

Book Reviews

Sergei I. Zhuk, *KGB Operations against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953-1991*. New York: Routledge, 2022, xxii, 260pp. \$180, cloth.

Sergei Zhuk, a professor of History at Ball State University in Indiana, is the author of previous books concerning Ukraine, including *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City* (2010). His new study builds upon his earlier work concerning youth culture, religion, and Soviet experts on America.

Drawing on extensive research in KGB files in the archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Kyiv, as well as several interviews with retired KGB officers, Zhuk presents many interesting findings. For example, he describes how the KGB refusal to let former political prisoners return to western Ukraine led many to settle in eastern Ukraine, with more than a thousand in Zhuk's hometown of Dnipropetrovsk. (Thus, the KGB may have unintentionally helped to spread Ukrainian nationalist influence from western regions to other parts of Ukraine.) Describing Soviet security preparations for President Dwight Eisenhower's anticipated visit to the USSR in 1960, Zhuk reveals that as late as April 23 KGB officers in Kyiv were planning operations against the numerous American journalists who would accompany the president. (That suggests the Soviet leadership remained optimistic about improving relations with the United States until the eve of the U-2 overflight of the USSR on May 1, in contrast to studies that have claimed Nikita Khrushchev had given up hopes for a breakthrough well before the shooting down of the spy plane.) A decade later, Zhuk shows, the KGB took action to prevent Vietnamese student demonstrations in Kyiv when President Richard Nixon visited in 1972. Among many other details, we learn from Zhuk's book that in the early 1980s Ukrainian punks, many of whom were strongly influenced by American music, used Nazi symbols and enthusiastically praised nationalist hero Stepan Bandera, who had collaborated with Nazi Germany.

Unfortunately, Zhuk tends to overstate and oversimplify, particularly in his treatment of Soviet enthusiasm about American culture and consumer products. For example, he writes that after Khrushchev's resignation in 1964 "Western, mostly American, influences ... spread throughout the entire Soviet society, affecting all its social groups" (193). Paraphrasing a KGB report, Zhuk adds that consumption of American mass culture "contributed to the 'hostile anti-Soviet attitudes of the Soviet youth'" (193). Missing from Zhuk's very brief Selected Bibliography are studies by scholars such as Susan Reid and Alexei Yurchak that

offer more complex and sophisticated perspectives on Soviet popular responses to American culture and consumer goods. In another case of oversimplification, Zhuk writes that Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the late 1980s "did not change priorities in the KGB treatment of their main adversary – the capitalist America" (242). Zhuk disregards the end of Soviet jamming of US-sponsored radio broadcasts, does not mention the halting of anti-American propaganda in the Soviet press by 1988, and does not include in his bibliography a book on the late Soviet press by Jonathan Becker, who analyzed that shift.

Although Zhuk realized that his archival material about KGB operations against the Ukrainian diaspora in the US after 1945 should be complemented by research in archives in the US, he decided in this book to focus only on KGB operations against America that originated in Ukraine from 1953 to the 1980s. As a result, the 1945-1953 period is neglected and the claims of KGB officers are not checked against records of US intelligence organizations.

Much of Zhuk's book summarizes and quotes the content of material in the KGB/SBU archive, without sufficient critical analysis or contextualization. As Zhuk puts it, his book concentrates "on the sequence of events presented in those documents" (xi). Zhuk's use of material from the KGB archive is often credulous. For example, he writes that the creation of 150 committees against US interference in El Salvador in the early 1980s was a result of KGB operations. That ignores the origins of most of the committees in local American indignation at the human rights abuses of the Salvadoran government and death squads, and it echoes the discredited claims of President Ronald Reagan and his advisers that opponents of their policies were pawns of the KGB. In another case of credulity, Zhuk reproduces a former KGB agent's claim that the KGB used Black Panthers and other African Americans in operations, for example against Ukrainian American demonstrations in Washington in 1984. Zhuk appears to be unaware that the Black Panthers had been active in Washington mainly in the early 1970s, and that they were not a powerful organization by the 1980s. He did not include any of the many studies of the Black Panther Party in his bibliography.

Other scholars who have used the KGB archive in Kyiv, such as Tatiana Vagramenko, have had more critical and sophisticated approaches to analyzing documents there. Zhuk's simpler and more credulous approach leads him to misidentify some individuals and to make some puzzling statements. For example, he writes that the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which European states played a leading role in negotiating, which Washington grudgingly tolerated, and which Leonid Brezhnev eagerly sought, were "perceived as the US' creation and inspiration" (197).

The quality of writing is poor. Many sentences are rough conversions of Russian into English, with awkward structures, inappropriate verb tenses, and missing or inappropriate definite and indefinite articles. Zhuk thanks the editors from Routledge for making his prose "more lucid" (xxii), yet the writing is often clumsy and sometimes opaque.

Winston James, *Claude McKay: The Making of a Black Bolshevik*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2022, 464 pp. Index. \$32, Paper.

James has written a brilliant biography that frames the intellectual development of poet, novelist, and political thinker Claude McKay within a world shaped by the aftermath of slavery, the continued force of colonialism, and the revolutionary upheavals of the early twentieth century.

This framing – and McKay’s own travels and perspective – has allowed James to paint a picture of the global political interconnectedness of the era. McKay was shaped by his travels from Jamaica to the U.S. South, New York, and England, and by the influence of the Russian Revolution, well before his travels to the Soviet Union (which took place after the period covered in this first of two planned volumes).

McKay’s Jamaican youth exposed him to contradictions. He came from a family of prosperous, land-owning farmers, but he was a dark-skinned man in a society deeply imbued with colorism. McKay’s early mentors including his brother, U. Theo, exposed him to various political ideas as well as the English literary cannon, but McKay never neatly fit into the elite literary tradition, nor did he fully adopt any of the political ideas he was exposed to in his youth.

By putting him in close contact with ordinary people, James argues, McKay’s unhappy period as a constable played a key role in his intellectual development. McKay’s early poetry is imbued with the perspective of workers and peasants, women and men battered by the impoverishment imposed on the bulk of Jamaica’s population as the transition from sugar to bananas allowed a few enormous foreign companies to dominate the country’s economy.

McKay’s experiences of race and colorism in Jamaica were one thing: the utter brutality of U.S. racism was another. James asserts that when he came to the United States, Jim Crow, lynchings, and anti-black riots at first shocked McKay into silence, and then radicalized him. The search for an answer opened McKay to revolutionary politics. This was the same period that McKay learned of the Russian Revolution. He was already open to the idea that working people understood any society at a more fundamental level than its elite and had the capacity to run it. He was taken with the further possibility that the Russian Revolution’s fight against antisemitism held a possible answer to the problem of racism in the rest of the world.

In 1919, McKay learned of Black people fighting back in organized fashion against racist mobs in Chicago and Washington, exhibiting the spirit of resistance even in the face of overwhelming odds captured so famously in McKay’s poem, “If We Must Die.” This, for McKay, was analogous in many ways to the Bolshevik struggle against pogroms. By 1919, then, “socialism was, in McKay’s estimation, the most effective and promising vehicle to achieve Black liberation” (260).

While McKay made the very un-Bolshevik choice to go to London to get a book published, the searing experience of British racism in the seat of empire, his close work with Sylvia Pankhurst on *The Workers Dreadnought*, and his engagement with Marxist classics led McKay to formulate a more fundamental

connection between the struggle for socialism and Black liberation. He came to argue that anti-colonial revolutions throughout the world were unlikely to stop by putting the colonial bourgeoisies in power, because workers and peasants in the colonies would not “tamely submit’ to a new capitalist order in place of the old one” (311). Rather, the anticolonial revolutions would be key parts of the world proletariat revolution, even in places where the working class was small. James notes that McKay here independently arrived at Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. Two conclusions flowed from this: socialists should support movements like Garveyism and the fights for independence in Ireland, India, and Africa because they struck at the single greatest obstacle to socialist revolution: the British empire. And, even after McKay had experienced the ignorance, racism, and violence of British workers, he still argued that Garvey and other fighters for Black and colonial liberation should “be more interested in the white radical movements” (310), because they were each fighting the same enemy.

It was in this light that McKay insisted on the importance of the fight against racism within the labor movement, shown by James through McKay’s critique of E. D. Morel’s “Black Horror on the Rhine.” Morel’s attack on the French occupation of the German Rhineland hinged on the accusation that Black colonial troops were raping French women – even though there was no evidence this had happened. McKay pointed out that this accusation played on the central trope used by lynch mobs and could only further enflame British workers against all those from the colonies deposited on their shores by the World War. Considering the continued popularity of Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost*, which lionizes Morel as a fighter against Belgian brutality in Congo, this is an important corrective on the limits of British Labour Party politics.

In the end, James’ shows McKay as more than an artist reacting against the brutality and injustice of his society, but as a deeply politically engaged thinker, inspired by the possibility that the oppressed around the world might find the way to organize themselves and overthrow their oppressors.

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Alexei Evstaf’ev, edited by Susan Smith-Peter. *The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth*. Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2022. – xxii, 71 p.

I had been awaiting the publication of this manuscript for many years, ever since I first encountered it in the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library. Alexei Evstaf’ev, the Russian consul in Boston and New York during the first half of the 19th century, provided a caustic yet well-informed critique of American democracy in his book. In many respects, his insights foreshadowed the ideological battles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Susan Smith-Peter has done an excellent job in preparing the text for publication and providing a detailed biographical sketch of the Russian diplomat

in her well-researched introductory article. In her text, Smith-Peter focuses on Evstaf'ev's close ties to American Federalists and contrasts his work with Alexis de Tocqueville's famous *Democracy in America*, penned two decades earlier. Indeed, Evstaf'ev's admiration for the British political system and his distrust of democracy aligned him with many Federalist thinkers, a party that dissolved shortly after 1815. His preference for aristocracy also reveals his agreement with his French noble predecessor. Evstaf'ev, however, himself referred to his famous forerunner as "the Utopian Tocquevilles of the day" who deceived himself and his readers with "false estimates" (p.8), contrasting his own more informed and well-founded judgments.

However, I would place this text within the context of the immediate political struggles of the years just before Evstaf'ev completed it, particularly within the international arena rather than solely within the domestic U.S. context. Indeed, he concluded the "Advertisement" (preface) to the book by directly referencing these circumstances: "Hungarian war, Lamartine's supremacy in France," and "the advent of Kossuth to the United States" (p.4). In other words, Evstaf'ev reacted to the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848-49 and the emergence of new ideas about America's world mission in response.

The "Spring of Nations" revealed the popularity of the American model among European revolutionaries, with republican ideas spreading across the Old World and the Hungarian call for independence shaking the Austrian Empire. Many democratic and nationalist European revolutionaries viewed the U.S. as a model for their constitutional projects. Consequently, a new generation of American politicians dreamt of revolutionizing the international order to position the model democratic republic as the leading state rather than a mere survivor within the existing world system based on legitimism and monarchical rule. As Russia was the main guarantor of the Vienna system of international relations, created after the Napoleonic wars, it could not escape becoming a major target. The Russian intervention into the Hungarian rebellion sparked an outburst of anti-Russian sentiment on the part of the American public. The *New York Herald* described the events in Europe as a great struggle between "the liberal cause, and Russia leading the despots." In the event that Russian despotism were to win, the article went on, it would "immediately turn towards America, to punish us, the instigators, the first to lift up before the world the standard of republicanism."¹ The early aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848-1849 provided the first opportunity for Americans to amend their self-identification to reflect the new importance of their republican model for the Old World. This seemed to call for radical change to Russia's image in American political debates and journalists' depictions, especially those of journalists agitated by exiled Hungarian leader Kossuth's tour of the United States in 1851-1852.

It was this brief but intense surge in anti-Russian sentiment among Americans that compelled the senior Russian Consul General in New York, Alexei Evstaf'ev (who had proved himself an efficient propagandist forty years earlier during the

1. Cit.: Eugene Anshel, comp. *The American Image of Russia, 1775-1917*. 107.

War of 1812), to write a monograph criticizing the U.S. political system. Evstaf'ev completed his book in May 1852, skillfully summarizing the official Russian view of American democracy, which was shared by many Russian elites.

Evstaf'ev presented a comparison between “one of the extremes, the popular American Republic,” and “its antipodal Russian Despotism.” The Russian diplomat addressed the main question of his time: “whether monarchies combine against republics, or republics are sworn to destroy all monarchies.” He pounced on the United States and on Americans, criticizing the attitude that would later become known as American exceptionalism, and was especially indignant about the American belief “that nothing anti-republican has any value, that no good, physical or moral, can spring from the soil of monarchy,” reminding Americans of the irony of “their own doctrine that, in all respect, a negro slave is better off, much better, than the negro in a state of freedom!!” (p.6).

Evstaf'ev's aim appears twofold: to disavow the American example and to cast doubt on the bipolar vision of the international arena. Hence, he emphasized that England presented the happy middle ground between the extremes of Russian despotism and American democracy.

Evstaf'ev divided the main part of his essay into nine sections, arguing that “the great Republic is rich in illusions. Her gifts, worth having, are already enjoyed in the Christian civilized communities. Her constitution is radically defective. Her frame lacks real strength. Her basis lacks adequate solidity. Her boasted federative might is her adherent weakness. Her existence is contrary to the laws of Nature. The social principles on which she leans are false. She, as a whole, is but a plausible imposture” (p.9-10). The author developed each thesis with different types of arguments, and not all of them seem obsolete. Thus, when Evstaf'ev argued that the U.S. federal system was weak, and “[i]ts heavy and inert components [we]re so heterogeneous, that the first slight shock may cause disruption” (p.41), he certainly predicted what would happen a decade later with the secession and Civil War.

In some parts, Evstaf'ev's criticism of the United States appears very contemporary to us, despite his archaic language. When he blamed America for “sowing where she can the Dragon-teeth of Revolution” (p.5), one can easily recall Putin's propaganda in the aftermath of the “color revolutions” of the early 2000s or the Arab spring a decade later. When the Russian diplomat wrote that Americans were “so prodigal of censure toward others, and so sensitive to it themselves,” that they were “judging of men and things by their own standard and proscribing all that in their estimation falls below it” (p.6), it resonated with claims made by many critics of U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This essay, written in a field that we would now call comparative politics, was a new phenomenon. It reflected the fact that both American and Russian societies perceived approaching crises; its content also foreshadowed the bipolar vision of the world. For a while, it appeared as an antiquarian relic of a long-gone era. However, now, after the “end of history” has also ended we may reread old criticisms with renewed interest.”

Gregory J. Wallace, *Into Siberia: George Kennan's Epic Journey Through the Brutal, Frozen Heart of Russia*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2023., xvii, 284pp. Index. \$30.00, cloth.

Writer and lawyer Gregory J. Wallace has written an engaging new account of the travels of American explorer of Siberia, George Kennan, in his new book *Into Siberia: George Kennan's Epic Journey Through the Brutal, Frozen Heart of Russia*. Kennan was a distant cousin of the twentieth-century diplomat of the same name (George Frost Kennan) known for originating the containment policy for the United States with the Soviet Union after World War II. The George Kennan of the nineteenth century was famous for his explorations of Siberia in the 1860s and the 1880s that revealed to the outside world the history and culture of Siberia, most notably the exile system.

Kennan first traveled in Siberia in the 1860s when he was a very young man hired to be part of a crew that installed telegraph systems in some of the remotest and most isolated parts of the world. The Russian-American Telegraph Expedition took Kennan across some of the most frigid parts of Siberia exposing the young man to the Russian language, local customs, and the exile system. Upon his return, he defended the exile system as a humane system and wrote about his travels magazines like *Putnam's Magazine* and the *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*. Eventually, he would write books of his own travels from both trips to Siberia. These articles and books became some of the most influential impressions of Russians for Americans and other Western audiences.

Wallace's book focuses mainly on the second journey to Siberia in the 1880s when he was accompanied by the artist, George A. Frost. Kennan took many photographs on their journey while Frost sketched and painted scenes as they traveled through south-central Siberia. Many of Frost's sketches were published with Kennan's written work in *The Century Magazine* and his books, like *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891). Kennan and Frost explored such cities as Tomsk, Omsk, Irkutsk, Chita, and others. The path out to Siberia ended in the gold mines of Kara. Kennan's view of the exile system became more critical after the second trip. This negative assessment inspired American critics of the exile system.

Wallace's book relies heavily on Kennan's published and manuscript writings concerning the trip in the 1880s. The author takes the reader through Kennan's journey across Russia starting in St. Petersburg, ending in Kara, and then back again. The arduous trip left both American travelers excited by what they had seen, exhausted by the difficulties of the journey, and psychologically comprised (at least temporarily). A sustaining part of the journey for both men were numerous, yet only occasional, letters from their families.

Wallace's account is a compelling story of adventure as he leads the reader from place-to-place giving details on what the pair encountered. Yet, the account does not give much to the reader that those interested in Kennan and his writings did not already know. Wallace researched the account thoroughly using Kennan's published works as well as manuscripts and letters held at the Library of Congress. For a general audience, this work would be a fine introduction to

Kennan's adventures. For specialists, there are other works by Frederick F. Travis and Susan Smith-Peter that offer more analysis, context, and commentary on the nature of Russian-American relations.

Wallace's work is a welcome addition to the literature on the history of Russian-American relations. Kennan's adventures are a critical part of the history of Russian-American relations and Wallace's account helps illustrate this importance for a contemporary audience interested in learning more about Kennan, Siberia, and the era.

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