

The Holodomor:  
Genocide and National Identity

by

Nicolas D. Sawicky

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## Historiography of the Holodomor

The Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933 is one of the many unsolved mysteries that still surround the Soviet Union to this day. Referred to as the Holodomor, which translates to “hunger plague”, it sounds like and is inevitably compared to the Holocaust (Wemheuer, 2009). Unlike the Holocaust, where there is overwhelming evidence to support the claim that it was an act of Genocide, the evidence for the Holodomor is slightly more murky.

Historians agree that a famine did take place and millions of Ukrainian peasants died. The exact number of victims is not known but scholars agree that the number is somewhere between 3 and 10 million. Scholars also disagree over what role the Soviet Union played in the tragedy. Some scholars point to Stalin as the mastermind behind the famine, due to his hatred of Ukrainians (Hosking, 1987). Others assert that Stalin did not actively cause the famine, but knew about it and did nothing to stop it (Moore, 2012). Still other scholars argue that the famine was just an effect of the Soviet Union’s push for rapid industrialization and a by-product of that was the destruction of the peasant way of life (Fischer, 1935). The final school of thought argues that the Holodomor was caused by factors beyond the control of the Soviet Union and Stalin took measures to reduce the effects of the famine on the Ukrainian people (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006).

The Holodomor was mostly forgotten to the world until scholars like Robert Conquest brought up the event in the 1980’s and it saw a huge resurgence as topic

of scholarly discussion. During this time the United States held a commission on the Ukrainian Famine and the U.S. Congress declared the Holodomor to be a man-made famine and an act of Genocide. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became an independent nation in 1991 and began to revisit the Holodomor. Politicians like Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich have used the event as part of their platform to either distance themselves from Russia or more recently, attempt to “delete” the Holodomor so that Ukraine can once again fall under the dominion of the Russia.

During the 1930’s, Ukrainians found themselves under the control of the Soviet Union. As a result of the proud, mostly peasant farming citizens, the country was considered to be behind many western European countries when it came to industry. However, what Ukraine lacked in industry, it made up in its rich soil, which gave the country the nickname “the bread basket of Europe”. Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, saw the peasant farming communities as an obstacle in his plan to rapidly industrialize the entire Soviet Union. Before the Bolsheviks took over Russia in 1917, the Czar ran the country. The Czar had allowed Russia to fall behind the rest of Europe during the Industrial Revolution. Stalin saw the power of a country with a strong emphasis on industry. Industry would move citizens into the cities where they would work in factories and create goods that would both benefit the people of the Soviet Union and be able to sell to other countries. In order for the Soviet Union to compete with European countries that were producing goods, they had to modernize their entire country as fast as possible. What resulted in Ukraine

and other places in the Soviet Union is at least partially linked to this industrial push, Stalin's Five Year Plan.

One of the biggest issues with rapidly industrializing a peasant farming country is how to effectively create a new life for the people. To get factories to work, they have to be filled with laborers. These workers are going to have to come from the farms and move to the cities. However, the problem with cities is that they are not self-sufficient. Food cannot be grown in the cities; it must be imported from the countryside. This means that peasant farmers were no longer just growing crops for their villages, but also to sustain the growing number of Soviet cities. To deal with this issue, the Soviet government started the program of collectivization.

Collectivization was a new farming system that took individually owned farms and combined them into one massive village farm. The entire village would then tend to the farm and when it was time for crops to be harvested, the government would seize a large majority of the crops in order to feed the cities. The idea of losing your land and your crops to the government scared most Ukrainians and for that reason, most of them did not volunteer to join the collective farms when they were first introduced. This move angered Stalin and the communist party. Many scholars like Fischer, Bilinsky, and Hosking believe the famine that proceeded was some form of punishment for the Ukrainian peasants' fight against collectivization.

The pro-Soviet writer, Louis Fischer (1935) explained the situation that plagued the Ukrainian farmers in the early 1930's in his book *Soviet Journey*:

“The peasants brought the calamity upon themselves. Yet one can understand what prompted this suicidal action. The Bolsheviks had launched the ambitious Five Year Plan. It had to be financial. It was to cost something like forty-two billion rubles. That colossal sum had to come from within the country, for foreign nations refused loans and gave limited credits at usurious rates. The workers and the peasants had to pay. The worker paid in the form of reduced consumption goods. The peasant paid in the form of huge taxes. In many cases, the government took thirty, even fifty, indeed even sixty percent of his crop. Without such high-handed measures, the city could not have been industrialized quickly and foreign obligations could not have been met. But the result was that the peasant said: What is the use of plowing, planting and harvesting when the authorities seize a large part of my crop?”

As Fischer explains, the peasants were handed the burden of the Soviet Union’s Five Year Plan without receiving any benefits. The Five Year Plan was a “major policy on which the strength and character of their regime depended” (Fischer, 1935). The plan failing would mean a failure for the entire idea of communism and would risk the collapse of the still young Soviet Union. The peasants did not see it this way. They only saw how the plan would negatively affect their way of life. Fischer (1935) concludes that:

“...The 1932 famine was a concomitant of the last battle between private capitalism and socialism in Russia. The peasants wanted to destroy collectivization. The government wanted to retain collectivization. The peasants used the best means at their disposal. The government used the best means at its disposal. The government won.”

Shkandrij (2012) agrees with the idea that the battle for collectivization and the resulting famine was a battle between the peasants and the government. He states that the Soviets view the famine in Ukraine as just the cost of modernization and that “to make an omelet one has to break eggs’, or in other words, that the opposition to collectivization had to be crushed whatever the cost in human lives” (Shkandrij, 2012). He even goes so far as to state: “Stalin was determined to destroy the roots of Ukrainian resistance to the regime, which lay in the countryside” (Shkandrij, 2012).

The former Minister of Agrarian Affairs for the Ukrainian People's Republic described the famine as "a terrible example of the clear destruction of the Ukrainian people by the Russian occupier" (Kovalevsky, 1937). He describes the collectivization as the Soviet Union's answer to their struggle against the tough Ukrainian peasantry. "The introduction of collectivization became transformed into the systematic destruction of material wealth, and when resistance was encountered, into the physical destruction of the Ukrainian peasantry" (Kovalevsky, 1937).

Other scholars also share the theory that the Soviet Collectivization plan was a weapon against the Ukrainian peasants. They point to the existence of Ukrainian nationalism as the catalyst for Stalin imposing a "final solution" on the troublesome nationality problem in Ukraine (Bilinsky, 1999). Hosking concludes in his article titled, "Arranging a Catastrophe", that the "famine was deliberately inflicted there [in Ukraine] for ethnic reasons" (Hosking, 1987). He argues it was Stalin's attempt at undermining the nation of Ukraine, which had just experienced a cultural and linguistic renaissance, which pulled the country away from the Russo-centric view that Stalin wanted them to have (Hosking, 1987). Robert Conquest, the author of *Harvest of Sorrow*, researched the Ukrainian famine extensively and promoted two terms to describe the events: "hunger holocaust" and "terror famine" (Conquest, 1986). His central thesis was that "Stalin produced the famine on purpose to crack down on the resistance of the Ukrainians to Soviet oppression" (Conquest, 1986). Marples (2009) also provides support to the theory that Ukrainian Nationalism was a thorn in the side of the Soviet Union. He describes it as a "pre-eminent issue" and

discloses that there are “simply too many references to the role of Ukrainian nationalism and its prevalence in Ukrainian villages, as well as evidence of the removal of prominent cultural and national leaders by the early 1930’s to be ignored by Western scholars” (Marples, 2009).

Unlike Hitler and the Holocaust, there are no speeches where Stalin condemns the Ukrainian peasantry. To understand Stalin’s true feelings, you have to look at the very few surviving documents and his actions from that time period. Bilinsky (1999) points out the depth of Stalin’s hatred toward “autonomy-minded Ukrainian leaders” with Stalin’s telegram from April 4, 1918 to Ukrainian communist Volodymyr Zatonsky: “You have been playing long enough those [childish] games of a government and a republic. Enough is enough, stop it” (Bilinsky, 1999). With that telegram, it can be seen that even back in 1918, Stalin thought the idea of Ukraine being anything more than a puppet controlled from Moscow was against his wishes. When it seemed like Stalin was losing control in Ukraine, he brought the full force of the Soviet Union against the Ukrainian farmers who wished to maintain their own cultural identity.

We do know that after Ukraine’s attempt at creating a national identity; it saw a rapid introduction of collectivization, when compared to other regions under Soviet control (Marples, 2009). In addition, Ukraine found itself with “unreasonable grain quotas” when compared to other regions. Moore (2012) argues that the famine “was wholly ‘man-made’ and did not result from any natural causes”. She cites that the harvests of the time were adequate and that the cause of the famine was a result of the Soviet Union’s “unrealistic grain requisitions from the Ukrainian

peasantry, which occurred alongside a simultaneous assault on Ukrainian nationalism” (Moore, 2012).

The famine was made worse by Stalin’s directive of January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1933. In this directive, Ukrainian peasants were prevented from migrating outside their villages and the borders of Ukraine were closed (Marples, 2009). This move made a negative situation even worse, since the last move for a starving peasant was to flee their village in search of food. Being turned away and forced to return to their villages was essentially a death sentence to the people. The Soviet police, the GPU, “searched trains on the border of Ukraine to prevent food being imported or refugees leaving to seek food elsewhere” (Hosking, 1987). Moore describes the closing of the borders as “leaving the starving to die”. This is further exacerbated by the fact that there are reports of “Russian villages receiving supplies while neighboring Ukrainian villages across the border were left to starve” (Hosking, 1987).

Many scholars argue that if the Soviet Union did not intend for a famine to occur in Ukraine, once it occurred, they should have jumped to the aid of the Ukrainian citizens. Moore accuses the Soviet Union of being “fully aware of the situation they had fostered, but refused any assistance to the starving, including rejecting international aid”. The Soviet Union’s decree on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1932 made the famine in Ukraine even worse when it called for the confiscation of not only “grain, but also meat and vegetables, ensuring the inevitability of the peasants starving” (Marples, 2009). After looking through the evidence, there is some indication that the Soviet Union set out to “destroy the Ukrainian nation as a political factor and social organism, a goal which could be attained far short of

complete extermination” (Moore, 2012). These facts are an important keystone in the overall argument that the Soviet Union used its Collectivization program to cause a famine in Ukraine, with the intent to starve off peasant farmers that the Soviet Union saw as an impediment on their plans to industrialize the entire Soviet Union.

Some scholars, like Moore and Wemheuer, disagree with theory that the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933 was directly caused by the Soviet Union. Moore and Wemheuer believe there is just not enough evidence to “convict” the Soviet Union, but believe there is enough to prove that they did not do everything in their power to prevent the famine from being as deadly as it became. The International Commission of Inquiry did a report on the event and concluded that: “the Soviet authorities, without actively wanting the famine, most likely took advantage of it once it occurred to force the peasants to accept policies which they strongly opposed” (Moore, 2012). Moore concedes that there “is not a lot of evidence that Stalin himself ordered the Ukrainian killer famine, but there is every reason to believe he knew about it, understood what was happening, and was completely indifferent to the fate of the victims”. She goes on to conclude that in an international court of justice, Stalin would most likely be acquitted in the charge of being a “genocidaire”, but is also quick to mention that even if there is not enough evidence to convict Stalin, it “does not mean that the event itself cannot be judged as genocide” (Moore, 2012).

To prove negligence on the side of the Soviet Union, it is first important to prove that the Soviet Union was aware of the situation. In 1962, *Pravda* published

an article about a conversation Comrade Terekhov had with Stalin in 1932. In this conversation, Comrade Terekhov told Stalin about the “grave situation in the villages and ask[ed] for bread to be sent to the districts” (Wemheuer, 2009).

According to Comrade Terekhov, Stalin retorted with claims that Terekhov was “a fine storyteller” and accused him of spinning “this yarn about he famine thinking that you’ll intimidate us, but it won’t work” (Wemheuer, 2009). This article shows that Stalin was at least informed of the famine and chose to disregard the information as a fairytale.

Information about the famine was not just contained to a single conversation with Stalin. Shkandrij (2012) discloses: “already in the winter of 1931-32 there had been newspaper reports of famine in Soviet Ukraine. And estimated 150,000 people died and numerous individuals had escaped across the border to Romania and Poland”. In these reports, there were descriptions of peasants being shot while attempting to cross the border (Shkandrij, 2012). Roman and British governments expressed their concern for the well being of these refugees when the Soviet Unions demanded them to be returned to Ukraine and meet “certain execution” (Shkandrij, 2012). Instead of working to fix the problem that was causing the Ukrainian peasants to flee, the Soviet Union “heavily reinforced the border to prevent similar escapes in the future. It cleared much of the local population from the border areas and inserted a large number of Russian troops” (Shkandrij, 2012). Some scholars see these actions as evidence that the Soviet Union “foresaw the possibility of another famine as a result of its policies” (Shkandrij, 2012).

Another scholarly theory on the famine that occurred from 1932-1933 is that

it was not an attack on the Ukrainian people, but peasants in general. This theory is one of the important arguments against declaring the famine an act of genocide against the people of Ukraine. Wemheuer (2009) points out that the victims were not just Ukrainians, “but also Kazakhs, Russian, and Germans”. Because of that, many historians view the event as a Soviet famine rather than just a Ukrainian famine (Wemheuer, 2009).

Scholars like Davies and Wheatcroft have looked at the impact of the famine in Ukraine in both the rural and urban areas and point out that the rural peasants were left to starve while urban workers received better provisions (Moore, 2012). They conclude that “the famine is most illustrative of the regime’s ruthless and callous approach to the peasantry as a whole, rather than one particular ethnic group” and therefore cannot be considered an act of genocide (Moore, 2012). Davies and Wheatcroft (2004) argue that the famine was “a consequence of the decision to industrialize this peasant country at breakneck speed” (Moore, 2012). These scholars point out that the upper-brass of the Soviet Union saw the peasantry as non-essential and when food became scarce, priority went to the cities and the army (Wemheuer, 2009).

The final theory argued by some scholars is that the Famine in Ukraine was simply an act of nature that the Soviet Union fought against. Some scholars criticize Conquest, one of the first scholars to point out the genocidal nature of the events in Ukraine. They assert that Conquest had “taken the side of his Ukrainian sources on this issue, even though much of the evidence does not support it well” (Whitney, 1986). Whitney (1986) goes on to claim:

“Mr. Conquest’s attempts to document the claim that while people were starving in the Ukraine they were being well fed just across the border in Russia fall far short of a rigorous standard—a few citations from ‘The Black Deeds of the Kremlin’ and other exile sources do not make the case.”

Another piece of evidence to prove that the Soviet Union is not at fault, are the documented grain quotas. Davies and Wheatcroft (2006) wrote a reply to Ellman’s “Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-33” in the *Europe-Asia Studies Journal* that acts as a great counter to the beliefs of scholars like Conquest. Davies and Wheatcroft (2006) disclose, “the USSR suffered two disastrous harvests in 1931 and 1932, which negated efforts to build up grain stocks”. Then in May of 1932, the Soviet government realized they had to reduce the entire Soviet grain quota targets from 23.5 million tons to 19 million tons (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006). This meant that the original 5.83 million tons quota for Ukraine was reduced to 3.77 million tons (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006).

The Soviet Union did more than just reduce its quotas for farms. “Once it was aware of the scale of the famine, the Politburo issued 35 ‘top secret decisions’ that provided small amounts of food relief to Ukraine and the North Caucasus” (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006). As history shows though, “these measures were insufficient to prevent mass starvation but they demonstrate the government’s efforts to reduce the hardship” (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006). Some might argue that providing small amounts of food was not enough, but Davies & Wheatcroft (2006) point out why Stalin was not able to do more for the people of Ukraine. “Stalin declined to seek grain relief from abroad because of a crisis in foreign exchange rates and also because of reluctance to expose the real problems in Soviet agriculture” (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006). They conclude their argument by stating: “we have found no

evidence, direct or indirect, that Stalin sought deliberately to starve the peasants” and cite a letter from Robert Conquest where he reveals that “he does not believe that Stalin deliberately inflicted the 1933 famine, but rather put Soviet interests ahead of feeding the starving” (Davies & Wheatcroft, 2006). Kuromiya (2008) arrives at a similar conclusion when he wonders why Stalin did not just announce his intention to kill Ukrainians like he did when he declared his objective of eliminating the Kulaks. An announcement from Stalin would insure his wishes were met instead of choosing to secretly impose a famine, which is much harder to control and predict. Kuromiya (2008) concludes, “It is unlikely that he intentionally caused the famine to eliminate millions”.

Ever since the famine of 1932-33 occurred, scholars have been trying to develop a complete picture of the events that transpired. The first Ukrainian’s to draw attention to the tragedy of the Holodomor, were survivors who had fled to the west (Motyl, 2010). The first survivor testimony was published in the 1950’s titled *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin: A White Book*. The authors were “dismissed as rabid anti-Communists and cold warriors by much of the Western political and intellectual establishment” (Motyl, 2010). It was because of that label that their work was only taken seriously by other Ukrainians who had moved to the West.

It was not until the 1983, the fiftieth anniversary of the famine that other western scholars began to research the event. The rediscovery of the Holodomor lead to an increase in attention by both scholars and the public. In 1984, the documentary film *The Harvest of Despair* was widely screened in North America (Moore, 2012). The very next year, the famine began to be featured in American

public high school history curriculum as part of the study on human rights and genocide (Moore, 2012). Even more significant was Robert Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow*, "which was the first in-depth scholarly account of the famine. Conquest presented the famine as being planned by the Soviet authorities and suggested that it was a genocide against Ukrainians" (Moore, 2012).

Following Conquest, the American historian James Mace, compiled three volumes of documentation and testimony for the U.S. commission on the Ukraine Famine and delivered it to Congress (Motyl, 2010). In those volumes, Mace argues that the "famine was an anti-Ukrainian measure" (Motyl, 2010). When Mace compared his findings to the internationally accepted definition of genocide, he declares that "since its focus was geographic, rather than discriminatory against specific groups within a given area, and it was clearly not an attempt to destroy all members of a given group", it cannot be considered an act of genocide (Bilinsky, 1999).

To better understand why the Ukrainian famine may or may not be considered an act of genocide, it might be beneficial to understand the definition of genocide. The U.N. General Assembly approved the legal definition of genocide on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1948. It defined genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group" (Moore, 2012). The definition was originally going to include "social and political groups as potential victims of genocide, but this element was eventually withdrawn after vigorous protests by some delegates, among the most vocal of which was the Soviet Union" (Moore).

The Jewish-Polish scholar, Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term genocide, was in favor of the Holodomor being considered an act of genocide. In a 1953 speech, he said the Ukrainian famine was “not simply a case of mass murder” but “a case of genocide, of destruction, not of individuals only, but of a culture and a nation” (Motyl, 2010). Lemkin declared that the Ukrainian genocide consisted of four components:

“The first blow [was] aimed at the intelligentsia, the national brain, so as to paralyze the rest of the body.” The second was “an offensive against the churches, priests, and hierarchy, the ‘soul’ of Ukraine. . . . The third prong of the Soviet plan was aimed at the farmers, the large mass of independent peasants who are the repository of the tradition, folk lore and music, the national language and literature, the national spirit, of Ukraine. The weapon used against this body is perhaps the most terrible of all, starvation. . . . The fourth step in the process consisted in the fragmentation of the Ukrainian people . . . by the addition to the Ukraine of foreign peoples and by the dispersion of the Ukrainians throughout Eastern Europe.” (Motyl, 2010)

Considering the lack of accessibility of the Soviet archives, it will probably remain impossible to document the real intent of Stalin. Bilinsky (1999) believes that although he cannot be sure on the Soviet Unions intent, he believes that “it would have been impossible to implement the mass extermination of the entire Ukrainian population”. Based on that, he theorizes that the intent was to “terrorize a people conquered”, much like a colonizing power. Bilinsky (1999) goes on to state that he believes Stalin reached the goal of terror, if that was his intent, although it did also cost an enormous amount of “human lives and suffering”.

Despite the lack of consensus in the academic world, the Commission on the Ukrainian Famine handed its report to the United States Congress in 1988. The commission found that “a famine that caused the death of millions occurred in Ukraine in 1932-33 and was manmade by the Soviet government” (Wemheuer, 2009). The report also stated that “Stalin produced the famine on purpose” and goes

on to detail how “Stalin used the resulting procurement crisis in Ukraine as an excuse to tighten his control and to intensify grain seizures further” (Wemheuer, 2009). The report concludes “Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians in 1932-1933” (Wemheuer, 2009). After seeing the report, the United States Congress voted and approved to recognize the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 as an act of Genocide by the Soviet Union (Wemheuer, 2009).

When discussing the Holodomor, it is almost impossible not to also discuss the Holocaust. Moore describes this as “a Holocaust-based conception of genocide”, which basically means that since we know the most about the Holocaust, we understand other acts of genocide “by analyzing their similarities and differences from the Holocaust” (Moore, 2012). The Holocaust is considered “the genocide of genocides” and its continued discussion has led to the realization of the power of victimhood (Moore, 2012). The Holocaust took a terrible event and turned it into a “political asset” (Moore, 2012).

When comparing the Holocaust and the Holodomor, you do see some commonalities. Both took place in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. Both events also saw the loss of an “estimated five to seven million lives” (Bilinsky, 1999). There are some striking differences too. The Holodomor was not “motivated by any quest for racial purity, nor was it an attempt to physically murder every single Ukrainian” (Bilinsky, 1999). According to Mace, the intent of the Soviets was to “destroy the Ukrainian nation as a political factor and social organism, a goal which could be attained far short of complete extermination” (Mace, 1984).

Despite the differences between the Holodomor and the Holocaust, some parties might find it useful to compare the two. Moore (2012) explains “past atrocities possess a certain potency in the present” and the moral power of the past events can lead to a certain group receiving victimhood status. This status becomes a useful political power in the present (Moore, 2012). What essentially is happening is that other groups have seen “the success of the Jews in gaining permanent position of center stage for their tragedy” and their success has created a fair amount of resentment or “Holocaust envy” (Moore, 2012).

With this envy comes a sense of competition between certain atrocities and the Holocaust. The victims argue that their suffering was somehow worse than what the victims of the Holocaust had experienced. What people fail to understand is that just because an act of genocide does not cease to be an act of genocide, just because a worse case exists (Moore, 2012).

The side that promotes the victimization of the Holodomor is fighting to keep the event in the spotlight; much like the Holocaust has continued to excel at being at the forefront of any genocide discussion. They use flashy descriptions to draw people in like, “a Holocaust the west forgot”, “the hidden Holocaust”, “Ukraine’s Holocaust”, “the early Holocaust”, and “the holocaust-famine” (Moore, 2012). Some go even further and use phrases that are meant to overshadow the Holocaust: “the greatest genocide of the century” and “the most brutal ethnic genocide in history” (Moore, 2012). Another historical commentator has stated, “History has not recorded another such crime as the famine perpetrated against an entire nation, nor one ever carried out in such a cold-blooded manner” (Moore, 2012). This statement

at least places the Holodomor in the category of famines. The historian Lubomyer Luciuk claims, “The intensity of mortality in Soviet Ukraine over a duration of less than a year confers upon the Holodomor the unenviable status of being a crime against humanity arguably without parallel in European history” (Moore, 2012).

What is terrible about this discussion is that the victims take a back seat to the arguments and counter arguments about how their research proves this and that. Fighting for “Holocaust Envy”, or the attention that comes with being the victim of genocide, has led to each group to fight each other for the “gold medal in the victimization Olympics” instead of working together to help prevent further atrocities and help previous victims tell their stories.

The fight for the “gold medal” is not limited to scholarly debates. The politics in Ukraine have been fighting to a certain view on how the Holodomor and the Holocaust should be discussed. The discussion is problematic because of Ukraine’s role in the Holocaust. There were some Ukrainian collaborators that took an active role in hunting down and killing Jews during World War II (Wemheuer, 2009). This fact along with the rest of the Holocaust is usually omitted from Ukrainian history textbooks in favor of the Holodomor (Wemheuer, 2009).

The former president of Ukraine, Victor Yushchenko, believes both the Holodomor and the Holocaust are important historical examples of genocide. According to him, “They were both effects of consciously planned policies by tyrannical dictators, and they both resulted in an intentional, systematic, and organized employment of violence against members of a stigmatized collective

group” (Dietsch, 2012). He believes that the two events are “entwined” and the Holocaust has actually helped the world understand the Holodomor.

In 1991, Ukraine became an independent nation. This new freedom allowed the Holodomor to finally be discussed openly in the country that suffered from the tragedy. The first president of independent Ukraine declared in 1992, “Ukrainians had suffered more than anybody else under the Stalinist machine” (Wemheuer, 2009). In 1998, the fourth Sunday in November was declared a day of commemoration of the famine (Wemheuer, 2009). What is interesting is that as the famine becomes integrated into Ukraine’s new national history, there are still public disputes on the scale and origin of the famine (Marples, 2009). “These disputes illustrate the continuing relevance of the Soviet period to life in Ukraine, despite the material and practical steps taken in forging an independent state” (Marples, 2009). Like many former Soviet States, Ukraine is struggling with explaining its past history under the dominion of the Soviet Union.

Due to this struggle, the Holodomor debate has now become the catalyst for a much larger debate in Ukraine. Since their independence, Ukrainians have been continuously searching for their national identity. That identity is something that is still argued today. Ukrainians are split on whether to have a Russo-centric view of their nation or an independent and uniquely Ukrainian view. How Ukrainians view the Holodomor is a giant step towards finding and embracing their national identity.

There are a few factors that cause Ukrainians to struggle with their national identity. First and foremost is the fact that “there are too few [positive events] in the history of Ukraine” (Wemheuer, 2009). When Ukraine received its independence, it

was not the result of a hard fought revolution like the United States or even other former Soviet Republics like Estonia, Georgia, or Lithuania (Wemheuer, 2009). The lack of a glorious revolution to add to their national myth, like the U.S. does with the founding fathers, makes it hard for citizens to rally behind a common hero. The men who fought against the Soviet Union in the 1940s are also the ones who collaborated with the Nazi Germany and committed terrible acts of anti-Semitism (Wemheuer, 2009). Despite this fact, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army is usually glorified as national heroes to some degree. This still leaves a void for some Ukrainians when they look for something to rally behind in their past.

The political side that favors an Ukrainian identity independent of Russia, the National Democrats, has argued that “Ukrainians could not have a history and an identity if they did not look for their roots in the distant past and come to terms with events and individuals demonized by Russian imperial historiography and Soviet propaganda” (Motyl, 2010). Victor Yushchenko, the former president of Ukraine and member of the National Democrats, attempted to take a terrible event in his nation’s past and turn it into an event that was both remembered and met his political goal of breaking ties with neighboring Russia. When running for president he made the “Holodomor-as-genocide thesis a central tenet of his nation-building efforts” (Motyl, 2010). After taking office, Yushchenko pushed to have Ukrainian constitutionally recognized as the state language (Motyl, 2010). He “founded the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory to research the Holodomor and built the Holodomor Memorial next to the old Soviet memorial celebrating the Great Fatherland War”, or as it is known by the west, World War II (Motyl, 2010). Yushchenko also “initiated a series of

celebrations to coincide with the famine's seventy-fifth anniversary in 2008 and sought international recognition of the Holodomor as genocide"; with fourteen countries agreeing that the Holodomor was an act of genocide (Motyl, 2010).

"Under the leadership of President Viktor Yushchenko, the famine has taken a central place in the construction of a Ukrainian national history, and the president has taken the personal lead in this campaign" (Marples, 2009). Bringing the atrocities of the Holodomor into the public eye has helped Yushchenko reach his goal of designating Russia as the perpetrator of not only the famine, but also the "wartime years that followed" (Marples, 2009). "The famine is now represented in school textbooks, and the Ukrainian parliament has recognized it as an act of genocide based on the UN definition of that term outlined in 1948" (Marples, 2009). Thanks to Yushchenko's efforts, "the memory of the famine has become a part of the new national myth and identity" (Wemheuer, 2009). Now that the Holodomor is in the public consciousness, "The victimization of the Ukrainian nation can serve as a link between the peasant narratives of suffering and the genocide discourse of the post-socialist intellectuals" (Wemheuer, 2009). Stalin's Russia is now held responsible for the famine and "the memories of [the Holodomor] serve to unify different cultural, ethnic, and political groups" (Wemheuer, 2009). The memory of Holodomor can now be described as "cultural trauma", which means that a "new identity" has been "created based on [Ukraine's] negative and catastrophic events of the past" (Wemheuer, 2009). Yushchenko believes that other lessons can be learned from the famine. In 2003, he argued that the famine has taught us that there is a need for a free press and a democratic European structure, which would guarantee Ukrainian

sovereignty (Dietsch, 2012). He goes as far as to say “If there existed a politically independent Ukraine in the 1930’s, the communist regime could never have instigated such a widespread starvation and withheld relief from the population” (Dietsch, 2012). This point, above all, helped Yushchenko prove to Ukrainian citizens that independence from “mother countries” like Russia was in Ukraine’s best interest.

Yushchenko and the National Democrats were not the only political factors in Ukraine attempting to build a national identity for Ukraine. “When the Ukrainian parliament voted in November 2006 to declare the Holodomor genocide, the votes spilt predictably” (Motyl, 2010). “The National Democrats voted for the motion, while the Party of Regions and the Communists voted against it” (Motyl, 2010). This vote showed the huge spilt in Ukrainian politics, with the motion barely being passed. Yushchenko’s opponents favored a Russian identity for Ukraine. With this vote, they understood that it would rewrite Ukrainian history. Ukraine’s history would transform from one that was written by the Soviet Union, to a history that would “carve out a distinct Ukrainian identity rooted in a democratic and pro-western culture” (Motyl, 2010). This history would also remove any “Russian claims to political hegemony over Ukraine” (Motyl, 2010). As Ukraine continued to rewrite its own history in favor of an independent Ukraine, neighboring Russia began to worry about its diminishing effect over the once Soviet nation. A spokesperson for the Kremlin was quoted as stating “A significant portion of Ukraine’s citizens has accepted nationalist clichés. These people quite sincerely believe that Ukraine should have a language, history, and heroes that are necessarily separate from

Russia's" (Motyl, 2010). Putin expressed alarm at these events and in 2006; the Russian Duma passed a resolution denying that the famine was genocide (Motyl, 2010). Putin then "mobilized Russian historians" to "produce textbooks emphasizing Ukraine's common history with Russia and to deny the Holodomor's Ukrainian specificity" (Motyl, 2010). In addition to the Kremlin's war via textbooks, it also "began funneling substantial sums of money to its supporters and intelligence operatives in Ukraine" (Motyl, 2010).

Russia's interference in Ukraine's affairs made its largest impact when it helped get a pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, elected president of Ukraine in 2010, beating Yushchenko. One of his first acts as president was the deletion of the Holodomor from the presidential website. Motyl (2010) describes the deletion as a "silent gesture, signifying to both the Kremlin and his own countrymen that his Ukraine, unlike Yushchenko's, would adopt pro-Soviet and pro-Russian stances".

Yanukovich's regime has since stated that it views genocide as a political act and the Holodomor, does not fit that criteria (Motyl, 2010). His minister of education and science has also announced that he intends to "purge history textbooks of delirious hyperbolization about the Holodomor" (Motyl, 2010). Yanukovich's minister of humanitarian affairs believes that Yushchenko's Institution of Historical Memory "may need to undergo official review" (Motyl, 2010). There is also a new director at the institute, who is a "Communist sympathizer". This new director has publically stated that the famine was "the result of difficult circumstances" and he intends to promote "a national memory that unities Ukrainians", a move that would retract from the institute's originally findings under

the now former president Yushchenko (Motyl, 2010). The Holodomor “cover-up” under the Yanukovich regime has even pushed the head of Ukraine’s Security Service to “close the secret police archives”, stating that “people know all they need to know” (Motyl, 2010). According to Motyl (2010), “The Holodomor has thereby been transformed into a touchstone of political loyalty and a code for what is permissible in talking about the Yanukovich regime”. He goes on to proclaim, “To maintain that the famine was genocide or an anti-Ukrainian crime is effectively to engage in dissent and declare one’s political opposition to Yanukovich. And in Yanukovich’s Ukraine, as in Putin’s Russia, dissent is risky business” (Motyl, 2010). This can be seen first hand when Yanukovich had the former prime minister of Ukraine under Yushchenko and a political opponent, thrown in jail.

The famine of 1932-1933, also known as the Holodomor or “Ukrainian Holocaust” is still very relevant in Ukraine today. There are still lots of debate as to how much the Soviet Union knew about the situation and if they played a hand in causing it, directly or indirectly. The debate goes beyond the scholarly world, with recent Ukrainian politics using the event to help their particular goals. What is amazing is that in this day and age, there are politicians that still have the power to effectively rewrite history to meet their personal political goals.

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## Original Research: The Holodomor in Modern Ukrainian Politics

In 2013, the Ukrainian people and the world will be commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holodomor. With the distance between this tragic event and the present continuing to grow, it is surprising to note that the Holodomor is still being discussed in politics today. Ground Zero for these discussions is in Ukraine, where the country is still struggling to find its identity after becoming an independent nation in 1992. To this day, there are two widely held and opposing views surrounding the events of the Holodomor. The first hypothesis declares that the events that occurred in Ukraine in 1933 were a deliberate act of genocide by the Soviet Union on the Ukrainian people. The opposing viewpoint states that the event, although terrible, was not a deliberate act of genocide by the Soviet Union, but instead the result of a poor harvest and the failure of the Soviet collectivization system as a whole. There have been politicians in Ukraine and around the world that have sat on each side of this debate. Despite its tragic nature, politicians have had no problem using the Holodomor to help their political agendas.

The first major Ukrainian politician to bring the Holodomor back into the spotlight was Viktor Yuschenko. In 2004, Yuschenko ran for president of Ukraine against Viktor Yanukovich. Yuschenko represented the citizens of Western Ukraine, who favored the views of Western Europe. Yanukovich's stronghold was located in Eastern Ukraine, where most citizens saw themselves as extensions of Russia. These two opposing factions in Ukraine came to head in the presidential election of 2004

(Krushelnycky, 2004). During the campaign, Yushenko was nearly killed by a mysterious dioxin poisoning, an attack that left him permanently disfigured but healthy enough to continue his campaign (Maykuth, 2005). After the election results were announced, many Ukrainians were surprised to learn that Yanukovych, the candidate personally chosen by the departing president “who had ruled the country in an authoritarian manner for a decade,” had beat the pro-western Yushenko. Putin, the president of Russia was quick to congratulate Yanukovych on his victory. At the same time, Western election monitors reported “massive election fraud by the government” (Krushelnycky, 2004). “The European Union, American and Western organizations condemned the elections as fraudulent” and demanded that the outgoing president review the election results (Krushelnycky, 2004). What followed became to be known as the “Orange Revolution”.

The Orange Revolution was not just a contested election. It was a fight for Ukraine’s identity. The result of the revolution would determine whether Ukraine moved closer to the European Union or return to its position as a Russian satellite State (Krushelnycky, 2004). Supporters of Yushenko flooded the streets of Ukrainian cities, with 200,000 supporters in Kiev, the capital, and 100,000 in the large western city of Lviv (Krushelnycky, 2004). A deputy in Yushenko’s revolution, Yulia Tymoshenko, took to the streets and led the protestors in chants of “Yushenko, Yushenko!” With the apparent support of the people, Yushenko declared himself president in front of Ukraine’s parliament and took the oath of office (Krushelnycky, 2004). The Ukrainian Supreme court did eventually annul the election results and called for a new election, where Yushenko won handedly.

Yuschenko's fight for a fair democratic election in Ukraine garnered some praise in the international community as well as at home. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005 Yuschenko was awarded the "Liberty Medal", which is awarded to individuals who "heighten America's founding principles" (Maykuth, 2005). Despite his popularity abroad, back in Ukraine the fever of the Orange Revolution quickly died down and turned into political dysfunction. After not even a year in office, Yuschenko was forced to fire his Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, and his entire cabinet after failing to agree on Ukraine's direction moving forward (Maykuth, 2005).

After consolidating his government, Yuschenko made his first big political statement to the world when he signed the Holodomor bill into law. The law "recognized the 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine, the Holodomor, as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people" (Ukraine News, 2006). This law was then emulated around the world, with a dozen countries passing similar laws declaring the famine to have been a Soviet-lead act of genocide (Dujisin, 2007). In addition to the passage of this law, Yushchenko succeeded in passing a domestic bill in 2007 that would "make those who deny either the Holocaust or the man-made nature of the famine criminally liable" (Dujisin, 2007). Breaking the law would bring with it a fine of up to \$1,000 and up to four years in prison (Dujisin, 2007). When discussing the proposed law, Yuschenko was quoted as saying, "I am convinced that it will be a good example of ensuring two major tragedies...on one hand will have international status, and on the other, [will be brought under] clear cut limits of accountability" (Dujisin, 2007). Outsiders view these political events in Ukraine as exploitation by Western-leaning Ukrainian politicians to win votes from their national-minded citizens (Dujisin,

2007). It is important to note that even with the passage of the law punishing deniers of the Holodomor, the political environment in Ukraine was still very much divided. There still was a sharp discord between the nationalist-minded Ukrainians in the West and the Russian-minded Ukrainians in the East in both a political and cultural sense (Dujisin, 2007).

President Viktor Yushchenko continued his fight for the Holodomor's recognition as an act of genocide with the United Nations. In 2003, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famine, "the United Nations approved a joint declaration that described the Holodomor as a 'great tragedy' – a compromise term that was then accepted by Russia, Ukraine and the major Western-powers" (Dujisin, 2007). Yushchenko hoped to add "genocide" to that joint declaration, but was unable to muster enough undeniable evidence to support the claim that the Holodomor was irrefutably an act of genocide. His opponents pointed to the fact that not only were there victims of other ethnicities besides Ukrainian, but the famine only affected Ukrainians in rural areas, leaving Ukrainians in the city mostly unharmed (Dujisin, 2007).

President Yushchenko also devoted considerable energy into Holodomor remembrance when he declared 2008, a famine commemoration year. Yushchenko pushed for the creation of memory books, a list of victims, the cleanup of their burial places, and the dismantling of monuments that celebrate Soviet officials who contributed to the famine (Dujisin, 2007). Yushchenko even announced plans to build a national museum dedicated to the Holodomor.

President Viktor Yushenko also took center stage to promote remembrance when he opened the “Holodomor 1932-1933 – genocide of the Ukrainian people” exhibit in Kiev. “In his speech, the President noted the positive shift in [the] study of the Holodomor and [the] honoring its victims that [had] occurred in recent years” (“President Opens Updated Exhibit,” 2009). He also made sure to mention that the Holodomor was a deliberately planned event and that should be known by all Ukrainian citizens. Yushenko summarized Ukraine’s recent accomplishments towards Holodomor remembrance with the following statement:

“Today we have revealed secret archives, collected over two hundred thousand testimonies of eyewitnesses, published the National Book of Memory, which included the names of nearly a million famine victims. Mass graves sites have been uncovered and brought in order and more than seven thousand monuments and memorials were placed in towns and villages across Ukraine” (“President Opens Updated Exhibit,” 2009).

Yushenko’s work with the Holodomor is commendable from the perspective of an historian. The key to finding the truth to any event is primary sources. Yushenko was able to take an event that had been covered up for so long and brought it back to life in a meaningful way.

In a speech to faculty and students at Ukraine’s national agrarian university in 2009, Yushenko gave one of his strongest speeches to date about the Holodomor and its connection to present day Ukraine. The president declared, “formation and development of a nation is possible only if it remembers and honors its history” (“Our Duty is to Uncover the Truth,” 2009). This statement makes perfect sense given the context that Ukraine was still trying to discover its own identity after being a part of the Soviet Union for so long. Yushenko also proclaimed that the famine was “one of the biggest humanitarian disasters in the history of mankind”

("Our Duty is to Uncover the Truth," 2009). Included in his rhetoric was the continued belief that the tragedy was unique to Ukrainians stating, "It is very important for us to realize that because no other nation has been through such a genocide" ("Our Duty is to Uncover the Truth," 2009). Yuschenko concluded his speech with the reason why he has continued to push for remembrance of the Holodomor, "It is not just a question of history – it is the question of memory. If you have memory, you must give assessment of that evil. It is not about punishment...but about human condemnation of the crimes" ("Our Duty is to Uncover the Truth," 2009). These comments not only give you an insight into Yuschenko's beliefs regarding the Ukrainian famine, they also put into perspective the belief that he was using the Holodomor as a medium for a proxy-battle between an independent Ukraine and Russia.

President Yuschenko's success in bringing the Holodomor to the forefront of national memory did come with a price. As Ukraine under Yuschenko continued to promote the memory of the Holodomor as a rallying cry for nationalist Ukrainians, Russia under Putin worked to obscure the national character of the Holodomor ("Long Memories," 2008). This "meddling" is not the first time Russia had been seen using its power to influence one of its former Soviet States. Russia had also meddled in Ukraine's presidential elections in 2004 and even created an economic blockade of Georgia in 2006 ("Long Memories," 2008). Many Russians did not see an issue with their interference with former Soviet Republics, because in their minds, they still belong to Russia. Putin had reportedly told former U.S. President George W. Bush during a NATO summit, "Ukraine is not a state" (Marson, 2008).

Ukraine's political makeup would once again be challenged in 2010 when Viktor Yanukovich, the man who ran against Yushenko in 2004, won the presidency by the slimmest of margins after Yushenko and Tymoshenko split the nationalist party vote. Yanukovich represented the interests of Eastern Ukrainians, who primarily identify themselves as Russians. In his public address to the nation, Yanukovich made it clear where he stood politically, now that he was president of Ukraine. Yanukovich stated "After five years of portrayal of Russia as an enemy, it has not been easy to restore trust in Ukraine on the part of the Russian leadership" (New Ukrainian President's Public Address, 2010). The five years Yanukovich is referring to was the term of the now former president, Viktor Yushenko. Yanukovich obviously viewed the political position of his predecessor in a negative light and did not even attempt to hide his plan to undo policies put in place under Yushenko. Yanukovich went on to announce that "I am prepared to report to my electorate that henceforth, dialogue with our towering neighbor will be structured on principles of equality, good neighborliness, and healthy pragmatism, not on confrontation and anti-Russian rhetoric" ("New Ukrainian President's Public Address," 2010). In this statement, Yanukovich lays out his foreign policy regarding Russia, which without any context seems like a beneficial policy to everyone involved. What Yanukovich fails to take into account are the citizens of Western Ukraine. These people are the ones who grew up with contempt for Russia. These people suffered first hand the policies of the Soviet collectivization program and the USSR's failed attempt at destroying Ukrainian nationalism. This speech and

Yanukovich's policies will not only alienate part of his country's contingency; it could cause a large rift between the already divided East and West.

To better understand the division, it is best to first understand who each party represents. The opposition members represent Ukrainians from the Western half of the country, all of which see themselves as national Ukrainians. Western Ukraine is primarily made up of farming land, so these people lived through devastation under the Soviet Union's collectivization program, which resulted in a famine that took the lives of millions of Ukrainians. The Party of Regions represents Ukrainians from the Eastern half of Ukraine. Eastern Ukraine is much more industrial and these people saw many of the positive effects of the Soviet collectivization program. With this information, it is not hard to understand why Eastern Ukrainians favor a close relationship with Russia and over the years have blended their Ukrainian heritage with that of Russia. On the flip side, it is very understandable to see why the people of Western Ukraine are more nationalistic and fearful of Russia due to past experiences.

The growing division between Yanukovich's Party of Regions and the opposition can already be seen in Ukraine's parliament. The elections for Ukraine's 2012 parliament were hard fought, with the Party of Regions fighting for seats against numerous opposition parties. These elections were condemned by the West as unfair and resulted in the Party of Regions gaining a majority in parliament ("Ukraine Parliament Brawl," 2012). The first order of business for Ukraine's newly elected parliament was to elect a new speaker. Since the party of Regions held a slim

majority, the speaker would be a member of their party. Already on edge, the members of parliament who were part of the opposition took extra offense when members of the Regions Party spoke Russian at the podium, chanting “Shame!” every time Russian was spoken (“Ukraine Parliament Brawl,” 2012). The situation escalated as the Regions Party members continued to address parliament in the Russian language. The result was opposition party members storming the podium and trying to forcibly remove a member of parliament speaking in Russian (“Ukraine Parliament Brawl,” 2012). This action started a snowball effect, which left members of parliament trading punches with each other (“Ukraine Parliament Brawl,” 2012). Although an extreme example, the brawl in Ukraine’s parliament shows the deep division that exists between Eastern and Western Ukrainians to this day.

Reporters for the BBC who are monitoring the former Soviet State of Ukraine believe that Yanukovych’s policies “could easily return Ukraine to the Soviet-Russian framework of civil passivity” (“New Ukrainian President’s Public Address,” 2010). What the reporters believe could happen, is that Viktor Yanukovych’s “good neighbor policy” with Russia could lead to a return of Russia’s dominance over Ukraine. Leaked U.S. cables show that Yanukovych’s Party of Regions has been described as a party that has the ability to “abuse state administrative resources, tamper with election laws, and seek to close media outlets they do not control” (Kuzio, 2011a).

It is already becoming hard to differentiate between Russia and Ukraine since Yanukovich has taken power. Past presidents had remained neutral on the “warring Ukrainian and Russia Orthodox Churches in Ukraine” (Kuzio, 2011b). Yanukovich is the first president to give the Russian Orthodox Church “a de facto state and official position while marginalizing Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek-Catholics” in Ukraine (Kuzio, 2011b). Yanukovich also appointed an education minister who favors a history of Ukraine from a Russian perspective, “importing the Russian position on the 1933 Holodomor” (Kuzio, 2011b). Yanukovich’s regime is so close with Russia, that in the first time since Ukraine gained its independence, a Soviet flag was flown in Ukraine on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Approved by the Party of Regions dominated parliament, the flag was flown in recognition of Victory Day for “The Great Patriotic War” (Kuzio, 2011b). “The Great Patriotic War” is the Russian name for World War II and its use in Ukraine is more evidence of the blurred lines between modern-day Russia and Ukraine. The flying of the Soviet flag was the last straw for many Ukrainians as violence erupted in the capital of Kiev. “On May 9, nationalist protestors clashed with police, Russian nationalists, Communists and the Russian Consul, a Soviet-era flag was burnt, and a commemoration wreath was destroyed. An adviser to a local deputy was shot in the leg” (Kuzio, 2011b). This event shows the entire world that Yanukovich’s domestic policies are causing an increased division between Eastern and Western Ukraine.

In addition to adopting Russian policy at home, Ukraine has been working with Russia to tighten their political friendship. In 2010, Yanukovich made two controversial agreements with Russia. The first was an agreement to extend

Russia's presence in the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol. Before the deal, Russia's Black Sea Fleet would have had to leave by 2017. With this agreement, Russia's lease was extended until 2042. In exchange for the extension, Russia gave Ukraine a discount on their vast gas resources (Halpin, 2010). The second controversial agreement under Yanukovich was a deal to merge Ukraine's state gas company with Russia's Gazprom (Halpin, 2010). The opposition leaders in Ukraine challenged both deals, but Yanukovich had the power to approve them without the need to compromise. The opposition's resistance to the deals is understandable, they believed that each of the deals were "a threat to national sovereignty" (Halpin, 2010).

After completing these deals, the president of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev, visited Ukraine to propose more arrangements between the two countries. The proposals from the Kremlin focused on the formation of "joint ventures in the nuclear energy, aircraft, and shipbuilding industries" (Halpin, 2010). During his visit, President Medvedev lit a candle in front of a monument dedicated to the victims of the Holodomor. This gesture was seen by many as move towards healing the troubled past between the two nations. Unfortunately, Medvedev and Yanukovich stopped with that gesture. When asked about the widely held claim that the event was a genocide perpetrated by the regime of Joseph Stalin, Yanukovich was quick to countermand it by calling "the famine a common tragedy suffered by people across the Soviet Union" (Halpin, 2010).

Yanukovich's viewpoint regarding the Holodomor has been a large point of contention with opposition parties located in the Western half of Ukraine.

Yanukovich's predecessor, Viktor Yushchenko, had successfully passed a law that made denial of the Holodomor a punishable offense. Opposition members have taken Yanukovich's latest statement with the utmost seriousness, going as far as accusing the president of breaking Ukrainian law by denying that the Holodomor happened. Yanukovich had once again stated that the famine should not be considered genocide because it was "a common tragedy of the Soviet People" ("Ukrainian Opposition Accuses Yanukovich," 2013). Yanukovich made those remarks during a parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe meeting where the council was discussing an amendment that would describe the Holodomor as an act of genocide ("Ukrainian Opposition Accuses Yanukovich," 2013). The opposition's accusations of law breaking were more for show, since Yanukovich's Party of Regions has a majority in parliament.

There is no denying that Yanukovich's continued pro-Russian policies are causing division in Ukraine, a point many opposition leaders have decried now that their parties do not have a majority in parliament. What is interesting is that when Yanukovich was on the outside looking in, he too cried against dividing the nation, using division as an excuse to push his Russian-minded ideals. Before Yanukovich became president of Ukraine, his fight against the nationalist viewpoint of the Holodomor was in the headlines. In 2009, Viktor Yanukovich "expressed his concerns regarding the recent opening of a case on the Holodomor famine of 1932-1933 by the Security Service of Ukraine" ("Ukraine-Regionals-Holodomor," 2009). Yanukovich, who at the time was just the leader of the Regions Party, declared: "On behalf of the Regions Party, I protest against another attempt by the current

government to involve society in civil strife, and start a new confrontation between Ukraine and Russia" (Ukraine-Regionals-Holodomor, 2009). This position change shows that Yanukovych is a hypocritical politician that will use any excuse available to push his agenda, even if it means fighting against political division in Ukraine one day and being the main cause just a few years later.

One of Yanukovych's biggest critics had been the former Ukrainian Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko. Tymoshenko was the heroine of the 2004 Orange Revolution that successfully fought for a fair presidential election in Ukraine that saw Viktor Yuschenko elected President over Yanukovych (Halpin, 2010). Tymoshenko was quick to criticize President Yanukovych after he made remarks declaring it "unjust" to call the Stalin-era famine that killed millions across the Soviet Union a genocide of the Ukrainian people. She fired back: "It is a pity that the current leadership of Ukraine denies genocide, committing outrages upon the memory of millions of victims of Holodomor" ("Timochenko Slams Ukrainian President", 2010). She called Yanukovych's statements about the Holodomor, not just an everyday violation of the law, but also a "violation of universal norms of morality" ("Timochenko Slams Ukrainian President," 2010). These harsh words against the President of Ukraine would not go unpunished.

On August 5, 2011 Yulia Tymoshenko was arrested with charges of corruption. In October, she was sentenced to seven year in prison for "crimes related to a 2009 gas deal with Russia" ("Pro-Tymoshenko Rally," 2013). Many Ukrainians call the arrest "politically motivated" and two years after her arrest,

citizens are still protesting it as unjust. Activists from her Fatherland party held signs that read “Two Years of Democracy’s Imprisonment” and chanted “Freedom to Yulia!” (“Pro-Tymoshenko Rally,” 2013). Many Western nations agree with the protestors’ opinion that Yulia Tymoshenko’s imprisonment was politically motivated. “The European Union has repeatedly criticized Ukraine’s leadership for meting out selective justice and had warned that Kiev will see no progress on signing a much-desired EU Association Agreement without judicial and electoral reforms” (“Pro-Tymoshenko Rally,” 2013). Joining the European Union was considered a popular move for nearly all of Ukraine’s political parties, including the Party of Regions. Ukraine’s Ambassador to the European Union described EU membership as being comparable to “the fall of the Berlin Wall for Germany” (Rickerson, 2013).

Acceptance into the European Union had been a growing topic in Ukraine as the date for acceptance grew closer. Many Ukrainians believed that the Party of Regions would release former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko to appease the EU as they were preparing to make a decision on Ukraine’s acceptance. In a surprise announcement, current Prime Minister Mykola Azarov announced that Ukraine would abandon its bid to join the European Union (Herszenhorn, 2013). Azarov explained, “harsh terms set by the International Monetary Fund for a financial package were the ‘last straw’ that led to ditching the agreements” (Herszenhorn, 2013). Critics disagree with that statement and instead point to “intense pressure from Russia” as the reason for the agreement being derailed (Herszenhorn, 2013). Whatever the reason, Ukraine’s decision to “abandon far-reaching political and free-

trade agreements with the European Union and instead focus on improving economic ties with Russia” has caused a new round of protests. Thousands of protesters waving European Union flags marched through Independence Square on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013. They chanted, “Ukraine is Europe!” in the same location as the 2004 Orange Revolution (Herszenhorn, 2013). Just like in the 2004 protests, Ukraine is seeing the emergence of new leaders willing to fight for a nation that has been through so much despair as it continues to fight for true independence from Russia. The most notable leader is Vitali Klitschko, the former heavyweight-boxing champion of the world and current leader of the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform Party (Herszenhorn, 2013). Only time will tell if Klitschko or another leader can emerge to succeed where Yushchenko failed. What is certain is that Ukraine is still very much at the mercy of Russia, just like it was 80 years ago.

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## Teaching the Holodomor

After completing my research on the Holodomor, it has become clear that this historical event would be valuable in the classroom due to its magnitude and continued relevance in Ukrainian and Russian relations. Due to the controversial nature of the Holodomor and whether it meets the criteria of genocide, it would be best taught as a critical thinking project. The project will be group based and each group will be assigned either the task of proving the event was an act of genocide or not an act of genocide. The teacher will provide all the evidence and the students will have to read through the resources and figure out how to use them to prove their argument. In addition to proving their argument, they will be asked to prepare counter points by reading through the opposing side's resources.

This project will use numerous strategies to ensure student learning. First, this project is a great example of student-based learning. Students are taking charge of their learning and because of that ownership; they will be more likely to retain the information. With any group project, collaboration is a key component. Students will need to rely on each other to create an awesome project. Students will also be using their background knowledge to excel in this project. The precursor to this project is a lesson on the Holocaust, which introduces students to genocide.

Another key component to this project is reading through pieces of historical evidence and synthesizing that information so that they can use it as part of their

argument. The resources that are provided are in a variety of mediums, so students will have a chance to learn from a multitude of materials. The resources will be posted on separate pages, so students just have to search through documents that help their side of the argument. Documents include testimonies from survivors, a poem, a documentary, and period documents. Students are also provided with some general resources that can help them better understand the Holodomor, like the U.N.'s statement on the tragedy, the U.N.'s definition of genocide, and a timeline of the events that lead to the Holodomor. The final resource that is offered to students is a collection of *New York Times* articles from 1933 about the famine in Ukraine and Russia. The interesting thing about these documents is that they tell two very conflicting testimonies of what was happening.

I chose a website as the medium for Holodomor education for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons is that technology is becoming a larger part of our everyday life. Students today are very familiar with websites and that familiarity makes it easier for them to locate the numerous resources I placed. Manfra and Stoddard claim that online-based resources “have the potential to enhance genocide and Holocaust education by providing robust content resources and interactive opportunities for students to develop new skills and understanding” (2008).

Building a website to house your resources makes access to these resources easy. One of the key resources that you could not get from a book are videos of first person accounts. “These video interviews provide opportunities for teachers to integrate first-person accounts into lessons that empathize historical enquiry or developing historical empathy” (Manfra & Stoddard, 2008). Manfra and Stoddard

also argue that giving access to these types of resources allow students to not only hear a story, but “also offer analysis and context” (2008). “Teachers could use these accounts to stimulate discussion of contemporary, real-world issues or to help students develop conceptual understanding of the critical attributes of genocide” (Manfra & Stoddard, 2008).

My “Was the Holodomor an act of genocide?” project takes advantage of numerous teaching strategies that have been confirmed to improve student learning. The first strategy I implemented was the use of cooperative learning. This project is a group effort, which requires students to form into a cohesive unit that can work together and share the workload. To ensure this happens, I also implemented a student evaluation where each student gives not only themselves a grade, but also their group mates.

Another teaching strategy I implemented in my project was setting clear objectives and giving feedback. I created a rubric that spells out to students what kind of work I expect for an A+. I broke down the grade into 4 categories: Content, Organization, Creativity, and Cooperation. When grading their project, I will return that rubric to them with a grade and feedback on why they received the grade they did.

The final teaching strategy I implemented in my project was generating and testing hypotheses. I gave my students one of two hypotheses, either the Holodomor was an act of genocide or it was not. With that hypothesis, I sent students on a mission to test and prove that hypothesis using the resources I provided them. This

allowed them to think critically and gain experience looking at different kinds of documents to prove an argument, a skill that is tested often with Document Based Questions.

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