

Eagle Glassheim

Cleansing Czechoslovakia's Borderlands, 1940s-1990s

My book project, *Cleansing Czechoslovakia's Borderlands*, examines the political, social, and environmental legacy of the expulsion of Czechoslovakia's three million Germans in 1945 and 1946. With over 20% of the country depopulated, Czechoslovakia launched a massive effort to resettle the border areas where Germans had lived. Resettlement was intertwined with a communist drive to expand the region's heavy industrial infrastructure, with the borderlands recast as a "laboratory of socialism." This experiment had profoundly negative results; by the 1970s, communists, expellees, and dissidents alike described the region as riven with ecological and social pathologies. From the 1940s to the 1980s, Czech and German observers connected the health of borderland landscapes with social and physical health in the region. My book examines the formulation and political uses of these conceptions of borderland health.

This project ties together several historical narratives and fields that are not usually linked. First, I seek to raise broad questions about the environmental implications of forced migration. Second, I probe the connections between forced migration and the imposition of communist regimes in East Central Europe. Third, I bring separate historiographies associated with German expellees and Czech settlers together into an interwoven narrative of the Bohemian borderlands after 1945. Even in their absence, Sudeten Germans had a substantial influence on the ways Czechs understood and developed the borderlands. And finally, I examine expellee, reform Communist, and dissident concerns about borderland landscapes in relation to global post-war anxieties about modernity. In general, my goal is to transcend narrow historiographies of the expulsions that focus primarily on ownership and the political control of territory. Czechoslovakia's borderland landscapes were shaped by the transnational interplay of mental and physical, imagined and real geographies. Inhabitants, expellees, tourists, planners, dissidents, and doctors all contributed visions of what the borderlands were and should be.

During my time at the Carson Center, I will be revising my book manuscript and writing an introduction, and therefore trying to pull together its disparate themes and arguments. I want to think more about the book's environmental historical components and how I might better engage environmental historiography more generally.