

*TIJS Graduate Research & Travel Grants  
Summer 2015*

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Advisor: Miriam Udel (YID)

Purpose: Attend the National Yiddish Book Center's Steiner Summer Yiddish Program to improve language skills while researching further sources for potential PhD work.

I received a generous TIJS grant of \$300 for travel to and from Amherst, MA, where I studied intermediate Yiddish at the National Yiddish Book Center's Steiner Summer Program. This language program was seven weeks long with nearly eight hours of class and work per day. There were three main parts to the program: Yiddish language classes in the morning, a Yiddish culture course after lunch (in English and Yiddish), and a work project in the late afternoon. The intermediate language course was taught by one of the premier Yiddish teachers in North America—Rebecca Margolis, Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Ottawa. With Dr. Margolis, the intermediate students read literature from Mendele Moykher-Sforim and Sholem Aleichem to David Bergelson and Celia Dropkin. We discussed our readings in the context of an immersive Yiddish language environment, only being allowed to speak Yiddish in the classroom and mostly speaking only Yiddish outside of class. The Yiddish culture classes were also regularly conducted in Yiddish and taught by Dr. Samuel Kassow, Charles H. Northam Professor of History at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Dr. Kassow taught us the history of the Vilna ghetto through Yiddish primary source material, including Vilna ghetto poetry, essays, and songs. Finally, as part of the program I worked several hours a day for the National Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project, where I edited Yiddish oral history interviews. Aside from further experience in the language, the Wexler Oral History Project allowed me to gain greater knowledge of oral history's methods of collection, analysis, and production. I hope to use such skills later in my professional career. Each facet of the summer language program at the National Yiddish Book Center was relevant to my future research and professional interests.

The Steiner program was important for reasons beyond typical language training as well. The format of the program—intensive language study *and* cultural study—offered some interesting opportunities. First, the program organized an educational trip to New York to encounter both historic and contemporary uses of Yiddish in America. This included a tour of New York's Lower East Side, the historic center of Yiddish-speaking immigrant life in America, led by a curator from New York's Tenement Museum. Our trip to New York also coincided with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, the longest continuously running Yiddish theater in the world. We were able to see several theater performances and musical performances connected to the Folksbiene. Furthermore, we spent several days in and around Hasidic Williamsburg, using our Yiddish in routine interactions. Toward the close of the Steiner program, the National Yiddish Book Center hosted the 2015 Yidstock Festival of New Yiddish Music. Through the Festival of New Yiddish Music and the Folksbiene, I was able to meet numerous Yiddish speakers and Yiddishists, such as Sheva Zucker, correspondents from *The Yiddish Daily Forward*, and several professors from in and around New York. Residing at the National Yiddish Book Center also gave me access to potentially the world's largest collection of Yiddish books. I purchased a variety of titles that are directly relevant to my dissertation research, which will be intimately tied to American Jewish print culture. Overall, the National Yiddish Book Center's Steiner Summer Program was tremendously beneficial for my future work.

Thank you for your funding and support.



