Obshchestva vuchenia Russkogo Severa 5, no. 10 (1913): 446.

18 “O derev’enskikh prazdnikakh, 3; “O vianu uhtsy na molodee pokolenie,” Sel’sku vestnik, no. 211 (1913): 2–3.

outwork, earning just enough money to buy holiday vodka. One writer claimed in 1911 that during the course of a three-day January holiday celebrated collectively by three villages of Tobolsk province, peasants spent twenty-five hundred rubles at the state liquor shop. “For many, nothing remains after the holiday, not even bread.”19 Despite plentiful evidence that peasant communities were, on their own initiative, closing local taverns, banning holiday drunkenness, and prosecuting bootleggers more forcefully—and had been doing so long before moral reformers turned their attention to the countryside—outside observers and non-peasants living in rural areas nevertheless felt that liquor was destroying rural society, contributing to its physical, economic, and moral decline.20

Weddings were seen as especially onerous to the peasant budget because a single household had to supply food and drink to large numbers of guests, neighbors, and sometimes the entire village. Local government surveys of peasant liquor consumption conducted between 1911 and 1915 showed that patronal festivals accounted for the largest portion of annual household spending on drink, but that a wedding was the single most costly celebration. Studies calculated that marriage festivities cost poor families as much as 50 rubles, and that well-to-do peasants spent no less than 150 rubles.21 In 1910, a correspondent from Rostovskii district, Laroslav’l’ province, wrote that custom had established firm norms determining how much vodka should be provided at weddings—norms below


20 Similar views of the physical and moral degeneration wrought by alcohol were already widespread in Europe. See Nye, Crime, Madness, and Politics, 153–58; Harris, Murders and Madness, chap. 7; and Eric T. Carlson, “Medicine and Degeneration: Theory and Praxis,” in Chamberlin and Gelman, Degeneration, 130–33. For examples of peasant measures against drinking, see Volkovski vestnik, no. 14 (1892): 2; Tambowskie gubernskie vedomosti, no. 10 (1894): 4; Nedelia, no. 49 (1894): 1574; Orlowskii vestnik, no. 9 (1894): 2; Nizhnegorski listok, no. 152 (1899): 2; and Ruszkanski vestnik, no. 68 (1909): 4.

21 "Iz mest. Berezani, Pereiaslavskogo u., Poltavskoi gubernii," Sel’skii vestnik, no. 41 (1892): 457. For additional estimates, see Statisticheskie ocheredeni Moskovskoi uezdnii tseiskoi upravy, Derevnya i zaporotshene prodazhni piwt v Moskovskom uzele (Moscow, 1915), 31–32.
which a peasant family could not go without being shamed. Contradicting their earlier assertions that the city was most responsible for rural vice, reformers now blamed custom itself for peasant excess, noting that even villagers who preferred sobriety could not escape the pressures and expectations of tradition. “The weaker the influence of cities in a given locality,” the editors of a 1915 zemstvo survey argued, “the stronger the power of custom and the stricter the demands of public opinion that custom be observed.”

Established local norms and the fear of public shame provided sufficient incentive even for reluctant peasants to spend as much as possible on a good banquet. As another survey stated in 1916, “The greater the drunkenness [at a wedding] . . . the more honored will be the marriage and the couple’s happiness.” Such celebrations “are remembered for years.”

In their strikingly similar representations of peasant behavior during the long holidays, critics of popular culture turned to analogies of the primitive, the natural, untamed world, and social disorder. They claimed that villagers took on “the likeness of beasts” in their drunken revelries, and pointed with great concern to the resulting epidemic of rampant promiscuity (another Victorian characterization of savage society and otherness) and violence spreading throughout the countryside. The peasant “forgets he is a Christian” during patronal festivals, a temperance advocate asserted in 1908: “He does not go to church, but wanders around the market square from early morning in a drunken stupor, singing rowdy songs, using foul words. . . . And what happens on these holidays? They drink themselves into a complete frenzy, bite off one another’s fingers, often throw each other to death. . . . The same is true on religious holidays. . . . [when] vodka flows like rivers and there is widespread immorality and disorder—it is difficult to describe.”

On major holidays like Christmas, Easter, and especially carnival (maslenitsa), the village was transformed “into a veritable Sodom.” Moralists charged that peasants “conduct themselves like pagans at weddings and holidays, acting as servants of Satan.” The moment church services ended (and even earlier), “everyone turns to wild revelry. In the street there is great noise, laughter, the sounds of accordions, songs and dancing. Loud conversation, singing, incoherent speech, and the clutter of dishes spill from open windows. Young people stroll in large crowds, stopping at any given spot to dance. Many are already so drunk that they cannot lift a hand or foot, and lie down wherever they can—in a shed or simply on the street. By evening everyone is drunk, barely able to stand.” Such depictions of rural festivals abounded in newspapers and reformist literature, providing grim reminders of the task confronting educated outsiders determined to stop these behaviors.

Equally disturbing evidence of moral decline came in the last years of the nineteenth century with a growing perception that women, teenagers, and even children had begun drinking and participating in holiday disorders together with adult men. “We remember the countryside when drunkenness was rarely encountered,” lamented an 1894 editorial in the Saratov Provincial Gazette. Previously, “it was mainly adult men who drank, but now . . . we find something quite different: not only the men, but even women, even juveniles and young children drink, and this never took place before.” A correspondent for the Riazan’ Herald noted in 1909 that while such corrupting behavior was especially evident during parish festivals and carnival, children—including pupils—could be found drinking, cursing, and smoking at virtually any village celebration.

Peasant women also played an important role in the lucrative bootlegging trade, as a parish priest from Dankovskii district, Riazan’ province, pointed out in 1911. This was especially terrible, he wrote, because “up to now the woman was a symbol of sobriety, and she herself suffers from the drunkenness of a husband or son.” But now she was abetting the very drunkenness “from which she will undergo still greater suffering.”

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22 According to a recent survey conducted at a “poor” wedding and ninety-six at a “good” (i.e., wealthy) wedding. “Svadebny szenon,” Golos (laretslaw’), no. 19 (1910): 3. Though widespread in rural areas, such norms differed from one township to another. Derevnia i zapreshchenie prodazhi pitei, 26–29.

23 Derevnia i zapreshchenie prodazhi pitei, 27.

24 D. ] N. Voronov, Zhizni’ derevii v dni trezvosti (Petropgrad, 1916), 20. See also N. F. Sumtetrov, O tom, kakie sejiskie poveria i obychai v osobennosti srednyy (Khar’kov, 1897), 23–24; and “Svadebnoe razoren’e,” Sejiski vestnik, no. 12 (1888): 129.


26 “O p’astve (Ple’my iz derevii),” Detvetel 13, no. 6 (1908): 100.


28 Shelepokin, “Prazdnik v derevii,” 131–32.

lier viewed as a beacon of hope in the struggle against liquor, peasant women, too, had become part of the problem.

Still more troubling, rural parents commonly sent twelve- or thirteen-year-old boys to buy vodka and allowed their young children to drink. A 1915 zemstvo survey of Kharkov province found that 6.4 percent of all female peasant children drank at least occasionally, as did 11.2 percent of male children. Among adolescents, these proportions were 21.2 percent and 38.9 percent respectively, while 51.8 percent of all adult women drank. Other surveys conducted in rural schools claimed that only 6 percent of all children questioned had never tasted vodka, and fully 25 percent had drunk at least once.13 Such behavior contributed greatly to the breakdown of the patriarchal family and to rural degeneration. But by the 1890s, educated Russians were placing much of the blame squarely on parents for not raising their children strictly or instilling good morals in the family, impeding efforts at primary education, setting bad examples through their own drunken, immoral conduct, and allowing youths to run wild at holiday gatherings without proper adult supervision.14 As long as peasants themselves remained ignorant about “proper” methods of child rearing, and above all until their own behavior could be transformed, the cultural and moral salvation of their children would have to rest in the hands of educated outsiders.

To illustrate the degeneration of a “dissolute peasant youth,” reformers published graphic details of the brutal, mass fistfights and turf battles between gangs from rival villages, the frequent stabbings and maimings, and the rash of other crimes that accompanied the revelries of teens and young adults during village fêtes. These “savage pastimes,” reformers asserted, were spreading rapidly, “reaching into out-of-the-way corners where previously . . . the peasant never dreamed of such things.”15 After describing one bloody Christmas-season fight in rural Nizhnii Novgorod province, a press account declared: “Seeing such a picture, one becomes ill and terrified of these people. You want to shout at them to stop, to tell them this is enough, but of course your words would have no influence on the battle.”16 Drunken carousers threw themselves at one another “like beasts,” using not only fists but knives as well. Further stressing “the extent that the savagery of morals has reached in our remote localities,” commentators utilized images of primitive warfare in their attacks on these often deadly fights. Thus, during the 1910 celebration of a single holiday (Frolovshchina) in Luzhskii district, Petersburg province, “as many people were killed within a circumference of thirty kilometers as on a single day in a real war.” Likewise, according to a 1912 Pskov zemstvo resolution, “on the two holidays of Pokrov and Kuzu’ma Dem’ian, the murdered and wounded in Ostrovskii district were no fewer than during a war.” Even the weapons used by peasant youths and hooligans “are quite similar to those of savages. In all their crudity, just as in the Stone Age, these instruments for crushing human skulls carry traces of pain-taking decoration.”17 As one correspondent from laroslavl’ province warned, “we are living in a time of barbarity, when human life has no value.”18

32 “Razvretshenier na ravnov,” 565. Holiday fistfights had existed for centuries and survived long into the Soviet era. For descriptions of and attacks on this practice from Razan’ province, see Ruzanskaia vestnuk, no. 3 (1905): 3; no. 73 (1909): 4; no. 74 (1910): 3; no. 55 (1911): 3; no. 58 (1913): 3; “Kulaknye boi,” Ruzanskaia zhurna, no. 42 (1914); “Kulaknye boi,” Rabochii klich, no. 29 (1923); “Dikie zabavy,” Rabochii klich, no. 11 (1924); “Dikia zabava,” Kollett, no. 13 (1925); and “Diktye estche derzhissia,” Rabochnyi klich, no. 48 (1926). For other provinces, see Orlandskaia vestnuk, no. 10 (1894): 2; Povolzhskii vestnuk, no. 40 (1906): 4; and T. Segalova, “Pianye druki v gorode i derevne,” Problemy prestupnosti, 2 (1927): 84–99.

33 Nizhegorodskii listok, no. 1 (1900): 4.

Theft was also on the rise, many believed, because peasant youths had turned to crime in order to pay for growing vices like drinking, smoking, and gambling at cards. Observers failed to note that a form of ritual theft by young villagers had long been a part of preparations for their evening gatherings. Girls pilfered food, fuel, and other necessities from parents or relatives, while boys “cut wood on the sly [and] swipe grain and money from their fathers.” Such practices were “a common matter for rural youths,” wrote a student of peasant life in the 1880s, and “almost no one complains against them.”

By 1905, however, it was precisely this type of behavior, among others, that outsiders began to term hooliganism, claiming that rural lads would take grain from their fathers after the autumn harvest and sell it to bootleggers for vodka. If they could not manage to steal from the barn, then they went to another’s field and took sheaves, potatoes, or other crops. In his 1913 report to the Ministry of Justice’s committee on measures to fight hooliganism, the governor of Pskov province listed theft of various food supplies, domestic fowl, and vegetables among the typical crimes of rural ho’s.”

As in many European instances, “custom” had been degraded in the eyes of an educated society increasingly fearful of lower-class disorder.

Peasants who adopted urban tastes received a good deal of criticism as well, for if expenses on holiday vodka and food did not bring sufficient economic ruin to a village household, the growing slavery to fashion in rural areas would surely help to push it over the line between subsistence and poverty. Superfluous expenditures on samovars, tea, decorations for the home, and other consumer goods flooding the countryside by the century’s last decades brought sharp condemnation from those whose image of village life clashed with the peasants’ own notions of respectability. Here, too, critics singled out the young as primary culprits, for they in particular demanded the latest fashions that so they could attend evening gatherings in style. One peculiar account in the Voice of Moscow even charged that hooliganism and the fall of morality among peasant women could be attributed to the cost and “splendor” of their newly fashionable tastes.

Reformers also fretted that young peasants were dressing above their social station. As one historian recently noted, “educators already worried about the effects of education on attitudes toward work and occupational choice were outraged at its apparent influence on taste in clothing and personal appearance.” Others complained about “a heightened interest in tasteless and useless dandies” among the rural school-age population. Adult peasants, too, had begun imitating gentlemen, reformers mockingly charged. “Striving to be like the petty bourgeoisie [mieszchanskoje],” they allowed themselves “all sorts of extravagances with which true peasants do not even bother.”

Turn-of-the-century newspaper stories recounted the unfortunate consequences of these excesses. In 1901, for instance, a Kazan’ daily told its readers of a young Warsaw worker who saw a dress in a shop window and wanted it so much that she stole even harder at the factory (for which she received a raise) and went without food in order to save money. Two days after buying the dress, however, she died—the result, a doctor explained, of “the girl’s organism being unable to sustain this systematic starvation.”

These cautious moral tales were aimed particularly at lower-class women, lest they bring themselves to ruin, but their warning was meant for men and young people as well.

Elite anxiety about peasant demoralization reached its peak with post-1905 fear that a new crime wave and widespread disorder were sapping the nation’s strength and threatening the state’s very ability to maintain order. As the most frightening apparition of Russia’s “dangerous classes” (which included both peasants and urban workers), hooliganism made a timely appearance that served to bolster elite convictions about degeneracy. Though most critics of popular culture usually located the sources of hooliganism in towns and cities, they also remained convinced that its rural origins lay in the unrestrained debauch of evening gatherings, where “teenage village youths receive the first and most fundamental lessons of

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39 RGIA, f. 1405, op. 332, d. 424, l. 12a.
43 “Pod ignom inostrannykh mol.,” Devatel’ 8, no. 4 (1903): 175–76; “Narodnoe p’ianstvo,” 445. Similar attitudes found expression in Britain, among other countries, when workers were censured for aspiring to “comforts and refinements.” Golby and Purdue, Civilization of the Crowd, 33–34.
44 “Neskuchastnaya zhertva mody,” Vel’zhskii vestnik, no. 250 (1901): 3.
hoiliganism." During and immediately following the 1905 revolution, newspapers began applying the label "hoiligan" to protagonists of knife fights, assaults, murders, or general rowdiness at evening parties and other celebrations, in contrast to the term "mischief makers" (ozorniki) of earlier times. In effect, nearly all the separate elements of rural festivity attacked in the past conveniently came to be united in this veritable peasant counter-evolution.

Although descriptions of rural hooliganism portrayed peasant life in even grimmer terms than had previous accounts of village popular culture, they meshed well with older perceptions. While peasant revellry and disorder had clearly been viewed as harmful—even dangerous—in earlier times, the onslaught of hooliganism seemed to make conditions in the post-1905 village simply intolerable. A 1906 report in the Kazan newspaper the Volga Herald described "homegrown hooligans" shattering the usually monotonous life of one village in Makar’evskii district through their "savage" evening revelries, wounding passersby with knives and revolvers, breaking windows, and carrying on at the local tavern. A similar complaint was heard from Iaroslavl' province in 1910: "Hooliganism has grown greatly among the local lads. They go around the village with sticks, banging on windows and doing other things they consider to be daring. Especially now, during the wedding season... drunken lads are encountered at every step. In the evening the local intelligentsia dare not venture out into the village, for the drunken young men throw rocks at them. Can... nothing be done to put a stop to this disorder?" At holiday time, "the fighting sometimes continues all night. People fall bleeding to the ground. Windows are broken. Gangs roam everywhere with rocks and sticks. On the following day blood covers the street." As a result of such frightening scenes, one writer declared, "it has become impossible to breathe in the countryside." The rural population

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trembled in fear of hooligans, another report declared in 1913, and "not only degenerates and psychopaths are involved in this popular revelry and terror." Increasing numbers of peasant youths were being drawn into the ranks of a new, dangerous class of hooligans, who "boast openly about their crimes, brag about their debauchery, and brazenly demonstrate their complete impunity."

Calmer voices did argue that there simply was no solid evidence attesting to a specifically hooligan crime wave. As the congress of Moscow justices of the peace stressed in its 1913 response to a Ministry of Justice proposal to stiffen penalties for hooligan acts, "one can hardly speak of a growth of hooliganism." Indeed, after a careful examination of local judicial statistics, the report declared that "it would be even more inaccurate to talk of hooliganism as a new phenomenon" because prior to that time it existed everywhere under different local names. Yet many contemporaries still claimed that a rapid upsurge in juvenile crime—whether "hoiligan" or not—had occurred after 1900 (especially in rural areas), although in the absence of figures on commissions, their assertions were most often based on flawed analyses of court convictions. Widely disseminated and mingled with local tales of hooligan outrages, assertions of this sort caused middle-class Russians as well as gentry landowners to agree even more readily with pronouncements that "rural hooliganism has become so savage, so crude, that there is no word to describe the terrible manifestation of disorder." This depravity encompassed young peasants above all. Those seeking to reform peasant life and popular culture had been moving toward such a position for some time. Although a collapse of village morality had led to hooliganism's widespread growth, said one temperance advocate, "it

30 "Narodnaia anarkhia," p. 218, citing a zemstvo resolution from Pskov province. See also "Rel’ dukhovenstva v bor’be s khuliganstvom," Deiatel’ 18, no. 7 (1913): 210.
31 "Orzy Moskovskogo stolichnogo mirovogo suda o ministernome zakonopryekote o merakh bor’by s khuliganstvom," Izvestiia moskovskogo universiteta, no. 3 (1913): 235.
32 Zhenchenko, "Pervyi vlast,” 310. Figures for juvenile crime actually began growing at above-average rates as early as the mid-1880s, though contemporaries paid scant attention until the turn of the century. Also, in contrast to contemporary and some recent views, the rate of increase was quite high among females. Whether Russia experienced a real rise in juvenile crime remains open to serious question, however, for police repression, especially after 1905, focused on the young, and higher conviction rates may in large part reflect an increase in arrests prompted by public and state concerns. Indeed, during the entire period 1874–1913, the ten- to twenty-year-old age cohort grew from 15.1 percent to 17.8 percent of all persons tried—a statistically insignificant increase when population growth is taken into account. Furthermore, per capita crime rates based on age groups cannot be accurately calculated. See Frank, Criminality, chap. 3; and idem, "Women, Crime, and Justice in Imperial Russia, 1834–1913" [forthcoming], drawing on data from Svod statisticheskikh svedenii po delam ugolovnym, 42 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1873–1915).
should not be forgotten that the fall of morals does not refer to older peasants who were born and raised in a regime of strict discipline. Hooliganism in rural areas is almost entirely a phenomenon of the younger generation—the future of Russia.\textsuperscript{53} As for causation, this, too, could be readily found in the very factors that had set off the process of decline: drunkenness, immorality, ignorance, lack of culture, migrant labor, and the infectious individualism of factory and urban life. A new element, however, drawn from the contemporary discourse of social reform, was being added to post-1905 analyses of Russia's crisis. Thus, while counselor N. N. Kolomarov echoed many of his contemporaries by declaring in a 1912 speech to the Bezhetskii district zemstvo assembly (Tver' province) that hooliganism was the "offspring of drunkenness," he also deployed the language of degeneration theory to construct an image of generational deformation.

The widespread degeneration from alcoholism, the inherited traits of alcoholics, the immorality, untrustworthiness, and intoxication—all of these factors condition the phenomenon of hooliganism. And thus we confront the fact that this riffraff society of hooligan scum has become master of the situation; these are the tramps, the sick, and those who have no conscience or fear of the law or God. . . . Peaceful inhabitants of the countryside have become slaves to vice, trembling in fear for every imprudent word. This is terror in the full sense of the term.\textsuperscript{54}

Hooliganism, then, represented the final phase of lower-class degeneration. In this regard, it helped to finalize the conclusions of educated reformers: having imbibed the vices of their parents and the worst of urban culture, a new, frighteningly independent, and degenerate generation of peasants, raised under conditions of cultural backwardness without the discipline of serfdom, now represented the gravest threat to enlightenment, progress, and order in the countryside. The "future of Russia" and of civilization itself appeared to hang in the balance.

Rural revolution, crime, and hooliganism not only heightened elite fears about the lower classes, but convinced many that the "simple folk" of earlier times could no longer be found in the countryside. After the events of 1905–7, frequent reference was made to a time when these terrible problems had not existed. "Not long ago," claimed one proponent of this view, it was correct to assume "that our countryside was the repository of moral purity, that the healthiest forces of popular life were cultivated in the villages, and that crude vices were a rare and uncommon thing" among peasants. But this was no longer so.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly, a military officer remarked to the Simbirsk governor in 1914 that "the peasants of the 1830s were more moral, honest, and religious." Indeed, added a temperance advocate, "half a century ago rural holidays were simply rural holidays: [peasants] sang songs, danced the round dance, played catch, and so on," without collective drunkenness, crowds of rowdy, promiscuous teenagers, or bloody knife fights and brawls.\textsuperscript{56} One author moved this deferential, traditional life forward by two decades:

I remember the seventies. There were few taverns then, and it was shameful for people to drink. We, too, had "free" time such as at holidays. But this free time was spent very simply. People went to church in the morning, . . . [then] they would have lunch and rest, after which they went out to the street to sit and chat with neighbors. Boys and girls organized games and sports, or went sledding in the winter. Even the elders took part. . . . There was so much humor and merriment—good, splendid, healthy merriment. . . . Now all this has receded into memory.\textsuperscript{57}

Another commentator, recalling the winter holidays before railways had pushed into the countryside around Moscow, claimed that young people had conducted themselves innocently, gathering on a hill for sledding, building snow fortresses, then assembling in a house when evening fell and playing various games until the cock crowed, at which point they all went home. But with the coming of the railroad, rural lads who worked in Moscow regularly returned home at holiday time in their fine urban outfits and, no longer enjoying the old village pastimes, spent entire days in the local tavern getting drunk and setting bad examples for the yet-unspoiled peasant youths. Peasants of this sort, along with those dwelling in close proximity to cities, were no longer considered "real peasants"; rather, "the majority of them are drunkards."\textsuperscript{58}

In much the same way as their counterparts from industrial and middle-class societies to the west, educated Russians reworked peasant culture in their own minds and in their presentations of village life, past and present. Having created a culture of progress, enlightenment, science, rationality, legality, respectability, good manners, and cleanliness, to note

\textsuperscript{53} "Ozdarovlenie derevni," \textit{Dvostal} 18, no. 5 (1913): 157 (my italics). For similar views from a member of the St. Petersburg zemstvo stressing both moral and religious decline, see "Khitulganstvo i nerevy nashikh dni," \textit{Missionerskii sbornik} 24, no. 3 (1914): 170–73.

\textsuperscript{54} RGIA, f. 1405, op. 532, d. 424, l. 53. For similar views, see the 1912 church survey of bishops in RGIA, f. 796 (Kantselariia Sv. Sinoda), op. 195, d. 3223, ll. 1–194; and "Ibor'ba s khuliganstvom i zemstvo," \textit{Vestnik Riazanskogo gubernskogo zemstva}, no. 1 (1913): 115.

\textsuperscript{55} "Derevenskie souzy praveshcheniia," \textit{Sel'skiy vestnik}, no. 251 (1911): 2.

\textsuperscript{56} "Khitulganstvo i shkola," 119; "Pianyi terror v derevne," 429.

\textsuperscript{57} "Ob uveseleniakh dlia naroda," \textit{Dvostal}, 20, no. 6 (1915): 130. See also the comparisons in N. V. Davydov, \textit{Iz prostogo}, 2d ed. (Moscow, 1914), 161–62.

a few of its building blocks, they contrasted their culture to that of the lower classes and found the latter not only terribly primitive and deformed but, more ominously, stubbornly resistant to cultural colonization as a direct result of its continuing degeneracy. Swept up in Europe's finde-siècle insecurity over the impact of progress and equally insecure about their own social and cultural position, members of this far-from-homogeneous elite sought out a model for change by constructing a romanticized representation of the simple, uncontaminated traditions that, they believed, characterized peasant society before its infection by the insidious microbes of modern degeneration. The turn-of-the-century boom in folklore and ethnography was but one element in this new vision of the past. Another was the concerted effort to decisively transform rural popular culture and reshape the peasantry in a different image.

By the 1890s, then, educated Russians from various classes, professions, and political groups had determined that the peasantry could only be reformed through a broad range of measures designed to discourage villagers from the ruinous debauchery of their dying culture. Turning to philanthropy, voluntary associations, local government, and schools, they set out to take popular enlightenment into the village world on a scale far greater than attempted in any previous reform effort. They began a process that would, by the outbreak of the Great War, bring peasants and members of educated society into closer contact than ever before, though it would not necessarily lead to the much-envisioned cultural unity nor to a wholesale adoption of Victorian values by the rural population. This new "movement to the people" was, like all reform movements, anything but neutral or benign. For in attacking popular culture, reformers had already adopted the language and images of colonialism; now they armed themselves with the methods and ideology of Victorian social reform. Still beholden to an earlier moral obligation to guide peasants toward progress but with their perceptions of the peasantry (and the urban lower classes) rapidly changing, Russian reformers would attempt to colonize the rural population by means of an enlightened culture that was not yet dominant even in cities, seeking to rescue the peasantry from its very "lack of culture." In this respect, they closely resembled post-Risorgimento Italian social reformers who saw their national and cultural unity threatened by the "inherited backwardness" and degeneracy of the rural south, or French writers who described rural settlements as colonies "waiting to be claimed for civilization."\(^{59}\) Success, Russia's Kul-

turträger believed, would stem the tide of degeneration, reverse centuries of neglect, and enable the country to overcome the crisis that beset it by constructing a national culture capable of blurring class boundaries; failure, by contrast, meant continued cultural fragmentation and a dangerous plunge into deeper decline. Their intentions in this "struggle for civilization" therefore went well beyond government efforts at a more limited, political colonization.\(^{60}\)

The control and regulation of popular culture were important elements of these reform movements, elements deemed essential to rooting out the most harmful features of lower-class leisure activities. Suppression of rural youth gatherings, for example, became common practice after the 1905 revolution because they were viewed as potential breeding grounds for hooliganism as well as political opposition. During this same period, officials and reformers began calling for a reduction in the number of public holidays celebrated in Russia, but staunch church opposition succeeded in limiting legislation aimed at effecting such proposals.\(^{61}\) Attempts to alter festive behavior could be found long before 1905, however. As early as the 1870s and 1880s, local governments introduced regulations forbidding commercial activities on Sundays and holidays as a means of encouraging rest and church attendance while allowing employees (and others) to spend time with their families. By 1901, nearly fifty cities and towns had either outlawed entirely or greatly limited holiday markets and trade, with a clear impact on peasants who usually filled provincial centers during the holidays.\(^{62}\) Other regulatory measures initiated by clergy, police, or village and township authorities required more punitive tactics. Parish priests, for example, commonly pressured local officials to forbid drinking on Sundays and holidays, to ban festive assemblies before church services, or to abolish non-Christian celebrations like carnival. Some clerics would not perform marriages if drunken celebrations had preceded the ceremony, or refused to pay processional visits

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59 For examples, see Alfredo Niceforo, L'Italia barbara contemporanea (Milan, 1898); Cesare Lombroso, Delitto vecchi e delitti nuovi (Turin, 1902); John A. Davis, Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Italy (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1988); and

60 On political colonization, see Frances W. Weisbl, Reforming Rural Russia (Princeton, 1999); 74; and idem, "The Land Captain Reform of 1889 and the Reassertion of Unrestricted Autocratic Authority," Russian History 15, no. 2–4 (1988): 285–326.


to homes that allowed evening gatherings. Youth gatherings might be dispersed by the priest and police working together, sometimes forcing “sinners” to perform public penance at church. Without direct police supervision and the complicity of the local administration, however, measures of this type were short-lived at best, finding little support among villagers hostile to outside interference in local affairs. Peasants themselves frequently passed resolutions banning holiday drunkenness and the sale of liquor, closed taverns, or prevented evening gatherings when they got out of hand, and they oversaw these rulings far more successfully through community enforcement. But the moralistic and sometimes humiliating regulations introduced by clerics, police, and other outsiders met with resistance, especially from younger peasants—who found many ways to voice their protest, such as refusing to attend church.64

Liberal reformers also rejected such measures, arguing that they had little educational benefit and ignored the realities of contemporary life. Education therefore remained the cornerstone of elite efforts to transform peasant culture. But by 1900, experiments at popular enlightenment had expanded the notion of learning far beyond the school walls to the broader realm of village life, making leisure itself a sphere of educational activity. Voluntary associations, educational societies, and individual activists now sought to draw the population into programs designed to expand literacy and introduce a new world of useful, uplifting literature through Sunday schools, public lectures and readings, and evening classes. Educators, clerics, zemstvo activists, and other professionals, together with a flood of volunteers and philanthropists, encouraged self-help among the peasantry by supporting the establishment of cooperatives, village or township libraries, and local theaters. Many organizations simply appropriated the popular tradition of group readings but regulated the material and message they delivered.65 While the great interest that peasants displayed toward these activities was widely lauded, bibliographic experience had proved that education alone did not always produce immediate results, particularly when it came to changing behaviors deemed harmful to villagers.

In addition to education, peasants needed alternatives to the holiday activities that were so greatly abetting the process of decline in rural society. Hence, a primary task of Russia’s new reformers was to find “rational” recreations capable of raising the peasants’ spiritual and cultural level while offering wholesome diversions from their reliance on bootleggers and taverns, ending the savagery of village brawls, and discouraging young people from debauchery, hooliganism, and crime. One of the most successful of these efforts was the organization of a broad network of popular theaters designed to bring culture to the lower classes in cities, towns, and larger villages. Sponsored by the state-financed Guardianship for Popular Temperance, local governments, schools, rural cooperatives, and private or philanthropic sources, popular theater grew rapidly in the years prior to World War I and, as Gary Thurston has shown in his insightful study of the movement, attracted large peasant audiences eager to experience this new form of entertainment.66 Beginning in the 1890s, urban societies for the organization of popular entertainment also invested heavily in popular theater, along with People’s Houses (narodnye domy)—which enjoyed similar popularity among peasants, particularly in provincial towns. After initial hesitation, even the church acknowledged the usefulness of this medium for instilling moral values in its rural flocks. At least before 1905, Thurston argues, educated Russians saw popular theater as an ideal means through which the lower classes might appropriate elite culture.67 As the Riazan’ Zemstvo Bulletin stressed in

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68 Thurston, “Russian Popular Theater,” 240, 242, 251; “O narodnom teatre,” 2; “Narodnye razvlecheniya,” Sel’sku vestnik, no. 277 (1913): 2; Oriech Razusheii Obshhestva ustrinenia narodnykh razvlechenii za 1898 (Riazan’, 1899), and subsequent years. See also “Narodnye razvlecheniya i ikh znachenie,” in Panpamnaia knizhka dlia chlenov Obshhestve trezvosti na 1894 god (St. Petersburg, 1894), 139-42; I. Ivanovskii, “Ocherki provintsial’nosti zhizni,” Russkaiia mysl’, no. 11 (1897): 130-31; “K voprosu o teatral’nykh predstavleniakh dlia naroda,” Russkoosvedomstvo dlia sel’skikh pastyrev 5, no. 16 (1898): 381-84; and “Narodnyi teatr,” Nedelia, no. 38 (1897): 1213-14.
1913, popular theater was “one of the best means for raising the cultural level of the population, for softening the morals of the countryside, and for halting the growth of hooliganism among peasant youth.”

Social and moral reformers experimented with a broad range of “rational” entertainments, combining various media and holding these events—whether popular readings, theater, or lectures—during traditional holidays. Popular readings, for example, were regularly accompanied by magic-lantern shows to provide enjoyment and hold audience interest while imparting educational information. Some reformers organized musical concerts or established local peasant choirs in the villages, often linking the latter with charity work by recruiting the poor.

New ideas and technologies from abroad were adapted to the purpose of popular enlightenment and entertainment. By 1913—earlier in some localities—entrepreneurs had brought moving pictures to towns in Riazan’ province. Phonographs appeared in rural “clubs” or at dances sponsored by various societies for popular improvement.

Drawing on the success of holiday excursions among the urban working class (often financed by benevolent factory owners), rural educators also spoke of employing school excursions to remove children from festive violence and drunkenness in the villages. Utilizing degeneration theory, which emphasized the importance of milieu on the organism, medical practitioners, educators, and temperance advocates had long argued that drunkenards, much like diseased persons, should be removed from society to prevent further corruption and degradation of the larger social organism. But if this could not be achieved, then society’s most innocent—the children—should be protected from infection by “social disease.” Hence the growing discussion about the value of excursions, though most rural schools and reform societies lacked sufficient funds to provide such recreation for their adopted wards. Cheaper and equally beneficial was organized sport, which many teachers felt offered children rational pastimes while instilling discipline and self-reliance. Finally, a number of societies, such as

the Union against Tobacco Smoking and the various groups of the better-known temperance movement, confronted popular vice directly. Among their numerous activities, temperance societies organized popular theater and readings, opened free libraries and tearooms, and established a series of educational “temperance museums” on train cars at railway stations around the country—a tactic later used by Bolshevik enlighteners as well.

The reformist zeal of educated Russia also targeted custom itself, with efforts to restore dying practices whose passing many viewed as contributing to the decline of traditional peasant culture, or to purify popular festive activities by ridding them of their most corrupting elements. Critics of recent, peasant-initiated cultural innovations—such as urban dances and the “vulgar” songs (chastushki) that were sweeping the countryside by the 1890s—proposed using peasant choirs to revive the old folk songs “that are now nearly forgotten,” and called for Rural Unions of Enlightenment to sponsor entertainments like the round dance (khoro-
vod), which was dying out in many areas. In their rejuvenated and culturally cleansed form, of course, these recreations were expected to be devoid of the drunkenness and disorders that accompanied the fall of village morals. Similar attempts were made to “shatter drunken customs” and rituals that degraded holiday fetes and celebrations. Clergy and temperance activists, for example, fought for “sober weddings” in peasant communities, at which tea or kvass would replace the customary vodka and decorum would reign in place of wild revelry. Prior to prohibition, however, these experiments met with little success; and after liquor was outlawed in 1914, surveys found peasants generally gloomy and depressed not only about the war, but also because celebrations had become terribly boring without vodka. Weddings were reported to be poorly attended and “as merry as funerals.” In Poltava province, godparents could not be found for christenings now that the traditional treating with vodka was illegal. Even funerals proved more difficult to arrange, since payment could no longer be made in vodka for coffins or the digging of graves.

Increasingly popular by the turn of the century was the intriguing notion of creating new holidays and festive “traditions” to replace the violent practices of the old popular culture, for many believed that “the

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68 “Izlet narodnogo teatra,” 59.
70 Riazanskii vestnik, no. 166 (1913): 3.

Vestnik vospitaniya, no. 9 (1909): 162-78; Harris, Murders and Madness, 74-76. On excursions and other activities organized for the working class, see Mark D. Steinberg, Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867-1907 (Berkeley, 1992), esp. 58-61.
72 “Derev’enskiye souzy praveshcheniya,” Selskaya zhizn, no. 251 (1911): 2; Kuznetsov, “O merakh protiv khuliganstva,” 9; Vladimirska gubernskae vedomosti, no. 3-6 (1912).
people would willingly engage in cultured entertainments if they only existed.” The invented Victorian tradition of the Christmas tree, already adopted in Russian towns and cities well before the century’s close, had appeared in rural schools by the 1890s and became widespread in the countryside after 1900. Educators and reformers, again centering their efforts on children, established school holidays designed to wean pupils away from activities “not at all suited to their age.” Typically organized around nationalist and religious themes, the new holidays saw rural schoolhouses transformed by decorations, flags, pictures, and portraits of the imperial family, while students busily trimmed the Christmas tree, set up scenery for plays they would perform, and practiced songs and patriotic hymns or prose for public readings. These activities were carefully planned not merely to provide alternatives to the old culture, but also to develop the pupils’ aesthetic senses and, in the process, draw them into other intellectual pursuits. Teachers claimed that on such occasions, “you cannot drive the children away from school. They refuse to go home for dinner, but instead wait patiently at the schoolhouse or near it” for the festivities to begin. When a teacher at a zemstvo school organized the first Christmas Tree celebration in the village of Shurma, Viatka province, “so many people attended that the schoolhouse could not accommodate them, and many stood in the street watching through the windows.”

Temperance societies also played an active role in arranging school holidays (and inventing others, like “holidays of sobriety”), as did the reactionary Union of the Russian People, with which the temperance movement became associated after 1906. At Christmas Tree celebrations held in parish schools, for example, antialcohol activists added poems about the dangers of drinking, hymns honoring sobriety, and lectures against tobacco smoking to the general program.78 But if lower-class-be-

75 “Detskii prazdnik,” Vestnik trezvosti, no. 75 (1898); see also Volshebnaia vestniki, no. 7 (1912); Orel’ski vestniki, no. 4 (1894); and Goslo, no. 2 (1910). The tradition of the Christmas tree was introduced in Britain (from Germany) during the 1840s and soon spread elsewhere, along with the notion of family-centered festivity. In England, by the 1920s, “children were forbidden to leave the house on Christmas Day because it was ‘for family.’” Susan Easton et al., Disorder and Discipline: Popular Culture from 1550 to the Present (Brookfield, Vt., 1988), 73. On the invented like, see M. Oszf, Festivals and the French Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); and Charles Reichard, “Festivals in Modern France: The Experience of the Third Republic,” Journal of Contemporary History 12, no. 3 (1977): 435-60.

havior was to be changed decisively, temperance supporters argued, it would be necessary to establish a network of permanent “unions of sobriety” in rural schools, “as in America,” or religious-patriotic organizations that could sponsor and regulate the new festivals, “as in Germany.” Others looked to countries like Britain, Finland, and France, where “May Unions” had enjoyed great success among schoolchildren, and suggested that Russia follow their example. During the 1911-12 academic year, thirteen Moscow-district schools organized such unions, which continued to grow in number thereafter. The purpose of these unions and societies, a temperance activist explained, was to give holidays like the Christmas Tree a stronger moral foundation while creating “a healthier (both physically and morally) new generation in our fatherland.”

Another new festival was the tree-planting holiday (prazdnik derevnosazhdeniia), which mirrored reformist and educational uses of trees from Sweden to France—though not on the scale of the United States’ 1872 creation of Arbor Day. Unlike other Russian invented traditions, the honoring of trees was first practiced in rural areas during the 1890s and only gradually made its way to cities. In Moscow, for instance, the first such celebration was held on October 5, 1913.81 Tree-planting holidays were especially useful to Russia’s diverse strands of social and moral reformism, for they united nearly all the concerns of educated society over peasant culture; they not only provided “rational” recreation and thus helped to fill the village’s cultural vacuum, but were also expected to instill in peasants respect for nature, the forests, and private property. The 1902 Witte Commission on the Needs of Agriculture expressed great enthusiasm for the new holiday in the hopes that it would further popular enlightenment as well as keep future farmers from engaging in illegal woodcutting, as so many of their parents now did. As one commentator argued, “tree-planting holidays and school gardens will teach pupils to respect others’ property and treat it with care.”82 Rural teachers and officials began petitioning for permission to establish this holiday in their

locales; and, after seeing its apparent success in test cases approved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (for example, in Chernigov province), provincial governors instructed land captains, zemstvos, and schools to organize tree-planting holidays. Following a 1901 order by the governor of Riazan' province, for example, at least nineteen schools and peasant communes in Riazan' district alone were celebrating the holiday by 1903. During Russia's 1911 festivities commemorating the centennial of victory over Napoleon, land captains in Samara province united nature and nation by inducing rural townships to establish patriotic tree-planting holidays in honor of this occasion.83

Tree planting, proponents of the new tradition pointed out, had its aesthetic and practical sides as well, because trees served as ideal decorations for bringing beauty and order to village streets ordinarily strewn with refuse or "covered by stagnant, fetid puddles," in the words of a former justice of the peace.84 They also offered protection from the elements, gave shelter to birds, and kept the air fresh and healthy. Yet however innocent these goals appeared from the urban perspective, their impact on peasant society was potentially far-reaching. As did middle-class reformers elsewhere in Europe who attempted "to create a common national identity in a period of sharpened class conflicts," advocates of the "greening of Russia" envisioned a domesticated, recreational rural landscape into which morally reformed peasants could be comfortably situated.85 This was to be accomplished, in part, by means of their invented traditions, which they hoped would reify the myth of an older, more peaceful village community and give birth to a new class of country dweller—one that was educated, sober, hardworking, and more deferential. Through the ritualized yet practical act of planting trees, this holiday celebrated the majesty and power of nature's rejuvenation (aided, however, by human agency), symbolizing educated society's hopes for a similar regeneration of the peasant and, by extension, of the nation.

Many reformers felt that the monotony and boredom of rural life that encouraged drinking and hooliganism also had "a dulling effect on one's sense of the beauty of nature."86 The villagers' closeness to the soil, moral

imperishment, and "bestial" behavior exhibited during festivals led critics of popular culture to associate peasants not merely with the primitive, but directly with the natural and animal world. In other words, their very nearness to nature alienated peasants from its true appreciation. Some reformers therefore urged that schools organize excursions to large villages or district towns so that rural children would gain a fresh perspective of their surroundings when they returned.87 This altered outlook was critical to the achievement of the goals of educated society, for nature itself could not be successfully colonized or tamed as long as the population remained in a savage, "natural" state; as with milieu and degeneration, the two were tightly intertwined. Hence the conscious linkage of moral reform, the inculcation of new views of nature, and a transformation of the landscape. The new rural landscape described by Russian reformers would look strikingly similar to the idyllic descriptions found in contemporary belles lettres (especially in translations from European literature), while its more individualistic inhabitants came increasingly to resemble an ideal type of middle-class farmer. As one commentary in a government-sponsored publication told its imagined peasant readers:

Plant a garden around [village] homes and everything will change: all of the surroundings will come to life. . . . In early spring, . . . people can sit in the shade of trees. The greenery will attract others by its beauty. It is nicer still to drink tea in a garden created with one's own hands, to dream in the quiet evening on a bench beneath a tree grown by one's labor, to eat fruit from the trees and to know that you did all of this [so that] others will . . . remember you with good words. [In a garden] one can escape life's worries and rest one's soul. It is especially healthy for children, because here a good mother can find many useful and intelligent entertainments for them . . . Fathers and mothers! Build a garden for your children . . . and God will bless your work. . . . [O]ne neighbor after another will follow your example.88

With their gardens, pride in individual achievements, family-centered recreation, and tea drinking in the shade, peasants would lose their communal character and be made over into the likeness of the educated classes, whose members might then take their own recreational excursions into a domesticated yet still exotic countryside without fear of the savage Others.

Church and secular organizations similarly sought to instill a different view of the animal world as a means of softening and moralizing peasant behavior. "Being surrounded from childhood by cruelty toward ani-

84 Davydov, Iz proshlogo, p. 162.
86 Kuznetsov, "O merakh protiv khuliganstva," 8. This was also the reason that young peasants drank vodka and engaged in hooligan acts, according to Kuznetsov.
87 Ibid. Already practiced in the Baltic provinces by 1911, this type of excursion was known as rykhod v zelen'.
88 "Zelenais Rossia," no. 256: 2.
not be doubted; A. Bogdanov’s *How One Must Treat Animals* reached a fifth edition by 1912. More striking is evidence that the Society also had a clear impact in rural areas, where schools and popular readings introduced villagers to the new, morally superior views on treatment of animals with the aim of creating a more humane (and less bestial) peasantry. Nor were the Society’s legislative efforts without effect in the countryside; even in the early 1870s, some peasant township courts imposed strict punishments for cruelty to animals, basing their decisions on rules established by the Society.  

Activists engaged in these diverse attempts to transform popular culture repeatedly revealed that their ultimate goal was the creation of a new peasant class capable of filling what they saw as the moral and cultural vacuum of Russia’s dangerous countryside. Hence their focus on the younger generation—especially primary-school children—“who can form a new, cultured layer of the rural population.” Properly reared and educated, “they will be unserving enemies of vice in the village,” helping to re-create the moral foundations of peasant life. But another, equally important source for rural regeneration appeared at the turn of the century when the state bureaucracy, local governments, and (in part) educated society turned away from the traditional peasant commune as a basis for organizing rural society. Moral reformers, too, now reversed their positions; by the early 1900s, though not entirely abandoning earlier assertions about the corrupting influence of cities, they were blaming rural degeneration on the commune itself. A decade of decrying the tyranny of communal customs, mass holiday revelry, and the inability of peasant elders to educate their children or halt the growth of hooliganism convinced many that individualism itself, if properly channeled, could serve as the new bulwark of social order. Certain that the deferential peasantry of old was nearing extinction, they began to view a radical restructuring of peasant life as the key to civilizing the countryside, for within traditional communes, they believed, widespread vice, corruption, 

99 A. Bogdanov, *Kak nuzhna obrashchatsia s zhivotnymi*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1912). See also Ia. Levandovskii, *Posledstva zhivotnogo obrashcheniya s zhivotnymi* (St. Petersburg, 1879); and A. B. Bratchikov, *O rasprostranenii v narode razumnego i krotkogo obrashcheniya s zhivotnymi* (Zhitomir, 1901). Examples of state-approved publications for popular readings can be found in *Vestnik laroslavskogo zasveti*, nos. 3–8 (1905).

100 Trudy komissii po predobrazovannii volokynnikh sudov (St. Petersburg, 1873–74), 3:208.

101 Derevenskie snovy prosveshcheniia,” 2.

102 Opinions on the commune can be found in Trudy mestnykh komitetov o mezhdvkh sel’skokhozstvennoy promyshlennosti, 58 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1903). See also David A. Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia*, 1861–1906 (De Kalb, Ill., 1987); and Wseil, *Reforming Rural Russia.*
and oppressive collective institutions made it impossible for an industrious, honest peasant to lift his family from poverty or raise its cultural level.97

It is no surprise, then, that those seeking improvement in rural life hailed the Stolypin reforms of 1906, which allowed peasants to consolidate their holdings and escape the corrupting influence of the commune by withdrawing to individual farmsteads. Reformers resolutely—and literally—accepted Stolypin’s wager “on the strong and sober,” praising it for “giving free range to the individuality of the peasant” and allowing a unique class to be born “with a new relationship to the land, new views toward life, and . . . a consciousness of the value of their labor.”98 Indeed, as peasant separatists “threw off the chains of the commune” and became petty landed proprietors, reformers compared them directly to the rational, hardworking, independent farmers who, it was believed, provided stability in much of the European countryside, symbolizing progress and rural civility.99

Together with a stream of laudatory writings immediately following the reforms, journals appeared offering this new agrarian class extensive advice and information on agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, the legal procedures necessary to consolidate one’s land and leave the commune, how best to organize and run a private farm, and the advantages of becoming a property owner.100 These and other publications sought to allay uncertainty among peasants and to entice them out of their communes by describing the productivity and peaceful living conditions to be enjoyed on an individual homestead. Citing evidence from newly independent farms across the country, authors of such works claimed that separators produced larger harvests and enjoyed higher livestock on less land than average communal peasants farmed, and were safer from the epidemics that periodically ravaged village livestock. The petty disputes that commonly disrupted village communities and shattered families disappeared on the new farms because separators worked together harmoniously, largely immune to the devastating wave of household divisions that had wreaked havoc in traditional settlements for decades. The new system also strengthened family life and the morality of youth, for there was less corruption and vice by contrast with the disorderly streets of communal villages. As one staunch supporter of the reforms claimed in 1910, “the consolidated farmstead represents salvation from the commune.”101 When combined with the greater wealth that consolidated farms promised, these pictures of social and familial harmony meshed particularly well with the reformist ideal for combating and reversing the insidious process of degeneration.

Separators, in effect, came to be viewed as a social basis for cultural renewal, enlightenment, and order in the countryside. As petty proprietors, they had a greater interest in improving their farms and increasing family wealth; but because property conferred both respectability and individual responsibility, they were also less inclined toward the ruinous holiday drinking, carousing, and debauchery that beset most communes. Reformers argued that as the “sober and strong” freed themselves from the power of the wealthy exploiters (kulaki) and drunken “bawlers” (gorlana) who ruled their villages, occasions for communal drunkenness would eventually disappear entirely, along with hooliganism and other consequences of drinking. As one reform enthusiast noted, “it is not so easy to drink away one’s own farm as it is the communal meadows. . . . By giving land into the private ownership of honest and sober peasants, we will see an end to the mass of hooligans . . . who are destroying the countryside, abandoning their families, and spreading drunkenness” and vice. Others claimed that hooliganism had completely disappeared in areas where the reforms had been widely accepted.102 Perhaps most important from the perspective of educated society, ownership of private farms seemed to be creating respect for the property of others—a historical and cultural deficiency of the peasantry long decryed by observers of rural life—and contributing to a greater acceptance of social- and moral-reform movements.103

There is, in fact, sufficient evidence to suggest that Russia’s social engineers were at least partially correct in their assessment. The Stolypin reforms set in motion a process that encouraged forces already at work in

100 The major journals, largely overlooked in research on the Stolypin reforms, were Khutor (1906–17), Khutorianstvo (1909–17), with an earlier effort in 1896–97, and Khutorskoe khozjaistvo (1906–17).
101 “Khutora i ikh budushchee,” 3, 7; “Ispol’zovanie khutorskogo khozjaistva,” Sel’ski vestnik, no. 133 (1908): 3; “Novaya zemledel’cheskaia Rossii na khutorakh i otbrakakh,” Sel’ski vestnik, no. 142 (1910): 5–6. See also I. G. Dororeshen, Kak zhivut ljudi na khutorakh (Glebokie, 1913); and Zapiski khutorannogo (Mogilev, 1914). Such sentiments were far from universal, of course, and widespread opposition to the Stolypin reforms continued until the collapse of the old regime. E. G., “V zashchitu obshchin,” Rukovodstvo dlia sel’skih pastyriv, no. 49 (1912): 323–32; A. V. Shapkarn, ed., Krest’ianskoe dozhdanie v Rossii, 1907 g.–1914 g. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1966), 107–10, 132, 139–43, 165–70, and passim.
103 “Khutora i ikh budushchee,” 9.
the countryside, particularly social differentiation and the emergence of a rural petty bourgeoisie. Certainly communal peasants knew this to be the case, as their frequent and violent attacks on separatists attested. Those who left the communes found that former fellow villagers cut them off from participation in local cultural activities, and they therefore began to establish their own recreations or to accept more readily the invented traditions of outsiders.\(^\text{104}\) Separators took clear pride in their new status and sought to use it as a symbol of respectability. Many joined rural temperance societies, for example, and, when signing their names to membership lists, identified themselves as independent farmers and specified the amount of land they owned. Others contributed signatures to petitions calling for prohibition and supported rural cooperatives.\(^\text{105}\) The reforms may, at last, have provided a foundation for the efforts of educated outsiders by forming small islands of sobriety and enlightenment that could be used as a springboard to further cultural improvements.

Implicit in this belief that separators represented a new force for rural regeneration were powerful hopes that they would sow the seeds of civilization among the peasantry not only through hard work, but by their willing acceptance of moral reform, education, and rational forms of recreation. Indeed, contemporaries again turned to the language and rationale of colonialism when describing the benefits that Stolypin’s reforms would bring to backward peasants throughout Russia, and they used rural opposition to separators as a means of reinforcing these characterizations. “The separators want to work and are trying to propagate a new culture,” declared an article on peasant disorder, “but they literally find themselves in a hostile country, enduring partisan raids and sieges from the beasts who are running wild. . . . At the present time, a real civil war is taking place in the depths of the peasantry . . . which threatens destruction far worse than an external invasion.”\(^\text{106}\) After 1907, peasants who fought against the reforms or resisted enlightenment from above were classified in starkly alien terms of “otherness” that transformed them into colonial objects representing the antithesis of culture and progress. For the most vehement antagonists of rural life and culture, the undisciplined, depraved peasant youth became “rural outlaws,” “wild savages” displaying “beastly morals,” “degenerates,” and, finally, “apaches” and “hooligans.”\(^\text{107}\) By the 1930s, they would become “enemies of the people.”

\(^\text{104}\) See, e.g., Frank, “Simple Folk, Savage Customs?” 35; and Shapkarn, Krest’ianskoe dozhdение, passim.

\(^\text{105}\) See, for example, M. D. Chelekov, “Poshchadite Rossnu!” Pravda o kulturke, vykazannoy samym narodom po posvity zakona o merakh bor’by s p’ianstvom (Samara, 1911), 77–86.

\(^\text{106}\) “Narodnaya anarkhia,” 218, 221. See also “Pianyi terror v derevne,” 430.

\(^\text{107}\) “Narodnaya anarkhia,” 218–19, 220; 1. A. Rodionov, Nashe prestuplennye (Ne vred, a byl?) (St. Petersburg, 1909); RGIA, f. 1405, op. 532, d. 440, l. 36; d. 424, l. 53; f. 1276, op. 5, d. 116, l. 240b.; f. 796, op. 195, d. 3223, passim.

As with the attacks on rural festivity and peasant degeneration from which they arose, such formulations shed important light on the nature of moral-reform movements sponsored by the educated classes, clergy, and government in fin-de-siècle Russia. Whether the goal was to seek a revolutionary peasant ally, a class of solid, property-owning farmers to buttress state and civilization, or a God-fearing and deferential peasantry that would restore an imagined rural tranquility of old, the means for achieving such ends remained much the same from one group to the next.

Domination of rural popular culture—through education, invented traditions, transformation of worldviews, or even suppression—was fundamental to the goals of church, government, liberal reformers, and socialists alike, much as it would be to their Bolshevik successors (who used “red weddings,” konsonnot evening gatherings, and other new celebrations). Fearful of the “dark” lower classes and far more insecure than most of their European counterparts, Russia’s reformers aimed to sever peasants from the degenerative practices of a corrupted popular culture and instill their own vision of respectability in the village (or factory). By transplanting their culture, ideals, and values across class lines, they would create a radically different peasantry beholden to the forces that spread enlightenment and order. Hence the sharp hostility toward the continued vitality of many popular practices—particularly autonomous innovations such as peasant appropriation of tearooms or libraries established by outsiders, which were frequently transformed into local “clubs” for gambling, drinking, and other forms of socializing.\(^\text{108}\) In these cases, villagers willingly used the tools of cultural transformation provided by moral reformers but ignored or openly rejected the values and morality that accompanied them. Similarly, autonomous visions of respectability (such as peasant-sponsored and peasant-controlled sobriety movements, reading rooms, and self-education), which could be found throughout the countryside, were often greeted with suspicion from reformers precisely because they did not conform to the enlightened goals of educated society. By contrast, villagers who participated in the new holidays, joined official temperance societies, planted gardens and trees, or set up independent farmsteads became small but promising beacons of hope for reformers terrified about the state of their fragile civilization. These peasants, at least, most resembled the colonizers.

\(^\text{108}\) For examples, see Severnyy kras, no. 114 (1904): 3; Povolzhskiy vestnik, no. 181 (1906): 3; and Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti, no. 224 (1911): 5.