



JewishGen

An affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES

39TH IAJGS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

JEWISH GENEALOGY

28 JULY-2 AUGUST 2019 | CLEVELAND, OHIO | IAJGS2019.ORG

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Yefim A. Kogan

Masters of Jewish Liberal Studies

yefimk@verizon.net

July 30, 2019

JewishGen Bessarabia SIG Leader and Coordinator

www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

When we, the Jews, immigrate to America, we experienced something we never experienced before... we became “Russians”. It was always puzzling to me and my friends.

In order to understand WHY, I decided to do some research and make this presentation.

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Content

- ❖ Who were we back in the Soviet Union, Russia?
- ❖ What is Nationality?
- ❖ Passports in Russia, USSR, USA
- ❖ Story about Mark Chagal's art piece

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Who were we back in the Soviet Union, Russia?

In the Soviet Union, no one in the right mind, a Jew or a non-Jew,
will think about Jews or name us as Russians!

Everybody knew that we were Jewish even without
opening our Passports:

an employer trying to hire a software engineer,
an admission committee getting a prospective student...

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

The Soviet passport had a line Nationality. Let's go first to the definition of this important term - Nationality:

1. The status of belonging to a particular nation.

Synonym: citizenship

2. An ethnic group forming a part of one or more nations.

Synonym: ethnicity

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

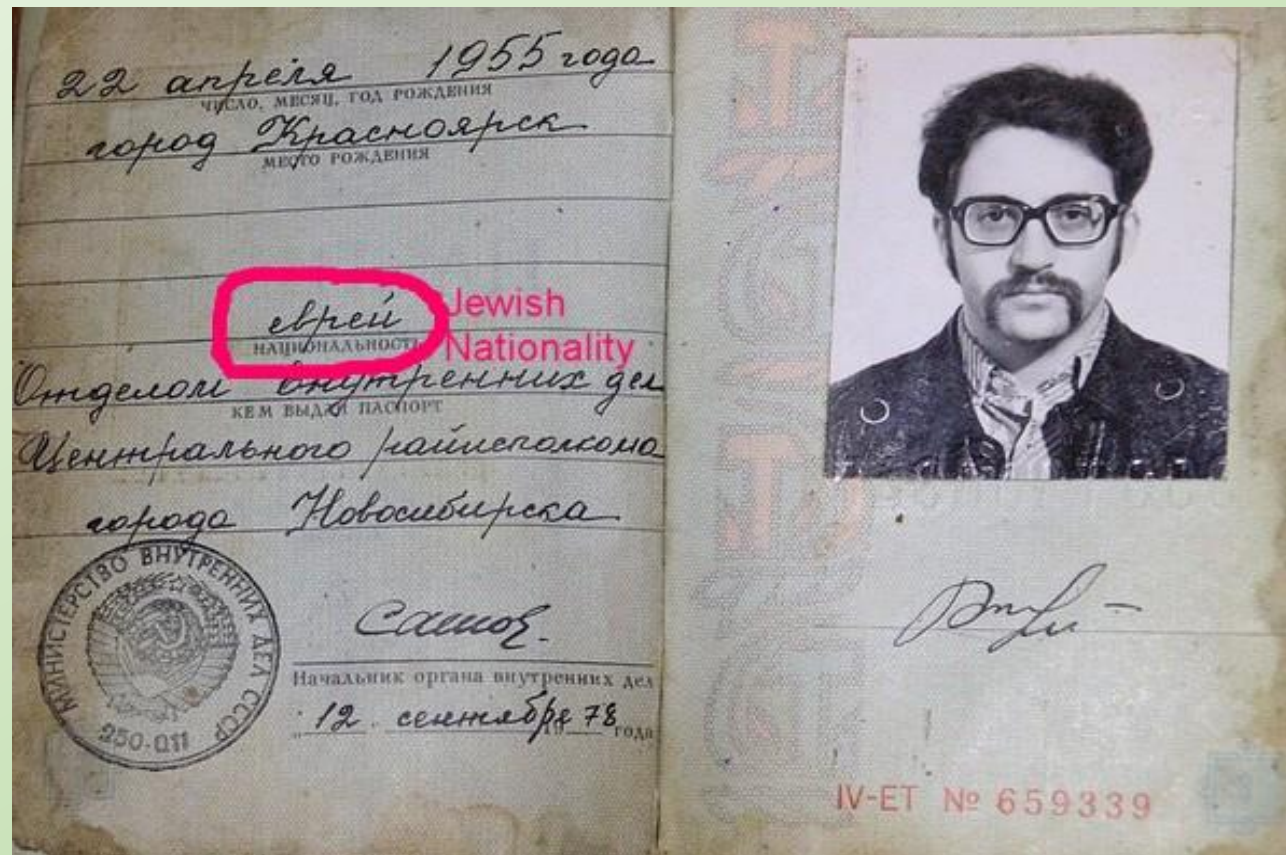
By the first definition, Jews should have Nationality – Soviets, because we all were citizens of the Soviet Union.

That was not the case for any person. It was not such a thing as nationality Soviet.

They used the second definition – Ethnicity... and this is not just for the Jews, but for everybody in the country.

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Here is the Soviet era Passport for a Jewish person (found on Google):



Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Was it a big deal to have “Jewish” in Passport? **HUGE...**

- **When you wanted to get a job;**
- **When you tried to get into a good University;**
- **You were a winner of All Russia Math Olympiad, but rejected to go to an International Math Olympiad;**
- **When you need to find a day care for your child ?!**
- **When you wanted to travel abroad...**
- **And more**

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

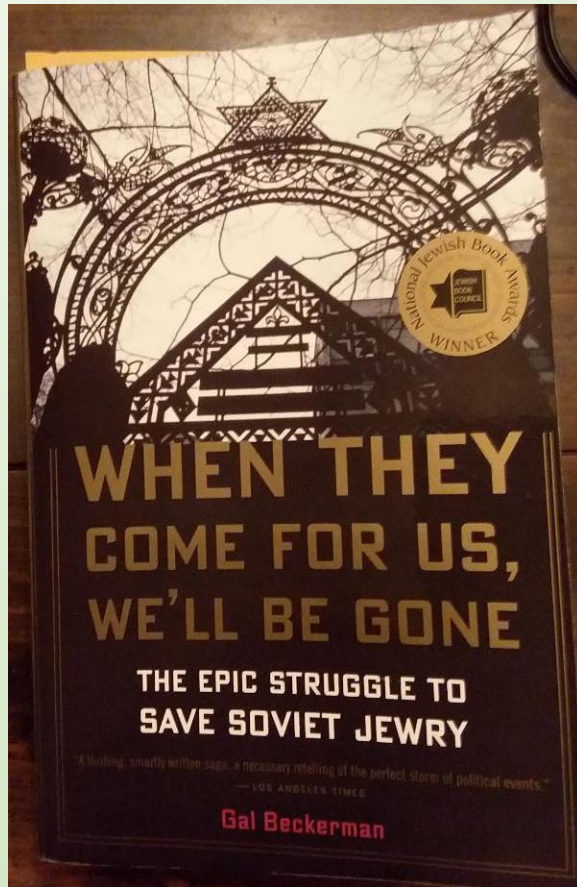
Several examples from my experience:

- Finding a job;
- Getting into the University;
- Find a day care for my son;
- Applying to travel to Bulgaria;

In addition to calling us Russians, we are getting a question

Why we left the Soviet Union? ☹️

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?



about
n. The
e fence
hs, the
n local
on No-
the city
head. A
ty-one-
y, were
s report
one of
he Ger-
the Jews
rcent of
attered

destroying the surrounding houses. The Germans had used it as a stable. At home, Mendelevich's mother prepared Jewish meals, matzo balls at Passover and poppy seed-filled *hamentashen* on Purim. Yosef and his sister spent hours peeling potatoes to make latkes for Hanukkah.

But for Mendelevich, the warm world inside did not resemble the world outside. There, he learned early that he was not like everyone else. On the first day of first grade, his teacher asked each child to declare his or her "nationality." Every Soviet citizen was required to carry an internal passport at all times; it gave basic identifying information and, more important, the bearer's *propiska*, the place where he or she was officially registered to live. On the fifth line of the passport was a space for nationality; for most, this was the place to indicate the republic, language, and culture the individual was ethnically connected to: Ukrainian, Georgian, Latvian, Russian. But for 2,267,814 Soviet citizens, the fifth line read *Jewish*, and it indicated only one thing: difference.

In Mendelevich's first-grade class, he was the only one of the forty students who had *Evrei*—Jewish—written on that fifth line. When the teacher asked the children to stand up and state their nationalities, Mendelevich considered lying, but his nose and his name gave him

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

I believe that now you know better why there was a 5th line in the Soviet passports...

Antisemitism!

Also why we do not like to be called Russians...

Antisemitism!

Finally, why we left the Soviet Union...

Antisemitism!

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Here is a story about identity from the United States, Massachusetts, Williamstown Museum of Fine Arts.

Marc Chagall works



La création (The Creation)

Artist: Marc Chagall (French, born Belarus, 1887 - 1985)

Date: 1960

Medium: color lithograph

Dimensions: sheet: 13 15/16 x 10 3/8 in. (35.4 x 26.4 cm)
frame: 20 1/4 x 27 1/4 x 1 in. (51.4 x 69.2 x 2.5 cm)

Classification: WALLS



The Flying Cow

Artist: Marc Chagall (French, born Belarus, 1887 - 1985)

Copy Right Holder: Artists Rights Society (ARS)

Copy Right Holder: ADAGP, Paris

Date: 1912

Medium: gouache on paper

Dimensions: (sight): 10 x 10 1/4 in. (25.4 x 26 cm)
frame: 19 x 19 x 1 3/4 in. (48.3 x 48.3 x 4.4 cm)

Classification: DRAWING

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Marc Chagall (French, born Belarus, 1887 – 1985) – this is at the online collection, but in the museum the label is a bit different:

Mark Chagall: French, Belarussian, 1887-1985

French is because he was French citizen, that is clear.

Why Belarussian? Belarussia was not a country at the end of 19 century...

Born Belarus? Was his nationality Belarus? Ethnicity - Belarus?

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Encyclopedia Britannica writes: Marc Chagall, (born July 7, 1887, Vitebsk, Belorussia, Russian Empire [now in Belarus]). This is better, but still not accurate. “Vitebsk, Belorussia”, does not make sense. Vitebsk was a main town in Vitebsk gubernia (province) of Russian Empire and not Belorussia.

The **YIVO Encyclopedia** provides good introduction:

Chagall was born Moyshe Shagal (officially, Movsha Shagalov) in the Russian city of Vitebsk (Vitsyebsk, now in Belarus) on 24 June 1887.

Finally, **Wikipedia** gives a bit more: **Marc Zakharovich Chagall** was a Russian-French artist of Belarusian Jewish origin. Nationality: Russian, later French (that is citizenship, we know).

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

How this label should be written? What do you think?

Chagall was born Moyshe Shagal (officially, Movsha Shagalov) in the Russian city of Vitebsk (Vitsyebsk, now located in Belarus) on 24 June 1887. He was of Jewish origin.

Or shorter

Mark Chagall was born of Jewish origin in Russian city of Vitebsk (now located in Belarus) in 1887

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

So,

now are you going to call a Jewish emigrant from the Soviet Union
Russian?

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Bibliography

Gal Beckerman. *When they come for us, we'll be gone. The epic struggle to save Soviet Jewry.*

Why Jews from the Former Soviet Union Often Called Russians?

Questions, new ideas, etc.

?