

**CULTURE AND HISTORY MATTER:  
RUSSIA'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AFTER THE FALL**

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**THE HALL HUMANITIES LECTURE**

10 APRIL 2007 7:30 PM

WOODRUFF AUDITORIUM, KANSAS UNION  
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

## INTRODUCTION

I am speaking tonight in my interdisciplinary incarnation as a Russian intellectual historian. I'm a Big Picture person. Some analyze; some synthesize. I synthesize. And I'm going to take advantage of this lovely bully pulpit that Victor has given me for one night, to talk about several "Big Picture" things that are important to me, but should be important to all of us. Embedded obliquely in my comments tonight, I hope, will be the four following themes:

1. **Language matters** (whether that language is Russian, or English, Spanish, Chinese, or one of the other 6,908 living world languages): language is the root of communication and identity. An enormous amount of cultural and psychic information is embedded in language; nothing reveals who and what you are more than the language you speak; it's the hardwiring in your brain;
2. **Culture and history matter**: we must know the culture and history of other countries, as expressed through their language, if we are to understand how we relate to the others who share our world;
3. The recognized and also *unrecognized* **realities of globalization** matter; we need to understand and deal with them; and finally,
4. **Ideas matter**; moving through history and forming culture, ideas have incredible power to mold realities -- our reality and the realities of others. Our ability to communicate effectively and productively rests on ideas.

So that's what I hope you will take away from my comments. To demonstrate how language, culture, history, and ideas really do matter, I will turn to the culture I know best, Russian culture.

## DOES RUSSIA MATTER?

In psyching up for this evening, I started by asking myself a simple question, “Does Russia *still* matter?” We know that Russia used to matter a lot, but now that the Cold War is over, does it still matter? They say we “won” the Cold War. But did that end our relationship with our erstwhile Cold War counterpart? Let’s consider a few things:

- If we consider land mass, Russia is still the largest single country on the planet: 15 time zones.
- If we consider population, Russia is still the seventh largest country.
- If we consider natural resources, Russia controls 25% of all of the world’s fresh water, 22% of the world’s forests, 20% of the world’s oil reserves. Russia has the world’s largest natural gas and diamond reserves, the world’s second largest coal reserves, and almost 50% of the world’s platinum group minerals (used in pharmaceuticals, electronics, plastics, chemicals).
- If we consider language, Russian is the fifth most spoken world language (after Chinese, English, Hindustani, and Spanish).<sup>1</sup> It is spoken in Russia, among a significant Russian diaspora, and in much of Central Asia (an important strategic area). Russian is an official language of the United Nations (and Russia has one of the five BIG vetoes at the UN). Russian remains on the US government’s and military’s short list of priority strategic languages.<sup>2</sup>
- If we consider arts and sciences, Russia is an artistic and scientific powerhouse. Who gave us Dostoevsky and Tolstoi and Chekhov and Chaikovskii and Stravinsky and Shostakovich, who gave us Mendeleev and Pavlov and Korolëv, and who beat us into space? This October 4<sup>th</sup> we will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Sputnik* launch. Some of you are old enough to know exactly what that meant for the US.
- Oh, and I should mention the 5000+ Russian strategic nuclear warheads, as well as Russian influence in the Middle East and China.
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So Russia still matters. And because it does, it matters that we understand Russia, as things shake out and take shape in the first generation following the end of the Soviet Union. Directions taken now will be set for a long time.

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1 Arabic is sixth; French is tenth.

2 With Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Persian, Farsi, and Hindi.

What the world witnessed in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 was cataclysmic. In 1989, the Warsaw Pact countries shook loose of Soviet hegemony, and the Berlin Wall came down.<sup>3</sup> Germany was reunited the next year. I hoped, but I never thought to see it in my lifetime.

Inspired by events in East and Central Europe, the 15 Soviet republics planned their own secessions. In June 1991, the Russian Republic elected Boris Eltsin as president and endorsed his agenda, which was to take the Soviet Union apart. A brief setback followed in August, as a group of Communist Party hard-liners attempted a coup to preserve the Soviet Union and the Communist Part. You may recall the TV footage of Eltsin on top of a tank, loudly repudiating the coup. On December 8<sup>th</sup> the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusan Soviet republics formalized the dissolution the Soviet Union and the formation of the new Commonwealth of Independent States. The remaining republics followed by December 21st. On Christmas Day 1991, using a pen borrowed from the CNN crew that was covering this “news moment,” Mikhail Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the Communist Party, resigned, ending Party rule. The Soviet flag that had flown for seven decades over the red stars of the Moscow Kremlin came down for the very last time.

It’s not often that an empire collapses, yet almost no one is killed, and we all get to watch on TV. Neither is it often that an ideology, in this case Soviet communism, implodes before our eyes. But as the dust of 1991 settled, Russians found themselves with an enormous new task: they had to build not only a new political entity, but they also had to find a new identity for themselves. What did it mean to be “Russian” on December 26, 1991, when the Soviet Union was no more? What remained after Soviet identity was removed? Who was “Russian,” and who was not? The disintegration of empire raised important issues of national and personal values, issues of power, influence, ethnicity, gender roles, and -- national self-esteem. It’s hard not to be an empire any more. You get no respect.

## HISTORY AND CONTINUITY

Immediately after the end of the Soviet Union, American commentators and talking heads (the same talking heads who had failed to predict the end of the Soviet Union) now predicted that Russia would be an American-style free-market democracy in about, oh, . . . five years. The peripatetic Harvard economist Geoffrey Sachs was sent off to Russia on weekends to build them a new economy. The World Bank gave Russia lots of money. The US Congress authorized millions to develop civil society in Russia and the former republics. Some cash, some investment, and the Russians would soon be on track.

We assumed that, of course the Russians were going to follow our lead. Hadn’t the Russian people suffered under the communist regime for 74 long years, waiting to shake it off so they could become like us? Well, it’s been 16 years, almost a generation. For Russians, it has been a

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<sup>3</sup> 9 November 1989. It is an irony of history that the Warsaw Pact effect disintegrated during the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

16-year roller coaster ride. For Americans, it has been a series of frustrated expectations. What did we misunderstand?

If you have had the misfortune to have had a course from me, you know what I'm going to say next: "In order to understand why things are this way now, we have to go back and understand the context from which they emerged. Because context and continuity are everything." And that is true: nothing comes from nowhere -- *history is prologue* to our present. And while knowing history and cultural context will not allow us to predict anything with precision -- (too many variables, and I didn't bring the crystal ball) -- history and cultural context will allow us to understand the meaning of events and to respond to them intelligently.

OK. Let's develop some "deep context" for understanding Russia. In only 45 minutes. We will have to speak in general categories.<sup>4</sup>

Let's start by understanding that:

- Russians have specific geographical conditions and logistic problems (different from ours), and they solve them differently;
- Russians have their own historical record (what happened to them didn't happen to us, and vice versa); thus their religion, political structures, social evolution, and cultural development are different;
- Russians have their own values, beliefs, and priorities that arise from their record, their language, their experience, and their conditions (none of which we share).

## HIGH AND LOW CONTEXT CULTURES

Several models exist to help us understand and analyze cultural difference. The model I want to suggest tonight places all world cultures on a continuum between **high context cultures** on the one end (like Chinese, Arabic, Slavic, and Spanish) and **low context cultures** at the other end (like Anglo-American, German, Scandinavian, and German-Swiss).<sup>5</sup> Other cultures position themselves at various points along this high-low context continuum. It is not my intent to privilege either high or low context cultures; both have strengths and weaknesses; and both just *are*. Our assignment is to understand their variety and implications.

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4 General categories are not stereotypes; unlike stereotypes, categories allow us to extract meaning from cultural paradigms and to analyze it in structured manner.

5 Mary O'Hara-Devereaux and Robert Johansen, *Globalwork: Bridging Distance, Culture, and Time*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1994. This model was developed by scholars who study the needs of global management. As a footnote, let me also point out that their high context - low context model may also be used in subsets of a single culture: most of you will have noticed that the cultures of engineers and sales reps are very different -- engineers are low context; sales reps are high. A military man who once heard me speak about high and low context cultures came up afterward and told me that the model helped him to understand many of the problems of communication that exist between the Pentagon (low context) and the State Department (high context).

Russian culture is on the “high context” end of the continuum. What does that mean? Well, high context cultures emphasize **internal context** over **external structure**. They are based on extensive, integrated informational relationships and networks among family, friends, neighbors, colleagues. These invisible networks are close, personal, and they last over generations. Members of high context cultures not only keep in touch, they keep score -- often over centuries.<sup>6</sup> High context cultures are obsessed by their past and often make an idol of their history. In our relationship with them, *we* cannot ignore *their* history, since they themselves do not view any single event in their personal, communal, professional, or national lives as an isolated event; everything is contextualized by shared history, shared experience, shared kinship, shared friendship, shared enmities, and/or shared prejudices.

Language, literature, history, and culture are important to high context cultures, since they are the tools that build shared context and “locate” the person in the social organism. Meaning comes through context, so *direct* or *precise* communication is not particularly important. High context cultures communicate “between the lines” (especially in those high context cultures where “direct” communication might easily result in imprisonment). So when we say that Russian writers were masters of “writing between the lines,” they really were, and this is what we mean. And it also makes them hard to translate. Translators must provide not just the literal meaning, but also the context.

In high context cultures, written contracts and formal agreements are of lesser importance; the culture itself provides alternative enforcement mechanisms (Russian culture, for example, uses shame, fear, personal friendship, honor, loyalty, and obligation to enforce agreements).

If you are a member of a low context culture, then high-context behavior will strike you as confusing, disorienting, and vaguely threatening. High context communications (and high context cultures love to talk) will strike you as melodramatic, unfocused, and inconclusive at best, and opaque, subjective, and secretive at worst. You always feel that there is something they aren’t telling you, but you don’t know what it is (because you lack knowledge of the relationships, contextual referents, and shared histories that create meaning in high context cultures). Can low context individuals develop knowledge of high context cultures? Sure they can, but it takes a lot of language study, time in country, considerable experience, openness to cultural idiosyncrasies, and very patient, understanding friends.

The key role of language in building context explains why so many people from higher context cultures find ways to learn English and study our history and culture. They are using the basic tools of higher context cultures to understand us. You might ask yourself: if they understand who you are better than you understand who they are, who’s ahead?

Let’s look now at low context cultures. They’re linear, not networked. Relatively speaking, they tend to compartmentalize the private and public, the personal and professional: “*Never*

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<sup>6</sup> Think about the recent Balkan wars -- the Serbs, another high context culture, are still trying to get revenge for the Battle of Kosovo. It happened in 1389.

*mix business with pleasure!*" Low context cultures studiously avoid developing too much "context" ("Don't tell me things I don't need to know," "I don't want to know that"); instead, low context cultures want "objectivity," precise information, and data ("Just the facts, ma'am"). They don't want subjective insinuations, tertiary level interpretations, allusions, or oblique references to shared historical and personal experiences. Low context communication is linear and direct and explicit and literal ("Tell it like it is"; "I always say what I think"). This is a strength, because the interlocutors always know where they are and what they are talking about ("We're all on the same page!") -- assuming that both interlocutors are from low-context cultures. But if you are low context and your interlocutor is high context, he or she will ponder what you are leaving out, and why.

Low context cultures are less interested in history and often don't know their own; instead, low context cultures are almost exclusively present- and future-oriented. They live "*in the moment*" or "*for the moment*"; most of the time they are "*looking ahead*."<sup>7</sup>

If you are a member of a high context culture, low context culture may look superficial and bland to you; it will strike you as unimaginative, ignorant, rude, unsophisticated, and "lowest common denominator" (that's the classic description of the "ugly American").

The general categories of high and low context cultures, sketched here with broad and simplistic brushstrokes, shape the attitudes and perceptions that form our personal and national identities. High and low context cultures view key ideas differently: concepts such as the passage of **time** and the use of **space**; the nature of **power** -- how it should be used and who should use it; the understanding of **cause and effect**; not to mention things like **law, liberty, morality, and truth**. Each culture defines all those things for itself. There is no single, universal definition of **time** and **power** and **cause** and **liberty** and **truth**. And we need to know what *we* mean and what *others* mean when we use these terms in inter-cultural dialogue.

Now, with this high context-low context model in mind, think again about the Cold War. The Cold War was a confrontation between high context Russian and low context American culture. There turn out to be good reasons why East and West seemed chronically unable to "read" each other and to find common ground. Political and economic ideologies were not the only problem; bedrock cultural assumptions and historical identities also played their role.

What continues from the Cold War into today's political climate is American nostalgia for the crisp black-or-white clarity of the Cold War (perhaps I should say "red-or-white clarity"). "The Reds" were the "Evil Empire," and we were the "Good Guys in White Hats." This view defined us and them *vis-à-vis* us. But seeing things in black or white is a reductive low context response to highly nuanced, complex, and layered situations (just as needlessly complicating things is a typical high context response to the straightforward).

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<sup>7</sup> Low context cultures also produced the Protestant work ethic and define themselves by it. High context cultures have a very different attitude toward work and leisure.

Our high-low context model also offers lessons for the war on terrorism in which we find ourselves. Arab culture is **extremely** high context, significantly higher than Russian. If we do not learn to understand that culture (and we should bear in mind that “blowing off” other people’s context or minimizing the importance of cultural factors is a *classic* low context response), if we do not comprehend how they view themselves or how they view us, and why, we cannot advance. Culture really matters.

It’s not my topic for tonight, but I want to add one observation here: low-context culture’s freedom from the extraneous and the contextualized is one reason that American popular culture “exports” so well -- it is an attractive structure, but it is virtually empty of context. Other cultures can easily adopt the structure and fill it with their own context. It looks like American culture on the outside (enough to take in most low-context Americans), but inside it’s filled with something different.

If you have eaten in a McDonald’s in, say, high-context Cairo, you are instantly aware that yes, it mostly looks like McDonald’s, but there are some interesting things on the menu that you won’t find in Lawrence or anywhere else in the US. Americans who go to Cairo and walk into McDonald’s are lulled into a sense of security that they know where are. But they don’t.<sup>8</sup>

## CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL FACTORS

We have posited a high context cultural model for Russia. But that cultural model exists within a historical narrative uniquely its own. What **Big Picture items** should we be aware of here? What **values** that we take for granted are missing in Russian culture, and what values do they have that we do not? Here are a few to consider (this is *not* an exhaustive list):

If we look at Russian history, the first thing we must be struck by is its **historical lack of democratic tradition**. From the beginning Russian political patterns have been consistently authoritarian. We would have to go back to the 12th century to seek even the embryo of a democratic “populist” tradition in the Novgorod *veche*, but that was a regionally limited, feudal institution, and it disappeared.

During the Middle Ages, as England worked its long and painful way beyond the *Magna Carta* (15 June 1215), a necessary step on the long road to the American and French democratic revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Russians were struggling under Tatar occupation and learning firsthand the finer points of Mongol-style administration.

Influenced by hierarchical Byzantine<sup>9</sup> and brutal Mongol administrative styles, as well as a relatively arbitrary legal system, the Russians fell heir to a tradition of endemic corruption so

8 I refer, for example, to the McArabia (yeeeee) chicken sandwich served in Egyptian flatbread with special spices. I haven’t seen it on Sixth Street yet.

9 The OED additionally defines “Byzantine” as a synonym for “complicated; inflexible; underhand.”

vast that it extends into the present day and continues to hamper reform.

Russia has mostly been a country where rulers and ruled were far apart. "Them" and "Us." The mission of "Us" was to withstand the coercive power of "Them" in any way possible, legal or illegal. (The display of naked coercive power by rulers is tediously familiar to Russian and Soviet history.) Russia has not shared the West's particular notion of social contract, of the individual's privileges and responsibilities to the state, or of the state's responsibility to the individual.

One of the reasons for this is Russian culture's long-term experience of "collective identity" and its rejection of Western individualism. Since the Age of Enlightenment, Western Europe has viewed "the collective" as a premodern, primitive, or tribal manifestation -- elemental and potentially dangerous. Western societies are not collectives, but groups of individuals, acting when expedient as a unit, but at times not, and having the right not to do so. The West has codified this particular version of the social contract in various 18<sup>th</sup> century charters, including the French "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" and the American Constitution and Bill of Rights. Our low-context Western culture, based on democracy or capitalism, could not have been emerged without individualism.

Russia, on the other hand, always viewed the growth of Western individualism as psychic fragmentation, a dangerous loss of the "wholeness of being." Such extreme individualism was, from the Russian point of view, dangerous. One aberrant individual could put the entire collective at risk. The rights of the individual can be granted only at the risk of jeopardizing the rights of the collective. In high-context Russia, where collective identity meant survival, individualism as a social/political stance was not encouraged. Low-context America, on the other hand, views the collective as an impenetrable and dangerous "monolith" (a Cold War epithet frequently used to refer to the "monolithic" Soviet Union).

Collectivism uses consensus, not majority rule, for decision making. In the ideal context, the collective talks about the problem until everyone sees it more or less the same way. In an autocratic context, it means that the autocrat and his henchmen may set the consensus, and those few exceptions who refuse to accept it are immediately and ruthlessly excised from the body of the collective -- they are exiled, imprisoned, or liquidated. The Tsar sent them to Siberia, Stalin sent them to the GULag.

Think, for example, of the Cold War stand-offs about dissidents: The Soviets would exile or imprison one dissident, one Sakharov, one Sharansky; the West would respond with moral outrage, seeing the act as an egregious violation of individual human rights. But the Russians could not understand why the West got bent out of shape when they dealt with a single individual who threatened their perceived collective good. They were only removing one harmful element that put the collective at risk.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The West was also shocked when Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who had been living in exile in Vermont, revealed



A series of historical factors contributed to the emergence of this particular world view. Let's survey them.

The East Slavs were late to **Christianize**. Prince Vladimir converted Rus' only in 988, and conversion was an elite phenomenon. Many pagan contents remained embedded in the culture, and there they remain -- to this day.

Moreover, the Christianity Kievan Rus' adopted was Byzantine, not Roman. With Byzantine Christianity, Rus' adopted Byzantine autocracy, Byzantine aesthetics, Byzantine social structures, and Byzantine ethics. The result was a particular medieval psychology with Middle Eastern dominants, North European pagan remnants, and a Christian overlay.

When the Great Schism divided the Eastern and Western churches in 1054, Russia remained with the East. Eastern Christianity privileged grace over law, was far less structured and less doctrinal than Roman Christianity, and promoted a mystical theology.

When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453 and Byzantium ceased to exist, Russia found itself a Christian land, but one that had been cut off culturally from the West by its Eastern brand of Christianity and cut off politically by the Tatar Yoke. It did not belong to the East, but neither did it belong to the West. It was time for major identity reinvention.

In 1511 a Russian monk (Philotheus of Pskov) wrote a letter to the Prince of Muscovy, Vasily III (ca. 1514-1521). Philotheus pointed out that the first Rome fell to heresy, the second Rome (Constantinople) fell to the Turkish barbarians, and Moscow, protector of the Orthodox Christian world, was destined by God to be the third and last Rome.

This famous epistle gave birth to a complex archetypal sequence, lasting into the present, in which Russia perceived its divine mission to be defender and preserver of the One True Faith. (Originally this faith was Eastern Orthodoxy; later this would be subliminally transmuted into the One True Ideology, Socialism.) But back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Russia saw itself as the last bastion of the true faith and heir of the royal mantle of the Byzantine emperors. The West, by contrast, was morally and spiritually bankrupt. This attitude, while possibly good for the late medieval Russian self-image, continued to separate it psychologically from the West. Neither did Russia share in the **classical heritage**, with its traditions of rationalism, formal discourse, the rule of law, and nascent democracy.<sup>11</sup> The heritage of classical antiquity finally came to Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an antiquarian tradition imported with the European Enlightenment, entering Russian culture only on the verge of Russia's first steps into modernity. Russia had no time to assimilate democracy as the Greek city states practiced it, or

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himself in his unflattering comments about the West, "A World Split Apart" (Harvard Address of June 1978).

11 Although the Rus' had access to the works of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and others through the libraries of Byzantium, they ignored them as pagan, and thus heretical and false. They had enough on their plate trying to consolidate Christianity's power over paganism.

philosophy as Plato and Aristotle wrote it, or law as the Romans codified it.

As Western Europe rediscovered antiquity during the the **Renaissance** and experienced the **Protestant Reformation**, Russia remained in the Middle Ages, still maneuvering to throw off the Tatar Yoke. Renaissance and Reformation were evolutionary steps on the Western road from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, crucial to the subsequent emergence of Western individualism, democratic institutions, and the codification of human rights. Russia observed all this from a distance as part of Western European history, but not of their own. Russian Orthodoxy was never "reformed," and the Enlightenment was later "imported" wholesale into Russia by Peter the Great. Change in Russia has historically been "top down," never "bottom up." It's an important point.

When Tsar Peter mandated modernization by *ukaz* at the start of the 18th century, symbolized by the building of his European-style capital, St. Petersburg, he succeeded in superficially "updating" a very small part of the service bureaucracy and the court -- but the vast majority of Russians continued to live as they had lived in previous centuries. Even educated Russians, while they learned to wear frock coats and cut their beards, had not changed their thought patterns overnight or experienced the personal, social, or political dynamic that would allow them to truly internalize the "fruits of European Enlightenment" in a very short time. **External structures**, borrowed from the West, and **internal context provided by Russian experience** created a cultural schizophrenia that subsequently expressed itself through **pro-Slavophile** movements on the one hand, and **pro-Westernizing** movements on the other. Both tendencies are still present in the Russian psyche to this day.

Russian historical experience did not work out a "**rule of law**" on the Western model. Today the lack of legal guarantees and respect for the rule of law has hampered reform of Russian economic and legal systems. In a country always ruled by an autocrat whose arbitrary word is law (whether that autocrat was a Russian Tsar or a Soviet General Secretary is irrelevant), law easily becomes a handmaiden of the state and its ideology.

In the low-context cultures of the Northern Europe and America, power flows from the law. Judges, the president, the police, the city council have power because the law gives it to them (and the law can take it away). In Russia, it was historically the other way around: law flows from power. He who has the power makes the law. We are seeing this in Putin's Russia.

The final point I want to mention in this survey of cultural and historical factors is Russia's historical contempt for the bourgeoisie and its fear of **capitalism**. Russia imported contempt for "the taint of the shop" along with aristocratic Enlightenment culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a fear of the horrors of capitalism as Marx described them motivated Russian radicals to plan a revolution that would enable them to evade capitalism altogether. The Russians feared capitalism would bring with it, besides industrialization and alienation, other things they dreaded: atheism, amorality, materialism, and spiritual bankruptcy.

But socialism and Marxism, like all political and economic theories, arose in their particular historical context. Socialism arose in Western Europe as a response to industrialization, capitalism, and their excesses. But Russia was neither industrialized nor capitalistic. In borrowing the original theory, the Russians took it out of its original context and distorted it. This is one reason why real, Marxist-style socialism never actually existed in the USSR, and when it became obvious to everyone, the Soviet Union came down like a house of cards.

Given these factors (among many others), we should not be surprised that Russia did not develop a “civil society” overnight and proceed directly to democratic capitalism by 1996 or even 2000. And yet many Americans were surprised that it did not happen.

### RUSSIA’S SEARCH FOR NEW IDENTITY

Let me say just a few words now about the directions Russia’s search for a new identity has taken, although I have actually been talking about identity all evening. I said before that *History is prologue*. It is, but our comprehension of history cannot be absolute. Individuals selectively construct their own past out of a huge range of available materials, and so do groups and nations. The interpretation of that constructed past and the meaning of historical events may also change with time. Selectively restructuring the contours of your past has the additional benefit of changing the shape of your perceived future. Since 1991 Russia has been on a quest for a new national identity, and there are many competing voices.

1. Some want a return to traditional identities from before the Revolution: a return to Russian Orthodoxy; emergence of neo-Slavophiles and neo-Westernizers; maybe even a tsar?
2. Some are nostalgic for Communist rule, for glories of empire, for Stalin; for inexpensive luxuries and cheap vacations;
3. Others want to obliterate Soviet identity and restore a pre-1917 status quo: Restoration has meant the return of previously proscribed writers, artists, philosophers, and political thinkers to Russian culture, but restoration has also been physically expressed. An example of this is the newly rebuilt Cathedral of Christ Savior. Funded by popular donations, the cathedral was originally built in Moscow in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a votive church to commemorate Russia's victory over Napoleon. Stalin tore it down in order to replace it with the Palace of Soviets, with a 245-foot statue of Lenin on top. It was never built. The foundation pit became the Moscow public swimming pool (and the pool was reputed to be haunted). After the collapse, the Cathedral was immediately rebuilt, exactly as it was before, on its original site as a symbol -- but of what? a symbol of the restoration of Russian Orthodoxy? of victory (over Napoleon? over Stalin?)? a symbol of national identity? of anti-Soviet sentiments? of Russian culture? all of the above?

4. The search has gone in some odd directions, which include the revival of pagan contents in a significant Neo-pagan Movement and broad interest in occultism and New-Ageism;
5. I will also mention Eurasianism, a belief that Russia's future is tied not to the West, but to its neighbors on the Eurasian land mass, especially in the Middle East; in this scenario the "Atlantic" countries (that would be Europe and America) are cast in the role of "ancient enemies";
6. New forms of Aryanism (with the Russians, instead of the Germans, in the role of the true Aryans); this carries the inevitable fascist baggage;
6. Nationalism and Chauvinism;
7. A few successfully seek the wealth that capitalism brings and many others embrace "biznes," but they do not necessarily embrace democracy or transparency;
8. But most searching reaches for a "New Authoritarianism": Putin is recreating a Soviet imperial model -- not in terms of ideology, but in terms of structure and organization of power. But this is a long-familiar and comfortable pattern.

Let us wish the Russians well in their search.

## CONCLUSION

One could counter my "language-culture-history matter" position with the argument that globalization, the great leveler, will make language, culture, and history moot. In this view of a globalized, homogenized future, leveled by computer technology, everyone will speak English and act like an American. But that's a low-context pipe dream, for two reasons:

First, while low context cultures, like ours, drive globalization -- our high structure - low context orientation makes it possible -- high context cultures have pushed back with surprising intensity, and their pushback is a strong expression of nationalism and cultural and ethnic identity and even separateness. That is certainly the case in Russia. And this is not a small thing, since nationalism and ethnic identity can easily spill over into chauvinism and tie in with right-wing doctrines such as fascism and reactionary modernism.

Second, technology and the new infosphere have *not* globalized us into homogeneity; instead they have magnified national identities a thousand-fold. Many Americans haven't noticed, because they can only access English language sites and there are lots and lots of those, but there is also a rich and immense Russian web out there, and a Chinese web, and Korean, Hindi,

and Arabic webs, each in their own characters. And here's the tricky part: the English web is accessible to many of those Russian, Chinese, Arab, and other users, because they have learned English; but their webs are not readily available to monolingual English speakers. Our educational system has never prioritized the learning of foreign languages, and now we're losing out. Sure, some of these non-English webs offer selected, "special" news reports in English. But if you read only English, you are not getting the same news in the same package and with the same emphases as the native speakers get. We've seen that with Al Jazeera English vs. Al Jazeera Arabic. But the same thing is true of Russian, Chinese, and other news sites. Monolinguals are locked out of what is an exploding part of the web. It is *not* all happening in English. And we are too low context even to notice it.

In wrapping up, I'll return to my original question. *Does Russia still matter?* Well, yes, it does, for a great many cultural, economic, political, and geo-strategic reasons (this last category includes Russia's roles *vis-à-vis* China, Korea, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the war on terrorism). And because Russia matters, our deep knowledge of Russian language, culture, and history also matters, profoundly, as we watch Russia in its process of self-reinvention. But China also matters, and Korea matters, and Iran and Iraq, and Central Asia, too; Egypt matters, Indonesia matters, as do Brazil and Venezuela and Mexico. *And they are all high-context cultures*, and as high context cultures, they may find it more comfortable and productive to communicate with each other than with us. We need to take the initiative and engage them in meaningful communication sooner, not later.

So the challenge we face, -- as students, as faculty, as educated Americans, -- is to prepare ourselves to stay relevant -- not only to our own American culture, but to a world of cultures and languages intensified by instant communication and technology. American culture, like all cultures, also exists in a specific context. We have great national talents and vast potential, and we should use our adaptability, our initiative, our intellectual curiosity, and our power of innovation to engage other cultures and to update our own sense of purpose in the world. And we should set the standard high.