Wednesday, April 3rd, 2019, noon

Literacy Center Balcony

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SCIENCE AND CULTURE ON THE SOVIET SCREEN: RUSSIAN AND MEMBER REPUBLIC BIOGRAPHICAL FILMS DURING THE EARLY COLD WAR, 1946-1953

Abstract. Between 1947 and 1953, the Soviet Union produced fourteen biographical films about writers, composers, and scientists. These films supported the cultural program of the zhdanovshchina, a period characterized by Andrei Zhdanov’s ideological policies asserting Russia’s leading role in world science and culture while downplaying Western influence. Although national pride was central to all the biographical films, this presentation will argue that once their historical context is restored, the cultural and scientific biographical films engaged such Cold War concerns as the demonization of the enemy and the struggle for peace through the use of historical metaphors that compared the Cold War with earlier clashes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By shifting the focus of the biographical films away from war and toward pursuits of peace, the Soviet Union hoped to portray the Russians as a peace-loving people who were not interested in provoking war. Instead, conflict in these films arises from either malevolent influence from the west (usually England) or those within Russian/Soviet society who seek to derail the Russians from their “progressive destiny” by making them “subservient to the West.”