

The New 'Old Country' and Its 'Tenth Province': Commemorating the 'Yugoslav' Diaspora in the Interwar Period

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Abstract

Abstract: With Serbia's annexation of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Montenegro and the subsequent proclamation of a single Yugoslav state on December 1st, 1918, a landlocked kingdom with little tradition of overseas settlement suddenly found itself with one-million new "subjects" overseas, primarily in the United States, Canada, Argentina, and the Benelux. After the provincial reorganization of 1929, this overseas settlement was declared to be Yugoslavia's *deseta banovina*, or tenth province. Conversely, one million overseas Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, and *prečani* Serbs¹ suddenly found themselves with a new 'old country,' one with a vested interest in teaching them that they were all part of a single "Yugoslav" people. One prong of this missionary effort was the creation of museums, exhibitions, and monuments, both in Yugoslavia and abroad, to commemorate a "Yugoslav" diaspora. However, outside of Yugoslavia, emigrants involved in these projects could present their own narrative about what it meant to be a "Yugoslav" overseas, using the representative space to explore dual or hybrid identities.

On the basis of original archival research in Serbia, Croatia, and the United States, this paper will examine and contrast the conceptualization of a 'Yugoslav Diaspora' as presented by the (regime-created) Museum of the Emigration in interwar Zagreb and by the (diaspora-organized) "Yugoslav Pavilions" at the World Fairs as well as the Yugoslav Room in the Pittsburgh Cathedral of Learning and the Yugoslav Garden in Cleveland. There are, of course, already many studies of how Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes maintained and expressed their respective national identities overseas, not to mention the many studies of diaspora nationalism in other ethnic groups like Jews, Poles, and Tamils. Yet nobody, to my knowledge, has looked at *Yugoslav* diaspora nationalism, perhaps because Yugoslavism been pronounced a "failed idea." Yet, as this paper will argue, Yugoslavism was not a total failure. Moreover, it and its short-lived successes are uniquely well-suited for exploring ethnic reinvention and the ways the diaspora itself is constructed.

¹ Serbs from areas outside of the historical Kingdom of Serbia: i.e. Vojvodina, Slavonija, the Banat, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.