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JRAS

Reflections on Russian-American Relations... 10 Years Later

This issue of the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*) marks the end of the tenth year of the journal. We are extremely proud of the work we have done together over the past ten years as an editorial board with our authors and reviewers! We look forward to ten more years! Some of the members of the editorial board offer below some reflections on the journal and the field of Russian-American relations over the past ten years in their own ways. Much has changed since we started in 2017, but we persist in our work to provide an outlet for publishing in this field as we move forward.

A note of thanks is necessary here. The staff at the University of Kansas Libraries has hosted the journal since the beginning. Without their assistance in this endeavor, there would be no journal. Marianne Reed, Pam LeRow, and Eric Bader have been excellent to work with over the years, and they deserve great praise for keeping this journal afloat. We appreciate their work so much! Thank you!

The other note of thanks is to the editorial board. The editorial board has always been the same and their dedication to the journal is highly appreciated. The original co-managing editors were Norman Saul and Ben Whisenhunt. A few years ago, Norman took a step back and remains on the board. Lee Farrow stepped forward to be the co-managing editor. The board also includes David S. Foglesong, Lybov Ginzburg, Ivan I. Kurilla, Matt Miller, Norman Saul, and Victoria I. Zhuravleva.

History of the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*)
by Ben Whisenhunt

The story of this journal begins nearly twenty years ago. I emailed Norman Saul a question about a book I was working on at the time about Russian traveler, diplomat, and painter Pavel S. Svin'in. Norman graciously answered my question and further inquired about my research and future ideas. This started a conversation that became an opening to a new group of scholars working in this field. Norman, of course, had written several books on the broad history of Russian-American relations that were instrumental for people like me moving into this field. Through Norman, I met many of the people in the field, including the people you see on our editorial board.

These conversations turned into conference panels, conferences in the US and Russia, and more. Eventually, Norman and I co-edited a volume on Russian-American relations published by Routledge. At that same time – about ten or eleven years ago, these conversations also led to the creation of a book series. This series was originally published by Slavica Publishers, but now it is the Anthem Americans in Revolutionary Russia series published by Anthem Press. Norman and I were the series co-editors in the beginning. Lee Farrow is now a co-series editor, and the series has eighteen books in print. These were accounts

by Americans who were in revolutionary Russia between 1914 and 1921, with scholarly introductions, footnotes, and indexes.

During this time, though, there was an ongoing conversation about the need for an academic journal in this small, but important, field. Norman and I both wanted a print journal, but we began to see that this was not feasible. So, we connected with the University of Kansas Libraries and created the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*) as an online, peer-reviewed journal. To be honest, it was a lot of trial and error. Marianne Reed, especially, at Kansas helped us avoid many errors along the way.

Our goal in the beginning was just trying to get the issues out, so several elements were not included. For instance, we did not require abstracts, but we do now. A note of thanks to Joanna Dobrowolska (recent Ph.D. in Polish history from the University of Illinois Chicago) who helped us create abstracts, update our website, and apply for a Web of Science designation. We also did not have covers. Several years into the process, Lee Farrow volunteered her son, Benjamin Farrow IV, to create our book covers. He moved from being a high school student to a professional graphic designer. He still does our covers. Thank you so much.

Without question, though, over the years this is a true labor of love. There is no massive organization behind it, nor does it have a massive budget (or a budget at all!). It is these people above giving their time and effort toward a project that provides a space for discussing a topic that we find meaningful. It is gratifying that more people have found our journal. This is because of the increasing volume of our publications, but also to the social media work of Lee Farrow. It is also rewarding to see material published in our journal now being cited in other scholarly articles and books. It is an indication that we are doing good work here.

As readers of our journal probably know, Norman Saul, is one of the leading figures in this field. It has been a true honor to work with him on many projects over the past twenty years, especially this journal. Even though he has stepped back from day-to-day work on these projects, his scholarly work and generosity over many years is unmatched. It is hard to express the importance of his being a part of these projects. Simply said: thank you!

Since we started this journal, Russian-American relations have changed fairly dramatically. We started about two years after the initial Russian invasion of Ukraine and now, of course, we are more than four years into a regional war. This has made cooperation across the Atlantic with our Russian friends and colleagues more difficult. It is more difficult for Russians to come to the US and more difficult for the Americans to travel to Russia. There are even political implications for Russians cooperating with Americans. There have been dark times in the relations before, but that makes the need for a journal like ours even more important. So, we have decided to persist to help bring light where there is darkness.

As always, we are always looking for articles, reviewers, etc. So, please take this opportunity to join us in our second decade of scholarly output! We would love to hear from you.

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Beyond the Prologue: JRAS at Its Tenth Anniversary
by Lyubov Ginzburg

This project also has its own prologue.
Norman Saul, Professor Emeritus, the University of Kansas
Journal of Russian American Studies, Special Edition, *Ernest Poole*
August 2022

When Russian-American art photographer Mark Serman found himself on the roof of the State Hermitage Museum, he experienced what he described as "his first encounter with perfection as [he] understood it then." Beyond the exceptional vantage point, he was struck by "an unusually high key diffused lighting … with enough haze in the air" that cast a "shadowless glow allowing one to shoot in any direction."[1]

That "long-forgotten feeling of a shift in space" came over Serman again several years later, when he was standing atop a New York skyscraper, "glued to the sights unseen and unexpected … completely humbled and awed by this avalanche of new sensations."[2]

In the fall and winter of 2016-2017, a collection of Serman's photographic impressions was on display at Columbia University in Manhattan under the title "Urban Poetry: St. Petersburg - New York." Although praised as "one of the Harriman Institute's most successful exhibits in the twenty years that we have been mounting exhibitions...,"[3] it was not mentioned in the nascent *Journal of Russian American Studies* that released its first issue only months after the show was over. Today, while reflecting upon versatile multidimensional and bilingual content of the publication on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, we are borrowing the photographer's associations, and thus finally making up for this inadvertent omission.

The journal is not published on behalf of any organization, government agency or think tank. Rather, it is driven by the collective effort of its editorial board, led by Dr. Lee Farrow of Auburn University at Montgomery and Dr. William Benton Whisenhunt of the College of DuPage, to steer toward a research altitude, which allows, as Serman once put it, for "all the points of compass and approaches [to be] covered."[4] The ever-expanding scope of themes, concepts, places, events and personalities discussed, analyzed or deconstructed in the periodical, turned it into a gripping page-turner series, with keenly anticipated new releases. Each issue promises to unleash yet another set of Russian American encounters that flow into a confluence of the two streams, swelling from the interplay of myths and realities, cultural influences, political pronouncements, ideological divisions, moments of rapprochement, military posturing, and personal experiences, such as Serman's Petersburg-New York rooftop flânerie, among countless others.

From its conception, the founding editors - Professor Emeritus of the

[1] Mark Serman, "Mark Serman Photography Exhibition," Russian American Cultural Center. Available at Russian American Cultural Center - Mark Serman Photography Exhibition

[2] Op. cit.

[3] Photography by Mark Serman. Available at Zenfolio | Photography by Mark Serman | About

[4] Mark Serman, "Mark Serman Photography Exhibition."

University of Kansas, Norman Saul and Dr. Whisenhunt - envisioned a forum for publicizing research rooted in rigorous analysis of historical context cleared from variables of changing politics and regimes. The publication permeates contributors' knowledge and wisdom stemming from decades of scholarship, deep appreciation of the freedom to transcend the boundaries, and sincere efforts to unveil the humanistic component of our field of studies. From its pages authors appeal to shared history rather than strategic vagaries, seeking to revisit precedents of meaningful engagement between the two geopolitical giants and their populations, emphasizing these tangencies' consequential outcome for the entire planet.

As the journal enters its second decade, navigating through Russian American currents is growing ever urgent and, at times, more challenging. The torrent is becoming muddier and more turbulent, steadily roaring over its well-established and carefully explored streamway, eroding entrenched assumptions and juxtapositions, the tendency to pit strength against each other, or win the other side over. Instead, it now runs into unchartered waters of unfathomable infatuation with the rogue obscurant prowess within the top echelons of the American establishment, on the one hand, and, on the other, the foreseeable rise of a new generation of the Democratic Socialists of America who are fearless of this political label since most of them came of age long after the fall of the Soviet state and thus not been affected by the Cold War propaganda. Meanwhile, Russian elites are sneering with schadenfreude at yet another awkward attempt to "play the Russian card" in America's internal struggle, and ordinary citizens in both countries take their frustrations out on "the other," falling victims to misunderstanding, misrepresentations, bitterness, and enmity. All of this unfolds against the backdrop of raging wars and deepening global uncertainty.

Our articles will continue to respond to treacherous trends and contentious dystopian narratives, calling phenomena and actions by their real names, in order to avoid being swept away by crushing ignorance or drawn into the black holes of disinformation.

When asked about his work of over four decades that includes the four-volume magnum opus chronicling two centuries of history of Russian-American relations, Dr. Saul referred to his scholarly approach as a "comprehensive treatment of the topic," acknowledging that there is always more to be found, or, as he aptly put it, "more trunks out of attics" to be retrieved. In that spirit, the editorial board welcomes more discoveries that deepen our appreciation of the past and help us make sense of the present, defying the recurrent threats of our times to further distort, marginalize, or altogether disregard history and other social sciences. And just as ostensibly foreign urban landscapes converged in the discerning eye of the photographer,[5] so too do seemingly disparate lofts and garrets coalesce into a more coherent whole, while the contents of those "trunks" inside continue to evoke the famous prophecy of Russia and America's common destiny.

Postscriptum

On a personal note, although I never had the opportunity to behold my native St. Petersburg from atop the Winter Palace, as a teenager and later as a young adult, I ascended to many roofs and mansards, including the glass-and-iron tower

[5] Василий Рудич, «Город, образ и взгляд: фотографии Марка Сермана», in *Elegant New York*, December 2016. Available at https://elegantnewyork.com/mark-serman-exhidition/

of the American Singer Manufacturing Company, which rises above its carefully gauged Neoclassical neighbors lamenting the loss of its landmark counterpart of Lower Manhattan. There was even a slimmer chance that I might locate the cluster of New York rooftops huddled together in one of Stern's photographs. And yet, against all odds, our universes, spanning two continents and myriads of similar structures adorned with graffiti and studded with "huge crystals" of skylights,[6] seemed to collide when I ran into his picture while jogging across the Manhattan Bridge and capturing snapshots of city life during the COVID pandemic. I rediscovered that still image right outside my long-term home in the city as it came to life with residents, driven from their apartments by lockdown, gathered on rooftops to seek respite from isolation, banging pots and pans to cheer for first responders.



Photographs by Mark Serman exhibited at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, New York. Fall – Winter, 2016- 2017. To view more photographs of Petersburg and New York cityscapes by Mr. Serman, visit https://www.markserman.com/

[6] Mark Serman, "Mark Serman Photography Exhibition," Russian American Cultural Center.

Studying Russian American Relations in an Era of Rupture: Access, Distance, and Presentism

by Ivan I. Kurilla

Since February 2022, historians of Russian-American relations have faced a paradoxical situation. The demand for historical explanation has grown just as many of the institutional conditions that made independent research possible, including access to sources and sustained professional contact in both countries, have been dismantled. Russia's war against Ukraine and subsequent policy decisions in Russia and the United States transformed a gradual erosion of the field, underway at least since 2014, into the near-collapse of Russian-American academic exchange and cooperation.

Many of these developments affect the much broader study of Russia and Eastern Europe. Their consequences are particularly significant for the history of Russian-American relations, however, because this is by its nature a relational field. Its practice has depended on simultaneous engagement with sources, scholarly communities, and historiographical traditions in both countries.

Many American specialists on Russia have been barred from entering the country. Since the beginning of the war, travel to Russia has also become unsafe, while cooperation with Russian universities has become undesirable or explicitly prohibited. Russian scholars, meanwhile, face greater difficulties in obtaining U.S. visas, sharply higher travel costs, and restrictions imposed by the Russian state on cooperation with the United States as an "unfriendly country." A number of American universities and professional organizations have been designated "undesirable" by the Russian authorities, making cooperation with them or participation in their activities potentially subject to fines or criminal prosecution.

Opportunities for joint projects, research in archives and libraries in the other country, personal contact, and sustained scholarly discussion have consequently declined dramatically. The expanding volume of digitized books, articles, and archival materials has helped sustain research, but the increasing fragmentation of digital access, especially on the Russian side but partly on the American side as well, has reduced even these possibilities. Russian authorities have made the websites of the National Electronic Library, e-library, and many state institutions inaccessible from outside Russia. American databases have terminated subscriptions for Russian universities, while some websites cannot be accessed from Russian IP addresses. U.S. and other Western financial sanctions have also made it difficult or impossible for individuals in Russia to pay for services in the United States, including database access and archival digitization.

The result is an asymmetry of knowledge. Researchers retain easier access to the sources, databases, and institutions on their own side of the divide, while materials on the other side become increasingly difficult to reach. Scholarship thus risks returning to a situation in which it is easier to study "how the United States viewed Russia" or "how Russians viewed the United States" than to reconstruct the interaction of the two societies and states. The asymmetry itself is uneven. Restrictions are more extensive on the Russian side, where fewer digitized collections are available, leaving scholars based in the United States with greater room for maneuver.

The war has also changed the geography of the scholarly community. Many Russian scholars have left the country; those who remain work under substantially

greater political and legal risks; and once bilateral professional networks are now dispersed among Russia, the United States, and numerous centers of emigration. The field can no longer be mapped neatly onto the territories of Russia and the United States. A Russian specialist may now work in Berlin, Prague, Riga, Yerevan, or at an American university, retaining language skills, professional contacts, and years of accumulated archival experience while losing access to new materials in Russian archives. A scholar who remains in Russia may still have physical access to those archives but far less freedom to participate in international academic cooperation.

For historians of Russian-American relations, this dispersal has a particular significance. What was once largely a bilateral field is increasingly becoming a transnational scholarly network whose geography coincides with neither Russia nor the United States.

A new structure of opportunities and constraints is also producing a different professional experience for younger scholars. A historian entering the field today may have access to far more digitized material than someone who began research twenty years ago, while having far less direct familiarity with Russia or with the Russian academic community. This changes the evidentiary base of scholarship, but it also changes the intellectual perspective from which evidence is approached.

The generational consequences may prove among the most durable effects of the present crisis. Current restrictions may eventually disappear, but scholars formed under them will remain. Senior researchers often spent years working in Russian archives, living in the country, building professional networks, and assembling personal collections of sources. Younger historians are entering the profession under a very different regime of access. The resulting generational divide may therefore concern more than the sources scholars use. It may also shape their understanding of what it means to be a specialist on Russia and on Russian American relations.

The broader transformations in Russian Studies have a more specific consequence for our field: they are changing the questions historians ask of the Russian-American past. Since 2022, that past has inevitably been reread through the prism of current confrontation. Empire, geopolitical rivalry, images of the enemy, propaganda, ideology, security, and historical memory have moved to the foreground. The shift is especially visible in the wider field of Russian Studies. ASEEES made "decolonization" the theme of its 2023 convention as part of a broader effort to reconsider inherited Russocentric hierarchies. Debate has followed over the extent to which this turn corrects genuine blind spots in earlier historiography and the extent to which the present war is itself retrospectively reorganizing our understanding of the field.

For historians of Russian-American relations, the more consequential question is what decolonization does to the object of study itself. If "Russia" is no longer automatically treated as the organizing center of the entire former imperial and Soviet space, the history of contacts with the United States changes as well. Russian-American relations increasingly have to be considered alongside U.S. connections with other societies and polities of the former imperial and Soviet space, including Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and other parts of Central Asia. The Russian state can no longer be taken for granted as the sole framework for organizing the history of American encounters with the territories and peoples of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This shift corrects an older state-centered perspective. At the same time, it

creates a risk of presentism if contemporary national and political boundaries are projected too directly into the past.

Presentism poses a broader problem for the history of Russian-American relations. The current confrontation may encourage a teleological reading in which the entire preceding history of the relationship appears to lead toward the crisis of the present. Cooperation, mutual curiosity, transnational connections, and when genuine alternatives remained open begin to look like deviations from a deeper historical trajectory.

War therefore changes more than the research agenda. It can alter the hierarchy of historical significance. If historians begin with the present state of relations, periods of conflict readily appear structural, while periods of cooperation become anomalies requiring explanation. Yet the question can be reversed. Why did a relationship that for much of the past two centuries involved no direct strategic confrontation become so intensely conflictual at particular moments? One task for historians is to reconstruct the different configurations Russian American relations assumed over time, to recover moments when alternative paths remained open, and to identify the factors that made particular outcomes possible.

The present constraints may also accelerate an older historiographical shift. Loss of access to some sources encourages greater use of others: personal and émigré archives, regional collections, digital databases, and materials located in third countries. These constraints may reinforce a long-standing shift toward transnational approaches to Russian-American relations, making topics such as religion, migration, business, science, culture, journalism, social movements, and intermediaries between the two societies still more prominent within the field. This development long predates 2022, but the current crisis gives it additional momentum and makes its methodological implications harder to ignore.

A related effect concerns periodization and political language. The widespread description of present-day Russian-American relations as a "new Cold War" inevitably encourages historians to compare the current confrontation with the Cold War of the 1940s through the 1980s. At the same time, contemporary analogies feed back into our understanding of that earlier conflict. The language of the Cold War therefore requires historical analysis of its own. The phrase "Cold War" in 1947, its political uses during the renewed confrontation of the early 1980s, and the language of a "new Cold War" in 2026 belong to different political contexts and perform different rhetorical and analytical functions. The recurrence of similar vocabulary across different historical contexts therefore calls for closer attention to the changing meanings and functions of these terms.

The present condition of Russian-American relations thus makes one function of the historian especially important: resisting the colonization of the past by the present. Historians must explain how today's confrontation emerged while keeping visible the possibilities, actors, and trajectories that did not lead to it. In this sense, the history of Russian-American relations retains its distinct value as a field of historical inquiry precisely when Russian-American relations themselves are in profound crisis.

Five New Books on Russian-American Faith Connections
by Matthew Lee Miller

Over the past five years several scholars have produced high-quality, creative studies on Russian-American links in the field of religion. These historians and anthropologists have asked new questions, explored new archives, and considered new perspectives. Here are a few new books to add to your reading list.

Aram G. Sarkisian's *Orthodoxy on the Line: Russian Orthodox Christians and Labor Migration in the Progressive Era* (New York University Press, 2025) examines the expansion of Russian Orthodox Christianity within the United States during the early twentieth century and pays special attention to the experiences of these believers as immigrants and workers. Sarkisian analyzes their movement from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and interaction with the existing Orthodox churches of North America. These churches provided religious, social, and other forms of support for industrial workers and miners. Sarkisian's book presents rich archival details and vivid personal reflections from believers who were served by the Russian Orthodox Immigration Society, an organization that provided information and support for travel planning, legal entry to the US at Ellis Island, and employment opportunities. The author describes the goals and perspectives of multiple periodicals, including *Russkii emigrant* (known also by its English-language title *The Russian Immigrant).* New arrivals often stayed for a time at the Russian Immigrant Home in New York City, which included an Orthodox chapel in the building. The book provides significant detail on the employment settings, including the coal mines of Pennsylvania, steel mills of Gary, Indiana, and factories and lumber mills of northeast Minneapolis. Missionary clergy organized and served parishes for communities while they interacted with the leadership of the archdiocese in North America. Believers participated in the establishment and expansion of dozens of local church Russian Schools, a theological seminary in Minneapolis (relocated to Tenafly, New Jersey), and an orphanage in Springfield, Vermont. Fascinating chapters explore Orthodox responses to the complex challenges of World War I, the Bolshevik revolution, and the influenza epidemic of 1918.

In *Before We Disappear into Oblivion: San Francisco's Russian Diaspora from Revolution to Cold War* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025) Nina Bogdan focuses on the Russian community in San Francisco and explores the interaction of Orthodox Christians, non-Orthodox Spiritual Christians, and Jewish neighbors with eastern European family roots. Her analysis pays attention to the cultural, social, artistic, and economic dynamics of the city and highlights the key role played by Holy Trinity Cathedral and Holy Virgin Parish. She also examines the important role played by Archbishop John (Maximovitch) and other clergy. This is a remarkable study which hopefully will inspire scholars to write similar works on other locations in the US. This book will open the eyes of readers to the complex, contrasting, and confusing realities experienced by many immigrants to the US. The author's full review of this book is in this issue.

Scott M. Kenworthy's *The People's Patriarch: Tikhon Bellavin and the Orthodox Church in North America and Revolutionary Russia* (Oxford University Press, 2026) offers the first comprehensive scholarly biography of Tikhon, who served as a bishop and archbishop in North America for eight years from 1898 to

1907. Chapters two and three address his years of service in the US and Canada and explore several essential topics in detail. Kenworthy describes his extensive pastoral travels from New York to Pennsylvania, Illinois, San Francisco, Alaska, and Canada. Tikhon led parishes which included Russians as well as many other nationalities. In his teaching and writing, he consistently emphasized the universal character of the Orthodox faith more than its distinct Russian forms. During these years he guided the complex transitions of many Greek Catholic (Uniate) parishes with roots in eastern Europe into Orthodox parishes. Tikhon built friendly relationship with several leaders of the Episcopal Church and attempted to find common ground for cooperation. For example, he interacted with Isabel Hapgood as she completed a translation of the Slavonic liturgy into English. The bishop was an enthusiastic fundraiser, collecting funds for the construction of new church buildings in Chicago and New York City (on 97th Street). Philanthropist Charles Crane made significant donations to these structures and additional Orthodox projects. Tikhon oversaw the organization of a seminary in Minneapolis and the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk in Pennsylvania. However, he was not simply a church administrator. His warm pastoral spirit generated deep appreciation from many across North America. These factors all contributed to his later selection as patriarch in Moscow in 1917. Chapter seven in this book addresses his connections with leaders of the American Relief Administration (ARA) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) during the famine of 1921-22. This is a solid work of scholarship which carefully explores Tikhon's thoughtful reflection on how believers in North America and Russia were responding to the trends of modernity in contrasting cultural settings.

Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia (Fordham University Press, 2022) by Sarah Riccardi-Swartz addresses developments in one 21st century context. She explores a small community of Orthodox Christians in West Virginia as an anthropologist. The parishioners and monks are members of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), and the majority are converts to Orthodoxy rather than "cradle" members of this jurisdiction. Many turned to the Orthodox faith after journeys which led them from evangelical Protestant Christianity to ROCOR after times of disillusionment, questioning, and experimentation. Also, many in this community believe that the US system of representative government is not able to withstand multiple cultural changes to which they object, such as shifting views on gender. However, they decided that the monarchy of Russian Emperor Nicholas II and the leadership of President Vladimir Putin were among the best models for opposing unwelcome cultural developments. Riccardi-Swartz is also co-author with Candace Lukasik of the forthcoming *Orthodox Christianity in America: An Introduction* (Routledge, October 2026).

Finally, another noteworthy work has been written by anthropologist Elena V. Kravchenko: *Becoming Orthodox: Women, Religion, and Ethnicity in the American South* (Fordham University Press, August 2026). The author concludes that "Russian women who immigrate to the United States and American women who convert to Orthodox Christianity engage with the materiality and visuality of the Orthodox Church to embrace conservative gender roles of a patriarchal tradition in a way that propels them to actively advocate for the equality, freedom, and empowerment of women." (https://fordhampress.com/becoming-orthodox-hb-9781531513870.html)

Pivotal Moments Alaska's Role in Russian-American Relations during the First Half of the 19th Century[1]

Author: Alexander Yu. Petrov.

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Abstract

The article offers analysis of Alaska's multifaceted historical role as a pivotal geopolitical and cultural crossroads that has profoundly shaped the trajectory of Russian-American relations over several centuries. The article explores the era of Russian America (late 18th – mid19th century), tracing the establishment and operations of the RussianAmerican Company (RAC), the chartered colonial enterprise that served as the de facto administrator of Russia's North American possessions. Special attention is given to the RAC's dual function: as an economic engine driving fur trade and exploration, and as a vehicle for extending imperial influence through outposts, missions, and alliances with Indigenous peoples. The study then examines key diplomatic milestones, including the RussoAmerican Treaty of 1824, which delineated maritime boundaries and regulated commercial privileges in the North Pacific. These agreements not only formalized spheres of influence but also reflected evolving dynamics and competing claims in the region. The framework established by these treaties particularly provisions safeguarding the RAC's trading rights until 1844 is analyzed. A portion of the article addresses the 1867 sale of Alaska to the United States, situating this transfer within broader geopolitical currents: Russia's postCrimean War reorientation, American expansionism, and the economic challenges facing the RAC. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, which maintained parishes, schools, and linguistic traditions long after political sovereignty shifted. the Russian Orthodox Church presence became a crucial conduit for preserving Russian identity among Alaska Natives and settlers. The article underscores Alaska's enduring significance as a lens through which to understand centuries of transnational interaction.

Pivotal Moments Alaska's Role in Russian-American Relations during the First Half of the 19th Century[1]

Alexander Yu. Petrov

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The history of Alaska, once peripheral to historical scholarship, has increasingly gained prominence on the academic agenda. This shift is primarily driven by the relevance of international issues and the desire to elevate interstate relations to a level commensurate with their historical depth and complexity. The largest body of research focuses on the history of Russian America and Russian American relations. In this context, the fundamental works of N. N. Bolkhovitinov and Norman Saul are of special importance: they comprehensively examined the history of Russian America and Russian American relations in their monographs and articles.[1] There is also collective three-volume study dedicated to the History of Russian America.[2] However, despite their broad scope, these works touch upon different issues and vast geographical areas, leaving more narrow subject of Alaska's role relatively unfocused. Moreover, the most notable works of these scholars were published back in the previous century, while a substantial body of material has been accumulated over the first quarter of the 21st century, making it possible to redefine research priorities in a new way.

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[1] Bolkhovitinov N. N. *Stanovlenie russkoamerikanskikh otnoshenii. 1775–1815* [The Formation of RussianAmerican Relations. 1775–1815]. Moscow: Nauka, 1966; Idem. *Russkoamerikanskie otnosheniia. 1815–1832* [RussianAmerican Relations. 1815–1832]. Moscow: Nauka, 1975; Idem. *Rossiia i voina SShA za nezavisimost'. 1775–1783* [Russia and the American War of Independence. 1775–1783]. Moscow: Mysl', 1976; Idem. *SShA: problemy istorii i sovremennaia istoriografiia* [USA: Problems of History and Modern Historiography]. Moscow: Nauka, 1980; Idem. *Russkoamerikanskie otnosheniia i prodazha Aliaski, 1834–1867* [RussianAmerican Relations and the Sale of Alaska, 1834–1867]. Moscow: Nauka, 1990; Saul N. E. *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763–1867*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991.1

[2] *Istoriia Russkoi Ameriki (1732–1867): V 3 t.* / Ed. by N. N. Bolkhovitinov. T. 1: Osnovanie Russkoi Ameriki (1732–1799) [The Founding of Russian America (1732–1799)]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1997; T. 2: Deiatel'nost' Rossiiskoamerikanskoi kompanii (1799–1825) [The Activities of the RussianAmerican Company (1799–1825)]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1997, 1999; T. 3: Russkaia Amerika: ot zenita k zakatu (1825–1867) [Russian America: From Zenith to Decline (1825–1867)]. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1997, 1999. Vol. 1, p. 479 (hereafter - IRA).

An important dimension enriching this chronological framework is the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska. Here, the studies by Metropolitan Kliment and V.O. and Val. V. Pechatnovs are essential, as they illuminate the confessional, churchdiplomatic, and cultural aspects.[3]

In our publications, we have already explored the development of RussianAmerican relations in the North Pacific, as well as the legal dimensions of Russian colonial activities in Alaska. During international conferences in 2025 – 2026 and subsequent discussions, repeated proposals were made to refocus research: instead of covering the entire region of Russian colonial presence (California, the Aleutian and Commander Islands, Hawaii), to concentrate specifically on Alaska in order to demonstrate its pivotal role in the evolution of RussianAmerican ties. Moreover, this approach is highly relevant in contemporary historiography.[4] This article aims to fill the identified historiographical gap by elucidating Alaska's place in the bilateral interaction between the two powers over a prolonged historical period.

Russia was the first of the great powers to reach Alaska during Vitus Bering's Second Kamchatka Expedition, which followed a series of geographical discoveries. Peter I played a key role in initiating the movement toward America. In 1799 Emperor Paul I approved the charter of the RussianAmerican Company (RAC), which formalized Russia's presence in the North Pacific. The document established the 55th parallel north as the initial southern boundary of the RAC's operational zone.[5] The company was granted the right to explore new lands south of this line, provided they were not under the jurisdiction of other states. The northern boundary of its activities ran along the Bering Strait; the western limits encompassed the Kuril and Aleutian Islands; and the eastern reaches extended to the coast of NorthEastern America. The charter also granted the RAC monopoly rights over fishing, trade, and the exploitation of natural resources within the designated zone, providing the legal basis for establishing further Russian settlements, including Fort Ross and the Elizabeth Fortress in Hawaii. The territorial policy of the Russian Empire had a dual character: on the one hand, it consolidated the existing status quo; on the other, it opened opportunities for expansion. The RAC's legal standing rested on the doctrine of *de facto* possession, which developed amid competition with Great Britain, particularly during the

[3] Kliment (Kapalin German Mikhailovich, mitr. Kaluzhskii i Borovskii). *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' na Aliaske do 1917 goda* [The Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska before 1917]. Moscow: OLMA Media Grupp, 2009, 604 p.; Pechatnov V. O., Pechatnov Val. V. *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' v Amerike: ocherki istorii, 1867–1917* [The Russian Orthodox Church in America: Historical Essays, 1867–1917] / Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2025, 447 p.

[4] Petrov A. Yu., Savel'ev I. V., Kliment (Kapalin). Stanovlenie kolonial'nogo prava v Russkoi Amerike [The Formation of Colonial Law in Russian America] // *Rossiiskaia istoriia* [Russian History], 2015, no. 4, pp. 101–112.

[5] Petrov A. Yu. *Nataliia Shelikhova u istokov Russkoi Ameriki* [Natalia Shelikhova at the Origins of Russian America]. Moscow: Ves' mir, 2012.

Nootka Sound crisis.[6] Sea otter furs were gathered with the help of natives by company hunting parties along the coast, stored in warehouses at Kodiak or Sitka, then shipped to China by way of Siberia or through the port of Canton.[7]

By the early 19th century, a system of colonial rivalries and diplomatic agreements had taken shape in North America. For the United States, which had gained independence after the War of Independence (1775–1783), borders were fixed by the 1783 Treaty of Paris: the western boundary ran along the Mississippi River, while the southern boundary followed the 31st parallel to the Apalachicola River and thence along the St. Marys River to the Atlantic. Thus, by 1799 the jurisdiction of the USA covered the territory of the original 13 states, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River, with no access to the Pacific coast.[8]

During the era of Thomas Jefferson (1801–1809), interest in the Pacific Ocean grew significantly. In 1803, he oversaw the Louisiana Purchase, which opened the way for the country's westward expansion. To grasp the scale of Louisiana, whose territory far exceeded the modern size of the state bearing the same name, an expedition was organized under the leadership of Jefferson's associates Meriwether Lewis and William Clark (1804–1806). This expedition reached the Pacific coast via the Columbia River and established Fort Clatsop; later known as Astoria. This strengthened US claims to Oregon and demonstrated growing interest in the Pacific frontier.[9]

In 1803–1806, the first Russian circumnavigation expedition took place under the leadership of chamberlain Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, who visited Alaska and also established connections with California. His activities contributed to the development of RussianAmerican trade relations. The ship "Yunona" was purchased from American Captain De Wolf, on which he sailed to California. Rezanov wrote: "Our company already has sufficient establishments and capital to establish trade with other powers. First of all, attention must be directed to

[6] Iz raporta kapitanleitenanta I. N. Bukharina vitseprezidentu Admiralteistvkollegii admiralu grafu G. G. Kushelevu o poseleniiakh RAK na Kuril'skikh i Aleutskikh ostrovakh, v severovostochnoi Amerike, 28 ianvaria 1800 g. [From the report of Lieutenant Commander I. N. Bukharin to the VicePresident of the Admiralty Board, Admiral Count G. G. Kushelev, on the settlements of the RAC in the Kuril and Aleutian Islands and in Northeast America, January 28, 1800] // RGAVMF [Russian State Archive of the Navy]. F. 198. Op. 1. D. 59. L. 124–125.

[7] Saul N. California-Alaska Trade, 1851–1867: The American Russian Commercial Company and the Russian America Company and the Sale/Purchase of Alaska // *Journal of Russian American Studies* 2.1 (May 2018). p. 1–2.

[8] Bemis S. *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*. Read Books, 2008, p. 320.

[9] Allen P. History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark by Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Vol. I. Toronto: George N. Morang & Co. Ltd., 1902. 435 p.; Ambrose Stephen E. Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996. 519 p.; Adams H. History of the United States of America During the Administration of Jefferson and Madison: In 9 vols. New York, 1931, vol. 3, pp. 215–216; Lavender D. The Way to the Western Sea: Lewis and Clark across the Continent. New York: Anchor Books, 1990. 462 p.

discoveries in the maritime sphere."[10]

Other US expeditions took place simultaneously with the first Russian circumnavigation, one of whose key objectives was Alaska. The results of these expeditions were quickly leveraged by Boston merchants, who obtained proof of the feasibility of making stops along the Columbia coast. They gradually strengthened their presence in Alaska, and in exchange for furs, the Boston traders were even willing to part with their own vessels. These contacts played a notable role in shaping RussianAmerican relations, which were officially established in 1807.[11]

At that time, there were no direct land or sea borders between the United States and Russia in the North American region. Relations between the two powers had the character of potential neighborhood: their zones of interest did not geographically overlap, but came into contact through the interactions of Russians and Americans in the northern Pacific Ocean. Figuratively speaking, the formation of the future border between Russia and the United States was carried out by merchants from Boston, who supplied colonial goods (sugar, coffee, tobacco, and foodstuffs). In the early 19th century, Bostonbased American traders gradually increased their presence in Alaska. They engaged in barter, exchanging furs for foodstuffs and even vessels. However, they tended to supply the local population with weapons, and violated the monopoly rights of the RAC. This aroused dissatisfaction on the part of the Russian government, which sought to protect its interests. Meanwhile, these contacts played a notable role in shaping RussianAmerican relations and became an important stimulus for establishing diplomatic relations between the countries in 1806-1807.[12]

In the first quarter of the 19th century, the RAC sought to expand its holdings. In 1819, its directors proposed shifting the southern boundary, incorporating the Northwest Coast. After a year of review, the government approved a new charter on 18 August 1821: it extended the RAC's privileges for 20 years, moved the boundary to 51° N, and prohibited foreigners from trading in Russian America within 100 Italian miles of the coast. The decree sparked protests from France, Britain, and the United States.[13] The imperial decree of 4 September 1821 was translated into several languages and sent to various countries via diplomatic channels. As was later noted in one of the office memoranda: "France, England and America became acquainted with the content of the decree and almost simultaneously lodged successive protests against its unconditional implementation. Our government initially defended its rights with factual and historical arguments, while the aforementioned powers —and particularly the USA, refuted them on the grounds of popular rights. Diplomatic debates continued

[10] OR RNB. Fund 542 (Olenin Collection). File 799. Sheet 12.

[11] Bolkhovitinov N. N. *Stanovlenie russkoamerikanskikh otnoshenii. 1775–1815*. Moscow: Nauka, 1966, pp. 269–281.

[12] *Meeting of Frontiers: About this Collection* [Electronic resource] // Library of Congress. URL: https://www.loc.gov/collections/meeting-of-frontiers/about-this-collection (accessed: [15 March 2026]).

[13] Saul N. E. *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763–1867*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991.p. 96 – 105/

from late 1821 until the conclusion of special conventions on this matter: with America in 1824 and with England in 1825." The United States of America, in particular, expressed strong objections. As early as February 1822, they sent a protest addressed to the Russian extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador in America, P. I. Poletika. The Russian diplomat countered the American claims with historical facts and invoked three rights: "the right of first discovery, the right of first occupation, and the right of undisputed use."[14]

The Americans succeeded in having the issue of borders brought to special negotiations. In the history of Russian Pacific colonization, these negotiations became the first to be held under pressure from another country. The pressure exerted by British diplomacy after Captain J. Cook's third voyage was not successful, and its results, as applied to Russia's actions, turned out to be secondary. Even the establishment of the fortress and settlement Ross in territories that Spain considered its own colonies had only a very minor impact on the generally detached attitude of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs towards the activities of the RAC in California. The United States, as in the case of establishing diplomatic and trade relations with Russia, became the initiator of this process. Diplomatic negotiations between the two countries began in Saint Petersburg in February 1824. The negotiation strategy, apparently, was developed by J. Q. Adams. The American representative at the negotiations, G. Middleton, immediately stated the U.S. position, which amounted to a demand for: freedom of navigation; permission for U.S. citizens to engage in fishing in the northern part of the Pacific Ocean; trade with indigenous peoples in areas where there were no Russian settlements. However, the greatest objections arose regarding the southern boundary of the colonial possessions. Middleton proposed pushing the border northward, up to 55° N, or 4° further north. Middleton was a Southerner and a slaveholder, accustomed throughout his career to fierce debates and to defending his positions. Moreover, the scope of his authority was unusually broad and extended to matters related to Eastern Europe, which made him a highly competent negotiator. In addition, as American researcher H. Berkvist discovered, Middleton had managed to establish direct contacts with the Russian Ministry of Finance and had at his disposal quite confidential documents related to the budget of the Russian Empire. Middleton was well aware of which goods from the United States and other countries Russia was interested in. He successfully leveraged this knowledge during the negotiations.[15]

A very narrow circle of persons took part in the negotiations: G. Middleton, K. V. Nesselrode, and P. I. Poletika, as well as assistants on either side. The negotiations took place in secrecy; other ministries and agencies of the Russian Empire, if they had any understanding of the essence of the negotiations at all, had only the most general one. Apparently, the tsar was briefed on the progress of the negotiations. American researcher B. Hall acknowledged back in 1930 that

[14] RGAVMF [Russian State Archive of the Navy]. F. 410. Op. 2. D. 313. L. 44, 46 ob. (underline in the document).

[15] Bergquist H. E. Henry Middleton as Political Reporter: The United States, the Near East, and Eastern Europe, 1821–1829 // *The Historian*, 1983, no. 45 (3), pp. 355–357.

"trade factors were the main reasons for concluding the convention; moreover, Russia had wellfounded claims to the territories under discussion, both by right of first discovery and by their settlement." The Americans drew attention to the need to preserve the principle of freedom of navigation. In general, this was one of the key principles upheld by the United States since the establishment of trade and diplomatic relations. Thus, as early as 1799, U.S. Secretary of State T. Pickering wrote to the U.S. Envoy to London R. King: "An important and relevant condition is that citizens and subjects of both parties be granted full freedom of navigation and trade in all possessions of said parties, where navigation and trade are currently permitted to any other state."[16]

The archives preserve correspondence between G. Middleton and R. Rush, analysis of which has shown that the negotiations were preceded by intensive consultations between the United States and Great Britain. N. N. Bolkhovitinov believed that the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine had prevented joint anti antiRussia actions by Britain and the United States, and cited Rush's letter to Washington as an example. Meanwhile, Rush wrote this letter on January 9, 1824, to Middleton, who was at that time in Saint Petersburg: "… Mr. Cannag hinted to me that acting separately had been the original intention of his [i.e., the British - A.P.] government; instructions to this effect had been given to Sir Charles Bagot, and that our government wishes all three powers to conduct the negotiations…". Based on the text of this letter, it nevertheless seems that although the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine on December 2, 1823, was perceived ambiguously in Great Britain, the decision to hold negotiations with Russia had been made in advance.[17]

In the modern American interpretation of the 1824 events, the following conclusion is presented: "Great Britain considered the ban on the movement of foreign vessels to be contrary to the laws of nations, while the United States declared that Russia was violating the principle of the Monroe Doctrine, according to which no new European colonies should emerge on the American continent."[18]

In April 1824, Russia and the United States concluded a convention officially titled *The Convention Concluded at Saint Petersburg Between the Emperor of All the Russia and the Government of the United States of America for the Indestructible Preservation of the Friendly Relations Existing Between Them*. A comparison of the Russian and English versions reveals some differences in wording and emphasis; specifies the regulated spheres (navigation, fishing) and

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[16] Bashkina N. N., Bolkhovitinov N. N., Brown J. H. et al., comps., *Russia and the United States: The Formation of Relations, 1765–1815* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 752 p., p. 218.

[17] *Correspondence in Relation to the Proposed Interoceanic Canal Between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the ClaytonBulwer Treaty and the Monroe Doctrine: Being a Reprint of Senate Ex. Docs. No. 112, 46th Cong., 2nd Sess.; No. 194, 47th Cong., 1st Sess.; and No. 26, 48th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1885), p. 185.*

[18] State of the Union History. Available at: http://www.stateoftheunionhistory.com/2017/11/1824-james-monroe-russo-american-treaty.html?m=1 (accessed 07.03. 2026)

geographic scope (the Pacific Ocean). The Russian version emphasizes the nature of interstate relations ("friendly relations") and their permanence ("indestructible preservation"), though a more substantive formulation also appears: "Convention on Friendly Relations, Trade, Navigation, and Fishing." Article 1 uses antonymic translation: the English *disturb* ("to hinder") and *restrain* ("to restrict") are rendered in Russian as "unhindered and with full freedom." Terminological differences are also evident: Americans are referred to as *citizens*, while Russians are *subjects*, reflecting the political realities of the two states. The Russian text is more emotive ("good mutual accord" vs. *perfect concord*) and replete with archaisms ("graciously faithful," "thereof,","these," "for"), whereas the English version adheres to a strictly official style, free of obsolete lexical units. In terms of substance, the convention had farreaching consequences. Its preamble declared the strengthening of friendly relations, yet Article 1 effectively annulled Russia's 1821 decree banning foreign trade in Russian America, meeting key U.S. demands. Subsequent provisions regulated the admission of American vessels to trade with Indigenous peoples in the Northwest of America, provided they obtained permits from local authorities.[19] For Russia, this meant significant concessions: U.S. citizens were allowed to engage in fishing and trade in areas free from Russian settlements. Monitoring the vast coastal zone with just a few thousand colonists was virtually impossible, and the Russian Empire's policy, which even barred its own subjects from settling in the colonies; exacerbated the situation. Unlike the United States, where the population grew through emigration, Russia offered no such opportunities.

The delimitation boundary was set at latitude 54°40′ N, with the United States receiving territories that had no Russian settlements. Notably, the RAC was completely excluded from the negotiations: its interests were not discussed, and no analysis was made of the potential impact on the company's financial and economic standing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not seek the views of RAC shareholders, including the imperial family, who may have been the only wellinformed circle. Archival documents show that even the Ministry of the Navy was skeptical about the convention, particularly due to the lack of consultations with the governors of Russian colonies in America. The only statesman who spoke in support of the RAC was Admiral N. S. Mordvinov. In January–February 1824, he sent three memoranda to Foreign Minister K. V. Nesselrode, arguing for maintaining the border at 53°40′ N (Cape Charlotte). His arguments rested on the right of first discovery and settlement of the territories, as well as considerations of state prestige. Mordvinov warned that concessions could provoke demands from other powers (notably Britain) and harm Indigenous peoples who had adopted Orthodoxy. However, Nesselrode's response, conveyed on behalf of Alexander I, signaled that diplomatic agreement took precedence over RAC interests: the emperor believed that while some circumstances should be taken into account, others, related to broader state tasks, must also be considered.[20]

[19] Saul N. E. *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763–1867*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991.p. 103.

[20] From the letter of the General Board of the RAC to M. M. Muravyov, April 16, 1825 // Russian State Archive of the Navy (RGAVMF). F. 1375. Op. 1. D. 4. L. 422–423.

After the convention was signed, the RAC's General Board initiated a Special Council, which on 10 May 1824 concluded that the company faced potential damage. Council members insisted on revising the articles, especially those concerning American trade with Indigenous peoples, and submitted petitions to Alexander I. In response, a special committee was formed, including Finance Minister E. F. Kankrin, V. K. Nesselrode, M. M. Speransky, and other highranking officials. Despite the presence of RAC directors at the 21 July 1824 meeting, their views were not taken into account: the Foreign Ministry's position, that the southern border of the Russian colonies needed to be fixed, prevailed. The committee decided to limit American trade and fishing between 59°30′ and 54°40′ N, instructing envoy F. V. Teil to convey this position to Washington. However, during the ratification process in the United States, Teil did not advance additional demands, yielding to the arguments of Secretary of State J. Q. Adams about risks to bilateral relations.

In the end, all provisions of the convention remained in force in their original version of 5 April 1824. The RAC and its supporters failed to influence the terms of the agreement. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs under K.V. Nesselrode ignored alternative viewpoints; in contrast to the American side, which consistently defended the interests of its commercial circles. Thus, the 1824 convention became Russia's first major territorial concession to the United States, and the negotiations took place without involving representatives of other states whose interests were indirectly affected by the agreement.[21]

After trade with representatives of foreign countries in Russian America was permitted, a special document to this effect was sent to M. I. Muravyov. The first ship to arrive on trading business from the United States to Russian America was the *Tameamea* under the command of J. Meek, dispatched by J. Astor. Muravyov purchased expensive cigars, 90 gallons of wine, and a fireplace for his house from Meek.[22] Soon, other ships from the United States also began to actively visit the Russian colonies. At that time, the General Board of the RussianAmerican Company became concerned that no specific norms had been developed in trade with the Americans to meet the requirements of the time. For example, in 1824–1830, the price of a sea otter pelt when sold to Americans was 8 rubles in banknotes, or 2 rubles 28 kopecks in silver. Meanwhile, the price of a similar pelt delivered to Okhotsk was already 15 rubles in banknotes and reached 25–30 rubles in Kyakhta or Saint Petersburg. It turned out that sea otter pelts in Russian America were being sold at clearly low prices.[23]

In 1839, RAC entered into a 10year contract with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) for joint fur hunting. This agreement reflected a pragmatic approach: despite growing competition from American trappers and traders, Russia opted to cooperate with the British. The treaty helped streamline the extraction and sale

[21] N. N. Bolkhovitinov, Russian American Relations and the Sale of Alaska, 1834–1867 (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 368 p., pp. 187–201.

[22] From the letter of M. I. Muravyov to the General Board of the RAC, December 13, 1824 // NARS. RRAC. R. 29, p. 160.

[23] Exchange rate of the silver ruble to the paper ruble averaged 1 : 3{,}5 in the 1820s.

of furs in the region, reduce costs, and avoid direct confrontation with the HBC, which held strong positions in North America. Consequently, the contract served as a balancing tool, it helped safeguard Russian interests under pressure from American competitors while simultaneously fostering working relations with the British side.

Preparation of the RAC's activity report for 1843–1844 coincided with the approval of its new charter, a key document that defined Alaska's role in RussianAmerican interactions. Since the RAC's founding in 1799, its founding acts had consisted of "rules" and "privileges," later consolidated into a single charter. Extending the "privileges" was critically important: they secured the company's monopoly right to commercial and trading activities in the North Pacific, imperial patronage, and a jointstock operational model.[24] The drafting of the new charter began in 1840. After discussion in the State Council, the draft was provisionally approved by the emperor on 7 March 1841. The document then underwent согласование in the Ministry of Finance and received comments from the Ministries of Justice and State Property. Following revisions, a new version was submitted on 24 March 1844, and the charter was finally approved on 10 October 1844.[25]

The 1844 charter significantly expanded upon previous regulations: whereas the 1799 version contained 34 sections and the 1821 version 70, the new charter grew to 286 sections. Key changes concerned status and territory: the RAC remained "under the highest patronage," and its area of operations was expanded to "the entire part of the Northeast Sea," including the Northwest of America, the Aleutian and Kuril Islands. Monopoly rights were confirmed for 20 years (from 1 January 1842).[26]

The charter included clarifications on trade with China (via the ports of Canton and Shanghai), with a ban on opium imports. The company's right to engage in trade and fishing with neighboring peoples, provided their governments consented, was reaffirmed. For nonnobles, 10 years of service entitled them to personal honorary citizenship, and in exceptional cases, hereditary status. Employees gained the right to wear the uniform of the Ministry of Finance and advance through the Table of Ranks.

Share value was set in silver rubles. Profits were calculated after debts and contributions to the reserve capital (10 %) were deducted; this reserve could only

[24] Bolkhovitinov N. N. *Russkoamerikanskie otnosheniia i prodazha Aliaski, 1834–1867*. Moscow: Nauka, 1990, 368 p., pp. 187–201.

[25] Report of the Main Board of the Russian-American Company for Two Years, up to January 1, 1842 (Saint Petersburg, 1842), pp. 33, 38. Note: The balance sheet was prepared on September 21, 1842, but the main calculations were made as of January 1, 1842 - hence both dates appear in the document. Starting in 1842, reports of the General Board of the RAC were printed at the printing house.

[26] As noted, a detailed analysis of the entire set of measures related to the adoption of the company's new charter was not the aim of this study. In addition, extensive files related to correspondence on the new charter can be found in the following archives: Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). F. 18. Op. 5. D. 1338; Archive of the Russian Geographical Society (ARGO). Razr. 99. Op. 1. D. 79, 82.

be used in extraordinary circumstances. Unclaimed dividends could be added to the reserve capital. The General Board of the Russian-American Company (GP RAC) was expanded to five members, elected for twoyear terms from among shareholders with experience in trade or colonial affairs. A system of bonuses tied to the company's annual profits was introduced. The GP RAC was required to submit an annual balance sheet and a report on the export of commercial goods to the Ministry of Finance. Internal audits included cash and recordkeeping checks, while external audits involved reporting to the general shareholders' meeting. The Chief Governor of the colonies retained broad powers but could not exceed the limits set by the GP RAC, especially in financial matters.[27]

The 1844 charter reflected the evolving role of Alaska in the context of growing RussianU.S. interaction. On one hand, it consolidated Russia's position in the region by expanding the company's hunting grounds and confirming the RAC's monopoly. On the other, it took into account international agreements delimiting possessions in the Pacific Ocean, signaling a desire to avoid conflicts with the United States and Great Britain. At the same time, the document revealed the contradictory nature of imperial policy: on one hand, the state maintained control through the Ministry of Finance and reporting requirements; on the other, it granted the company considerable autonomy in trade operations, including the right to appeal directly to the emperor in cases of disagreement with the ministry.[28] Thus, the 1844 charter became not only the legal foundation for the RAC's operations but also an indicator of the balance between imperial interests and the need to account for the realities of international trade in the Pacific region. It cemented Alaska as a key node in RussianAmerican economic and geopolitical ties, while simultaneously defining the limits of the company's capabilities under mounting external pressure.

The process of gradual rapprochement between Russia and the United States reached its peak during the American Civil War. As part of a demonstration of political support for Abraham Lincoln's administration, two Russian squadrons were dispatched to the shores of America: one to the East Coast under the command of S. S. Lesovsky, and the other to the West Coast under A. A. Popov. The visit of the Russian warships generated a wide public response. During the events organized by the American side in honor of the Russian sailors, the significance of bilateral relations was particularly emphasized, including their importance in the Pacific region.[29]

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[27] Report of the Main Board of the Russian-American Company for the One-Year Period Ending January 1, 1847 (Saint Petersburg, 1847); Report of the Main Board of the Russian-American Company for the One-Year Period Ending January 1, 1848 (Saint Petersburg, 1848); Report of the Main Board of the Russian-American Company for the One-Year Period Ending January 1, 1849 (Saint Petersburg, 1849).

[28] RGAVMF. F. 1375. Op. 1. D. 48. L. 111 ob.–112 ob

[29] «Privetstvennyi banket, dannyi Gorodskim bostonskim sovetom kontradmiralu [Stepanu Stepanovichu] Lesovskomu i ofitseram russkogo flota», 7 iiunia 1864 g. [«Welcome Banquet Given by the Boston City Council to Rear Admiral [Stepan Stepanovich] Lesovsky and Officers of the Russian Navy», June 7, 1864] // Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi natsional'noi biblioteki (OR RNB) [Manuscript Department of the Russian National Library]. F. 1000. Op. 2. D. 1110. L. 1–27.

In the mid-19th century, there was a substantial expansion of American whaling operations in the waters off the coast of Alaska. The dynamics of whaleoil production show impressive growth: the figure increased from 35.0 thousand tons in 1825 to 146.0 thousand tons by 1850. The intensity of whaling activity is confirmed by fleet data: in 1846, the United States had 656 whaling vessels with a total displacement of 233.0 thousand tons, with the Hawaiian Islands serving as the key logistical hub for these operations. Shipcall statistics also reflect US dominance in the industry: in 1853, American whalers accounted for the vast majority of recorded visits, 500 out of 533 total entries. The expansion of whaling had begun earlier: as early as 1835, Captain B. T. Folgers identified promising whalefeeding grounds near Kodiak Island. By 1841, at least 50 American vessels were operating in the Alaskan region, and by 1842 the number of ships visiting the waters off the western tip of Alaska and the eastern part of the Aleutian Chain had reached 200. By 1845, 263 out of 690 American whaling vessels were engaged in whaling in the waters of the RAC. Economic indicators for the period 1848–1861 show that whale oil and baleen were exported to the value of 130 million dollars, equivalent to approximately 200 million silver rubles. Such largescale and unregulated harvesting led to a serious decline in whale populations, which in turn undermined the traditional way of life of the region's indigenous peoples (Aleuts, Eskimos, Tlingits), depriving them of their usual food sources.

Moreover, in the course of pursuing whales, American whalers increasingly entered the waters off the coast of Kamchatka, an area that the Main Board of the RussianAmerican Company regarded as one of its key bases for trade and commercial fishing activities.[30]

The management of the RAC proposed to impose restrictions on the entry of American whaling vessels into Alaskan waters, but this request failed to gain the support of Foreign Minister K. V. Nesselrode. Furthermore, the RAC directors' proposal to organize cruising patrols along the Alaskan coast was never implemented. In the 1850s, the presence of representatives from the British Hudson's Bay Company noticeably intensified in Alaska. This was accompanied by an increase in its trade and commercial fishing influence in the region, which led to heightened competition with the RussianAmerican Company. During this period, negotiations even took place at the highest level regarding the potential cession of Russian possessions in Alaska to the British. Various geopolitical and economic aspects of a possible deal were discussed. However, after considering all the options, the decision made by a limited circle of highranking officials under the leadership of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich was ultimately taken in favor of the United States of America. This outcome determined the future trajectory of relations between the Russian Empire and the North American continent and had a significant impact on the geopolitical situation in the Pacific region.[31]

[30] Zavoiko V. S. – Konstantinu Nikolaevichu, 16 avgusta 1855 g. [Zavoiko V. S. to Konstantin Nikolaevich, August 16, 1855] // AVPRI [Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire]. F. RAK. Op. 888. D. 391. L. 33.

[31] Murav'evAmurskii N. N. – Konstantinu Nikolaevichu, 26 maia 1853 g. [Murav'evAmursky N. N. to Konstantin Nikolaevich, May 26, 1853] // Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voennomorskogo flota (RGAVMF) [Russian State Archive of the Navy]. F. 410. Op. 2. D. 313. L. 1–7.

In the 1850s, Alaska played an important role in the interaction between the Russian Empire and the United States of America, which was determined primarily by the economic interests of both sides in the Pacific region; the key factor was the rapid development of California following the start of the gold rush in 1848–1849, when the rapidly growing population of San Francisco and other cities in the state created enormous demand for basic resources, primarily for construction timber and fresh water in the form of ice for domestic and commercial needs. Russian America, administered by the RAC under the direction of the General Board, leveraged its natural resources to establish stable trade: highquality coniferous timber and massive blocks of natural ice, harvested during the winter from Alaska's mountain rivers and lakes, were shipped from Aleutian and Alaskan territories to San-Francisco. This trade proved extremely beneficial for both Russians and Americans: for the RAC, it became a significant source of revenue that helped partially offset the growing operational costs of colonial administration, while for California entrepreneurs it provided a reliable supply channel for critical materials amid limited local production and difficulties in transporting goods from the eastern U.S. states.[32]

Key figures of the time played an important role in organizing and developing these trade ties: Ferdinand Petrovich Wrangel, manager of the RAC's affairs, who had laid the foundations for interaction with American traders in previous decades, and subsequent colonial administrators, who ensured logistics and sales. The American side was represented by major trading houses and private entrepreneurs from San Francisco, such as the companies of William H. Davis and other merchants specializing in supplying the rapidly growing city. Diplomatic contacts also had a significant impact on the intensity of trade: during this period, a relatively favorable climate persisted in RussianAmerican relations, supported by both informal agreements at the local level and the stance of Russian diplomats in Washington, including Ambassador Alexander Andreevich Bodisko, who sought to maintain a constructive dialogue with the U.S. government. Technically, shipments were organized by sea: Russian sailing ships and schooners regularly plied between the ports of Russian America and San Francisco; a typical expedition took several weeks, taking into account weather conditions and ice conditions in the northern Pacific Ocean. As a result, by the mid1850s, trade between Alaska and California had reached considerable volumes: according to available estimates, several thousand cubic metres of timber and hundreds of tons of ice were delivered to San Francisco annually, which not only strengthened the economic ties between the two countries but also facilitated informal cultural exchange between Russian settlers, Aleuts, Tlingits, and the rapidly growing multiethnic population of California. Two significant challenges disrupted trade between Alaska and California during this period. Firstly, the unusually mild winter of 1855–1856 resulted in a severe shortage of ice available for harvesting and shipment to San Francisco. This scarcity prompted trading companies to

[32] Saul N. California-Alaska Trade, 1851–1867: The American Russian Commercial Company and the Russian America Company and the Sale/Purchase of Alaska // Journal of Russian American Studies 2.1 (May 2018). p. 1-13.

search for new ice harvesting locations farther north, ultimately identifying Wood Island near Kodiak as a viable source. The first ice shipments from this site commenced in 1858. Secondly, large vessels transporting ice faced a persistent hazard: submerged rocks, particularly abundant in Sitka Harbor. This danger led to the loss of several key vessels, including the *Zenobia* (the workhorse of the ARCC) in 1858, the *Kodiak* of the RAC in 1860, and the RAC's replacement flagship, the New Englandbuilt Yankee clipper *Tsaritsa*, in 1861. These incidents accelerated the shift towards safer waters less prone to such navigational hazards.[33]

In 1859–1860, Russia negotiated with Great Britain over a possible sale of Alaska. The talks yielded no results: the British did not accept the terms. This experience showed that London was unwilling to assume the costs and risks of developing a remote territory. Meanwhile, the United States maintained a steady interest in Alaska and had the resources to develop it. Moreover, selling to the U.S. would allow Russia to strengthen relations with Washington and gain a counterweight to British influence in the region. For these reasons, after failed negotiations with London, the Russian government ultimately opted for a deal with the United States.[34] The key event was the sale of Alaska: on 30 March 1867, a treaty was signed in Washington ceding Russian possessions to the United States for 7.2 million dollars in gold. The transferred territories included the Alaska Peninsula, the Alexander and Kodiak Archipelagos, the Aleutian Islands, and the islands of St. Lawrence, St. Matthew, Nunivak, and Pribilof, among others.[35] The border was drawn based on the 1824 and 1825 conventions: the western line ran through a point in the Bering Strait (65°30′ N) along a meridian equidistant from Ratmanov Island (retained by Russia) and Kruzenshtern Island (ceded to the U.S.); the southern border followed 54°40′ N; and the eastern border followed the 1825 RussianBritish convention line (141° E). The transaction covering approximately 1,519,000 square kilometres became the largest territorial transfer in the history of the Russian Empire. After the cession, Alaska ceased to be an internal Russian space in the North Pacific, necessitating subsequent resolution of maritime jurisdiction issues.[36] The 1867 treaty transferring Russian possessions in North America to the United States, which established the boundary line in the North Pacific, served as a foundational document that predetermined the

[33] Saul N. California-Alaska Trade, 1851–1867: The American Russian Commercial Company and the Russian America Company and the Sale/Purchase of Alaska // Journal of Russian American Studies 2.1 (May 2018). p. 1-2.

[34] The history of the preparation and adoption of this treaty has been described in sufficient detail in the works of N. N. Bolkhovitinov. He also thoroughly identified the reasons behind the Russian government's decision to sell Alaska to the United States. N. N. Bolkhovitinov, Russia Opens America, pp. 213–228; Idem, Russian American Relations and the Sale of Alaska, pp. 167–214.

[35] Doklad M. Kh. Reiterna Aleksandru II «O merakh k ispolneniiu dogovora ob ustupke severoamerikanskikh kolonii», 5 maia 1867 g. [Report by M. Kh. Reutern to Alexander II "On Measures for the Implementation of the Treaty on the Cession of the North American Colonies", May 5, 1867] // AVPRI. F. RAK. D. 412. L. 98–99 (copy).

[36] Bolkhovitinov N. N. *Russkoamerikanskie otnosheniia i prodazha Aliaski, 1834–1867* [RussianAmerican Relations and the Sale of Alaska, 1834–1867]. Moscow: Nauka, 1990, 368 p., pp. 187–201.

nature of subsequent agreements on the border in the Bering and Chukchi Seas. Its significance extended far beyond mere territorial delimitation, exerting a longterm impact on the geopolitical configuration of the region and the logic of future international arrangements.

Norman Saul added more arguments to Bolkhovitinov's reasoning about why Russia decided to sell Alaska to the USA. In his recent article, he argues that the California–Alaska trade heavily influenced Russia's 1862 decision to sell Alaska to the United States, following reports from inspectors of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Navy. The sale was delayed until the Union's victory in the Civil War. By then, the RAC had failed to build profitable ties with California: ice was its only viable export, as coal, fish, and lumber found no market. Costly ship losses during ice transport and the shift of operations from Sitka to Kodiak, which disrupted supply returns to Sitka — further undermined the RAC's position and likely affected the incomes of the Tlingit and Aleut peoples.[37]

Reflecting the level of development of international maritime law in the mid19th century, the document detailed the transfer of land territories and adjacent islands but entirely omitted the issue of maritime boundaries. This omission stemmed from the absence at that time of codified concepts of exclusive economic zones and continental shelves, a gap that later gave rise to a series of legal disputes.

It is important to note that even after the dissolution of the RussianAmerican Company and the closing of Russian America as an administrative entity, Russian cultural and religious presence in the North Pacific not only persisted but continued to develop steadily; primarily thanks to the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its continuity was ensured by the purposeful missionary work of a number of outstanding church figures, among whom special mention must be made of Saint Innocent (Veniaminov), later Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna, and Venerable Herman of Alaska. Their decadeslong pastoral, educational, and linguistic work, including the translation of liturgical texts into local languages and the compilation of grammars; not only preserved but systematically strengthened Russia's spiritual heritage in Alaska, and later extended its influence to California, where Orthodox parishes emerged in the 19th century.[38]

The legal foundation for the continuation of church activities was directly embedded in the 1867 treaty on the sale of Alaska. According to its provisions, the Russian Orthodox Church retained special jurisdiction over real property rights, in particular, the right to use land plots on which churches, chapels, and other religious buildings were located. This ensured the institutional stability of the church infrastructure and prevented its liquidation or secularization following the change of state sovereignty over the territory. Subsequently, Alaskan parishes

[37] Saul N. California-Alaska Trade, 1851–1867: The American Russian Commercial Company and the Russian America Company and the Sale/Purchase of Alaska // Journal of Russian American Studies 2.1 (May 2018). p. 10.

[38] Kliment (Kapalin German Mikhailovich, mitr. Kaluzhskii i Borovskii). *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' na Aliaske do 1917 goda* [The Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska before 1917]. Moscow: OLMA Media Grupp, 2009, 604 p.

became an important training ground for missionaries. Among those who served in these parishes was the future Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Saint Tikhon (Bellavin), whose work in Alaska during the 1890s not only strengthened local communities but also contributed to the development of models for intercultural dialogue with Indigenous peoples. Moreover, Orthodox clergy consistently pursued pastoral and educational activities among diverse ethnic and social groups across the vast expanses of the North Pacific; from the Aleut and Tlingit peoples to Russian colonists and American settlers. This work encompassed: organizing parish schools and teaching literacy; maintaining metric records and preserving the historical memory of communities; adapting liturgical practices to local conditions while upholding canonical tradition; providing medical and social assistance to the population. Clergy undertook long journeys to remote areas of northern and northwestern America.[39]

A new impetus to the RussianAmerican dialogue in Alaska was given in 2025 during a meeting between Presidents V.V. Putin and D.J. Trump at the ElmendorfRichardson military base in Anchorage (Alaska), where the prospects for cooperation in the Arctic and in Alaska were discussed. Following the talks, D. Trump stated that the USA also had excellent representatives from the business sector and others present there. If one wished to cooperate with the United States, the country looked forward to it and eagerly anticipated working together.[40]

The significance of Alaska for RussianAmerican relations was emphasized by Russian President V. V. Putin at a joint press conference with U.S. President D. J. Trump in Anchorage on August 16, 2025: "It is also important that a significant part of the shared history of Russia and the United States, along with many positive events, is linked to Alaska. For instance, the vast cultural heritage of the Russian America era is still preserved here to this day: Orthodox churches, and a great number of geographical names..."[41] Indeed, Alaska unites Russia and the United States through a shared historical and cultural heritage, which must be restored to the historical memory of the peoples of America and Russia. One possible approach is to resume international conferences on various aspects of history and cooperation in different fields, which were held annually in Russia and the United States.[42]

In the first half of the 19th century, Alaska was a key node in RussianAmerican relations. The activities of the RAC consolidated Russia's presence in the North Pacific: through fur trapping, trading posts, and agreements, it defined spheres of influence and rules of interaction with foreign powers. Alaska became a testing

[39] For details, see: Kliment (Kapalin German Mikhailovich, mitr. Kaluzhskii i Borovskii). *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' na Aliaske do 1917 goda* [The Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska before 1917]. Moscow: OLMA Media Grupp, 2009, 604 p

[40] *Kremlin.ru [Electronic resource]. URL: (accessed: 07 February 2026).*

[41] A. Yu. Petrov, Metropolitan Kliment (Kapalin), M. G. Malakhov, A. N. Ermolaev, I. V. Savel'ev, History and Heritage of Russian America // Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2011, vol. 81, no. 12, pp. 1090–1099.

[42] A. Yu. Petrov, The Study of the History and Heritage of Russian America: New Approaches, Books, International Conferences and Round Tables (2012–2013) // American Yearbook. Moscow, 2013, pp. 341–347.

ground for models of interaction between Russia and the United States. Economic interests, diplomatic compromises, and cultural heritage shaped the trajectory of bilateral relations for decades to come.

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Goodbye, Uncle Joe: U.S. Reactions to the Death of Joseph Stalin

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Abstract

This article discusses contemporaneous U.S. reactions to the death of Joseph Stalin. It includes discussions of the reactions of the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. embassy in Moscow. It also discusses the reactions the mainstream American press, including the *New York Times*, news magazines and the liberal press. The Communist Party USA eulogized Stalin, following its longstanding pro-Stalinist ideology. The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party condemned him as a dictator and betrayer of the Russian Revolution and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Goodbye, Uncle Joe: U.S. Reactions to the Death of Joseph Stalin

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Joseph V. Stalin led the Soviet Union during his absolute rule from the 1920s to his death in 1953. He eliminated his rival Leon Trotsky through exile and assassination, forced collectivization, conducted the Great Terror, conducted the Winter War with Finland and led the country through World War II (the "Great Patriotic War") as an ally of the United States and Great Britain. The war caused devastating losses for the Russian people through the German invasion of European Russia and occupation of such area as Ukraine and the city of Smolensk. In the postwar era he effected Soviet expansion into eastern Europe, saw the development of the atomic bomb, and steered the country through the early years of the Cold War. On March 4, 1953, the Soviet press announced that Stalin had suffered a "brain hemorrhage, loss of speech, and paralysis of right arm and leg."[11] When his death was announced, the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee eulogized him on March 5, stating:

> Comrade Stalin's death—the man who devoted all his life to the unselfish service of the Communist cause—is a tremendous loss to the party, to the workers of the Soviet Union and to the whole world. … The immortal name of Stalin will live forever in the hearts of the Soviet people and all progressive mankind.[2]

Much has been written about Stalin's death and its impact on Soviet internal affairs and foreign relations, including relations with the United States.[3] Using contemporaneous sources, this paper brings together for the first time the reactions to Stalin's death by U.S. government agencies and officials, the reactions of the

[1] "Stalin's Illness Similar to Paralysis that Brought on Death of Lenin," *New York Times* (March 4, 1953), 3.

[2] Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Central Committee, "The Death of Premier Stalin," *Current History* 24, no. 140 (April 1953): 247-248.

[3] For examples, see Joshua Rubenstein, "A Chance for Peace," in *The Last Days of Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 146-188 and Keith Larres and Kenneth Alan Osgood, eds., *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2006).

U.S. mainstream media and the reactions of U.S. radicals.

The reactions of U.S. government officials and agencies centered around three major sources. The first was the attempts to formulate the State Department's plans to exploit Stalin's death. The second was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The third source was the eyewitness accounts of Jacob Bean, the chargé at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the senior diplomat at the embassy at the time of Stalin's death. Stalin's illness was discussed at a March 4 meeting of the National Security Council (NSC). The main topic of discussion was to "see whether and how … Stalin's illness could be best exploited for psychological purposes." The NSC agreed to the following: President Dwight D. Eisenhower would issue a public statement, the CIA would do a new Intelligence Estimate and the State Department would issue a statement on policy implications and a "plan for psychological exploitation of this event."[4]

Perhaps reflecting the tense relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the president's public statement on Stalin's illness was very brief and did not even mention Stalin's name. The statement referred to the "illness of the Soviet ruler" and that Americans are praying that "the Almighty will watch over the people of that vast country." He ended with a hope for a world of "peace and comradeship."[5] This brief public statement belied the government's ongoing preparations in anticipation of Stalin's death. These preparations dated back to the 1940s. An example of governmental thinking was a 1948 CIA paper entitled *The Succession of Power in the USSR*. The authors speculated on Stalin's ill health and the likelihood of Vyacheslav Molotov being his successor. The author considered that the "dominant criterion" for choosing a successor was "How well does it guarantee the safety of the present regime and the continuation of its present policies?" This paper acknowledged Stalin's suspicious nature and that "originality and initiative have been subordinated to obedience" and that the "aims of the Soviet system" would not change.[6] In 1952 departing U.S. Ambassador Alan G. Kirk reported that there was "no concrete evidence of the failing health" of Stalin.[7] Also in 1952, George F. Kennan, a former secretary at the U.S. embassy in the 1930s, became U.S. ambassador. He reported on rumors about Stalin's replacement. He surmised that the deaths of any of his successors (e.g., Georgi Malenkov, Vyacheslav Molotov, or Lavrenti Beria) would "have most unsettling and unexpected effects."[8]

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[4] S. Everett Gleason, "Memorandum of Discussion at the 135th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 4, 1953," *in U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the Unted States, Vol. 8, Eastern Europe, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1988), pp. 1091-1095; hereafter cited as *FRUS.*

[5] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Messages Relating to Illness and Death of Joseph Stalin," *Department of State Bulletin* 28, no. 716 (March 16, 1953), 400.

[6] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The Succession of Power in the USSR: Summary* (Washington, DC: The Agency, 1948).

[7] Alan G. Kirk," Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador to the Soviet Union (Kirk), in *FRUS*, p. 963.

[8] George F. Kennan, "The Ambassador to the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Department of State," in *FRUS*, 1014-1015.

The State Department organized a Working Group (Stalin) in 1951. The Working Group's most often cited paper at that time was *Program of Psychological Preparation for Stalin's Passing from Power*, issued in November 1952. This paper had a speculative and cautious tone as to how the Soviet populace would react, future Soviet government policies, new Communist Party leadership and how the West should react. One hope on Stalin's passing from power was the following: "It may touch off a split in the top leadership. It may also lead to the crystallization of present dissatisfactions among various groups in the Soviet population which feel themselves discriminated against."[9] In January 1953, Francis B. Stevens of the Office of Eastern European Affairs sent an addendum to this paper that demonstrated the uncertainty within the State Department. This addendum was full of such phrases as "cannot be foreseen," "impossible to issue intelligent standby instructions" and "not easy to predict." Stevens considered the usually routine issuance of an official condolence message on the death of a foreign head of state to be problematic. He listed three scenarios for such a message, including sending a message, omitting a message, and sending a message through "United States information media to the Soviet people" that noted Stalin's death, extended the "hand of friendship" and "inviting cooperation in seeking a peaceful and secure world." He listed the possible implications of each scenario.[10] This paper was based on a working draft from the CIA.[11]

In response to the March 4 directive of the NSC, the State Department issued an Intelligence Estimate, "Implications of Stalin's Collapse," on the same date. It stated the obvious conclusions that the "attack appears fatal," that it came as a surprise, that a new head of the Council of Ministers was needed, and that while the succession was unclear, there "will not be a struggle for the succession." It listed Georgi Malenkov as a "likely candidate" for leadership. It did not predict any "early changes in Soviet domestic or foreign policy."[12] On March 5 President Eisenhower issued a very brief message of condolence on the announcement of Stalin's death.[13]

Charles E. "Chip" Bohlen recently had been appointed as the new ambassador to the Soviet Union but was still in Washington, DC. Therefore, Chargé Jacob Beam was the senior member of the Embassy staff and sent communiqués on the situation in Moscow. Beam sent a communiqué with the announcement that the news of Stalin's illness had been suppressed for "at least two full days" and that there was "great confusion" among the ruling elite. He speculated that Stalin was soon to die and also speculated as to why there had been a delay in announcing his condition which was "actually unexpected and quite possibly unprepared

[9] U.S. Department of State, Psychological Strategy Board, *Program of Psychological Preparation for Stalin's Passing from Power*, in *FRUS,* 1059-1060.

[10] Francis B. Stevens, "Memorandum by Francis B. Stevens of the Office of Eastern European Affairs to the Deputy Director of the Psychological Strategy Board (Morgan)," in *FRUS*, 1071-1073.

[11] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Working Draft," The Agency, January 19, 1953.

[12] U.S. Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, "Implications of Stalin's Collapse," in *FRUS*, 1086-1090.

[13] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Message of Official Condolence," *Department of State Bulletin* 28, no. 716 (March 16, 1953), 400.

for." He further stated that in the announcement no one was singled out as his successor and that public reaction in Moscow was subdued. He concluded with a supposition that if Stalin's death had been "approaching for some time" and that "its development has affected Stalin's already abnormally suspicious mind," which could have been the cause of the "alleged doctors plot against the lives of the top Soviet leaders."[14]

On March 6 Beam reported on the subdued reactions of the public which he characterized as a "surprising lack of response." He also reported on the membership of the committee to organize the funeral.[15] On March 8 Beam wrote on "preliminary impressions on the consequences of Stalin's death and [the] character [of the] new government." He cited that a "natural and best balance" had been created in "assigning government and party leadership to Malenkov, security to Beria, foreign policy to Molotov and army affairs to Bulganin." He concluded that "Stalin's death strikes a blow to Soviet international Communist leadership" and wondered whether Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung would be "less tractable" while he was still depending on Soviet for support for the Korean War.[16] Beam's communiqué on the funeral included his impressions that it was a cut-and-dried proceeding and that prominence was given to representatives from China. He commented on the eulogies given by Malenkov, Lavrenti Beria and Molotov. In a footnote Beam believed Molotov was the only person to express genuine grief, stating that: "From his voice [it] was obvious, he was shaken, and [the] bulk [of] his speech was devoted to Stalin and his accomplishments."[17]

Back in Washington, the memoranda kept coming. Newly appointed Ambassador Bohlen sent a cautiously worded memorandum on March 7. He had been a chargé in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in the 1930s. He had witnessed the Great Terror and had attended the third Moscow show trial in 1938. Bohlen discussed the likely transfer of power and the opportunity to "stir up some development in China and the satellite states." He also stated the need to avoid a "direct frontal political or psychological assault on the Soviet structure of leadership" as he felt that it would have the effect of "consolidating their position and postponing the possibility of dissension in the top leadership."[18]

Bohlen then sent a sobering memorandum on March 10, "Policy Implications of Stalin's Death." He discussed the "Soviet system of control" which was tied to the "propaganda that created Stalin's mystique." He asserted that nationalism was a counterbalance to the "reality of naked Soviet imperialism in Eastern European countries," and he encouraged U.S. support of such nationalism. Regarding

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[14] Jacob Beam, "The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Beam) to the Department of State," in *FRUS*, 1083-1085.

[15] _____, "The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Beam) to the Department of State," in *FRUS*, 1099.

[16] Jacob Beam, "The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Beam) to the Department of State," in *FRUS*, 1103-1104.

[17] _____, "The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Beam) to the Department of State," in *FRUS*, 1105-1106.

[18] Charles E. Bohlen, "Memorandum by the Counselor of the Department of State (Bohlen)," in FRUS, 1100-1102.

China, Bohlen wrote that exploitation of any rift between China and the Soviets was complicated by U.S. support of Nationalist China (Taiwan). He itemized the following on Soviet policy: 1) "We have no indications that the situation is not well in the hands of the new rulers;" 2) The Russian people "are playing no part in the transfer of power," 3) The new leaders will "close ranks and present a united front;" and 4) The new regime will not be aggressive in terms of expansion but will "take great risks to avoid the physical loss of any territories or area." Bohlen concluded with these three cautionary "policy guidelines:"1) "Stand resolutely and firmly on all present positions in order to not show any weakness;" 2) "There would appear to be little advantage in stepping up cold war pressures;" and 3) "The State Department is examining urgently the possibility of some initiative … which might confront the new leadership."[19] During this time, the Korean War raged on. Paul H. Nitze, the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and a Cold Warrior, sent a memorandum on March 10, entitled "Exploitation of Stalin's Death." He concentrated on the implications of Stalin's death on ending the Korean War. He outlined steps to do so.[20]

At the same time, Walter Bedell Smith, a former Army general, sent a memorandum to the Acting Director of the Psychological Strategy Board. Drafted by Robert W. Tufts of the Policy Planning Staff, this memorandum was in reaction to the "Plan for Psychological Exploitation of Stalin's Death." This paper advocated a cautious approach to avoid an "aggressive heightening of cold war pressures" as had been stated in other memoranda. He advocated consultations with the United Kingdom and France. He opposed holding a special meeting of the foreign ministers of the U.K., France, and the Soviet Union. It concluded that a "sharp heightening of cold war pressures at this time would not be advantageous."[21]

In order to maintain a united front on the international scene, the State Department reached out to "certain diplomatic posts," stating that Kremlin leaders would be in a state of confusion and anxiety and that it "seems unlikely that [the] regime has been able to evolve [a] clear-cut succession plan." This document urged restraint and outlined a "list of themes" to be developed for the following areas: The Soviet orbit and China, European satellites and China and the free world. The outlined steps included planting doubts about the new Soviet leadership and about an uncertain future.[22] The following day another circular telegram was issued that outlined the following themes to be used in "all US information output" to "sow doubt about the new leadership." These themes were to question Malenkov's

[19] _____, "Policy Implications of Stalin's Death," in *FRUS*, 1108-1111.

[20] Paul H. Nitze, "Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze) to the Secretary of State," in *FRUS*, 1107-1108.

[21] Walter Bedell Smith, "Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Smith) to the Acting Director of the Psychological Strategy Board (Morgan)," in *FRUS*, 1111-1113.

[22] Lewis Revey, James Pratt and Couleter D. Huyler, "The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Posts," in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, National Security Affairs*, 2, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1984), 1681-1684.

competence and the "possibility that there may be "another struggle for power."[23]

On March 10 Administrative Assistant to the President Emmet J. Hughes sent a memorandum in preparation a meeting of the NSC. It summarized the "division of opinion" within the State Department over holding a meeting with foreign ministers and illustrated contrasting theories of courses of action. The differences were summarized as one opinion "to exploit the deep and inherent weaknesses of the Soviet System, we cannot afford to fail to act affirmatively and quickly." The contradictory view was that "we can well afford to give the internal stresses of the Soviet system time to become acute … nothing is better calculated to increase Soviet nervous strain that studied American silence."[24]

U.K. Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Eisenhower corresponded on the possibility of such a meeting with both expressing doubts about including the Soviets. Eisenhower suggested that "your government and ourselves, and probably the French, should agree upon some general purpose and program."[25]

On March 12, the CIA issued a joint Special Estimate, authored by various departments within the Defense Department, entitled *Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin and of the Elevation of Malenkov to Leadership in the USSR*. It started with a section on "the initial transfer of authority," noting that Malenkov's rise to power had gone with "remarkable rapidity and precision." However, the authors noted that a struggle for power could later take place within the Party and within the upper bureaucracy. In a section on the "probable consequences of [the] death of Stalin," the authors asserted that the "economic and military bases of Soviet power" were not immediately affected but wondered if the new leaders would be able to maintain these bases as effectively as Stalin had. The authors concluded that the "USSR is politically more vulnerable today." In a section on the effects of Stalin's death upon Soviet policies, the authors stated that the new regime would continue Stalin's policies ("unremitting hostility to the West") and portrayed Stalin as an "autocrat … ruthless and determined to spread Soviet power." Regarding the Soviet people, the authors asserted that Stalin's death will be a "psychological shock" but would have no effect on the new regime. The report included brief discussions on the effect of Stalin's death on Soviet influence in Eastern Europe, on international communism and on relations with Yugoslavia and China. The authors concluded that, unless there was a power struggle in the Kremlin, there would still be cohesion in the "Communist movement outside the Bloc" and that control of Eastern Europe would continue with the exception of Marshal Tito in Yugoslavia. The Soviets' relations with China would be affected by the increased prestige of Chairman Mao, and the Kremlin would deal cautiously with him. In the concluding section, the report stated that western

[23] Edward P. Montgomery and Couleter D. Huyler, "The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Posts," in *U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, National Security Affairs*, 2, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1984), 1684-1685.

[24] Emmet J. Hughes, "Memorandum by the Administrative Assistant to the President (Hughes) to the President," in *FRUS,* 1113-1115.

[25] See Winston Churchill, "Prime Minister Churchill to President Eisenhower," in *FRUS*, 1115-1116 and Dwight D. Eisenhower, "President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Churchill," in *FRUS*, 1116-1117.

European countries would "conduct the East-West struggle with greater hesitancy and caution," hoping for a "temporary relaxation of tensions."[26]

On March 11, the NSC met with the review of the CIA's Special Estimate a major topic. The CIA director was Allen W. Dulles, the brother of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Allen Dulles had been a career diplomat, State Department official, lawyer and OSS officer. He led off the discussion by wondering whether Malenkov would have a "personal dictatorship" or "some sort of committee control." He believed that the Kremlin would still control the satellite countries and would have to deal the Chairman Mao "with the utmost care and tact." President Eisenhower made the statement that, contrary to the thinking that Stalin maintained a one-man rule, he believed that the "Government of the Soviet Union has always been "something of a committee government" and that Stalin "would have sought more peaceful and normal relations with the rest of the world" on his own. Eisenhower further stated that the Cold War meant that "Stalin had had to come to terms with other members of the Kremlin ruling circle."[27]

The efforts to exploit Stalin's death continued through March during the finalization of the *Plan for Psychological Exploitation of Stalin's Death*. In a memorandum on March 18, the State Department recognized the "need for coordinated political, military and economic action in taking advantage of the situation that now exists."[28] The *Plan* was finally approved by the Psychological Strategy Board on March 19.

On March 20, Chargé Beam sent a report on Soviet media coverage of the new leaders, including efforts to build up Malenkov, the "necessity of rallying around [the] Central Committee of the Party" and a lessening of the Soviets' "hate America campaign."[29] In a brief memorandum to Paul H. Nitze from Carlton Savage of the Policy Planning Saff, Savage cited some agreement with the Soviets on the Korean War, a Soviet proposal for a conference for a peace treaty and the reunification of Germany, as well as other conciliatory gestures.[30]

The CIA issued a spate of memoranda and reports on the death of Stalin. It should be noted that that at that time, the CIA was a relatively new government agency. Its origins were in the World War II Office of Strategic Services (OSS), led by General William "Wild Bill" Donovan. When the war ended, the OSS was abolished, and the Central Intelligence Group under Rear Admiral Sidney Souers took its place. In 1947 the National Security Act created the CIA and was reinforced by the Central Intelligence Act of 1949.

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[26] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin and the Elevation of Malenkov to Leadership in the USSR*, in *FRUS*, 1125-1129.

[27] S. Everett Gleason, "Memorandum of Discussion at the 136th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 11, 1953 (Washington)," in *FRUS*, 1117-1125.

[28] See James Cowles Hart Bonbright, "Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Bonbright) to the Under Secretary of State (Smith)," in *FRUS*, 1133-1134

[29] Jacob Beam, "The Chargé in the Soviet Union, (Beam) to the Department of State," in *FRUS,* 1137.

[30] Carlton Savage, "Memorandum by Carolton Savage of the Policy Planning Staff to the Director of the Staff (Nitze)," in *FRUS*, 1138.

In addition to the previously cited Special Estimate, on March 18 it issued *Comments on 'Plan for Psychological Exploitation of Stalin's Death*. This paper was a critique of the original *Plan.* The authors asserted that the "basic objectives and strategic concept of the Communist ideology has [*sic*] not been altered" and that the free world was still in danger. The document suggested changes to be made to the *Plan*, considering the Agency's pessimistic assessment of the new Soviet leadership. The Agency assumed that the new leadership would try to "throw off balance western efforts to interfere with or impede the consolidation of the regime's power" and would test the West to prevent the "formation of a united western effort against the new Soviet leadership." This document also acknowledged the "absence of definite information" on internal conditions in the Soviet Union. The authors gave two opposing hypotheses on the opportunities posed by Stalin's death. The first had an optimistic take on the "ideological and mystical vacuum" that could lead to greater freedom in the Soviet bloc and a weakened central government. The pessimistic view was that the "new Soviet machinery" would grind on.[31]

On April 6 the CIA issued *Malenkov and Stalin's Death* which analyzed Stalin's actions at the Nineteenth Party Congress in 1952 during which he dissolved the Politburo, introduced a larger Presidium and spoke of a cautious approach to the West. The author noted that, as soon as he took power, Malenkov reversed these actions. As with other government documents, it was full of cautious guessing and speculation. The author urged that U.S. propaganda portray Malenkov and Beria as "murderers" and as politicians who are "staking the lives and interests of their peoples on the card of war." This document also broached the theory that Malenkov and Beria had ordered doctors to hasten Stalin's death.[32]

CIA memoranda continued to flow from March, 1953 through May, culminating in July's publication of *The Death of Stalin*.[33] The authors discussed his death as being unexpected, the mystery surrounding his death, his funeral, the "abortive Malenkov Build-Up," the reorganization of the Soviet government and the Communist Party and possible successors, briefly noting Nikita Khrushchev's increasing prominence. This report was based on the mining of official Soviet pronouncements, the realignment of various commissariats and the reassignment of different departments within the MVD (the secret police), especially the forced labor camps. The report ended with this assessment of Stalin's legacy: "It is the author's contention that Stalin was unable to contemplate anyone succeeding him. … The evil genius of Stalin … was moving against all his enemies … and perhaps he had planned to use Malenkov for this purpose and then discard him."[34]

The Voice of America (VOA) was the government's international broadcasting arm and was then under the State Department's International

[31] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Comments on the "Plan for Psychological Exploitation of Stalin's Death* (Washington, DC: The Agency, 1953).

[32] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Malenkov and Stalin's Death* (Washington, DC: The Agency, 1953).

[33] U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, *The Death of Stalin* (Washington, DC: The Agency, 1953).

[34] *Ibid.*, 21-22.

Information Administration. The VOA took a beating during the McCarthy era when it was accused of employing "subversives."[35] On March 6 the VOA issued a cautious statement that asserted that Stalin's death "should not result in a slacking of vigilance in the fight against communism." It also stated that his likely successors, Molotov, Malenkov and Beria, were "well-reared in the Stalin tradition of extermination and suppression."[36]

On April 23, 1953, the Subcommittee on Europe of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs, held a briefing on the impact of Stalin's death on Soviet foreign and domestic policies. Mose Harvey of the State Department's Intelligence Division was the only witness. He began with some background on the agencies involved in analyzing the Soviets. He then tried to address to question of whether the Soviet Union was different after Stalin's death in regard to the transfer of power and any changes in Soviet policies. His statements were full of cautiousness and hedging as he plowed through what they knew and what they reported as speculation. He summarized the following changes: 1) A complete reorganization of the top leadership; 2) The publicizing of these changes; 3) An extensive amnesty; 4) The reversal of the Doctors' Plot; 5) The reorganization of local governments and Communist parties; 6) Reorganization of the police; 7) Any changes in Soviet conduct toward the outside world; and 8) New positions on prisoners of war in Korea. Harvey discussed Malenkov's position, the likelihood of his remaining in power. and stated that the Soviet system had not changed. In terms of foreign policy. Harvey reported that there were no changes in the Soviet line toward Indochina, Germany and Japan and that anti-American editorials continued to appear in the Soviet press. He closed his testimony with these conclusions: 1) There was no real power struggle for leadership; 2) There had been no break from Stalinism; and 3) No break in Soviet foreign policy. An extensive question and answer session followed.[37]

In concluding this section on official U.S. government reactions, it is worth noting that efforts to decide how to handle Stalin's death had been ongoing for several years and went into high gear to develop strategies to take advantage of his demise. This state of affairs was noted by President Eisenhower's admission at the March 11 NSC meeting: "The President told the Cabinet that *no specific plan for Government action or policy had been developed in advance,* despite continuous talk since 1946 about the possibility of Stalin's death."[38] [Italics added.]

Stalin's death was headline news around the world and led to extensive reviews of his life, career and speculation about his successors and their policies going forward. The *New York Times* predicted that Stalin's death would lead to a crisis in terms of finding successors in such a totalitarian state.[39] On March 6,

[35] U.S. Voice of America, Public Relations, "VOA Through the Years," accessed February 7, 2026, http://www.insidevoa.com/a/3794274.html.

[36] Voice of America, "VOA Says Stalin's Death Brings no Relief from Communism," *UPI's 20th Century Top Stories* (March 6, 1953). ProQuest Central.

[37] U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. *Selected Executive Sessions of the Committee, 1951-1956*, 14 (Washington, DC: Govt. Print. Off., 1980), 459-490.

[38] U.S. Department of State, "Editorial Note," in *FRUS,* 1098.

[39] "Crisis in Moscow," *New York Times* (March 5, 1953), 26.

1953, the *New York Times* published articles on Stalin's death, career, possible successors and foreign policy.[40] These articles had an overtone of his massive influence and on the fact that his likely successors were in place because they had shown absolute loyalty to him.

The U.S. government's lack of a definitive plan for any new policies following Stalin's death was revealed in a *New York Times* article that highlighted the lack of preparedness of the U.S. government. The article also reported on the need for a plan of psychological warfare strategy in order to "capitalize on any confusion or struggle for power that may develop in Moscow."[41] Its article on Stalin's funeral had a skeptical tone about public acceptance of the new leadership and analyzed the funeral orations by Malenkov and Beria, speculated on the possible rivalry between Malenkov and Beria, and reminded the readers that Beria was Georgian and that Stalin "the first Georgian … killed of four of the five other Communist leaders with whom he carried Lenin's coffin … twenty-five years ago."[42]

New York Times Moscow correspondent Harry Schwartz wrote a profile of Malenkov as the "epitome of the successful man in modern bureaucratic totalitarianism" who mirrored Stalin's "ruthlessness, industry, shrewdness, the ability to intrigue."[43] Schwartz also reported on the new hierarchy of leaders. As was the habit of Kremlin watchers, his observations were based on official announcements and photographs. He reported on their places in the official listing of members of the Communist Party's Presidium with Beria now as number two and Molotov seemingly demoted to number seven.[44]

The leading news magazines of the day devoted much space to Stalin's death. During this time the news weekly *Time* was published by Henry Luce whose anticommunist sentiments were well known and were reflected in its coverage of the Soviet Union. In a lengthy article *Time* portrayed Stalin as a ruthless killer as he rose to power and eliminated his enemies. This lead article termed him to be an "administrative genius" who built up the "Great Stalin myth" and that he was pragmatic enough to change during World War II in order to appeal to Russian patriotism. The article concluded with the portrayal of Stalin as a "man of ceaseless evil and immense success" who had created the "largest empire ever put together by any one man."[45]A sidebar article portrayed Malenkov in a bad light—"devious, inscrutable and cruel," "pale and pasty" who bested his rival Yuri Zhdanov to become a "comrade of Stalin."[46]A follow-up *Time* article was a

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[40] See "Stalin Dies after 2-Year Rule," *New York Times* (March 6, 1953), 1, 8, "Stalin Rose from Czarist Oppression to Transform Russia into Mighty Socialist State," *New York Times* (March 6, 1953), 9, "Soviet Leaders," *New York Times* (March 6, 1953), 10 and "Kremlin's Foreign Policies Gave Soviet Union Great Rewards but Cost Has Been Heavy," *New York Times* (March 6, 1953), 11.

[41] Anthony Leviero, "'Cold War' Set-Up in U.S. Unprepared," *New York Times* (March 6, 1953), p. 13.

[42] "In Moscow's Red Square," *New York Times,* March 10, 1953, 28.

[43] Harry Schwartz, "Russia's New Boss Is Schooled in Dictatorship," *New York Times* (March 8, 1953), 3.

[44] _____, "Beria Is No. 2 Man in New Soviet List," *New York Times* (March 9, 1953), 5.

[45] "Death in the Kremlin: Killer of the Masses," *Time* 61, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 29-31.

[46] "The Man That Stalin Built," *Time* 61, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 31.

photo array of the new leaders and was followed by an article on "Stalin's Heirs."[47] A lengthy article on "The New Command" highlighted the smooth transition of power, recounted Stalin's career (a "killer of the masses" and the "most vindictive man on earth") and included a sidebar with brief biographies of Beria, Molotov, Nikolai Bulganin and Lazar Kaganovich and brief quotes from foreign leaders on Stalin's passing.[48] In a follow-up article on March 23, *Time* included photographs from Stalin's funeral and discussed Malenkov's first days in power. The reporter portrayed Eastern European leaders as a weak lot, quoted the reactions of Western European communist parties and reported on the Kremlin's "pampering" of Mao Tse Tung, portraying him as now the world's most preeminent communist leader.[49]

Newsweek also had several articles in its March 16 issue on Stalin's illness, death, the rise of Malenkov and implications for Soviet and U.S. foreign policy. The lead article related the chain of events leading up to the funeral. It listed the passing of power to several leaders.[50] A sidebar was a dour portrait of "Malenkov—Fat, 51, a Nonstop Haranguer." It chronicled his rise to power, calling him a "hard worker" and a prodigious orator."[51] A review of Stalin's life was included.[52] *Newsweek* published an opinion piece by W. Averill Harriman, a wartime ambassador to the Soviet Union. He wrote that he was sure that Molotov would not be the next Soviet leader, opined that the Soviet Union was going through a "period of heightened crisis" and that the U.S. should help "increase the strength of the whole free world."[53]

Another article chronicled the U.S. government's uncertainty as to how to react to Stalin's death and how to exploit it to Western advantage during the Cold War. It reported that "U.S. intelligence agencies were almost completely ignorant of the political situation inside the Soviet empire." The article described a meeting with President Eisenhower on sending a message of condolence that expressed regrets on his passing but pointedly separated Soviet citizens from the Soviet government. The reporter called the president's message "cold." The article ended with the future meetings to plan a course of action and Eisenhower's vague statements at a press conference that reflected the government's cautious attitude.[54] [This article echoed a *New York Times* article, previously cited.] Another article concerned the Voice of America's broadcasts about Stalin's death. As previously mentioned, during this time Senator Joseph McCarthy was holding his subcommittee hearings on communists in government and raked the VOA over the coals. The article discussed the VOA's broadcasts to Iron Curtain countries as it tried to find its way in exploiting Stalin's death.[55]

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[47] See "The News in Pictures," *Time* 61, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 32 and "Stalin's Heirs: The New Lineup," *Time* 61, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 33-34.

[48] "The New Command," *Time* 61, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 34+.

[49] "Watch on the Wall," *Time* 61, no. 12 (March 23, 1953), 27-32.

[50] "World Watching for First Move by New Red Chiefs," *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 21-22.

[51] "Malenkov—Fat, 51, a Nonstop Haranguer," *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 22.

[52] "The Myth of Stalin … A Communist Legend," *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 24-25.

[53] W. Averill Harriman, "After Stalin, What?" *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 28, 31.

[54] "Cold War, Ike, and Malenkov: Watch and Wait," *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 34, 36.

[55] "Solo Voice!" *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 38.

Newsweek columnists also speculated on Stalin's death. Ernest K. Lindley echoed the themes of uncertainty and caution. He recommended trying to "stimulate distrust between Moscow and its satellites" and putting pressure on China. He concluded that "American policy must be backed by great strength."[56] Economist Henry Hazlitt criticized past U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union, stated that the U.S. needed to know how to combat communist ideology and to know how to use this opportunity to "restore hope and peace in the world."[57] Veteran political commentator Raymond Moley put Stalin's death within the context of history, calling the Soviet Union a "malignant contraption" that now had the problem of the "maintenance of an overextended and precarious geographical and political monstrosity."[58] *Newsweek*'s March 23 issue documented the State Department's split between the advocates of the "wait-and-see" attitude and advocates for quickly using Stalin's death for a propaganda advantage. It also briefly discussed the Voice of America's plan to plant doubt in the satellite nations.[59]

Independent journalist I. F. Stone took a derisive attitude toward the U.S. government's timid approach to Stalin's death and wrote a pro-Stalin article. Stone called him "one of the giant figures of our time" and the "leader of something new in history, a party: a party in a new sense, like nothing the world has known since the Society of Jesus, a party ruling a one-party state." Stone concluded by urging that Washington and Moscow collaborate.[60] Samuel L. Sharp wrote in the liberal weekly *New Republic* that Stalin was a completely political creature, "always given to doubt and suspicion" and practiced "determined political manipulation."[61]

The pictorial weekly *Life* magazine also was owned by Henry Luce. It published a series of articles by Soviet defector Alexander Orlov in which he took a critical look at the personalities of the Soviet leadership and various Kremlin intrigues. In the last article in the series, Orlov wrote that he was not impressed by Malenkov ("a mere Party functionary … without a revolutionary past … and lacking the qualities … in a leader of a state"). Orlov believed that that Malenkov "had much to fear" and that an "inevitable purge will come."[62]

Isaac Deutscher, one of Stalin's best-known biographers at the time, authored an article in *The Reporter* on the succession of Malenkov to power and on Stalin's extension of communism into Eastern Europe. Deutscher surmised that there must be anxiety among "leading Stalinists" as to "whether the cult is not going to have its final revenge on them."[63] In the same issue Max Ascoli wrote a lengthy, thoughtful editorial, "Can We 'Coexist' with Malenkov." It had a "time will tell"

[56] Ernest K. Lindley, "The Effects of Stalin's Passing," *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 45.

[57] Harry Hazlitt, Business Tides, *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 89.

[58] Raymond Moley, Perspective, *Newsweek* 41, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 108.

[59] "Wait out or Pressure Reds," *Newsweek* 41, no. 12 (March 23, 1953), 23-24.

[60] I. F. Stone, "Washington after Stalin," *I. F. Stone's Weekly* 1, no. 9 (March 16, 1953), 1.

[61] Samuel L. Sharp, "Stalin's Place in History," *New Republic* 128, no. 11 (March 16, 1953), 8-10.

[62] Alexander Orlov, "The Ghastly Secrets of Stalin's Power," *Life* 34, no. 14 (April 6, 1953), 110-123.

[63] Isaac Deutscher, "The Legacies and Heirs of J. V. Stalin," *The Reporter* 8, no. 8 (April 14, 1953), 10-16.

attitude toward the new Soviet leadership and portrayed the "game of coexistence" as a struggle between communism and "democratic capitalism." In his opinion, coexistence meant strengthening the "unity of the non-Communist world."[64]

Bertram D. Wolfe was a founder of the Communist Party USA and remained a lifelong Communist. He had met Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin during a trip to the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Wolfe broke with Stalin and remained an anti-Stalinist. He published a long article in *Foreign Affairs* on the problems of Stalin's successors in which he condemned the Soviet system, including the "blood purges" and the Doctors' Plot. He concluded that the world was now a safer place while this "total dictatorship" went through "convulsive struggles" to reach success." He portrayed Stalin as "jealous, resentful, envious, capricious and suspicious."[65]

American radicals reacted to the death of Joseph Stalin based on their strong, ideological difference and expressed opposing views on Stalin's legacy. The leadership of the Communist Party USA was slavishly devoted to the Stalinist party line. Far fewer, the Trotskyists were devoted to Leon Trotsky's theories of world revolution and anti-bureaucracy sentiments. Both American Communists and Trotskyists had suffered during the 1940s with the passage of the Smith Act which outlawed advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government. Some of their leaders had been imprisoned, and membership had declined.

Nevertheless, the Communist Party USA was still active, and its National Committee issued a statement on Stalin's illness, stating that it felt the "deepest grief on the heavy sickness that has befallen Comrade Stalin," and that the world needed his "splendid leadership." The official Party newspaper *Daily Worker* published an editorial which claimed that collective leadership "would carry forward the great tasks of socialist construction and the maintenance of peace among nations."[66] The National Committee of the Communist Party USA issued another statement, "On the Loss of Stalin," which eulogized him as a "beloved and revered teacher, leader and guide to millions of working people around the globe." They vowed to realize his aims and predicted that "Stalin will live forever in the new world arising in the radiant tomorrow of a Socialist life for all."[66]

Political Affairs, the Party's journal of Marxist philosophy, devoted its April, 1953, issue to eulogies from prominent U.S. Party leaders, including William K. Foster and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Foster was a founding member of the American party and praised Stalin's "heroic revolutionary struggle and achievements," writing that his death caused grief to "countless millions of the world's toilers." Foster predicted that Malenkov's leadership would lead to a "rapid march forward into the Communism" that the "war-mad powers of capitalism cannot halt."[67] In florid prose, Flynn called Stalin "the best loved man on earth," praised his career, and wrote that his "deeds would live forever" in the bright future of the Soviet

[64] Max Ascoli, Editorial, *The Reporter* 8, no. 8 (April 14, 1953), 8-9.

[65] Bertram D. Wolfe, "The Struggle for Soviet Succession," *Foreign Affairs* 31, no. 4 (July, 1953), 548-565.

[66] "Communists of U.S. Voice Their Grief," *New York Times* (March 5, 1953), 11.

[67] Communist Party of the USA, National Committee, "On the Loss of Stalin," *Political Affairs* 32, no. 4 (April, 1953), 4-5.

Union.[68]

The monthly *New World Review* (formerly *Soviet Russia Today*) published a eulogy by its editor Jessica Smith who cited the National Committee's statement, previously mentioned, and called Stalin's illness and death a "tragedy for all democratic humanity," and she sent a message of "deepest grief."[69]

The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) wasted no time in vilifying Stalin, its ideological enemy who had exiled Leon Trotsky and had ordered his assassination in 1940. *The Militant*, the Trotskyist weekly newspaper, published a spate of anti-Stalin articles in its March 9 and March 16, 1953 issues. Following Leon Trotsky's anti-bureaucracy philosophy, these articles pictured Stalin as a creature of the bureaucracy and often cited Trotsky's past criticisms of Stalin. The March 9 issue included a lead article by Joseph Hansen which called Stalin the "Kremlin's high executioner." Hansen also criticized U.S. reactions to Stalin's death and urged "Imperialist powers" to keep their hands off the Soviet Union so that the Soviet people could "raze his police regime to the ground."[70] In the same issue Art Preis called Stalin a "betrayer of revolution, accused his regime of "naked brutality" and called Stalin the "Bonaparte of the rising bureaucracy." He stated that Stalin "left a Soviet Union exuding the stench of the secret police and concentration camps."[71]

The March 16 issue of *The Militant* included another lead article by Joseph Hansen in which he alleged that the new rulers were trying to play to the Soviets' "entrenched bureaucratic caste," the "workers and peasants" and the "Imperialist foe headed by Wall Street." Hansen again criticized Western reactions to Stalin's death.[72] In a speech delivered in New York City, leading Trotskyist George Clarke claimed that Stalin must go down in history as a "usurper, a hangman, hated and despised," and he proclaimed the "coming vindication of Trotskyism as the "science of working-class victory."[73]

Writing under the pseudonym Albert Gates, Albert Glotzer wrote a lengthy article in the Trotskyist *New International,* in which he claimed that Stalin had wiped out "every trace of the old party." Glotzer also catalogued Stalin's historic mistakes and personal failings, including his "personal cruelty, his sadism and his envy." He termed him to be the "hangman of the Russian Revolution" who created a "new industrial slave society under a totalitarian police regime."[74] [Glotzer had been the stenographer during the Dewey Commission hearings with Trotsky in 1937.] In October 1953, the National Committee of the SWP issued

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[68] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "He Loved the People," *Political Affairs*, 32, no. 4 (April, 1953), 43-47.

[69] Jessica Smith, "Stalin and His Heritage," *New World Review* 21, no. 3 (March, 1953), 3-10.

[70] Joseph Hanson, "Stalin's Heirs Continue Dictatorial Kremlin Rule," *The Militant*, March 9, 1953, 1, 3.

[71] "Art Preis, "Stalin—Betrayer of the Revolution," *The Militant* March 9, 1953, 3.

[72] Joseph Hansen, "Malenkov Pledged to Follow in Dictator Stalin's Footsteps," *The Militant*, March 16, 1953, 1.

[73] George Clarke, "Stalin's Role—Stalinism's Future," *Fourth International* Vol. 14, No. 1 (January-February, 1953), 5-13.

[74] Albert Gates, pseud., "Stalin's Place in History: Assessing the Social Role of the Great Assassin," *New International* 13, no. 3 (May-June, 1953), 144-167.

a long memorandum on the "Rise and Decline of Stalinism." It includes many criticisms of the bureaucracy, the belief in the world revolution and predicted that Stalinism "has irretrievably entered upon its period of decline" and that the "post-Stalin regime is no longer able to rule." In a section on the events since Stalin's death, the SWP stated: "Stalin's death unquestionably released a flood of hope among the people that with the death of the dictator they would get a new deal."[75]

The aftermath of Stalin's death brought about a rapid series of events, including the abrupt end of the Doctors' Plot. In 1952 Stalin accused nine doctors of poisoning prominent Soviet leaders, including Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov, in 1948. By the time of Stalin's death 15 doctors had been arrested, imprisoned, and awaited trial. The surviving doctors were freed. Stalin's fellow Georgian Lavrenti Beria, head of the MVD and part of the ruling triumvirate, was purged. Arrested in the summer, he was tried, convicted, and executed with six of his associates in December, 1953. Malenkov himself was removed from leadership in 1955 and removed from the Presidium in 1957.

In conclusion, the authors consider that it is obvious that the United States had no definitive plan for capitalizing on Stalin's death, due to the lack of inside knowledge and the division between the "act now" and "wait and see" advocates. They knew Stalin's vengeful and distrustful personality but not what the new regime would do. In spite of the "confidential," "secret" and even "top secret" designations given to meetings and memoranda to formulate policy, these divisions and the lack of a clear grasp of the internal workings of the new leadership were reported by the press, so the public knew as well.

Ambassador Bohlen's insights may be emblematic of U.S. thinking at the time of Stalin's death. Newly arrived as ambassador and writing from Moscow in July, 1953, Bohlen stated the following premises: "The Soviet Union remains a totalitarian police dictatorship, reinforced by a highly integrated ideology and consequently basically continues to regard all countries and organizations which it does not control as basically hostile and no change in this respect can be anticipated as long as the basic structure of Soviet society remains unaltered."[76]

After his time in public service, Bohlen wrote a thoughtful autobiography, *Witness to History*, which included his conclusions about the enigma that was Joseph Stalin. He portrayed Stalin as the "vengeful Georgian" who surrounded himself with "lackeys" and who "did not need thinkers, he needed executioners." Bohlen wrote: "Judged by his actions, I believe he ranks high on the list of the world's monsters. … Stalin gave me the impression of a man to whom pity and other human sentiments were completely alien."[77]

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[75] Socialist Workers Party, National Committee, Memorandum of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee on the Rise and Decline of Stalinism, October 5, 1953. Accessed March 11, 2026, Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org.

[76] Charles E. Bohlen, "The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Bohlen) to the Department of State," in *FRUS,* p. 1193.

[77] _____, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: Norton, 1973), 338.

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“I Wanna Hold Your Hand... But Not Too Tightly!”: Soviet Translations of Western Music Lyrics and Mid-Century [Soft] Power

Author: Thomas Jesús Garza

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Abstract
Attempts to satiate Soviet youth’s appetite for Western rock music in the 1950s and ‘60s on the one hand and the need to stem persistent attempts to obtain these products of the “decadent West” on the other prompted the creation of state-sanctioned Russian-language covers. These translations often reflected the “rewriting and manipulation” process (Lefevere 2017) that rendered suggestive innuendo and socio-political content of the original English-language texts impotent – or, at the very least, linguistically banal. The results were reimagined versions of the English-language original songs that accommodated the Soviet sociopolitical and cultural vernaculars of the Cold War.

“I Wanna Hold Your Hand … But Not Too Tightly!”: Soviet Translations of Western Music Lyrics and Mid-Century [Soft] Power

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Introduction: Western Music Crosses the Iron Curtain

The meeting of Allied troops on the Elbe River on 25 April 1945, iconically depicted below (Fig. 1), signaled not only the beginning of the end of WWII, but also, as American and Soviet soldiers shook hands, marked a symbolic cultural exchange of the ephemeral allies. After the war, U.S. troops brought back Russian hats, military badges, and belt buckles to homes and families; Soviet troops returned to their homeland with bars of Hershey’s chocolate, nylon stockings, and recordings of American big band and jazz music in their backpacks. The heady end-of-war infusion of tokens of positive impressions of the two disparate cultures. Years later, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and in anticipation of the collapse of the Soviet Union, political scientist Joseph Nye would call this kind of positive coercion “soft power.”[1] But the ensuing Cold War and the Soviet government’s prohibition of Western ideas and cultural products in the wake of the Marshall Plan and the last years of Stalin’s reign put an abrupt end to the symbolic cultural exchanges. However, despite attempts by the USSR to prevent cultural products from the West from entering the Soviet Union, English-language music found its way through the Iron Curtain and into the Soviet Union via illegal tape recordings (магнитиздат) and so-called «музыка на костях», or “music on bones.”

“Music on bones,” or “Ribs” / «Рёбра» (Fig. 2), were a testament both to Soviet technical ingenuity and the determination of some Russians to get access to recordings of Western music. Russian rock critic and music culture historian Artemy Troitsky described the process of taking old x-ray films, cutting them into discs, and then «с помощью специальных машин – говорят, законспирированные умельцы переделывали их из старых патефонах – нарезали дорожки, копируя

[1] Joseph S. Nye coined the term “soft power,” or co-optive power to describe “when one country gets other countries to *want* what it wants” in contrast to “hard or command power of *ordering* others to do what it wants.” See Joesph S. Nye, “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy* Autumn, no. 80 (1990): 166, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1148580.



Fig. 1. Russian and U.S. Soldiers Meet at the Elbe River 1945[3]

пластинку-оригинал или магнитофонную запись».[2] […grooves were cut with the help of special machines (made, they say, from old phonographs by skilled conspiratorial hands), to copy the original record or tape recording]. Western music, from big band orchestras to nascent rock, was thus propagated throughout the Soviet Union during the early years of the Cold War. Though the quality of these recordings was often quite poor, young Russians eagerly bought them on the black market to gain access to Western music.

By the early 1960s, the Soviet government, in partnership with the monolithic State-owned record company, Melodiya, began to allow the recording and sale of Russian-language covers of Western popular music performed by Russian artists to offer Soviet citizens linguistically and culturally intelligible alternatives to the so-called decadent cultural products of the West. These lyrical and cultural translations, while based on the original English-language versions, created reimagined products of Soviet realities that, while far from being accurate and artistic representations of the original works, were acceptable to the authorities and might still quell the Russian youth's desire to listen to Western music.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's postwar «оттепель», or "Thaw" (1953-

[2] Артемий Троицкий, Back in the USSR (Санкт-Петербург: Амфора, 2009), 23.

[3]Creative Commons use: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East_Meets_West_April_25_1945_when_Russian_and_American_soldiers_finally_joined_linkup_dividing_WWII_German_into_two_regions.jpg#

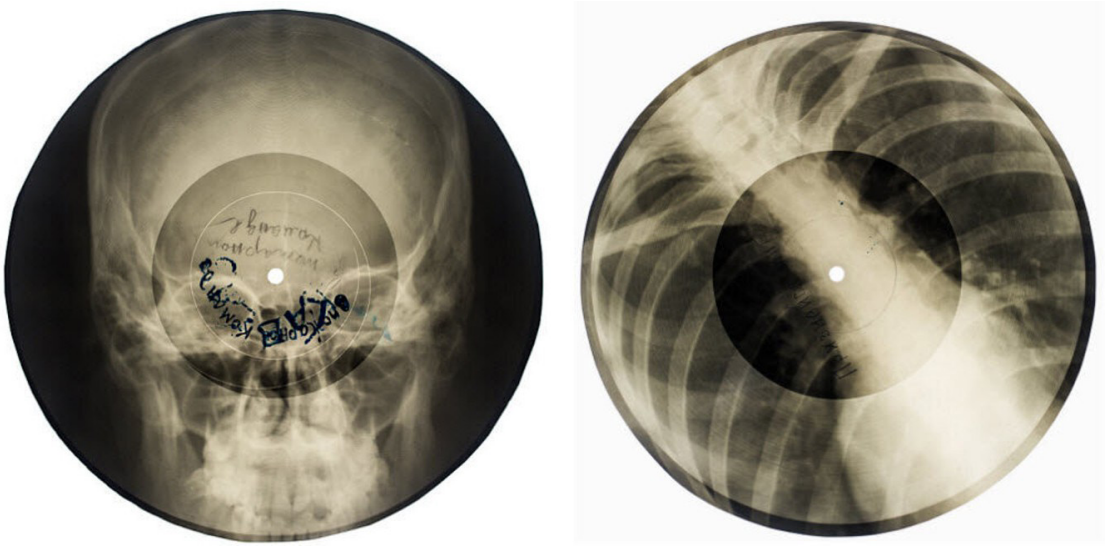


Fig. 2. “Music on Bones”: Unofficial Recordings of Western Music on X-Ray Films[4]

64), which relaxed restrictions on music production, also ushered in new televised programming. Among the new production were several shows that mimicked American youth-oriented TV productions that featured live musical performances and dancing, such as “The Buddy Deane Show” (1957-64), “Hootenanny” (1963-64), and “American Bandstand” (1952-2002). In the Soviet Union, shows such as «Голубой огонёк» (1962-present) «Музыкальный киоск» (1962-93), and «Кинопанорама» (1962-1995) created sets, formats, and programming that closely resembled that of their American counterparts. Musical performances on these programs included Russian-language covers of popular Western songs performed by newly emerging Russian bands and musical ensembles. These Soviet-era attempts to appropriate Western pop and rock music idioms through these translations, or, covers, effectively disrupted the musical genre’s “inappropriate” content and language and propagated instead narratives that aligned with contemporary Soviet/Russian ideology and power.

Cultural Hegemony and Capital

Two theoretical frames are relevant in discussing translation as tool of political soft power in the post-war mid-twentieth century: Antonio Gramsci’s concept of *cultural hegemony* and the creation of cultural products as an instrument of domination[5], and Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *capital*, specifically symbolic capital, as a source of power – real or perceived[6]. Gramsci considers culture as an instrument of domination that creates consent among those dominated. In the case of translation, the use of cultural symbols, motifs, references, and/or background knowledge transfers the power of those cultural objects into the new version of

[4] Public domain image.

[5] Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans Quintin Hoare, & Geoffrey Nowell Smith. (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

[6] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

the original text. The result is a new product that becomes a part of a state's cultural hegemony and a tool of domination over those who consume the product.

Bourdieu suggests that the term "capital," including economic, social, and cultural capital, but especially *symbolic capital*, underscores the fact that any form of capital needs to be recognized and perceived as valuable by other members of a society to function effectively as a source of power. This definition designates the translations of Western music into Russian covers in a lingua-culturally intelligible and politically acceptable idiom as symbolic capital, valued by Soviet listeners as source of access to Western culture and by the state, which can claim that it not only permits, but facilitates access to these products. In the Soviet context, both frameworks support an understanding of translation as a modified form of Nye's 1990 soft power model, one that, as Roig et al. suggest, has now long "departed from its initial monosemy to acquire additional layers of nuance and complexity.[7]" In this expanded model of soft power, translations provide examples of ideological interventions that played a crucial part in intercultural conversations between the U.S. and USSR during the Cold War.

Translation as Soft Power

Translations, or *rewritings*, as Lefevere[8] characterizes them, are reimaginings that reflect the translators' attempt to adapt and reshape the text to function in each culture at a particular point in time in a particular way. Translations may be considered successful to varying degrees because they attempt to express different values, practices, and lexicon interculturally. "The translator's *power* lies not only in their attempt to express the content – linguistic and indexical -- of the source text, but also to convey the [allowed] expression of public morals, national priorities, and cultural politics of the target audience[9]." If, as Lefevere contends, literary translation is not a reductive reproduction of the language of the original text, but rather a rewriting, a reimagining of the original in the vernacular of the new language and culture, then an interrogation of the translation should reveal not only the linguistic and cultural markers and realities of the place of the translation, but also markers of soft power. For example, as Inaba contends, products of translation may reflect different values and practices aimed at both satiating the reader's or listener's desire to understand the original and promoting a morally indexed version of the original that supports the state's agenda(s). The examples below offer translations of American songs into Russian made during the Cold War and reflect how local cultural, political, and social values affect the translated versions in both form and content.

[7] Roig-Sanz, Diana, Lucia Campanella, & Elisabet Carbó-Catalan, "Translation as a Soft Power Resource: Exploring the Possibilities, Scope, and Challenges of an Interdisciplinary Approach." *Perspectives* 33, no. 1 (2025): 2.

[8] André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame.* (New York: Routledge, 1992a).

[9] Tomoko Inaba, "Is Translation a Rewriting of an Original Text?" *Translation Theory* 13, no. 2 (2009): https://translationjournal.net/journal/48rewrite.htm.

Soviet-Era Covers of American Music

The first official Russian-language cover of a Western popular song appeared in 1963 with the recording of «Только ты», a reimagining of The Platters' 1955 highly successful doo-wop song "Only You." The decision to cover an American song that was originally performed by an all-Black, predominantly male recording group in a rhythm and blues style that emerged from the urban setting of post-war African American communities on the East Coast was a bold one. Performed by Polish Russian chanteuse, Edita Piekha, the recording appropriated the cultural import of the doo-wop sound of the original performance and, other than the misspelled last name of lyricist Samuel "Buck" Ram (spelling it "Ramand") on the record label (Fig. 3), the Melodiya release made no other mention of the song's U.S. provenance. The song's lyrics and performance in the U.S. and most of the rest of the world were inextricably tied to the African American experience and their fundamental participation in the early days of rock-and-roll music but was simply erased from the Soviet translation of the song.



The Russian lyrics, while attempting to maintain the versification of the English original – do not quite convey the emotion of the R&B original. Absent from the Russian version are evocative phrases, such as "thrill me," "hold my hand," and "magic that you do," which are instead replaced with much more subtle lexical items, such as «нежный» / "gentle" and «родной» / "dear." The Russian version also includes the ideologically charged phrase «навстречу солнцу рядом мы пойдём вместе» / "we will walk together toward the sun," invoking the image and substance of the «светлое будущее» / "bright future" of Soviet propaganda from the Russian Revolution through the end of the Cold War. The parallel texts below and in the remainder of this piece represent the lyrics of the U.S. original

[10] Image from YouTube site My VINYL: https://www.youtube.com/@myvinylcollection3256

recording of the song in the first column, with the Russian translation/cover in the middle, and a literal translation of the Russian version in the third column.

“Only You”	**«Только ты»**	**“Only You”**
The Platters	**Эдита Пьеха**	**Edita Piekha**
Only you	Только ты!	Only you!
Can make this world seem right	В мой дом весну принёс!	You brought Spring into my home
Only you	Только ты!	Only you!
Can make the darkness bright	Открыл мне счастье грёз!	You showed me the joy of dreams!
Only you and you alone	Лишь тобой, любимый мой,	Only with you, my dear,
Can thrill me like you do	Полны мои мечты	Are my dreams filled
And fill my heart	И в каждом нежном взгляде	And in every gentle glance
with love for only you	Только ты!	Only you!
Only you can make,	Только ты	Only you
oh, this change in me	Теперь в душе моей	Are now in my soul
For it's true, you are my destiny	Только ты и нет тебя родней	Only you – and no one is dearer
When you hold my hand,	И с тобой навстречу солнцу	And together with you, side by side,
I understand the magic that you do	Рядом мы пойдём вдвоём	We will walk toward the sun
You're my dream come true,	Только вместе	Only together
my one and only you	Наше счастье мы найдём	Will we find our happiness
Buck Ram & Ande Rand	И. Самойлова	T. Garza

The Emergence of the Soviet Musical Group

As the 1960s progressed and the Soviet appetite for Western music increased, a new development appeared in the Soviet musical entertainment scene: the «вокально-инструментальный ансамбль» / “vocal-instrumental ensemble,” or «ВИА» / “VIA.” These musical collectives were the most concerted attempt by the Soviet authorities to create an imaginary of Western musical culture – Russian versions of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and The Who – complete with electric guitars, organs, and drums, but in state-approved translations in line with the ideological and cultural conventions of the time. Troitsky’s description of the VIA phenomenon is palpably grim:

> В ВИА обычно насчитывалось порядка десяти человек (ритм-секция, пара гитар, орган, пара медных и несколько солистов, иногда с тамбуринами), и репертуар состоял из бодрых инструментальных пьес, вялых русскоязычных версий английских хитов и массы

> обычных рутинных поп-песенок в умеренно электронной «обработке». Ужасно скучно, но это был этап в культурной революции […][11].
>
> A VIA band usually had around ten musicians in its lineup (rhythm section, two guitars, organ, a couple of horns and several singers, sometimes with tambourines) and a repertoire that included cheerful instrumental songs, flaccid Russian-language covers of English and American hits and a bunch of the usual Russian pop tunes with a soft electric sound. Terribly boring, but it was a stage in our cultural revolution […].

Andrei Makarevich, founder, guitarist, and lead singer of one of the first *bona fide* Soviet rock bands, Машина времени / Time Machine, called VIAs the "most monstrous Soviet-era phenomenon on stage," and goes on to characterization of this Russian response to Western rock groups, capturing their qualities both in appearance as well as in ideology:

> Музыканты, лабавшие на репетициях Джимми Хендрикса и Лед Зеппелин, надевали по команде одинаковые пиджаки с вышитой на лацкане лирой, вставали на сцене по стойке «смирно» и слегка кастрированными голосами (такой специальный вокально-инструментальный голос – полумужской - полуженский) выводили песенки про то, как веселей, ребята, выпало нам строить путь железный. […], про то, как не надо печалиться – вся жизнь впереди, и иногда про несчастную любовь.[12]
>
> Musicians, who would jam to Jimmy Hendrix and Led Zeppelin during rehearsals, would, on command, put on identical jackets embroidered with a lyre on the lapel; they would stand at rigid attention on stage and, in slightly emasculated voices—that peculiar, specialized vocal-instrumental timbre, neither quite male nor quite female—trill out little songs about how cheerful it was for them, the guys, to be building a railroad [...], about how there was no need to be sad, because all of life lay ahead, and, occasionally, about unrequited love.

The onset of the British Invasion in the U.S. with The Beatles' appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" in February 1964 and initiated the dominance of the Fab Four's music on the global stage, extending to the USSR. Though numerous Russian bands and VIAs performed their own interpretation of The Beatles' music in the late 1960s[13], the first official translated rendition of a Beatles' song in the Soviet Union appeared at the end of the decade, but not in the performance of a band or ensemble. In 1969, Russian Jewish stage singer Emil Gorovets (See Fig. 4) became the first Soviet performer to record official translations of songs by The Beatles in the USSR. One of the most successful of these recordings was Gorovets' rendition of Mark Podberëzsky's translation of "A Hard Day's Night," one of The

[11] Троицкий, Артемий. *Back in the USSR*. Санкт-Петербург: Амфора, 2009.

[12] Андрей Макаревич, *Было, есть, будет…* Эксмо, 2015), 306.

[13] Leslie Woodhead, *How the Beatles Rocked the Kremlin: The Untold Story of a Noisy Revolution* (Bloomsbury, 2013).



Fig. 4. Emil Gorovets (1923-2001)[14]

Beatles' first popular songs from their second studio album, *Meet The Beatles* (1964). With lyrics filled with Liverpudlian working class masculine bravado about returning home after a long day at work to a loving partner, the song became the eponymous title track of the group's first feature-length film. To quell the Russian demand for British and American rock-and-roll music, especially of The Beatles, Soviet television allowed the performance of "A Hard Day's Night" in its more ideologically acceptable translation for Russian listeners and viewers in 1969.

"A Hard Day's Night"	**«Тяжёлый день»**	**"A Tough Day"**
The Beatles	**Эмиль Горовец**	**Emil Gorov**
It′s been a hard day's night	Сегодня трудный день	Today's a hard day
And I′ve been working like a dog	Пришлось работать допоздна	I had to work late
It's been a hard day's night	Какой тяжёлый день!	What a tough day!
I should be sleeping like a log	Сказать по правде я устал.	To tell the truth, I'm tire
But when I get home to you	Но я вернулся домой	But I've returned home
I find the things that you do	Я снова вместе с тобой	I'm together with you ag
Will make me feel all right	И жизнь становится другой!	And life becomes differe
You know I work all day	Конечно тяжело	Of course it's difficult
To get you money to buy you things	Когда нет денег на свете жить	When there's not money live on
And it′s worth it just to hear you say	Но только всё равно	But it makes no differen anyway
You′re gonna give me everything	За деньги счастья нельзя купить.	You can't buy happiness with money
So why on earth should I moan?	А мне всё время везёт	But I'm always lucky
'Cause when I get you alone	Пока меня круглый год	For now, all year long,
You know I′ll feel okay	После работы счастье идёт	Happiness comes my wa after work

[14] Public domain image: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Горовец,_Эмиль_Яковлевич#/media/Файл:Emil_Gorovets.jpg

When I'm home	Я с тобой	I'm with you
Everything seems to be right	Но прекрасен белый свет	But the wide world is beautiful
When I'm home	Я с тобой	I'm with you
Feeling you holding me tight	И ни забот ни тревог	And neither cares nor worries
Tight, yeah	Даже в помине нет	Are anywhere to be found
McCartney & Lennon.	М. Подберёзский	T. J. Garza

The Soviet translation/reimaging of The Beatles' song eschews the suggested physicality and playful sexual innuendo of the Lennon and McCartney original in favor of a portrait of the "beautiful wide world" / «прекрасен белый свет» and the stability of married life. Suggestive phrases, such as "the things that you do," "give me everything," "make me feel all right," that tap into the imagination of the English-speaking listener, are eliminated. Instead, the Russian lyrics focus on the moral values of being a hard-working Russian and the reward of coming home to a refuge of happiness «без забот и тревог» / "without care or worries." This rewriting of the original text and meaning conform with the strict code of moral conduct of the Komsomol, the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League in the 1950s and '60s, which "consistently disparaged all that was erotic in human beings.[15]" It is difficult to imagine the early songs of the Beatles without *double entendre* and suggestive lyrics; who really think that "Baby You Can Drive My Car" is actually about an automobile, that "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" is the sole intention of the singer of these words, or that "Norwegian Wood" refers to Scandinavian Lumber? But for Soviet youth eager to consume the musical products of the West, these lyrical and cultural translations were at least some consolation.

The second example, Neil Sedaka's 1959 B-side hit, "One Way Ticket," offered listeners a danceable tune of love lost and of the feeling of seemingly unrecoverable heartbreak, complete with a musical arrangement that suggests a train whistle and the acceleration of the cars on the track. The song's lyrics are replete with lexicon and phrases that are taken directly from the blues and well known in early rock music performances in the U.S. Covered in 1969 by the popular Soviet VIA, Поющие гитары / The Singing Guitars (See Fig. 5), the song, in contrast to the English original, takes on the melancholy mood, tempo, and timber -- in both text and performance -- of Romantic lyric poetry:

"One Way Ticket"	**«Синяя песня (Синий иней)»**	**"A Blue Song (Blue Frost)"**

[15] Igor Kon, "Sexuality and Culture" in *Sex and Russian Society*, eds. Igor Kon and James Riodan (Indian University Press), 24.

Neil Sedaka	**Поющие гитары**	**The Singing Guitars**
Choo, choo train chuggin' down the track	Синий-синий иней лёг на провода	Blue, blue frost lay on the wires
Gotta travel on, never comin' back	В небе тёмно-синем синяя звезда,	In the dark blue sky is a blue star
Oh, oh got a one-way ticket to the blues	Только в небе, в небе тёмно-синем	Only in the sky, the dark blue sky
Bye, bye love my baby's leavin' me	Синий поезд мчится ночью голубой	A blue train rushes in the blue night
Now lonely teardrops are all that I can see	Не за синей птицей, еду за тобой,	I'm going for you, not the blue bird
Oh, oh got a one-way ticket to the blues	За тобою, как за синей птицей	For you, like for the blue bird.
I'm gonna take a trip to lonesome town	Ищу я лишь её, мечту мою,	I seek only her, my dream,
Gonna stay at heartbreak hotel	Лишь она одна мне нужна	She's the only one I need
A fool such as I that never was	Ты, ветер, знаешь всё, ты скажешь	Wind, you know all, you'll say
I cry a tear so well	Где она, она, где она.	Where she is, where she is.
Choo, choo train chuggin' down the track	И снега несутся синие назад.	And the blue snows rush backwards
Gotta travel on, never comin' back	Только б окунуться в синие глаза,	If only I could dive into your blue eyes
Oh, oh got a one-way ticket to the blues	Лишь в твои глаза мне окунуться	Just dive into your eyes
Oh, oh got a one way ticket to the blues	Лишь в твои глаза мне окунуться	Just dive into your eyes
I'm gonna take a trip to lonesome town	Ищу я лишь её, мечту мою,	I seek only her, my dream,
Gonna stay at heartbreak hotel	Лишь она одна мне нужна	She's the only one I need
A fool such as I that never was	Ты, ветер, знаешь всё, ты скажешь	Wind, you know all, you'll say
I cry a tear so well	Где она, она, где она.	Where she is, where she is.
Keller and Hunter	Альберт Азизов	T. J. Garza

Fig. 5. VIA The Singing Guitars / ВИА Поющие гитары[16]

Keller and Hunter's original English-language lyrics use the metaphor of a one-way train ticket to express the emotional spectrum evoked in the early

[16] Public domain image: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3jirl4yLJU



twentieth century's Tin Pan Alley song pluggers' hackneyed, but emotive, lyric images. Phrases such as "the blues," "heartbreak hotel," and "lonesome town" capture this nostalgic mood in the American mid-century. In the Russian version, Albert Azizov's rewriting and reimagining of the lyrics adheres to well-known tropes and images of nature from Russian Romantic poetry, beginning with the title of the song itself: «синий иней» / "blue frost," followed by «синяя птица» / "blue bird," «облака» / "cloud," «небо» / "sky," and «ветер» / "wind." «Тоска», the untranslatable Russian term describing a yearning that incorporates melancholy and nostalgia, replaces "heartbreak" as the dominant theme of the lyrics, and the translation leaves out original thematic and lexical references to the blues.

Translating Social [In]Justice

A final example of Soviet lyric and cultural translation engages the more complex and controversial material of an American social protest song, "Cherokee Nation." John Loudermilk's original 1954 text, entitled "Indian Reservation (The Lament of the Cherokee Reservation Indian)," was first recorded in 1959 by Marvin Rainwater, a quarter Cherokee singer who performed the song publicly in traditional Native American clothing. Rainwater's rendition, called "The Pale Faced Indian," was not successful in sales or recognition. A 1967 British version by Don Fardon had considerable success both in the U.K. and in the U.S. But it was the 1971 version by the American rock band, Paul Revere and the Raiders, that brought the song fully into the U.S. social consciousness and inspired a translation by Soviet Jewish writer, Jakov Goldstein. In performance at concerts in the Soviet Union, the song was introduced in Russian as «песня протеста» /

a "protest song," though its Russian lyrics in translation offer little in the way of replicating the social justice commentary on the treatment of Native Americans in the U.S. in the original version:

"Indian Reservation"	**«Индейская резервация»**	**"Indian Reservation"**
Paul Revere and the Raiders	**Поющие гитары**	**The Singing Guitars**
They took the whole Cherokee nation	Зачем нам опять прерии снятся?	Why do we dream of prairies again?
Put us on this reservation	Разве нам мало резерваций?	Don't we have enough reservations?
Took away our ways of life	Где на всех одна беда	Where one misfortune befalls us all
The tomahawk and the bow and knife	И бьёт хлыстом по спине нужда...	And need whips our back…
Took away our native tongue	А живём, где жить нельзя...	And yet we live where one cannot…
And taught their English to our young	Спасибо вам за всё, друзья!	Thank you for everything, friends!
And all the beads we made by hand	Вы не смогли у нас отнять	You couldn't take it away from us
Are nowadays made in Japan	Святое право - умирать...	The sacred right: to die…
Cherokee people	Чероки, брат мой,	Cherokee, my brother,
Cherokee tribe	Чероки - знак!	Cherokee, a sign!
So proud to live	Есть где-то рай	There's heaven somewhere,
So proud to die	О нём мечтай!	Dream about it!
They took the whole Indian nation	Зачем нам права, гордые люди?	Why do we, proud people, have laws?
Locked us on this reservation	Их на том свете вдоволь будет	There'll be plenty of them in the next life
And though I wear a shirt and tie	Голод смерть живым сулит,	Hunger spells death for the living,
I'm still part Redman deep inside	А мёртвый вечно будет сыт	But the dead will forever be sated.
And some day when they've learned	Из резервации, брат мой, знай	My brother, from the reservation
Cherokee Nation will return	Одна дорога -прямо в рай	There is one road: straight to heaven
Will return will return…	прямо в рай…	Straight to heaven…
John Loudermilk	Яков Гольдштейн (Голяков)	T. J. Garza

Loudermilk's original lyrics are written from the Cherokee Indians' positionality, using the pronouns "them" and "us" to create a narrative of occupation, colonization, and oppression. The Russian version emphasizes the US government's physical assault on individual Native American citizens, focusing instead on the ethos and injustice of the attempts to erase the cultural markers of the Cherokee Nation. As such, this translation creates an imaginary

of the U.S. that is consistent with the narrative of oppression and racism that was pervasive in the Soviet Union. The translation and performance of the song, again by The Singing Guitars, was one of numerous distractions from the multitude of human rights violations in the USSR, whether of women, Jews, or intellectuals, by focusing instead on the difficult positionalities of Blacks, other people of color, and other minoritized groups of people in the West, particularly in the United States.

Rewriting the Times

The above meditations on lyric and cultural translation of Western music into Russian in the mid-twentieth century returns us to Lefevere: "Whether they produce translations, literary histories or their more compact spinoffs, reference works, anthologies, criticism, or editions, rewriters adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time.[17] If Lefevere is correct and translation is, indeed, rewriting to fit the time, place, and ideology, in addition to the lexical and discourse elements of the source text, then Soviet re-imaginings of Western popular music at the height of the Cold War were, even in their deliberate cultural lacunae and textual manipulations, are legitimate and appropriate objects of their translators. The art and craft of literary translation do not, and should not, require "faithful" iterations of the original texts into another idiom; rather, they are in their idiosyncrasies, appropriations, and purposefully crafted representations of their time, place, and circumstances. As such, they require close reading, interpretation, and a degree of perspicacity to examine these works in their specific settings and environments.

The art and craft of translation permit both the practitioner and the consumer of translated works to bring their respective positionalities to the texts, as well as to engage their respective linguistic, cultural, social, and political circumstances as they read, listen to, or perform these texts. In that way, even the seemingly inappropriate, incongruous appearance and performance of a Soviet-era band singing an oddly construed and differently worded translation of a well-known rock song can be the source of intercultural communication, the most effective form of soft power.

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[17] André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 1992a), 6.

completed a book manuscript on filmic portraits of *machismo* in contemporary Russian and Mexican cultures and his volume *Diversity and Decolonization in Russian Studies,* co-edited with Rachel Stauffer, was published in 2025 by Palgrave Springer. His current book project is on Soviet singer-songwriter and actor Vladimir Vysotsky's visits to Mexico in 1976 and 1977.

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Edita Piekha / Эдит Пьеха "Only You" / «Только ты»
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgRoapi0KDA

The Beatles “A Hard Day’s Night”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yjyj8qnqkYI
Emil Gorovets / Эмиль Горовец “A Tough Day” / «Тяжёлый день»
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRk691uKJ08

Neil Sedaka “One-Way Ticket”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwBo0jnAKSw
The Singing Guitars / Поющие гитары “A Blue Song” / «Синяя песня»
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIZAYk1tGBY

Paul Revere and the Raiders
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVwEwdIIZD0
The Singing Guitars / Поющие гитары “Indian Reservation” / «Индейская резервация»
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Book Reviews

Joy Womack, as told to by Elizabeth Shockman. *Behind the Red Velvet Curtain: An American Ballerina in Russia*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2025. 284 pp., notes and illustrations. $27.95 hardcover.

The Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, Russia, has long been associated with some of the greatest ballet performances in the world and is home to one of the oldest ballet companies, tracing its roots to the reign of Catherine the Great. In the post-Stalinist period, it became widely known and celebrated across Europe and in the United States, touring and bringing its brilliant productions to Western audiences. It has also, however, been a source of scandal in recent years. In 2013, its young handsome ballet director, Sergei Filin, was severely injured in a sulfuric acid attack perpetrated by one of his own dancers. Several years later, a former Bolshoi ballerina launches accusations of a "pay to play" system in the company whereby female dancers were expected to sleep with theatre administrators if they wanted the plum roles. There have also been claims of state interference in the theatre's choice and execution of performances.

Joy Womack was in Russia, training and performing with the Bolshoi company, when the above scandals occurred, so one might imagine that her book, *Behind the Red Velvet Curtain: An American Ballerina in Russia*, would peel back that curtain and shed some light on the inner workings of this esteemed and elite organization. It does, but not as much as one might imagine. The "Author's Note" defines the book as a memoir, and it is certainly more a memoir than a critical look at the Bolshoi company. Readers should not expect to learn much about the ballet company; this book offers little about the history of the Bolshoi or its complicated relationship with the Russian/Soviet government over its many years of operation. The memoir is based on interviews conducted by Elizabeth Shockman over period of ten years (2012-2014) and follows Womack's life from her youth and early passion for ballet through the Russian invasion of Ukraine and her reluctant recognition that she could no longer call Russia home.

Womack was raised in a religious family that, for a time, belonged to what most people would call a cult and this upbringing gave her a faith that helped her through some challenging times, but also left her with some significant baggage about perfection and perseverance. Still, Womack's tale is no rags-to-riches story; though she describes her large family of nine as "the actual Beverly Hills Hillbillies," she recalls that her Santa Monica neighbors were doctors, lawyers, and celebrities. Her mother had a medical degree from Harvard and her grandmother lived on the Upper East Side in New York and owned a Picasso. Her parents were competitive and pushed their children to strive for excellence. Hard work was the norm.

Joy left her family to join a preprofessional ballet school in Washington, D.C., when she was only thirteen and was accepted in the Moscow State Academy of Choreography (affiliated with the Bolshoi) two years later. Womack had significant obstacles and challenges. Her dormitory living quarters were less than ideal (unsanitary bathrooms, tight quarters, and unappetizing food) and she did not speak Russian. Womack worked hard, but she was not without

connections. By her second year in Russia, her life improved considerably as she enjoyed a level of privilege that her classmates did not. Taken in by a friend of her grandmother's, an American businesswoman in Moscow, Womack now lived in a luxurious apartment a few blocks away from the Bolshoi with her own bedroom. She took private lessons on the side and eventually married a fellow Russian dancer (against her parents' wishes) when she realized it is her only way to fulfill her dream of joining the company. When her American benefactor decided to leave Russia, she set Womack up with a new apartment.

Womack's career in Russia was also affected by internal politics, however. In her second year at the Bolshoi, a teacher tells her that she was only hired because they thought as an American, she could bring in sponsors and generate money; until then, she would never get cast in the big roles. A later meeting with Filin seemed to indicate the same expectation. Womack subsequently revealed these conversations to a journalist, claiming that she did not realize that her name would be attached. The Bolshoi did not care, and Womack was fired. But she lands on her feet, and get a position with the Kremlin Palace Ballet Theatre, and it is this relationship that helps her achieve citizenship in 2021.

For the ballet enthusiast, there are many descriptions of practice and training, classes with world-class teachers, and the painful injuries that result when bodies are pushed to their limits. There is also the all-too-familiar story of a ballerina who resorts to food deprivation and purging to stay thin. Womack suffers from both anorexia and bulimia for most of the period covered. She continues to dance through broken bones and extreme pain, and her determination to shine and impress her teachers is admirable, if often self-destructive. Womack also highlights the lack of support for the arts in the United States compared to other countries. During a brief stint in Boston, she struggled to survive, with no experience in obtaining housing and, oddly, no help from her family. Her dormitory in Moscow may have been filthy, but at least she had a roof over her head and food to eat. Womack questions why authoritarian countries are better at supporting the arts without, however, acknowledging that support usually comes with strings attached. (p. 245)

The book has its shortcomings, however. The references to ballet poses and movements (Battements frappes! Ronds de jambe en l'air!) are distracting to those uninitiated in the vocabulary of this art, and a glossary of ballet terms would have been useful if this book was intended to be read by a broad audience. Shockman, who we must assume ultimately wrote the book, has an appalling tendency to use similes in her prose, many of which are awkward or make little to no sense: "The city center at night was lit up like a Faberge egg"; everything she had learned was "strung together likes beads in an intricate necklace"; ballet dancers greet Womack's teacher "like Olympians paying homage to the potentate who had led them to their current mountaintop of fame and talent." An instructor's t-shirts hang off her shoulders "like windsocks" and watching some of the best dancers was "less like seeing Louis XIV prance to a minuet and more like observing a well-drilled squad of elite marines jumping in midair from one helicopter to another." For a journalist who has written for Reuters, the BBC, and *The Moscow Times*, one expects better.

Finally, one wishes that Womack had spent more time describing the politics and personal relations of the Bolshoi. Though Womack and Shockman did not intend to narrate/write a research-based book (a la Christina Ezrahi's *Swans of the*

Kremlin), one feels certain that they could have offered more insights. Womack was on the inside, yet she reveals little about that rarified world, focusing mostly on the rigors of training and her personal struggles, including those with her parents. She spends a whole section of the book discussing her relationship with her boyfriend/husband, a story that was neither particularly unique nor interesting. In many ways, *Behind the Red Velvet Curtain* feels incredibly self-indulgent; but perhaps that is what memoirs are, after all. At least there is only one mention of "the Russian Soul."

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Meredith L. Roman, *The Black Panthers and the Soviets: A Comparative History of Human Rights Movements*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. ix, 218 pp. Hardcover.

In February 1966, the Moscow trial of writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel for "anti-Soviet agitation" galvanized a human rights movement among intellectuals in the Soviet Union. Across the world, police brutality spurred Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to found the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California in October 1966. The next year, in July 1967, Yuri Andropov established the Fifth Directorate of the KGB to neutralize individuals engaged in "ideological sabotage (*diversiia*)" (3). Around a month later, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover launched a new operation under Division Five's domestic counterintelligence program (Cointelpro) to neutralize Black nationalist groups. Both Soviet human rights activists and Black Panthers assigned great importance to disseminating knowledge about laws to empower themselves and hold government authorities accountable. While US journalists lionized Soviets they called "dissidents," Soviet journalists valorized the Black Panthers.

These are among the striking parallels and coincidences Meredith Roman reveals in her important and stimulating book, *The Black Panthers and the Soviets*. A professor of History at SUNY Brockport, Roman earlier wrote *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (2012). Her new book builds on articles published in *Cold War History* in 2018 and in the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 2024.

The main purpose and value of the comparative perspective Roman develops is to challenge a self-righteous American exceptionalism that has often been affirmed by discourse about human rights violations in the Soviet Union. In 1977, for example, a US journalist agreed with Soviet dissident and physicist Valentin Turchin that dissidents were not jailed in the United States and that the absence of state violence against dissenters was a major difference between the United States and the USSR, thereby ignoring the jailing and killing of African American activists, particularly members of the Black Panther Party (BPP). As Roman explains, "Cold War politics reified white supremacist notions of human rights and political repression that elided the arrest and 'jailing' of African American dissidents" (1).

One of the strengths of Roman's work is that she fully recognizes the significant differences between the Black Panthers and Soviet human rights activists. For example, she acknowledges that the BPP "operated in a vastly wider field of permissible discourse and action" (2). At the same time, however, the vilification of the Black Panthers by the freer press in the United States was more successful than the denunciations of rights defenders in the state-controlled Soviet press. As Roman shows, US journalists, often influenced by the FBI, depicted the Panthers as crazy traitors and blamed lawless, uncontrollable Black bodies for the violence inflicted on them. Unfortunately, some Soviet activists agreed with the dominant US narrative that Black activists "were deserving of repression because they engaged in lawless, criminal behavior" (127).

Although Roman shows impressive command of vast scholarship on movements and governments in both countries, there are some omissions or gaps. For example, while she argues that "the role of Vietnam veterans in the BPP has been understated" (10), her bibliography does not include books on African Americans and the Vietnam War by James E. Westheider or the broader study of the relations between Black freedom struggles and the US military by Kimberley L. Phillips. In another instance, Roman notes and appears to endorse the Panthers' "condemnation of Soviet leaders as imperialist oppressors" (129), yet studies of Soviet policies toward imperialism in Africa by scholars such as Sergey Mazov, Natalia Telepneva, and Piero Gleijeses are missing from her bibliography.

One can also quibble with the way Roman appears to assume that "the Cold War" was a shared reality in both countries. For example, she writes that "the Cold War consensus in the Soviet Union and United States prioritized exposing the hidden truth behind the lies that the US and Soviet enemy disseminated," while "the more imperative task of the Cold War" for Soviet rights defenders and Black Panthers was to expose the lies of their own countries (35). Yet Soviet journalists and leaders actually rightly understood that "the Cold War" was from its first deployment in 1947 an American propaganda construct that centered on false or grossly exaggerated images of a Soviet enemy. Soviet cartoonists often ridiculed "the Cold War" (*kholodnaia voina*), which they commonly depicted as a ghoulish snowman, and writers often put scare quotes around "the Cold War."

Such quibbles should not obscure the excellence of *The Black Panthers and the Soviets*. Roman's writing is vigorous, direct, and bold. Her analysis is careful and sophisticated. This concise study is an important addition to scholarship on the global human rights revolution, which, as Roman rightly notes, has neglected the contributions of African Americans. The book can be assigned in both undergraduate and graduate courses. It will be of interest to many scholars of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Russian-American relations.

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Peter Kolchin, *Emancipation: The Abolition and Aftermath of American Slavery and Russian Serfdom.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024. – xiv, 547 p.

In the thirty-seven years since the publication of Peter Kolchin's *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (1987), the book has become a classic of comparative history.[1] By the time *Emancipation* appeared, the terms of the comparison had changed. The enormous literature of recent decades has substantially revised our understanding of both systems of unfree labor; the questions historians ask of their sources and the categories they employ have changed as well. Kolchin himself notes that even the language has changed. Explaining why he does not consistently replace *slaves* with *enslaved people*, he points to a comparative problem that would then arise with Russian serfs, since English offers no natural equivalent such as *enserfed people*.[2] This small terminological problem encapsulates one of the book's larger tasks: to find a contemporary language in which two experiences of unfreedom and emancipation can be compared without turning the categories of one into a universal norm.

Whereas *Unfree Labor* primarily compared two systems of unfree labor, *Emancipation* examines their destruction and its consequences. The book's structure itself indicates how broadly Kolchin understands his subject. Part I, "Process," begins with the preparation, process, and terms of emancipation, followed by chapters titled "What Kind of Freedom?," "The Struggle Continues: Land, Labor, and Liberty," and "The Politics of Freedom." Part II, "Consequences," turns to free labor, everyday life, and finally the problem announced in the title of the last chapter, "Change and Continuity, Hope and Disillusionment." Emancipation here is not an event with a fixed date but a process through which the meaning of freedom itself was worked out.

This approach is familiar from Eric Foner's work on Reconstruction.[3] The Russian comparison, however, allows Kolchin to take a further analytical step. Personal freedom, mobility, family autonomy, land, economic independence, and political citizenship emerge as distinct dimensions of freedom that could be combined in very different ways. A Russian peasant acquired personal freedom and land without becoming a political citizen; an American freedman could acquire citizenship and the vote without receiving land. Comparison thus reveals the historical contingency of the particular combination of rights and opportunities that emerged through Reconstruction and the Great Reforms.

The Russian material also brings the radicalism of the American experience into sharper relief. The connection between emancipation and citizenship, readily comprehensible within the history of Reconstruction, no longer appears to be a natural extension of freedom once Russia is placed alongside it. The destruction of legal bondage did not in itself lead to the transformation of former bondspeople into equal members of the political community. The attempt to do precisely that in the United States therefore appears as a distinctive and extraordinarily far-

[1] Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

[2] Peter Kolchin, *Emancipation: The Abolition and Aftermath of American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024), esp. Preface.

[3] Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

reaching historical experiment. Conversely, the American case changes our view of Russia: the allocation of land to emancipated peasants emerges as a substantial gain, although it was combined with redemption payments, communal restrictions, and the absence of political citizenship. Each case becomes a means of making the other analytically unfamiliar.

At times this defamiliarization allows Kolchin to identify differences that cannot readily be reduced to a comparison of legal institutions. One of his most illuminating observations concerns the social geography of domination. The American South was in many respects a slaveholders' world: the ruling class was locally rooted and continually present in economic and social life. The Russian village remained primarily a peasant world, in which the landowner, especially a large one, was often physically and socially distant from his serfs and governed through intermediaries.[4] This distinction also helps explain the different consequences of emancipation. In the South, emancipation disrupted an order in which former masters constituted the locally dominant social group; in Russia it transformed legal and economic relations within a rural world that had already remained demographically and culturally peasant. Here the comparative method moves beyond law to illuminate differences in the everyday structure of power.

Another major advantage of Kolchin's comparative method is that comparison provides a historical scale for assessing the radicalism of reform. Emancipation can be judged against contemporary standards of equality, or against the expectations of the freedpeople themselves and the projects of reformers. Comparison adds another perspective: what was actually accomplished in another society of the same period, and what remained beyond the limits of the politically possible.

The same institution can therefore acquire a different meaning when the comparative frame changes. The Russian peasant land settlement can be assessed in terms of inadequate allotments, redemption payments, and its failure to meet peasant expectations. The American case, however, reminds us that the alternative was not necessarily a more equitable distribution of land: most former slaves in the American South received no land at all. This does not make the Russian settlement just, but it allows us to assess its radicalism more precisely in historical context. Segregated schooling for African Americans likewise obviously falls short of later standards of equality. Yet the historically available alternative to integration could be the exclusion of Black children from public education. Comparison changes the counterfactual against which the historian measures what occurred, and thus helps distinguish the limitations of a reform from its historical insignificance.[5]

This procedure runs throughout the book. Russia and the American South remain the two principal cases, but Kolchin continually broadens the comparative field, turning to Haiti, the British colonies, Cuba, Prussia, and other experiences of the abolition of slavery or serfdom. These comparisons vary in scale and function, and they prevent the two central cases from becoming a closed binary. The broader field reveals which features of Russian or American emancipation were common in the nineteenth century and which were historically unusual. The epilogue brings this method together, but the comparative scale is constructed throughout the book.

[4]Kolchin, *Emancipation*, 158–59; Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, xii, 52–53.

[5] Kolchin, *Emancipation*, 66–71, esp. 68–70.

The comparative perspective also points toward another question, adjacent to Kolchin's main concern. Russia and the United States were compared not only by historians: contemporaries of emancipation themselves watched developments in the other country and used such comparisons in political debate. This subject appears only episodically in the book. A particularly telling example is Thaddeus Stevens, who invoked the Russian reform in the mistaken belief that the emancipated peasants had received land from the state and used this supposed Russian precedent in the American debate over land redistribution.[6] What matters here is more than the factual misunderstanding. The very image of the Russian experience enlarged the range of imaginable solutions available to an American politician. Alongside the comparison of two historical processes, another history thus comes into view: the circulation of comparisons between the two societies and their use as political arguments. This history only touches on Kolchin's project, but it suggests another sense in which Russia and the United States belonged to a shared history of emancipation.

The concept of *choice*, to which Kolchin repeatedly returns, connects these comparative observations to the book's central concern. Freedom is measured not only by income or property, but also by an expanded range of possible action. The right to leave a former master, seek another employer, form a family without his permission, or move elsewhere could substantially alter a person's position even when material conditions remained harsh. The possibility of exiting relations of dependence altered the balance between worker and employer because the former master's power over the person was no longer unconditional.

This is especially clear in Kolchin's discussion of mobility. For freedpeople, freedom of movement became both a right of a free person and a crucial means of bargaining with employers: the ability to leave gave practical substance to free labor. Kolchin explicitly calls mobility the freedpeople's "ultimate bargaining weapon" and links geographic mobility to their pursuit of freedom itself.[7] In Russia, emancipation also greatly expanded mobility, but the commune, the passport system, and the connection between the land allotment and place of residence continued to restrict it. Comparison makes it possible to see freedom of movement both as a mark of emancipation and as a material mechanism that turned legal freedom into the capacity to shape one's own life.

This leads to one of the book's central arguments about the relationship between change and continuity. The persistence of poverty and social inequality, as well as the emergence of new mechanisms of exploitation, does not by itself tell us how much had changed. Kolchin resists both a triumphalist history of emancipation and an interpretation in which continuing oppression renders freedom fictitious. *Change* and *continuity* appear as simultaneous processes. Older forms of power disappeared while others survived or emerged anew.

Seen in this light, the question "Which emancipation was more radical?" is too general. The answer changes depending on whether the measure is political participation, access to land, economic autonomy, or some other dimension of freedom. The more useful questions are therefore: radical in what respect, for whom, and relative to which historically available alternatives?

The same perspective helps Kolchin explain *dashed expectations*, one of the major themes of the final chapters. Disillusionment was especially intense where

[6] Kolchin, *Emancipation*, 69, 411n58; Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 8.
[7] Kolchin, *Emancipation*, 204, 232–33.

emancipation had generated the most far-reaching expectations. Former slaves and serfs encountered the limits of promised freedom; former masters experienced the loss of accustomed power. Reformers, for their part, confronted societies that failed to develop according to their assumptions about how free people should behave. The subsequent reaction therefore cannot serve as simple evidence that the original transformation had been insignificant. The intensity of the struggle to reverse the results of emancipation itself indicates how seriously those results had affected the old order.[8]

Here lies one of the book's productive paradoxes. The broader the possibilities opened by emancipation, the more visible the gap between expectation and outcome could become. Profound change could therefore generate equally profound disappointment, while subsequent retreat did not return society to its original condition. The history of emancipation becomes at once a history of expanding freedom and of struggle over the new boundaries imposed upon it.

Against this background, one question about the book's comparative construction concerns geography. Kolchin is right to stress the absence in Russia of an equivalent to the American sectional divide: there was no territorially organized "free North" capable of turning opposition to serfdom into a conflict between regional political blocs over control of the state. Yet the absence of sectionalism did not mean the absence of profound spatial differentiation. Serfdom was distributed extremely unevenly across the empire; the North, the black-earth center, and the western borderlands differed in patterns of landholding and legal regimes, while the Baltic provinces, Poland, and Finland followed different chronologies of reform.

The deeper contrast, therefore, may lie between two ways of politically organizing spatial difference. In the United States it became sectionalized, forming the basis of party competition, conflict over the federation, and eventually secession. In the Russian Empire, heterogeneity was more often imperially administered, through legal pluralism and differentiated rule. Kolchin notes many regional distinctions, including the differences between the North and the black-earth zone and the earlier reforms in the Baltic provinces, but empire as a mechanism for organizing this diversity rarely becomes an analytical framework in its own right. This is particularly noticeable beside the consistency with which he differentiates the American South, from the Upper and Lower South to the cotton regions and sugar-producing Louisiana.

This observation extends rather than challenges the book's comparative logic. Precisely because Kolchin's comparisons so productively unsettle the apparent naturalness of national trajectories, they invite the same procedure to be applied to the spatial construction of the Russian case. *Emancipation* convincingly demonstrates why comparative history remains necessary even when each of the histories being compared already possesses an enormous historiography of its own. It changes the questions we ask of each national case.

Kolchin's comparative method historicizes the very measure of change. A reform may be deeply limited in relation to the hopes of its participants and at the same time radical in relation to the alternatives available to contemporaries; subsequent defeat may coexist with an irreversible transformation of the structure of possibilities. This is perhaps the book's central achievement: comparison turns

[8] Kolchin, *Emancipation*, 367, 372–74.

freedom from a predetermined standard of judgment into a historical problem whose content had to be worked out anew in each post-emancipation society.

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Nina Bogdan, *Before We Disappear into Oblivion: San Francisco's Russian Diaspora from Revolution to Cold War,* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025, xiii. 404 pp. Index. $34.95, Paper.

In this book, historian Nina Bogdan examines multiple trends within the Russian-speaking community of San Francisco from 1917 into the 1970s: "The primary focus of this book is on the internal dynamics of the inter-war San Francisco Russian community and the negotiation of their identity within a distinctive American urban environment that included a diverse Russian population" (11). Russians had lived in the city since the nineteenth century, but this volume does not focus on earlier developments. Group population numbered from 6,000 to 10,000 at different points in the interwar period—much smaller than the émigré communities in Paris and Berlin (11, 19). The author develops insightful analytical arguments through discussions of a wide variety of people and places.

This volume presents stories of many community participants, some briefly, some in detail. Readers meet multiple rectors of the Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, including Father Vladimir Sakovich (151). Archbishop John (Maximovitch) arrived with a group from Shanghai in the early 1950s (266-283). Nadia Shapiro, entered in 1922 from Harbin with 500 fellow Russian young people, supported by the American Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). She worked as a journalist in the city for many years and wrote articles reflecting on various aspects of émigré life (44-45). Victor Arnautoff served as an imperial and White Army officer but later emerged as an outspoken communist (65). Other stories emerge through discussion of dozens of social, cultural, artistic, business, publishing, and religious associations. The book includes an extensive list of organizations formed after World War II, with names of leaders (310-312).

Bogdan presents these characters as they inhabit significant places in the Russian world of San Francisco; she describes the shifting functions and imagined meanings of these spaces. Fort Ross, the 19th-century outpost of the Russian American Company, in Sonoma County, northwest of the city (37, 140-141), served as a pilgrimage destination with evolving significance. The Holy Trinity Cathedral, founded in the 19th century, was rebuilt in 1909 (37). Later the Holy Virgin Parish was organized in 1927 (153), affiliated with the bishops of Sremski-Karlovci (Serbia) and Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR)(187). The William Westerfeld House was the first building purchased by the émigré community for a variety of social and cultural purposes (3). The city included two distinct multi-ethnic neighborhoods with large Russian populations: Fillmore and Potrero Hill (16). Significant attention is paid to the Russian Center building on Sutter Street, the location of the Museum of Russian Culture (4).

Vivid and engaging descriptions of these people and places enable the reader to visualize key dynamics in the book. The author demonstrates clearly that there has not been one unified Russian community in the city; she explores relationships between Orthodox Christian Russians, members of non-Orthodox "Spiritual Christian" communities, and Russian-speaking Jewish residents (16-17). The chapters highlight distinct experiences of groups arriving in distinct waves: before 1917, during the interwar period, and after 1945. Readers learn more about the experiences of groups arriving from different places, such as Harbin and Shanghai. Significant attention is paid to the views of generations: grandparents, parents, and children faced shifting challenges as they encountered evolving realities. All these groups adapted to life in the United States with contrasting views on assimilation and preserving Russian cultural identity. Like other immigrants, these Russians often lived dual lives—one with family and close friends, and one with the outer American world (177). Many faced stress and trauma related to career, family, and social transitions; the author provides a long, detailed list of community members who committed suicide (110-117). Many had experienced combat in World War I and/or the Russian civil war. Russians wrestled with their own personal challenges, which were multiplied due to the views of others in the country. The author documents the wide variety of discrimination against immigrants, based on assumptions of a hierarchy of ethnic groups. Some viewed Russians as "invaders" (6). Arguments on "race" and "whiteness" shaped evaluations of Russian immigrants in the US (13). For many years San Francisco's port provided the main entry point for Asian immigrants—this reality often shaped how all newcomers to the area were viewed (12). Changing immigration laws restricted the numbers of Russians allowed to enter (22). All these realities contributed to a wide spectrum of political views held in the community, with preferences for monarchy, Republican or Democratic parties, or communism.

The book follows a chronological approach with sections on a variety of topics. The author grew up in the San Francisco Russian community; she includes interviews of several members, as well as evaluations of many primary source documents from multiple archives and newspapers, and scholarly secondary works (25). Nadia Shapiro's articles and letters illustrate a range of issues. The author carefully explores an abundance of evidence with careful analysis to describe the losses, hopes, tensions, conflicts, and paradoxes of Russians establishing new lives in a new city. This is an outstanding book which should be read by all with interests in the Russian diaspora, immigration in the United States, or intercultural connections. Instructors in undergraduate world, US, and Russian history courses should consider the adoption of this excellent book due to the clarity of the writing and the presentation of multiple issues for classroom discussions. Readers will gain deeper appreciation of multifaceted realities of immigrant lives and identities.

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Field Notes

1. Yasha Klots, Mark Lipovetsky, Valeriia Korotkova and The Tamizdat Project | Banned Books from the Cold War to the Present – New York Public Library
https://events.leapevents.com/event/tamizdatprojectyashaklots/tag/nyplconnect?utm_source=eNewsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=NYPLConnect_20261001&utm_campaign=NYPLConnect

2. Staging Nuremberg: How the United States and the Soviet Union Fought over the Portrayal of Nazi Crimes
https://maisonfrancaise.columbia.edu/events/staging-nuremberg-how-united-states-and-soviet-union-fought-over-portrayal-nazi-crimes?mc_cid=1eada2649d&mc_eid=1580b026d8

3. The National Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) will be held online in October and in-person in November in Chicago. Below are a few of the sessions related to Russian-American relations. Look at aseees.org to find the full program and more details about these sessions.

1. Literary Institutions and the Status of the Poet in Cold War America and the Soviet Union. Sat, November 14, 4:00 to 5:45pm CST (4:00 to 5:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 3rd fl, Kimball

2. Book Discussion: The People's Patriarch: Tikhon Bellavin and the Orthodox Church in North America and Revolutionary Russia, by Scott M. Kenworthy. Sat, November 14, 4:00 to 5:45pm CST (4:00 to 5:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 7th fl, Clark 7

3. Digital Divides: East, West, and Our Networked Selves. Sun, November 15, 12:00 to 1:45pm CST (12:00 to 1:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 7th fl, Clark 3

4. Heroes of Identity: Symbolic Ethnicity and Ideological Embodiment in the USSR and Socialist Europe. Fri, November 13, 1:30 to 3:15pm CST (1:30 to 3:15pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 3rd fl, Logan

5. Emigration, Immigration, and Reemigration: Imperial and National in the History of Soviet Jewish Migrations. Sat, November 14, 12:00 to 1:45pm CST (12:00 to 1:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 3rd fl, Kimball

6. Intimate Relationships, Violence, and a Specter of Hope in Tsarist Russia. Sat, November 14, 12:00 to 1:45pm CST (12:00 to 1:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 7th fl, Dearborn 3

7. Literature beyond the State: Faces of Contemporary American Russophone Poetry. Thu, November 12, 4:00 to 5:45pm CST (4:00 to 5:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 7th fl, LaSalle 5

8. Socialist Experimentation Across The Cold War Divide: Identity Formation and International Links in the 20th Century. Sat, October 17, 1:00 to 2:45pm CDT (1:00 to 2:45pm CDT), Virtual Convention, VR1

9. Russia and the Anglo-American World in Mutual Perception. Sat, November 14, 12:00 to 1:45pm CST (12:00 to 1:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 3rd fl, Salon 5

10. The Journal of Russian American Studies (JRAS): 10th Anniversary! Sat, November 14, 2:00 to 3:45pm CST (2:00 to 3:45pm CST), The Palmer House, Floor: 3rd fl, Salon 10

11. Russian Jews and Blackness. Fri, October 16, 2:00 to 3:45pm CDT (2:00 to 3:45pm CDT), Virtual Convention, VR8