

Overview of *Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives*

Drawing on the latest archival-based research on the Gulag, this web exhibit will provide an innovative, multifaceted consideration of the human struggle for survival in the Gulag, the brutal and often lethal Soviet system of forced labor concentration camps and internal exile. The Gulag was an inhuman system that consumed millions of lives, and the web exhibit will reveal that stark brutality while engaging the public to think about the diversity of the Gulag experience, the ethical quandaries of survival in extreme situations, and the difficulties entailed in overcoming the legacy of past injustice. *Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives* will provide visitors with a clear, accessible, and engaging history—accompanied by rich visual, audio, and film resources and grounded in the most recent scholarship. The project proposal received the highest possible grade from every NEH reviewer.

The Gulag was simultaneously a place of mass death and mass release. During the Stalin era, deaths in the Gulag reached the millions, while each year saw the release of no less than twenty percent of the Gulag population. *Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives* will take the experiences of individual prisoners and explore the struggle to be among that group of survivors. A great diversity marked the struggle to survive the Gulag. Drawing on the latest scholarship about the Gulag and playing off Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's famous Gulag novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the web exhibit will show how there were many different days for many different Ivans (and Bohdans, Katias, and Alibeks). The Gulag was neither a single unified experience nor a single institution. The Gulag was comprised of a wide variety of forms of detention—all harsh but not uniformly so—and held a wide array of prisoners, both political prisoners and regular criminals of different nationalities and genders with different life experiences. Soviet authorities sought constantly to pigeonhole their prisoners into categories based on these elements of their identity, and an individual prisoner's Gulag experience and even his or her chance for survival depended heavily upon those categories. Ivan Denisovich was just one prisoner in one location at one time. The web exhibit will open up the variety of experiences of the Gulag in ways that will be compelling to a general audience while grounded in the latest historical scholarship.

The web exhibit will provide an engaging multimedia experience and will break free of the limiting format of simple narrative to allow the visitor to explore Gulag history in a variety of directions and at a variety of levels. The web visitor will be able to follow the history of the Gulag chronologically and thematically, all the while being drawn into the Gulag experience through the struggle for survival of well-chosen individual prisoners whose life stories reveal the complexity, diversity, and difficulty of survival in this extreme institution. This approach will engage visitors in the deeply human story of struggle and resistance that give this history a universal appeal. In addition to the narrative of the history of the Gulag, the site will incorporate a rich database of other archival resources, including Gulag artifacts, photographs, and prisoner artwork. For those resources we will benefit from our close alliance with the Gulag Museum in Perm, Russia and the organization *Memorial* in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. Additional material for those wishing to explore the subject further will include streaming video of

the October 2006 scholarly conference being held at Harvard University on the history and legacy of the Gulag, an annotated bibliography, and Gulag-related curricular materials.

Our project plan also includes video and Quicktime Virtual Reality panorama displays from the Gulag Museum in Perm. Unfortunately, these elements are currently beyond the limits of our budget. The costs of working in Russia and of creating a bi-lingual, multimedia site are quite extensive and so we are seeking specific funding sources to enable members of the project team to travel and research in the former Soviet Union. The interactive sections of this site include panoramic tours of a specific Gulag camp, Perm-36 and its material objects. This level of interactivity requires intense preparation in videoing and photographing the materials in Russia and then transferring these files into flash files that can be viewed on the web. As well, we need additional funding to help support translation, Russian research assistance, and copyright privileges for film, photograph, and textual sources.

CHNM is a nationally recognized center that combines cutting edge digital media with the latest and best historical scholarship to promote an inclusive and democratic understanding of the past as well as a broad historical literacy. The project is directed by Steven Barnes, a George Mason University Russian history professor and a leading scholar on the history of the Gulag, and assisted by an advisory council including several of the top scholars of Soviet history in North America and Anne Applebaum, author of a Pulitzer Prize winning study of the Gulag. The Gulag Museum in Perm, Russia, is a national historic site located at one of the very last Gulag camps to close in the late Soviet era.