

Soviet America:
Popular Responses to the United States in Post-World War II
Soviet Union

By

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ABSTRACT

KONSTANTIN AVRAMOV: Soviet America: Popular Responses to the United States in post-World War II Soviet Union

In this work, I attempt to explore how average Soviet people reacted to the images and depictions of America presented to them through official and unofficial channels from both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. I argue that average Soviet citizens' view of America was primarily informed by, and closely followed that of official propaganda. Deprived of any coherent information about America, Soviet citizens fell back on pre-World War II and even pre-Revolutionary views of America as an incredibly rich yet socially unjust country dominated by an insatiable pursuit of money. While these views did not remain static they adjusted to social and political events--the changes remained on the outer layers and did not touch the foundations of ordinary Soviet people's image of America. To put it another way, Soviet citizens had two levels of beliefs about America. The first, or the core level, was more static, based mostly on official propaganda. The second, or the outer level, was more flexible and allowed for incorporation of unofficial information about America, including the use of American consumer and cultural products. Moreover, I will show that core Soviet attitudes about America remained roughly the same at least into the mid-eighties, highlighting a high degree of success in the Soviet state's manipulation of information on this issue.

I contend that unofficial information about America available to the Soviet people in form of radio broadcasts, magazines, movies, and encounters with foreign visitors did little to alter their core perceptions of America. Furthermore, when Soviets came in

contact with information about real America through interaction with Western travelers, they frequently chose to ignore it if it challenged their core image of the United States. Instead, many average Soviets used new information in a way that reinforced their already formed beliefs, positive or negative, about America. While outside information and products from the United States served as a proverbial “window to the West,” they also served as a mirror through which the Soviets, denied free access to information, sought to reflect on their own country and its standing in the wider world.

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Introduction

The Cold War has had a lasting impact on Americans' perception of Russians, and on Russians' perceptions of Americans. The threat of nuclear war between the world's two military superpowers, which arose out of the disintegration of their alliance in World War II, colored two generations' sense of their identity and their future.

In the past ten years Cold War scholarship finally began to address the fact that this conflict was not just diplomatic or geo-political in nature. At the time of the Berlin Airlift and the Cuban Missile Crisis, both the Soviet Union and the U.S. also waged battles for the hearts and minds (to use a well-worn phrase) of their own citizens as well as people outside their borders. Various forms of soft power, a term I borrow from Joseph Nye, stood at the center of this struggle.¹ Here, I attempt to explore how average Soviet people reacted to the soft power of the images and depictions of America presented to them through official and unofficial channels from both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.

In this work I will argue that average Soviet citizens' view of America was primarily informed by, and closely followed that of official propaganda. Deprived of any coherent information about America, Soviet citizens fell back on pre-World War II and even pre-Revolutionary views of America as an incredibly rich yet socially unjust country dominated by an insatiable pursuit of money. While these views did not remain

¹ For more on soft power see Joseph Nye, *Soft power : the means to success in world politics* (New York : Public Affairs, 2004).

static they adjusted to social and political events--the changes remained on the outer layers and did not touch the foundations of ordinary Soviet people's image of America. To put it another way, Soviet citizens had two levels of beliefs about America. The first, or the core level, was more static, based mostly on official propaganda. The second, or the outer level, was more flexible and allowed for incorporation of unofficial information about America, including the use of American consumer and cultural products. Moreover, I will show that core Soviet attitudes about the United States remained roughly the same at least into the mid-eighties, highlighting a high degree of success in the Soviet state's manipulation of information on this issue.

I contend that unofficial information about America available to the Soviet people in form of radio broadcasts, magazines, movies, and encounters with foreign visitors did little to alter their core perceptions of America.² It did, however, force Soviet authorities to tailor their domestic propaganda message to adjust for outside information.

Furthermore, when Soviets came in contact with information about real America through interaction with Western travelers, they chose to ignore it if it challenged their core image of the United States. Instead, many average Soviets used new information in a way that reinforced their already formed beliefs, positive or negative, about America. While outside information and products from the United States served as a proverbial "window to the West," they also served as a mirror through which the Soviets, denied free access to information, sought to reflect on their own country and its standing in the wider world.

² Primarily these unofficial images were those constructed by American authorities to "market" to Soviet citizens at the USIA exhibits and via Voice of America and Radio Liberty. At the same time, American movies and books permitted for internal consumption also faced censorship as Soviet authorities used them to support their version of America. Therefore, I use the term "unofficial information" when talking about content not physically created by the Soviet government.

America's status as the most powerful capitalist nation and Soviet Union's enemy in the Cold War made it an appealing symbol for Soviet citizens to use to promote their own messages to the government or the larger Soviet society. Workers and others unhappy with economic situation, marginalized groups (such as religious sectarians and convicts), youth in search of self-identity, and those wishing to showcase their status in society all used the image of America to further their cause. Having little knowledge about the real America, all of them molded America into something that best suited their needs, no matter how far removed from reality. Paulina Bren drew similar conclusions about how political leaders and average people in Czechoslovakia in 1960s to 1980s used images of the West.³

In addition, by the late 1960s Soviet people's positive images of America as a country or their affinity for American cultural and consumer products did not necessarily signal their denunciation of the Soviet system.⁴ This was especially true of the younger Soviets. In other words, Soviet people created an internal hybrid system where socialist and nationalist values co-existed together with their desire for, and use of, popular American cultural and consumer products, areas in which the Soviet system was deficient. In his recent book, William Risch found similar trends in the Ukrainian city of Lviv, which "represented a compromise with the capitalist West and Soviet socialism."⁵

In the past decade, social and cultural histories of the Cold War emerged as some of the more popular areas of study in the historical field. And my attempt to understand

³ Paulina Bren, "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall ... Is the West the Fairest of Them All? Czechoslovak Normalization and Its (Dis)Contents," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9:4 (Fall 2008), 831-854.

⁴ For process of normalization of these practices among the younger generation see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, 160-185.

⁵ William Risch, *The Ukrainian West : culture and the fate of empire in Soviet Lviv*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Soviet reactions to the United States is not new. Alan Ball's excellent study explored the influence of America on the Soviet Union in 1920s and 1990s, concluding that "no other country approached America's influence on Soviet popular culture."⁶ Over many years, sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh has been one of the leading scholars of Soviet society, often touching on frequently conformist nature of Soviet public opinion (in line with my findings). More recently, Denis Kozlov and Karl Loewenstein produced highly informative and insightful works where they showed Soviet public's increased expression of their opinions over a variety of topics through their responses to events such as the XXth Party Congress as well as the Pasternak and Siniavskii–Daniel' affairs.⁷ Donald Raleigh's recent book is an engaging oral history of "Russia's Cold War generation" constructed from interviews with former students of an elite school in the city of Saratov.⁸ Another work by Vladislav Zubok and Eric Shiraev's concluded that "While the government exerted all its strength to compete with the United States, the society was largely neutral and even friendly toward Americans."⁹ Alexei Yurchak and Juliane Furst examined the lives of younger Soviets in late-Stalinist and Brezhnev periods, in part touching on their relationships with the West as a way to form identities that differed from ones envisioned by the government.¹⁰ Thomas Cushman and Sergei Zhuk

⁶ Alan Ball, *Imagining America: influence and images in twentieth-century Russia*. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 113.

⁷ Denis Kozlov, "I Have Not Read, but I Will Say" Soviet Literary Audiences and Changing Ideas of Social Membership, 1958–66," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7: 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 557-597; Karl Loewenstein, "Re-emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech" *EUROPE-ASIA STUDIES* Vol. 58, No. 8, (December 2006), pp. 1329 – 1345.

⁸ Donald Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁹ Eric Shiraev and Vladislav Zubok, *Anti-Americanism in Russia: From Stalin to Putin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 2.

¹⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

investigated Soviet youth's relationship with Western music in the late Soviet period, arguing that consumption of Western music carried elements of counterculture.¹¹

All of these works help us better understand public opinion in post World War II Soviet Union. There are, however, almost no studies that deal specifically with the topic of reactions to the United States by average Soviet people in this period. One exception is Rósa Magnúsdóttir's dissertation on Soviet popular attitudes towards America (1945-1959) where she argued that "The Soviet State Failed To Control Popular Attitudes Toward The United States Of America."¹² Although contrary to Magnúsdóttir's conclusion, I find that the Soviet state did remarkably well in controlling and shaping public attitudes about its Cold War rival.

The post-World War II period of Soviet history has enjoyed increased scholarly attention in the last ten years. Elena Zubkova's pioneering book brought forth a number of social issues such as crime, poverty, demographics, and the interrelationship between the people and the government.¹³ Looking at post-war social dynamics, Donald Filtzer undertook a study of Soviet workers.¹⁴ He argued that due to dire economic conditions following the war Soviet workers could not assert much agency and counter the government's more repressive measures such as forced labor conscription. Meanwhile, Juliane Furst wrote about the younger generation growing up in post-war years. She found that some among the younger post-war generation managed to establish identities

¹¹ Thomas Cushman, *Notes from underground : rock music counterculture in Russia*. (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1995); Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City : The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

¹² Rósa Magnúsdóttir, "Keeping Up Appearances: How The Soviet State Failed To Control Popular Attitudes Toward The United States Of America, 1945-1959" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2008).

¹³ Elena Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo : politika i povsednevnost', 1945-1953* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2000).

¹⁴ Donald Filtzer, *Soviet workers and late Stalinism : labour and the restoration of the Stalinist system after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

separate from the ones dictated to them from the top, largely through consumption of Western music, clothes, and dance.¹⁵

Better relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death led to increased contact between the two countries. Studies by David Caute and Walter Hixson devote a great number of pages to covering this war of cultures. Caute's work provides extensive examples, but little analysis. On the other hand, Hixson is more inclined to suggest that American victory in the battle of cultures eventually led to victory in the Cold War, as did Yale Richmond.¹⁶ Calling her latest book *Moscow prime time : how the Soviet Union built the media empire that lost the cultural Cold War* Kristin Roth-Ey reaches a similar if more limited conclusion.¹⁷ Greater interaction with the world outside of Soviet borders also forced Soviet people to redefine their views on what it meant to be Soviet.¹⁸ Moreover, while Stalin's passing brought a change in leadership and foreign policy it also raised questions of de-Stalinization and its effect on generational interrelationship.¹⁹

¹⁵ Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*.

¹⁶ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: the Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange & The Cold War: Raising The Iron Curtain* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), ix.

¹⁷ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the media empire that lost the cultural Cold War* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation* and Timothy Johnson, *Being Soviet: identity, rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin 1939-1953*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) provide good background on ideas and practices of being a Soviet citizen in the late Stalinist period. Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61:2 (Summer, 2002), 211-252 and Kristin Roth-Ey, "Loose Girls' on the Loose?: Sex, Propaganda and the 1957 Youth Festival," in Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 75-95, offer evidence of change in social perceptions and definitions in the Khrushchev period. For Soviet tourism abroad see Anne Gorsuch, *All this is your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ See Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Also, Jones, Polly. ed. *The dilemmas of de-Stalinization : negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*. (New York : Routledge, 2006). For an excellent discussion on definitions of the term "generation" see Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 16-23.

The social history of the Brezhnev period has also received some recent attention, with scholars reevaluating the long-standing label of stagnation from economics to intellectual climate.²⁰ Christine Evans's recent work continued historical reassessment of the Brezhnev period by showing that social and cultural competition from the West forced Soviet television to make its content more appealing to a wider audience.²¹ David Ruffley's book highlighted growing frustration with Soviet system's inability to meet their aspirations among young Soviet professionals (1960s-1980s). These "Children of Victory," as he called them largely funneled their complaints through official channels such as petitions and letters to authorities.²² Exploring the younger generation of the period, Alexei Yurchak showed how the Soviet government unintentionally "normalized" the use of Western consumer and cultural products among the Soviet youth through mixed messages and portrayal of those who used these products in terms that did not correspond to reality.²³

On the other side, several scholars focused on the response of ordinary Americans to the image of the Soviet Union presented to them by the U.S. government during the Cold War. In his work on American patriotic rituals in the Cold War, Richard Fried showed that despite intense campaigns by certain segments of the American elite, average Americans did not buy into the more exaggerated threats promoted by these

²⁰ See for example, Edwin Bacon and Marc Sandle. eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered*. (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2002).

²¹ Christine Evans, "Song of the Year and Soviet Mass Culture in the 1970s" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 12 : 3 (Summer 2011): 617-645. Also see Thomas Wolfe. *Governing Soviet journalism : the press and the socialist person after Stalin*. (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2005). Other studies showing the need to reexamine the Brezhnev period include collection of essays in Bacon, *Brezhnev Reconsidered*.

²² David Ruffley., *Children of victory : young specialists and the evolution of Soviet society* (Westport : Praeger, 2003).

²³ Yurchak, 160-185. For more indepth discussion of Soviet youth and Western music of the period see Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*.

campaigns.²⁴ Fried also noted the fact that popular consumer culture did more to shape American sense of itself than did patriotic campaigns of the Cold War. David Foglesong argued that, for many of the same people Fried discussed, their focus on reforming the Soviet Union served as a way to soothe internal negative feelings about America, such as the Vietnam War.²⁵ Joanne Sharp's study of the Cold War *Reader's Digest* explored how America's most popular magazine of the time shaped its readers view of America's Cold War enemy.²⁶

A number of studies also addressed the topic of American Cold War propaganda both domestic and abroad. Focusing on Western and Eastern exhibitions and trade fares, Greg Castillo highlighted the importance of consumerism as a Cold War propaganda battleground.²⁷ Laura Belmonte showed the process of "selling the American way," a highly idealistic and sanitized version of the United States, to the world.²⁸ The United States Information Agency and American radio broadcasting has received considerable attention both in the form of memoirs by former staff members as well as professional scholars.²⁹

²⁴ Richard Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁵ David Foglesong, *The American mission and the Evil Empire : the crusade for a Free Russia since 1881* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Nancy Bernhard, *US television news and Cold War propaganda, 1947-1960* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁶ Joanne Sharp, *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

²⁷ Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²⁸ Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American way : U.S. propaganda and the Cold War*. (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

²⁹ See for example, James Critchlow, *Radio Hole-in-the-Head: Radio Liberty- An Insider's Story of Cold War Broadcasting*. (Washington: American University Press, 1995), Arch Puddington. *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: an insider's memoir of Radio Liberty*. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999), Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: an Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR during the Cold War*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007) and Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and The United States Information*

Many of these studies touch on the topic of Soviet people's interaction with the West. They do so, however, in narrow terms, focusing on either a particular period or single issue such as music or propaganda. Therefore, my study aims to combine my research with the micro-studies of other scholars in the field into a coherent narrative detailing reactions to America by average Soviet people from the end of World War II to period right before beginning of Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*.

My use of the words "average" and "regular" in reference to the subjects of my study immediately raises the questions: Who are these average Soviets? What makes them different from the others?

A 1970s MIT study of Soviet listeners to Western broadcasts divided Soviet society into:

Elite groups

Top-level nachalniks [supervisors]
Top-level intelligentsia

Sub-elites

Middle-level nachalniks
Middle-level intellectuals

Large socio-professional groups

Members of the mass professions
Students
Skilled workers
White-collar workers

Labor groups

Rank-and-file workers
Agricultural workers
Unskilled workers
Kolkhoz peasantry³⁰

Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁰ National Archives (College Park, Maryland), hereafter NA 306/A1-1016/44.

Because the MIT study was computational in nature, it required firm delineation of social groups that in reality were much more fluid in composition. Even so, these descriptors represent a reasonable approach to parsing Soviet society.

So which of these people are average?

For purposes of this study, I have focused on responses of those who consumed messages about America, not those who produced them. I selected people who did not play an active role in shaping public opinion, such as intellectuals and government officials responsible for various aspects of propaganda, to give two prominent examples.³¹ Neither high government officials nor prominent dissidents are central to my study; instead, I strive to recover the voices of persons who were remarkable only for their ordinariness.

It is difficult to reconstruct the perspective of the “average Soviet.” Soviet sociology and especially public opinion studies were almost non-existent until the 1960s, and even then quite limited. As a result, there is little scientific sociological information on demographics and how they relate to public opinion. Even the very small number of such Soviet studies that do exist must be used cautiously, as with any public opinion survey data.³² Thus, uncovering public reactions in the Soviet Union is no easy task, especially in relation to sensitive topics such as people’s opinion about the United States, Soviet Union’s chief rival in the Cold War. Formal, published studies of popular opinion using statistically reliable polling techniques certainly did not exist before Khrushchev.

³¹ Attitudes towards America by Soviet intellectuals are discussed in Shlapentokh, Vladimir. *Soviet intellectuals and political power : the post-Stalin era.* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1990). For analysis of America by Soviet experts in political and social studies see Richard Mills. *As Moscow Sees Us: American Politics and Society in the Soviet Mind Set.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³² See for example, George Bishop, *The illusion of public opinion : fact and artifact in American public opinion polls.* (Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

However, Soviet authorities were intensely interested in the "popular mood" and gathered information about rumors, complaints, etc.³³ Various state administrative and security agencies, such as the local Ispolkoms (executive committees) and the NKVD (State security agency 1934-1954), acted as the main sources of gauging how the Soviet people felt about this or that particular topic. However, the accuracy of such reports was not guaranteed, given that local authorities had their own agendas in suppressing information that placed them in an unflattering light to higher authorities, or over-exaggerating facts in order to force action from the top.

Understanding the importance of public opinion, the Soviet government did allow some social scientists to conduct public opinion studies starting in the late 1950s.

Komsomolskaya Pravda, a newspaper intended for a younger audience, even began a public opinion section based on readers' letters.³⁴ The column, however, was closed down in late 1960s under a more politically conservative Leonid Brezhnev. There were sociological studies done in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of these, however, often suffered from the Soviet public's distrust of any type of official questionnaires.³⁵ Therefore, people often told the researchers what they thought the official line was, instead of their real opinion.³⁶

That is not to say that Soviet Union lacked quality studies in public opinion. Notably, Boris Grushin and his team produced excellent studies in the area.³⁷ From time to time, Soviet security organs such as the KGB would produce or commission public

³³ See for example Elena Zubkova, "Mir Mnenii Sovetskogo Cheloveka 1945-1948 Gody: Po Materialam TSK VKP(B)" *Otechestvennaia Istorii*; September (1998), Issue 4, p. 99-108.

³⁴ Boris Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale oprosov obshchestvennogo mneniia: ocherki massovogo soznaniia rossiian vremen Khrushcheva, Brezhneva, Gorbacheva i El'tsina v 4-kh knigakh*. (Moskva : Progress-Traditsiia, 2001), 45-49.

³⁵ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 785.

³⁶ Gorshkov, M.K. *Obshchestvenoe Mnenie*. (Moskva: Politizdat, 1988), 304.

³⁷ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*.

opinion studies.³⁸ Unfortunately, KGB (now FSB) archives are currently closed to most researchers. Even if we had better access to these archives, it would not have a significant impact on the accuracy of Soviet public opinion and reactions to the United States. Judging from several available reports, KGB officials tended to view any expression of affinity for the West as harmful and anti-Soviet. And as I make clear in this work, many average people did not share the KGB's view of such practices. On the positive side, they are useful for their factual information such as examples of people's statements about America and the West.

Interviews are an obvious choice as a source. Time, however, becomes a factor. Even if we are to take 1985, the cut-off year of my study, that is still a quarter century after the fact. And as several scholars have shown, memory and remembrance are dynamic forces that do not always reflect reality of the time in question.³⁹ Others noted the fact that during interviews, even after the fall of the Soviet Union, Soviet citizens are still reluctant to talk frankly about their past, especially if the interview is conducted by a foreign specialist.⁴⁰ As a result, after careful consideration I decided not to make interviews conducted more than five years after the period in question a significant part of my source material.⁴¹ I do, however, make extensive use of interviews conducted

³⁸ See for example "Analiticheskaia spravka KGB SSSR o kharaktere i prichinakh negativnykh proiavlenii sredi uchaisheisia i studen'cheskoi molodezhi" *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, No. 1, 1994, 195-207 and Elena Bashkirova. "The Foreign Radio Audience in the USSR During the Cold War: An Internal Perspective" in Ross Johnson and Parta, Eugene, eds., *Cold War broadcasting: impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe : a collection of studies and documents*. (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 103-120.

³⁹ For example, James Wertsch suggests that collective memory is always shifting in response to political and cultural forces; see *Voices of collective remembering*. (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Stephen Bittner showed that many Soviet intellectuals recollections about the Thaw period did not necessarily correspond to their views at the time.

⁴⁰ Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson and Anna Rotkirch. eds., *On living through Soviet Russia*. (New York : Routledge, 2004), 7-9.

⁴¹ One notable exception is Donald Raleigh. ed., *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their lives*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) and his follow up his book *Baby*

shortly after interviewees left the Soviet Union, such as the Harvard Project and a several studies by the United States Information Agency.

A number of foreign visitors visited the Soviet Union in the period of my study, especially following cultural and academic exchanges that began in the late 1950s. Scores of scholars, students, professionals, officials, journalists and ordinary tourists sought to experience the other great super-power of the Cold War first-hand. And given the mystique that surrounded the Soviet Union, many Western observers reflected on their experience in form of a book shortly after their return. We must take into account that Westerners saw the Soviet Union through their own prism, one colored by the Cold War, and through infinite prisms of their own experiences and personalities. Consequently, their observations concerning what Soviet citizens thought must be regarded with great caution, and due attention to the authors' own biases. Even though the KGB collections remained inaccessible to me, a number of other archives proved a treasure trove of information. Because the Soviet government did not have a centralized public opinion department I focused on three Russian archives: State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI).

GARF holds a large collection of documents from Soviet agencies that had direct contact with American citizens and institutions. These included records of agencies such as *Inturist* (collection 9612) that was responsible for hosting foreign tourists, as well as various agencies that sent specialists (such as scientists and doctors) to seminars in the U.S. (collection 8009). GARF also houses substantial materials on Soviet-American

Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Although I do not want to suggest that oral histories are not a valuable historical source; they certainly are, just not in trying to ascertain popular opinion in the past.

relations, including, for example, letters from regular Soviet citizens related to the Khrushchev-Eisenhower meetings (collection 5446).

My research at the RGASPI archive focused on two major areas. The first included records of the Soviet Propaganda Department of the Central Committee (1945-1956) (collections 125, 132). The second area housed archives of various Soviet newspapers such as the ideological *Komunist* and the rural *Sel'skaia zhizn'*, many of which contained letters to the editor, including a number concerning the United States. My RGANI archive research largely dealt with the records of the Soviet Propaganda Department of the Central Committee (1958-) that was responsible for directing public opinion based on instructions from the central government (collection 5, op. 33), as well as various documents from other governmental departments such as the KGB from the post-Stalin period (1960s – 1980s) (collection 89).

American exhibitions in the Soviet Union constituted another area of interest for my project. Throughout the Cold War, the United States Information Agency, created in the mid-1950s to promote U.S. national interests abroad, hosted a number of exhibitions in the Soviet Union. USIA exhibitions covered areas from agriculture to plastics, from sports equipment to space exploration. While these exhibitions promoted a positive image of America in the Soviet Union, they also functioned as barometers of Soviet public opinion toward the United States. The USIA archives (National Archives - College Park, MD) contain a wealth of information on Soviet public reactions to the U.S. USIA staffers collected reactions of Soviet citizens attending these exhibitions, in official Comment Books, voluntary questionnaires, and recollections of interactions with Soviet

citizens by American exhibition guides. In many cases, these responses were organized and printed in forms of research reports.

As we have seen, getting a coherent picture of Soviet responses to the United States during the Cold War requires piecing together information from a wide array of sources. This method has its drawbacks such as not being rooted in quantitative methods; the sources provide few opportunities to determine what percentage of the Soviet population held a particular view.⁴² At the same time, this source jigsaw puzzle allows us to study the issue from many angles, thus painting a much wider and intricate picture.

My study consists of three chapters. The first chapter examines official Soviet images of the United States from newspapers, magazine articles, books, films and the like, and how they were constructed. Some high-quality scholarship already exists on official Soviet images of America, particularly, works of Frederick Barghoorn, Jonathan Becker, Eric Shiraev, Vladislav Zubok, Yale Richmond, and Kevin McKenna. For the most part, however, these works focus on specific events or timeframes and do not deal with the broader picture. In this chapter I survey a broad range of Russian publications, but particularly focus on the popular Soviet magazines *Ogonek* and *Krokodil*. More importantly, in discussing official Soviet images of America I include new sources from the Soviet Department of Propaganda (RGANI and RGASPI), which speak to the goals Soviet officials pursued in constructing propaganda regarding America.

The second chapter focuses on images that were available to average Soviet citizens from sources other than their government. These included Western radio broadcasts, magazines, movies, and American exhibitions put on by the United States

⁴² Vladimir Shlapentokh provided a good critique of available sources for the study of Soviet public opinion in *Soviet public opinion and ideology : mythology and pragmatism in interaction*. (New York : Praeger, 1986), xvii-xx.

Information agency starting with the 1959 Moscow exhibition. I devote large sections of the chapter to discussion of American radio broadcasts, especially the Voice of America and American exhibitions. Radio because it was by far the biggest source of unofficial information available to the average Soviet person and exhibitions because they were the only chance for Soviets to come face to face with America, or at least America that Americans wanted the Soviets to see.

The third and final chapter deals with Soviet youth. In most years of the post World War II Soviet period, young people engaged with images and ideas of the West more intensely than adults, because the idea of the West had close ties to their search for self identity. Therefore, I devoted a separate chapter to exploring this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 1: Informing the Masses: Official Propaganda and Public Reaction to America

Introduction

Before we can discuss public perceptions and reactions to America in the Soviet Union we must first understand the sources of information that were available to the Soviet public. For most Soviet citizens, state media in the form of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television were their main information resource. Having little opportunity to travel abroad, they especially learned about international topics from official sources. Therefore, we must form a clear picture of the official image of the United States presented to its citizens by the Soviet government to provide a proper

context for discussion of public reaction to those messages.

In this chapter, the source base rests first upon popular magazines, especially the satirical *Krokodil* and the weekly *Ogonek*. Both magazines had large numbers of readers and were designed for non-specialized audiences, making them ideal for study of official propaganda meant for broad popular consumption.¹ State newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* presented starkly-drawn images of the United States; several fine scholarly studies drawing upon them have already been published. A number of foreign journalists, government officials and tourists writing about their time in the Soviet Union provided detailed analysis and observation of official Soviet propaganda. Most foreigners viewed the Soviet Union through a different prism, shaped by their own worldview that was quite different from that of an average Soviet citizen. Consequently, they sometimes misunderstood or misrepresented official Soviet representations of the United States. To overcome their bias, I have tried to verify their depictions by comparison to other sources. In addition, unpublished documents from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) from the Soviet propaganda department² offer an inside look at the shaping of official propaganda about the United States. Still more revealing are the collections of uncensored and unsolicited letters written by Soviet citizens to Soviet leadership regarding America, on occasions such as Nikita Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the United States and his meeting with John F. Kennedy, the Bay of Pigs and U2 incidents, as well as Richard Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union in the early 1970s. There

¹ For a view of America as presented by Soviet scholars see Richard Mills. *As Moscow Sees Us: American Politics and Society in the Soviet Mind Set*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

² Its official name was Department of Propaganda and Agitation (Otdel Propagandy i agitatsii). It was part of the Central Committee Secretariat.

is little doubt about authenticity of feelings expressed in the letters, considering the fact that vast majority of these were unsolicited. However, the largest percentage of the letters came from retirees, and therefore only represent a specific demographic of Soviet population. At the same time, however, the views in retirees' letters in many ways resemble the feelings of other population segments.³ For the most part, I do not discuss the topic of Soviet youth, part of Soviet population most effected by ideas and images of the West, reserving them for a separate chapter on the subject. Other collections contain people's letters to various newspapers such as official ideological publication *Kommunist* and popular rural paper Rural Life (*Sel'skaia zhizn'*) some of which touch on Soviet views of America.

From the very beginning of the Soviet state official propaganda regarding the United States was largely based on the Marxist idea of a two-class world where one class, the capitalists, ruled over and exploited the other, the working class. Both countries emerged as leading representatives of their respective economic and social systems after World War II, and as Cold War tensions between them grew, so did Soviet propaganda about America. The tone of propaganda became more hostile and attacks on America more frequent, yet fundamental ideas stayed the same until at least the mid 1980s.

The term propaganda often carries a negative connotation, largely due to its association with German propaganda efforts in World War I, World War II, and Soviet media during the Cold War. There is no intent on my part here to load the term with any of these associations. Here I follow Edward Bernays, one of the founders of American

³ Rósa Magnúsdóttir discusses this topic in some detail - Magnúsdóttir, 229-232. She largely relies on published letters from one book: *Face to Face with America: The Story of N.S. Khrushchov's Visit to the U.S.A. September 15-27, 1959* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publ. House, 1960). However, they do tend to resemble archival holdings in many ways.

public relations following World War I, who defined propaganda neutrally as simple efforts by one group or the other to sway the public to a specific point of view.⁴ Therefore, here I use the term propaganda to signify efforts to influence public opinion on the part of the Soviet, or other, governments, without endorsing or condemning such efforts. Furthermore, there is no intention on my part to label official Soviet depictions of America as either right or wrong, as much of it is a matter of perspective and such discussion is outside the scope of this study. I do so only when the information presented in official Soviet sources was factually incorrect.

Official propaganda did not remain static over time, and while keeping the core messages, it used different topics to drive the point home. For example, in the post-World War II Stalin period, official Soviet publications used the fear of war to portray America as not only profiting from world conflicts but also employing particularly barbaric methods to achieve their goals. The Khrushchev period saw use of Soviet victories in the space race to underscore superiority of the Soviet system. In the Brezhnev years, Soviet propaganda employed a combination of the two in order to counter the growing gap in consumer economics. Tony Shaw schematized cogently, specifically in regard to propaganda in Soviet cinema, this periodization: “1946-1953 (hard-line propaganda); 1953-1978 (the beginning and development of soft propaganda); 1978-1986 (a return to harder propaganda, but a return that bears hallmarks of softer times)”.⁵

The Soviet government had great success in convincing the population to believe the official image of the United States. And for the most part, having little outside

⁴ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*. (New York : H. Liveright, 1928), 21-24.

⁵ Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 40.

information about the United States, a majority of the Soviet population saw America much in the same way as it was presented in the Soviet media. Largely this was a reflection of the lack of outside information about the United States and on international issues in general. When people's view of the United States diverged from the official line, it not so much signaled their admiration for America, although this played a part, as it expressed their disapproval of the situation inside the country, usually relating to the Soviet standard of living. To put it another way, having little outside information about America, Soviet people created their own vision of America-- one that served as a counterweight to much of what they saw wrong with their own country. In this chapter I frequently use phrases such as "most Soviets" or "many Soviets" while citing one or two examples. It is certainly not my intent to pass off singular instances as evidence of larger trends, or lump all of Soviet people into one singular whole. In fact, former Soviet sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh stressed extreme diversity in Soviet population's attitudes towards the West.⁶ However, sociological studies as we understand them today largely did not exist in the Soviet Union until the 1960s. Even then they were subject to heavy state censorship. As a result, there are very few empirical studies of Soviet public opinion, with the notable exception of Boris Grushin's research. Thus, I am not able to provide statistical evidence for the prevalence of a particular view, and instead I need to rely upon the frequency with which similar expressions appear in the sources available to me.

⁶ Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 143.

Constructing the capitalist: official propaganda before World War II

In the period prior to 1945, we see the emergence of official depictions and popular views of America that would last until the final years of the Soviet Union. For example, American unemployment, racism, lack of social benefits and warmongering were all featured in official Soviet narrative about America shortly after the 1917 Revolution.⁷ Many of these themes had roots going back to decades preceding the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the focus here will be on the Soviet period.

Through out late 19th and into the 20th centuries many people throughout the world saw America as a land of opportunity where old notions about the world crumbled, giving way to new modernist horizons, especially in the fields of industry and technology. Among intellectuals in Europe and elsewhere, “by the 1920s”, wrote Russian historian Alan Ball, “America had become the modernist nation par excellence.”⁸

In the early years of the Soviet state, America did not occupy as prominent a spot in official propaganda nor in the public mind as it would during the Cold War. Despite limited American intervention in the Russian Civil War in 1919, Soviet media did not usually single America out for individual denunciation. Instead, America was frequently lumped together with other capitalist countries into a single hostile bloc that threatened the Soviet state.⁹ For the young Soviet country, however, America contained qualities to

⁷ Kevin McKenna, *All the views fit to print : changing images of the U.S. in Pravda political cartoons, 1917-1991*. (New York : Peter Lang, 2001), 39-44.

⁸ Ball, 9.

⁹ McKenna, 27.

be emulated, despite its capitalist economic system. Soviet leaders and media frequently held up America as an illustration of industrial efficiency exemplified by the scientific time management system of Taylorism and the assembly lines at the Ford plants.¹⁰

Concurrently, while marveling at American technological achievements such as the Brooklyn Bridge, some of those Soviets who visited America noted the darker side of America progress. The Soviet poet and propagandist Vladimir Mayakovsky, during his brief visit to New York in 1920s, wrote memorably about America's obsession with commercial pursuits and shallowness of its spiritual life.

I HATE NEW YORK ON SUNDAYS: around ten o'clock, wearing only purple cloth, a clerk raises his curtain. Without putting on pants, he sits near a window with a two-pound, hundred-page edition of the *World* or *The Times*. Then he reads poetic and illustrious section of the department store advertisements (that constitute the extent of the American worldview.) After the advertisements, he looks at the robbery and murder section.¹¹

Another leading Soviet poet, Sergei Esenin, reacted similar to his American experience in the 1920s: "Internally, America does not believe in god. There is no time for such nonsense."¹²

Despite the appearance of such dismissive statements about the United States, the rarity of hostile official propaganda, the lack of any direct confrontation between the two countries, and American aid to the Soviet Union during a severe famine in the early 1920s combined to produce a relatively positive image of America in Soviet sources of the period. American relief efforts in the 1920s, "reinforced the pre-existing image of "golden America" as a land of magical abundance. It also led to a broader use of the

¹⁰ For a good discussion of Soviet Union and American industrial planning, see Thomas Hughes. *American genesis : a century of invention and technological enthusiasm, 1870-1970*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) – particularly Chapter 6. Also see Alan Ball – Chapter 1.

¹¹ Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Sobranie Sochinenii v Shesti Tomah*, Tom 3 (Moskva: Pravda, 1973), 224-225.

¹² Sergei Esenin, *Sobranie Sochinenii v Peti Tomakh*, Tom 4. (Moskva: Gosudarstvenoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvenoi literatury, 1962), 262.

term *Amerikanizm* to refer to a fast-paced, hard-working ethos,” concluded historian David Foglesong.¹³ At the same time, Soviet officials and other visitors to America often noted appalling exploitation and racism, themes noted by Russian visitors prior to 1917.¹⁴

The 1920s saw relatively few official treatments of individual Americans in the Soviet media. When they did appear it was often in a humorous light. 1924 Soviet silent film *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of Bolsheviks* (*Neobychnyye priklyucheniya mistera Vesta v strane bolshevikov*) featured a rich American businessman (Mr. West) traveling to Moscow. At first, Mr. West is apprehensive about the Soviet Union, his perceptions driven by preconceived notions that the country is full of crime and disorder. Eventually, after a number of comical adventures, Mr. West learns that Soviets are good and hospitable people. Overall, the movie presented Americans as rich and spoiled by luxury (Mr. West came with a servant), but not bad people at heart.

Considering the still low literacy rates and general preoccupation with post Civil War reconstruction, it is unlikely that too many average Soviet people read poetry and other books largely targeted at the more educated crowd. The average Soviets’ view of America was shaped by official propaganda (lectures and printed media – largely posters), contact with Americans and America goods during famine relief, and growing number of American cars and tractors on Soviet streets and fields.¹⁵ As a result, they saw America as a wealthy country, a leader in industrial and technological areas, yet suffering from exploitation and racism. According to Alan Ball, many Soviet peasants of the period viewed America largely through the “cult” of Ford and attributed fantastic and almost magical qualities to American technical progress after seeing American tractors in

¹³ Foglesong, 65.

¹⁴ Ball, 39.

¹⁵ McKenna, 29-31. Ball, Chapter 2.

the fields.¹⁶ At the same time, pointed out popular magazine *Krokodil*, American business acumen was not always used for the most humane purposes (see Illustration 1).



“Americans, being industrious people, use the smoke from a peace-pipe to power their military factories...” (taken from a German satire magazine) *Krokodil* 1924 #26 p.14 (Illustration 1)

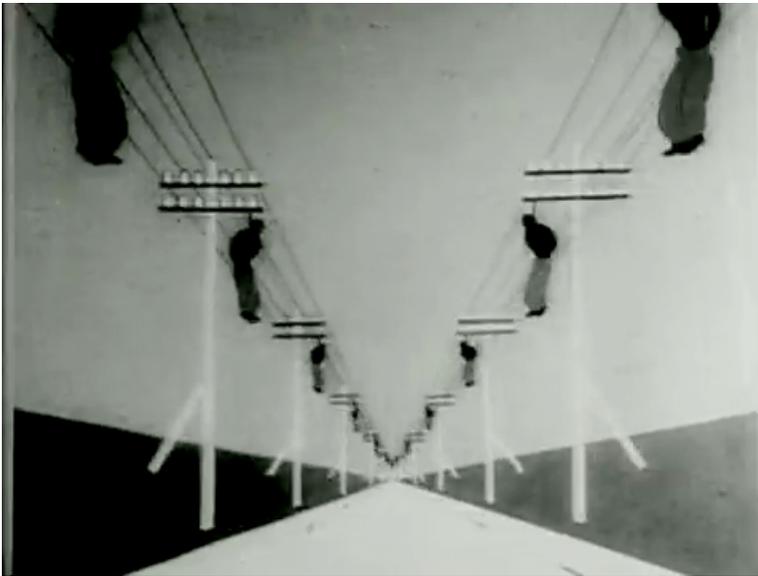
The start of the Soviet industrialization effort in the early 1930s brought a number of American businessmen, engineers, and other specialists into the country, creating positive personal contacts between Soviet and American people.¹⁷ Official propaganda, however, began to present America in a more negative light in order to show superiority of the Soviet system. Following Marxist ideology that divided the world into two classes, the capitalists and proletariat, the exploiters and the exploited, Soviet media continued to

¹⁶ Ibid, 58-59.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of American-Soviet business and social relations from the period please see Norman Saul, *Friends or Foes? The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921–1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006). Also see, Thomas Hughes, “How America helped build the Soviet machine.” *American Heritage* 39:8 (December 1988), 56; Ball, Chapter 4; Kurt Schultz, “Building the “Soviet Detroit”: The Construction of the Nizhnii-Novgorod Automobile Factory, 1927-1932,” *Slavic Review* 49:2 (Summer, 1990), 200-212.

portray America as a country of the moneyed elite and unemployed and oppressed working class.

Specifically, Soviet propaganda focused on the issue of racism, one of the most visible features of inequality in American society. *Black and White (Chernoe i Beloe)*, a Soviet animated cartoon from 1933, showed African Americans in a virtual state of slavery, beaten and lynched by their white masters (see Illustration 2). 1936 movie *Circus (Tsyрк)* told the story of Marion Dixon, a white American circus performer and a mother of an interracial child, who escapes racial discrimination at home and comes to perform in Moscow circus. Once in the Soviet Union she discovers that Soviet people do not care about the color of her baby's skin, highlighting the difference between the two countries and two social and economic systems.



American road - *Black and White (Chernoe I Beloe)* – 1933 (Illustration 2)

In addition, the Soviet press began to compare capitalist and communist systems by contrasting Soviet industrial growth of the 1930s with long unemployment lines of America in the midst of the Great Depression. Again Soviet media showed America as a

country of astounding inequality where a few got rich at the expense of the many.

“Soviet propaganda [of the 1930s] portrayed America as a plutocracy ruled by a handful of ruthless, selfish, and wasteful monopolists, who held in poverty the vast majority of the population. It dilated on unemployment and exploitation in the United States,” wrote Frederick Barghoorn, American scholar of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Writing about popular Soviet satire magazine *Krokodil*, William Nelson pointed out that pre-World War II *Krokodil* depicted the United States “as a nation of dollar-mad imperialists with a moribund economic system and a gangster culture.”¹⁹

In 1937, Ilya Ilf and Evgeni Petrov, two of the most popular Soviet comedic writers, published a book detailing their recent trip through the United States. Titled *One-Storyed²⁰ America (Odnoretazhnaya Amerika)*, the book described the United States as a country where commercial spirit ruled the land:

Advertisements have penetrated American life to such an extent that, if upon waking up one morning Americans were to find all advertisements gone, the majority of them would be in the most desperate of plights. They would not know:

What cigarettes to smoke?

In what store to buy ready-made clothes?

Which drink best quenches thirst – Coca-Cola or ginger ale?

Which whisky to drink – White Horse or Johnny Walker?

Which gasoline to buy – Shell or Standard Oil?

Which god to worship – Baptist or Presbyterian?²¹

At the same time the writers praised the high American living standards, “Comfort in America is not a sign of extravagance. It is standard and accessible,” they wrote.²²

As a result, by the start of World War II, average Soviet citizens developed a

¹⁸ Frederick Barghoorn, *The Soviet image of the United States: A Study of Distortion*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 21-22. Barghoorn's book contains both his first hand experiences, which I will use as a primary source, and scholarly material that will serve as a secondary source.

¹⁹ William Nelson, *Out of the Crocodile's Mouth: Russian Cartoons About the United States From "Krokodil", Moscow's Humor Magazine*. (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1949), 12.

²⁰ Referring to prevalence of one-story houses in American landscape.

²¹ Ilya Ilf and Evgeni Petrov, *Odnoretazhnaya Amerika* (Moskva: Tekst, 2003), 121.

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

highly polarized picture of the United States. On the one hand there was America - world leader in technology and industry, and America - land of personal wealth and multitude of consumer conveniences. On the other, there was America of financial inequality, racism, crime, and the all-pervasive obsession with profit where a few fabulously rich men called the shots for the whole country. This perception would lie at the foundation of Soviet propaganda about America, and the Soviet people's view of the United States, until the mid-1980s.

Overall, prior to World War II the Soviet media showed America as a capitalist country with all of the problems inherent to capitalist economic system according to Marxist theory: unemployment, exploitation, racism, overproduction, and lack of social services. These images, however, did not present America as an evil or overly militaristic country bent on world domination, as was the case during the Cold War period. At the same time, due to lack of serious geo-political friction between the two countries, America did not feature as prominently in the Soviet mass media as it would in post-war years.

Both Lenin and Stalin admired American economic practicality and industrial ingenuity.²³ This, coupled with American aid during famines of the early 1920s and heavy American involvement in Soviet industrial development of the 1930s, established America as a country of inequality and racism but also as a country of generosity and of admirable entrepreneurship rooted in practicality of production. The two countries' wartime alliance, centered on the American Lend-Lease program that supplied the Soviet

²³ A. V. Fateev, *Obraz vraga v sovetskoj propagande. 1945-1954 gg.* (Moskva: RAN, 1999). Available at - <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev5.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

Union with much needed food products and military hardware, further cemented America's status as a friendly, if capitalist, nation in the eyes of most Soviets.

Brief Friend-New Enemy: official propaganda after World War II

The period immediately following World War II saw a major change in the way the Soviet media portrayed the United States.²⁴ With the start of the Cold War in the late 1940s,²⁵ Soviet media had an up-hill challenge in trying to persuade Soviet people that its recent ally was in fact now its biggest and most dangerous enemy. It was no surprise then that the sudden shift in the Soviet relationship with America caused confusion, as Soviet people were not clear on how to interpret the countries' past and present relationships. For example, in late 1947, during the height of the anti-American campaign, Soviet authorities from various regions of the country reported that questions about the rapid change in relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union featured most prominently on the minds of Soviet citizens. "What caused the radical change in American policy towards the USSR?" was the most common.²⁶

One strategy that Soviet propaganda institutions pursued to address people's concerns was diminishing the American contribution to the war effort. For example, in describing the wartime alliance, Soviet textbooks published in the late 1940s made no

²⁴ For a brief overview of Soviet propaganda about the West during World War II see Timothy Johnson, *Being Soviet* – Chapter 2.

²⁵ The beginnings of the Cold War are beyond the scope of this paper. I will however mention a few major issues at the center of the post war conflict between the Soviet Union and America. These included: mutual misunderstanding of Soviet post-war security concerns and the American Marshall Plan. See John Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) and Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and The Cold War, 1945-1996* (New York: McGraw-Hill College, 1996) for good overviews of the subject.

²⁶ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter RGASPI f.17, op.125, d. 515 l.24, f.17, op.125, d. 517 l.34.

mention of the German war against Britain or the U.S. war against Japan in the Pacific. It claimed that the Soviet Union singlehandedly saved itself and its allies.²⁷ Such portrayals played on the already existing perceptions among the Soviet leaders and citizens that America delayed the opening of the second front in order to weaken the Soviet Union. The Soviet people sometimes sarcastically referred to American Spam as the “second front”.²⁸

Soviet authorities went so far as to suggest that America and its European allies were responsible for the outbreak of the war in the first place. In a 1948 speech before the writers of the Soviet propaganda department, Party ideologist Boris Ponomarev laid out the official version of pre-war events:

In your propaganda you must make clear, taking the current international situation into account, that it was the ruling circles of the US, England, France, and especially American monopolies, that were responsible for the start of World War II by arming Hitler’s Germany.²⁹

The message that the United States contributed to the rise of Nazi Germany continued well into the early fifties.³⁰

In 1951, Soviet Propaganda Department instructed regional party officials to discuss Allies involvement in World War II in the following way: At the end of World War II it has become clear that America and England entered the war not to defeat Nazism but to “weaken their imperialist competitors, to dominate their economies and markets.”³¹ In other words, besides letting the Soviet Union do most of the fighting, America’s motives for entering the war were far from noble.

²⁷ Richard Hilton, *Military Attache in Moscow*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), 51-52.

²⁸ Barghoorn, 237.

²⁹ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter GARF f. 8581 op. 2 d. 203.

³⁰ Harrison Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 175-176.

³¹ RGASPI f.17, op.132, d.467, l.76.

Furthermore, America hoped to profit from the post-war devastation. In his study of Soviet propaganda, Fredrick Barghoorn, described official Soviet depiction of post-war American foreign policy in this way:

It [America] abandoned its prewar isolationist foreign policy and switched to a drive for world domination. Its grandiose aspirations have been motivated by a combination of factors including a desire to utilize excess production capacity accumulated during World War II, lust for super-profits, and hatred and fear of the increased power and prestige of the “socialist” camp headed by Russia.³²

The Marshall Plan, American project to aid Western European post-war reconstruction, became one of the most popular items for attack in the Soviet media. Coupled with announcement of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 of American financial and military help to Greece and Turkey in their fight against communist forces, the Marshall Plan signaled a new phase in the Cold War.

American intentions in offering aid to Greece, Turkey, and Western Europe became the chief focus of Soviet propaganda on the subject. Late 1947 saw a sharp increase in anti-American material in the Soviet media, accusing America of taking advantage of war-devastated Western Europe. The Soviets painted American offers of aid as efforts to enchain Western Europe and others through so-called “dollar diplomacy”. Soviet depiction of the Truman-Marshall Plan, as they called it, claimed that American aid was simply a smoke screen to ensnare war-ravaged countries in debt that could be used later to extract economic concessions by unloading overproduced American goods on European markets.³³ The Marshall Plan is “nothing else but a tool of

³² Barghoorn, 180.

³³ N. I. Nikolaeva, “Novyi obraz SShA. Izmeneniia v sovetskoi politike i propagande v 1947-48 gg.,” *Nauchnye publikatsii Saratovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Novoi i noveishaia istoriia*. Vyp. 20. Here I use an electronic version of the article available at - http://www.sgu.ru/faculties/historical/sc.publication/historynewtime/new_history_20/21.php. Accessed April 22, 2012.

American imperialism for economic and political enslavement of Western Europe,” explained ideological magazine *Komunist* in its December, 1948 issue.³⁴

The satirical magazine *Krokodil* summarized the issue in a 1947 poem titled “The Savior of Europe”:

The Marshall Plan helped Europe so much
that in the end
such “help” will see the death of Europe³⁵

The theme continued well into the early 1950s. An American tourist visiting the Soviet Union in 1953 noted the following skit in Kharkov (Ukraine) circus: “Two clowns came out with a long rubber cow labeled, “U.S.A.” “This is the longest cow in the world,” they explained. “It feeds in Western Europe and gives milk in the United States.””³⁶

The message about the ulterior motives behind American aid served a dual role. It portrayed the United States as a selfish and a greedy country in its post-war foreign policy. At the same time it attempted to undermine the value of American help to the Soviet Union in the form of Lend-Lease program that supplied the Soviet Union with many consumer and military goods. American help during the war was still fresh in the minds of the Soviet people; in fact many still used some of the American Lend-Lease items.³⁷ Therefore, Soviet propaganda sought to re-characterize Soviet people’s associations about Lend-Lease, suggesting that it was an inherently selfish act on part of the United States.

To answer the question of why the United States took such an aggressive stance towards the Soviet Union following World War II, Soviet propaganda described America

³⁴ RGASPI f. 599 op.1 d. 8 l. 103.

³⁵ Quoted in N. I. Nikolaeva.

³⁶ Marshall McDuffie, *The Red Carpet: 10,000 Miles Through Russia on a Visa from Khrushchev*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1955), 315.

³⁷ Barghoorn, 236.

as a country that could survive only on war. Business monopolies controlled American foreign policy and sought any excuse to start a war as way to earn generous profits. Tensions with the Soviet Union resulted in increased military spending, thus lining the pockets of American business monopolies.

The Korean War was frequently used as an example of America's reliance on war as a means for economic gain. In the early 1950s, the magazine *Komunist*, in answering readers' letters, stated that the American economy is sustained only through war. It pointed out that after the Great Depression America recovered only because of World War II, and now Americans started the Korean War in order to prop up their economy.³⁸ In 1951, the Soviet Propaganda Department instructed officials to inform people in their districts that American corporations profited handsomely from World War II and were now hoping to do the same in Korea.³⁹

Recent war provided for a smooth propaganda transition. Soviet propaganda quickly eased America into the role previously occupied by Nazi Germany--that of a bloodthirsty war machine seeking world domination. All of the hatred stored in the hearts of the Soviet people for the Nazis was now to be directed at the new enemy.

Many of the characterizations and images previously reserved for the Nazis were now used to describe America. One 1948 issue of *Krokodil* featured a cartoon comparing Voice of America to Nazi propaganda, while 1951 issue suggested Americans were recruiting and arming former Nazis in West Germany (see Illustration 3).⁴⁰ Newspaper articles frequently pointed out similarities between American and Nazi foreign policy. Other publications suggested that along with German weapon scientists, Americans also

³⁸ RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 415 l. 43-45.

³⁹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 467, l. 78.

⁴⁰ N. I. Nikolaeva.

imported Nazi ideology.⁴¹ A Soviet Propaganda Department draft of a 1949 plan for an increase in anti-American propaganda called for use of themes such as: “Monopolies help the growth of fascism on American soil” and publication of books such as *American fascism* (original title *Pattern for Domestic Fascism*) by American communist writer John Spivak.⁴²



Title: In West Germany (Pic. 1) Aha! That’s where your Nazi organization is! Follow me! (Pic.2) ...and they followed willingly. Krokodil #13 1951 p.6 (Illustration 3)

Writing about early Soviet Cold War propaganda, historian Kevin McKenna noted:

The suggestive association of Anglo-American designs with images of their former foe would soon develop as a permanent feature of the Soviet propaganda campaign to install

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² RGASPI f. 17, op. 132. d. 224. l. 48-52.

the United States into the role formerly occupied by Nazi Germany as the threat to international peace and, in particular, to Soviet security.⁴³

Richard Stites also pointed to Soviet use of World War II iconography in their anti-American Cold War propaganda.⁴⁴

In official Soviet depictions, early Cold War America regained all of its pre-war flaws of racism, inequality, exploitation, and imperialism, but now it acquired something even more sinister. By highlighting American use of Nazi scientists and close cooperation with former Nazi officials, Soviet propaganda suggested that somehow America was now infected with the virus of Nazi brutality and inhumanity. This was an easy sell to the Soviet population that still vividly remembered Nazi atrocities during the war. The goal, therefore, was to make America look like the old capitalist bogeyman but now with the added viciousness of Nazi Germany.

Along with trying to change America's image from a recent ally to a new enemy, Soviet authorities faced an equally difficult task. Millions of Soviet soldiers witnessed first-hand the standard of living enjoyed by people in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Germany, even after wartime devastation, as the Soviet army marched towards Berlin at the end of World War II. Stories making it back to the Soviet Union did not portray Soviet living standards in a flattering light.

Already in August 1945, a few months after the end of the war, a group of Soviet teachers wrote a letter to Stalin complaining about low teacher salaries. In the letter they stated: "Our troops and specialists stationed abroad testify to the fact that material wellbeing and outward appearance of [their] school teachers is infinitely better than

⁴³ McKenna, 76.

⁴⁴ Richard Stites, *Soviet Popular Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 111.

ours.”⁴⁵ In another case, a number of Soviet soldiers serving in Europe shortly after the war were overheard praising Western capitalist system for its ability to provide better material rewards.⁴⁶ Around the same time, Soviet officials noted that negative feelings towards collective farms, as evidenced by rumors that Britain and the U.S. were pressuring the Soviet government to abolish them, were stronger among those who have been abroad, usually as prisoners in Germany.⁴⁷ An influx of American Lend-Lease goods, many of superior quality to their Soviet counterparts, further raised a suspicion among Soviet people that life in the West, at least in material terms, was better than in the Soviet Union. For example, Americans frequently reported Soviet fascination and admiration of neat cellophane packaging of Lend-Lease goods such as cigarettes.⁴⁸

Soviet people’s exposure to life outside its borders worried the Soviet leadership, especially in the face of the government’s continuing struggle to rebuild the country after the war. Consumer products, such as food and clothes, and living space were extremely limited. The government looked at the standard of living as a secondary issue, instead focusing on industrial reconstruction. As a result, the consumer goods situation improved very slowly. Soviet people, wanting a chance to relax and live a more comfortable life after enormous sacrifices during the war were to be disappointed.⁴⁹

The post-war situation on collective farms (*kolkhozy*⁵⁰), was even worse than during the war. Following defeat of Germany, peasants refused to sacrifice any longer by performing backbreaking labor for next to nothing. For example, Elena Zubkova noted

⁴⁵ Elena Zubkova, *Sovetskaia zhizn', 1945-1953*. (Moskva : ROSSPEN, 2003), 18.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 357.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 374.

⁴⁸ Barghoorn, 263-264.

⁴⁹ Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo*, 55-59.

⁵⁰ The Soviet Union had two types of farms: *kolkhoz* (collective farm) and *sovkhov* (state farm). While technically different, the two functioned almost identically in real life. Therefore, when I use the term *kolkhoz* or collective farm, I also include *sovkhov* in this category as well.

that after all of the state taxes and forced grain requisitioning, sometimes the peasants were left with no income at all.⁵¹ There were persistent rumors that the government was about to dismantle state farms. A lot of the rumors centered on speculation that the United States and Britain were about to force the Soviet government to abolish collective agriculture.⁵² A member of a Ukrainian religious community repatriated from the American sector after the war claimed

Ukraine will soon be given to America; that is why the Soviets are in a hurry to take all of the Ukrainian bread to [Russia]. America said – take most of the bread, leaving enough for two weeks, take all the communists, komsomol members, and all of communist activists, but do not touch the average people. Living in the Ukraine was much better under the Germans, there was freedom, and when Americans come, things will be even better.⁵³

Another repatriated peasant was heard saying

If I knew it would be like this in Russia I would have never returned. Americans agreed to let us stay with them. I still remember the words of American officer, who said, “When we signed an agreement with the Soviet Union about aid, it specified that at the end of the war [the SU] had to disband all of the communal farms (*kolkhozy*), the Communist party, the Komsomol, and that all Soviet citizens had to adopt American ways, and if the Soviets broke that agreement then the Soviet Union would be crushed by the rest of the world.”⁵⁴

Members of religious communities were not the only ones with such views. Peasants from other regions, those not involved in organized religious sects and who did not have first hand experience with Americans, voiced similar sentiments. For example, collective farm workers in the Pskov province said, “Soon America will come to rule our country

⁵¹ Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo*, 60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵³ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 517 l. 37. There is some evidence that this sentiment remained at least into the mid-1960s. For example, Sergei Zhuk quoted from a sermon by a Ukrainian Orthodox priest in 1963: “Look at our collective farmers; they are paid only 40 kopeks a day. Their living conditions are appalling. But do not worry; the time is coming when the Germans and Americans will come again and liberate us.” Zhuk, 189.

⁵⁴ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 517 l. 37.

and there will be no more collective farms” and many similar messages.⁵⁵ There were comparable reports from other regions.⁵⁶

A number of industrial workers, unhappy with their post-war situation made similar remarks. After hearing about laborers being sent east to lift industrial production there, a factory worker was quoted as saying: “This is serfdom. I will run away to America.”⁵⁷ Others suggested that the Soviet Union buy food from America and Britain, as there was not enough to feed the country.⁵⁸ Some among the deported nationalities, such as Chechens and Ingushi, spread rumors that Western powers put pressure on the Soviet government to move them back to their original homelands.⁵⁹

In one interesting case, a government report from Chukotka, a far eastern Soviet region, described a situation where Soviet collective farm workers, members of an indigenous Inuit tribe, visited American Inuits on nearby island of St. Lawrence. There, the report stated, Soviet Inuit saw that most American Inuit lived much better than their Soviet counterparts: the store was full of food, the houses had electricity, all residents had their own bed. And because Soviet authorities failed to provide enough goods, many Soviets ended up acquiring them from America. A few Inuit complained that “The American government cared more about Inuit than the Soviet government.”⁶⁰

Despite these examples, we must not assume that majority of the post-war Soviet population was deeply unhappy with the Soviet government and wished to relocate to the United States. Most Soviets understood that much of their present day suffering was a

⁵⁵ Zubkova, *Sovetskaya Zhizn'*, 50.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁵⁷ RGASPI f. 17, op. 88, d. 695 l. 106.

⁵⁸ RGASPI f. 17, op. 121, d. 524. l. 7.

⁵⁹ Zubkova, *Sovetskaia zhizn'*, 381.

⁶⁰ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 561, l. 8-9.

result of a devastating war and that rebuilding the country was not an easy task. It is clear, however, that Soviets who had been outside the Soviet borders and the people who heard their accounts used the information they garnered as a way to express disapproval with the pace of the post-war recovery, and low standard of living in general. America, heavily mythologized by rumors that passed through numerous people, stood as the centerpiece of people's hope of a better life after so much had been put on hold in the name of wartime sacrifices.

Increasingly hostile rhetoric between the Soviet Union and its recent allies, the U.S. and the U.K., along with the sudden opening of the Soviet Union to foreign influences during and immediately following the war, triggered a fast response from the Kremlin. Officially, the goals of the new campaign were to raise domestic patriotism and put a stop to the practice of “bowing [*nizkopoklonstvo*] before the West.” In other words, at least on paper, Stalin and others at the top accused a number of people of over admiring the West and not giving enough credit to domestic achievements. The bulk of criticism was aimed at writers, musicians, journalists, and others who shaped public perceptions of issues in the Soviet Union.

Most importantly, this campaign was not a simple act of criticism but signaled the course that the Soviet mass media was to follow. In April 1947, the Soviet Propaganda Department issued a detailed plan to promote Soviet patriotism. Among other things, the plan called for press, film, art, and other media specialists to raise awareness of the differences between Soviet and bourgeois social systems. Furthermore, it stressed the need to highlight achievements of Russian and Soviet scientists, specifically stressing that

many Russian/Soviet scientific discoveries had been downplayed and later stolen by foreigners.⁶¹

Several months later, the Soviet leadership discussed publication of *Russian scientists (Liudi Russkoi Nauki)*, a book detailing Russian/Soviet scientific accomplishments. The book, eventually published in 1948, claimed that a Russian named Polzunov and not James Watt invented the first steam engine, and Popov not Guglielmo Marconi developed the radiotelegraph system.⁶² The revisionist campaign was not limited to the field of science. All of Soviet society had to participate, from music to engineering. At the tail end of the campaign in the early 1950s, one Soviet journal even claimed that American baseball was simply a distorted version of a traditional Russian game of *lapta*.⁶³

In 1947, Konstantin Simonov, a leading war-time writer, met Stalin to discuss the issue and wrote about it in his journal later that day. Simonov noted Stalin saying the following about Soviet intelligentsia including writers, scientists, doctors, and academics:

[they] have an underdeveloped sense of Soviet patriotism. They have an ungrounded admiration for foreign culture. They see themselves as minors, as incomplete, used to the position of eternal students. This tradition is outdated and comes from Peter I. Peter had good ideas, but soon too many foreigners came into the country. This was a period of bowing down to the foreigners.⁶⁴

The signal from the top was clear. Soviets needed to feel more pride in their achievements and stop looking to the West in veneration, and those in the Soviet media had to promote the new direction.

⁶¹ RGASPI f. 17 op. 125 d. 503 l. 40-48.

⁶² RGASPI f. 17 op. 125 d. 545 l. 118.

⁶³ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 280.

⁶⁴ Web fragment from Konstantin Simonov, *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniia. Razmyshleniia o I. V. Staline*. (Moskva: APN, 1989) Available at - http://www.hrono.ru/libris/lib_s/simonov07.php. Accessed April 22, 2012.

The early phase of the patriotism campaign, launched in 1946, asserted itself on the pages of the Soviet press in form of attacks on several literary journals and performance theaters, accusing some staff members of “bowing before modern bourgeois culture of the West.”⁶⁵ The main focus of criticism, however, fell on academics in fields of philosophy, genetics, microbiology and many others⁶⁶ mentioned by Stalin in his conversation with Simonov. Press articles accused members of Soviet intelligentsia of downplaying Soviet achievements while giving too much praise to foreign accomplishments. The press labeled such people “cosmopolitans;” therefore the whole campaign was widely known as “anti-cosmopolitan.”

One case in particular served as a blueprint for the rest of the campaign. In June, 1947, Soviet press broke the story of two Soviet microbiologists who recklessly provided Americans with results of their most valuable experiments while attending a conference in the U.S. Specifically, Soviet authorities charged Professors Kliueva and Roskin with giving American spies a cure for cancer due to their lack of vigilance.⁶⁷ A letter from the Central Committee to lower Party organizations described professors’ crime in this way:

They could not withstand American spy importunities and gave Americans a scientific discovery that is the property of the Soviet government and the Soviet people. Disregarding vital interests of the state and the people, and forgetting their debt before the motherland that attentively supported their work, Kliueva and Roskin deprived Soviet science of primacy of this discovery and inflicted serious damage on state interests of the Soviet Union.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ RGASPI f.17 op. 122 d. 269 l. 183.

⁶⁶ A. V. Fateev - <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev2.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶⁷ For more on Kliueva and Roskin see: Nikolai Kremmentsov. *The Cure: A Story of Cancer and Politics from the Annals of the Cold War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

⁶⁸ RGASPI f. 17 op. 122 d. 269 l. 183.

Furthermore, the letter revealed that Kliueva and Roskin's crimes were uncovered during the so-called Court of Honor (*sud chesti*), where their peers and other members of the Health Ministry, numbering in the thousands, questioned them regarding the matter.⁶⁹

A year later the movie *Court of Honor (Sud Chesti)* presented the Soviet moviegoers with an almost identical scenario. The movie told a story of a group of Soviet scientists who just discovered a new pain medication. One of the scientists, a vain man susceptible to flattery, is overcome with praise while presenting the discovery at an American conference and provides Americans with some of the experiment designs. Eventually, an American science professor travels to the Soviet Union in order to study the laboratory producing the pain medicine. Unknown to Soviet scientists, one of the people in professor's retinue is a spy who wants to steal Soviet production secrets. Only hyper-vigilance on the part of a number of young Soviet scientists thwarts American spy efforts. In the end, the Ministry holds a Court of Honor where the guilty parties are exposed and reprimanded for their lack of awareness.

Kliueva and Roskin case, as well as the movie, touched on a number of propaganda themes. First, it brought back the issue of vigilance that was popular during the 1930s where Soviet citizens were instructed by the state to watch for foreign spies and saboteurs who infiltrated that Soviet Union and intended to harm the country by any means. In the same vein, Courts of Honor resembled the "self-criticism campaign" of the late 1920s-early 1930s, when Soviet organizations were supposed to engage in self-criticism during meetings. One critical difference, however, was the fact that the general foreign saboteur/spy of the earlier period now acquired a more specific identity – a largely American identity.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

In fact, the late 1940s saw a number of high profile cases in the Soviet press denouncing Americans in the Soviet Union as spies. One that received particular attention from the Soviet press focused on *Truth about American Diplomats*, a book by Annabella Bucar, a former employee of the American embassy in Moscow, and a self-proclaimed American spy. In the book, Bucar, an American citizen, who attributed her desire to come clean to her falling in love with a Soviet opera singer, described the American embassy as a nest of spies and the American attitude towards the Soviet Union as determined by a small anti-Soviet clique at the State Department who took their order from moneyed interests in the United States. In addition, she related information that Americans would try to recruit old men and women who came to the embassy for help in contacting their relatives in America. Furthermore, wrote Bucar, American spies actively pursued Soviet individuals who bowed before Western culture.⁷⁰

A British military attaché living in Moscow in the late 1940s recounted an incident where he was accused of taking photographs of a factory in central Moscow. After some interrogation where he insisted they search him to see that he did not have a camera (they did not search him), he was let go. A few days later a Soviet newspaper published a letter to the editor by four factory workers who saw the incident and vehemently protested British spying.⁷¹

The point was unambiguous. A vast majority of foreigners, particularly Americans and their close allies in the Soviet Union, were spies attempting to gather information that later could be used against the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens who showed interest in foreign, especially American, culture were most vulnerable.

⁷⁰ Annabella Bucar, *Pravda o amerikanskikh diplomatakh*. (Moskva: Izdanie "Literaturnoi Gazety", 1949), 65-67.

⁷¹ R. Hilton, 77-78.

Therefore, Soviets had to avoid any contact with foreigners and keep a close eye on those who did. In reviewing the Bucar book, *Pravda* concluded:

The facts outlined in the book once again remind us about the necessity to raise our vigilance in every way possible, and remember about the intrigues of agents from anti-democratic imperialist camp.⁷²

Did the Soviet leadership actually believe these stories? There is some indication pointing to the fact that the Soviet patriotism campaign exaggerated the evidence in order to make the problem appear more serious than it actually was in real life. Kliueva and Roskin, for example, two microbiologists accused of passing scientific discoveries to Americans, received promotions and a new lab not too long after their case ended up on the front pages of Soviet newspapers.⁷³ It is highly unlikely that they would have been rewarded had they actually done the things they were accused of in the Soviet press. Most likely, authorities drummed up the Kliueva-Roskin affair and many other incidents that characterized the patriotism campaign, so as to prepare the psychological groundwork for the Cold War with the United States. Furthermore, some scholars suggested that Soviet bureaucracy used anti-American/Russian patriotism campaign in order to solidify its hold over Soviet people disoriented by the war, as well as for purposes of promoting personal ambitions.⁷⁴

In addition to the noisy press campaign, late 1940s saw the passage of several anti-foreigner laws. Two main laws, the State Secrets Act (June, 1947) and Marriage to Foreigners Act (February, 1947), precluded any substantive contact with foreigners that had not been officially authorized. The State Secrets Act imposed harsh penalties on

⁷² *Pravda*, March 1st, 1949.

⁷³ Fateev - <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev2.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev5.htm>, <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev6.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

anyone caught passing information to foreigners, while the Marriage to Foreigners Act effectively forbade Soviets from marrying non-citizens. Influenced by high level of fraternization, including marriage, between Soviets soldiers stationed in Europe and local population, especially Germany,⁷⁵ the Acts fit well with the overall anti-foreigner campaign amid rising Cold War tension.

Soviet children were also targets for the anti-foreigner propaganda. The 1949 children's cartoon *A Foreign Voice* (*Chuzhoi golos*) showed a Soviet bird coming home from a tour abroad. Now, performing in front of Soviet birds it was dressed in foreign clothes and sang jazz instead of its usual Soviet repertoire. Soviet birds were outraged and drove the Westernized bird off stage (see Illustration 4).⁷⁶ The cartoon's references to American style clothes and jazz suggested that anything American was simply too alien for a Soviet person and had to be rejected. Children were not only target but also tools in Cold War propaganda battle. As Margaret Peacock showed in her work, Soviet propaganda used embellished images of Soviet childhood being threatened by American warmongers, as well as contrasting happy Soviet childhood with bleakness, violence, and despair that characterized growing up in America.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: a history of the Soviet Zone of occupation, 1945-1949*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 92-94.

⁷⁶ Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-T7xwuTxxU>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁷⁷ Margaret Peacock, "Contested Innocence: Image of The Child in The Cold War" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2008), 28-38.



A Foreign Voice (Chuzhoi Golos) – 1949 (Illustration 4)

Good American – Bad American: dual nature of America in official propaganda

Marxist ideology divided the world into two classes, the exploiters and the exploited. Soviet post-war anti-American propaganda reflected this divide in its depiction of America. According to Soviet media, Americans belonged either to the exclusive ultra-wealthy elite that owned all of the capital and means of productions, or to the vast majority that was poor, overworked and had little to show for it.⁷⁸ Therefore, Americans were either bad or good with little grey area in the middle.

Roughly, the bad camp (frequently referred to as reactionary) consisted of three basic parts: First, a small number of bankers who controlled disproportionate amount of wealth, were collectively referred to as simply “Wall Street.” In Soviet narrative, Wall Street partnered with a handful of rich industrialists (“monopolists”), often in the military industries, in order to exploit the working class in America and abroad, and through

⁷⁸ McKenna, 92-93.

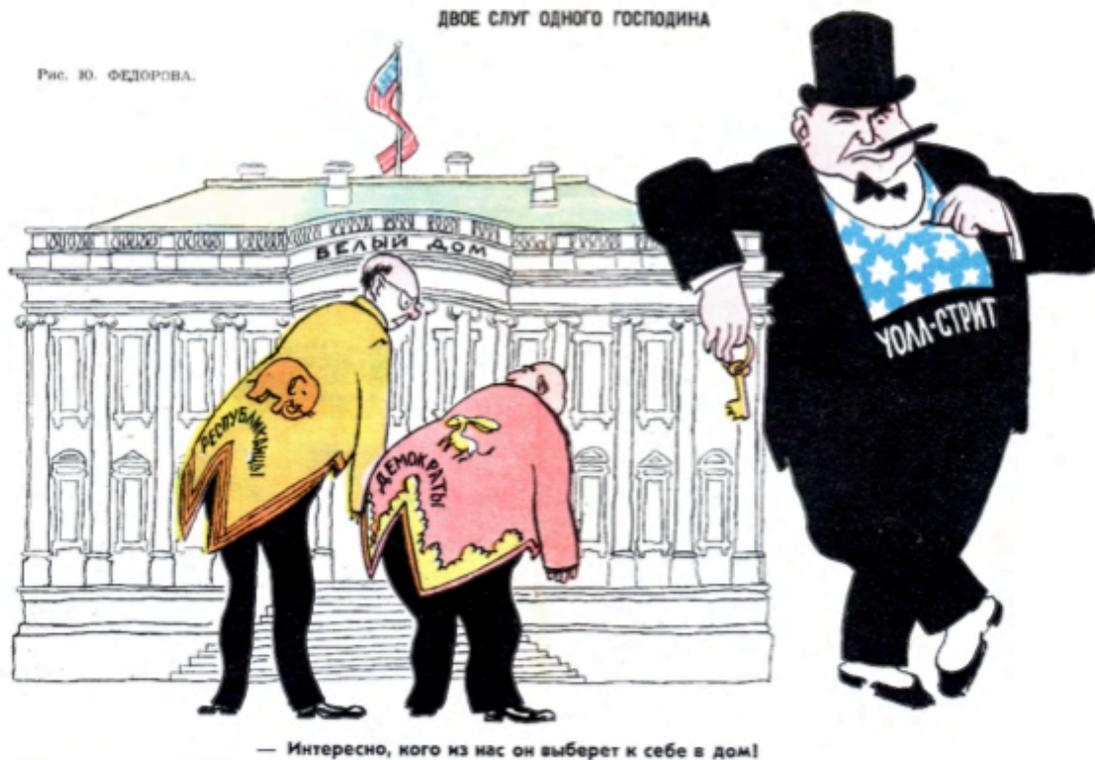
perpetual wars further increase their wealth. The third part of the unholy trinity included various governmental and independent institutions that aided the ruling class in exploiting and suppressing American workers. These included things such as the military (collectively known as “Pentagon”), federal and state law enforcement agencies (CIA, FBI, and police in general), non-governmental organizations (KKK, Salvation Army, YMCA), Congress, and the press.

The 1949 anti-American propaganda plan circulated by the Propaganda Department suggested, among others, the following topics for publication and discussion in the media:

Capitalist monopolies in America – the force behind politics of aggression.
American ruling circles against global cooperation.
American reactionaries in the role of “saviors” of capitalism from communism.
Large monopolies’ total control of American economy and politics.
American progressive forces in fight for peace and international cooperation.
Who do American union leaders really serve?⁷⁹

Moreover, the Soviet media showed the office of American president as simply an instrument of the wealthy elites who pick and choose who is to occupy the White House (see Illustration 5).

⁷⁹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 224, l. 48-52.



Title: Two servants of the same master.
Wall Street (large man on the right). Republicans, Democrats (two men in front of the White House) - "I wonder which one of us he will pick to stay at his house!"
Krokodil #25 1952 p. 7 (Illustration 5)

The issue was addressed in a 1949 play about Harry Truman titled *The Mad*

Haberdasher. Harrison Salisbury described it in this way:

The play is set in a small Missouri town. The central character is an unsuccessful haberdasher who in appearance resembles Hitler. A gang of Missouri Democratic politicians, members of the Pendergast gang, decide to put the haberdasher in the White House.⁸⁰

In another example, echoing official rhetoric, a Soviet tourist guide explained the difference between the Kremlin and the White House to a group of Indonesian students visiting Moscow in 1953:

Question: Is the Kremlin the same as the American White House?

⁸⁰ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 28.

Answer: No. The Kremlin serves the interests of the people, peace, friendship of peoples and is a symbol for all of progressive humanity. At the same time, the White House is a residence for Wall Street appointees.⁸¹

The American press was also depicted as a slave to moneyed interests. The subject came up in a 1947 play titled *The Russian Question*. The play, written by Konstantin Simonov (a famous Soviet author and journalist), won a Stalin prize and played extensively in many Soviet theaters, and was eventually made into a movie. The play focused on the life of an American reporter who got to know the Russian people while working on the Eastern front during World War II, ultimately writing a positive book about Russia in 1942. When he returns, his boss offers him a huge sum of money to write a book claiming that Russia wants to conquer Europe and then America. The boss wants the book because only this kind of subject matter will make him money. Following his consciousness, Smith (the reporter) ends up writing a positive book and because of this ends up without money and family (his wife leaves him because he is broke.) In the end, Smith declares that even though he is ruined he will still fight for America of Lincoln and Roosevelt and not for America of William Randolph Hearst.⁸²

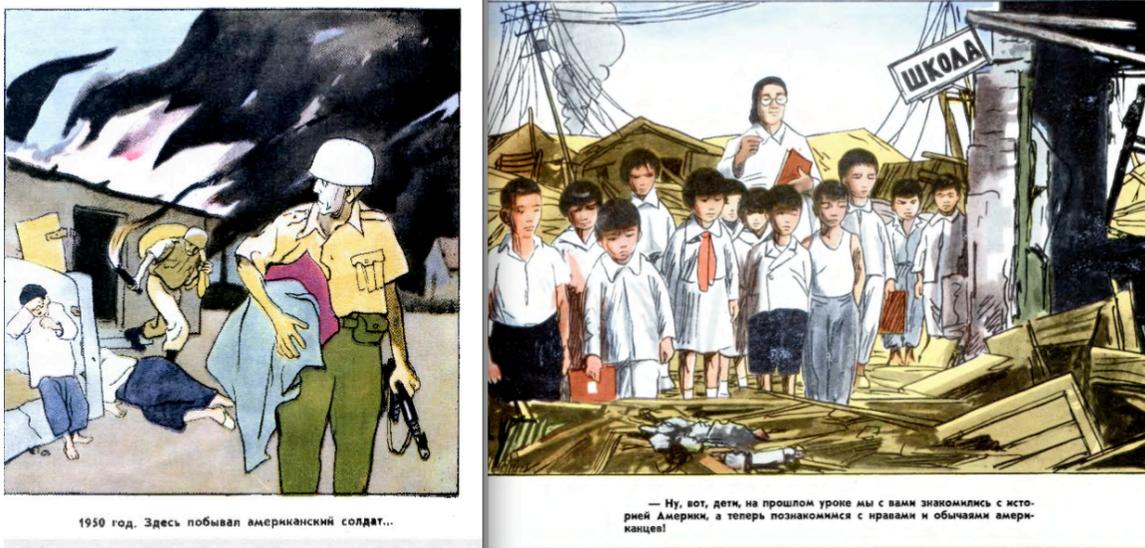
In search of profit, Soviet propaganda stressed, American ruling circles would go to any length, commit any crime. The theme gained particular traction during another escalation of Cold War tensions. Apparently in response to renewed questions about Katyn massacre,⁸³ Soviet media launched another ferocious anti-American campaign in

⁸¹ GARF f. 9612 op. 1 d. 313.

⁸² Cate, 88-100. William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) was an American newspaper and magazine publisher. At its peak, Hearst publishing empire was the largest of its kind in the world.

⁸³ Referring to the killing of around twenty thousand Polish citizens near Katyn forest in Poland, including many members of the Polish military and intelligentsia, by Soviet Security forces in spring of 1940. Nazi officials conducted the first examination of the matter in 1943, accusing Soviet authorities of carrying out the executions. Stalin denied Soviet involvement and instead blamed the Nazis. Soviet government eventually admitted responsibility for the killings in the early 1990s.

the early 1950s. The thrust of the campaign focused on American involvement in the Korean War. Soviet newspapers, radio stations, and propaganda lectures accused American reactionary forces of starting the war so that the defense industry could profit from it. Furthermore, it charged American forces with using bacteriological and chemical weapons, as well as perpetrating various atrocities against Korean civilians (see Illustration 6).



(Pic 1) 1950. An American soldier was here. *Krokodil* #5 1951 p. 7 (Pic 2) School (sign in the background). “Ok children. During the last lesson we went over American history and now let’s learn about American customs.” *Krokodil* #13 1951 p. 5 (Illustration 6)

The scale of the campaign took even the seasoned American diplomats by surprise. In a 1952 telegram to the Department of State, American ambassador George Kennan wrote:

George Kennan, American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, suggested a connection between Katyn issue and new anti-American campaign in the Soviet Union in 1952 - *Foreign Relations of the United States*, hereafter FRUS – 1952-1954 – volume VIII, pp. 972.

The quantitative figures on space and time given to the subjects are impressive enough. We estimate that on an average well over half entire foreign news sections of major papers have been devoted to these subjects, not to mention domestic radio programs and other outlets... I must say that I have never seen anything to equal in viciousness, shamelessness, mendacity and intensity what is now being done in this country to arouse hatred, revulsion and indignation with regard to Americans in general and our armed forces in particular.⁸⁴

Even the state-controlled Soviet religious organizations joined in the anti-American campaign. An English priest visiting the Soviet Union around that time cited the following statements made by Soviet religious authorities at a peace conference:

Archbishop Flavian of Moscow: 'At the present time, the American invaders, trampling upon all that is holy in the soul of man, are committing horrible deeds by using against the peaceful population of Korea chemical weapons, poisoning peaceful people with lethal gases and infecting by bacteriological means the population with plague, cholera, typhus and other diseases.' ...Ali Zade, President of the Moslem Council for Transcaucasia: 'Bloodthirsty American imperialism, American bankers and industrialists, losing all conscience and semblance of human beings, have embarked on the path of shameless violation of the laws of God and man.'⁸⁵

An American tourist recalled the following news article about American atrocities in Korea. The story, he wrote, accused the U.S. Army in Korea of:

burning alive, tearing out their [Korean civilians] hearts, and gassing them. The Americans hung up prisoners by their feet, broke arms and legs of prisoners with wooden cudgels, stabbed them with bayonets, cut away pieces of their flesh, forced nails under their fingernails, tortured them with electrical current, poured hot water into their stomachs, put prisoners in cells flooded with water, and shut them in cages with sharp nails.⁸⁶

In not so subtle ways, campaign suggested that reactionary forces, or bad Americans, had little in common with the human race. Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, politicians, and other instruments of American authority were simply a faceless machine that used money as fuel and ground up ordinary people in the process.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 972.

⁸⁵ Mervyn Stockwood, *I Went to Moscow*. (London: The Epworth Press, 1955), 189-193.

⁸⁶ McDuffie, 315-316.

The dehumanization of the bad Americans contrasted with intense humanization of the so-called progressive forces, or good Americans. Usually, the Soviet media portrayed the “progressive” faction of American society as the vast majority of American people who were exploited by the ruling class yet fighting to achieve equality and fairness in socio-economic relations. Average American workers, farmers, doctors, engineers, and so forth lived in poverty and oppression and waged an unequal fight with the ruling institution that stopped at nothing to extinguish the people’s will. In parallel with the Soviet narrative on American racism, the progressive movement frequently featured black Americans who fought not only for worker rights but also for civil rights for American minorities.⁸⁷

Soviet press and radio broadcasts often featured stories of Americans struggling to overcome racism, poverty, violence, and lack of social benefits. It painted a picture of America in a struggle for human rights on the part of the American public against inhuman reactionary forces. Clearly, this was a classic Marxist duel between the exploiters and the exploited that superseded national borders. Leaders of the American progressive movement, as defined by the Soviet media, saw past petty personal agendas and sought world peace and friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

Soviet propaganda identified specific American intellectuals, politicians, and civil rights leaders as being at the forefront of the progressive struggle. Criticism of the United States and a call for improved relations with the Soviet Union were the common threads. Henry Wallace, vice-president under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a 1948 presidential candidate and an advocate for better relations with the Soviet Union, became a symbol of the American progressive movement. Soviet newspapers also suggested that

⁸⁷ See examples in section on American social problems in the Soviet press.

a majority of the American people agreed with and supported Wallace.⁸⁸ In contrast to reactionary and warmongering Harry Truman, Wallace was portrayed as carrying on the progressive torch of Roosevelt, who was a true friend of the Soviet Union and an enemy of American reactionary forces.

For the Soviets, the figure of Roosevelt served a convenient purpose. Under Roosevelt, the United States and the Soviet Union enjoyed a relationship of friendship and mutual aid. That was how the Soviet media had presented it and that was how the Soviet people remembered it. In Soviet minds, Roosevelt was the president of industrial cooperation of the 1930s, the wartime alliance, and Lend-Lease. Relations between the two countries soured quickly following Roosevelt's death, therefore it was easy for the Soviets to blame the post-war split on the change in the White House. Soviet people were bombarded with the simple message that Roosevelt was good and Truman is bad. "The death of President Roosevelt must have been a stroke of luck for the Soviet propagandists. It enabled them to suggest that with this great progressive figure removed, American capitalist politics moved naturally to the right," observed historian Frederick Barghoorn.⁸⁹

On the literary front, Soviet propaganda singled out a number of works by American authors critical of various aspects of American life. These included well-known American writers such as Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, and Theodor Dreiser.⁹⁰ Soviet media presented these and a number of other less known authors as evidence that American progressive intelligentsia saw the true America. America that oppressed and

⁸⁸ Whitman Bassow, "Izvestiia Looks Inside the U.S.A.," *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 12 (Fall 1948), 436.

⁸⁹ Barghoorn, 219-220.

⁹⁰ Fateev - <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev5.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

exploited its people, not the country of prosperity and equality as presented in American propaganda.

The Good American-Bad American construct fit nicely with the Soviet leadership's characterization of the post-World War II world. Following Andrei Zhdanov's⁹¹ 1947 speech at Cominform meeting, Soviet propaganda writers were instructed to portray the post-war world as divided into two camps. The first camp, led by the United States, sought to enslave other countries of the world through war and exploit their resources for the benefit of a handful of rich Americans. On the other side, the second camp, led by the Soviet Union, stood against American imperialism, and for freedom, human rights, and world peace.⁹²

Soviet propaganda attempted to drive the point home by a staging a number of so-called peace offensives in the late 1940s and early 1950s (see Illustration 7). Through these the Soviets presented the Soviet Union as a country that fought hard for peace, only to be rebuffed by American leadership. Soviet media compared American and Soviet military expenditures where, according to their figures, America spent far more on the military than the Soviet Union.⁹³ The nuclear issue faced a similar treatment where Soviets were shown as using the power of the atom for peaceful energy, while Americans desired nothing more than to employ it for destructive military purposes.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Andrei Zhdanov was one of Stalin's closest allies. In the late 1940s he was responsible for setting the cultural policy of the Soviet Union as well as organizing Cominform, organization to coordinate communist parties of Eastern Europe.

⁹² GARF f. 8581 op. 2 d. 203.

⁹³ Barghoorn, 148.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

Alexander Dallin, "America Through Soviet Eyes," *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 11 (Spring 1947), 38-39.



For Peace Pact (sign in dove’s beak). “God save us!!!” *Krokodil* 1951 #26 Cover (Illustration 7)

In other examples of the differences between the two regimes, a *Krokodil* cartoon from the period showed Soviets discussing strategic plan of fighting drought, while Americans made plans for strategic military bases.⁹⁵ “America sends weapons. The USSR sends tractors,” read a headline of a 1950 *Ogonek* magazine article about Soviet aid to Italy.⁹⁶ Furthermore, a large proportion of Soviet movies produced at the time contrasted “capitalist-imperialist American with the peace-loving, socialist-

⁹⁵ W. Nelson, 25.

⁹⁶ *Ogonek*, #21 May, 1950. p. 12.

internationalist Soviet Union.”⁹⁷ “In other words, capitalism generates war and Soviet socialism generates peace,” wrote Frederick Barghoorn in describing Soviet propaganda of the early Cold War period.⁹⁸

The threat of a new conflict with America appears to have been one of the primary reasons for Soviet propaganda’s focus on the issue. An American visiting the Soviet Union in the late 1940s put it this way:

There’s no question that the common people of the U.S.S.R. are sincere in their desire for peace – as are the common people of every nation in the world. But in the Soviet Union this normal hatred of war has been pumped up by the unrelenting propaganda campaign into something close to fanaticism. Peace is an obsession with the Russians. I believe the Kremlin leaders may be counting on their ability to switch this obsessive desire for peace into a feeling of righteous rage in any future emergency, by charging that some nation has broken the peace every Russian holds dear. The groundwork has already been laid by the concurrent propaganda drive depicting American leaders as warmongers and criminals.⁹⁹

Pseudo-Country: American society and culture

Social and economic problems such as racism and unemployment were some of the major focus points for the early Cold War Soviet propaganda about the United States. Faced with a low post-war living standard, an end to the wartime Lend-Lease program, the slow pace of reconstruction, the greater availability of information about the West, and quickly rising Cold War tensions, Soviet authorities tried hard to dispel the myth of America as the land of milk and honey. Again they turned to the familiar Marxist line that cast the capitalist world into a small group of exploiters who grew wealthy by keeping the rest of the population in poverty. Consequently, Soviet propaganda

⁹⁷ Shaw, 45.

⁹⁸ Barghoorn, 135.

⁹⁹ McDuffie, 317.

attempted to present America as a country with an extravagantly wealthy elite while the rest of the population lived in destitution, lacked opportunity and any kind of social safety net. African-Americans, claimed the Soviet media, still lived in slave-like conditions and faced discrimination and intimidation at every turn, as did anyone who dared to oppose the oppressive capitalist system. None of these themes were particularly novel; they appeared in Soviet media on and off for decades. However, the frequency with which these subjects appeared in the Soviet propaganda was new.

In trying to shape public opinion about America, Soviet officials could hardly deny that America was a wealthy and industrious country. America provided the Soviet Union with billions of dollars' worth of food and equipment during the war, and many ordinary people still remembered the large role America played in 1920s famine relief, and Soviet industrial revival of the early 1930s. Thus, the thrust of the attack had to concentrate on areas of American life that were less familiar to Soviet audiences, with the American domestic situation being an obvious target.

American unemployment and other economic problems were some of the most common subjects of Soviet anti-American campaign.¹⁰⁰ American prosperity was only available to a select few while the rest lived in hardship, and chronically high unemployment was the best evidence. Soviet propagandists were offered the following headlines when discussing the subject of American economy:

Fear of new economic crisis
Myth of a high living standard among all classes in America
American monopolies attack American workers' living standard
Reality and fables about American "prosperity"

¹⁰⁰ Dallin, 31-32.
McKenna, 5.

Impoverishment of the American small farmer¹⁰¹

Soviet children studying English used textbooks containing the following reading exercise: “John Smith is an American. John’s elder brother is an engineer. He is not married because he cannot afford to keep a family. He is out of work now.”¹⁰² Soviet newspapers published stories about American farmers not being able to sell their product due to “the impoverishment of the working class and the ruining of the toiling peasants are narrowing down the internal market.”¹⁰³

A *Krokodil* cartoon from the late 1940s mocked the notion of equality between the haves and have-nots in America by showing two unemployed men sitting on a bench. Turning to the other man, the first man says: “In the United States, everybody is equal. Rockefeller has the right to sleep on a park bench, just like us unemployed. If he doesn’t choose to exercise that right, why that’s his business.”¹⁰⁴ The magazine *Krokodil* sighted the following notice from a college bulletin board in the U.S.: “I am willing to move to any town, state, country, or even planet to find a permanent job.”¹⁰⁵ Another magazine *Ogonek* featured an article describing lavish American dog shows where some dogs wore expensive furs while millions of American unemployed lived in poverty (see Illustration 8).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 132, d. 224, l. 48-52.

¹⁰² McDuffie, 315-316.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ W. Nelson, 33.

¹⁰⁵ *Krokodil* #3 1951 p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ogonek*, #8 February, 1950. p. 16.



“American heaven for dogs” - *Ogonek* #8 February, 1950. p. 16 (Illustration 8)

In his 1947 study, Whitman Bassow summarized the Soviet press’s treatment of the American economy as follows:

The United States was beset by severe economic problems which apparently could not be solved. Everyone feared a new depression. Prices were high and workers wanted higher wages to keep pace with the rising cost of living. They were forced to strike in order to get their demands and this resulted in additional economic dislocation. In the face of these problems, the President of the United States could do nothing but plead with Big Business to lower prices. Of course, these pleas went unheeded.¹⁰⁷

Racism took up a large percentage of Soviet propaganda about the United States since the early days of the Soviet state.¹⁰⁸ Even in the days of more cordial relations between the two states in the 1930’s, “Unemployment and racial discrimination remained, however, the chief and all-pervasive themes of Soviet attack on American capitalist society,” wrote Barghoorn.¹⁰⁹ The issue’s visibility and its unambiguously immoral character made it an easy target for those wishing to criticize America. It provided a clear and easily identifiable group of Americans exploited by the corrupt and unjust capitalist system. American ruling circles oppressed African-Americans not only

¹⁰⁷ Bassow, 438.

¹⁰⁸ On relationship between Russian government/Russian people and black people please see Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro : Blacks in Russian history and thought*. (Washington, D.C. : Howard University Press, 1986).

¹⁰⁹ Barghoorn, 26.

because they represented the working class but also because of their skin color, thus providing twice the ammunition for Soviet attacks on capitalism and the United States. Since racism frequently made it onto the pages of American newspapers, Soviets could easily use these stories to provide credibility to their claims that America was a country of tyranny, cruelty, and most importantly inequality.

Soviet movies of the period featuring Americans often focused on the issue of race. A group of American servicemen attack a fellow black soldier in a bar simply because of his skin in *Meeting on the Elbe* (*Vstrecha na Elbe*, 1949), a movie about Soviet and American post-war relations in Germany. *Silvery Dust* (*Serebristaia pyl'*, 1953), showed African-Americans as intelligent people fighting for civil rights yet still forced to work as servants for wealthy white families and under constant threat from reactionary whites, particularly the police. Furthermore, in the movie, in order to test a lethal substance on human subjects, white scientists forced blacks to become test subjects by using corrupt justice system.

Soviets used all forms of media to instill the image of America as a country where blacks were second-class citizens, if not still slaves. The Soviet children's cartoon *Masha's Concert* (*Mashen'kin kontsert*, 1948) told a story of a little Soviet girl Masha who receives a black doll named Tom for her birthday. "Why is Tom so sad?" the little girl asks her mother. "Oh. I remember that you told me how poorly the Negroes live in America," says the girl not waiting for an answer.¹¹⁰ A *Krokodil* cartoon from the late 1940s showed two American black men playing chess. "I don't want to play black, Sam. Black always loses around here," says one to the other.¹¹¹ Some Soviet newspapers

¹¹⁰ Available at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKmYynSkcRg>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹¹¹ W. Nelson, 44.

published stories alleging that up to five million African Americans still lived in virtual slavery in the American South.¹¹²

To further paint America as a country where money prevailed over more human concerns, Soviets picked the subject of social benefits. Thus, in contrast to the Soviet Union that featured free healthcare and full employment, America was portrayed as a country where one had to pay for these services or risk death. One *Krokodil* cartoon showed an American doctor inspecting the contents of a man's jackets instead of the man himself. "I'm very much worried by your condition. I'm afraid that you aren't going to be able to pay me for this visit," says the doctor.¹¹³ The American healthcare industry not only failed to provide free service, noted the Soviet press, but in some cases desire to make a dollar actually hurt patients. *Ogonek* magazine printed a story alleging that American pharmaceutical companies produced drugs that were often useless and sometimes harmful.¹¹⁴

Lacking unemployment benefits, American workers had to do whatever it took to survive. A 1950 expose in a Soviet magazine claimed that American blood banks profited from desperate unemployed who were forced to sell their blood in order to feed their families.¹¹⁵ Another article, citing an American newspaper, told a story of one William Moden who for forty-four years worked for General Mills Corporation. Once he got older the corporation promptly threw him out, and when he brought up the question of a pension he received a framed picture of the company's board of directors instead.¹¹⁶

¹¹² McDuffie, 315-316.

¹¹³ Nelson, 67.

¹¹⁴ *Ogonek*, #19 May, 1950. p. 27.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ogonek*, #9 February, 1950. p. 15.

Besides attacking American weaknesses such as racism and lack of socialized healthcare, Soviet propaganda also tried to chip away at things that Americans pointed to as their strengths. Besides above-mentioned stories of American wealth as only benefiting a handful of people, Soviets attacked other cornerstones of American society promoted by Americans in the Soviet Union via newly operational Voice of America and printed media such as magazine *Amerika*. These included freedoms of speech and press, democratic political process, independent judiciary and others. Soviets pointed to American anti-communist hearings in Congress and the Taft-Hartley bill (authorizing government monitoring of labor unions), among others, as evidence that free speech and civil rights were suppressed in America. A 1950 issue of *Ogonek* magazine reprinted a story by an American author titled “Alice’s Adventures in American ‘democracy’.” The story suggested that most people in American prisons were there because of their demand for free speech or equality, and that American judicial system simply made up false charges to lock them up.¹¹⁷ The American press was also frequently accused of being on the payroll of wealthy Americans who used it to twist the truth, as detailed in the previously mentioned story *The Russian Question*.

American culture and society received much attention from the Soviet post-war media. From the late 1940s and into the 1950s, the popular magazine *Ogonek*, for example, featured a column “Foreign Customs” (*Zarubezhnye Nrawy*). The column detailed various episodes from American life, which according to the magazine, confirmed Soviet statements about America, greed, corruption, and violence. In another example, in 1949 leading Soviet newspapers were instructed to publish regular materials

¹¹⁷ *Ogonek*, #22 May, 1950. p. 31.

exposing the “degeneracy of bourgeois [American] culture.”¹¹⁸ Like the rest of anti-American propaganda of the early Cold War, official Soviet information sources divided American culture and society into good and bad, progressive and reactionary. The profit motive dominated a majority of American life. The result, therefore, was one of shallow entertainment aimed at the lowest human instincts: sex and violence, both representative of American society in general.

So why focus on American culture? Frederick Barghoorn speculated that the intended goal was “the desire to reduce discontent among the Soviet people, particularly among intellectuals, by persuading them that Soviet culture and life are superior to the decadent, bourgeois West.”¹¹⁹ There is, however, no evidence that Soviet intellectuals of the period had any deep admiration for American culture. If anything the opposite was true.¹²⁰ A certain segment of Soviet youth, which I will discuss in a separate chapter, did in fact idolize American culture. This group, however, was rather small and hardly warranted an all-out propaganda campaign. A more likely explanation is that the Soviet government, facing widespread destruction from the war and unable to compete with America on the issue of living standards, especially consumer goods, sought to regain some psychological control over the population by providing Soviet citizens with an alternative source of pride – we might not have fancy cars but we have culture and progressive, humane society. “The Soviet view of American civilization is compounded of a profound admiration for our [American] achievements in technology and a profound

¹¹⁸ RGASPI f. 17, op. 132 d. 224 l. 48.

¹¹⁹ Barghoorn, 121.

¹²⁰ Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children : The Last of Russian Intelligentsia*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6.

contempt for our backwardness in humane and cultural pursuits, ” wrote William Nelson, a scholar of post-war Soviet propaganda.¹²¹

According to official Soviet information sources, everything in the United States revolved around the pursuit of the dollar, which in turn warped everything around it. American culture was not immune. A late 1940s *Krokodil* cartoon showed a money safe parading around a theater stage with actors and all of the supporting staff bowing. “Mr. Safe, Chief Director and Artistic Inspiration of the American Theater,” read the caption.¹²² In describing Broadway of the late 1940s, Soviet critics wrote that it in no way resembled the idea of theater by Soviet or European standards. American theaters were a revolving door of quickly staged plays that focused on the worst sides of life: crime, prostitution, sex, hopelessness, etc.¹²³

The American music scene, claimed the Soviet media, exploited amateur and young composers by requiring them to pay money to studios in the hope that they would produce their songs. Furthermore, musical events were often sponsored and littered with advertisements.¹²⁴ In talking about one New York opera performance, Soviet critics noted that “The music, even from the reports of sympathetic critics, was filled with various terrifying effects, resembling a sinister requiem service. Yet this ‘delirious’ (*bredovoi* – a word frequently used to describe Western culture) production had been hailed by American critics as ‘an opera for Americans’.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Nelson, 55.

¹²² Ibid., 63.

¹²³ Caute, 58-65.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 387.

¹²⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 386.

Despite the popularity of American movies in the Soviet Union, such as the Tarzan series,¹²⁶ Soviet propaganda attacked American cinema as “among the worst expressions of Western/American imperialism” because it “glorified, under various sauces, obscurantism, violence, murder, and war.”¹²⁷ A 1947 article by the famous Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein referred to American movies as “Dealers in Spiritual Poison.”¹²⁸

American literature did not fare much better. Apart from several progressive authors, the Soviet press labeled American prose as “cheap and stupid.” In domestic press articles, Soviet writers coming back from visiting the United States, noted the “spiritual simplicity” of American literature.¹²⁹ This was no surprise, noted the Soviet press, since education was only available to the rich, while a majority of Americans lacked access to a quality education. One *Pravda* article claimed that up to ten million Americans are “virtually illiterate.”¹³⁰

Overall, the picture of American culture readers got from the Soviet media was one of cheapness, shallowness, depravity, and absurdity. A Soviet article “Bubble Gum Culture” argued that “American ‘culture’ has a long time ago become a synonym for “degeneracy and decay” and turned into a parody of itself. In other words, it was a pseudoculture. The article provided examples: American comics were pseudoliterature, American jazz was pseudomusic, American psychics were an example of pseudoscience, and finally baby stroller races were a pseudosport.¹³¹ Foreshadowing Nikita

¹²⁶ See more about this in the section on American movies in the Soviet Union.

¹²⁷ Sergei Kapterev, “Illusionary Spoils: Soviet Attitudes toward American Cinema during the Early Cold War.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10:4 (Fall 2009): 788.

¹²⁸ Barghoorn, 227.

¹²⁹ McKenna, 35.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ogonek*, #5 January, 1950. p. 31.

Khrushchev's denunciation of abstract art in the 1960s, 1948 *Krokodil* issue made fun of formalist art pointing out its incomprehensibility.¹³² Moreover, having no culture themselves, Americans had no respect for the culture of others. Harrison Salisbury noticed the following article in 1951: "Under a headline 'Savages in Yasnaya Polyana,' the *Literary Gazette* charges that ten American embassy staff members have desecrated the grave of Lev Tolstoi by boisterous, drunken behavior..."¹³³

Of course not all of American culture was degenerate and lowbrow. Cultural figures critical of the United States were labeled as progressive and given publicity in the Soviet Union. Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, and other less notable writers saw some of their works published in the Soviet Union. Soviet propaganda paid particular attention to African Americans because their stories could easily be tied to the racist narrative. In 1952, *Ogonek* introduced its readers to Charles White, an African-American painter who focused on the subject of black America. The story detailed his frequent struggles against racism even as his works hung in many leading American museums. "From a very early age I learned what it means to be a Negro in America," he was quoted as saying, referring to frequent instances of racism in his life.¹³⁴

Perhaps the most notable was the African-American singer and actor Paul Robeson. His activism in the fight for minority and worker rights, as well as his sympathetic attitude towards the Soviet Union, ensured frequent invitations to perform in the country. In 1952 he was awarded an International Stalin Peace Prize for strengthening peace among peoples, one of the highest Soviet honors for foreigners.

¹³² *Krokodil* #33 1948 p. 10. *Krokodil* made light of formalist art as early as 1936 #27 p. 10.

¹³³ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 205.

¹³⁴ *Ogonek*, #8 February, 1952. p. 25.

Investigation of Robeson's Communist connections by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1949 and the confiscation of his passport by the State Department in 1950 provided Soviet media with lots of material to accuse Americans of suppressing progressive culture.

The media told the Soviet people that much like American culture, American society as a whole was under the influence of the forces of greed and depravity inherent in capitalist social structure. Atrocities perpetrated by American soldiers in Korea were not isolated incidents but sprung from the very fiber of American life. Stories about America in the Soviet press often insinuated that extreme violence was part of everyday American life. In the section titled "Foreign Life and Manners", a Soviet magazine conveyed a story of David Unruh who killed thirteen of his neighbors in Camden, New Jersey, in 1949. The article sarcastically noted that a reporter looking for a profitable story was the first person on the scene asking the killer about his wellbeing and the exact number of victims. The article quoted *Time* magazine as saying that Unruh's only mistake was that in his personal conflict he used methods reserved for resolution of group conflicts.¹³⁵ A satirical piece in a Soviet magazine named "American school" featured the following conversation - "Your son was shooting with a slingshot during class, Mrs. Baxter," complained the teacher. "Oh! The rascal again lost his Colt that I gave him for his birthday," the mother replied.¹³⁶ One Soviet magazine even described baseball as a "bestly battle, a bloody fight involving mayhem and murder."¹³⁷

In the Soviet narrative, violence and inhumanity, collectively labeled as gangsterism, spread to all layers of American society from the office of the President, the

¹³⁵ *Ogonek*, #13 March, 1950. p. 22.

¹³⁶ *Ogonek*, #38 August, 1952. p. 31.

¹³⁷ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 280.

halls of the American Congress, and the corporate boardrooms to the American Main Street. Gangsterism in American society, wrote one Soviet author in the late 1940s, was “a rather natural phenomenon” that existed throughout “all of the United States history.” “Gangsterism,” he stressed, was “the last stage of capitalist society’s moral decay.”¹³⁸

Extensive use of factual stories, supposedly taken from the American media, was the hallmark of early Cold War Soviet propaganda and continued with varying intensity until the final days of the Soviet Union. In order to give their image of America credibility, Soviet propagandists made it appear as if they came from America and they simply relayed information to the Soviet people. A typical Soviet story about America usually opened with or included lines “The American press, or American newspaper X reports”, or “This fact/story comes from American newspaper X.”

In reality, even if a news item came from an American source it was often altered in a way as to make America look in the worst possible light. Sensational and extraordinary stories were presented to the Soviet people as being typical of American life. And Soviet people’s lack of access to outside information allowed authorities to use rather crude tactics in order to make its Cold War adversary fit the image assigned to it by the Soviet media. In the earlier mentioned story of Howard Unruh who killed thirteen people in Camden in 1949, the *Ogonek* article stated that psychiatric examination found him to be a completely normal man, suggesting such behavior was normal in America. In fact, Howard Unruh never stood trial after being diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. In other cases, David Caute noted that when describing American theater plays Soviet critics often altered the play’s actual content.¹³⁹ There were also reports of

¹³⁸ Quoted in N. I. Nikolaeva.

¹³⁹ Caute, 64-65.

Soviet magazines publishing pictures of Americans waiting to see a movie and passing them of as evidence of unemployment lines.¹⁴⁰

Silvery Dust

Made in the last year of Stalin's life, the 1953 movie *Silvery Dust* (*Serebristaia pyl'*) encapsulates all of the key stereotypes in Soviet anti-American propaganda in the early Cold War period.

From the very beginning, the movie reiterates the idea of the profit-mad American military-industrial complex by showing the military working in close cooperation with chemical monopolies in order to profit from development of a chemical weapon (silvery dust) regardless of human consequences - one milliliter of the dust is enough to kill anything living within a one hectare radius. Furthermore, the generals in charge of the research project conspire to sell the silvery dust to the highest bidder, therefore defrauding the chemical company that funded the project. The silvery dust research lab is located in a small town of Fortskill. To the Soviet audience, Fortskill, located somewhere in the South, was supposed to represent an average American town. Highlighting the issue of racism, the movie shows Fortskill blacks being treated as second-class citizens. They work as servants for the whites and are verbally and physically abused. KKK lynchings are a common occurrence. But the younger generation of African-Americans strives towards education and equality. In the movie, together with the progressive whites, young black Americans hold a demonstration for worker and civil rights in the middle of town. At one point, during the rally one demonstrator says "the world must hear what real, honest Americans are saying", echoing

¹⁴⁰ Harvard Project – <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:981834?n=48>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

Soviet claims that a majority of average Americans sympathize with the goals of communism and oppose oppressive American social structures.

Promoting the idea of America as the successor of Nazi Germany, the film shows silver dust research lab using Nazi scientists, who dream of revenge against the Soviet Union. “An American army uniform weighs a little heavy on the shoulders of an average man,” says a former American officer, explaining the reason for his quitting the army and confirming Soviet claims of American warmongering.

The degeneracy and dishonesty of American government institutions feature prominently in the movie. People in charge of developing the silver dust use the corrupt justice system, crooked cops, and gangsters in order to perform experiments on black subjects. Police and other instruments of government authority are just tools for the reactionary capitalist forces to further their agenda and keep the progressive population down. Religion is ridiculed when an American priest (his denomination was not specified) is shown as caring little about the plight of African Americans, instead engaging in various psychic and extrasensory séances.

In the end, viewers were supposed to have formed an impression that the United States was ruled by a few moneygrubbing individuals who would do anything and sell anyone for a dollar, including starting a war. American culture consisted of spending time in a bar, attending a lynching, or participating in psychic readings. The elite exploited and victimized workers and African-Americans through the use of police and the legal system that were under their influence. But there was hope. The progressive elements of American society-- workers, black Americans, and others yearning for

equality, peace and justice--were organizing, and sooner or later would overthrow the oppressive capitalist regime.

To use an analogy of a piano, Soviet leaders pushed certain keys of anti-American propaganda to suit a particular occasion. At times of economic crisis they focused on wealth inequality so as to tell the Soviet people that while things were hard at home, they are even worse abroad; at times of war such as the one in Korea, they highlighted American militarism and savagery.¹⁴¹ Sheet music changed depending on domestic and international events, but the piano remained the same. Except for a few minor adjustments and level of intensity, the image of America presented to the Soviet people closely resembled that of pre-war America.

Why do they want to bomb us?: public reaction to official propaganda

Soviet post-war propaganda painted America as a country of war, greed, moral and spiritual degeneration, racism, crime, and economic decline. The campaign's intensity, and its sharp focus on the negative aspects of America, left little doubt in the mind of Soviet citizens concerning what the government wanted them to think about the United States. So how did the Soviet people react to all of the negative information about America in the Soviet media? Did they fall in line and begin to hate their country's recent ally as the government wanted, or did they reject the official line and retain some of the goodwill for the country that supported the Soviet Union with billions of dollars of food and equipment?

¹⁴¹ Fateev - <http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev7.htm>.

American famine relief in the 1920s, technological cooperation between the two countries during the Soviet industrialization drive of the early 1930s when thousands of American specialists came to the Soviet Union to help build its industry, as well as the Lend-Lease Program during the war, proved to be the biggest obstacles to the spread of official view on America in the Soviet Union. Soviets who worked with Americans in the 1930, or met them during the war, as well as those directly affected by the American wartime aid, still held positive images of the American people years after the fact.

Living in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, American journalist Harrison Salisbury wrote about an exchange with a Soviet architect in Leningrad (St. Petersburg):

What I asked, did the people of Leningrad think about Americans? Did they still remember the days of the war?

My friend smiled, sadly. "Of course we remember," he said. "American Spam... we still make jokes about it but we were glad to eat it at the time. American butter... American sugar... We haven't forgotten that America helped us. We Leningraders never forget a friend."¹⁴²

Similarly, an American visiting the Soviet Union in 1962 remembered a conversation with a Siberian couple, who expressed their goodwill for the American people despite the recent cooling of relations after the Soviets shot down an American U2 spy plane.

As a very young man the husband worked with American engineers during the first Five-Year Plan and said he could never forget those years of common enthusiastic endeavor or the friendly, easygoing relationship between the Americans and the Russians.¹⁴³

Another American traveling on the Trans-Siberian railroad in 1966 met an old Soviet man who fought alongside Americans at the end of the war.

¹⁴² Harrison E. Salisbury, *American in Russia*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 63.

¹⁴³ Markoosha Fischer, *Reunion in Moscow, a Russian revisits her country* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 52.

For him, there was no Cold War, no bitter rivalry between America and the Soviet Union; there were only those old days when Americans and Russians were together against the dreaded Nazi juggernaut.¹⁴⁴

Interestingly, Soviet citizens expressed the same sentiments to their own leaders.

Writing to Nikita Khrushchev in 1959 before his trip to the United States, a Soviet engineer from Stalingrad (Volgograd), described his liberation by American troops from a German POW camp in 1945.

29 April 1945, American soldiers liberated the German concentration camp Dachau, among 30 thousand political prisoners of various nationalities were several hundred Soviet people – members of the underground resistance. I remember the first moments of this event. Three tall American soldiers, still hot from battle, looked in horror at the crowd of starving and sick people who ran to the barbed wire. Everybody was crying. The soldiers had large tears in their eyes. And then who can forget the heartwarming care of the medical battalion that arrived to treat the typhoid fever. Maybe these people will listen to you in America. Tell them thank you from the Soviet people. Tell them that the people they saved returned to their homeland and are happy.¹⁴⁵

Many of these accounts took place years after Stalin's death. However, the fact that some Soviets still remembered their encounters with Americans with fondness decades later serves as evidence that these feelings were more intense and more common in the period immediately following the war.

A friendly attitude on the part of Soviet people towards Americans did not necessarily signal a failure of Soviet propaganda. An overwhelming majority of positive comments about America coming from Soviet citizens focused on Americans as people. This was very much in line with the theme of Soviet propaganda that most average Americans were good and decent people stuck under an exploitative government run by a few wealthy individuals. These attitudes, however, blunted the more vicious attacks on

¹⁴⁴ Jay Higginbotham, *Fast Train Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1983), 88.

¹⁴⁵ GARF f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309.

America by the Soviet media, ones portraying America as a country full of indifference and inhumanity.

Comrade-like feelings towards Americans persisted even during the height of the anti-American campaign of the early Cold War period. “In no case when the Russians discovered that I was an American did it evoke any antagonism, resentment, or rudeness. On the contrary, the usual reaction was one of amazement, surprise, and pleasure,” noted an America journalist living in the Soviet Union in the early 1950s.¹⁴⁶ Others made similar observations.¹⁴⁷

On the whole, post-war anti-American propaganda did not break any new ground in popular attitudes towards America. Besides changing the image of America from friend to foe, there was little variation in the way that the Soviet information sources characterized America and the American people. However, the focus on the United States as the primary foe was new. America had replaced Nazi Germany as enemy number one, but the image of America remained largely the same as it was before the war: Good America and Bad America; America of Lend-Lease and racist America; America of technological progress and widespread unemployment. Soviet popular attitudes continued to reflect this view. After talking to a number of Soviet officers in Germany in the late 1940s, American journalist Werner Knop characterized their attitude towards America this way:

as they saw it, there was on the one hand, the America of Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Wallace, the America of oppressed Negroes, enslaved workers and shackled intellectuals fighting for democracy. On the other hand, there was the semi-fascist America of Marshall and Wall Street...even when they castigated it, you saw how, to them America was out of this world--a mixture of monster and fairy prince. Something greedy, cruel, decadent, and

¹⁴⁶ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 180.

¹⁴⁷ Barghoorn, 253.

voluptuous, but also something so rich and efficient, so inventive, glittering and daedalian.¹⁴⁸

In large part, the availability of outside information and Soviet reality dictated the extent to which Soviet people believed the official image of America. As we will see later in the chapter, lacking outside information on the subject, most Soviets subscribed to the official view of American society. A Harvard project participant from the Ukraine described his view of America while living in the Soviet Union in the following manner:

Due to lack of comparison, I even believed the Soviet radio, that only capitalists live in good conditions, and that the ordinary working people must sleep under bridges, live in slums and endure the constant threat of unemployment.¹⁴⁹

On the other hand, faced with post-war food and consumer good shortages at home, hearing stories from Soviets returning from the West, and still using many American Lend-Lease items, many Soviet people saw America as a land of plenty. Alongside instances of Soviets praising American and Western living standards mentioned earlier in the chapter, a number of people suggested that the Soviet Union should turn to America in addressing post-war food shortages: “Why doesn’t the Soviet Union purchase bread and other foodstuffs from America?” was a common question during lectures and meetings on post-war economic situation.¹⁵⁰ “Here a kilogram of meat costs 6 dollars, but in America you can get a hundred killograms of pork for 6 dollars,” complained one Soviet citizen.¹⁵¹ “Workers in America live better than our teachers,” commented one Soviet teacher in the late 1940s. Clearly, despite attacks on the American standard of living as only available to a few, the image of America as a

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Barghoorn, 257.

¹⁴⁹ Harvard Project - <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=3>.

¹⁵⁰ RGASPI f. 17, o.121, d.524. l. 7;
Zubkova, *Sovetskaia zhizn'*, 28.

¹⁵¹ RGASPI f. 17, o.121, d.524. l. 63.

wealthy country stayed with the Soviet people, growing in times of economic hardship in the country, and serving as a source of criticism of their own government's reconstruction efforts.

In contrast, Soviet propaganda about American warmongering was notably successful. This was largely due to post-war conditions, both domestic and international, rather than the content of the message itself. Having faced frequent military conflict since the start of World War I in 1914, and the "us against the capitalist world" message enshrined in Stalin's "socialism in one country" speech in 1924, Soviet people quickly accepted the possibility of war with their recent ally. "War with America is unavoidable and will start not later than the coming spring;" "Currently Vyshinskii [the Soviet foreign minister] is waging diplomatic war in New York, soon we will be in a real war, therefore, mama, don't wait for me," read some of the letters from Soviet military officers shortly after the end of World War II.¹⁵² Soviets from other segments of society voiced similar concerns.¹⁵³

At times, the Soviet focus on American militarism had the opposite of the intended effect. Faced with constant headlines about American military spending and atomic bombs, some Soviets were left feeling that Soviet Union would lose the upcoming war. "It's pointless for them to make us to go through all this training, we will not win the future war with America," wrote a Soviet major in a letter back home.¹⁵⁴ "America and England will choke us with atomic bombs," lamented others.¹⁵⁵ There were official

¹⁵² RGASPI f. 17, o.125, d.507, l.296-298.

¹⁵³ RGASPI f. 17, o.121, d.524. l. 13, f. 17, o. 88, d. 694; Salisbury, *American in Russia*, 301;

Barghoorn, 254.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

complaints that during lectures that speakers talked about America in such a way that many listeners came away with an impression that America was all-powerful.¹⁵⁶

Certain segments of the Soviet population, particularly ones that had been persecuted by the Soviet government, looked forward to the upcoming war. They hoped that America would prevail in the conflict and free them from Soviet control. A 1946 official report from Zakarpatskaia region (*oblast'*) of the Ukraine mentioned that some members of the Uniate church were praying for invasion by Anglo-American forces.¹⁵⁷ Devastation and slow recovery in the countryside, especially in Ukraine where resistance to collectivized agriculture was the strongest, sparked hopes and rumors that Americans would invade the Soviet Union and abolish collective agriculture.¹⁵⁸

The vast majority of the Soviet people simply could not believe that after everything their country went through during the war that the Soviet government was in any way responsible for rising international tensions and risking another war. American observers living in the country at the time reported a uniformity of opinion on the subject. “The Russians generally feel, why should the Americans dislike us? Why aren’t the Americans friendly?” wrote Harrison Salisbury.¹⁵⁹ “Whenever I tried to explain to ordinary Russian citizens that American war fears are prompted by Soviet actions abroad, they expressed astonishment,” noticed Marshall McDuffie. Furthermore he observed that:

The Soviet people, incessantly indoctrinated over the years, seem to believe their government is incapable of starting a war; from the discussions I had, if they were told the United States was aggressor in any future struggle, most of them would accept the

¹⁵⁶ RGASPI f. 17, o.125, d. 516 l. 10.

¹⁵⁷ RGASPI f. 17, o.125, d. 507 l. 268.

¹⁵⁸ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 517 l. 37.

Zubkova, *Sovetskaya Zhizn'*, 50, 55-59, 63.

¹⁵⁹ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 176.

statement without question. Time after time Russians said to me, “The Soviet Union has never attacked any other nation.”¹⁶⁰

Many Soviets took up the official line that change in the White House was responsible for the shift in the American stance towards the Soviet Union. “What would the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union be if Roosevelt was still alive? What party does Roosevelt’s son belong to? Will Henry Wallace be elected President?” and similar questions dominated discussions of international issues among the Soviet people at the time.¹⁶¹ “The simple Russian thought that Roosevelt had been killed, and that if he had lived America would have still been Russia's friend,” asserted one participant in the Harvard Project (a survey of Soviet defectors in the early years of the Cold War).¹⁶² In addition, this line of reasoning closely followed the official Soviet depiction of American politics, including foreign policy, as hijacked by America’s financial interests who chose the man in the White House.

The image of America as the new Nazi Germany also stuck with some Soviet people. “Is it possible that Truman will turn into a second Hitler?”¹⁶³ “Will reactionary forces in the U.S. be able to get the American people behind them, much like the Nazis were able to?” asked some.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, others compared Americans to fascists when voicing their concern over a possible nuclear war.¹⁶⁵

On social issues in America, most Soviets’ opinions seem to have been influenced by Soviet propaganda. In large part, Soviet people in the early Cold War era believed that racism was entrenched and widespread in American society. In fact, the Soviets’

¹⁶⁰ McDuffie, 317.

¹⁶¹ RGASPI f. 17, o.125, d. 517 l. 34.
Zubkova, *Sovetskaya Zhizn*’, 38-41.

¹⁶² Harvard Project - <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959184?n=40>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁶³ RGASPI f. 17, o. 125, d. 515 l. 24.

¹⁶⁴ Zubkova, *Sovetskaia zhizn*’, 38-41.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 626.

propensity to mention the issue constantly in their conversations with Americans turned into a joke among those who had been to the Soviet Union – “An American finds a flaw with the Moscow subway. And the Russian immediately replies “But what about Negro discrimination in America?”¹⁶⁶ The joke also highlighted Soviet sensitivity to any outside criticism.

Marshall McDuffie, visiting the Soviet Union in 1953, remarked on the Soviet view of American society as shallow, focused on the lowest of human instincts, non-progressive, and lacking any kind of opportunity and safety nets for the average people. In touring the country he noted the following encounters with Soviet people whose comments he judged to be genuine:

One public school superintendent had asked me if teachers were still punished in America for teaching Darwinism... Some Soviet officials commented that: “failure to provide free education for all students who want it, your failure to provide free medicine, show that your government and your rulers do not really care for the welfare of your people... One person claimed that: “I have seen advertisements in *The New York Times* asking for sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls to work as secretaries. I don’t think they wanted them for such purposes.”¹⁶⁷

Frederick Barghoorn drew upon his own experiences with up Soviet people in the 1940s, reporting

Soviet girls, for example, sometimes criticize their American sisters for marrying not for love but for money. In view of their own conduct, this criticism is hardly consistent, however sincere. It stems in part from the ideological indoctrination which holds Western people, including American, to be “commercial,” “dry” and “soulless.”

An extremely intelligent American Army officer who was stationed during the war at Poltava told me that Soviet people often remarked that of course America had a far superior material culture to that of the U.S.S.R. but that Soviet people were spiritually superior. This opinion was sometimes accompanied by condemnation of American culture as commercial.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ McDuffie, 185.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 143.

¹⁶⁸ Barghoorn, 252.

Educational level and access to information played a significant role in whether Soviet persons believed official information about America. At times, the crudeness of anti-American propaganda raised questions among those who had more information about a given subject or simply took the time to reflect. For example, in 1951 a person complained to the propaganda department that a collection of poems about America by a famous Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky had serious flaws because almost all positive comments about America were removed, thus distorting the poems' meanings.¹⁶⁹ Around the same time another Soviet citizen wrote a letter stating that recent newspaper articles did a disservice to the Soviet press and people because they blatantly lowered statistics for American hydroelectric capacity while raising Soviet ones.¹⁷⁰ "How can it be, that America, that is dumping grain into the sea, will not avoid an [economic] crisis, while the Soviet Union, that has bread shortages, will avoid it?" asked Soviet students in Latvia in response to articles in the Soviet press that America, not wanting lower grain prices, was dumping grain into the sea due to overproduction.¹⁷¹ Obviously the low quality of Soviet propaganda raised doubts about its truthfulness among listeners who possessed contradictory information or chose to think about issues in depth.

On the other hand, those without outside information or any desire to subject official information to more intense scrutiny were more likely to believe official sources. Harold Laycock, a British journalist visiting the Soviet Union in 1950, reported

While I was at work she [the Soviet maid] confided in my wife. These American planes strewing Colorado beetles all over Eastern Europe to destroy the Communist potato crop had disturbed her deeply...She, and millions of others in the Soviet Union, believed

¹⁶⁹ RGASPI f. 17, o. 132, d. 133, l. 49-55.

¹⁷⁰ RGASPI f. 17, o. 132, d. 486, l. 279-290.

¹⁷¹ RGASPI f. 17, o. 125, d. 518 l. 17.

without thought of doubt this and thousands of similar bizarre fantasies in their daily papers.¹⁷²

For most Soviet people, their knowledge about America came from official sources where information was often scattered and incomplete. As a result, some people lacked basic understanding of the issues involved in anti-American propaganda. For instance, Soviet people wrote newspapers asking questions such as “Who are American negroes? Are they part of the American nation?”¹⁷³ Others asked for newspapers to explain the meaning of “Pentagon,” which they had seen mentioned so many times in the press.¹⁷⁴

So was there anything about America that the Soviet people liked or respected? As noted earlier, Soviet propaganda did not vilify the American people; for the most part they were depicted as victims of the American capitalist system. This, coupled with American aid to the Soviet people during famines in the early 1920s, and Lend-Lease during World War II, led Soviet people to develop positive feelings towards Americans as people. Several Americans living in the Soviet Union at the time reported that Soviets often admired American lack of pretense, their politeness, and had a generally friendly attitude towards the American people.¹⁷⁵

Since the early days of the Soviet state the media complimented Americans for their work ethic and efficiency. Technological cooperation during the 1930s further solidified the image of Americans as industrious, technologically advanced and hard working, a perception that remained in the years of the early Cold War and beyond.¹⁷⁶

An American visiting the Soviet Union in the early 1950s recalled his conversation with a

¹⁷² Harold Laycock, *Moscow Close-Up* (London: D. Yates, 1951), 72-73.

¹⁷³ RGASPI f. 599 o.1 d. 29 l. 5, f. 599 o. 1 d. 30 l. 44.

¹⁷⁴ RGASPI f. 599 o. 1 d. 67 l. 36.

¹⁷⁵ Barghoorn, 234-236; Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 176.

¹⁷⁶ McKenna, 1.

Soviet official who had been to the U.S.: “Since he seemed to attack everything American, I finally asked what he liked best about my country, if anything, and he promptly answered, ‘American practicality.’”¹⁷⁷ “Soviet admiration for American technology was nothing new, but the flood of American products which reached the U.S.S.R. during the war confirmed and intensified it,” wrote Frederick Barghoorn.¹⁷⁸

As we have seen, in large part, most people’s image of America closely followed one presented by the Soviet media, with little deviation from the image of the pre-war United States. Those who had supplemental sources of information, such as experts in certain fields, met some of the more outrageous claims regarding America with skepticism. Most others, however, went along with the official line. Since propaganda did not challenge some of the more positive and well-entrenched views of American people as generally good, it was easy to believe that worsening relations between the two countries were caused by a few immoral and greedy people in American government and business interests.

Let’s race! : presenting America in the Khrushchev period

Stalin died on 5 March, 1953. His death, however, did not have a drastic impact on Soviet propaganda about America. Soviet foreign policy towards the United States assumed a softer tone, yet the basic characteristics of America in the Soviet media remained largely the same. Gone were the crude depictions of America as the center of violence and vice. Soviet journals no longer printed poorly edited tales of daily mass murder and appalling poverty on American streets. What replaced them, however, were

¹⁷⁷ McDuffie, 28.

¹⁷⁸ Barghoorn, 240.

the same stories, but now with less visible hostility towards the subject matter. The authors of the new Soviet propaganda wanted to appear as more objective in their treatment of its Cold War rival. In spite of the change in tone, however, Soviet propaganda still showed America as a country of wealth inequality and racism, a country where domestic and foreign policies, as well as culture, were slaves to selfish interests of the affluent elite who stopped at nothing to make money.

Three years after Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev emerged as the clear leader of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's policy towards America, at least on paper, called for "peaceful coexistence"¹⁷⁹ between the two countries. "Whether you like your neighbor or not, nothing can be done about it, you have to find some way of getting on with him, for you both live on one and the same planet," he wrote in his 1959 article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine.¹⁸⁰ The new relationship, he added, was not simply about tolerance and shelving of old conflicts only for them to reemerge at some later date. Peaceful coexistence, he noted "can and should develop into peaceful competition for the purpose of satisfying man's needs in the best possible way."¹⁸¹ In other words, Khrushchev suggested that each country's peaceful achievements speak for themselves.

In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first manmade object into space. The small metal satellite named *Sputnik*¹⁸² signaled a new age in human history and made strong impressions around the world regarding Soviet technological capabilities.

Moreover, Soviet leadership in the space-race provided a new platform for Soviet

¹⁷⁹ Khrushchev first suggested the phrase for use in Marshal Georgii Zhukov's 1955 May speech; see Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 28.

¹⁸⁰ Nikita Khrushchev, "On Peaceful Coexistence," *Foreign Affairs* 38:1 (1959), 1.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸² *Sputnik* means companion in Russian. In this case the name refers to satellite's role as earth's companion once it started orbiting the earth.

propaganda to showcase Communism's superiority over capitalism, particularly America, a country often portrayed by the Soviets themselves as a technological leader.

Propaganda frequently used the issue of Soviet space achievements to stress the point that Soviet Union was the country of the future. "October [referring to the October 1917 communist revolution] opened the road to space;" "Glory to the conquerors of the universe!" "Sons of October - Pioneers of the Universe!" proclaimed official Soviet posters of the time (see Illustration 9).¹⁸³ Soviet feats in space frequently appeared on covers of Soviet magazines such as the popular satirical magazine *Krokodil*.¹⁸⁴ A lot of Soviet futurist literature portrayed the future of capitalism on Earth as the real fantasy, where Soviets (people of the future) could not understand why the capitalists would live in such backward conditions when they met them on other planets. "Science-fiction became fiction only when the subject was capitalism," quipped Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Available at - <http://russiatrek.org/blog/art/propaganda-posters-of-soviet-space-program-1958-1963/>, <http://russiatrek.org/blog/art/propaganda-posters-of-soviet-space-program-part-2/>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁸⁴ *Krokodil* #32 1957, #2 1959, #11 1961, #24 1961, #30 1962, #18 1963.

¹⁸⁵ Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e--mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Ann Arbor : Ardis, 1988), 99.



Glory to the Soviet people – Pioneers of space (Poster 1)
Socialism is our launching pad (Poster 2) (Illustration 9)

At the same time the Soviets gladly gloated over American space failures. After a visit to Disneyland, Alexei Adzubei, Khrushchev’s son-in-law and a prominent Soviet journalist, informed the Soviet reader that “There is only one American rocket that works. The children like it very much; it takes them to the moon for only twenty cents.”¹⁸⁶ *Face to Face with America (Litsom k Littsu s Amerikoi)*, an official Soviet account of Khrushchev’s visit to the United States in 1959, contained lots of talk about Soviet scientific achievements – a rocket to the moon and the first atomic icebreaker. The book contrasted these with American failures such as two unsuccessful rocket

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Alberto Ronchey, *Russia in the Thaw* (New York: Norton, 1964), 207.

launches in one day during Khrushchev's visit and slow progress in building an American icebreaker.¹⁸⁷ The book added that:

At the same time as the rockets on Cape Canaveral were blowing up and Americans launched satellites the size of oranges, something new happened, something so important that it even eclipsed the satellite era. A rocket launched by Soviet people reached the second cosmic speed – 11.2 km per second. A magic number, like “Open Sesame” – a number that opens the gates of the universe...behind which lies an era of interplanetary travel.¹⁸⁸

Visiting the Moscow circus in 1957, an American couple recalled seeing the following skit: “When the lights went up, a lonely clown was wandering around the arena patting a balloon into the air until it burst. The master of ceremonies shouted, ‘Who are you and what are you doing? Can’t you see you have no place in this show?’ The clown said, ‘But I am an American and I’m trying to launch my sputnik.’”¹⁸⁹

In addition, the Soviets used the issue of space exploration in order to reinforce some of the old Soviet propaganda themes about the United States. Soviet posters and other media painted Americans as trying to use the new cosmos frontier for military purposes while the Soviet Union was committed to using space for peace and progress.¹⁹⁰ The theme expanded into anything space related. For example, a popular 1957 science-fiction book *Kallisto* told the story of an alien spaceship that landed in the Soviet Union. After meeting with the aliens Soviets find out that they come from a planet that built communism many years ago. As the aliens share their advanced knowledge of things

¹⁸⁷ A. Adzhubei et al., *Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi* (Moskva: G. I. Pollit, 1959), 68-75.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 79.

¹⁸⁹ Santha Rama Rau., *My Russian Journey* (New York, Harper, 1959), 215.

¹⁹⁰ Available at - <http://russiatrek.org/blog/art/propaganda-posters-of-soviet-space-program-1958-1963/>, <http://russiatrek.org/blog/art/propaganda-posters-of-soviet-space-program-part-2/>, <http://englishrussia.com/2006/09/21/soviet-propaganda-against-usa-posters-part-2/>. Accessed April 22, 2012;

Raymond Garthoff, *A journey through the Cold War: a memoir of containment and coexistence* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 160.

such as medicines and new engines to help Earth, leaders of unnamed capitalist countries fear that Soviets might try to use alien technology for military purposes and unsuccessfully attempt to destroy the alien spaceship.¹⁹¹

Khrushchev threw another wrinkle into Soviet treatment of the United States when in 1957 he announced that the Soviet Union was going to "catch up with and overtake America in per capita production of meat, milk, and butter." While the idea was not new,¹⁹² now it came from the very top of the Soviet leadership, therefore becoming official policy. The whole country was now engaged in beating the U.S., not only in agricultural output but in all spheres of life.¹⁹³ Historian Greg Castillo argued that the campaign was a part of a larger effort by Khrushchev to stimulate Soviet consumer industry.¹⁹⁴

As we have seen, Soviet leaders and people always saw America as a wealthy, if unequal, country. After Khrushchev's announcement, however, America became the official standard. According to Zdenek Mlynar, (Secretary of the Czech communist party, 1968-1970) Khrushchev made the mistake in comparing the Soviet Union to the U.S. Stalin never did this, he wrote, insisting instead that the Soviet Union was unique and could not be compared to any other country. Therefore, by making "catching up with and overtaking America" the goal, Khrushchev "undermined the Soviet people's faith in

¹⁹¹ Georgii Martynov, *Kalisto* (Moskva: Iz. Detskoi literatury, 1957). Available online at <http://lib.ru/RUFANT/MARTYNOW/kallisto.txt>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁹² The famous Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky already wrote something similar when visiting the U.S. in 1925; see Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange & The Cold War*, 9. In an article titled "Krokodil Encyclopedia" (Krokodil 1936 #30 p. 3), the magazine identified America as "a country which our [Soviet] industry must overtake."

¹⁹³ Vail' and Genis, 6.

¹⁹⁴ Castillo, 163-165.

their political and social system, thus creating a framework of constant comparison between the Soviet Union and the United States.”¹⁹⁵

There are several problems with this statement. First, in terms of material wealth, America had been the “measuring stick” for the Soviet people since at least the 1920s.¹⁹⁶ We saw examples of this in the previous section, when many Soviets had high opinion of Western, and especially American, living standards. Therefore, it is unlikely that Khrushchev’s speech was responsible for Soviet people losing their faith in the system, although it might have intensified the level of comparison. Khrushchev simply told them what they had already known for many years.

Furthermore, Soviet authorities sought to blunt any aggrandizement of America by providing a number of reasons why the Soviet Union lagged behind the United States in material terms. For example, magazine *Komunist* pointed out that U.S. had not had a war on its soil for a hundred years, netted huge profits from World War I and World War II, and benefited from decline of other capitalist countries following World War II. The U.S. was ahead of the Soviet Union in productivity but only because the workers were forced to work at fast speeds and for long hours. Furthermore, the Soviet Union provided many social services to its citizens while the U.S. did not, stressed the magazine.¹⁹⁷ In an interview with foreign reporters in 1962, Khrushchev himself pointed out that the Soviet Union had to spend a lot more resources to achieve comparable living standards because of the colder climate.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Shiraev and Zubok, 13-14.

¹⁹⁶ Ball, Chapter 5; Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Ideologies in the Period of Glasnost* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 158.

¹⁹⁷ RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 419 l. 112-117.

¹⁹⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*. V 7 tomakh. Tom 7. (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1964), 102.

The Soviet Union just experienced one of the most devastating wars in its history; therefore, most of these reasons seemed valid and relatively new. Therefore, as we will see later in this chapter, many Soviets believed the official line that outside forces, and not the system itself, kept them from achieving American level of material wealth.

In addition, Soviet media tried to appeal to a sense of patriotism in the Soviet people by suggesting that despite not being as wealthy as Americans, Soviet citizens still preferred their way of life, one that did not revolve around pursuit of wealth and profit.

An English professor touring the Soviet Union in 1960 described several such incidents:

Tipping stories had their part to play in this campaign. One Russian mother wrote to *Izvestiya* about the disgraceful behaviour of an American professor in a Russian post-office. First he tried to tip one of the assistants and received a rebuff ‘full of dignity’. Then the writer’s twelve-year-old son helped the American by carrying his parcels, and was offered a hundred-ruble note ‘to buy ice-cream’ – enough incidentally to keep even a Soviet Billy Bunter going for several days. But the little boy was equal to the situation and coldly explained that it was his duty as a Pioneer¹⁹⁹ to help his seniors without thought of gain. His mother felt proud to see her son ‘make the Boston professor blush.’²⁰⁰

Soviet movies of the period sought to convey a similar message. “It was very important to show that Soviet life, modest though it may be compared with material life in the West, was still preferable,” wrote film historian Tony Shaw.²⁰¹

Besides the new angle of space exploration and friendly economic competition, official Soviet image of the United States changed little. A survey of late 1950s – early 1960s issues of the satirical magazine *Krokodil* underlines continuity in Soviet propaganda about America. As before, the most common portrait of America continued to be one of a country highjacked by a few wealthy elites who used war mongering in

¹⁹⁹ Soviet Youth movement, in some ways resembling American Boy Scouts. It sought to teach Soviet children on how to be a model citizen under communist form of government.

²⁰⁰ Ronald Hingley., *Under Soviet Skins: An Untourist’s Report* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), 202.

²⁰¹ Shaw, 49.

order to enrich themselves. The image used by *Krokodil* to designate this category of Americans gives us a good idea of how the Soviet people were supposed to view them. Almost always, the *Krokodil* American was grossly overweight, in the effort to suggest the unhealthy excesses of American life, a dollar sign being another permanent feature in *Krokodil's* depiction of rich Americans. The dollar represented American obsession and worship of wealth and money, and was closely linked to American militarism, with dollar symbol frequently appearing on drawings of missiles and nuclear bombs.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union was depicted as a country that worked day and night on the side of peace, but was ready to defend itself against American aggression if necessary. The Soviet Union was the side that was constantly asking for peace via a ban on nuclear weapons, but its peaceful intentions were always thwarted by American business interests. “Reaction of a businessman” a cartoon typical of the theme, showed an American businessman ripping out his hair in a fury, and screaming “Again they demand a ban on nuclear weapons. How can I not blow up.”²⁰² Another cartoon put it this way: “What’s wrong, Johnny?” asked a worried wife. “I dreamt that the disarmament race has begun,” replied her obese and horrified husband, in a caricature that featured an American couple sleeping in a luxurious bed with a sizable dollar sign on the headboard and pictures of weapons proudly hanging on the wall behind them.²⁰³

In many of its stories and cartoons, *Krokodil* implied that America had other, more urgent, problems to worry about besides the arms buildup. The magazine focused on the old subject of unemployment, frequently mentioning it as a dark force crippling American society – suggesting a contrast with the Soviet Union that, at least officially,

²⁰² *Krokodil*, #3 30 January, 1957, 10.

²⁰³ *Krokodil*, #8 20 March, 1957, 8.

had no unemployment.²⁰⁴ Unequal treatment of African-Americans, underlined by cartoons where blacks were acceptable as objects of entertainment, yet were discriminated against in other social situations, was another staple theme on the pages of *Krokodil*.²⁰⁵ The official ideological magazine *Komunist* claimed that many African Americans faced forced sterilizations, although now these were being done in secret.²⁰⁶ Similarly, Soviet propaganda showed American children as having few opportunities at getting an education, in contrast to Soviet kids who enjoyed all the fruits of socialist society.²⁰⁷

American society and culture were once again shown as under the influence of money, making them shallow and depraved. A 1961 *Ogonek* article featured a story by Soviet journalists who recently visited San Francisco. In the article, they mentioned the overall friendliness of the people but focused on one incident: An old man on a ferry complained that Soviet press never publishes crime stories, and proudly stated that tomorrow's San Francisco paper will feature a story about a father who killed his children. After some discussion with other passengers, the writers claimed that most Americans agreed with them and few were interested in these kinds of stories. The article noted that this proved the fact that these horror stories did not arise from reader demand, but were instead being pushed by the newspaper owners.²⁰⁸ Once again, we see Soviet media highlighting American obsession with violence, but at the same time pointing out that most good Americans were under the influence of bad newspaper owners.

²⁰⁴ *Krokodil*, #14 20 May, 1958,13; *Krokodil*, #11 20 April, 1958,12

²⁰⁵ *Krokodil*, #3 30 January, 1957, 12.

²⁰⁶ RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 419 l. 63.

²⁰⁷ Peacock, 54.

²⁰⁸ *Ogonek*, #28 July, 1961,28-29.

In rehashing another old theme, a 1959 *Ogonek* cartoon underscored the American obsession with money and profit by showing a long line of Americans waiting to invest in land on the moon, for cash or credit, claiming the cartoon was based on real newspaper articles.²⁰⁹ In another magazine story, Soviets visiting an American television studio noted that famous actors, writers, and many others were forced to make commercials to support themselves, instead of working to produce real culture.²¹⁰ American art, being a product of rotting bourgeois society, “necessarily reflects philosophy of doom, hopelessness, pessimism, tragedy” concluded USIA survey of Soviet propaganda regarding American culture for 1957-1958.²¹¹

Furthermore, despite Khrushchev’s statements to the contrary,²¹² Soviets continued to distort information about the United States. A Propaganda Department report from 1959 complained about a TV program where a group of Soviets, who recently visited America to soften up relations before Khrushchev’s visit, shared their experiences with a Soviet audience. Specifically, the official report stated that one of the writers said too many positive things about the U.S. during the televised program.

Officials underlined parts deemed most offensive:

- He called America a “great nation”
- Talked about how much freedom they [the Soviet delegation] had to visit anywhere and talk to anybody
- He said Americans are very independent and proud to the point where you can’t tell the difference between the poor and the rich
- He called Americans genuine
- He talked about how he saw little Negro children dance rock-and-roll (a dance, he said, that is looked down upon in the Soviet Union) and how beautiful it was.
- He mentioned clear segregation between blacks and whites

²⁰⁹ *Ogonek*, #1 January, 1959, 29.

²¹⁰ *Ogonek*, #3 January, 1956, 25.

²¹¹ NA 160/13/31 p.1.

²¹² Nikita Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 96.

- He said how he was in awe of skyscrapers. They made him feel proud for humanity's achievements

In the end, the Propaganda Department decided to take measures to ensure that such things never got on the air again and reprimanded the writer.²¹³ We see that officials were most troubled by segments that directly contradicted fundamental parts of Soviet anti-American propaganda such as the disparity between the rich and the poor and racism.

Not all features of the propaganda campaign remained the same under Khrushchev. Soviet media now could describe positive aspects of America, without also referring to the negative. In one example, a magazine story featured a Soviet delegation visiting American laboratories where scientists did research on the polio vaccine. The article contained almost no negative references to America and kept the focus on the disease.²¹⁴ A 1961 New Year's *Ogonek* issue even included a cartoon suggesting that all Cold War adversaries should shake hands and make up, without being overly grotesque in its depiction of Uncle Sam (see Illustration 10).²¹⁵



***Ogonek*, 1961 #1 p. 3 (Illustration 10)**

²¹³ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii, hereafter RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 105 l. 50-58.

²¹⁴ *Ogonek*, #19 March, 1956, 21.

²¹⁵ *Ogonek*, #1 January, 1961, 3.

Of course, at least some of the improvement in the image of America in Soviet propaganda was a result of warming relations between the two countries, with 1961 being a particularly good year. American observers of Soviet media in 1961 found “considerable restraint” in Soviet treatment of its Cold War opponent.²¹⁶ Evidence from Soviet archives confirms American observations. A 1961 note from the main Soviet news agency (Sovinformburo) to the Central Committee suggested that they were ordered to delay further publication of a brochure detailing American spy and sabotage operation in the Soviet Union “due to efforts to normalize U.S.-Soviet relations.”²¹⁷

Periodic thaws in U.S.-Soviet relations did affect the way Soviet media portrayed America to Soviet citizens. These, however, did not alter the core image of America presented by Soviet propaganda. On the pages of Soviet newspapers and on the screens of Soviet televisions, America still remained the same place it had been before and after World War II. To illustrate the point more vividly, instead of a conclusion I provide a section from a book written by a British lawyer who came to the Soviet Union in 1960 to witness the Gary Powers²¹⁸ trial:

To take my mind off the storm I picked up a Russian magazine and looked at the pictures. In the middle page spread there was a feature about life in the United States. The pictures made it clear what the publishers were trying to convey – an idea of the depravity of life in the leading democratic country in the world. There were pictures of New York bookshops displaying stacks of books. They related to sex and sex crimes, to famous crimes and to “the anatomy of murder”. There was a ghastly picture of a bout of all-in wrestling. The expressions on the faces of the packed audience were contorted with sadist delight. There was a reproduction of a horoscope feature in a leading newspaper and of well-known film stars displaying busts and behinds. There were reproductions of cinema hoardings giving the titles and horrific backcloths of such productions as “War of the Planets”, “She Beast of Venus”, “The Gangster’s Moll”. Several pictures showed

²¹⁶ NA P160/16/5 p. 1.

²¹⁷ GARF f. 8581 op. 2 d. 528.

²¹⁸ Pilot of an American U2 spy plane shot down over the Soviet Union in May, 1960. Powers was captured, put on trial in the Soviet Union and sentenced to 10 years in prison for espionage. He returned to the United States in 1962 as part of a spy exchange.

Beatniks lying about in the unbelievable squalor of their flats. New York street scenes showed obvious prostitutes ogling men who passed, pitiful-looking urchins in the Bowery, unbelievably large limousines with fat, cigar-smoking tycoons. There were also pictures of a poor wretch near a beauty parlor for dogs.²¹⁹

If America is so good, why didn't it launch the Sputnik?: public reaction to America in the Khrushchev period

The Khrushchev period saw a number of small changes in the official treatment of the United States. The biggest was the announcement that the Soviet Union was now in a friendly competition with America, with the Soviet *Sputnik* launch providing hope that communism was finally ready to prove its superiority as a system. Khrushchev's announcement of "catching up and overtaking America" cast America as the official basis for the comparison of standards of living. Furthermore, Soviet propaganda decreased the level of hostility with which it talked about America. For the most part, everything else in the Soviet portrayal of America remained the same. "To many Soviets citizens, America is a land of baffling contradictions, where great luxury and poverty exist side by side," concluded a 1962 United States Information Agency (USIA) report.²²⁰

In large part, Soviet people echoed official propaganda themes. Partly as a result of an inferiority complex due to the well-known and often exaggerated American standard of living, people welcomed Soviet space achievements with enthusiasm and pride, often using them to underscore Soviet superiority in the Cold War conflict and as a counterweight to any perceived American advantage. The American-backed intervention in Cuba in 1961, the U2 incident, the Cuban Missile crisis, as well as Soviet media's non-

²¹⁹ W. Byford-Jones, *Uncensored Eyewitness* (London: Robert Hale, 1961), 62.

²²⁰ NA P142/8/42 p.9. The report was largely based on conversations with Soviet citizens who traveled abroad as tourists, exchange students, scholars, professionals, and exhibition guides.

stop portrayal of the Soviet Union as a country of peace, cemented the perception that America was ruled by a handful of money-hungry, wealthy men who would stop at nothing, even starting a nuclear war, to achieve their goals. At the same time, the Soviet Union stood as the champion of peace, highlighted by Khrushchev's visit to the United States in 1959 where he emphasized peaceful coexistence.

Khrushchev's policies exposed the Soviet people to a lot more information about its Cold War rival. The 1957 Youth Festival in Moscow, Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the United States, the American exhibition in Moscow the same year, and the start of a cultural exchange between the two countries, all provided the Soviet people with a first-hand look at America. Even though a lot of this information had to go through the censorship lens of Soviet and American propaganda, it was still as close as most Soviet people got to real America in their lifetime. The 1957 Youth Festival and American exhibitions in the Soviet Union provided face-to-face contact and had an impact on Soviet public's view of Americans as real people who had much the same aspirations as their Soviet counterparts.²²¹ However, deprived of an opportunity to experience or see American life for themselves, and lacking unbiased context, most Soviets saw America²²² in much the same way as they did in post-war Stalin period, be it with less hostility.

The most evident change in Soviet popular attitudes stemmed from the Soviet Union's success in the space race, as reflected in Soviet propaganda. The Soviet Union had bested the most powerful capitalist nation in area of global importance.²²³ People writing to Khrushchev on various issues frequently referred to Soviet space victories as a

²²¹ For discussion of the 1957 Youth Festival, see Magnúsdóttir, 201-217. For discussion of American exhibitions see my chapter on the subject.

²²² See my chapters on American exhibitions and unofficial information.

²²³ Khrushchev himself labeled America as the leader of the capitalist world in an interview with foreign reporters; see Nikita Khrushchev., *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 103.

source of pride and strength.²²⁴ “It [*Sputnik*] proves Soviet superiority over the U.S.,” noted one village driver.²²⁵

For some, *Sputnik* was enough proof of the accuracy of Soviet statements about America. As an American visitor remembered,

“There are two Americas,” he [a Soviet Army captain] explained. “A fine life for the capitalists, but misery and starvation for the workers. How sad to see so many unemployed, so many starving! If you had looked on the other side of Fifth Avenue you would have seen them.” After Caryl [an English TV producer] explained that American workers were not treated that badly the captain said he did not believe her. “If America is so good, why did it not launch the *sputnik*?” he replied.²²⁶

The army captain summarized the general feeling of many Soviets that their achievements in space proved the supremacy of the Soviet system, just as the Soviet media had claimed for years. Since these statements seemed to have been proven right, there was little need in doubting other official statements about America, especially in the absence of information to the contrary.

The theme of peaceful coexistence caught on with the Soviet public very quickly because it tapped into already existing phenomena in Soviet society. Having experienced World War I, civil war, and the recent devastation of World War II in the past fifty years, Soviet people were desperate for a return to normal life. In letters to Khrushchev many people sited their personal experiences during World War II. In describing the horrors of war, Soviet people expressed their desire to channel international disagreements into the

²²⁴ GARF f. 5446 op. 95 d. 1168, d. 1169.

²²⁵ Aksutin, *Khrushchovskaia “otepel” i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg.* (Moskva : ROSSPĖN, 2004), 247. Markoosha Fischer also wrote about a conversation she had with a young Soviet engineer – ““Wasn’t our first *Sputnik* quite a shock to you after you had so relished a novel about that poor nice Soviet engineer who got nowhere with his inventions because of those nasty Soviet bureaucrats?” he said, talking about a famous novel from the Thaw period *Not by Bread Alone* by Vladimir Dudintsev; see Fischer, 152.

²²⁶ Rama Rau, 189-190.

peaceful competition of building schools and hospitals instead of a nuclear arms race.²²⁷

“Your main freedom is freedom of business. We prefer – freedom from exploitation by other people. The superiority of each system should be determined through peaceful competition,” wrote a retired schoolteacher among many others.²²⁸

In keeping with official propaganda, Soviet people in general voiced the sentiment that if the Soviet Union was simply given a chance to prove its system without being interrupted by war than Khrushchev’s predictions would come true. Bolstered by Soviet achievements in space, many Soviet people had optimism in the future. One foreign tourist reported this conversation with a Soviet man while visiting the Soviet Union in 1959:

The main thing to remember is that five years ago things were far worse, and if you come again in five years from now you’ll hardly recognize it. We really will beat America in butter, meat and milk, like they say. Then everything else. This country is growing, steadily and absolutely surely, despite any setbacks and mistake. We’re moving, and we’re moving with history.²²⁹

While having more optimism in their country’s future, many people, in stereotypical Russian fashion, took it with a grain of salt, especially when Khrushchev’s economic policies did not live up to expectations. Several Soviet jokes from the period help convey some of the underlying feelings:

What would happen if Stalin rose from the dead?
— Khrushchev would surpass America.²³⁰

A Russian was asked: “Would it be possible to build communism in the United States?”
The answer: “Of course but it would be such a pity.”²³¹

²²⁷ GARF f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Sally Belfrage, *A Room in Moscow* (New York: Reynal, 1959), 38.

²³⁰ Available at http://www.allrussias.com/jokes/khrushchev_03.asp. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²³¹ Quoted in Fischer, 139.

US President Dwight Eisenhower suggests to Nikita Khrushchev that they see who will catch and overtake whom in a 100-meter race. The fit Eisenhower covers the distance easily, while paunchy Nikita barely manages to puff to the finish line a few minutes later. The Soviet newspaper Pravda reports on the event: "US President Eisenhower and our dear Nikita Sergeevich participated in an athletic contest; Nikita Sergeevich captured second place, while the US president finished second to last."²³²

For many Soviets, the bright future, at least in term of consumer goods and comforts, closely resembled their image of America. As we have seen, for decades, a majority of Soviets acknowledged America as the gold standard when it came to questions of material wealth and technological progress. Denied most outside information about the United States, Soviet people turned America into a consumer and technological fairytale that scarcely resembled real America.²³³ And Khrushchev's "surpass and overtake America" policy further cemented that assumption. As a result, "from the production of pigs to hydrogen bombs not the western European countries but the United States of America are the provocative standard of comparison," noted Laurens Van Der Post, a British journalist visiting the Soviet Union in 1963.²³⁴ Several other foreigners made similar observations.²³⁵

Apart from Soviet optimism about their ability to compete with America there was little change in Soviet popular opinion about the United States. A majority still saw the Soviet Union as a country of peace and America as a country of war. Much like in the late Stalin period, these feelings were based on the assumption that since the Soviet Union just went through a terribly destructive war there was no way that the country could want another one. Letter after letter addressed to Khrushchev before his 1959 trip

²³² Available at http://www.kommersant.com/p764742/Khrushchev,_Russia,_America/.

²³³ In the chapter on American exhibitions I provide several examples of Soviet disappointment with American products because they did not correspond to imaginary level of America created by the Soviets themselves.

²³⁴ Laurens Van Der Post, *Journey into Russia* (London : Hogarth Press, 1964), 16.

²³⁵ Fischer, 153; Ronchey, 57.

to the United States stated support for Soviet peace initiatives, with people telling personal war stories and expressing shock and anger at what they saw as American warmongering.²³⁶ “I was five when the war started. My father died in Stalingrad. I don’t want any children to be orphans. Americans need to stop playing with fire,” wrote a thirty-five-year-old Soviet woman.²³⁷

As before, Soviet people blamed the so-called American ruling circles and not the American people. Taking the lead from domestic media, many assumed that a majority of Americans were forced to go along with policies that they disagreed with.

“Eisenhower’s actions do not coincide with the peaceful intentions of the American people,” wrote a retiree from Kiev.²³⁸ “The day is not too far away, when the people of America will take the government into their hands and planet earth will have peace,” stated another.²³⁹ “Your Pentagon is no friend of ours, but the American people and the Russian people will never fight one another because in the end it will be the people who decide things,” a high ranking Soviet military officer told an American journalist.²⁴⁰

The division of America into bad government and good people appears to have accounted for Soviet people not taking out their anger over tensions between two countries on American tourists. Even at the height of the U2 incident in 1960 where an U.S. spyplane was shot down over Soviet territory, American and other foreigners in the Soviet Union reported friendly attitudes towards American visitors on the part of the Soviet people, who mostly regretted “that our relations, which had been moving toward

²³⁶ GARF f. 5446 op. 95 d. 1168, f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309, f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1326, f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1328, f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1343.

²³⁷ GARF f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1343.

²³⁸ GARF f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309.

²³⁹ GARF f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1281.

²⁴⁰ Eddy Gilmore, *The Cossacks burned down the YMCA* (London: The Bodley Head, 1964), 114.

genuine friendship, were getting worse again.”²⁴¹ In letters to the Soviet government over the U2 episode, a majority of people blamed the bad Americans (government, military-industrial complex, Wall Street...etc).²⁴²

Most Soviets continued to believe that while prosperous, America was beset by a host of social problems and lacked refined culture. Racism and unemployment once again occupied top spots on the list of American social ills. In a collective letter to Khrushchev, a seventh grade class expressed their sorrow at the plight of minorities in the U.S.:

We have been following your trip to New York City. We have various nationalities in our class and we live like one big happy family. And if we had negroes and Indians [Native Americans] studying here, we would treat them the same and not like [they get treated] in the USA. Where they are despised and humiliated.”²⁴³

After reading some Soviet propaganda about Native Americans, a sixty-eight year old retiree from Tashkent suggested they be relocated to the Soviet Union where they would be safe. She wrote:

Dear comrade Khrushchev. Can we not save the once great people that are slowly dying out because of U.S. policies? These people are called “Redskins” [*krasnokozhie.*] There are only a few of them left. Can we not find some land for them here?²⁴⁴

Quite often Soviets used these perceived problems in order to counter criticism of the Soviet Union. For example, a Soviet factory worker, in reference to Nixon’s 1959 visit to the Soviet Union, wrote:

We know that it [America] is not as nice as it was portrayed by Mr. Nixon. We know that millions of young people don’t have jobs. Many people live in poverty and blacks

²⁴¹ Byford-Jones, 68.

Fischer, 188.

²⁴² GARF f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1326, f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1328, f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1276.

²⁴³ GARF f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1280.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

are treated poorly. So why do they talk about freedom when they don't have it themselves.²⁴⁵

In the minds of many average Soviets, American culture continued to be largely associated with the lowest of human instincts. "We are not sextortured in this country as in America, you know. We can have a perfectly natural association as friends with the opposite sex," commented one Soviet writer in a conversation with a British tourist.²⁴⁶ American abstract painting featured at the 1959 American exhibition in Moscow, received a cold reception from Soviet visitors.²⁴⁷ "Maybe they have created a more comfortable life than ours. But there are many things we can't understand about them... Their abstract painting. It is meaningless," noted a Soviet elementary school teacher, talking about her visit to 1959 American Exhibition.²⁴⁸ By 1960s, however, expanding cultural exchange started in 1958 between the two countries began to have an effect. A 1967 Soviet sociological study found that 41% of respondents ranked American cultural achievements at a high level, above Czechoslovakia and India, and on par with Spain.²⁴⁹

Not all believed everything they saw and heard about America from domestic information sources. As in the late Stalin period, any doubt as to the accuracy of domestic media usually resulted from personal experiences, access to outside information, or critical thinking on the part of the Soviet citizens, much of it tied to their professional position and educational level. "In general, Americans are great people. They have much in common with the Soviet Union. They are extremely friendly and hospitable. Underneath the stern business exterior lies a warm, emotional and even

²⁴⁵ GARF f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309.

²⁴⁶ Byford-Jones, 92.

²⁴⁷ See the chapter on American exhibitions, below.

²⁴⁸ Ronchey, 57. Its possible she got her cue from Khrushchev who strongly criticized American avant-garde art at the same exhibition. See interview with former U.S. Embassy cultural attache at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOl2imi10Q0>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²⁴⁹ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 800.

sentimental person,” wrote a Soviet engineer who studied and lived in the U.S. for over seven years, and worked with Americans in the 1920s and 1930s, in a letter to Khrushchev.²⁵⁰ Some still remembered American Lend-Lease help to the Soviet Union during the war and expressed their gratitude to the American people and government.²⁵¹

Those who had access to more complete information about America and their own country formed a better picture of the real situation. “I read about America, and knew how things were in our country [meaning good in America and bad in the Soviet Union],” recalled former first Secretary of Belorussian Central Committee years later.²⁵² A number of those who analyzed publicly available information developed similar suspicions. “How can U.S. give aid to other countries if they have a 693 billion dollar foreign and domestic debt?” asked a reader of *Komunist* magazine, questioning magazine’s premise that America was too poor to help others.²⁵³

Frequently, official and unofficial information about America merged with Soviet people’s frustration over domestic living conditions. In this case, people tended to question official information and see unofficial sources as closer to the truth. “If Americans making \$80 a month are considered to be on the verge of poverty, then what can we say about Soviet people making 27 rubles a month,” asked one *Komunist* reader. In time of economic downturns, some Soviet workers openly cited things they heard in Western radio broadcasts as means of comparing American and Soviet workers, largely in favor of the former.²⁵⁴ In writing about a major Soviet worker uprising over economic

²⁵⁰ GARF f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309.

²⁵¹ Marguerite Higgins, *Red Plush and Black Bread* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1955), 84; Eddy Gilmore, *The Cossacks burned down the YMCA*, 164.

²⁵² Aksiutin, 356.

²⁵³ RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 432 l. 2, 5.

²⁵⁴ RGANI f. 89 op. 6 d. 6. See more on this in my chapter on unofficial information.

conditions in the city of Novochoerkask in 1962, Erik Kulavig noted that information about working conditions in the West (often America), obtained from Western broadcasts, played a large “consciousness-raising role” among striking Soviet workers.²⁵⁵ Clearly, the workers cared little about the accuracy of this information as they had few means of verifying it. They simply used imaginary America as a way of criticizing domestic economic conditions.

Much like the striking workers in Novochoerkask used incomplete information from Western sources to build up America and criticize the Soviet Union, others used bits and pieces of information from official sources about America to support their own version of America, one that often mirrored the one presented by Soviet propaganda. Traveling through the Soviet Union in 1962, an American electrical engineer had the following exchanges with Tanya, his Soviet traincar neighbor:

”Why did you attack Japan?” she inquired in an accusing voice.

“Because they attacked us at Pearl Harbor,” I replied truthfully.

“Where is Pearl Harbor?”

“In Hawaii. The Japanese treacherously sank seven of our largest warships.”

Her only reaction was a puzzled look. The story of Pearl Harbor was just a blank in her education!²⁵⁶

Tanya became very excited about an article in Pravda concerning the death of Marilyn Monroe. It had been given two columns.

“You Capitalists killed her to make money!” she accused me.²⁵⁷

An American doctoral student on a trip to the Soviet Union in 1956 recorded a similar story when sharing a train compartment with a Soviet man. For hours the man kept repeating official propaganda about the U.S. – oppression of African -Americans, poverty...etc, and “imposing on peace-loving people soldiers who rape women in the

²⁵⁵ Erik Kulavig, *Dissent in the years of Khrushchev : nine stories about disobedient Russians* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 132-133.

²⁵⁶ James M. Robinson, *Americanski Journalist* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1969), 62.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

streets and chew gum²⁵⁸... What amazed me was his complete sincerity, his total lack of bitterness or rancor, his dedication to the system, and his abysmal ignorance of America and the ‘American way of life,’ for lack of a better phrase,” noted the author.²⁵⁹ “In short, the great majority of Russians knew nothing about the problems of the Western world, whether past or present,” wrote Markoosha Fisher visiting the Soviet Union in 1962.²⁶⁰

When faced with alternate material, many Soviets simply refused to believe information that challenged their set beliefs about America. Among other examples,²⁶¹ an American tourist remembered one such incident when traveling in the Soviet Union in 1962:

Then Seva [the Inturist guide] said to me, “The chauffeur wants to know if it is true that the unemployed in America are starving.”

“No,” I answered, “they are paid \$32 a week if you are out of work.”

“He doesn’t believe you,” Seva answered. “He says it is Capitalist propaganda. Nobody gets paid for not working.”²⁶²

Vladimir Kozlov’s study uncovered another interesting use of American images in the Soviet Union. In describing the Soviet criminal world of the Khrushchev period, Kozlov showed that America became a symbol of resistance to the Soviet state among

²⁵⁸ “Gum, much like Coke, became a symbol of American way of life. If you wanted to portray someone in a negative light (in theater or film) all you had to do was have them chew gum,” noted Viktor Slavkin; see Viktor Slavkin, *Pamiatnik neizvestnomu stiliage* (Moskva: “Artist. Rizhiser. Teatr.” 1996), 125.

²⁵⁹ Marvin Kalb, *Eastern Exposure* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), 210-211.

²⁶⁰ Fischer, 218. There are other examples “Perhaps the single most disturbing thing about Soviet Russia is the ignorance of these friendly, warmhearted people about us,” observed Adlai Stevenson during his trip to the Soviet Union in 1958; see Adlai Stevenson, *Friends and Enemies* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 96.

²⁶¹ Markoosha Fisher recalled the following after informing a young Soviet saleswoman that American working class did not suffer as much as she thought: “I may have put one or two new thoughts into the young salesgirl’s head, but the pity she carried in her heart for the tragic fate of the downtrodden American workers was probably too deep-seated to be shaken;” see Fischer, 219. Also see the section on American magazines in chapter on unofficial information as well as examples from the section on popular responses to propaganda in the Brezhnev period from this chapter.

²⁶² Robinson, 53.

Soviet criminals. “A certain notion of the far away “Amerika,” a land hostile to the Soviet bosses, and its remarkable President Truman, who would one day begin a war against the Soviet Union and then liberate the prisoners, generally occupied an important position in criminal mythology at the beginning of the 1950s,” he wrote.²⁶³ In other words, Soviet criminals used America in much the same way as religious minorities did immediately following the war, and to a lesser extent as striking workers in Novocherkask.²⁶⁴ Soviet criminals and religious minorities, both persecuted by the Soviet state, saw America as the other world power and naturally ascribed it a savior status, the only one capable of bringing down their mighty oppressor – the Soviet government. Novocherkask workers and others unhappy with their economic conditions did not want America to destroy the Soviet system, but they did employ the myth of American wealth to criticize Soviet standard of living.

It is also worth mentioning that most Soviets, while admiring American living standards, did not attribute those achievements to the American system of government. Instead they chose to believe domestic propaganda line that American wealth was based on exploitation of the working class at home and abroad.²⁶⁵ “Apparently the thought seldom if ever occurs to the average Soviet that there is any connection between American living conditions – which vitally interest them – and America’s political and social institutions – which do not,” stated a USIA report.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Vladimir Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: protest and rebellion in the post-Stalin years* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 156.

²⁶⁴ See my discussion of post-war public reactions to Soviet propaganda.

²⁶⁵ GARF f. 5446 op. 93 d. 1309, f. 5446 op. 94 d. 1343.

²⁶⁶ NA P142/8/42 p. 7. American exhibition guides also noted large-scale ignorance about American political and social systems among Soviet visitors. Please see my chapter on American exhibitions.

In the end, public reaction and the official view of America in the Khrushchev era closely resembled that of the post-war Stalin period. In the above-mentioned letters many admitted that they received their information from official sources, primarily newspapers and radio. Moreover, Boris Grushin's pioneering sociological studies of the period revealed that overwhelming majority of respondents, men and women from different segments of Soviet society, not only agreed with, but also frequently used official propaganda language in their answers to questions on issues of international war and peace.²⁶⁷ We must not discount the effect of World War II on Soviet people's desire to go along with official peace rhetoric, yet as analysis of the Grushin data revealed, the effectiveness of official propaganda played a significant role in shaping their views regarding these issues.²⁶⁸

In addition, Shiraev and Zubok stressed that more than one-third of Soviet population of the period, including bureaucrats, employees of service industries, and the bulk of peasantry and blue-collar workers:

believed the United States was an enemy that wanted to deprive them of their hard-won gains. Therefore, these individuals continued to respond favorably to the themes – promoted unflinchingly by the propaganda – that endorsed xenophobic isolationism and the Soviet way of life and thinking.²⁶⁹

As we have seen, a majority of the others, while not as hostile in their view of America,²⁷⁰ still held views similar to those found in the Soviet media. The Soviet state did remarkably well, save for a few minor instances, in controlling and channeling popular opinion about America in this period.

²⁶⁷ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 75-100.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁶⁹ Shiraev and Zubok, 23-24.

²⁷⁰ Although judging from the letters to Khrushchev, many retirees had a rather antagonistic attitude toward the United States.

Gangster's paradise: official presentation of America in the Brezhnev period

The Brezhnev period (1964-1982) and the brief transitional phase before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 saw little in the way of change in official Soviet portrayal of the United States. In its tone, it resembled the late Stalin period more than when Khrushchev was in the leadership position, yet it borrowed much from the latter as well. There was a warming of relations in the early 1970s, the so-called *détente*, where America and the Soviet Union agreed to slow down the arms race (SALT I) and established closer economic ties, with Pepsi winning the right to be the exclusive American cola drink in the Soviet Union in exchange for distributing Stolichnaia vodka in the United States.²⁷¹ Overall, however, “the tone of the coverage might have altered during periods of particularly bad or good relations, but the foundation remained the same,” noted Jonathan Becker in describing Soviet mass media’s coverage of the United States in the Brezhnev period.²⁷²

One notable feature of this period was Soviet society’s greater shift towards materialism, with people focusing on improving their own living standards. While the phenomenon was more widespread among the younger generation,²⁷³ it had an effect on other segments of Soviet society.²⁷⁴ As a result, America became an even greater symbol

²⁷¹ J.C. Louis and Harvey Yazijian., *The Cola Wars* (New York: Everest House, 1980), 205.

²⁷² Jonathan Becker, *Soviet and Russian press coverage of the United States: press, politics, and identity in transition*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan in association with St. Anthony’s College, 2002), 25.

²⁷³ I will discuss this in more detail in my chapter on Soviet youth.

²⁷⁴ James Millar, “Quality of life: subjective measures of relative satisfaction” in *Politics, work, and daily life in the USSR: A survey of former Soviet citizens*, ed. James R. Millar (New York: Cambridge University

of material wealth among the Soviet population. “Denouncing Americans for consumerism and vanity, the Soviets during this period themselves demonstrated a growing interest in material comfort and prestige,” stressed Vladimir Shlapentokh.²⁷⁵ Hedrick Smith, a *New York Times* reporter living in Russia in the 1970s, noted a similar trend.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, because of increased frustration with stifling bureaucracy and the lack of consumer goods in the country, the hopes for a better future present in the Khrushchev period declined and led to a situation where by the late 1960s “for most representatives of Russia’s new middle class, America became the antipode of the inefficient, bureaucratic, and backward Soviet Union,” wrote Shiraev and Zubok.²⁷⁷

Faced with growing cynicism toward clichéd propaganda language found in mass media,²⁷⁸ the government increasingly turned to what Vladimir Shlapentokh called “covert propaganda,” political and foreign affairs lectures being the most common examples. He identified the main functions of covert propaganda as

1. Transmission of messages that cannot be conveyed through mass media;
2. The organization of counterpropaganda, especially against foreign radio and rumors, without directly implicating the authorities; and
3. The adaptation of propaganda to the specific features of each recipient group, in order to maximize the effect.²⁷⁹

Press, 1987), 53; Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76-79.

²⁷⁵ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Changeable Soviet Image of America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 497 (May, 1988), 157.

²⁷⁶ Hedrick Smith, *The Russians*. (New York: Times Books, 1976), 53-55.

²⁷⁷ Shiraev and Zubok, 16.

²⁷⁸ “Piano in the bushes” (*roial’ v kustakh*) became a popular phrase associated with predictable structure of official propaganda in the Brezhnev period where obviously scripted features of official programs, mostly official news, were presented as random. The phrase came from a 1966 comedy sketch where a reporter discovers that a person he is interviewing, a random man on the street, is not only a leading worker at his factory but is also quite proficient at playing a number of musical instruments. The reporter finds out that the man can demonstrate his musical prowess right there and then because “by accident”, the man brought his violin with him. After a violin solo, the man announces that he can also play the piano. “By accident” there happens to be a piano in the nearby bushes.

²⁷⁹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 99.

In other words, realizing that the population was getting desensitized to information from the regular propaganda channels, the Soviet government sought to transmit its message through other means. Soviet authorities used this pent-up demand for other sources of information by increasing the number of informal lectures regarding domestic, but mostly international issues. During these seminars, official lecturers frequently distanced themselves from official propaganda by using different terms and providing information not available from regular mass media sources.²⁸⁰ As a result, the Soviet state was able to turn millions of those who attend lectures into voluntary activists in the “horizontal propaganda” of rumors and suggestions.²⁸¹ We must keep this fact in mind when discussing Soviet propaganda of the period.²⁸²

“Writing about the West was governed by one overriding criterion: it had to show the superiority of Soviet socialism over American capitalism,” stated Jonathan Becker in describing Soviet media of the period.²⁸³ Accomplishments in the area of space exploration continued to take center stage in Soviet claims of supremacy. While no longer highlighting American space failures, Soviet media continued to emphasize Soviet leadership in the field. In describing Soviet space missions, magazine articles frequently cited these as victories for domestic science and technology, thus implying the victory of communism over capitalism.²⁸⁴ Steadily falling behind the U.S. in consumer and agricultural production, this was a safe and reliable area to showcase Soviet dominance

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 106.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 107.

²⁸² Vladimir Shlapentokh gives a good overview of covert propaganda in his book *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 99-107. However, it is only a cursory glance at the issue that deserves a separate study.

²⁸³ Becker, 25.

²⁸⁴ *Ogonek*, #40 September, 1968, 4-5, #48 November, 1968, 2-3.

over the West, raising national pride and shifting attention away from less successful areas of the Soviet system.

Increased American military involvement in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s provided Soviet propaganda with excellent material for reemphasizing old notions of the U.S. government as militaristic and inhumane, as well as ensuring people's support for Soviet help to North Vietnam. At the height of the conflict, Soviet media regularly published stories focusing on war atrocities perpetrated by American soldiers and the heroic liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people.²⁸⁵ A 1972 animated cartoon *Ave Maria* condemned American involvement in Vietnam by showing Americans bombing Vietnamese cities and brutally killing Vietnamese children (see Illustration 11). Part of the poem recited in the background to music and lyrics of *Ave Maria* stated:

In black Boeings, like thieves in the night,
our husbands fly above foreign countries.
Turning them into a blood colored desert.
The land is dying but there is no end in sight.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Vietnam consistently took the number one spot for number of political cartoons in Pravda from 1965 to 1971 (data for period after 1971 does not include Vietnam related issues but it certainly continued to be one of the leading subjects in Soviet publications into the mid-1970s) – McKenna, 115. For some typical examples see *Ogonek*, #6 February, 1968. p. 16-17, #7 February, 1968. p. 4-5, #30 July, 1968. p. 3.

²⁸⁶ Available at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lMhOtp62xc>.



American soldier in Vietnam – *Ave Maria* (1972) – (Illustration 11)

Some Soviet Vietnam propaganda was coordinated at the highest levels of the government with input from a number of government agencies, signaling its importance. In 1967, four American sailors Craig Anderson, John Barella, Richard Bailey and Michael Lindner, left the U.S. carrier *Intrepid* while it was docked in Japan. They asked for help from Japanese peace organizations and were eventually flown to the Soviet Union. Once in there they were interviewed by the KGB. Following the interviews, head of the KGB Yuri Andropov and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko sent a note to the Soviet Central Committee. In it they recommended that Soviet authorities should, among other things:

- Publish an interview with sailors in newspaper *Pravda*
- Organize Moscow radio and TV programs with sailors and broadcast it on *Intervision*²⁸⁷
- Publish personal statements by sailors in the Soviet press

The International Department of the Central Committee agreed with most suggestions from the note and even approved thousand dollar allowances for the sailors' Western

²⁸⁷ *Intervision* was a Soviet bloc (Soviet Union plus East European satellites) radio and television network.

European tour where they were to denounce American involvement in Vietnam.²⁸⁸

At the same time, Soviet propaganda continued to show American society as rife with inequality, racism, and overall chaos, while American culture as shallow and depraved, in a tone reminiscent of the late Stalin period.²⁸⁹ American crime became a particular focal point in Soviet efforts to show that while wealthy, American society was disorganized and lawless (see Illustration 12), therefore Soviet people had no reason to be envious. “Gangsters Sue” a 1968 *Ogonek* article, informed Soviet readers about a California resident who was suing *Life* magazine because they published a story claiming he was an Italian mob boss. In the end, *Ogonek* sarcastically noted that perhaps in the future American crime syndicates will demand that shares of their organizations be traded along others on the New York stock exchange.²⁹⁰ In another *Ogonek* story, a caption for a photograph showing a middle-aged woman shooting a gun read:

Elderly housewives learning how to shoot. An unusual sight anywhere in the world except America. They are used to it there. Americans are learning self-defense, not being able to rely on police to protect them from criminals whose numbers grow every year.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ RGANI f. 89 op. 46 d. 9.

²⁸⁹ “Dial M for Masochism: Miller, Motherwell and Manson” read the title for a typical late 1970s article about American culture; see Jay Martin, *Winter Dreams: An American in Moscow* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 67.

²⁹⁰ *Ogonek*, #20 May, 1968, 25.

²⁹¹ *Ogonek*, #33 August, 1968, 21.

Цена номера 12 коп.
Индекс 70248



Crime (large man in the middle). American policeman: “I finally got you under control!”

***Krokodil* #1 1969 p.13 (Illustration 12)**

Stories of racism and unemployment, two unwavering pillars of Soviet propaganda about America since the founding of the Soviet state, became more graphic and extravagant. Soviet press ran stories of athletes being kicked off the American team for publically protesting racism in the U.S. at 1968 Olympics in Mexico. “Alabama in Olympic Village” read the caption under a photo of the incident.²⁹² A 1979 animated cartoon *Shooting Range (Tir)*, set to a jazz soundtrack, offered a unique twist on American unemployment where the main character, unemployed and desperate for money, is forced to work as a human target at a shooting range for the rich.²⁹³

The hierarchy of priorities became clear, however, when covert propaganda,

²⁹² *Ogonek*, #44 October, 1968, 31.

²⁹³ Available at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cEDCeJuBPg>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

mentioned earlier in the section, sacrificed the official view on racism in America in order to show American society as being disorganized and dangerous. David Shipler, a *New York Times* correspondent living in the Soviet Union in the late 1970s, remembered one incident where:

A friend of mine once sneaked a tape recorder into a closed lecture at Moscow State University, where a Soviet journalist just back from a visit to the United States described the following scene:

“Not knowing all the customs and habits of American life, we started to walk up a Washington street, and from around the corner three Negroes advanced upon us. I carried a hammer, which I had bought earlier, and it had a chrome-plated handle. The working tools in America are excellent, and if it’s a hammer, the handle will never break or fall off, and it gleams. So the only thing that I had in my hands was that hammer, and in confusion and apprehension I thrust it into my pocket and then drew it out again. And it turned out that that was the most appropriate gesture I could make because the Negroes evidently saw that something flashed, black and long, and just as they were coming to us, they swerved around us, and we went in opposite directions. Should it have been otherwise,” the journalist concluded. “I’m not quite sure that I would be delivering this lecture.” So the stereotypes are confirmed: material excellence, dangerous streets, hostile blacks, terrifying disorder – a profound ambivalence about America.²⁹⁴

In another example, a 1968 propaganda department report summarized official Soviet view of American society by pointing out that for Americans lack of freedom signifies absence of “anarchy, gangsterism, violence, compulsion to practice religion, mysticism, irrationalism...etc.”²⁹⁵

As I noted earlier, increased preoccupation with living standards among Soviet people forced official propaganda to devote more time to the subject. Soviet officials were particularly sensitive to American claims of capitalist system’s superiority in economic matters. The Soviet Information department briefed the Central Committee that a 1966 five-volume study “New directions in Soviet economy” published by the U.S. Congress falsified figures on completion of Soviet seven year economic plan and asserted

²⁹⁴ David Shipler, *Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams* (New York: Times Books, 1983), 360.

²⁹⁵ RGANI f. 5 op. 60 d. 43 l. 67.

that Soviet economy is significantly lagging behind the U.S. In response, the Information department suggested that *Pravda* put out an article critical of the American study and several others including leading economic magazine *Voprosy ekonomiki* publish figures countering American conclusions. The Central Committee approved the proposal.²⁹⁶

Almost a decade later, in preparation for extensive Western propaganda focusing on American living standards in connection with the American bi-centennial in 1976, Soviet authorities suggested that Soviet media emphasize the fact that credit for American achievements belonged to American people, not capitalism.²⁹⁷ The fact that these issues consistently made it to the highest level of the Soviet government and responses appeared in leading Soviet publications testified to the level of importance Soviet authorities attached to the issue.

Furthermore, in order to discredit the myth of American material prosperity, the Soviet press continued to stress the old notion of American wealth inequality. One magazine article did this by attacking the idea of an average American. Addressing a fictional “average American” the author wrote:

I am very well aware that you really don't exist. You are an invention of American statistics that created you from an average of numbers and determined your brand of cigarettes, the kind of car you prefer to drive and everything else that does not really represent the average American citizen. Because your image, created by statistical willpower, mixes the incomes of a millionaire and an unemployed Negro, tastes of a four-star general from the Pentagon and a young draftee, and habits of a newspaper boss and a farmer.²⁹⁸

This division of America into the rich and poor, the good and the bad, continued in Soviet patronage of certain American cultural figures. American writers critical of the

²⁹⁶ RGANI f. 89 op. 46 d. 2.

²⁹⁷ RGANI f. 5 op. 68 d. 477 l. 1-15.

²⁹⁸ *Ogonek*, #6 February, 1968, 16.

United States continued to be the only ones officially available to the Soviet public.²⁹⁹ Soviet films intensified distinctions between “good” (ordinary people) and “bad” (military, politicians, Wall Street) in their portrayal of America.³⁰⁰ The American singer, Dean Reed, little known in the United States, was a star in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe because of his Marxist views and opposition to many American policies, foreign and domestic.³⁰¹ Consequently, for many Soviets, American objects of their love or hate were often insignificant, or long forgotten in the West.³⁰²

Other period-specific issues also affected Soviet propaganda regarding the United States. American support of the Soviet dissident movement in American media and Western radio broadcasts, particularly the issue of Soviet people not being able to freely leave the country, prompted high level response from the Soviet government. In 1981, *Pravda* published a letter to the American President (Reagan) from a Soviet worker.³⁰³ It opened up with: “Mr. President I don’t need you defending my rights in my house. My government of workers and peasants protects my rights. And protects them well.”³⁰⁴

Heightened tensions between the two superpowers in the early 1980s, reflected in the content of Soviet films with a return of the American spy theme, prominent in anti-American campaign in the late Stalin period. The best example, TASS³⁰⁵ Is Authorized to Declare (*TASS Upolnomochen Zaiavit’*), a wildly popular 1984 Soviet TV series,

²⁹⁹ Shiraev and Zubok, 14-17.

³⁰⁰ Shaw, 56-57.

³⁰¹ For a more detailed account of Dean Reed, see Chuck Laszewski., *Rock 'n' Roll Radical: The Life & Mysterious Death of Dean Reed* (Edina: Beaver’s Pond Press, 2005); and Reggie Nadelson, *Comrade rockstar : the life and mystery of Dean Reed, the all-American boy who brought rock 'n' roll to the Soviet Union*, (New York: Walker & Co, 2006).

³⁰² Veil’ and Genis, 216.

³⁰³ It is difficult to determine whether this letter was written by the worker or someone in the Soviet propaganda department. However, the very fact that it was published in *Pravda* underscores the fact that it reflected official opinion.

³⁰⁴ Quoted in Slavkin, 267.

³⁰⁵ Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (*Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuz*) was responsible for distribution of international information in the Soviet Union – 1925-1992.

featured KGB agents outwitting CIA spies while fighting for peace across the globe and eventually uncovering an American spy network in Moscow.

During the Brezhnev period, Khrushchev's call for peaceful coexistence and friendly competition disappeared, replaced with a more negative picture of America. Economic and Soviet dissident issues took center stage in official discourse about the United States, and Soviet media once again suggested that head to head conflict between the two countries was possible. At the same time, while varying in degree of hostility depending on the current state of relations between the two countries, the official Soviet image of the United States remained fundamentally the same.

Better safe than rich?: public reaction to America in the Brezhnev period

Growing desire for better living standards was the greatest change in public's view of the United States. For Soviet people, America had always been a symbol of material prosperity. Khrushchev's statements, and the inability to verify their perceptions with outside information further cemented and inflated American status as the land of consumer paradise. In the 1950s and 1960s, most Soviets still believed official statements that recent wars prevented the Soviet system from achieving its full potential. As a result, until the 1970s, "the party could always find workers who were willing to make a sacrifice not only for the evident material advantages but also because of their patriotic commitments," wrote sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh.³⁰⁶ By the 1970s, as memories of the war faded and people realized that Soviet missions to Venus would not

³⁰⁶ Vladimir Shlapentokh, Eric Shiraev and Eero Carroll, *The Soviet Union: Internal and External Perspective on Soviet Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 117.

put furniture into their apartments and quality food on their tables, they began to suspect that in the West “living standards were infinitely higher and that the gap between the Soviet Union and wealthy countries was widening.”³⁰⁷

Naturally, as Soviet people focused more and more on their living standards, the legend of American prosperity grew. By the late Soviet period, Western consumer goods, especially ones from America, became some of the most desirable items in the Soviet Union “making them symbols of well-being and prestige for a majority of the population.”³⁰⁸ Andrea Lee, an American Ph.D. student living in Moscow in the late 1970s wrote of her and other Americans’ experiences “we who live – and in my case, work - among Russians find at every step the universal, awestruck belief in the barbarous wealth of Americans.”³⁰⁹ She also noted that when challenged, Soviets defended mythological America at all cost, “Is it really better there [in America]?” When we began an equivocating answer, she waved us away. America had to exist as a promised land of big cars and cheap jeans; it was an attitude we had found before,” recalled Lee of her conversation with a woman at a Moscow farmers’ market.³¹⁰

The perception of America as the wealthiest consumer country, however, did not translate into more positive image of America in other areas. Most Soviets had no reason to doubt domestic propaganda that America was plagued by severe wealth inequality, lack of a social safety net, racism, violence, and crime. Soviet propaganda worked hard

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 127.

³⁰⁸ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, 63. In another example, director of a large automobile factory in Moscow smokes *Marlboro* cigarettes as a sign of his high status in 1982 movie *Private Life* (Chastnaya Zhizn’).

³⁰⁹ Andrea Lee., *Russian Journal* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 132. Soviet sociological surveys from the late 1960s, revealed that 73% of respondents thought America had achieved “very high” level of economic development--far ahead of any other country (Western as well as those from the Soviet bloc) in the survey; see B. A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 800.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

to show that while less affluent, Soviet society offered order and security, in contrast to the chaos of American system and most Soviets had little problem believing it. David Shipler noticed that

In all aspects the United States looks chaotic to many Russians. Politically, because of its pluralism, it seems disorderly, directionless, frighteningly disharmonious. Economically, because of its diversity and decentralization, life seems insecure, uncertain, dangerously unpredictable. Socially, the country seems riven by street crime and racial conflict. It makes a terrifying spectacle.”³¹¹

A study of former Soviet citizens who left the country between 1978 and 1981 revealed that a majority still thought that America could learn from the Soviet Union in areas of healthcare and education.³¹² An analysis of Soviet people’s conversations with American exhibition guides from the period revealed similar trends.³¹³ “When I asked a young woman what she thought the main differences were between American and Soviet societies, she said, “Here I feel secure. I know I will never starve. In the U.S. I could have a lucky day and an unlucky day,” recalled David Shipler.³¹⁴ It is possible that at least in part these feelings developed out of realization that Soviets were never going to achieve Western living standards and thus had to amplify other areas of their life where they felt superior to the West in conversations with foreigners, whether they truly believed it or not.

³¹¹ Shipler, 358. My findings from the chapter on American exhibitions in the Soviet Union also confirm this view.

³¹² James R. Millar, “Quality of life: subjective measures of relative satisfaction” in *Politics, work, and daily life in the USSR: A survey of former Soviet citizens*, ed., James R. Millar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 42-43; Brian D. Silver, “Political beliefs of the Soviet citizen” in *ibid.*, 111.

³¹³ See the chapter on American exhibitions, below.

³¹⁴ Shipler, 359. Hedrick Smith had a similar conversation with a Russian environmentalist who admitted that Americans had higher salaries and bigger houses than Russians but Russians did not have to worry about the future; see Smith, 69-70.

As I noted earlier in the chapter, covert Soviet propaganda at times sacrificed the long held official view of African-Americans as victims of oppressive American system in order to show American society as beleaguered by black crime. Perhaps influenced by frequent pictures of black Americans being at the center of disorder (protests, riots, crime...etc) and negative perceptions of blacks in the Soviet Union, often in association with interracial dating, many Soviets privately agreed with racial discrimination in America while denouncing it in public.³¹⁵

The Vietnam War was one issue that appears to have struck a real chord with the Soviet people. Bombarded with stories of American brutality and the suffering of Vietnamese people, Soviets were genuine in their anger at the Vietnam conflict. Many expressed their outrage in letters to Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in connection with Richard Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union in 1972. Echoing a general theme, a person from Krasnodar wrote: "You will sit at the table with a fascist while his bombs are killing women and children. There is no difference between Nixon and Hitler."³¹⁶ A British man traveling around the Soviet Union in 1966 noted, "They would become quite white with passion when discussing the horrors of this ghastly [Vietnam] war, and spat out the names of Johnson, McNamara and Dean Rusk with the utmost contempt."³¹⁷

At least part of the animosity appears to have come from wounded national pride when the Soviet press reported that Americans bombed a number of Soviet ships in a North Vietnamese harbor. One Moscow veteran from World War II wrote

³¹⁵ Please see my chapter on American exhibitions.

David Shipler also provided a number of examples of anti-black attitudes among the Soviets; see Shipler, 338-339.

³¹⁶ GARF f. 5446 op. 106 d. 1339.

³¹⁷ James Kirkup, *One Man's Russia* (London: Phoenix House, 1968), 55.

The Soviet Union talks about peace too much and Americans just take advantage of that and do what they want. They invade Vietnam and attack our ships! And all we do is talk. We need to stand up to them. And now we humiliate ourselves by inviting Nixon.”³¹⁸

Skepticism and disagreement with official propaganda about America continued to revolve around issues such as economics. By the 1970s, gap in the standard of living between the West and the Soviet Union had become an area of primary concern for many in the country. Therefore it was no surprise that most comments from the public concentrated on specifically this issue when discussing the United States.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Soviet Union was forced to purchase grain from America due to a poor harvest and inefficient agricultural system, Soviet people frequently asked why their country was so far behind America in agricultural productivity, a fact admitted by official Soviets publications.³¹⁹ Often, concerns were tied to unofficial information from Western sources such as radio or traveling exhibitions. Writing to main propaganda magazine *Agitator* in 1979, one reader complained:

I recently visited the “Agriculture: USA” exhibit where I found out that American farmers who constitute 1% of the population provide all of America’s agricultural needs, as well as selling a 100 million tons of agricultural products to other countries – such as the Soviet Union for gold.³²⁰

A Soviet joke, an altered version of one from the Khrushchev period, made light of the issue:

Is it possible to build communism in America?”
Answer: “It’s possible, but who will we buy grain from?”³²¹

³¹⁸ GARF f. 5446 op. 106 d. 1339.

³¹⁹ In answering a question from one of the readers in 1976, the Soviet magazine *Country Life (Sel’skaia zhizn’)* had to admit that the U.S. produced more agricultural goods with far fewer people. It quickly added, however, that this was due to higher level of automation on American farms, American farmers being deeply in debt as a result. See RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 634 l. 77-82.

³²⁰ RGANI f. 5 op. 76 d. 214 l. 139.

³²¹ Available at http://www.johndclare.net/Russ12_Jokes.htm. Accessed April 22, 2012.

In many letters, people expressed similar concerns, often referring to Soviet grain purchases from America.³²² In letters to newspapers, others asked analogous questions about areas where reality did not completely correspond to official media statements:

If the West has such high unemployment and we are projecting worker shortage, than why don't we hire some workers from the West?³²³

Success of countries such as the Soviet Union and Cuba clearly show advantages of socialism over capitalism. So why don't more workers support the American Communist Party?³²⁴

In other words, some people asked the question: If we have the best system in the world as our media keeps telling us, then why are we purchasing grain from our Cold War nemesis? If their system is so bad then why don't more Americans oppose it?

Of course we must keep in mind that in order to raise such questions, Soviet citizens had to have access to outside information, view it as at least partially truthful, and have the ability to put it into the context of the Soviet situation.³²⁵ Therefore, education seems to have been one of the primary factors in whether an individual questioned official propaganda, in this case about the United States.³²⁶ However, we should not view this skepticism of official propaganda as an indication of Soviets' preference for American system. In fact, as Vladimir Shlapentokh pointed out, the Soviet intelligentsia of 1970s, the most educated segment of Soviet society, while convinced of

³²² RGANI f. 5 op. 84 d. 118 l. 85, f. 5 op. 84 d. 119 l. 11.

³²³ RGANI f. 5 op. 76 d. 213 l. 40.

³²⁴ RGANI f. 5 op. 76 d. 214 l. 105.

³²⁵ Soviet sociological studies from the period revealed that a majority of people surveyed tended to agree with their government's foreign policy because they had little way of verifying this information and it had no immediate impact on their day to day lives; see Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 129.

³²⁶ As I mention in my chapter on unofficial information, education was also one of the leading factors in determining ones listenership of Western radio broadcasts. Jonathan Becker, quoting Ellen Mickiewicz, stated that those with greater level of education "were more likely to disagree with official communications; see Becker, 28. Boris Grushin also found education to be the number one criteria in one's interpretation of mass media information; see B. A. Grushin, ed., *Massovaia Informatsiia v sovetskoi promyshlennom gorode: opyt kompleksnogo sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1980), 263.

American superiority in economic and technological matters, still saw American culture and its way of life as significantly inferior.³²⁷

The public image of America among a majority of the Soviet population in the Brezhnev period continued to be marked by a generally low level of knowledge about the subject. Most Soviet people had little detailed information about the United States and therefore formed their opinions based on little superficial details they picked up from domestic mass media. Often the little available information was distorted in word of mouth exchanges. An American graduate student related the following conversation with a Soviet shipyard worker in Leningrad in late 1970s:

“The U.S.A. took control of Alaska under your President Lincoln, who was a very sly man,” he [a Soviet worker] told us. “Lincoln foresaw that in America’s future, that land would be very useful against Russia.”

“I don’t think that’s true,” said Tom [author’s husband]. “Lincoln had no designs against Russia. Besides, we didn’t just take over Alaska. We bought it fair and square.”

“Even that’s not right!” said Petya with a triumphant laugh. “Someone at the factory told me that in the treaty, America agreed to pay Russia for Alaska *na viek*. Now, *na viek* means two things in Russian: ‘forever’ and ‘for a hundred years.’ Russia sold that land only for a century, but Lincoln took it for good. That unfair seizure is at the bottom of all the trouble between our two nations.”³²⁸

People’s letters to Soviet newspapers often asked for definitions of such words as: KKK and phrases such as “American imperialism is the world policeman.”³²⁹ Boris Grushin’s sociological studies in the city of Taganrog in the 1970s found that many people often misinterpreted information from the media, especially when it came to international issues. For example, a number of respondents in the Grushin study thought that *Bundesver* was “something tied to America”.³³⁰ Therefore, it appears that the average Soviet person simply compartmentalized these issues into the categories of good and bad.

³²⁷ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Changeable Soviet Image of America”, 157-171.

³²⁸ Lee, 207.

³²⁹ RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 472 l. 4, 8, 37.

³³⁰ Grushin, *Massovaia Informatsiia v sovertskom promyshlennom gorode*, 246.

In this case, the constant association of America and West Germany as bad and enemies of the Soviet state in the Soviet media, triggered confusion between the two.

Rural areas suffered from particularly poor understanding of complex issues, “An examination of television habits of viewers with less than fourth grade education (which described 40 percent of the rural population) revealed that 93 percent could not understand programmes on social/political topics,” wrote Becker.³³¹ In a letter to *Country Life* (*Sel'skaia zhizn'*), a leading rural publication, one reader mentioned that a majority of the people in the countryside got all of their outside information from this one magazine.³³²

Some people continued to believe conspiracy theories that America deliberately smuggled harmful weeds and insects in order to damage Soviet agriculture.³³³ Soviet playwright Viktor Slavkin made light of this phenomenon when one of the characters in his play tells others that he heard a rumor about American plans to disrupt the 1980 Olympic games by bringing in a hundred moles who then would be released at the main stadium in Moscow right before the opening where they would have dug up the whole field and ruined the aesthetics of the ceremonies.³³⁴ Clearly, the average Soviet citizen's image of America was not marked by sophistication and was largely composed of half-truths from official media and often grossly distorted rumors.

As we have seen, the Brezhnev period did not offer any dramatic changes in the image of America. Gone was the talk of peaceful co-existence and affable competition of the Khrushchev years, yet the fundamentals remained. The same was true for the Soviet

³³¹ Becker, 26.

³³² RGASPI f. 591 op. 1 d. 47 l. 32-33.

³³³ Colin Thubron, *Among the Russians*. (London: Heinemann, 1983), 185.

³³⁴ Slavkin, 137.

people whose opinion regarding America continued to closely mirror that of official propaganda.³³⁵ For most, America was still the country of immense wealth and technological marvels, especially in the area of consumer products. At the same time, it was a country of wealth inequality, high unemployment and crime, whose leadership threatened world peace in the name of profit. In the late 1960s, 99% of respondents in a sociological study identified the U.S. as a country that favored war over peace.³³⁶ On the other hand, increased preoccupation with living standards among the Soviet population and the government's failure to deliver on that front pushed many Soviet people to use the image of America to criticize their own government's shortcomings. To put it another way, Soviet people's views and opinions regarding America were closely tied to their everyday concerns of wanting a peaceful and prosperous life.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the official Soviet image of the United States, largely formed in the early years of the Soviet Union, kept its basic message well into the 1980s. For decades, as if by inertia, Soviet image of America followed the classic Marxist blueprint of a capitalist country where the privileged few extracted wealth from the oppressed masses. Racism and unemployment, solidified their position as official Soviet characteristics of the U.S. in the 1930s during the Great Depression, and remained as key staples to the end. Following World War II, the Soviet state faced increased availability of information from the West via returning veterans, newly founded Western radio

³³⁵ “[S]urveys in the USSR show that the majority of people perceive life in the United States much as it is presented in the official mass media,” wrote Vladimir Shlapentokh about the period; see Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 120. There is more evidence in the Grushin surveys; see Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 794-812.

³³⁶ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 802.

stations broadcasting to the Soviet Union and traveling American exhibitions, among others. Eventually, authorities had to account for this unofficial information, particularly in the sphere of living standards. More importantly, however, Soviet people saw firsthand that material life in the Soviet Union was behind that of the West. Until the end, Soviet propaganda sought to deflect these concerns by pointing out the recent war, Soviet leadership in space exploration, and the negatives of life in the West/America such as absence of social benefits, crime, and lack of cultural life.

For the Soviet people official channels were their primary source of information about America. Small amounts of outside information and the largely insurmountable difficulties of traveling to the United States for the average Soviet person forced them to rely on official propaganda. Of course, it was no secret to the Soviets that domestic media and other forms of propaganda sought to present America in the worst possible light; therefore their image of America did not adopt the more hostile characteristics assigned to the U.S. by those sources. However, few seem to have challenged the basic premises of official messages. Old, and often exaggerated, perceptions of America as a wealthy and business-oriented country, were used by the Soviets to criticize their own government's failure to provide them with better living standards. These do not, however, appear to have been signs of wholesale rejection of the Soviet system in favor of American capitalism, but were simple messages that things could be better at home.

CHAPTER 2: Sources of Unofficial Information About America

Introduction

The Soviet government tightly controlled the majority of information about America available to Soviet citizens. This included most mass media devices such as radio, print, and television. Considering the fact that America was Soviet Union's chief adversary in the Cold War, the official version of the United States (as we saw in the official information chapter) was far from positive. It portrayed America as a country hijacked by the money-obsessed Wall Street executives and the military-industrial cartel. American workers, on the other hand, faced high-unemployment, lack of social safety nets, and racial discrimination.

While official information constituted most of what the Soviets saw or heard about America, it was not the whole story. There were a number of unofficial¹ sources of information about America available in the Soviet Union. The American government sponsored the largest and most consistent of these in the form of American radiobroadcasts such as Voice of America and Radio Liberty and the magazine *Amerika*, published by the State Department. Other sources included magazines and music smuggled into the Soviet Union through the black market or brought in by foreign visitors. American movies, shown both legally and illegally, attracted hundreds of

¹ Here by unofficial I mean information that was not produced or controlled by the Soviet government. American movies were a bit of a grey area since many were chosen by the Soviet government for their ideological content and thus could be considered as a type of official information. I discuss this issue further in the section about American movies in the Soviet Union.

millions of Soviet viewers. American visitors to the Soviet Union, including tourists, diplomats, scholars and students, and Soviets traveling to the United States, although small in number, also accounted for some unofficial information about America.

In this chapter I look at all of the above² sources of unofficial information about America and their impact on Soviet citizens. Furthermore, I address the issue of Soviet authorities' reaction and response to unofficial information. Below, I argue that while millions of Soviets listened to American radio, saw American movies, and read American magazines, their views did not significantly diverge from the official portrayal of America in Soviet mass media as a result. For the most part, these sources reinforced already established notions about America among the Soviet population. However, the availability of these sources did put pressure on Soviet authorities to account for this outside information in official media.

Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe (RFE)/Radio Liberty (RL) had their origins in the early Cold War strategies drafted by people such as George Kennan and Alan Dulles, many of whom saw propaganda as one of the more important features in the struggle with the Soviet Union.³ "Initially, these radio stations sought to occupy the Soviets with broadcasts into Eastern Europe so as to divert their attention and resources and prevent them from making inroads in Western Europe. Some planners believed that fomenting trouble in Moscow's backyard was one means of diverting Stalin from westward expansion," recalled a former RL employee.⁴

² American exhibitions in the Soviet Union were an extremely important source of unofficial information not included here. I devote a separate chapter to this issue.

³ Puddington, 10-13.

⁴ Ibid., 15.

In the post-World War II struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union actual military conflict would mean the annihilation of both sides by nuclear weapons. Therefore, conflicting sides found more subtle means of trying to win the war. Consequently, propaganda, especially radio broadcasts, became important parts of the Cold War arsenal. This was especially true for the United States that subsidized numerous radio stations that broadcasted to the East European Soviet bloc as well as to Soviet Union itself, from the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) to the Far East.

This chapter focuses on Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Liberty (RL), which attracted the most listeners within the Soviet bloc. Both, especially VOA, were very popular with the Soviet public and had millions of dedicated listeners. What is more important, at least in the scope of this chapter, is the fact that both VOA and RL attempted to study and understand their listeners. They did so with the goal of improving the stations' message. At the same time, however, these studies, although rather limited and of uncertain accuracy, provide us with some information about Soviet listeners' reactions to America. This is especially true of VOA studies considering that a large part of its broadcasting content focused on America.

Most scholars, and those who participated in the American broadcasting effort to the Soviet Union, tend to agree that it was successful in attracting large numbers of Soviet listeners. Estimates put the number of regular listeners anywhere from 3 to 20 million. It is also true that Western⁵ radio stations achieved their intended goal of breaking the Soviet government's monopoly on information inside the Soviet Union. However, whether this effort succeeded in changing the minds of regular Soviet citizens

⁵ While majority of the time I am talking about VOA and RL, both American radio stations, sometimes I will use the term Western when the statement can also be applied to other radio stations such as the BBC and Deutsche Welle.

on domestic or international issues is a subject of debate. In other words, the problem lies in how we should answer the following questions: What were the reactions of Soviet listeners to American radio broadcasts? In what way did these broadcasts shape listeners' view of the United States? Did American broadcasts alter the average Soviet citizens' view of their own country and the outside world?

Therefore, in this chapter I will focus mainly on Soviet public reactions to American broadcasting. However, in order to provide context, I will also talk about other issues that surrounded Western radio transmissions to the Soviet Union, including broadcast content and its goals, American and Soviet official reactions.⁶ Finally, I will discuss the impact of these broadcasts on the Soviet Union. I will show that for the most part Soviet listeners tuned into American radio broadcasts in order to supplement domestic media that failed to supply Soviet people with enough entertainment and information, particularly about the world outside Soviet borders. Furthermore, it appears that Western radio did not have a drastic impact on Soviets' view of America as a country. Generally speaking,⁷ Soviet people's perception of America closely followed that of official propaganda and did not change significantly due to American radio broadcasts. However, American radio did force the Soviet media to account for information Soviet people heard on VOA and RL, and this constituted its greatest impact.

Uncovering information about Soviet reactions to American broadcasting is challenging as sources are scattered across various institutions, archives and countries.

⁶ The topic of Soviet official reactions to American broadcasts is well covered in Simo Mikkonen, "Stealing the Monopoly of Knowledge? Soviet Reactions to U.S. Cold War Broadcasting." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11:4 (Fall 2010), 771-805. In order to provide context, I will mention the issue here as well.

⁷ I making this statement I do not include the issue of Soviet youth that formed its own perceptions about America (this issue is discussed in more detail in the chapter about Soviet youth) and were more influenced by American radio than the rest of the population.

Here I use documents from the Russian archives, books by those who worked directly for the radio stations, accounts of foreigners who traveled to the Soviet Union, studies done by the United States Information Agency (USIA), primary materials on U.S. foreign relations (FRUS), as well as several American studies of Soviet immigrants.

Despite the large number of sources, there are some source issues that I must mention here. Lack of access to the Soviet public limited the amount of information American sources could use. Therefore, questions about reliability of the results were a problem that affected a majority of the American sources. For example, surveys of Soviet immigrants and defectors contained much bias against the Soviet system and therefore could not be taken as a representative sample of Soviet population as a whole a fact acknowledged by those involved with these studies at the highest level.⁸ The same issue affected studies by the USIA, where lack of informants cast doubt on the value of its findings. Other issues include the fact that the memoirs of those who worked at these radio stations are usually loaded with the authors' personal opinions on the matter. These opinions were formed through years of inter- and intra-departmental conflicts, and do not necessarily reflect any reality.⁹

Russian archives such as the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) contain a wealth of information on the subject of this study. For example, the GARF collection 5446 holds large collections of citizens' letters to the Soviet government and collection 8009 holds numerous reports by and about

⁸ Discussion about the value of the Harvard project by two directors of research in Alex Inkles and Raymond Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily life in a totalitarian society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 3-58.

⁹ Alan Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 33.

Soviet citizens who spent time in the United States. RGANI houses numerous KGB reports (collection 89) and files from the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party (collections 5, 11, 72, 81). RGASPI contains reports from Communist Party officials regarding public opinion on specific issues as well as on the general mood of the population (collections 17, 591, 599, 614).

While Russian archives do contain a wealth of useful information, they are not immune from a number of source problems. Letters from ordinary citizens and some official reports that mention people's reactions to American radio suffer from similar issues that affect the US sources. They are usually scattered and therefore do not lend themselves to any kind of systematic analysis. Furthermore, those who wrote letters to officials often had some sort of a grievance against the authorities.¹⁰ Reports by Soviet officials were often doctored to make the situation appear in the best possible light for those submitting the report.¹¹ Some of the more thorough studies on the subject are locked away in Russian security archives are not available to researchers.

Therefore, reliance on a single source would produce inaccurate results. However, a combination of the above sources coupled with an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses permits us to draw some informed conclusions on the subject.

The Voices: Western radio broadcasts

“VOA and *Amerika* are our only means of presenting the US story”

– March 5, 1949 Airgram from Secretary of State Dean Acheson to American embassy in the Soviet Union.¹²

¹⁰ Vladimir Shlapentokh, et al., *The Soviet Union: Internal and External Perspective on Soviet society*, 114-115.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Foreign Relation of the United States (FRUS) – 1949, volume 05, pp. 586

Goals and content

Following World War I, many nations realized the importance of using the new mass media in form of radio, movies, and mass-produced print to distribute information they deemed beneficial to their causes to a large numbers of people, friend and foe alike. This practice soon acquired a name: propaganda. During World War II, all sides used extensive propaganda in one form or another to either support the war effort at home or undermine it for the enemy.¹³

Once relations between the Soviet Union and America began to sour shortly after World War II, Americans turned its propaganda tools on its recent ally. Given the closed nature of the Soviet Union, Americans had few ways of delivering their message to the Soviet people. Among the propaganda tools available to America during the Cold War, radio stood out as the most effective. It did not require a physical (at least in macro terms) penetration of Soviet borders and it covered a large amount of territory.

Voice Of America (VOA), which was to become the backbone of American Cold War radio broadcasting, sent its first signal a few months after Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. During the war, it served as a propaganda and entertainment tool by broadcasting news, commentary, musical and other entertainment programming in over 40 languages.¹⁴ After the war, the station was enlisted in fighting a new war, the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Officially, the U.S. announced VOA's role in the Cold War

¹³ On the history of propaganda see for example Philip Taylor., *Munitions of the Mind: a history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present era* (New York : Manchester University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ For history of VOA see Alan Heil, *Voice of America: A History*.

in 1947 when American Embassy in the Soviet Union issued the following announcement to members of the press:

American Ambassador takes pleasure in announcing that beginning February 17, American Government's radio program Voice of America will include daily broadcasts in Russian language beamed to USSR. These broadcasts will consist of music, news about America and world affairs and special features. They will be transmitted from 9 to 10 p.m. Moscow time on two frequencies 6170 kilocycles (48.6 meters) and 9540 kilocycles (31.5meters). Ambassador believes that these broadcasts, which are in line with desire frequently expressed by representatives of governments of both countries for wider exchange of information of a cultural and scientific character will help to broaden base of understanding and friendship between peoples of Soviet Union and United States.¹⁵

American ambassador Walter Smith suggested, and the State Department agreed, that the Soviets were not to be notified in advance, citing Soviet unwillingness to discuss their own radio broadcasts to the West.¹⁶

From the very beginning of its Cold War broadcasts VOA attempted to employ the best of American mass media talent. As a result, despite its goal of not being in the “amusement” and “entertainment” business, VOA assembled a group people who did have a lot of experience in entertaining, among other things. The first group of VOA employees contained “extraordinarily talented journalists, war refugees, dramatists, poets, philosophers, theater producers, radio announcers, musicians, artists, linguists, and bureaucrats [who] suddenly were thrust together overnight in crowded, makeshift offices and studios in New York City.”¹⁷

Following one of the original goals from its early days as a Cold War station, those deciding on the shape of VOA programming tried hard to gain trust and respect of its listeners, because they knew that without credibility VOA was likely to be dismissed as simply a propaganda tool of the American government. “The USA should not

¹⁵ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 531-532

¹⁶ Ibid, 514, 518.

¹⁷ Heil, 32-33.

criticize Soviet system, Government or personalities. Such technique would, on nationalistic and patriotic grounds, arouse resentment of Soviet listeners and would prejudice our relations with the Soviet Government,” warned the American ambassador to the Soviet Union a few months before VOA’s first broadcast.¹⁸

Early VOA programs included interviews and reports from America designed to familiarize listeners with history and culture of the United States.¹⁹ Other programs introduced listeners to American and international news and events that included a discussion by a number of American journalists and correspondents. There was also a morning show that featured music and news. Overall, early VOA programming focused mainly on informing the Soviet listeners about the United States. And even though it was officially a government-sponsored radio station, people outside the station rarely interfered with its broadcast message.²⁰

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RL) was the other major American station broadcasting to the Soviet Union. Unlike VOA, RL was officially not a government-sponsored station. Its funding was supposed to come from private donations. In reality, initial attempts to raise the funds for RL through private donations failed to net much money and it soon became apparent that these funds could only cover a small portion of the necessary expenses. Therefore, the American government, mostly through the CIA,

¹⁸ FRUS – 1946, volume 06, pp.676.

¹⁹ VOA’s early programs about the United States were usually selections from programs produced by NBC and CBS. However, it was determined that at times these programs did not portray the United States in the best possible light. Therefore, by late 1948 VOA discontinued its partnership with NBC and CBS as it sought more control over its content. Cull, 42.

²⁰ Heil, 55-68. In its early days, the issue of VOA’s independence from the government line was brought up several times. William Benton, a U.S. senator from Connecticut, was one of the most vocal defenders of VOA’s autonomy in its early years. In the late 1950s, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles reemphasized the importance of VOA being an independent news source. See Cull, 49, 69-74, 142-144.

took on the role of making sure RL stayed on the air.²¹ In fact, CIA's funding of RL "was arguably the worst-kept secret in the history of statecraft," noted a former employee.²²

RL went on the air in July, 1950, with Eastern European exiles composing a majority of its staff. Unlike other broadcasters such as Voice of America (VOA) that focused on events inside the U.S., RL program content dealt largely with news from the Soviet bloc countries. Early on, there was little pressure, or even guidance, from the American government over the broadcast content. The CIA, although unofficially funding the venture, rarely interfered with the station's broadcast contents, and the station was officially listed as a non-governmental organization, allowing it more freedom in what it could broadcast.²³

Much like VOA, from the very beginning RL sought to avoid outside meddling in the content of its broadcasting. The man in charge of RL until 1975, Howland Sargeant, adopted a stance that the radio station would not become a tool of the CIA, even though it was secretly funded by it. He seemed unaware of the irony of RL striving to bring the truth to the Soviet Union while at the same time lying about its funding source. Moreover, Howland resolved not to allow the station to be used by disgruntled emigres in order to broadcast vengeful and hateful messages to the Soviet Union. Instead, under his policy, RL strived to "convey to listeners the genuine feelings of sympathy and friendship of Americans, but always speak to them from the viewpoint of Soviet citizens' genuine needs and interests."²⁴

²¹ Puddington, 21-25.

²² Critchlow, 15.

²³ Puddington, 18-19, 29-32.

²⁴ Sosin, 32.

As planned, VOA transmitted its first broadcast on February 17, 1947. Almost the entire American colony in Moscow tuned in. In the opinion of the American embassy staff, judging by the reaction of the Americans living in Moscow, the show was a modest success. An embassy report to the United States State Department noted that most of the announcers had good diction and pronunciation, although it is not clear whether the American staff had a good enough command of Russian to be able to judge on this point. This was particularly important so as not to alienate Russian listeners by sounding “foreign.” On the other hand, the report noted, “we were a little too cultured in the Russian sense of the word. Fifteen-minute talk on structure of American Govt was rather ponderous, particularly as Soviets are rather bored with long winded discussions of political conditions, which to them mean very little.”²⁵ As we will see later in the chapter, this observation proved to be true as political commentary consistently ranked towards the bottom of topics enjoyed by Soviet listeners throughout the life of Western Cold War broadcasts.

In other reports, American embassy staff suggested that VOA broadcast its news with an eye for the Soviet listener, as American-style news did not work in Russia. According to the report, small factual news stories without proper context only further entrenched the Soviet view of America as a chaotic place. For example, if VOA was to run a news story about a possible teacher strike in some small American town Soviets might interpret this singular event as a widespread and seriously problematic. The embassy argued that such a report should also provide a background story and mention how this situation was to be resolved. Moreover, any news story about America should focus on the differences between Soviet and American approaches to solving problems.

²⁵ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 533-534.

The goal of the newscast stated the report “must be to show that we have our own ways for arriving at the better life.”²⁶

Later embassy telegrams, supposedly in part based on conversations with Soviet listeners, called for more entertainment. They recommended that programs avoid “esoteric” subjects because the audience was not limited to a “small group intellectuals.” In addition, embassy telegrams asked that broadcasts contain a lot more music. “There has been too much solid talk and not enough music,” they complained, noting that music should be spaced out between various programs throughout the day.²⁷

It did not take long for the embassy to report that program quality improved significantly following their initial suggestions. Although reception still proved to be a problem, knowledge about VOA was spreading among the Soviet population, even beyond Moscow, according to embassy sources. During the first few weeks following the first VOA broadcast to the Soviet Union, the American embassy sent a daily report to the State Department with their reactions as well as of those of Soviet listeners.

Assessment of Soviet listener reactions was far from a scientific procedure. Having no direct access to large numbers of Soviet citizens, the American embassy had to rely on information gathered from individual and random sources. Therefore, early Soviet listener assessment took the form of reports such as: “‘cultured Soviet executive type’ person from a provincial industrial city near Moscow declared that he and many of his acquaintances listened regularly to Voice of America broadcasts, chiefly for news, but would also like to hear more music.”²⁸ Overall, wrote American ambassador Smith in his telegram to the State Department, “There is no question in my mind that our Russian

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 537-538.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 541-542.

²⁸ Ibid, 546.

language news broadcasts are of great interest to Soviet listeners.”²⁹

It is clear that from its early days as a Cold War broadcasting station, VOA geared its content to a broader base by providing less high-brow political and philosophical discussion and more entertainment, such as music. VOA quickly learned that if it wanted to attract Soviet listeners it could not dictate its preferences to the Soviet audience but in fact had to tailor its message to their wishes. By doing this, VOA became “the” entertainment station of the Soviet Union, with jazz being by far its most popular product. Moreover, despite claims by former employees that VOA was largely immune from outside pressures, we can see that recommendations from the American Embassy did in fact influence early VOA broadcasts.

After several years without comprehensive and reliable studies of listener composition and reaction, the American embassy had to feel its way in the dark. Recommendations about VOA content therefore largely relied on educated guesswork. For example, the 1949 dispatch from US embassy to the State Department stated that:

Soviet "intelligentsia," though by no-means the sole group deserving attention in planning VOA programs, are probably a more important target than the workers and peasants because they occupy more influential positions, own a disproportionate number of radios and, being better educated, are more responsive to the spoken word...they presumably suffer with boredom or mental numbness from the monotony of 'official propaganda', and with frustration from being unable to express themselves sincerely and spontaneously. This state of mind should be admirably suited for seduction with forbidden fruit.³⁰

The “forbidden fruit” represented the various things mentioned by the Soviet press as being taboo, things such as Western music and news for example. However, since the Soviet press rarely gave specific examples of taboos, Americans thought VOA could tap into the Soviets’ natural curiosity. And if done right, along with satisfying curiosity,

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 545-546.

³⁰ FRUS – 1949 – volume 05, pp. 578-579.

VOA could sow seeds of opposition to the official regime among the Soviet population. Consequently, the embassy report concluded that “Every effort should rather be made to tempt the Soviet listener to identify *himself* with heresy, and some third person or group (such as Party Leadership), with orthodoxy.”³¹

The 1950s and 1960s proved to be the most formative years for the VOA in general and its Russian service specifically. Those in charge of VOA programming clearly understood that impartial and unbiased reporting was essential to its effectiveness. Therefore, during the Eisenhower administration VOA fought hard to make sure that its content and message to the Soviet Union was objective. And by the beginning of 1960s VOA stressed these principles in its charter that stated:

- The Voice of America must win the attention and respect of its listeners
- VOA news must be accurate, objective, and comprehensive
- VOA must represent America, not any single segment of the nation, including “a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.”
- As an official radio, it must present U.S. policies and “responsible discussion and opinion on those policies.”³²

It is, however, hard to say with any degree of certainty whether VOA succeeded in its goal of content objectivity. The main part of the problem lies in the fact that objectivity is viewed differently depending on a person’s worldview. While VOA staff thought they presented a balanced story, its Soviet audience did not always agree. The issue of the standard of living is a good example. VOA frequently stressed the fact that Americans had a much higher standard of living than their Soviet counterparts. Americans had more living space, more cars, more clothes and other consumer goods. And most Soviets did not dispute those claims. What the VOA did not often mention

³¹ Ibid.

³² Heil, 65.

was the fact that the Russian lands endured a violent revolution, a destructive civil war, and two world wars, in less than half a century. Therefore, the Soviet audience saw these omissions as a sign that VOA was not completely objective. Soviets visiting American exhibitions in the Soviet Union frequently made similar observations.³³

Political commentary was the one part of VOA broadcasting that clearly lacked objectivity, especially in the eyes of Soviet listeners. From the very beginning this segment of VOA content became a propaganda tool of the American government.³⁴ Soviet listeners quickly took notice. In fact, VOA's political commentary was the least liked segment with the Soviet audience and many listeners cited it as the reason for why they preferred BBC to VOA.³⁵

Even though many Soviets did not view VOA as completely objective, it did manage to win a degree of respect for its news service even from Soviet officials. A 1959 secret Soviet report on VOA content admitted that VOA did use a lot of factual and objective information in its news broadcasts. However, it quickly noted that this was done only to give credibility to the rest of its content that was clearly biased against the Soviet Union.³⁶

Without a doubt the music program was the most popular segment of VOA's broadcasting with the Soviet audience. This was largely due to the nightly jazz program called *Music USA* hosted by Willis Conover. Started in January, 1955, *Music USA* stayed on the airwaves for over four decades until Conover's death in 1996. The program featured a fifteen-minute newscast, forty-five minutes of popular music, then followed by

³³ See the chapter on American exhibitions below.

³⁴ Hixson, 38.

³⁵ NA P160/13/30 p. 35, 41-42, 62. Harvard Project - <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959199?n=4>.

³⁶ RGANI f.5 op. 33 d. 106 l. 31-45.

forty-five minutes of jazz. At its height *Music USA* was estimated to have more than thirty million listeners, a large percentage of them in the Soviet Union, and had the “largest audience of any international broadcast although it was done completely in English.”³⁷

By the 1960s, VOA had a fairly regular program content that remained until the early 1980s. According to Soviet sources, regular VOA broadcasts consisted of:

- News (foreign and domestic)
- Programs about history (foreign and domestic)
- Reports about daily life in the United States
- Music³⁸

There were a number of consistent themes present in almost all of VOA’s programming. These included exposing of such historical distortions by the Soviet government as the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. VOA frequently highlighted life under tyranny and freedom by stressing the Soviet government’s complete control over its citizens in such things as travel and freedom of speech and religion. On the other hand, VOA talked at length about American electoral process.³⁹ The KGB noted that broadcasts also frequently emphasized the superiority of Western life-style, pointing to a higher availability of consumer goods and focused on lack of freedoms in the Soviet Union as everything is subjugated to the State.⁴⁰

In addition to setting up stable programming, VOA expanded its reach. In order to get through to a wider Soviet audience it began broadcasting in languages of Soviet

³⁷ Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: How the West Won*. Available at http://mountainrunner.us/2009/12/yalerichmond_2.html. Accessed April 12, 2012.

³⁸ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 110 l. 1-75.

³⁹ Hixson, 40-43.

⁴⁰ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 106 l. 31-45.

national minorities. In 1951 alone VOA added Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Turkestani, and Armenian languages to its broadcasting services.⁴¹

The first major shake up to VOA's broadcasting content came with the election of Ronald Reagan as American president in 1980. Under Reagan, all "free" radios' budgets increased as Reagan placed more importance on beaming America's message of freedom to the East. Along with the budget increase, however, came a shakeup of broadcast content where new appointees wanted a stronger-worded message.⁴² As a result, VOA faced the most pressure to politicize the news and there were large purges of VOA staff. After the stormy early 1980s, however, VOA managed to regain its former form.⁴³

Although it was the most popular, VOA was not the only American radio station broadcasting to the Soviet Union. Attracting millions of Soviet listeners, Radio Liberty consistently placed behind VOA as the second most popular American radio broadcast in the Soviet Union. RL began broadcasting in March, 1953 from Germany and differed from VOA in that most of its content dealt with matters inside the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries.

Since Soviet emigres composed the majority of RL's staff, many of its programs were strongly anti-Soviet. Moreover, because RL was not officially associated with the American government, it could therefore be less diplomatic in its broadcast content. According to one former RL staff member, the station's original goals were "the identification of the broadcasters with listeners as fellow Russians," "obligation to bring

⁴¹ Hixson, 37. It is not clear what Hixson meant by Turkestani language as "Turkestan" referred to a region divided among several USSR Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

⁴² Paddington, 253-283

⁴³ Heil, 199-219.

truthful information to compatriots who were denied that opportunity by the regime,” and “unequivocal expression of the need for a democratic system to replace the Soviet Communist order.” At the same time, he pointed out that RL “avoided inciting listeners to rise up against the Kremlin rulers.”⁴⁴

In its regular broadcasting RL held reading of books banned by the Soviet government such as Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. Other programs featured discussions of Russian history and culture. There was also a program exposing wrongdoing by individual communist officials as well as reporting of happenings in the Soviet Union that were not mentioned in official news sources.⁴⁵ In its reporting on America, because VOA mainly focused on material (economic) aspects of America, RL decided to present other aspects of American life such as discussions of American political institutions.⁴⁶ Much like VOA, RL featured a highly popular daily music program that was run by a DJ of Hungarian decent.

Audience

Few disputed the fact that American radio broadcasts to the Soviet Union had millions of listeners. But who were they? Were they peasants or workers, officials or intellectuals, male or female, rich or poor? Did they listen alone or with a group of friends? American radio stations such as VOA and RL, as well as Soviet and American

⁴⁴ Sosin, 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23-25;
Paddington, 48-49.

⁴⁶ Critchlow, 113.

security agencies, all had particular interest in getting answers to these questions and understanding more about the kinds of people who listened to these broadcasts.

Obtaining any detailed information about the Soviet audience, however, proved quite difficult. When asked by the RL to help with determining their listener base in the 1950s, one Western communications expert compared their efforts to “a fisherman who drops his line through a hole in the ice and tries without any bait to identify the fish that brushes against the line.”⁴⁷ Therefore, results often proved to be incomplete and spotty, even after considerable efforts to obtain them. Many of those working to gather audience data for various Western radio stations from the 1960s to 1980s noted the difficulty of such an undertaking and expressed doubts about its accuracy.⁴⁸

The problems were numerous. For Americans, getting access to Soviet people was the main hurdle. Locked behind well-guarded borders and rigid travel restrictions, few Soviets ever made it to Soviet bloc countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and even fewer traveled to the West. Those who did leave Soviet borders underwent intense screenings to determine their ability to interpret their experience “correctly”: in other words, to make sure they remained loyal Soviet citizens even after seeing the temptations of the West.⁴⁹ For an added layer of protection they were under constant surveillance by a Soviet tour guide who reported to the KGB.

Of course, Soviets who traveled abroad were not the only source of information. Embassy staff, US exchange scholars and tourists, American exhibition staff, and Soviet informants provided information as well. Yet obtaining honest opinion about Western

⁴⁷ Sosin, 74.

⁴⁸ Donald Browne, *International Radio Broadcasting: The Limits of the Limitless Medium* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 155.

⁴⁹ Eugene Parta, “Audience research in *Extremis*: Cold War Broadcasting to the USSR,” *Participations* 8:1(May 2011), 107.

radio inside the Soviet Union faced far greater challenges considering Soviet people's reluctance to associate with foreigners for fear of official reprimands.

Even the KGB had a tough time in determining the exact make up of the Soviet audience. The authorities discouraged listening to foreign broadcasts but millions still listened. It was not so much the listening part as discussion and dissemination of what one heard on the radio that had potential for serious consequences. Therefore, average Soviet citizens were understandably cautious in discussing their listening habits.

Considering these difficulties, early attempts to understand the make-up and the nature of Soviet audience were largely based on "Soviet statements... as well as what was known about the Soviet society at the time," recalled one former RL staffer.⁵⁰ In other words, when the Soviet media launched attacks against those listening to foreign broadcasts, Americans used those characterizations as clues to determining the audience. First, the very fact that Soviet media admitted that some Soviets listened to Western radio led Americans to assume that in order to elicit such a response the number of listeners had to be sufficiently high.⁵¹ Furthermore, they assumed that the audience was most likely well-educated and urban, since those with education were more inquisitive about the outside world, and those living in the cities had more access to short-wave radios. It was also assumed that more men than women listened because of the double burden of work and family faced by Soviet women.⁵²

⁵⁰ Sosin, 38.

⁵¹ In this case, American assumptions proved correct. Yet in other instances official ban did not necessarily imply a large following – see for example Emily Baran's work on Jehovah's Witnesses, "Faith on the Margins: Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova, 1945-2010" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2011).

⁵² Sosin, 38.

Other attempts to obtain feedback from Soviet listeners included RL setting up mailboxes in West Berlin and encouraging Soviets to send in postcards with their opinions about the radio station. RL did receive thousands of letters from Soviet citizens over the years. However, considering KGB censorship of Soviet letters, especially those going outside the Soviet Union, it is unlikely that these in any way represented a typical Soviet listener.⁵³ In fact, RL suspected that majority of the early letters from the Soviet Union were the work of the KGB.⁵⁴ There is little evidence to suggest that the situation changed in later years.

Starting in the late 1950s and through 1960s, RL undertook a more ambitious program of understanding its audience by interviewing Soviet tourists who traveled to the West and intended to come home (this was important in order to weed out Soviet defectors to the West who did not represent a typical Soviet listener). Covert interviewing efforts took place during events such as the 1958 Brussels World Fair where American researchers managed to contact as many as three hundred Soviet citizens. These efforts yielded some important data showing that there was indeed a large audience of Soviets listening to Western broadcasts. However, the statistical sample was not significant enough to draw any kinds of general conclusions.⁵⁵

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the RL audience research group began employing more sophisticated methods such as the use of standardized questionnaires.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid, 38-39. We must assume that the KGB confiscated majority of letters praising RL. Furthermore, if a Soviet citizen risked writing a letter that in any way approved of American radio broadcasts, it probably meant he/she had strong negative feelings about the Soviet system and therefore was not a typical Soviet listener.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Parta, "Audience research in *Extremis*", 105-106.

⁵⁶ Dr. Max Ralis founded RL audience research group in 1956. Before RL, Ralis worked for U.S. Army intelligence and the Harvard Project. For brief overview of RL's early audience research see Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, 75-79 and Crichlow, 99-103.

Highly trained specialists engaged Soviet tourists in a conversation when they were away from their tour group. The interviewer then posed questions regarding Western radio in a subtle manner that did not scare the interviewee. Results were recorded on the standardized questionnaire immediately following the interview. Furthermore, with the coming of *perestroika* in the mid-1980s and the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, RL researchers managed to obtain more statistically significant data without the restrictions of previous decades.⁵⁷

Even though the RL audience studies of the 1970s were the most extensive to date, American evaluators criticized them severely. Critics cited the bias in the studies towards better educated people, since the majority of interviewees had some sort of higher education and came from Moscow or Leningrad.⁵⁸ They also noted a gender bias as almost all of those interviewed by researchers were male.⁵⁹ Therefore, the biggest criticism of RL audience reports was that they projected results from a non-representative sample onto the Soviet population as a whole. In discussing a particular RL study some of the harsher critics went as far as stating it could “only be judged as invalid in major respects.”⁶⁰ More objective evaluators put RL efforts in the context of “near-insurmountable difficulties facing the researcher in this field.”⁶¹ One cannot reject these criticisms as unfounded. However, a majority of RL’s findings did prove quite accurate when compared to some of the Soviet research on the subject.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 107-108.

⁵⁸ NA P160/30/17 p.1-2, NA P160/35/18 p.1.

⁵⁹ NA P160/30/17 p.1-2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.1.

⁶¹ NA P160/35/18 p.1.

⁶² *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, Hoover Institution and the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Stanford University, 13-16 October 2004., 18-19. Available at media.hoover.org/documents/broadcast_conf_rpt.pdf. Accessed April 22, 2012;

American attempts to understand the Soviet radio audience became more sophisticated when RL joined with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1973 to analyze audience data using computer technology. The data used for these studies included a survey of over sixteen hundred Soviets citizens who traveled abroad, data from ComCom project,⁶³ as well as “published Soviet audience studies on the radio, TV, and press audiences.”⁶⁴

Other studies included panels of experts, usually those who specialized in Russian/Soviet studies, knew the Russian language, and spent some time in the Soviet Union. These experts were provided with transcripts and tapes of radio broadcasts and asked to use their knowledge in offering suggestions on how to improve the radio’s message. For example, a 1961 panel focused on assessing and improving VOA broadcasts included eight experts in fields of political science, sociology, history, and literature from institutions such as Yale, Columbia, Indiana, and Illinois Universities, as well as USIA.⁶⁵

Despite the difficulties involved in audience research, it appears that most of the these studies were not too far off the mark. As mentioned earlier, the RL/MIT project results turned out to closely match those conducted by the Soviets themselves, once the Soviet studies became available to researchers after the fall of the Soviet Union. Moreover, as we will see below, some of the evidence from other Soviet sources corroborated parts of RL and expert panels’ conclusions. Therefore, even with limited

Bashkurova, 103-120.

⁶³ The ComCom project was conducted by communication experts at MIT and used interview data from Soviet citizens to produce computer models of Soviet foreign radio audience as well as its impact; see Sosin, 112.

⁶⁴ NA 306/A1-1016/44.

⁶⁵ NA P160/17/36 p. 1.

data available on Soviet audience of Western radio stations we can draw some helpful conclusions about its makeup and listening habits.

How large was the Soviet audience of Western radio stations? There is little reliable data from the 1940s and 1950s, primarily due to the difficulties mentioned above. Some rough estimates by Stephen White suggest that around 2% of the Soviet population listened to Western radio in the 1940s with the number rising to 8% in the 1950s.⁶⁶ It is safe to assume that the number of Soviet listeners went up after the death of Stalin as the punishment for listening to foreign radio became less severe.⁶⁷ Both American and Soviet estimates from the 1970s and 1980s put the number of Soviets listening to VOA at around 25% to 27% percent of the adult population who listened on weekly basis.⁶⁸ Numbers for BBC and RL were around 15% and 9%.⁶⁹ These figures, however, do not take into account that much of the information from foreign radio was passed along by word-of-mouth.⁷⁰ Therefore, these calculations tend to underestimate the number of those who received information from these broadcasts.

According to both Soviet and American studies, numbers of Soviets listening on regular basis remained largely stable throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁷¹ Large audience increases were usually attributed to important international and domestic events.⁷²

⁶⁶ Stephen White, *Gorbachev in Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 58.

⁶⁷ Exact numbers on people prosecuted for listening to foreign radio broadcasts are not available but according to Brian LaPierre, Khrushchev adopted a “softer line”, such as public shaming, in dealing with lesser crimes compared to the Stalin period; see LaPierre, 216- 323.

⁶⁸ Bashkirova, 103-120, Parta, “Audience research in *Extremis*”, 111; Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 43; NA P160/36/6.

⁶⁹ Parta, “Audience research in *Extremis*”, 111.

⁷⁰ *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 17.

⁷¹ Bashkirova, 103-120. NA P160/36/6, p.2.; Parta, “Audience research in *Extremis*”, 111.

⁷² NA 160/22/29 p. 2, *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 18.

Liberalization of Soviet radio in the early *perestroika* period (1985-1987) caused a serious drop in people tuning into foreign radio.⁷³

Originally, American researchers believed that those listening to Western radio were predominantly male. As mentioned earlier, this conclusion came from the assumption that because Soviet women faced a double burden of working and taking care of the family they had little time to listen to the radio. Later American studies, done in the 1970s and based on interviews with Soviet tourists, confirmed the gender gap. For example, a three-year study done between 1972 and 1975 found that males composed anywhere from 66% to 71% of listeners.⁷⁴ USIA studies from the 1980s and early 1990s, also found that males were more likely to listen to Western broadcasts because they were more interested in their political content.⁷⁵ Soviet studies, however, saw a 50/50 split between the genders. Much like the discrepancies in entertainment as a motivating factor for listening, the gender differences in American and Soviet studies were probably due to differences in samples. Soviet studies involved a larger percentage of young people many of who listened in order to hear American music. Therefore, the gender difference in the studies can be explained if we are to assume that women were more interested in radio's musical rather than political content. Evidence from studies by Soviet sociologist Boris Grushin supported this assumption when data collected in 1972 showed greater preference for musical content among female radio listeners.⁷⁶

⁷³ Parta, "Audience research in *Extremis*," 111.

⁷⁴ NA P160/36/6 p.2.

⁷⁵ Parta, "Audience research in *Extremis*", 111.

⁷⁶ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 556.

Those between the ages of 30 and 50 constituted the majority of Soviet listeners.⁷⁷ Most likely this was due to the fact that this segment of Soviet population was more interested in information from other than official sources as opposed to a younger generation (16-29 years old) that was more interested in music and entertainment topics. However, the last group accounted for a sizable portion of around 30% of the listeners.⁷⁸

By all accounts the urban population made up the bulk of Soviets who listened to Western radio. Most participants in the Harvard Project who touched on the subject, for example, revealed that urban population overwhelmingly exceeded its rural counterpart in listening to foreign radio.⁷⁹ The ComCom project yielded similar results, as did the Soviet studies.⁸⁰ At first glance, Soviet people in the countryside had better opportunities to listen to Western radio. Jamming in rural areas was not as intense as in highly populated areas, due to the size of the area and low population density.

So why didn't the rural Soviets tune-in more frequently? There are several reasons for this phenomenon. First, and most important, was the issue of education. Audience studies suggested that listenership of Western radio tended to increase with education.⁸¹ Therefore, it was not unusual to see lower rates of listening in the countryside as rural Soviet population tended to be less educated. We cannot, however, assume uniformity of this trend. American researchers of Soviet audiences found a strong correlation between holding a "divergent" opinion and one's likelihood of

⁷⁷ *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 17.

⁷⁸ NA P160/36/6 p.2.

⁷⁹ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959186?n=54>, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959205?n=4>, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:981834?n=69>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁸⁰ NA 306/A1-1016/44; Bashkirova, 103-120.

⁸¹ NA P160/35/18, p.7; Bashkirova, 103-120; *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 17-18.

listening to foreign radio.⁸² In other words, the more someone disagreed with the government's policies the more likely that person was to listen to Western radio. As we saw in the previous chapter, certain groups such as some Ukrainian peasants⁸³ and religious minorities living in rural areas had strong negative feelings about the Soviet government. Thus, it would not be out of line to suggest that those groups had higher than average listenership rates.

The cost of radio sets was another factor impacting rural listening. Short wave radios were expensive, at least in the 1940s and 1950s, and not many could afford such a luxury, especially in the decade of post-war reconstruction. A 1957 survey of Western repatriates who spend many years in the Soviet Union concluded that "Ownership of a short-wave radio means that his [Soviet listener's] socio-economic status is likely to be at least that of a semi-skilled urban worker."⁸⁴ Harvard Project respondents also frequently mentioned cost as the main reason for peasants not having access to a radio.⁸⁵ An MIT study for years 1971-1978 found that "The groups at the lower end of the spectrum [these included majority of peasants and agricultural workers] will remain unexposed [to Western Radio]. But, it seems that these cannot be reached anyhow: they have no shortwave radios."⁸⁶ There was some evidence of peasants on state farms organizing

⁸² Eugene Parta's presentation at the *Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, Hoover Institution and the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Stanford University, 13-16 October 2004. Video available at <http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/ondemand/index.cfm?fuseaction=media.play&mediaid=C51D5E65-A6AA-616C-B91F7E7B2489A70F>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁸³ There is also some indication of this in Harvard Project interviews.

⁸⁴ NA P160/13/30 p.60.

⁸⁵ For example one interviewee noted that "A *kolkhoznik* cannot buy one [radio], because he does not have the money", <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959186?n=54>. Others made similar remarks, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959205?n=4>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁸⁶ NA 306/A1-1016/44.

listening circles of VOA.⁸⁷ These, however, coincided with major changes in the country, such as Khrushchev's 1956 speech denouncing Stalin, or 1968 Soviet lead invasion of Czechoslovakia, and therefore cannot be attributed to evidence of regular listenership among rural population.

In terms of geographical distribution, large urban centers such as Moscow and Leningrad saw the highest percentages of foreign radio listeners. Again, this was most likely a result of those cities having higher educational levels since education was one the primary indicator of listener rates.⁸⁸ Baltic States and Trans-Caucasia also saw high listener rates, probably influenced by strong nationalist and anti-Soviet feelings in those regions. Moldavia and Central Asia saw among the lowest listener rates in the Soviet Union.⁸⁹

While there is not enough reliable data to estimate listener rates in other regions, limited evidence suggests that people in all parts of the Soviet Union tuned in to Western broadcasts for news and entertainment. For example, a 1960 report from the Ideological Committee to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party noted that radio committee directors and other sources reported instances of regular listenership of Western radio in republics of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and cities of Lvov, Odessa, Tom', as well as many others.⁹⁰ A taxi-cab driver in Barnaul, a Siberian city close to Kazakhstan, confided to one American traveler that he regularly listened to American music on the radio in 1950s.⁹¹ An American survey from the 1970s also discovered a

⁸⁷ Kulavig, 32.

⁸⁸ Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁹⁰ RGANI f. 89 d. 46 o. 19.

⁹¹ Higgins, 118.

number of people from Siberia who listened to VOA, mostly for information.⁹² A 1959 official report from the Far-Eastern Soviet island of Sakhalin complained that many people were able to, and did, listen to foreign radio programs such as VOA. As a result, report noted, there was an upsurge of various provocative rumors and wrong interpretations of official policy.⁹³

One's occupation alone did not appear to be a major determining factor for listenership. Neither was one's membership in the Communist Party.⁹⁴ Likely, this correlated with the fact that many people listening to Western radio did not see themselves as being disloyal to the Soviet state.⁹⁵ Therefore, we see people in positions directly tied to the Soviet governing and defense institutions among those who tuned into foreign radio, people such as *gorkom* (city executive committee) officials,⁹⁶ Red Army officers,⁹⁷ and even one of the drivers for the Soviet Foreign Ministry.⁹⁸ Like many others, these people might not have listened regularly, only in times of heightened domestic or international tensions,⁹⁹ but the very fact that they did is evidence that listening to Western radio became a legitimized practice in post-World War II Soviet Union among all sectors of Soviet population.

⁹² NA P160/30/17 p.4.

⁹³ RGANI f. 5 o.34 d.56 l.25.

⁹⁴ Parta, "Audience research in *Extremis*", 112.

⁹⁵ This does not mean that a person did not have opinions that differed from official policy. Here, I used the term "disloyal" to describe people who called for removal of the Soviet system.

⁹⁶ RGANI f. 5 o. 34 d. 24 l. 35.

⁹⁷ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:962251?n=55>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁹⁸ Aksiutin, 285.

⁹⁹ "[L]istener rates of Western broadcasting increased significantly during periods of crisis, such as the *samizdat* era of the 1970s, the war in Afghanistan, the Korean airliner incident, the Chernobyl disaster, and *perestroika*," *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 18.

While occupation alone did not determine proclivity for listening, one's attitudinal type¹⁰⁰ was a major factor. Those classified as Liberal or Moderate in their attitude towards civil liberties in the Soviet Union were far more likely to get their information from Western radio than did those classified as Hardline or Conservative.¹⁰¹ Consequently, while we cannot establish a direct connection between one's occupation and listenership of foreign radio we can make an educated guess. It is quite probable that those employed at higher echelons of the Soviet system were more likely to hold conservative views (such as those supporting the status quo) and therefore less likely to listen to Western radio on a regular basis than people on the other side of the spectrum. There is some evidence to support this conclusion based on the fact that those most critical of the Soviet system listened to RL, the harshest critic of the Soviet system of all Western radio station.¹⁰²

When people did listen to foreign radio, most likely they did so alone. This was especially true of the late Stalin period (1945-1953) when consequences for being caught were still quite high. When people listened with someone else it was with someone they absolutely trusted. A young Ukrainian man, a participant in the Harvard Project described listening to VOA in the late 1940s: "I listened to the VOA broadcasts together with a friend of mine, a manager of a theater, by the name of Yefim Yefimovich. I did not talk to anybody else about this, since there was no other person I could trust. I was quite confident, that he would not report it, since he had invited me first to listen to these

¹⁰⁰ I take the term from Eugene Parta's book *Discovering the Hidden Listener*. Parta divided Soviet audience in to five attitudinal types based on their opinions regarding civil liberties in the Soviet Union: Liberal, Moderate, Indifferent, Conservative, and Hardline.

¹⁰¹ Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, 31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 32.

broadcasts.”¹⁰³ “[T]hey [news from VOA] will be told only to trusted people who will keep their mouth shut. As you know, it would be impossible to discuss it in the open,” stressed another respondent.¹⁰⁴

Even after the death of Stalin, when chances of imprisonment for listening to foreign radio decreased, people were still careful about discussing what they heard with others. If not careful, listeners could lose their job, or hurt their children’s chances of getting into a university. There is little concrete evidence of this due to lack of any studies on this specific subject, as well as Soviet people’s understandable reluctance to answer truthfully if such a study was conducted. However, there are some individual examples. For instance, one interviewee who lived in Saratov in the 1950s recalled that his father did not discuss foreign radio because of his position as a university professor of political economy.¹⁰⁵ It is safe to suppose that people with something to lose, in other words those who feared being denied chances of promotion, or foreign travel, or vacationing at resorts. Even being called in and lectured was likely unpleasant enough to deter many people from letting others know that they listened to foreign radio. Consequently, one was much more likely to mention hearing the latest American pop song than discussing a news item heard on American radio that contradicted the official story of events.

In discussing Soviet society of the Brezhnev period (1964-1982), Soviet sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh concluded that despite a more politically relaxed climate of the period Soviets were still reluctant to discuss information obtained from unofficial (non-Soviet) sources. He wrote:

¹⁰³ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=4> Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959205?n=5> Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Raleigh, *Russia’s Sputnik Generation*, 103.

A majority of the Soviet people under normal circumstances (i.e., not at times of crisis) do not disseminate in public information they got from foreign radio or from other foreign sources of information (newspapers, magazines, contacts with foreigners inside the country, and so on). Even the materials of the magazine *America*, which is distributed legally in the Soviet Union under the provisions of an international agreement, are not usually discussed in offices and workplaces.¹⁰⁶

There is some evidence of differences in attitude towards discussing Western radio among Soviet generations. Soviet youngsters, because of their age, did not have to worry about losing their jobs and ability to provide a better future for their family. Furthermore, they did not grow up under Stalin, and therefore appear to have been more open to talking with their friends about things they heard on foreign radio. Talking about his childhood, one Soviet man recalled:

Yes, we discussed it at school. We weren't afraid. No. That's our parents. We talked about it and we had our own opinions about things, and I think this was a good thing. *In other words, in this regard, your generation differs.* In this regard, yes. We lacked that genetic fear that was hammered into them.¹⁰⁷

In part, it was the Soviet government itself that was responsible for the more relaxed attitude toward foreign radio among Soviet youth. Writing about the Soviet generation of the last two decades of the Soviet Union, Sergei Yurchak pointed out that official encouragement of shortwave technology, and “ambivalent policies of jamming” led to “normalizing the practice of shortwave reception among the majority of Soviet people.”¹⁰⁸ In addition, many Soviet young people did not see themselves as lazy and parasitic individuals, the type most often associated in the Soviet press with listening to

¹⁰⁶ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation*, 134.

¹⁰⁸ Yurchak, 181.

Western radio. As a result, Soviet young people did not see the act of listening to Western radio as something inherently bad or anti-Soviet.¹⁰⁹

Official response

Beginning with the first VOA broadcast in 1947, Soviet officials did not turn a blind eye to Western radio broadcasts. Over the course of the Cold War, the Soviet Union tried to block or at least limit the impact of Western radio in a number of ways. Some of these included attempts by Soviet authorities to alter Soviet radio sets in such ways as to make them unable to receive those frequencies used by Western radio stations. Soviets also attempted to jam Western broadcasts by setting up sizable jamming stations outside, as well as inside, of major cities. Some of the less subtle means included kidnapping of radio station's personnel as well as bombing of the stations themselves. Furthermore, Western radio forced Soviet authorities to take a long look at their own propaganda in order to make it more effective against the message from the West.

Overall, a majority of Soviet efforts to keep its population from listening to Western radio proved costly and largely ineffective. Eager to hear something other than domestic propaganda, Soviet people found a number of ingenious ways to get around radio set restrictions and jamming. What Soviet anti-Western radio efforts did accomplish, however, was to provide Western radio stations with proof that their work was having some effect on the Soviet population, enough to warrant a serious response from Soviet officials.

In combating Western radio, jamming was perhaps the most important and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,174-175.

widespread tool employed by the Soviets. Initially, the U.S. Department of State did not think that the Soviets would rely heavily on jamming as it would suggest that Western radio was having an impact on Soviet population. In 1946, U.S. ambassador Harriman wrote to the Secretary of State that “While USSR might attempt to jam American broadcasts it would probably be reluctant to do so because such action-or more extreme measure of calling in all short wave sets-would be an admission to its own people that it feared outside ideas and intensify public curiosity over American broadcasts.”¹¹⁰

Harriman’s prediction proved inaccurate as first jamming efforts began within a year of VOA’s first broadcast (February, 1947). Officially, the reasons for jamming were best summarized by one Soviet tourist guide in Leningrad. When asked why the Soviet government is jamming Western broadcasts in 1962, he replied that “We must keep out hostile broadcast by VOA because Soviet living conditions haven’t yet caught up with those in the U.S., and VOA is designed to make us dissatisfied with our own system.” When asked whether or not jamming would stop when Soviet conditions were better, he replied, “Certainly.”¹¹¹

Jamming interfered with VOA broadcasts by producing high pitched and irritating noises on the frequency of the targeted station.¹¹² By 1949, jamming turned into an all out effort that “employed over 250 sky-wave transmitters and perhaps as many as 500 ground-wave transmitters, drowning almost 90 percent of VOA transmissions and crippling millions of Soviet-issued shortwave receivers that picked up foreign

¹¹⁰ FRUS – 1946, volume 06, pp. 677.

¹¹¹ NA P142/8/42 p. 13.

¹¹² Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 20–45. For an in-detail description of Soviet jamming efforts please see Rimantas Pleikys, *Jamming*. (Vilnius: R. Pleikys, 1998).

broadcasts.”¹¹³ In 1950 alone, the Soviets spent around \$70 million dollars on jamming hardware and close to \$18 million in operating costs. The second figure in itself neared the total VOA budget for that year.¹¹⁴

By the late 1950s, Soviet jamming efforts grew in sophistication in part due to their early ineffectiveness. A 1958 KGB reports noted numerous complaints from officials that jamming did not diminish the quality of Western broadcasts and stated that 1660 Soviet radio stations were involved in jamming, more than the number used for domestic broadcasts. But “Despite these efforts and billions in spending, jamming is not achieving its goal.”¹¹⁵ In response, KGB censors that monitored Western broadcasts suggested that some of VOA programs should not be jammed as they did not contain anti-Soviet propaganda. The ruling Central Committee agreed with the KGB assessment and jamming became more selective, limited to what Soviets saw as clear anti-Soviet propaganda. In addition, Soviet authorities decided to stop the jamming of programs in rare languages such as Finnish, Hebrew, and Farsi.¹¹⁶ The new strategy, therefore, called on Soviet jammers to leave VOA’s music and educational programs alone, instead focusing on programs with more political content. Consequently, radio stations such as RL that devoted most of their broadcasts to criticizing the Soviet system received much more attention from Soviet jammers.¹¹⁷

Even regular Soviet people voiced their opinions regarding jamming. In a 1960 letter to Khrushchev, an electrical engineer from Stalingrad wrote that he had been

¹¹³ Timothy Stoneman, “A Bold New Vision The VOA Radio Ring Plan and Global Broadcasting in the Early Cold War.” *Technology and Culture*, 50:2 (April 2009), 322.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d.73 l. 148, 164, 165.

¹¹⁶ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 75 l. 94, 96. f. 5, op. 33 d. 106 l. 24-26. f. 89 op. 46 d. 19.

¹¹⁷ Mikkonen, 785.

following Soviet radio jamming efforts since 1953 almost daily by listening to VOA, BBC, and RL. In the letter he noted that Soviet jamming wasted millions of dollars without much success as the jamming mostly interfered with domestic stations. “[Americans] do not throw money to the wind,” he wrote, stressing that they quickly adapted by broadcasting to those regions where there was no jamming. In the end, he suggested a number of technical methods to improve jamming.¹¹⁸

Besides pointing to the shortcoming of Soviet jamming, his letter revealed a number of other things about Western radio in the Soviet Union. First, it is highly unlikely that an ordinary Soviet citizen would listen to numerous Western radio stations for over seven years simply to monitor jamming, or “to listen to them lie,” as he wrote in the letter. Thus it is safe to assume that this loyal Soviet citizen (his letter was unsolicited and genuinely sought to help the government) listened because something in the broadcasts interested him. This and numerous other examples demonstrate that it was not just dissidents and intellectuals who listened to Western radio broadcasts.¹¹⁹ “The lower classes didn’t listen, but the majority of the workers, of skilled workers, they all listened,” recalled one former resident from Saratov. Moreover, American counter-jamming effort impressed this loyal Soviet man, if only from technical and economic standpoint, signaling at least some positive opinions about the United States, likely rooted in long standing admiration for American technology among the Soviets.¹²⁰

We must note that Soviet jamming did have an impact, as it did indeed create a number of serious problems for those trying to listen. In fact, some American studies

¹¹⁸ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 623.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Donald Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 147.

¹²⁰ See my discussion in the section on official pre-World War II propaganda and public opinion in my chapter on official propaganda.

from the early 1980s found that Soviet “listening habits [of Western radio] were significantly affected by jamming.”¹²¹ This was especially true for large urban centers where Soviet authorities used ground jammers that had a limited range but were much more effective. Therefore people in cities such as Moscow and Leningrad had a much more difficult time catching a signal. In 1958, a KGB report noted that even official Soviet censors had trouble listening to VOA because of jamming in the city of Moscow.¹²² A former Radio Liberty employee praised Soviet jammers in his memoir by writing “I always used to marvel at the efficiency of the Soviet jamming network. Operating over a vast space that embraced eleven time zones and one-sixth of all the land on earth, its staffs had to hear and identify “hostile” broadcasts on any frequency and in any language.”¹²³ Years later, several residents of Saratov, a provincial Soviet city, recalled having great difficulty in trying to listen to foreign radio: “Yes, it was simply impossible. You had to exert tremendous effort, which, well, who need this? You literally had to sit for hours in front of the receiver to catch [it].”¹²⁴ Some USIA studies also pointed to the fact that at times jamming did have “a significant impact on the ability of Soviet citizens to listen to Western broadcasting.”¹²⁵

In the end, however, the Soviet jamming program’s results seemed like a poor investment. By Western estimates, Soviet Union spent about 750 million to 1.2 billion dollars to jam RL alone. This was twice the amount U.S. spent on RFE/RL and VOA combined.¹²⁶ Trying to catch a signal was a challenge at times; however, someone who

¹²¹ Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, 11.

¹²² RGANI f.5 op. 33 d.75 l. 83.

¹²³ Critchlow, 65.

¹²⁴ Raleigh, *Russia’s Sputnik Generation*, 198, 231.

¹²⁵ *Report from Conference on Cold War Broadcasting Impact*, 17.

¹²⁶ Puddington, 224.

wanted to listen to Western radio could do so a majority of the time. Moreover, finding ways to get around jamming “bec[a]me almost a kind of hobby” for many Soviet citizens.¹²⁷



Abandoned jamming station outside of Moscow (photo by the author - 2011)

Another technical measure taken by the Soviet authorities was attempting to limit the number of radio sets capable of receiving Western radio signals. During World War II, in order to more effectively broadcast to distant parts of the country Soviets developed short-wave capable radio sets. After the war, Western radio stations used these to provide Soviet population with unofficial information. In the late 1940s and 1950s, there were serious attempts by the Soviet government to alter Soviet radio sets, preventing them from receiving Western frequencies.¹²⁸ These efforts, however, met with limited

¹²⁷ Mikkonen, 789.

¹²⁸ *Presidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964*, ed by A.A. Fursenko et al. (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2003), 702.

success.¹²⁹ An official government report from 1959 admitted that there were roughly twenty million radio sets in the Soviet Union capable of receiving short wave transmissions. For a small price many others could be “fixed” to do the same.¹³⁰

A similar situation developed in Soviet-occupied Germany. In 1948 Soviet authorities confiscated all radio sets from Soviet troops stationed in Germany. This did make it harder for the soldiers to listen but those who wanted to still found a way. Furthermore, they left the officers’ radios untouched and some used them to listen to Western broadcasts.¹³¹

The Soviet press, and other media, also played an important part in counteracting Western broadcasts. In fact, some of the earliest official responses to Western radio involved the Soviet press articles denouncing foreign broadcasts as harmful and misleading propaganda. One such article appeared in the magazine *Gudok* in October 1947, a few months after the first VOA broadcast. It sought to refute VOA claims that life under capitalism was much better than in the Soviet Union. A high ranking American embassy official at the time noted that the “Very defensive tone of this article indicates VOA hitting where it hurts. *Gudok* type defense not likely be effective for long time since Soviet people have different idea of American living standards.”¹³²

Another early Soviet press attack on Western radio involved pieces in the highly popular satire magazine *Krokodil*, where they depicted VOA as simply making up false stories. A 1949 *Krokodil* featured a cartoon called THE VOICE ON THE RADIO. It portrayed a group of men making sound effects in a room, while a commentator read the

¹²⁹ Ibid, 781-782.

¹³⁰ RGANI f. 89, op. 46, d. 14, l. 2.

¹³¹ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:962251?n=55> Accessed April 12, 2012.

¹³² FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 566.

news, saying:

“Attention! Attention! You are listening to a special correspondent of the Voice of America. I am speaking to you from the frontier of a certain eastern country. This is an on-the-spot report. A clanking column of tanks is passing by. Following it is a regiment of red infantry- listen to the tramp of marching feet! The crack of rifles alternates with the rattle of machine guns. And now the red cavalry breaks out of cover. You can hear their hoof beats on the pavement. What is this new sound? It is the communists massacring their enemies. You can hear the blows of their clubs and the terrible cries of the wounded.”¹³³

1950 saw a debut of a “VOA” play that depicted the radio station as a crude tool of American propaganda.¹³⁴ Overall, a 1950 American report on the subject described

Soviet portrayal of VOA as:

not only as the mouthpiece of American reaction, but as absurd, stupid, gross and “uncultured” – the sort of thing no Soviet citizen could or should want to listen to. It shows its lack of culture by broadcasting about women who pour beer on their heads for a shampoo, about people who chew gum and blow bubbles with it, and by similar gross stories. It seeks to sell America and American ideas in the same way in which it seeks to sell soap and soft drinks. Why should the cultured Soviet citizen listen to the froth of the American soap salesman when he can turn to some Soviet station and hear a concert, an opera, or a serious and enlightening talk on some Soviet theme.¹³⁵

An early 1950s American study of Soviet domestic media including newspapers, journals, and radio, found that during a four-year period beginning in April 1947, shortly after VOA’s first broadcast, Soviet mass media contained over nine hundred references to VOA alone.¹³⁶

By the 1960s, Soviet propagandists admitted that press, radio, and TV countermeasures were not achieving their intended aim. A 1960 report from the Soviet broadcasting department found that Soviet counterpropaganda had a defensive character, was too abstract, and did not vividly portray the life of Soviet citizens who were building

¹³³ W. Nelson, 75.

¹³⁴ NA 306/1007A/40.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Alex Inkeles, “Soviet Reactions to The Voice of America” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16:4 (Winter 1952), 612.

the brightest society on the planet.¹³⁷ Other official reports from the period noted that foreign radio was popular among the Soviet people due to poor timing of Soviet radio broadcasts that left many parts of the country without news, because they were broadcast too late or too early (due to time zone differences). As a result, the only information available was from VOA or BBC. They also pointed to the fact that Soviet radio programming failed to provide interesting and entertaining programs to distract people from foreign radio.¹³⁸ Some of the suggested recommendations for improving Soviet propaganda included forming a special department to study foreign broadcasting, improving domestic radio programs as well as more focus on television.¹³⁹ For example, in 1960, in order to counter information from Western radio, the Latvian Central Committee instructed local authorities to publish more stories from Soviet tourists on difficult conditions of workers in capitalist countries as well as testimonies of repatriated persons, and foreign tourists with a positive view of the Soviet Union. Other Soviet republics received similar directives.¹⁴⁰ As a result, Western radio had the unintended effect of improving Soviet radio and television programming, much in the same way as it forced Soviet press and other propaganda to account for information received by Soviet citizens from Western channels.¹⁴¹

Despite the many changes to make Soviet propaganda more effective against Western radio the main message remained the same: Western radio was simply a capitalist ploy to mislead the Soviet public and turn it away from communist ideals. A

¹³⁷ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 669.

¹³⁸ RGANI f. 89 op. 46 d. 19.

¹³⁹ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 73 l. 148, f. 5 op. 33 d. 106 l. 24-26.

¹⁴⁰ RGANI f. 89 op. 46 d. 19.

¹⁴¹ Shlapentokh, *Soviet Public Opinion and Ideology*, 43; Kulavig, 131-132.

1972 poem published in official print media warned Soviet citizens against these dangers:

We will not crush you with loud wars,
but will get you with our short waves
We will not crush you with our tanks,
But will get you with our jazz, dances...

And with a million sparkling eyes,
A foreign cobra is watching:
Waiting until we are all swallowed by the "American way of"¹⁴²

At times, in addition to the above-mentioned efforts, Soviet authorities resorted to more direct and violent means of dealing with the problem of Western radio. Over the years, there were several unexplained deaths of RL's émigré writers which RL attributed to the KGB.¹⁴³ In 1981, someone bombed RL's Munich headquarters--an act frequently attributed to Romanian security agents. Such tactics, however, were rare and KGB preferred more subtle means of affecting Western radio. Throughout its existence almost every section of RL had been infiltrated by Soviet agents. In one instance, a KGB agent spent more than twenty years working in RL's Russian language service, at one point even being considered for the chief editor position.¹⁴⁴ Many KGB spies did manage to penetrate the highest levels of Western radio stations but their role was largely limited to information gathering. As one former RL employee pointed out:

While the agents could provide many items of interest to Communist security officials--staff biographies, program schedules, technical data, internal memos, information about the American managers (always of interest to East bloc security)--no agent, so far as is known, succeeded in influencing broadcast content. There is, in fact, evidence that agents were discouraged from meddling in broadcast policy, since that might lead to their unmasking. The spies provided their masters with cabinets full of files, and all manner of interesting gossip. But the radio's message remained unchanged.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Quoted in Slavkin, 58-59.

¹⁴³ Sosin, 34.

¹⁴⁴ Puddington, 225-226.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 226.

From their beginnings in the late 1940s and until Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the late 1980s, the Soviet government took the issue of Western radio broadcasts very seriously. They often blamed it for stirring up trouble inside the country. On 19 December 1956, for example, Soviet leadership sent out a closed letter to Party officials for discussion. The letter warned about the fast pace of de-Stalinization: "Much attention was devoted in the letter to 'imperialist propaganda broadcasters' (the BBC and Radio Liberty), which were accused of being in themselves a cause of the outbreak of 'anti-Soviet consciousness' and 'anti-Soviet actions'."¹⁴⁶ In a similar report a few days earlier Soviet officials complained about the rise of "unhealthy" attitudes in the population due to influence from the West on politically and ideologically unstable elements, who are influenced by bourgeoisie ideology which they get from the radio – VOA, BBC, RFE/RL.¹⁴⁷ A few years later KGB blamed Western broadcasts for brainwashing a group of students at the Moscow State University, who then formed a discussion group and printed anti-Soviet pamphlets.¹⁴⁸

In spite of these official fears, the government's options were limited, especially since it no longer relied on the use of mass terror following the de-Stalinization process. It simply could not, and later would not, arrest millions of Soviet citizens simply for listening, particularly after admitting that shortcomings in Soviet broadcasting pushed many to turn to the West.¹⁴⁹ The resulting effort combined attempts to prevent Soviets

¹⁴⁶ Kulavig, 19.

¹⁴⁷ RGANI f. 89 op. 6 d. 1.

¹⁴⁸ RGANI f. 89 op. 6 d. 8.

¹⁴⁹ There were some early attempts to find and arrest those who listened to foreign radio; see interviews with a former Soviet citizen, Harvard Project <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=14>, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=2>. Accessed April 12, 2012. These however appear to have been rare, especially after Stalin's death. For example, a 1962 USIA report concluded that "overall the government does not take any serious measures to prevent people from listening as long as they don't listen in large groups or spread what they heard;" see NA P142/8/42, p. 2.

from listening by jamming and at the same time improving domestic programs. Its success, however, was limited because it simply did not address the main reasons for popularity of Western programs – shortage of information and lack of quality entertainment in the Soviet Union.

Public response

In 1947, VOA sent the first Western Cold War radio transmission to the Soviet Union. As we saw earlier, this greatly alarmed Soviet officials who within months launched campaigns aimed at countering these broadcasts. It was clear that Soviet authorities viewed Western radio as a threat. But were these fears justified?

In talking about official Soviet expectations of its citizens in regard to Western radio, a noted Soviet sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh wrote:

The good Soviet individual takes a hostile public stand toward the West, its policy, ideology, and style of life, and rejects Western views on the Soviet Union and other socialist countries...As Yuri Zhukov, a leading Soviet journalist, said during his appearance on Soviet TV in the early 1980s, “a decent Soviet person does not denigrate himself by listening to all these voices.”¹⁵⁰

Within a decade of VOA’s first broadcast, however, by some of the more conservative estimates, millions, many loyal and decent Soviet citizens, “denigrated” themselves by listening.¹⁵¹ So what motivated these people to tune-in to VOA, RL, BBC and other Western radio stations despite official condemnation? Below, I will argue that while there were many reasons for listening, the two main ones were clearly the shortage of information and lack of quality entertainment. Moreover, despite official fears that Western radio had a harmful effect on Soviet people there is little evidence to support

¹⁵⁰ Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, 30.

¹⁵¹ A 1957 report by the USIA put the number of Soviet listeners between one and six million. NA P160/13/30 p.6.

such statements. As we saw from earlier examples, Soviet authorities uncovered instances where Western radio did influence some people to question official policies. Some scholars have also pointed out such moments.¹⁵² These, however, were rare and for the most part influenced people who already had a negative view of the Soviet regime. If it were not VOA, it would have been something else.¹⁵³ As a rule, a majority of those listening remained loyal to the Soviet Union.

Gauging the Soviet public response to Western radio broadcasts presents a serious challenge as there were few institutions in the Soviet Union that undertook the study of public opinion. Perhaps KGB came the closest to serving that role; however, its archives are currently closed to most researchers. There are, however, a number of KGB documents that are available for study, either because they were published before the archives were reclosed, or because they were transferred to a different archive. Another possible source, sociological studies, did not get an official blessing until the 1960s, and even then they experienced heavy censorship, although a number of these studies had been published in full since the fall of the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁴

Some of our best sources regarding Soviet responses to Western radio are accounts of foreign travelers to the Soviet Union as well as Soviet citizens who left the Soviet Union for the West. Since a majority of those who left the Soviet Union did so because of their dislike of the Soviet system their opinions are not representative of Soviet population as a whole. For the very same reason, however, they are representative

¹⁵² Kulavig, 132.

¹⁵³ In the cases of Soviets who cited VOA or other Western programs as forming their negative opinions of the Soviet Union, they also cited a number of other formative factors. For example, see Harvard Project interviews where respondents frequently referred to their pre-existing gripes with the Soviet system such as the living conditions when commenting about the influence of Western radio broadcasts.

¹⁵⁴ Perhaps the best example is Boris Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale oprosov obshchestvennogo mneniia*.

of a certain part of the Soviet population--a part that was, for some reason or the other, not satisfied with the Soviet Union.

Accounts of foreign travelers to the Soviet Union are quite valuable because many kept a journal throughout their travels. Many events and claims, however, appear to have been exaggerated to various degrees so as to make the books more appealing to American readers. Another invaluable resource that sheds some light on public reactions and perceptions of Western radio in the Soviet Union came from the USIA. It produced a number of reports dealing with the Soviet public and Western broadcasts. Many of these reports were in turn based on studies done by RL that relied largely on discreet interviews with Soviet travelers abroad. Some scholars criticized these studies as having serious statistical mistakes where the authors made assumptions based on statistically negligible differences.¹⁵⁵ We must remember, however, that few other means were available to researchers conducting studies on the subject at the time. It is also possible that some of the criticism arose out of inter-station rivalry between RL and VOA.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, RL studies tend to support information found in most other sources.

In addition to the RL studies, in 1957 USIA conducted an extensive survey with repatriates from Western Europe who spent their “formative years” in the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷ A majority of those interviewed came to the Soviet Union from Western Europe as children. Therefore, it is not exactly clear how representative they were of the Soviet population as a whole. The report itself put the chances of the group being a

¹⁵⁵ NA P160/30/17.

¹⁵⁶ Heil, 33.

¹⁵⁷ NA P160/13/30. The exact interview process was classified but certain information about those interviewed can be derived from the report. A majority of interviewees moved to the Soviet Union from Western Europe as children. A majority (75%) worked as skilled (41%) or semiskilled (31%) manual laborers with the average age of 31 years. At the time of the interview most left the Soviet Union within 4.5 months. Out of the 164 people interviewed 64 (39%) listened to Voice of America (VOA).

delineative sample at 50/50.¹⁵⁸ Despite a number of drawbacks, all of the above-mentioned sources contain enough reliable information for us to draw an accurate picture about Soviet public reactions to Western radio broadcasts.

The first question we must answer is why, despite all of the obstacles and dangers, did some in the Soviet Union listen to Western radio? There is no single answer to this question. This was not simply a case of people wanting to hear the truth that was denied to them at home. Nor was it merely people's desire for better entertainment. While information and entertainment were clearly the two major reasons for listening they are not the whole story.

In 1946, in one of the earliest predictions about broadcasting to the Soviet Union, the U.S. ambassador pointed out that if the Soviets started jamming VOA this “would be an admission to its own people that it feared outside ideas and intensify public curiosity over American broadcasts.”¹⁵⁹ It appears that for many Soviet people this was one of the primary stimuli to start listening. Harrison Salisbury, an American correspondent for the *New York Times*, recalled hearing the following story from a Soviet engineer in Leningrad in the early 1950s:

“My friends and I never used to listen to the American radio. It simply never occurred to us. Then, not so long ago, something happened. Our Government started a big campaign against the Voice of America. There were articles in the paper denouncing it, and special stations were set up to interfere with the broadcasts from America and make it impossible to hear them. We thought that there must be something to hear, an American truth which was important. Otherwise, our Government would not have taken such measures to keep us from listening. So we started to experiment to see if we could hear the American stations because we all wanted to know what it, this new American truth.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ NA P160/13/30 p.73-75.

¹⁵⁹ FRUS – 1946, volume 06, pp. 677

¹⁶⁰ Salisbury, *American In Russia*, 63.

Another Soviet citizen recalled years later: “I listened to Voice of America. Ever the more so because it was jammed, and everything that’s secretive and off-limits elicits interest.”¹⁶¹ A young Irish woman visiting the Soviet Union in the late 1950s wrote at the time: “I found more fanatical jazz enthusiasm in Russia than anywhere else I’ve been. Almost everyone loved it, if only as an expression of resentment at the ban.”¹⁶² This “forbidden fruit” effect did not go unnoticed by the American embassy staff in their feedback about VOA’s early programs. American diplomats suggested that in its broadcasts to the Soviet Union, VOA include more subjects deemed taboo by Soviet authorities.¹⁶³

Desire for information was perhaps the single most common reason for Soviet people to tune into Western radio. The state controlled Soviet media presented the people with only one side to the story. And most Soviets suspected that there was a lot of information out there besides what they read in Soviet newspapers, heard on Soviet radio, and saw on Soviet TV. In the early 1950s, when asked if VOA was a good thing for the Soviet Union, a former Soviet citizen replied, “Of course, it is a very good idea. Because people are informed of news that can't be found in the local newspapers or heard over the local radio.”¹⁶⁴ Another former citizen praised VOA by saying “The main thing is that the VOA informed the Russian people about things that were hushed up by the Soviet regime. These things, which the Soviet regime would like to keep secret, are picked up by the VOA discussed, and the reasons explained.”¹⁶⁵ Soviets living inside the Soviet Union

¹⁶¹ Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation*, 167.

¹⁶² Belfrage, 76.

¹⁶³ FRUS – 1949, volume 05, pp. 579.

¹⁶⁴ Harvard Project – <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=10>, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=11>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid - <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959205?n=3>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

at the time of questioning provided similar reasons for listening. An American woman traveling in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s noted that most Soviets she talked to listened in order “To pick up news they don’t get at home.”¹⁶⁶

However, just because many Soviets listened to Western broadcasts to receive information not available from official channels did not mean that they completely distrusted those channels. In fact, most sources from the period show a majority among the Soviet public was simply skeptical that Soviet media provided them with the whole picture. According to a 1957 USIA report based on interviews with repatriates from the Soviet Union, most people thought that the Soviet press/radio coverage was not so much false as it was slanted, emphasizing the good and omitting the bad in domestic coverage and vice versa in reporting about the West.¹⁶⁷ In a representative statement, one of the survey respondents stated: “VOA and BBC. I had doubts about the Soviet version, but still couldn’t make out who was right and who was wrong.”¹⁶⁸

Ostensibly, Western radio broadcasts preached to the choirs. They reinforced negative opinions about the Soviet Union among those who disliked the Soviet regime and strengthened beliefs that Western radio was just propaganda among those who strongly supported the Soviet government. The majority in the middle, deprived of opportunity to check most of what was said, simply stayed in the middle, not sure whom to believe. There is little evidence to show that any significant number of Soviet people radically changed their opinion about their country, or the rest of the world, because of Western radio.

¹⁶⁶ Fischer, 157.

¹⁶⁷ NA P160/13/30 p. 16.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 19.

Eugene Parta, former director of audience research for RL, concluded that Western radio had an “important role” in shaping Soviet public opinion on events.¹⁶⁹ This conclusion, based largely on data of Soviet opinion on the Afghan war,¹⁷⁰ however, is problematic. First, as Parta himself acknowledged, a lot of information about the war came from returning Soviet soldiers. Second, RL survey on the issue compared numbers in 1984 to 1987. Therefore, one must take into account the liberalization of the Soviet media with coming of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in 1985, and its impact on public opinion.

The audience for Western radio included societal elements, such as dissidents, who were alienated from the Soviet system, and they were the ones whose opinions were most likely to reach the West. A more accurate view of the impact as a whole would need to start by separating out listeners who already held the opinions Western radio was trying to impart from those who changed their opinions as a result of Western radio. Considering all of the issues discussed in this section, the evidence on the question of “importance” of Western radio in forming Soviet opinion, as opposed to simply preaching to the choir, tends to support the latter. Although more research is needed for more nuanced conclusions, it is clear that Western radio did force the Soviet media to provide more information to the public.

To examine the issue in more detail we must answer the question: What did Soviet citizens do with the information they received from Western radio broadcasts? Most Soviet citizens not happy with the Soviet system often looked to Western radio stations to take the lead in providing the Soviet population with the truth. A participant

¹⁶⁹ Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, 66.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-51. Other examples (pp.52-58) from Parta’s book simply underline Soviet citizen’s view that Soviet media did not present them with the whole picture.

in Harvard Project (most of who escaped from the Soviet Union to the West), in a typical response called on VOA to:

furnish the Russian people with true information, thus opening its eyes. America and the VOA have sufficient data to tell about the true life in the Soviet Union. If the Russian people shall be informed about these facts, they will adopt a critical attitude towards Bolshevism, and recognize the truth about America, for America does not hide anything from the Russian people and reveals all shortcomings of the Soviet regime. This is the main thing.¹⁷¹

In fact, many others in the Harvard Project thought that Western radio was too timid in their criticism of the Soviet Union. Many of those asked about the VOA saw its programming as not “biting, sharp and straight-forward,” as “very delicate” and “not convincing.”¹⁷² One former Soviet high school teacher faulted VOA with being too indecisive “Because through the Voice of America we guess, we suppose, we assume, but we never state and assure.”¹⁷³ Another thought that VOA should respond to all of the information provided by the Soviet radio, domestic and international, providing Soviet citizens with the truth in these matters.¹⁷⁴

There were those who called for Western radio to openly denounce and call for the overthrow of the Soviet system. One of these was a young Soviet soldier who escaped from Berlin. “Time is short,” he said. “One should not - so to say - monkey around with Bolshevism too much. We should tell everybody, that the Soviets are scoundrels, that they are striving towards their own ruin, I wish the VOA would not

¹⁷¹ Harvard Project - <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959205?n=7>. Accessed April 12, 2012.

¹⁷² Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959200?n=13>, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959500?n=42>. Accessed April 12, 2012.

¹⁷³ Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:981993?n=40>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959500?n=42>, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959500?n=43>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

mince words any longer.”¹⁷⁵ “They should hit them right on the head,” suggested another.¹⁷⁶

Many participants in the Harvard project risked death in escaping to the West. Some had spent many brutal years in Soviet labor camps. Therefore it was only natural that many had very strong negative feelings about the Soviet Union. And as is often the case, they assigned those feeling to those around them whether this was true or not. A former Soviet army officer, citing the dangers of listening to Western broadcasts, stated that the average Soviet citizen “does not want to listen to programs about new music in America.”¹⁷⁷ “They [Soviet listeners] do not like the musical program of the VOA. They say, that nowadays it is essential to expose Soviet lies, and not dawdle the time away with music,” stated another.¹⁷⁸ Yet another Soviet, interviewed in 1951, claimed that the:

Soviet masses are not interested in history. They are hungry and they want to know when Stalin's power will be destroyed. The Voice of America speaks about American history, about the colonial period and God knows what else. The Soviet masses know that in America there are no concentration camps, bread lines, etc . And they want to know when in Russia it will be the same. The Voice of America should say that America is going to liberate them and to destroy Communism in Russia.¹⁷⁹

In reality, however, most other evidence (discussed below) pointed to the fact that a majority of Soviet listeners enjoyed American music and programs about history more than they desired the end of the Soviet state. And indeed were extremely sensitive to any criticism of the Soviet Union by Western radio stations. In other words, this group of people, representing a radical segment of Soviet population, looked to the West, and specifically America, to help topple the Soviet system that wronged them or they did not agree with. To them, most of what they heard on Western radio simply underscored the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959199?n=7>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959204?n=6>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:962261?n=29>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁷⁸ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959199?n=7>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:981834?n=49>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

negatives in the Soviet regime. If the broadcasts tried to be objective they were seen as not being tough enough. As we will see later, such views were not in line with the majority of the Soviet population.

On the other side of the spectrum were people who simply dismissed Western radio as mere propaganda. Typically they saw it as having only one goal in mind: slandering the Soviet Union and making it appear in the worst possible light. In a conversation with an American journalist in the early 1950s, a Soviet man told a story of spending a lot of time trying to catch the VOA signal together with a friend. Once they did, “We had heard the new American truth. But it wasn’t truth. It wasn’t truth at all. It was propaganda. American propaganda.”¹⁸⁰ A woman from Saratov remembered listening to foreign radio broadcasts as child in the 1960s, “When they [Western radio] broadcast things that deviated from our radio broadcasts I didn’t believe it. It seemed to me that they were slandering us, that’s what they [Soviet authorities] pounded into our heads.”¹⁸¹ In that respect, she claimed to have been a typical Soviet child of that time. Many Soviets made similar remarks at some American exhibitions in the Soviet Union.¹⁸²

There were a number of reasons for negative opinion about, or outright rejection of, foreign radio. Fatigue with propaganda in general was one of the more common ones. On a daily basis, many in the Soviet Union faced a barrage of government-crafted information. In turn, some projected that view onto all governments, assuming that everything they heard on the radio, domestic and foreign, was simply government

¹⁸⁰ Salisbury, 63.

¹⁸¹ Raleigh. *Russia’s Sputnik Generation*, 198.

¹⁸² NA P160/35/19 p. 3.

propaganda.¹⁸³ Furthermore, most Soviets understood that America was if not the enemy, then at least a rival superpower, one that had its own interests in mind. Therefore, they were bound to view information from American radio with a grain of salt. A 1964 USIA study, for example, concluded that “Most Soviet citizens look upon VOA as the Washington counterpart to their own Radio Moscow. Many believe American ‘propaganda’ as presented by the Voice is just as self-serving as the Soviet brand.”¹⁸⁴ Yet another segment simply believed official statements about Western radio and thus saw foreign broadcasts as just attempts to denounce and slander the Soviet state.

While there were strong opinions about Western radio among those who strongly opposed or strongly supported the Soviet state, the majority of those listening to foreign radio stood somewhere in the middle. As we saw earlier these people simply wanted more access to information that was not adjusted to support one point of view or the other. They hoped to find raw information in order to form their own opinions.

In other words, Soviet citizens longed for some kind of a measuring stick. Their government insisted that they lived in the best country in the world. Yet many did not feel that way.¹⁸⁵ So they wanted to compare it to something. And since they kept hearing mixed messages about the West (unofficial vs. official information) they were hungry for any information they deemed objective, or at least information that differed from what they heard on official channels. As one former Soviet citizen put it:

I understood listening to two points of view as part of that very personal search for truth. For that reason I saw listening to foreign broadcasts as normal. I never felt that I was

¹⁸³ Oleg Anisimov, “The Attitude of the Soviet People Toward the West.” *Russian Review* 3:2(1954), 80-81.

¹⁸⁴ NA P160/22/29 p. 1.

¹⁸⁵ Dissatisfaction with the standard of living figured prominently even in the late 1970s when material conditions were relatively high by Soviet standards; see James Millar, ed., *Politics, work, and daily life in the USSR: A survey of former Soviet citizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

some sort of freedom fighter. Not at all. It was simply interesting for me to know the truth. That's all. It was a view of the world. I'd put it that way.¹⁸⁶

For most Soviets, this search for truth usually expressed itself in looking for information that related to their day-to-day lives. We will see a similar phenomenon in my discussion of Soviet reactions to American exhibitions in the Soviet Union. Similarly, when Soviets listened to Western radio they wanted information in order to put their lives in the context of a wider world. Most frequently, this manifested itself in terms of economic wellbeing. By far, the most common questions faced by American exhibition guides from Soviet visitors touched on subjects such as the average American salary and prices of various consumer goods. Similarly, Soviet listeners of Western radio programs craved analogous information.

One survey of VOA listeners found that “life in the West; life in the United States, life of working people in the West,” and comparison of living conditions in the West and the USSR, ranked as number one and two suggestions for themes for Western broadcasts.¹⁸⁷ Most other theme requests centered around similar subjects.¹⁸⁸ For example, one VOA listener noted that shoes in the Soviet Union were expensive and of poor quality. He requested that VOA announce figures of how many pairs of shoes an average American worker could buy with his monthly salary.¹⁸⁹ Another recalled “a program (on VOA) which compared the purchasing power of an American workman's wages with a Soviet worker's pay. We all liked that type of program very much.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation*, 133-134.

¹⁸⁷ NA P160/13/30 p. 61.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 64.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁹⁰ NA P160/13/30 p. 66.

Some used information obtained from Western radio, directly or through a social grapevine, to voice grievances over living standards. At a 1957 meeting, a student from a forest management institute openly complained that the: “The Russian *muzhik* [workingman] was and will be poor. Soviet power did not better his life...In America a worker can buy an automobile, but here even an engineer cannot do so. And we keep talking about how we overtook capitalist countries in the standard of living for workers.”¹⁹¹ The same year at a factory meeting one worker pointed out that: “As for our country’s achievements that are constantly written and talked about, they are miniscule. For example, Ford in the U.S. produced few cars in the 1920s, but now produces 9 million cars per year, our country is still stuck on 500,000 cars.”¹⁹² Along with several other examples from archival sources,¹⁹³ other scholars also noted similar phenomenon at times of social unrest in the Soviet Union, and pointed to Western radio as the primary source of information used by those comparing USSR to the West.¹⁹⁴

The above mentioned examples should not be taken as proof that foreign broadcasts fermented popular uprisings in the Soviet Union. They appear to have simply served as supporting material for already existing grievances within the Soviet population, usually dealing with economic conditions. Open disapproval of the Soviet system by Soviet citizens based on information from foreign radio, however, was rare. And even then, as is clear from examples above, Soviets tended to use information that

¹⁹¹ RGANI f. 89 op. 6 d. 6.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Another worker claimed that: “In America things are better than in our country,” Ibid. Around the same time a worker in Stalingrad complained that “In 40 years of Soviet power, socialism gave us nothing because the standard of living in capitalist countries is higher than in the USSR.” The report mentioned that such sentiment was not common but not exactly rare, see Ibid., f. 5 o. 34 d. 24 l. 49.

¹⁹⁴ Kulavig, 132.

they felt was more or less objective and without political overtones, such as numbers of cars produced.

For the most part, at least in the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet people tended to put information from Western radio into context. As one foreign repatriate from the Soviet Union noted in the late 1950s:

Soviet citizens are aware of the reasons for their less comfortable life, such as the belated industrialization of their country, and the wars. For instance, they are neither impressed by, nor envious of the many workers' families in the West who have their private bathrooms. They are satisfied to go to a public bath, remembering that their fathers were denied even of this facility. If VOA would describe the life of the working population in Western countries without making comments or insinuations, and without trying to arouse envy, such broadcasts would be more interesting and would draw more listeners.¹⁹⁵

Similar statements were frequently heard from Soviet visitors to American exhibitions in the Soviet Union.

A number of Soviets did get their news from Western radio on regular basis. These, however, appear to have been limited to university students, a small number of intellectuals and dissidents with the taste for news and information from the outside world.¹⁹⁶ When large numbers of Soviets listened to Western radio to get the news it was usually "during the times of international tensions between the U.S. and USSR."¹⁹⁷

Many Soviets did tune in to foreign radio for information; however, it was music that consistently took the number one spot among Soviet listeners. For decades, every night millions of Soviet citizens from all walks of life turned on VOA to hear *Music USA*, a jazz program hosted by Willis Conover. At its peak, the program had an estimated global audience of thirty million, a large percentage of those Soviet citizens.¹⁹⁸ There were reports of Soviets stopping Americans on the Red Square and passing along music

¹⁹⁵ NA P160/13/30 p. 66.

¹⁹⁶ RGANI f. 5 op. 60 d. 48 l. 133, NA P160/13/36 p.2.

¹⁹⁷ NA 160/22/29 p. 2.

¹⁹⁸ Richmond, http://mountainrunner.us/2009/12/yalerichmond_2.html. Accessed April 22, 2012.

requests to Conover.¹⁹⁹ One scholar of Soviet jazz called Conover “the single most influential ambassador of American jazz in the USSR.”²⁰⁰ And years later, the famous Canadian-American news anchor Peter Jennings wrote of Conover: “In the midst of the Cold War, Conover landed at the Moscow airport and was greeted by a line of generals who proudly showed him the medals covering their jackets. Only underneath the medals, the Russians wore buttons which read *Jazz USA*.”²⁰¹

A young Western tourist in Moscow in the late 1950s reported hearing jazz almost everywhere she went: “They [Soviets] listened religiously every evening to the Voice of America jazz hour,” she wrote.²⁰² When asked by a British journalist about where he got his music in the early 1960s, a young Soviet engineer replied: “From the ‘Voice of America,’ of course. It’s the favorite music of most young people today.”²⁰³ Other Western tourists reported hearing of Soviets listening to American music on foreign radio as far away as Barnaul, on the border with Kazakhstan.²⁰⁴ According to historian Sergei Zhuk, however, by the 1970s the situation changed. “For the new generation of rock music consumers, the first and most popular source of rock was not foreign radio stations such as the Voice of America or the BBC. Instead, most developed their first taste and enthusiasm for this new music on the dance floors in their schools, in offices, or at private parties,” he concluded from his study of Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk.²⁰⁵

The Soviet fascination with jazz appears to have started with *stiliagi*, a group of

¹⁹⁹ RGANI f. 5 o. 33 d. 95 l. 44.

²⁰⁰ Frederick Starr, *Red and hot: the fate of jazz in the Soviet Union 1917-1991* (New York: Limelight, 1994), 243.

²⁰¹ Heil, 291.

²⁰² Belfrage, 76.

²⁰³ Van Der Post, 132.

²⁰⁴ Higgins, 118.

²⁰⁵ Zhuk, 95.

Soviet young people, usually but not always rich, who tried to imitate Western culture.²⁰⁶ It, however, quickly caught on with the rest of Soviet population, especially the youth. A late 1960s, survey from industrial city of Sverdlovsk, found that 70% of those in the 18-19 age group “prefer jazz to all other types of music.”²⁰⁷ A later 1983 survey noted that: “Even young workers who with their more traditional tastes have to be less captivated by Western music ascribed a score of 4.5 (on a 5-point scale) to jazz, whereas folk music got a 4.0 and opera 3.4.”²⁰⁸

Much like the news, most of the time listening to American music on VOA did not make one turn against the Soviet state. In his study of Soviet rock and roll culture Timothy Ryback stressed that “By the mid-1950s, it was not simply the iconoclastic *stiliagi* who were indulging in decadent Western music. Loyal and industrious socialist men and women, the models of the socialist upbringing, not only danced to but also publicly defended the “ape culture” coming from the West.”²⁰⁹ He pointed out an example of a 1957 letter to a newspaper by a young Soviet factory worker who had “driven cattle”, “rebuilt mines” for the Soviet state, and was a dedicated Communist. In his free time he admitted liking to dance to swing music, as did a lot of his friends, and he saw nothing wrong with that.²¹⁰

Sergei Zhuk came to similar conclusion when he pointed out that the vast majority of Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine) youth who listened to Western radio was “interested in new music, popular culture, and fashion – not in politics.”²¹¹ Soviet youth

²⁰⁶ Starr, 243.

²⁰⁷ Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, 148.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Timothy Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Zhuk, 66.

was simply too tired of political topics from both sides. According to one USIA report from 1962 young Soviet listeners of Western broadcasts did not seem to differentiate between the types and themes of political programs, they simply “switch stations.”²¹² An American scholar who spend some time among Soviet students in the early 1960s made a similar observation: “I found that often what interested them [Soviet students] most were not the political stories, regrettably, but the news of Western culture, technology, sports, and other general non-political news items.”²¹³

In fact, most Soviets listened to Western music because domestic radio did not meet their entertainment demands. As early as 1947, American embassy staff noted, “Russian people are starved for humor, bright music, folk songs and any form of entertainment which offers an escape from grim reality of daily existence.”²¹⁴ While most Soviets probably did not consider their daily existence grim, they did expect options when it came time to relax. The options the government provided, which were designed first of all to conform to official goals of self-improvement and building Socialism, were simply deficient as forms of relaxation. One Soviet author recalled listening to VOA jazz program because he “needed relief from the strictures of our minutely controlled everyday lives, of the five-year plans, of historical materialism.”²¹⁵

There is substantial evidence that many Soviets listened to Western radio, be it news or music, because domestic programs failed to address their needs.²¹⁶ In one telling

²¹² NA P142/8/42 p. 3.

²¹³ NA P160/17/36 p. 65.

²¹⁴ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 533-534.

²¹⁵ Richmond, http://mountainrunner.us/2009/12/yalerichmond_2.html.

²¹⁶ News and unavailable information ranked #1 and #2 in motivation for listening in a 1985 USIA survey. Entertainment ranked rather low (20%) as compared to news (77%). However, according to the survey’s lead researcher this was most likely due to sample variations since entertainment (mostly music) was highly popular among young people, a segment underrepresented in the USIA sample. Parta, “Audience research in *Extremis*”, 113.

case from the late 1940s, one Soviet person tuned in to VOA simply to understand what was meant by “formalist” music that was frequently denounced by the Soviet mass media at the time.²¹⁷ Two letters from the late 1970s further highlighted Soviet people’s frustrations with domestic media. One, addressed to *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, talked about the need to improve Soviet mass media, especially in regard to domestic affairs. The author complained that too many young people listened to foreign radio. If we improve Soviet mass media “then there will be fewer people wanting to listen to various Voices,” he wrote.²¹⁸ The other letter, sent to *Izvestiia*, asked the question: “Why are we forced to get information about the Soviet Union from foreign radio?”²¹⁹ In fact, the number of Soviet listeners to Western radio decreased by as much as twenty percent in the early years of Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* (1985-1987) when Soviet media became more open and less censored by the government.²²⁰

These numbers support several conclusions about Western broadcasts in the Soviet Union. First, the Soviet government did not actually succeed in intimidating people who wanted to listen to foreign radio broadcasts. If it was only government intimidation keeping people away, then when Gorbachev released the holds on it, the number of listeners should have increased dramatically. Second, when Soviet media became less propagandized, with fuller consideration of issues and criticism of the Soviet Union, and had broader entertainment value (with greater importation of foreign music and film), then ordinary Soviets found domestic media to be sufficient to satisfy their interest.

²¹⁷ FRUS – 1949, volume 05, pp. 579.

²¹⁸ RGANI f. 5 op. 76 d. 213 l. 21.

²¹⁹ Ibid, f. 5 op. 76 d. 213 l. 91.

²²⁰ Parta, “Audience research in *Extremis*”, 111.

In assessing the credibility of Western radio, Soviet listeners largely focused on their treatment of the Soviet Union. The harsher the criticism of the Soviet Union in the broadcast the more likely it was to be labeled as less reliable. Already in 1950, the American embassy reported some informants choosing BBC over VOA because the former was less aggressive in their treatment of the Soviet Union.²²¹ A 1956 note from a British Embassy to the American State Department mentioned a visit to the Soviet Union by a well-known Soviet expert, Louis Fischer. After talking to a number of Soviet people over his month long stay, Fischer found that most Soviets preferred BBC to VOA because VOA's broadcasts "reek of propaganda."²²² A 1957 USIA report also suggested that Soviet listeners found VOA more entertaining but BBC more objective when it came to news coverage.²²³ The same report ranked Radio Liberty, the most aggressive station in its criticism of the Soviet Union, last in perceived objectivity.²²⁴ Even Harvard study participants, many of whom had negative views of the Soviet Union, admitted that BBC had more effective news programs because "BBC often does not use severe criticism, its broadcasts do not try to impose their views."²²⁵

In the end it appears that the vast majority of Soviet listeners of Western radio tuned in not because of strong opposition to the regime, but because of frustration with the amount of information and entertainment available to them. One Soviet citizen was not too far off when in the late 1950s he told an American friend: "no matter what we think of regime, we are patriots."²²⁶ Those who did use information from Western radio

²²¹ NA 306/1007A/14.

²²² FRUS – 1955, volume 24, pp. 137.

²²³ NA P160/13/30 p. 35

²²⁴ Ibid, 41-42.

²²⁵ <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:959199?n=4>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²²⁶ FRUS – 1955, volume 24, pp. 137.

to criticize the Soviet Union did so mostly in relation to economic rather than political issues.

For the most part, Western radio did not turn Soviet citizens into dissidents or rebels.²²⁷ People unhappy with the Soviet system for political reasons developed these views not because of VOA or RL, but instead turned to them in order to further solidify their opposition to the Soviet government. One overview of the 1960's generation, for example, stressed that the choice of radio program was simply a form of social self-identification, with loyalists listening to *Maiak* and non-conformists to Voice of America.²²⁸ Alexei Yurchak's study of the last Soviet generation produced similar results where he asserted that most of the Soviet youth who listened to Western radio and dressed in Western fashions still saw themselves as loyal Soviet citizens.²²⁹ However, forcing authorities to account for information and entertainment Soviet citizens got from Western broadcasts was one way in which Western radio made a major impact.

Overall, a 1962 USIA report described Soviet listenership of Western radio best when it concluded:

[The Soviet listener] does not regard his own curiosity about the non-Soviet world as disloyalty to Communism. So when he tunes in the Voice of America his motivation is not primarily political. More likely, he listens because of willingness to experiment and boredom with the Soviet media.²³⁰

²²⁷ There were rare exceptions. For example, a pair of Soviet pilots defected to the American zone in Germany in October, 1948 claiming they did so after hearing a VOA broadcast about a Virginia State Fair a few years before. Eventually one of the pilots returned to the Soviet Union voluntarily after getting homesick; see Cull, 47.

²²⁸ Vail' and Genis, 297.

²²⁹ Yurchak, 171-175.

²³⁰ NA P160/17/36 p.1.

Magazines

Radio was neither the first nor the only way for America to present its case to the Soviet people. While radio attracted a much bigger audience, American magazines also played an important role in providing Soviets with images and information not coming from official Soviet sources. Unlike radio, magazines allowed the Soviet reader to not just imagine but actually see America. This, along with the high quality design and production that exceeded most Soviet counterparts, made American magazines extremely popular with the Soviet people.

Most of my discussion of American magazines in the Soviet Union will center around *Amerika*, a magazine published by the American government and intended for distribution in the Soviet Union. *Amerika*, while the most popular among the Soviets, was not the only American magazine available in the Soviet Union. Foreigners and black market entrepreneurs smuggled magazines such as *Time*, *Vogue*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Life*, *Playboy*, and others, into the Soviet Union on a regular basis. Therefore, Soviet people had a chance to look and react not just to *Amerika* that represented images and stories selected by American government officials, but also to material designed for the American reader.

In the next pages I will argue that the Soviet public responded to American magazines much in the same way as they did to Western radio. Soviet people, starved for

quality entertainment²³¹ went wild for pretty, colorful pictures of American houses, cars, movie stars, and fashion models. I note a similar phenomenon in the chapter on American exhibitions with Soviet visitors' reactions to American gift bags and pins.

Even more than radio that also dealt with news and politics, American/Western²³² magazines filled the entertainment void in Soviet consumer culture. Indeed, a few Soviet intellectuals and students did read magazines such as *Time* for news and political analysis. However, the vast majority of those who went to great lengths and paid lots of money to get their hands on an American magazine did so not because of news, but because they wanted to see something different, something pretty, and something new. In other words, they sought to see the world outside of the Soviet Union.

In addition, I argue that Soviet people used these magazines as status symbols because they signaled one's position in Soviet society. Due to shortages of high quality consumer goods, Soviet society saw more value in social connections over more "direct" symbols of wealth (such as money). As a result, one's ability to obtain rare and desirable commodity such as American magazines elevated one's social status. Therefore, as we saw in the chapter about American exhibitions, Soviet people exerted a lot of effort to obtain any American item, including American magazines.

Furthermore, I will show that one's possession and readership of American/Western magazines did not identify as, or make, a person hostile to the Soviet government. For the most part, those loyal to the Soviet regime saw nothing wrong with

²³¹ The term "quality entertainment" does not lend itself to be easily defined. For the sake of clarity, here I define "quality entertainment" as things that satisfied aesthetic (colorful) and curiosity (something new) needs of the wider Soviet public. A few examples include pictures of American cars and latest fashions, as well as stories about African Americans and American Indians.

²³² There appears to have been little difference in the way Soviets reacted to American as opposed to other Western (mostly from Western Europe) magazines. Therefore, I will use the terms American and Western interchangeably. However, when talking about consumer products, especially starting in the late 1970s, one must also include Japan under the term Western.

their desire for, or possession of, American goods including American magazines.

However, American magazines did help to solidify average Soviet's view of America as a country of immense wealth and power, if only for the rich.

In 1944, the U.S. State Department published the first run of the magazine *Amerika* meant for distribution in the Soviet Union, still America's ally at the time. With the onset of the Cold War, *Amerika* remained as the only officially sanctioned American magazine for sale in the Soviet Union. Originally, the magazine intended to provide the Soviet reader with a multi-faceted view of American life. As relations between two nations degenerated following the war, some in the U.S. State Department sought to turn the magazine into a propaganda tool, similar to the planned Voice of America.

It quickly became apparent, however, that the magazine was poorly equipped for such a mission. Already in 1946 American ambassador Harriman wrote to the Secretary of State that *Amerika* was "primarily a cultural project."²³³ He explained that "While there is no doubt that those Russians, who see it, are tremendously impressed by it as a symbol of progressive American technics and culture, it does not and cannot act as a medium for presenting American point of view on immediate national and international events."²³⁴ He pointed out that Soviet censorship delays would make any news obsolete by the time they reached the Soviet reader via printed material.²³⁵ The State Department agreed, and throughout its existence *Amerika* remained largely a picture of American life for the Soviet audience.

The Soviet public developed a strong interest in *Amerika* from the very beginning. In the above-mentioned telegram American ambassador Harriman wrote: "[*Amerika*'s]

²³³ FRUS – 1946, volume 06, pp. 677.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

influence far exceeding its limited 10,000 circulation” and “is a great success.”²³⁶ A year later, when hearing of possible funding cuts the new ambassador Walter Smith defended the magazine in a telegram to the State Department saying:

we could have a subscription list of a quarter of a million if Soviet Govt would allow us to do so. It would be a tragedy if this one sure source of information to Soviet people on life in America were discontinued. Confidentially, I can tell you, that single shoots of this magazine are sold on black market for price of average magazine in US..²³⁷

Despite the recent launching of the VOA and feared budget cuts, *Amerika* survived. Moreover, several months later, in an agreement with the Soviet government, the number of magazines distributed in the Soviet Union increased five-fold to fifty thousand. Tensions over Soviet attempts to limit *Amerika*'s distribution in the Soviet Union saw the magazine canceled in the early 1950s. However, as the Cold War tensions eased in the mid-1950s, *Amerika* came back from the dead. In 1956, the new agreement between the two countries called for distribution of fifty thousand *Amerikas* in the Soviet Union (distributed in eighty four cities) and fifty thousand *SSSR* magazines in the United States.²³⁸

In its content *Amerika* continued its focus on showing American life in the best possible light. It was no secret that the Soviet economy struggled to provide its consumers with high-quality and attractive products. Consequently, *Amerika* devoted the most energy in exploiting this weakness. It did so by allocating a large portion of its content to pictures and stories about the latest consumer products available to the American public. To underscore its point, the State Department printed the magazine on high quality glossy paper and used high-resolution photographs and graphics--something

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 549.

²³⁸ RGANI f. 5 o. 33 d. 16 l. 61.

the Soviet people did not see in domestic magazines.

In large part based on articles taken from magazines such as *Harpers*, *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Vogue*, *Amerika*'s first comeback issue in 1956 featured life of average American people, efficient and large scale agriculture, industrial achievements, latest fashions, and cars. Knowing Soviet problems in the area, cars received particular attention on the magazine's pages. First 1956 issue included a large article with the title "1956 Automobiles: This year about six million Americans will choose a car from a large assortment of models."²³⁹ In addition, the article featured numerous colorful high quality pictures of various car models.

Cars were not the only consumer items featured in the magazine. Almost every issue included articles about the newest kitchens, telephones, and clothing fashions. In a typical example, one article told a story of a large American family shopping for a big house, including pictures and information (including price) about the houses they looked at.²⁴⁰ The magazine also responded to Soviet claims that only the rich could afford to live comfortably in the U.S. by publishing articles about affordability of consumer products such as a large article about an array of inexpensive furniture on sale in American furniture stores.²⁴¹ Clearly, one of magazine's main goals was to impress the Soviet consumer with the diversity of consumer goods available to the average American citizen, thus highlighting the superiority of the American system in satisfying its citizens' desire for a more comfortable life.

Along with a heavy focus on consumer products, *Amerika* sought to show the U.S. as a country of high technological achievements in all spheres of life. Almost every

²³⁹ *Amerika*, 1 (1956): 40.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 74 (1962).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4 (1956): 10.

issue saw articles dealing with achievement in areas of medicine,²⁴² construction,²⁴³ mass communication,²⁴⁴ space exploration,²⁴⁵ agriculture,²⁴⁶ and manufacturing.²⁴⁷ Again, the choice of article themes was not coincidental. Plainly, they correlated with major areas of emphasis of Soviet propaganda that admitted shortcomings in sphere consumer products yet stressed Soviet superiority in all of the above-mentioned fields. Therefore, *Amerika* put a lot of energy in attempting to show the Soviet people that the U.S. was excelled not only in standard of living for ordinary people, but in the same spheres in which the Soviet Union claimed leadership.

Countering Soviet propaganda about America was another one of magazine's goals. The Soviet media devoted a lot of time and effort to depict America as a country of a few extravagantly rich individuals while the rest of the people as overworked and poor. Therefore, almost every issue of *Amerika* allocated space to describing and showing that American workers were well paid and had plenty of time for rest and relaxation. One such article titled "Robert Forrester has lots of work and good pay" profiled an airplane factory worker.²⁴⁸ The article focused on his family life, showing the wife using a modern kitchen and the newest ironing machine as well as a brand new family TV.

Racial and gender inequality always featured prominently in official Soviet portrayal of America. And *Amerika* sought to refute these perceptions with a variety of stories about African-Americans and women in American society. Surprisingly, early

²⁴² Ibid., 2 (1956): 53, 3 (1956): 33, 5 (1956): 26, 8 (1956): 12, 7 (1956): 21, 77 (1962).

²⁴³ Ibid., 2 (1956): 57, 3 (1956): 54, 5 (1956): 3, 7 (1956): 21, 8 (1956): 12.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 2 (1956): 36, 5 (1956): 22, 73 (1962), 76 (1962).

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 77 (1962).

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 2 (1956): 3, (1956): 9, 4 (1956): 39, 77 (1962).

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 9 (1956): 8, 75 (1962).

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 3(1956):30.

issues mentioned African-Americans only in relation to music or sport, precisely the kind of thing mentioned by Soviet propaganda. For example, one of the biggest issues dealing with African-Americans in 1956 did so only in relation to the Melbourne Olympics. By the early 1960s, however, the magazine's editors began to publish different types of articles, which focused not only on music and sport, but showing the progress and achievements of African-Americans in other areas of American life since the days of slavery.²⁴⁹

From the very first issues, in an attempt to counter Soviet claims that American women were second-class citizens,²⁵⁰ *Amerika* featured articles about American workingwomen. A large number of articles did profile women as homemakers, however, there were also frequent stories of women in the workplace. For instance, a 1962 issue highlighted careers of five women who worked for NASA.²⁵¹

By the early 1960s, *Amerika* assumed a more aggressive stance in its portrayal of American life. Along with the usual colorful pictures of American consumer products and technological achievements, *Amerika* now featured a number of articles about American political and social systems. One article described in detail American labor unions and their progress in bettering the lives of American workers.²⁵² Another discussed JFK's fight with major U.S. steel producers against hikes in steel prices.²⁵³ Continuing in the same manner, several early 1960s issues featured a long discussion of private property and social good as well as freedom of opinion and the progressive

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 74(1962), 75 (1962).

²⁵⁰ Barghoorn, 216.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 73(1962).

²⁵² Ibid., 74(1962).

²⁵³ Ibid., 77(1962).

intellectual climate.²⁵⁴ While stronger worded and dealing with more controversial and complex subjects, these articles continued a previous trend. In showing American unions improving worker lives, American president fighting with big business, and private property bringing social benefits, *Amerika* once again responded to Soviet propaganda about the U.S. that depicted American unions and the American political system as helpless slaves of big business and private property as causing widespread social injustice.

Soviet authorities treated *Amerika* as a tool of American propaganda from the very beginning of U.S.-Soviet tensions following World War II. Considering the fact that distribution of *Amerika* in the Soviet Union was authorized by high-level official agreements between two countries, Soviet officials had to resort to covert means in limiting its circulation. Government hostility was already evident in 1946, during discussions about increasing the number of *Amerika* magazines shipped to the Soviet Union to fifty thousand. A secret memo from the Soviet Propaganda Department to the Central Committee, suggested that the magazine be distributed only in major urban centers and only among trusted individuals. Furthermore, the memo recommended that only ten of fifty thousand copies be made available, in spite of the fact that the Soviet government was to take a loss of almost two million rubles since it would have to purchase the remaining forty thousand with state funds.²⁵⁵

In 1947, an American embassy official managed to get a first-hand look at Soviet distribution policies during his visit to several Soviet cities. In his report to the embassy, he noted that cities such as Gorkii, Baku, Ordzhonikidze, and Tbilisi received copies of

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 78(1962); RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 189 l. 1-3.

²⁵⁵ RGASPI f. 17, o. 125, d. 436, l. 17, 41-42.

Amerika. These, however, were only available through “special party channels” and only to a handful of “leaders of the workers.” When questioned by the American official, Soviet authorities replied that this was simply a “logical distribution policy for desirable commodities in short supply” and was not intended to “lessen effectiveness of magazine.”²⁵⁶ Subsequent checks by American officials and visitors to the Soviet Union several years later, discovered “complete absence of *Amerika* mag[azine] on sale at local outlets comparable with those which display the magazine for sale in Moscow.”²⁵⁷ In further efforts to impede *Amerika*’s circulation, Soiuzpechat’ the Soviet agency responsible for distribution of *Amerika*, regularly delayed payments for the magazine claiming the magazine simply did not sell well among the Soviet public.²⁵⁸ Moreover, there were reports of harassment of people found to be reading the magazine.²⁵⁹

Blatant attempts to limit the magazine’s distribution by Soviet officials caused serious diplomatic friction with the American embassy. In 1947, because of Soviet attempts to limit *Amerika*’s distribution, U.S. stopped circulation of *Information Bulletin* distributed by the Soviet embassy in Washington.²⁶⁰ By 1950, after several telegrams of protest over the Soviet handling of *Amerika*, the American ambassador wrote a long note to the State Department. He questioned “whether it is worthwhile attempting to continue [the] magazine in [the] face of apparent Soviet intention to effectually prevent it being read.”²⁶¹ Furthermore, he suggested that “In view of expense and improbability *Amerika* will reach any appreciable number of Soviet readers, we doubt it is in our interest to

²⁵⁶ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 566.

²⁵⁷ Ibid – 1950, volume 04, pp. 1080.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 1137-1138.

²⁵⁹ Cull, 38.

²⁶⁰ Hixson, 7.

²⁶¹ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 1137-1138.

continue and feel timely cessation... [is] considerably preferable to gradual strangulation.”²⁶² The State Department, however, did not agree with the ambassador’s assessment, viewing the magazine as an important part of the American effort to reach out to Soviet people. In his reply, the Secretary of State stressed that “Abandonment of this effort, on U.S. initiative might be interpreted as surrender in our efforts for peace.”²⁶³

Along with limiting the distribution and circulation of *Amerika* in the Soviet Union, Soviet authorities turned to mass media and party propaganda organs in order to undermine the magazine in the eyes of Soviet readers. Already in 1947, the Soviet magazine *Culture and Life* published a long article about *Amerika*. The article, titled “Catalog of Noisy Advertisement” accused the magazine of deliberately glossing over the true nature of American society where “workers [are] oppressed, Okies wander homeless, Indians discriminated against and the Negro is lynched”.²⁶⁴ Instead, stressed the article, *Amerika* simply showed a made-up reality produced by the capitalist PR machine.²⁶⁵ Continuing in a similar trend, the popular satirical magazine *Krokodil* featured a 1949 cartoon called THE DISCOVERY OF “AMERIKA”. It showed a poor black family talking to each other while reading the magazine *Amerika* with the caption: “See why it’s so important to keep up with the magazines! I would never have guessed that we Negroes led so happy a life.”²⁶⁶

The official Soviet critique of *Amerika* and other American magazines remained largely the same into the late Soviet period. It emphasized that most of what readers saw in American magazines was simply window-dressing that lacked any real substance.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., 1186.

²⁶⁴ Ibid – 1947, volume 04, pp. 583.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ W. Nelson, 76.

However, it became a little subtler considering that the Soviet people had a lot more exposure to America since the 1940s. A *New York Times* journalist stationed in Moscow in the late 1970s attended a lecture by a Soviet journalist who just returned from a trip to America. During the lecture, the Soviet journalist shared details of his trip with a group of Soviet students:

I must say that American life, as well as its nature, is beautiful, especially in one looks at it in such magazines as *Amerika*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and others. But when you look at it more closely, it doesn't smell. There is no more than beauty. There is none of that coziness, that goodness, and trust of one another, which can be observed on the other side, in the socialist camp....²⁶⁷

When the magazine returned to the Soviet Union in 1956 after a four-year absence, the official view and reaction to the magazine remained largely the same even under the new Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev. This is clearly evident in a draft letter to Party organizations written by the Soviet propaganda department and sent to the Central Committee for approval in preparation for *Amerika* once again being made available in the Soviet Union. The draft letter stressed that Americans will use the magazine as propaganda to promote the so-called "American way of life," unrestrained praise for American "achievements" in economic and cultural spheres, especially production of consumer goods, etc... The publishers of *Amerika*, continued the letter, will try to show that the people in the U.S., including the workers, are living better than Soviet people. Selection of facts and materials in this magazine will be thematic and one-sided, and advantageous to the ruling circles in the U.S.

The letter suggested that local Party organs (obkom, kraikom, etc) make every effort to help press institutions to establish correct procedures in distribution of *Amerika*. Specifically, magazine subscriptions should be done in a way where subscriptions go to

²⁶⁷ Shipler, 360.

“politically literate” and “ideologically reliable” individuals. The letter also recommended that subscriptions take place not in post-offices but through factory and enterprise press distributors. During the retail sale of the magazine, it should not be sold in kiosks that are near crowded places (bazaars, parks, railroad stations), but distributed to kiosks in factories, enterprises, theaters, central streets and only in limited quantities. There is no reason to try to sell all of the magazines noted the letter, because in agreement with the U.S., it was possible to return up to half of the unsold magazines to the publisher. Furthermore, it stressed that Party organizations must ensure that there is no unhealthy environment and panic around the sale of the magazine.

Some of the magazines will end up in the hands of politically unstable and politically inexperienced people, and there might be unwanted conversations centered on materials from the magazine, warned the letter. In order to neutralize effect of *Amerika*, the Central Committee instructed Party organizations to organize correct counter propaganda. To ensure that the local press, radio, lectures and discussions exposed the true nature of “American way of life” and “American democracy.” In addition, local authorities were to counter, without mentioning *Amerika* directly, figures and materials published in the magazine. “Our propaganda must show that the real ‘American way of life’ is far from what is portrayed in *Amerika*”, noted the letter.²⁶⁸

The Central Committee approved the letter. Although it questioned the wording as being overly strong and “fear inducing,” especially in sections dealing with the possible negative effects the magazine might have on “politically illiterate” individuals. Overall, however, the official Soviet view of *Amerika* as an instrument of American propaganda, one that distorted the truth and had to be contained and countered, remained

²⁶⁸ RGANI f. 89 op. 46 d. 11.

unchanged.

Besides limited distribution, Soviet authorities resorted to more direct methods. A 1965 KGB note reported confiscating nineteen hundred of the two thousand “free distribution”²⁶⁹ copies of *Amerika*. “Trusted” institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, received the remaining hundred copies.²⁷⁰

Amerika, it must be noted, was not the only American magazine deemed harmful by Soviet authorities. From the start of the Cold War and into the late Soviet period, Soviet officials regularly scrutinized and confiscated other American magazines brought into the Soviet Union, even ones meant for internal consumption in the U.S. Western tourists reported Soviet border guards scrutinizing and confiscating copies of *Time* and *Good Housekeeping* magazines in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁷¹ A KGB memo from 1970s also revealed that authorities regularly confiscated copies of *Time* magazine, smuggled in mostly by Asian and African students, from Soviet university students. However, officials confiscated only those editions determined to contain anti-Soviet propaganda, or of anti-Soviet character such as pornography.²⁷² At times border guards commandeered foreign magazines for their own benefit.²⁷³

Despite, or possibly because of, official hostility to *Amerika* and other American magazines, they remained hugely popular with the Soviet public. Already in 1947, representatives from the Soviet printing department responsible for selling of the magazine complained that demand far exceeded supply. “Tell Moscow we want more

²⁶⁹ Under the official agreement both sides were allowed to send 2000 copies of their respective magazines to who ever they wished.

²⁷⁰ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 218 l. 129-130.

²⁷¹ Higginbotham, 22;

Higgins, 21.

²⁷² GARF f. 9425 op. 1 d. 1365.

²⁷³ Smith, 466.

copies of your magazine down here,” said one official from a provincial Soviet town to a member of the American embassy staff.²⁷⁴ Several others requested ten, and even thousands more the amount that they were getting.²⁷⁵ A number of Soviet citizens wrote letters to members of the Politburo complaining that *Amerika* enjoyed widespread popularity among Soviet people.²⁷⁶

The situation changed little once the magazine reappeared in 1956. Due to high demand, copies of *Amerika* were still nearly impossible to obtain even when they were available to the general public.²⁷⁷ Some Soviets reported standing in line from early in the morning and still not able to purchase the magazine.²⁷⁸ The magazine was one of the most requested items at American exhibitions that toured the Soviet Union in 1960s and 1970s.²⁷⁹ At times, Soviet visitors asked American exhibition guides to request that the American government purchase more *Soviet Life* magazines so as to have more copies of *Amerika* distributed in the Soviet Union.²⁸⁰ At one exhibition, two Soviet girls told an American guide that they once followed a drunk home because they saw him carrying a copy of *Amerika*, hoping he would drop it along the way. Unfortunately for them he never did.²⁸¹

For the most part, a majority of the copies went to officials of various Soviet ministries, with only a few available to the general public. As a result, “the journal became a much cherished commodity on the growing black market.”²⁸² There were

²⁷⁴ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 566.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ RGASPI f. 17, o. 132, d. 486, l. 132, f. 17, o. 88, d. 812 l. 125-126.

²⁷⁷ Belfrage, 43.

²⁷⁸ Kalb, 236-237.

²⁷⁹ NA P142/47/33 p.30, P142/47/7 p.29, P142/42/10 p.32.

²⁸⁰ NA P142/42/10 p.32.

²⁸¹ NA P142/27/144 p.22.

²⁸² Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 113.

reports of the magazine fetching American style prices, a luxury few average Soviets could afford.²⁸³

Amerika's, as well as other American and Western magazines', popularity with the Soviet people, rested not so much in the content but in the presentation. When Soviets mentioned Western magazines it was almost always in relation to their aesthetic qualities. When in 1947 American officials asked a Soviet journalist his opinion of *Amerika* he noted the "the fine paper, the color pictures, the typography, everything about the publication struck him as being "first class."²⁸⁴ Even Western tourists complimented the physical quality of the magazine. Once told of *Amerika's* immense popularity, a young Irish woman who visited the Soviet Union in the late 1950s commented: "I could see why, if only because it was something beautiful in a world of shoddy production."²⁸⁵

For a lot of Soviets, Western magazines, with their vibrant colors and high quality paper served as a sort of window into the mythical West. These had a particular effect on the younger Soviet generation that wanted a better, more comfortable, more colorful life. Unable to realize these dreams in the Soviet Union they projected them onto America, a country most knew only from distant rumors, radio, films, and magazines. The America they imagined in their minds sprang into life from the colorful photos of shiny American cars and beautiful supermodels wearing the latest fashions featured on pages of *Amerika*.²⁸⁶ Andrea Lee, an American student who lived in Moscow for ten months in the late 1970s noted that her friends, a young Soviet couple, spent many hours looking

²⁸³ FRUS – 1947, volume 04, pp. 549.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 647.

²⁸⁵ Belfrage, 43.

²⁸⁶ Zubok, 113.

through her *Good Housekeeping* magazines,²⁸⁷ probably imagining themselves living in American homes and using American appliances.

Soviet young people, limited in their choice of status and identity symbols,²⁸⁸ often decorated their rooms or workspace with cutouts from Western magazines, much like American undergraduates would decorate their dorm-rooms with posters of their favorite bands, films and sex symbols. Andrea Lee described a room of her Soviet guide: “the walls of his small green cubicle are decorated, almost papered, with liquor and automobile advertisements cut carefully from the American magazines Grigorii has received as presents from other foreign acquaintances.”²⁸⁹ In addition, she noted his fascination with underwear ads in her copies of *Vogue*.²⁹⁰ In talking about the younger generation’s desire to separate themselves, Michael Binyon, a *New York Times* Russian correspondent in the late 1970s to early 1980s, noted:

Whereas the middle-aged careerists look back to the disciplined days when they proudly pinned up their class photographs, their sports trophies and Komsomol awards, today’s 28-year-old gives pride of place in his room to a centerfold from an old edition of *Playboy*.²⁹¹

Furthermore, while the evidence is limited, it does appear that when something in American magazines challenged imagined America, people simply refused to believe it. An American tourist riding in a train compartment with a Soviet general recalled reading a *Life* magazine with an ad showing American woodsmen riding floating logs with bare feet, when the general saw the ad “[he] thought this barefoot business was too primitive.

²⁸⁷ Lee, 85.

²⁸⁸ Here, by “status and identity symbols” I mean those items that young people often use to express their individuality and status within a social group.

²⁸⁹ Lee, 12-13.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia* (London : H. Hamilton, 1983), 174.

He couldn't believe that the United States did not have some more modern method.²⁹²

In another example, a guide with an American exhibition in the late 1970s reported that after looking at *Ebony* magazine, Soviet visitors absolutely refused to believe that there were middle-class African-Americans.²⁹³

Much like listening to Western radio did not indicate one's anti-Soviet tendencies, or make one rebel against the state, the same was true of Western magazines. In fact, people at the highest levels of the government subscribed and read Western magazines. In a 1958 note to the Central Committee, the Soviet ministry of literature (Glavlit) reported that a number of Soviet officials subscribed to Western magazines that had little to do with their day-to-day operations. The note added that proliferation of these magazines is responsible for dissemination of anti-Soviet views. However, a look at the list of magazines provided in the Glavlit report reveals a different picture and pointed to the fact that starved of high quality consumer decorative items, Soviets sought American/Western magazines for esthetic and recreational purposes, again plugging the hole left by the low level of domestic publishing. Therefore, the vast majority of magazines on the list were of the entertainment variety such as sports, outdoor recreation, film, celebrity, and fashion. Only a handful could be considered political publications. Furthermore, Glavlit complained that professional journals constituted a tiny fraction of overall subscriptions.²⁹⁴ This was not a new phenomenon. Looking at the 1946 list of magazine subscriptions from the Soviet Radio Committee one finds magazines such as *National Geographic*, *Life*, *Collier's*, *Time* and many others that had little connection to

²⁹² McDuffie, 79.

²⁹³ Shipler, 358-360.

²⁹⁴ Afanas'eva, E. S. comp. et al., *Ideologicheskie komissii TSK KPSS 1958-1964 : dokumenty* (Moskva : ROSSPĖN, 1998), 65-68.

radio.²⁹⁵

The fact that a number of highly-placed Soviet officials, including assistant ministers, openly approved and even requested these magazines shows that this was done for other reasons besides ideological purposes. It also showed that even high members of the Soviet government saw no discrepancies between their loyalty to the Soviet state and their readership of foreign magazines. An American journalist for the *New York Times* noted a similar phenomenon where Soviet people managed to reconcile their patriotism with their love of Western consumer products. In one example, he told a story of a Soviet woman who married an American and was subsequently vilified by her nationalistic neighbors as a traitor to her country. At the same time, the same neighbors “shamelessly acquired every possible electronic or wearable item from the West... They talked about these goods constantly and seemed to see no inconsistency between their material and social views.”²⁹⁶ In another case, an informer for the KGB and a loyal Soviet citizen decorated his room almost exclusively with pictures taken out of Western magazines.²⁹⁷

Movies

Along with radio and newsprint, American movies were another source of unofficial information about the United States available to Soviet audiences. However, unlike American radio broadcasts, out of reach for Soviet authorities, and American magazines (although *Amerika* was constrained by certain bilateral agreements on content), movies, at least the ones shown officially, faced heavy censorship. One must

²⁹⁵ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 137.

²⁹⁶ Shipler, 339.

²⁹⁷ Lee, 12-13.

keep this fact in mind when talking about the impact of American movies on Soviet audiences.

The very fact that the Soviet government chose which American movies to screen constituted heavy censorship in itself, especially after the start of the Cold War. Not wanting to portray the United States in a positive light, Soviets selected movies for pure entertainment value, or ones demonstrating the negative aspects of America.²⁹⁸

Furthermore, movies' subtitles and titles were often changed in order to align them with the official statement about America.²⁹⁹ For example, the 1939 classic gangster film *The Roaring Twenties* became *The Fate of a Soldier in America* on Soviet screens.³⁰⁰

Before relations between the two nations soured following World War II, Soviet audiences saw a number of Hollywood films during the war. Entertainment films such as the Western *Stagecoach* (1939) starring John Wayne and those highlighting the wartime alliance between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (*North Star* (1943), *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *Song of Russia* (1944)) made up the majority (there were around twenty movies and two Disney cartoons) of the types of Hollywood films available to the Soviet public. Writing about the influence of American movies on the Soviet Union during World War II, Sergei Kapterev pointed out that while these movies “constituted typical Hollywood entertainment.... [they] still had a momentous impact upon Soviet life.”³⁰¹ Alan Ball noted similar effects by American movies on Soviet audiences in the 1920s.³⁰² Working in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, *New York Times* correspondent Harrison Salisbury remembered: “The questions I got about the U.S.A. were about the movies (No. 1 topic

²⁹⁸ Stites, 124-126.

²⁹⁹ Kapterev, 791.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 784.

³⁰² Ball, 89-96.

by far – they wanted to know what has happened to Deanna Durbin, Bing Crosby, Shirley Temple, and Charlie Chaplin),”³⁰³ American actors familiar to the Soviet public from wartime films. Interestingly, some Soviets also found it ironic that “Soviet villages, towns, and homes” portrayed in American movies of the time “seemed fantastically luxurious” by Soviet standards.³⁰⁴

A stock of trophy films captured by the Soviet Army in Germany during the war made up the first wave of American movies to hit post-war Soviet Union. By far, the most popular of the American trophy films with Soviet audiences was a collection of Tarzan movies following adventures of a man raised by apes in the heart of African jungle, starting American Johnny Weissmuller, ironically an actor of German ethnicity. The Soviet public did not see the Tarzan films until 1952. They were, however, shown regularly at Stalin’s private screenings in the Kremlin. While criticizing them in public, Stalin reportedly enjoyed the films, and saw each one of them.³⁰⁵ Finally, in February 1952, after much deliberation and negotiation, Soviet authorities allowed Tarzan movies (trophy copies as well as those acquired from the U.S. in trade agreements) to be screened in the Soviet Union.³⁰⁶ In order to ensure the correct ideological interpretation among the Soviet population, the first movie featured a preface noting that Tarzan was raised by monkeys and therefore was primitively innocent in his political outlook –his first brush with capitalist culture coming during his encounter with American explorer party.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ Salisbury, *Moscow Journal*, 181.

³⁰⁴ Barghoorn, 242.

³⁰⁵ Caute, 117.

³⁰⁶ Alex Vernon, *On Tarzan* (Athens: Georgia University Press, 2008), 52.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

Immediately after appearing on the Soviet movie screens, American ape-man became a major sensation. Overall, around 120 million Soviets saw the first three Tarzan movies³⁰⁸ - a staggering number, considering the total Soviet population of 200 million. Many foreigners visiting the Soviet Union in the 1950s noted Tarzan's popularity with the Soviet public.³⁰⁹ Harrison Salisbury, writing about living in Moscow in 1954, described Soviet fascination with Tarzan:

Children often sat through a whole day's showing in a movie house. Nine and ten performances per picture was a common score. And everyone from baby to babushka was delighted and charmed by Tarzan. Many a taxi driver and even schoolchildren asked me whether Tarzan really lived.³¹⁰

Around the same time, another American visitor to the Soviet Union wrote:

Many Russians tell one with a great air of superiority that the Tarzan pictures are only for children or are *nye kulturni* [literally meaning "not cultured." An equivalent of "trashy".] But the reason that they speak with such authority is that just about every Russian who has had the opportunity has gone to see the so-called *nye kulturni* Tarzan films.³¹¹

Soviet youngsters were especially affected by the Tarzan craze.³¹² Tarzan style haircuts were all the rage and it was not uncommon to hear boys address passing girls on the street as Jane, Tarzan's female partner in the movies.³¹³ Postcards featuring Weissmuller, illegally smuggled into the Soviet Union were a popular item on the black-market.³¹⁴ The Nobel prize winning Soviet poet Joseph Brodsky wrote that "one series of

³⁰⁸ Fedor Razzakov, *Gibel' sovetskogo kino. 1918-1972. Intrigi i spory*. Book available at http://www.e-reading.org.ua/bookreader.php/130087/Razzakov_-_Gibel%27_sovetskogo_kino._Intrigi_i_spory._1918-1972.html. Accessed April 22, 2012. This particular book has more of a nationalistic and conspiratorial tone and does not appear to be wholly objective in its conclusions. Nor does it cite its sources. However, from context and cross-references with other material its sources do appear to be accurate. I use it because some of the facts mentioned in this book are unavailable elsewhere.

³⁰⁹ McDuffie, 99. Vernon, 37.

³¹⁰ Salisbury, *American In Russia*, 261.

³¹¹ Higgins, 184.

³¹² Zubok, *Zhivago's children*, 41.

³¹³ Salisbury, *American In Russia*, 261.

³¹⁴ Vernon, 37.

Tarzans did more for de-Stalinization than all of Khrushchev's speeches."³¹⁵ Therefore, it was not long before Soviet authorities began to worry about the influence of Tarzan on Soviet youth and launched a campaign denouncing these harmful imitations.³¹⁶

What accounted for Tarzan's, as well as most other American movies' popularity with the Soviet public? The post-war years were ones of extreme hardship for the Soviet people. The war destroyed not only houses and factories, but also families and people's physical and mental health. Those hoping for improvement after the war were to be greatly disappointed as the country struggled to rebuild.³¹⁷ Tarzan's light-hearted adventures, and high-quality Hollywood production, was exactly what the Soviets needed to escape the struggles of their everyday lives.³¹⁸ The Soviet young people, in particular, many deprived of their parents and a chance to be children by the war saw an opportunity to recapture some of that lost youth through Tarzan. As Sergei Kapterev put it "people desperately needed distractions; and in its usual manner, Hollywood was to bring them its well-tested medicine—albeit without getting anything in exchange."³¹⁹

Soviet authorities showed many of the captured German, Italian, and British movies directly to the Soviet public by playing them in public movie theaters. Given the growing post-war tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S. captured American movies (these accounted for roughly 43% of the total) were first screened at the so-called "Movie House" (*Dom Kino*), a private movie theater for members of the film industry

³¹⁵ Quoted in Slavkin, 135.

³¹⁶ Caute, 118, Vernon, 36. Some officials suggested that watching Tarzan movies led to criminality; see Juliane Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 257.

³¹⁷ Elena Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo : politika i povsednevnost', 1945-1953*. (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2000), 26-35.

³¹⁸ Juliane Furst, "The importance of being stylish. Youth, culture and identity in late Stalinism" in *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between reconstruction and reinvention*, ed. Juliane Furst (New York : Routledge, 2009), 209-230.

³¹⁹ Kapterev, 793.

union. The initial showing of fifty some American movies proved a smashing success.³²⁰ The magnitude of success, however, attracted official attention and Movie House showings became a target of the press that accused the movie theater of exposing Soviet people to “tasteless Western films” despite availability of quality Soviet features.³²¹ In 1947, in another example, Mikhail Suslov, head of the Soviet Ideology and Propaganda Department complained to Andrei Zhdanov the man in charge of Soviet cultural policy about unhealthy obsession with foreign films in certain Soviet organizations. Specifically, he pointed to officials in All-Union Society for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries who sought contact with foreign diplomats, in this case American, in order to obtain foreign films.³²² The same year, satirical magazine *Krokodil*, noted that Americans were trying to infect Europe with the “red scare,” but not to fear, Americans also promised an antidote summed up by the slogan: “American movies are the best defense against communism.”³²³

So why, in spite of the quickly escalating Cold War and denunciations in the press, did the Soviet government allow many of these movies to be shown in public? Much like many other industries, the war had a major effect on Soviet movie production. A lot of film studios had been destroyed by the war and they did not feature prominently in the post-war rebuilding effort. As a result, between 1946 and 1953, the Soviet movie industry made a total of 124 true feature films,³²⁴ a far cry from hundreds of movies

³²⁰ Shaw, 44.

³²¹ Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet society from the revolution to the death of Stalin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 193.

³²² RGASPI f. 82, op. 2 d. 1013, l. 22-23.

³²³ *Krokodil* #23 1947 p. 2.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

produced annually in pre-war years.³²⁵ Noting the immense popularity of the first few trophy films among the Soviet moviegoers, authorities saw their chance. Here was an opportunity to provide a much-needed escape for the war-weary country and at the same time help the beleaguered native film industry without having to use any more of the already thinly spread resources. Moreover, some of these funds could be used on other vital projects. As a result, concerns about the ideological content of these movies were put on hold, trumped by the country's need for post-war reconstruction funds.

A 1947 case file from the Communist Party Central Committee's document collection helps illustrate the point. The file deals with the 1944 German musical *The Woman of My Dreams* (*Die Frau meiner Träume*) that had been shown in Soviet movie theaters with great success. A Soviet citizen wrote a letter to the Central Committee complaining that the movie was offensive to those raised on communist morals. In rebuttal, Soviet film officials stated that the movie was bringing in a lot of money that could be used to rebuild Soviet film industry instead of using scarce hard currency on purchasing films from abroad.³²⁶ While the movie in question is German, the logic applied to all of the trophy films including American ones, which constituted a majority. Writing about post-war American trophy films in the Soviet Union, Sergei Kapterev concluded:

The Soviet regime was using American films...to obtain money needed for the implementation of its grand projects, to satisfy the population's hunger for light entertainment, and to restore its psyche, shattered by war. This time, however, it was not ready to pay for the products it was using—the fact that they turned up in the USSR seemed to be fully justified by its contribution to the war effort.³²⁷

³²⁵ John Rimberg, "The Soviet Film Industry Today," *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 11:2 (Winter 1956), 152-153.

³²⁶ RGASPI f. 17, o. 125, d. 576, l. 3.

³²⁷ Kapterev, 794.

Did the success of many American movies among post-war Soviet audiences signal their affinity for the country and its culture? Cold War film historian Tony Shaw thought so when he wrote: “Indeed, given the popularity of American trophy films, it might be argued that moviegoers were the segment of the population most likely to admire Americans and American culture.”³²⁸ Shaw’s statement cannot be discounted outright, but it is problematic. As Shaw himself pointed out in talking about the popularity of Soviet post-war anti-American films: “The Cold War films’ popularity does not necessarily imply that Soviet moviegoers were particularly anti-American. By the standards of Soviet cinema, these were first-rate pictures, with invariable high production standards.”³²⁹ So if the popularity of anti-American films did not signify anti-American attitudes among the Soviets than why did the popularity of American films point to admiration for American culture? As noted above, German pictures were also quite popular but it is highly doubtful that Soviets held much admiration for German culture at that time.

Taking into account success of other foreign movies, the above noted German *The Woman of My Dreams* for example, as well as some of the Soviet movies, a more likely explanation is that Soviet audiences simply would have watched any quality entertainment movie regardless of its country of origin. Therefore, it is unlikely that large numbers of Soviet moviegoers began to admire America after watching American movies. That is not to say that these movies did not solidify certain perceptions, many

³²⁸ Shaw, 47.

³²⁹ Ibid., 44.

positive, about America that already existed in the minds of many Soviets from the countries' wartime alliance.³³⁰

American trophy films continued to account for the bulk of American movies playing in the Soviet Union for the next decade. This changed in the mid-1950s, when the Soviet Union bought a number of American movies, and the U.S. acquired a number of Soviet films as part of the deal.³³¹ As before, the Soviet choice of American pictures focused on two major categories: ideology (movies critical of certain aspects of American life) and entertainment. Films such as *Salt of the Earth* (1954) dealing with labor and racial issues represent the former category, and the romantic comedy *Roman Holiday* (1953) the latter.

However, the popularity of films produced in capitalist countries quickly drew attention from the top. In December 1960, Cultural department of the Central Committee (otdel kul'tury TsK KPSS) sent several notes to the Central Committee criticizing repertoire of Soviet movie theaters. The notes complained that too many Soviet theaters showed foreign movies, especially those of capitalist countries:

Movies from capitalist countries received an unreasonable share of our box office. As a result, the Soviet viewer's attention is fixated on themes and ideas distant from our ideological goals and at times contrary to them.³³²

Officials noted that movie theaters reserved the most popular night showings for foreign movies, ignoring many quality Soviet titles. Moreover, Soviet theaters reproduced foreign movies in different formats, making them suitable for showing in almost all Soviet theaters, urban and rural. Among other capitalist movies, American films received particular attention. *Roman Holiday* was consistently used as an example of

³³⁰ See chapter on official propaganda.

³³¹ Kapterev, 805.

³³² Afanas'eva, 258.

ideologically harmful movie (without stating specific reasons) that attracted large numbers of Soviet viewers. In the end, the notes recommended limiting the number of capitalist movies played on Soviet screens.³³³

In addition, the Department of Culture criticized the method of selecting movies to be acquired from abroad. It stressed that there were too few people involved in the selection process, and too many ideologically harmful movies getting through as a result. Along with several other foreign pictures, the note pointed to the American films *Gigi* (1958) and *Apartment* (1960) as movies that glamorized “adulterous adventures of spoiled bourgeoisie.”³³⁴

As with the post-war movies, the financial situation was the primary driving force behind large numbers of Soviet theaters showing foreign movies.³³⁵ Soviet movie theaters had to fulfill a certain government dictated plan, and much like the rest of Soviet industry, fulfillment of the plan took precedence over most other considerations, because jobs and bonuses depended on it. Therefore, it was the plan that dictated the types of movies shown on the screen. Soviet movie theater managers simply screened movies that would be the most popular with the movie going public, thus bringing in the most revenue and assuring fulfillment of the plan.

Despite some apprehension, Soviet officials, not wanting to lose a sizable revenue stream, continued releasing American movies in the Soviet Union well into the 1960s. Even months after Soviet downing of the American U2 spy plane, 63 out of 103 Moscow

³³³ Ibid, 258- 262.

³³⁴ Ibid, 265.

³³⁵ Ibid, 260. According to the Department of Culture report, fulfillment of the plan was the number one reason given by movie theater managers for showing large numbers of foreign movies.

movie theaters still showed American movies.³³⁶ In fact, one of these movies went on to become one of the most popular in the history of Soviet box office.

Released on Soviet screens in 1962, the American western *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), an adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), took the country by storm. Featuring lots of high action gunfights, it told a story of a group of American cowboys who teamed up to save a Mexican village from marauding bandits. The movie's popularity with Soviet people, particularly the Soviet youth, was such that at times it was shown in stadiums – Soviet theaters unable to meet the demand.³³⁷

Yul Brynner, the star of the movie, who incidentally was born in the Russian city of Vladivostok and immigrated to the United States in 1940 via China and France, became an icon for Soviet children of all ages. They imitated his walk, his style, his way of talking, and anything else they could think of. As a result, "Shaven heads became the high fashion of the day, jeans were desperately sought after, and the lines from the movie provided an endless source for cryptic passwords between the initiated."³³⁸

The movie's popularity caught the Soviet authorities off guard. When they bought the license to show the movie in the Soviet Union, they had no idea that American cowboys would so quickly replace Soviet heroes among scores of Soviet youngsters. And it did not take long for the Soviet government to strike back. One Soviet movie critic wrote the following:

One must look a little deeper into events on screen in order to understand that all the glitz in the form of circus stunts and pyrotechnics hides something much more

³³⁶ Hixson, 223.

³³⁷ Sergei Lavrentyev, "Red Westerns – A Short History," in *Red Westerns: The communist answer to the American Western*. Booklet. Rotterdam International Film Festival. 2011. pp.5 Available at www.crossingeurope.at/uploads/tx.../Red_Westerns.Booklet.pdf Accessed April 22, 2012.

³³⁸ Moscow News interview with Rock Brynner (Yul Brynner's son). Available at <http://freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1160528/posts>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

substantial... This is a film with a fake bottom. The sweet stuff on top, with sourness hidden a bit deeper...

And therein lies the second layer of the film. Apparently, noble aspirations and unselfish bravery are only inherent to American cowboys, these knights without fear and reproach. If not for them who would save Mexican villagers from devastating raids?...

This professionally produced film-fairytale, however, does not correspond with known facts...

It is true, in America there is no shortage of cutthroats who expertly use hot [guns] and cold [knives, swords...etc] weapons. Is it not from their midst that they recruit hired assassins who commit sabotage against revolutionary Cuba, ignite war in Congo and Vietnam, and terrorize Taiwan...

Glaring contradictions surround the made-up legends about kind Americans who rush to help nations in trouble.³³⁹

Another critic, writing in the Soviet film magazine *Sovetskii Ekran*, stated:

Try to remember how many people were killed by the “brave seven” during the film. You will not succeed. The counting would be too complex and take too much time. With incredible ease the heroes shoot their Colts left and right. For them it is nothing to shoot some man for no reason, just in case. While watching these never-ending fights and shoot-outs... one becomes fearful for the young boys in the theater. [Any] production, willingly or unwillingly propagating violence and murder, is spiritually foreign to us.³⁴⁰

Even Khrushchev himself weighed in. In an interview with American reporters he remarked:

I saw the movie *The Magnificent Seven*. The acting is great. We screened this movie and received many reprimands. Many teachers responded on the pages of our press. A critical article called “Seven receives a Two” [referring to Soviet grading system where two equals a D] was published. It noted that the movie has a negative influence on our youth. I agree with the teachers. In America such movies are everywhere, where people hit each other in the face, torture and kill each other. There is a lot of perversion. In your country this is deemed as entertaining. In ours, dissemination of such things is deemed harmful...³⁴¹

What bothered the Soviet leadership was not necessarily the fact that Soviet children imitated violence. Soviet children stores always had large numbers of toy handguns, machine guns, tanks, fighter planes, etc available for sale and were quite popular with Soviet boys. Soviet literary heroes such as Alexander Dumas’ *Three*

³³⁹ Quoted in Razzakov.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Nikita Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, Tom 7, 97.

Musketeers killed as many if not more people than the Magnificent Seven, and for lesser reasons. What really bothered authorities was the source of imitation - American cowboys, with emphasis on the former. Even the 1964 movie *Lemonade Joe*, a Czech a parody of an American Western, was quickly banned by Soviet censors “who decided that Soviet viewers missed the parody.”³⁴² If the cowboys on screen came from France, Italy, or Sweden, it is doubtful that they would have faced as much criticism as cowboys from the Soviet Union’s main Cold War rival, especially coming on the heels of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Tarzan was also made in America, but the character’s origins lay in the African jungle. *The Magnificent Seven* heroes were quintessentially American. Soviet ideologists could hardly spin their on-screen actions into a positive narrative. These cowboys saved the Mexican villagers from wicked banditos instead of some greedy factory owner or exploitive plantation boss, something that could have be presented as class warfare. The movie glamorized the primal fabric of American society, in a way legitimizing contemporary America and American way of life, areas of particular concern for Soviet officials tasked with portraying America as a country sitting on a rotten foundation of greed and exploitation.

It is therefore even more remarkable that the movie continued its run in the Soviet Union for a number of years, signaling the primacy of financial considerations over any misgivings over ideological content. That is not to say that Soviet authorities gave up on trying to dull what they saw as the movie’s more harmful effects. Besides the critique in the press, Soviet officials altered attendance numbers, making them appear

³⁴² Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 133.

lower, and finally canceled the film all together in 1966, almost a year before its Soviet license was due to expire.³⁴³

The movie's influence on the Soviet film industry, however, continued for years to come. Less than a year after the *Magnificent Seven* ended its run in Soviet theaters, the Soviet public was introduced to a homegrown version of the American cowboy. Although not the first Soviet Western,³⁴⁴ *Elusive Avengers* [*Neulovimye Mstiteli*], produced by Moscow studio Mosfilm and released in 1967, featured many of the high paced horse and gun action of American Westerns, yet with a much more palatable ideological message. Here, the main heroes helped the communist Red Army against the monarchist White Army in the Russian Civil War.

The movie's success at the Soviet box office suggests that the Soviet moviegoers were not so much captivated by the Americanness of the *Magnificent Seven* as by its entertainment value, something not provided by the Soviet movie industry at the time.³⁴⁵ Tony Shaw made a similar observation about the popularity of anti-American movies in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, noting that it was not the ideological message that brought people to the theaters but high quality of production.³⁴⁶

Of course not all of the Soviet people got swept up in the Western craze. As noted earlier, to a large extent these movies appealed to a younger Soviet generation. There is some evidence that those Soviets who truly believed information from official sources saw American movies through a prism provided by the government-controlled

³⁴³ Lavrentyev, 5.

³⁴⁴ The first American inspired Soviet Westerns appeared in the 1920s and quickly became some of the most popular movies of the time. In 1936, at Stalin's suggestion, the Soviets produced a remake of American Western *The Lost Patrol* (1934) called *Thirteen*; see Ibid.

³⁴⁵ In one example, in a 1968 detailed report to the Central Committee's Ideological department, an Odessa university student attributed *Magnificent Seven's* popularity to lack of strong hero characters in Soviet movies. RGANI f. 5 o. 60 d. 48 l. 133.

³⁴⁶ Shaw, 47.

media. May 1968 issue of popular Soviet magazine *Ogonek*, featured a letter from a factory worker titled “Poisonous cine-food” [*Iadovitaia kino-pisha*]. In the letter, the author claimed that majority of foreign movies, including *The Magnificent Seven*, provided Soviet youth with terrible role models of violence and debauchery, which many of them imitated.³⁴⁷ Subsequent issues of the magazine published a variety of reader responses to the letter. While a number of readers agreed with the letter, many others, primarily younger ones, defended themselves as conscious members of Soviet society who were able to think for themselves and who would not go out and commit murder after watching a foreign adventure film.³⁴⁸

In another example, in a 1978 letter to *Komunist*, an official ideological magazine of the Soviet Communist Party, one Soviet reader complained about the numerous “bad” American movies playing in Soviet theaters. His chief complaint was the fact that they often showed American Indians getting killed by the hundreds, often in gruesome ways.³⁴⁹ The sentiment closely resembled official media portrayal of American Indians as victims of genocidal policies of the American government.

Throughout 1960s, 1970s, and into the late 1980s, Soviet people continued watching American movies with great interest. Besides officially sanctioned hits such as *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *Mackenna’s Gold* (1969), and *Tootsie* (1982) many copies of other, those not approved by official censors, made their way into closed theaters of various unions and government agencies. Therefore, those privileged enough to have access saw a much wider variety of American movies. American literature professor Jay

³⁴⁷ *Ogonek*, #21 May, 1968. p. 11.

³⁴⁸ *Ogonek*, #29 July, 1968. p. 30-31. This discussion touches upon the issue of generational differences in popular attitudes toward America and the West. I will discuss this issue in more detail in my chapter on Soviet youth.

³⁴⁹ RGASPI f. 599 op. 1 d. 661 l. 96.

Martin, visiting the Soviet Union in the late 1970s, wrote about a conversation with one Soviet intellectual:

He wanted to know all about the costumes in *Chinatown* – were they wonderful? And the special effects in *The Towering Inferno*. And had I seen *Deep Throat*? – all Americans had been to see that movie, hadn't they? And *The Godfather, Part Two* – he had read the reviews. Did it really show that the Mafia were the heroes of America?³⁵⁰

VCR technology that gained mass appeal in the late 1970s and early 1980s, introduced American movies, among others, to a much broader section of the Soviet public. The size and low cost (as compared to movie projectors) of the VCR equipment made it possible to reproduce and watch movies in one's apartment. In turn, this technological advancement caused problems for Soviet authorities trying to control the flow of information into the country. In a 1982 note to the Central Committee, KGB head Yuri Andropov reported that there had been an increase in underground showings of foreign video films, dubbed into Russian, copied and either resold or rented. In a three-month period the KGB arrested seven people in various cities and confiscated 22 color TVs, 20 VCRs, 5 video cameras, and 397 videotapes. The report noted that foreign and Soviet citizens brought them into the Soviet Union as contraband, along with instances where Arab and Yugoslav diplomats smuggled them into the country.³⁵¹

Andropov's report classified the movies as having pornographic and ideologically harmful content that promoted violence, sadism, moral laxity, and had a corrupting influence on Soviet public. It went on to state that gathered information pointed to the fact that the enemy [that is, the United States] actively and purposely used this form of ideological sabotage against the Soviet Union, trying to indoctrinate some segments of

³⁵⁰ Martin, 16.

³⁵¹ RGANI f. 89 op. 37 d. 1.

Soviet population with certain attributes of Western lifestyle.³⁵² Clearly, KGB and Soviet leaders, who approved the report, saw unauthorized foreign movies, many of them American, as a weapon employed by its Cold War adversaries.

As we have seen, from the end of World War II, Soviet authorities tried to strike a delicate balance between the large financial rewards brought in by American movies and the perceived ideological damage to the Soviet public. Their concern, however, was exaggerated. Soviet people who watched American movies did not suddenly turn into fanatical admirers of America or the capitalist social system. Most remained loyal Soviet citizens, and imitation of American cowboys or disco moves from *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)³⁵³ by Soviet young people did not translate into large-scale opposition to the Soviet government.

That is not to say that these movies did not have some kind of effect on the Soviet people. As Yale Richmond noted:

From foreign films Soviet audiences learned that people in the West did not have to stand in long lines to purchase food, they did not live in communal apartments, they dressed fashionably, owned cars, and lived the normal life so sought by Russians. Soviet audiences were not so much listening to the sound tracks or reading subtitles as watching people in the films--how they lived in their homes, the clothes they wore, and the cars they drove. And when refrigerators were opened in Western films, they were always full of food.³⁵⁴

In other words, Soviet audiences focused on the things that they did not have at home, consumer goods, entertainment, and living space being the primary focus. For example, American movie *Marty* (1955) was very popular with Soviet audiences. The Soviets particularly enjoyed parts

when Marty's girl tells her mother that she doesn't think in-laws should live with their married children. Intense interest was shown in the modest Bronx kitchen of Marty's

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Stites, 160.

³⁵⁴ Richmond - http://mountainrunner.us/2009/12/yalerichmond_1.html. Accessed April 22, 2012.

home, the bar and lunchrooms he frequented, the elevated trains in the Bronx, the lively music at the dance-hall.³⁵⁵

In another example, instead of focusing on the ideological message about the capitalist society's greed in *It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963), Soviet people instead admired American superhighways shown in the movie.³⁵⁶

In the same way that fighting through Western Europe during World War II opened up Soviet soldiers to consumer and other accomplishments of the non-communist Europe, American movies, along with other unofficial information, did the same for Soviet viewers of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Soviets might have thought of the United States as full of crime and inequality but there was no denying that America had more consumer goods and better roads. And as the World War II spirit of sacrifice moved further into the past, Soviet people demanded more from their government, in part using what they saw in American movies as a benchmark.

³⁵⁵ Caute, 219.

³⁵⁶ Delia and Ferdinand Kuhn, *Russia on our minds; reflections on another world* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1970), 100.

CHAPTER 3: American Exhibitions in the Soviet Union

Introduction

As I have previously mentioned, Soviet sources regarding public perceptions and reactions to the United States are often limited and therefore provide an incomplete picture of the topic. Fortunately, the archives of the United States Information Agency (USIA), located at the National Archives in College Park, MD, contain a wealth of information on Soviet public reactions to the U.S. Throughout the Cold War, USIA, created in the mid-1950s to promote U.S. national interests abroad, hosted a number of exhibitions in the Soviet Union. USIA exhibitions covered areas from agriculture to plastics, from sports equipment to space exploration. While these exhibitions served to promote a positive and often sterilized image of America in the Soviet Union, they also functioned as a barometer of Soviet public opinion toward the United States.¹

As we will see, for Soviet citizens, American exhibitions in the Soviet Union were not so much a “window to the West,” although this played a significant role, but rather served as a mirror in which Soviet people viewed themselves.

More so, they wanted to know what others saw in the mirror. Did Americans see Soviets in the same way that Soviets saw themselves? And did they like what they saw? In short, through American exhibitions, Soviet people sought to understand the world

¹ On construction and content of American propaganda abroad see Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, especially chapter 4.

outside of their own country and find themselves within it. Otherwise, they knew this world largely through the heavily-filtered information the Soviet government provided, but they suspected that was not the whole picture. Finally, here was a chance to see if what they have been told about the Soviet Union and the outside world was true.

In talking about the American exhibition program, some scholars have concluded that it had a deep and long lasting impact on Soviet citizens by successfully promoting American consumer culture.² Some even credit the program with having a role in ending the Cold War.³ In studying the 1959 Moscow Exhibition, others pointed out that it came up short of its intended goals of turning Soviet people onto an American life style.⁴ This chapter will show that subsequent exhibitions of the 1960s and 1970s, while having some success, did not have the intended effect on the Soviet public. It will argue that despite some mistrust of the official mass media, the Soviet people largely adhered to the picture of America presented in official sources.

A number of USIA staff that organized exhibitions in the Soviet Union also collected and recorded reactions of Soviet citizens attending these exhibitions. Entries from Comment Books, voluntary questionnaires, and recollections from their interactions with Soviet citizens by American exhibition guides reveal unguarded reactions on the part of Soviet citizens. A lot of the comments in comment books, both positive and negative, were anonymous, and thus most likely reflected the real thinking of ordinary Soviets. However, sometimes KGB agents planted comments in exhibition comment

² Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*.

³ Hixton, *Parting the Curtain*.

⁴ Susan Reid, "Who Will beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9:4 (Fall 2008), 903.

books.⁵ Therefore we have to be careful in assessing some of the more negative comments. In many cases, these responses were organized and printed in forms of research reports. In general, research reports dealt with questions such as who came to the exhibition and why they attended, as well as visitor reactions to the exhibit specifically, and America generally. Therefore, USIA research reports offer an invaluable opportunity to glimpse into Soviet public reactions to America.

Of course, these reports offer only a partial picture of Soviet perceptions of America. In some cases, Soviet authorities restricted visitors to the exhibits to individuals they deemed reliable. Moreover, depending on the category of exhibition, only a specific type (determined by profession) of a person was represented. Furthermore, visitors knew that the KGB maintained surveillance over the exhibit, and that could have affected how honest they were in their comments. However, frequent comments voiced good will towards Americans, and at times American way of life, although these tended to be anonymous while many others contained at least some information about the author(s). This suggests that in general people were not too intimidated by the prospect of getting into trouble with Soviet authorities. Furthermore, Soviet citizens had become accustomed to voicing their complaints through comment books since the 1920s and they knew that people did not get in trouble for writing critical comments.⁶ Despite these limitations, USIA exhibition research reports offer a wide-ranging sample of Soviet public reactions simply by their number (exhibitions averaged ten to twenty thousand people a day) and diversity, both in content and location.

⁵ See Aksiutin, 262 and Vladislav Zubok, "Zato my delaiem rakety: Strasti vokrug amerikanskoi vystavki v Sokolnikakh v 1959 godu," *Rodina* 8 (1998), 77.

⁶ See Marjorie Hilton, "The Customer is Always Wrong: Consumer Complaint in Late-NEP Russia," *Russian Review* 68:1(2009), 1-25.

I will use the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow (the first major American exhibition in the Soviet Union) as a starting point and a template of analysis and will discuss this exhibition as a whole. The 1959 exhibition was unique; it was larger (2.7 million Soviets saw the exhibit) and more significant, as evidenced by the presence of the American vice-president Richard Nixon, than those that followed. Later exhibitions will be broken down and analyzed as parts of separate category. Also, because the goal of the exhibits and the tenor of Soviet reactions did not change through the mid-1980s, the exhibitions over the space of 2 1/2 decades can be analyzed as a unit.

Looking at the 1959 exhibition as well as Soviet responses to America from later exhibitions, the chapter will address questions such as: What issues figured most prominently in Soviet reactions to America? Did the exhibits change the opinions visitors held of America?

1959 Exhibition in Moscow

The 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow was perhaps one of the most famous of all American exhibitions in the Soviet Union. It was the first time average Soviet citizens came face to face with American way of life and American people in form of exhibition guides. The Moscow exhibition was part of a cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States, with Soviets organizing an exhibition in New York earlier in the year. American vice-president Richard Nixon opened the exhibition, highlighting its importance. Consumer products were the main focal point of the exhibition. And the model American kitchen became the site of the famous Nixon-

Khrushchev “Kitchen Debates” (see Illustration 13) where the two discussed the merits of capitalist and communist systems.⁷



Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev debates American Vice-President Richard Nixon during the 1959 American Exhibition in Moscow (Illustration 13)⁸

The post-exhibition USIA report analyzed 924 questions asked by the Soviet public. The report based its analysis on questions that came from RAMAC (an IBM computer designed to answer over three thousand questions about America), questions posed to American exhibition guides, as well as questions asked of American travelers to

⁷ For more background information on 1959 Moscow exhibition, see Zubok, “Zato my delaem rakety”. Ralph White, “Soviet Reactions to Our Moscow Exhibit: Voting Machines and Comment Books,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23:4 (Winter, 1959-1960), 461-470. Hixson, Chapter 7.

⁸ Original photo courtesy of <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009632334/>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

the Soviet Union.⁹ Analysis found that over 60% of all questions focused on six topics: living conditions, American awareness of the USSR, technology (especially consumer technology), education, music (especially jazz), freedoms and ideals.¹⁰ More hostile questions accounted for 13% of all questions. These largely dealt with topics of: unemployment, the “Negro problem,” and [American] bases around the USSR (U.S. military installations).¹¹

The report concluded that in their interests about America, Soviet citizens were quite similar to other foreign audiences. Much like other foreigners, Soviet people were most interested in how an average American lives, how much money he earns and what that money is spent on. Soviet public showed little interest in American religion and in most expressions of American culture. According to the report, Soviet audience was no more preoccupied with negative images of America (racism, unemployment) than were the Western European audiences.¹²

Other features, specific to Soviet audience, included lack of interest in important international events such as the Berlin crisis (the USIA report attributed this to “42 years of Communist indoctrination and censorship”), as well as political and enterprise freedom (although there was strong curiosity about freedom of access to information and to travel). On the other hand Soviets expressed strong interest in what Americans and the rest of the world thought about the Soviet Union (“They want to be liked”), on how much Americans earned and how much things cost, and American technology. The report noted that interest in technology was not so much technical but rather on how technology

⁹ The report does not specify who these travelers were but most likely they included American tourists as well as academics and students doing research or studying in the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ NA P142/1/15 p.i.

¹¹ Ibid, p.ii.

¹² Ibid.

related to consumers (automobiles, washing machines). In other words, Soviet people looked at American technology as a child would look at a new and shiny toy, and were disappointed that there were not more of them; they evinced little interest in the science that lay behind the objects.¹³

Living conditions in America received the most interest from the Soviet audience. The most popular questions were, “How much are wages? How much is needed to live? Does every worker have a car? Can one buy land in the U.S.?”¹⁴ According to the report, this was not simple curiosity but rather a sign of frustration with everyday life in the Soviet Union, especially the consumer goods situation.

Given acute shortages of consumer goods such as cars, washing machines, stylish clothes, and many others, the Soviet people viewed the United States as the land of plenty. Lacking reliable information about the West, Soviet people amplified this myth, imagining Americans to be much wealthier than they really were. The exhibition, therefore, served as testing ground for the myth, where Soviets could finally hope to see whether indeed every American had a car. But even more, as the USIA report put it, “It was as if the question uppermost in many visitors’ minds was ‘How would I be living (in material terms) if I were in America?’” In other words, Soviet visitors were actively comparing an American chimera with their own reality. The report also noted, however, that while questions about living conditions in America were more frequent in the Soviet Union, this was a world-wide phenomenon.¹⁵

American awareness of the Soviet Union was the second most common theme in Soviet questions at the exhibition. Some of the more typical included, “Which Russian

¹³ Ibid, p.ii-iii.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

composers are the most popular in the U.S.? What Russian writers are known in America? How many people are studying Russian in the States and why? How do you like Moscow?” While the USIA report was unsure as to the underlying reasons for such questions, Ronald Hingley, an expert in Russian literature, suggested that conversations with foreigners cause a conflict “between Russians’ outward self-confidence and inner uncertainty.” As part of his evidence he uses the notes of the prominent French writer Andre Gide who, after his 1936 trip to the Soviet Union, wrote:

It is not so much understanding of, it is recognition by, the West that Russian crave. Though they do take some interest in what is happening in foreign parts. They are far more concerned about what the foreigner thinks of them. What really interest them is to know whether we admire them enough. What they are afraid of is that we should be ill-informed as to their merits. What they want from us is not information but praise.¹⁶

This is further evidenced by some anonymous questions written on pieces of paper and passed to American guides during the exhibition. These included questions such as, “What is your impression of as to how well the Soviet people are informed as to what does on in America? Is it true that we paid you on Lend Lease? How much?”¹⁷

In addition to perennial anxiety about Russian inferiority to the West, such questions also reflected Soviets wanting to understand their standing in the wider world, as little information of this sort was available to them. This frustration with lack of outside information and inability “to see for themselves” was evidenced again in the anonymous questions. These included things such as, “Why do Soviet agencies not permit wide travel of Soviet citizens to the U.S.A.? I would like to see all with my own eyes?”¹⁸ Interestingly, this question is not a question at all. Why would American exhibition guides have better insight as to why Soviet agencies do not allow more Soviet

¹⁶ Quoted in Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 145.

¹⁷ NA P142/1/15 p.3-4.

¹⁸ Ibid.

people to travel to the U.S.? In fact, this question/statement was a simple voicing of irritation with the Soviet system, perhaps hoping that Soviet authorities would read them.

The topic of technology and science elicited frequent questions such as, “Has U.S. medicine discovered any drugs successful in the treatment of cancer? What development first made possible miniaturization of mass-produced radio sets? How many satellites has the U.S. fired successfully?” According to the report, what the Soviet visitors were most interested in was not technology itself, but rather how that technology could be applied to daily life (see Illustration 14). Consequently, the USIA report suggested that more consumer-oriented technology be included in future exhibitions.¹⁹ As with the questions about living conditions in America, Soviet interest in consumer technology reflected not only curiosity about America but also a commentary on the Soviet system that failed to provide adequately for people’s consumer demands.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.5-6.



Soviet visitors checking out American TVs at the 1959 American Exhibition in Moscow (Illustration 14)²⁰

Just as questions about American living conditions and consumer goods reflected Soviet deficiency in those spheres, questions regarding American education signaled Soviet pride in their own accomplishments in the area. “Can workers’ children go to college?” “What sort of fellowships do you have? How much is average?” “Is education free in the U.S.?” “How do students pay for education?”²¹ These, the more common questions about American education system (the second most popular topic), showed Soviet people’s desire to verify what they had been told for years by domestic propaganda—namely, that education in America was only available to the rich. In

²⁰ Photo courtesy of <http://publicdomainclip-art.blogspot.com/2010/05/television-sets-at-american-national.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²¹ Ibid, 35.

addition, it showed pride that the Soviet Union was able to provide free quality education to all. The assumption of superiority in this realm had been further reinforced by recent Soviet achievements in area of space exploration.

American music, particularly jazz and rock and roll, ranked high among Soviet interests about America. USIA noted that in large part, this interest was fueled by “Music USA” a popular *Voice of America* (VOA) broadcast run by Willis Conover. In fact, Willis Conover “would be considered one of the big names of the decade by the majority of Soviet youth. His programs have an enormous following,” wrote one American exhibition guide in a letter back home.²² At one point, *American Newsweek* magazine ran an article about an American who was stopped on the Red Square and asked if he could pass some music requests to Conover.²³ Furthermore, interest in American music was “not confined to excitement-loving younger generation” but ran across various age and social groups.²⁴

American culture and other forms of American music, such as classical, received little interest from Soviet audiences. One exception was exhibition of American abstract art. It evoked both strong positive and negative feelings, but mainly a sense of confusion from the Soviet people, who asked “What explains the impulse towards abstract paintings and sculpture in Europe and the U.S.?” “What is abstract painting as practiced by American artists?” “Is the work of contemporary artists in the U.S. intelligible to the general public?” “What do the pictures mean? What do they say?” “Do Americans

²² Interviews with former exhibition guides conducted by the State Department. <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110892.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²³ RGANI f. 5 o. 33 d. 95 l. 44.

²⁴ NA P142/1/15 p.7-8. I discuss this further in my chapters on unofficial information and Soviet youth.

really understand abstract art?”²⁵ It appears that in their responses to American art, Soviets received their cue from official statements on the subject, considering that popular comments closely resembled those of Nikita Khrushchev, who described one of the American abstract paintings at the exhibit as if “a little boy pissed on the canvas.”²⁶

Soviet attitudes towards the American system of government pointed to the fact that what the Soviet people were most interested in was not America as a country, but how America related to the Soviet Union in areas Soviets deemed themselves deficient – salary, access to consumer goods and freedom of movement. According to USIA, the subject of American freedoms, American politics and American foreign policy received little attention from Soviet visitors. The two exceptions were freedom to travel and freedom of access to information. “Are there really no passports for traveling within the United States?” “Are the works of Marx and Lenin available in the U.S.?” were some of the most popular questions on the topic.²⁷ On the other hand, questions regarding American salaries, American prices, and availability of living space consistently ranked at the top of Soviet questions.²⁸

Since the Soviet government restricted both travel and information, the Soviet people wanted to see how this aspect of their own system compared to others, in this case America. “In many minds [of Soviet visitors] the question might have been “You boast

²⁵ Ibid, 44-45.

²⁶ Interview with former U.S. Embassy cultural attaché at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOl2imi10Q0>. Accessed April 22, 2012. Khrushchev made similar remarks about Soviet avant-garde artists while attending an art exhibition at Manezh Exhibition Hall in 1962; see William Taubman, *Khrushchev : the man and his era* (New York : W.W. Norton, 2003), 530-532.

²⁷ Ibid, p.10.

²⁸ Interviews with former exhibition guides conducted by the State Department. <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/c26659.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

so much about your freedom, but are you actually much more free than we are?" noted the USIA report.²⁹ Consequently,

Most of the questions on communication through the press and other media (obviously a particularly sore subject at home) show that they have about American academic freedom and freedom of the press and assembly much of the ingrained skepticism that they do about their own. It is often assumed, for example, that Soviet broadcasting in the U.S. is jammed that books on Marxism-Leninism are forbidden to the general public, and that when the press fails to give full coverage to Soviet news it is by government order.³⁰

The negative, or antagonistic, comments ranked low on the most frequently asked questions list. The IBM computer RAMAC, designed to answer questions about America, received far fewer negative comments than did the exhibition guides. USIA attributed this to the fact that, in part, Soviet people wanted to see a human reaction to these types of questions. "Courtesy bias" also contributed to the relatively low numbers of negative questions/comments. In wishing to be good hosts and in the spirit of peaceful coexistence, many Soviets deliberately avoided what could be considered as rude questions. The USIA report also speculated that many people asking seemingly accusatory questions in fact were looking for American guides to answer these questions in a way that would reaffirm their belief that the Soviet press distorted facts about America.³¹ This was a reasonable assumption given a general Soviet distrust of more sensational facts about the West in official media.

The types of negative questions centered around three major themes: unemployment, racism, and American military bases. Not surprisingly, these topics were also central in official (newspapers, radio, lectures) Soviet criticism of the U.S. "How do the unemployed live in America?" "Why do you have unemployment?" "How many

²⁹ NA P142/1/15 p.10.

³⁰ Ibid, 17.

³¹ Ibid, p.11.

Negroes have been lynched in the U.S. since 1950?” “Can Negroes and whites go to the same schools?” “Why does the U.S. have bases around Russia?” “Why doesn’t America want peace?” asked Soviet visitors.³²

Such questions reflected not so much curiosity about America but a way of testing and confirming their ideas about their own country, specifically the media. Under the surface of these questions, Soviet citizens were asking, “To what level is the Soviet press distorting the image of America?” This was a way to reaffirm their already set ideas about America, and in some ways about the Soviet Union. Many Soviet people knew that America was a much wealthier country, at least in terms of the standard of living. Due to Western radio broadcasts such as the VOA and BBC and the weakening Soviet censorship, Soviet people began to realize that an average American family had much more living space, more consumer goods, and higher wages. As the leading Soviet-American sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh noted,

Since 1953, this situation [censorship] has changed substantially. Even when the jamming of foreign radio broadcasts is in effect, a significant segment of the population is able to listen. In our survey of Pravda readers in 1968, about 10 percent of the respondents acknowledged that they listened regularly to foreign radio broadcasts.

With foreign radio systematically informing the population of developments on the domestic and international scenes, and with the vast network of informal communication, it is more difficult for the leadership to ignore information from the West. All propaganda dealing with major events must take into consideration how foreign radio broadcasts will deal with these events.³³

Soviet authorities took note and incorporated new realities into official propaganda.

Thomas Robertson, one of the American exhibition guides, also noted this trend in Soviet treatment of the unemployment issue in America: the official Soviet news sources began

³² Ibid, 12-14.

³³ Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 43.

to mention existence of unemployment benefits in the US. Although quickly stating that these were not available to only a few.³⁴

Thus, the Soviet mass media also acknowledged the gap in consumer products, but at the same time stressed that the Soviet Union had a better social safety net. As we saw earlier, this was quite evident from the popularity of questions about American consumer culture and critical questions about poverty in America.

It would be inaccurate to say that the Soviet people did not believe their sources of official information. In fact it appears that they did, especially in regard to international affairs.³⁵ They were, however, concerned that they were not getting the whole picture.

Exhibitions in the 1960s and 1970s

Visitor Demographics and factors influencing attendance

Exhibition attendance ranged anywhere from 3600 per day (102,450 total over 28 days), as was the case during *Agriculture: USA* in Kishinev in 1978, to around 20,000 per day (28 days total) at same exhibit in Kiev.³⁶ Several factors influenced attendance: location, theme, weather conditions, time of year, advertising, as well as the attitude of local authorities. At times it was simply a matter of physical capacity. At *Agriculture: USA* in Kiev, for example, “The walls actually started to burst out sometimes, just

³⁴ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

³⁵ Shlapentokh notes, “Surveys in the USSR show that the majority of people perceive life in the United States much as it is presented in the official mass media. Yet when the issue is domestic life in the USSR, people are substantially more critical of official description, partly because these descriptions clash with their own experiences, but also because they are more emotionally involved in their everyday concerns than with developments in other countries,” *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 120.

³⁶ NA P142/47/5 (cover).

because of the press of people,” “I mean, we had lines out the door that were sometimes a mile long;” “I will never forget that despite the difficult climate conditions, we would have people who would show up at six, seven o’clock in the morning and just stand in line until the exhibit opened at ten,” remembered several of the American guides.³⁷ During particularly hot and busy days a number of people fainted.³⁸

The location (what city) and theme of the exhibit played an important role, as during the *Agriculture: USA* exhibit. For instance, a significantly higher number of people attended the Dushanbe, Tajikistan, exhibit because it was a provincial town and it was the first American exhibit in the city. The same was true of Rostov-na-Donu.³⁹ On the other hand, the same exhibit in Moscow drew fewer people because of the exhibition’s theme, as highly urban Muscovites had little interest in agriculture.⁴⁰

At times, local authorities tried to influence exhibitions’ attendance. The authorities’ cooperation depended on the location; in provincial locales they were generally less helpful, and cooperation waxed and waned in relation to the current state of Soviet-American relations.⁴¹ At *Plastics U.S.A.* in Moscow in August, 1961, Soviet authorities went out of their way to make sure that the exhibit was a success. Newspapers ran positive reviews and troublemakers were quickly escorted out.⁴² The same was true of *Technical Books: USA* exhibit in Kiev in 1963.⁴³

Along with observations of the American staff, we have some concrete evidence from the Russian archives dealing with the subject of local Soviet authorities and

³⁷ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110528.htm>, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110533.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

³⁸ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110528.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

³⁹ NA P142/47/33.

⁴⁰ NA P142/47/7 p.5.

⁴¹ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/c26659.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁴² NA P142/5/48 p.7.

⁴³ NA P142/16/160 p.1.

American exhibitions. One such document includes a list of actions to be taken by authorities in Alma-Ata (Kazakhstan) to counteract the “Photography: USA” exhibit in 1976. In it, Alma-Ata officials were instructed to:

- Hold propaganda events focusing on the general crisis of capitalism, unemployment, crime, and racism. (600 people were assigned to this task.)
- Form a special militia to patrol the hotel and place of exhibition to maintain order.
- Keep away people known for bad behavior – people with mental problems, easy women, beggars...etc
- Make sure Americans are comfortable and well fed.
- Schedule events for Americans during their free time, for the duration of their stay.
- Have local newspapers publish more information on Soviet accomplishments – domestic and foreign.
- Schedule more entertainment events in the city as well as outdoor excursions.⁴⁴

As we can see, the main goal was to limit interactions between Soviet people and American staff by occupying their time with various activities. Furthermore, Soviet authorities sought to downplay and counteract any positive information about America that the average Soviet person might pick up at the exhibition. In general, we see that in case of Alma-Ata, official instructions did not call for active or aggressive attempts to interfere with the exhibit or limit its attendance.

In other cases, however, American personnel not only received little help from local authorities, but at times were met with resistance. At *Agriculture: USA* in Kishinev, in December 1978 for example, local authorities discouraged attendance of the exhibition. According to some reports, workers at several factories were told not to attend the exhibition or write positive comments in the comment book. Students at local schools were warned that exhibit was little more than anti-Soviet propaganda and a

⁴⁴ RGANI f.5 o. 69 d. 381 l. 1-3.

majority of guides were CIA agents.⁴⁵ At the same exhibit in Dushanbe (1978), volunteer security (*druzhinniki*) were rude to the visitors and did attempt to intimidate some people from writing in the comment book and from talking to the American guides. Several visitors (those involved in long conversations with American staff or visiting the exhibit more than once) reported that local officials questioned them afterwards.⁴⁶

Such methods, however, had little if any effect. The Dushanbe exhibit, for example, did not see a decrease in number of visitors or in their disposition, despite harassment and negative local press.⁴⁷ In fact, the only thing that kept the Soviets away from American exhibitions was when they coincided with New Year holidays--a time when the Russians were busy rushing around buying presents and food.⁴⁸

At times, hostility from Soviet authorities had the opposite of the intended affect. During *Architecture: USA* in Minsk (1965), negative articles in local newspapers helped spread the knowledge of the exhibit. Local officials apparently warned Soviet citizens to stay away from the exhibit at lectures at factories and other locales; large posters criticizing American foreign policies were hung up around town; and pamphlets depicting America in a negative light were distributed.⁴⁹ Despite all this official discouragement, around nine thousand visitors a day came to the exhibit for the month it was open.

In general, American exhibitions received a colder reception in provincial cities. Along with attempts to limit attendance, there was a lot more surveillance of the American guides, and at times even harassment. Some of the guides reported incidents

⁴⁵ NA P142/47/5 p.3.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.1,4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.3.

⁴⁹ NA P142/27/144 p.ii.

where people, presumably undercover security officials, came up to them and said things such as “You American imperialist. American imperialist bastards.”⁵⁰ Others noticed heavy surveillance in places such as Tbilisi and Minsk.⁵¹ The most likely explanation for this phenomenon was that while Moscow and Leningrad were accustomed to receiving foreign visitors, almost all other Soviet cities saw very few. Therefore, authorities were trying to be extra vigilant in preventing American “propaganda” from infecting virgin territories.

According to USIA report advertisements during Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts and word of mouth served as some of the primary ways by which Soviet people heard about American exhibitions.⁵² Mention of exhibit in the Soviet press, even negative ones, also spread the word about the existence of the exhibit.

An average exhibition saw more men than women visitors. Some of the guides attributed this to the fact that Soviet women had to both work and take care of the family, leaving little spare time to attend exhibitions.⁵³ Even Soviet publications of this period admitted to this reality, and a survey of former Soviet citizens both men and women agreed that Soviet women had a more difficult life in the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ Regional differences also played a role in gender distribution. Thus, in Dushanbe, men constituted a much larger proportion of visitors at the *Agriculture: USA* (1978) exhibit, most likely due to old tribal customs that were still present in Soviet Tajikistan, especially in rural

⁵⁰ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110890.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁵¹ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110892.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁵² <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110519.htm>, NA P142/27/144 p.ii.

⁵³ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110530.htm>.

⁵⁴ Millar, 51. Also see Natalia Baranskaia, “A Week Life Any Other,” in *A Week Like Any Other: Novellas and Stories*, trans. Pieta Monks (Seattle: Seal Press, 1990), pp. 1-62.

areas.⁵⁵ In general, though, exhibit's subject matter had the most noticeable effect on whether more men or women attended. Thus *Agriculture: USA* exhibits consistently saw fewer women, regardless of location, than the *Technical Books: USA*, where at times women outnumbered men.⁵⁶ In almost all cases, however, men constituted an overwhelming majority of those who filled out questionnaires provided by the exhibit staff.⁵⁷

The type of people who attended American exhibitions varied depending on whether it was held in the two major cities (Moscow, Leningrad) or somewhere else. Almost always, exhibitions in Moscow and Leningrad drew a more refined crowd that, on average, was better informed and better educated.⁵⁸ Other cities saw a different audience, such as at the *Technical Books – USA* exhibit in Kiev (1963), where a majority (around 90%) of those attending the exhibition tended to be “common people” (industrial and farm workers, rather than experts in technical fields).⁵⁹ A few years later American guides noticed the same thing at a Minsk exhibition where “the audience was noticeably less sophisticated on the average than the audience in Leningrad.”⁶⁰ As a result, concluded USIA report, “visitors in Minsk stuck more stubbornly to their preconceived notions or to propaganda about the U.S. domestic scene and foreign policies.”⁶¹

⁵⁵ NA P142/47/33 p.1,4.

⁵⁶ NA P142/16/160 p.1.

⁵⁷ NA P142/15/119 p.1,3-5, P142/16/160 p.1.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ NA P142/16/160 p.1.

⁶⁰ NA P142/27/144 p.ii.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Why people came

Considering the highly specialized nature of some of the exhibits, such as the *Plastics: USA* for example, we must ask: why did so many Soviet people attend American exhibitions? Based on the nature of the visitors' questions and observations of American guides, with a few exceptions, Soviet visitors in the 1960s and 1970s came for largely the same reasons as those who attended the 1959 Moscow exhibition. In particular, they came out of simple curiosity about America, and a desire to know where the Soviet Union stood in the larger international community and to see if what the Soviet press wrote about America was true. This was especially true of the "common people" (industrial and farm workers, rather than experts in technical fields) who, in contrast to the specialists looking for concrete technical information, came largely to "see Americans first hand [and to] view a slice of American life and American products."⁶² They also may have heard about souvenirs that were being distributed at the exhibitions, as will be discussed below.⁶³

As a rule, visitor questions had little to do with the theme of the exhibit. "[T]hey didn't care about the exhibit. They mostly wanted to ask about life in the USA: What does your father do? What does your mother do? How much does he make? What does your education cost? How much will you make when you get a job? Do you have a car?"

⁶² NA P142/16/160 p.1, P142/15/119 p.1,3-5.

⁶³ American souvenirs were very popular with Soviet visitors as early as the 1959 exhibition where "You had to work with your elbows [to get] where cans with 'USA' written at the bottom were produced and given away." Quoted in Gretchen Simms, "The 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow and the Soviet Artistic Reaction to the Abstract Art" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2007), 114.

remembered one guide at *Plastics: USA* exhibit.⁶⁴ A guide from a photography exhibit recalled that:

Very quickly, step by step, the questions went from specific to the camera, or whatever other aspect of photography we were demonstrating, into economic questions and then political questions. The jump from ‘who can afford to buy this camera?’ to ‘how much does a kilo of meat cost?’ was usually only one step. And from there, questions about your personal upbringing, your background as an American was fair game, how much you made, how much you were being paid to be on this exhibit.⁶⁵

This was especially true of cities that received few foreign visitors due to their remote location or not being part of official tourist itineraries. At *Agriculture: USA* in Dushanbe, for example, questions about agriculture were few and far between, usually serving as “ice-breakers” in order to steer the conversation towards other aspects of American life not related to agriculture.⁶⁶ Guides at other exhibits reported similar observations.⁶⁷ The *Plastics: USA* exhibit in Tbilisi in 1961 was the first American exhibition in the city and therefore people showed up less interested in the exhibition itself and more in making “first contact” with real Americans, and finding out first-hand about life in America. As a result they asked the guides many more personal questions than Muscovites.⁶⁸ One notable exception was the 1962 *Medicine: USA* exhibit in Moscow. There, almost all of the exhibit visitors were medical professionals, a majority of whom were interested only in medical topics. Therefore, questions “run between 90 and 95 percent about matters specifically related to or growing out of the exhibition itself and its subject matter. Personal queries directed at the guides have been few, relatively. Questions about life in the U.S. have been even fewer,” reported USIA.⁶⁹ Unlike almost all others, this exhibit

⁶⁴ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110892.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶⁵ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110528.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶⁶ NA P142/47/33 p.8.

⁶⁷ NA P142/27/144 p.3, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110519.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶⁸ NA P142/6/59 p.5.

⁶⁹ NA P142/7/25 p.1.

showed “acceptance of the idea that it is essentially a professional medical display rather than a popular engagement.”⁷⁰ In contrast, the same exhibit in Kiev drew far fewer professionals and more ordinary people who, much like visitors in other provincial towns, wanted to know about typical life in America.⁷¹

The exception of *Medicine: USA* in Moscow notwithstanding, the vast majority of American exhibitions were not simply a way of familiarizing the Soviet audience with various aspects of American industry, technology, or other narrow fields, but rather they served as important points of contact between ordinary citizens of two superpowers standing on opposite sides of the Cold War. When given the opportunity, Soviet people were eager to know about the details of the daily lives of their rivals, and how those lives compared to their own existence. Moreover, people in towns outside of Moscow and Leningrad saw American exhibitions as a kind of a carnival. Lacking the leisure options of the big two, they tended to treat them as “public entertainments, as a kind of recreation in an existence comparatively barren for opportunities for amusement.”⁷² One American guide recalled talking to a man in Ufa, who brought a button and a brochure from a previous American exhibit, four or five years prior, and talked about it as one would about a time when “a circus came to town.”⁷³

Soviet curiosity about America revolved primarily around the subject of American standard of living. Many Soviets thought themselves behind the US in this area. So they frequently asked questions about the American standard of living such as the number of cars an American family owns, or the size of an average American house,

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.6.

⁷¹ NA 142/8/45 p.2.

⁷² NA 142/8/45 p.6-7.

⁷³ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

all signs of American wealth that the Soviet media could hardly deny. Writing about the *Architecture: USA* (1965) exhibition in Minsk a USIA report noted that “Visitors in Minsk followed the usually pattern of seemingly endless enquiries about the price of butter in the U.S., the average wage, and how much one can buy for a dollar, how much does a car cost, how much rent do you pay for an apartment, and so forth.”⁷⁴

Furthermore, in private conversations, a majority of visitors tended to admit that Soviet standard of living lagged behind that of America. However, most of them attributed that to recent devastation from World War II than to any flaw in the Soviet system.⁷⁵

The question of “Is it really like that?” came up over and over again, at the 1979 *Agriculture: USA* exhibit in Moscow, when visitors wanted to talk about the American standard of living. Many Soviet visitors thought of Americans as being rather well off, despite official Soviet portrayal of the U.S. as a country with a small and ultra-wealthy elite oppressing half-starved masses. A majority of the questions about American standard of living revolved around issues most faced by the Soviets in their own daily lives. Many asked about housing, a major problem in the Soviet capital. How much living space does an average American have? How much does it cost to buy/rent a house or an apartment? What are American houses/apartments like? As in other places, many Muscovites asked about prices of various consumer goods, a constant concern for the average Soviet citizen.⁷⁶ For the most part, Muscovites took a largely objective view of American life, as a USIA report observed:

there were individuals at both extremes- those who idealized conditions in the U.S., and those who painted American life in the grimmest colors. But the mass of people seemed able to take a relatively balanced view, appreciating to some extent the generally high

⁷⁴ NA P142/27/144 p.12.

⁷⁵ NA P142/5/32 p.18.

⁷⁶ NA P142/47/7 p.22-23.

standard of living in American society but recognizing that the American system and way of life has its disadvantages and virtues.⁷⁷

In short, Soviet questions about America reflected issues that were central to their lives in the Soviet Union. Through these questions, Soviets seem to be wondering how they personally would live as Americans.

At the same time, they expressed reservations when told about the existence of various American social safety nets such as social security and medical insurance. Official Soviet propaganda taught that while a small percentage of Americans were wealthy, the rest were poor and had few options to safeguard themselves from exploitation by the rich.⁷⁸

While most Soviets agreed that certain consumer goods were cheaper and more accessible in America, they still preferred the Soviet system with free education, medical care and subsidized housing. Many envisioned America as a frightening place with criminals taking over cities at night and unemployed dying on the streets. In short, they preferred their more structured and secure lives in the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ “On a few occasions, visitors even asserted, “We would prefer to have a lower standard of living and full employment than to have cars and refrigerators – and joblessness.”⁸⁰ All of this tends to confirm that majority of the Soviet population largely believed the image of America painted in the Soviet mass media. American exhibition guides confirmed this general tendency, when they noticed that many Soviet visitors asked questions that were

⁷⁷ NA P142/47/7 p.23.

⁷⁸ NA P142/15/119 p.10-12.

⁷⁹ NA P142/47/33 p.14, 19.

⁸⁰ NA P142/7/1 p.10.

“motivated more by a desire to reaffirm preconceptions than to increase understanding,” an understanding largely gained from Soviet mass media.⁸¹

The availability of free American souvenirs, ranging from pins to copies of American Constitution, placed high on the list of factors that influenced attendance. At the 1976 *USA: 200 Years* exhibit in Moscow, souvenirs were the most popular items at the exhibit. The most popular item turned out to be, surprisingly, the plastic bags. When they ran out after four days “there were very many disappointed visitors.” In talks with the guides some visitors hinted that the majority of people came only for the souvenirs.⁸² In fact, the overall attendance of the exhibit appeared to have been determined by the speed with which Americans could hand out the gift package that included a lapel pin, record, plastic bag, exhibit brochure, and a copy of American Declaration of Independence and Constitution in Russian.⁸³ This was true of other exhibitions as well.⁸⁴

At times, souvenirs were the only things responsible for high attendance. This was especially true in larger cities such as Moscow. For example, being the capital, Moscow received a fair number of international exhibitions and Americanness was no longer sufficiently novel to draw large crowds. As a result, few outside a specialized audience were interested in attending, unless an exhibit had “desirable souvenirs (such as colorful plastic bags).”⁸⁵

Exhibition pins were another highly coveted item. Each exhibition had its own original pins that were handed out to Soviet visitors at the entrance. If for some reason

⁸¹ NA P142/15/119 p.5.

⁸² NA P142/42/10 p.4.

⁸³ NA P142/42/10 p.1.

⁸⁴ NA P160/35/19.

⁸⁵ NA P142/47/7 p.5.

there were no pins to hand out, many Soviets let their disappointment be known.⁸⁶ Collecting pins, or *znachki* in Russian, was (and still is, although to a lesser extent) a popular Soviet pastime. Consequently, American exhibition pins were a hot commodity because of their rarity and association with America. American exhibition guides recalled seeing American exhibition pins still being sold in Moscow as late as 2007.⁸⁷

Having little outside information about America, Soviet visitors to American exhibitions often sought to get their hands on American magazines because of the difficulties of obtaining them in Russia. Many complained that it was nearly impossible to buy or even subscribe to magazines such as *Amerika*, a magazine published by the U.S. State Department in the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ In fact, starting with the 1959 Moscow exhibit questions about *Amerika* and *America Illustrated* were as frequent as requests for pins and plastic bags.⁸⁹

Sometimes people complained that they could not get hold of *America Illustrated* journal and asked Americans to purchase more *Soviet Life* magazine so more *America Illustrated* would be made available in the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ In one conversation “two girls related how they had once seen a drunk carrying a copy of *Amerika*, and they had followed him down the street hoping he would drop it (he did once, but he picked it up). They said they were afraid to ask him for it.”⁹¹

At times, visitors took souvenir acquisition into their own hands. At the *USA: 200 Years* exhibition in Moscow, for instance, people stole labels off picture frames at a

⁸⁶ NA P142/5/32 p.4.

⁸⁷ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110890.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁸⁸ I talk more about *Amerika* in my chapter on unofficial information.

⁸⁹ NA P142/47/33 p.30, P142/47/7 p.29, P142/42/10 p.32.

⁹⁰ P142/42/10 p.32.

⁹¹ NA P142/27/144 p.22.

rate of about a hundred fifty per day.⁹² At the same time, Soviet people would get highly offended when exhibition personnel did anything to suggest that such practices took place. For example, there was quite a backlash at the Donetsk R&D exhibit when American organizers put the comment book pen on a chain to prevent it from being taken, undoubtedly a frequent happening at previous exhibits. As a result, a typical comment from the Donetsk exhibition read, “The exhibit is very good, but it’s not good to have your pen on a chain.”⁹³ To the Soviets, the chain signaled that Americans thought of Russians as thieves. And some visitors responded directly to such insinuations: “Soviet people are not thieves!” stated one Soviet visitor.⁹⁴

Soviet young people were frequent and enthusiastic--at times too enthusiastic--visitors to American exhibitions. Young people comprised majority of the so-called “exhibit groupies,” “those that make the rounds of all the exhibits, or those who seek out anything and everything American” at exhibitions such as *Agriculture: USA* in Moscow, February 1979.⁹⁵ At times, the younger audience was unhappy with the lack of music records and tapes, as well as other “cool” items such as jeans. Consequently, “guides were constantly asked if they had anything to sell or if they could give away exhibit display items as souvenirs.”⁹⁶ As a USIA report noted,

On some days, well over half the visitors were young people, and in Moscow, unlike Kishinev, many of those attending were adolescents (14 to 18 years of age). After school let out in the afternoon, the exhibit was usually overrun by boys in the 8 to 13 age bracket who created a nuisance with their tireless efforts to collect “souvenirs” (chewing gum, pens, badges, etc.) from exhibit personnel, and their repeated tours past the button and brochure give away stand, where they sought to get as many items as possible.⁹⁷

⁹² P142/42/10 p.4.

⁹³ NA 143/1 p.1.

⁹⁴ NA 143/1 p.15.

⁹⁵ NA P142/47/7 p.5.

⁹⁶ NA P142/47/33 p.11.

⁹⁷ NA P142/47/7 p.2.

It was not just the young, however, who hoped to obtain some of the exhibition items. At 1961 *Plastics: USA* Moscow exhibition, for example, many visitors were disappointed that it was impossible to purchase the goods on display at the exhibit. “Why can’t you sell us something,” was the most frequent complaint/question.⁹⁸ This “something” did not always imply souvenir items. Short on many products, Soviet visitors attempted to procure any deficit item they could get their hand on, especially if these products came from the West, as they were deemed higher quality. During *Medicine: USA* in Kiev, for instance, many visitors asked whether they could purchase American drugs.⁹⁹

Even more professional exhibits such as the *Medicine: USA* in Moscow were not immune to the “exhibit groupie” phenomenon. USIA American guides observed:

There continues to be the accustomed attendance of “Americanophiles” – primarily youths and students interested in first-hand contact with Americans, in practicing and demonstrating their knowledge of English, and the juveniles and teenagers among whom things Americans are apparently a cult, a possible gesture of bravado, and sometimes a source of profit.¹⁰⁰

In its report, the USIA also noted that these “Americanophiles” comprised an important segment of Soviet population. They were willing to accept American, or at least, different ideas. Therefore, US representatives hoped that as these children grew up, they would make up a “strategic audience” for American propaganda.¹⁰¹

In fact, this audience of young Soviets was so enamored with the West (or Western popular culture to be exact) that popularity was guaranteed simply by the fact that the thing or a person was from the West. For example, in Kishinev, a musical performance by an Irish group received a far more enthusiastic response from the

⁹⁸ NA P142/5/48 p.4.

⁹⁹ NA 142/8/45 p.12.

¹⁰⁰ NA P142/7/25 p.3.

¹⁰¹ P142/7/25 p.4. As we will see in the chapter on Soviet youth such hopes proved largely unfounded as one’s admiration of things American (music, clothes, etc.) rarely turned into opposition to the Soviet government.

audience than the local music group even though American guides judged the Soviet group to be better than its Irish counterpart.¹⁰² Western jeans were so popular that some people reported that several people in Kishinev were killed because assailants wanted their jeans.¹⁰³ Furthermore, young people were into Western disco music and often tried to turn school dances into kind of discothèques.¹⁰⁴

Soviet youth posed similar questions a decade earlier, in the 1960s, when young people often asked about the latest developments in rock music, especially their favorite rock groups and rock lifestyle in general. Some asked questions about pornography and “free love” and how these affected American society. The persistence of these questions over two decades signals the durability and longevity of the “cult of the West” among a certain segment of Soviet youth.¹⁰⁵

Soviet young people were also generally very interested in all aspects of student/college life in the United States. How did American students spend their free time? What classes did they take? How were they graded?¹⁰⁶ In short, they were interested in the same things as the Soviet adults, asking the question “How would I live if I lived in America?”

At times, visitors took the opportunity to vent their frustrations with the Soviet system, hoping that sharing their grievances with American exhibit personnel would somehow help their situation. As a result, some Soviet visitors came seeking help in immigrating, often dropping off letters to American president, Congress, Voice of

¹⁰² NA P142/47/5 p.20.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.17.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 32.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the subject, see Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*.

¹⁰⁶ NA P142/47/33 p.27-28.

America and the U.N.¹⁰⁷ At one exhibition, some of the visitors complained about shortages of certain goods in the Soviet Union to the American guides. One family, apparently frustrated by inability to purchase a car, wrote a detailed description of their struggles in the exhibit comment book, likely hoping Soviet officials would read the comments and help.¹⁰⁸

Public reactions to the exhibits

Soviet visitors' reactions to the content of American exhibits reveal not only what interested them about America, but also what they felt was lacking in their everyday life in the Soviet Union. Specifically, things with any type of aesthetic quality, especially in consumer products (cars being the most popular), received the most attention from visitors. This response reveals that visitors recognized how the Soviet Union still lagged behind America and the West in terms of quality consumer goods well after the 1959 Moscow Exhibition. Furthermore, Soviet reactions pointed to the fact that the Soviets were extremely sensitive to any kind of a perceived slight on the part of the Americans. This indicates, perhaps, a high level of insecurity about Soviet status in the world—a concern already expressed at the 1959 exhibition.

The list of missing/stolen books is an odd, yet rather telling, source of information about what really interested Soviet visitors. At the 1963 *Technical Books: USA* exhibit, for example, art and music (specifically jazz) books comprised majority of those missing, indicating a strong preference for aesthetic/entertainment subjects. This preference for

¹⁰⁷ P142/42/10 p.i.

¹⁰⁸ NA P142/47/33 p.11.

aesthetic, or “pretty” things, is also evident from the questionnaire answers where two of the most popular answers to “What did you particularly like about the exhibit?” were “External appearance of the books” and “General layout of the exhibit.”¹⁰⁹ At the 1965 *Architecture: USA* exhibitions, similar to Soviet fascination with external book bindings at the *Technical Books* exhibitions, Minsk and Leningrad audiences showed particular interest in things with aesthetic qualities. This was especially true of transparencies—an item unknown in the Soviet Union. Many commented on their beauty, wondered if these were paintings or photographs, and asked about the process of making them.¹¹⁰

One of the explanations for this phenomenon was the lack of what the general public would see as aesthetically pleasing consumer products in Soviet life, in this case books (usually exemplified by absence of bright/vivid colors). This was still the case more than ten years later at the 1974 Odessa exhibit when American officials noted that: “[Exhibit’s] kaleidoscopic colors have an obvious impact. A woman in her twenties commented wistfully, “It must be very pretty in your country where everything is not dull grey, green, brown, or black.” A young man said that compared to the exhibit, everything in the Soviet Union was colored as if the country were expecting war.”¹¹¹ At the 1978 *Agriculture: USA* in Dushanbe, the exhibit’s aesthetic qualities were again one of the most popular features with Soviet visitors. Visitors especially liked the “colorfulness” of the exhibit presentation.¹¹²

Another explanation (I think both probably play a role), for *Technical Books: USA* questionnaire answers, is that there were simply not enough questionnaire options to

¹⁰⁹ NA P142/15/119 p.5.

¹¹⁰ NA P142/27/144 p.2.

¹¹¹ NA P160/35/19 p.i.

¹¹² NA P142/47/33 p.8.

choose from and “External appearance of the books” and “General layout of the exhibit” seemed like the most generic, friendly options. And Soviet people, not used to filling out questionnaires, (that is, solicitations of public opinion) just put them down because they thought they had to put something. Another sign of this was the fact that the option of “general approval” was the number one choice.

Technology, especially consumer technology, consistently drew a lot of attention from Soviet visitors. Various agricultural machines, for example, were the stars of the *Agriculture: USA* exhibits in almost every city.¹¹³ This was particularly true of the Dodge pickup truck, which was usually the most popular item in the whole exhibit from Dushanbe to Kishinev.¹¹⁴ The popularity of the pickup truck highlighted the general appeal of American cars among Soviet people. “American automobiles seem to be an object of fascination for many Soviets,” noted one USIA report,¹¹⁵ an accurate statement for other American exhibitions.¹¹⁶

Years later an architect from Kiev remembered how an American automobile shaped his career decision:

My memory often strays back to a summer day in 1967. Then 6 years old, I was taken by my mother to the "Industrial Design in the USA" exhibition put on Kiev. It was an United States Information Agency (USIA) exchange expo. I was struck by the looks of gorgeous, sculptural lines of 1967 Buick Riviera in gold paint. Such an automobile was very unusual in the former Soviet Union. This event has become one of the brightest days of my childhood, sparked my interest in design and influenced my decision to become an Architect.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ibid, p.6.

¹¹⁴ NA P142/47/33 p.29, P142/47/5 p.7, P142/47/13 p.i.

¹¹⁵ NA P142/47/33 p.29.

¹¹⁶ NA 143/1, P142/42/10 p.23.

¹¹⁷ http://history.gmheritagecenter.com/wiki/index.php/Greetings_from_1967,_USSR. Accessed April 22, 2012.

Smaller consumer technology was also extremely popular with Soviet audiences. Things such as the eight-track tape player, headphones, and home canning and preserving equipment, for example, produced a high level of excitement from Soviet visitors.¹¹⁸

Frequently, expectations exceeded reality. Having imagined America as the leader in many technological fields, some visitors complained that technology at some of the exhibitions was outdated, that they anticipated better from a country like America. “If such are really your latest achievements, then the exhibit could stand much improvement,” wrote a Soviet visitor at the 1972 exhibition in Kazan, a sentiment echoed by many other visitors to that and other American exhibits.¹¹⁹

In fact, it was not just technology that carried heightened expectations, but almost all American products. Soviet visitors, used to inferior and bland quality of their domestic consumer products, and having little objective information about the West, envisioned American products to be light-years ahead of the Soviet Union. When these unrealistic expectations were not met, they came away disillusioned. A USIA report from a Kiev exhibit noted that:

Whatever his attitude towards American political and economic system may be (and it often appears to be most contradictory), he views America as a golden land. This view creates expectations, often extravagant ones, about showings of American products. When the average Kievan comes to an American exhibition, he frankly expects to be wowed. If he is not, he is often disappointed and not infrequently responds with exaggerated complaints and sometimes suspicion.¹²⁰

Once again location played a part in shaping Soviet reaction, as there was a marked difference between large open cities such as Moscow and Leningrad and other Soviet cities. Having fewer newest and best domestic products, little exposure to

¹¹⁸ NA P142/47/13 p.i, P142/42/10 p.i, P142/47/33 p.8.

¹¹⁹ NA 143/1 p.1.

¹²⁰ NA P142/5/32 p.11.

foreigners, or outside information about America, Soviets living in cities besides Moscow and Leningrad were easier to please than their more sophisticated compatriots. A USIA report stated

It would appear that the average Soviet citizen who lives in the provincial city is far less discriminating and sophisticated than his counterpart in the United States. He seems most easily impressed by the sheer size, the illusion of great variety, availability and low prices of consumer goods, by vividness of color and novelty.¹²¹

While many Soviets were indeed dazzled by what they saw at American exhibits, they also sought to find something to redeem their own country. Echoing Soviet press statements, one of the more frequent comments complimented America on its accomplishments but at the same time remarked that these were only accessible to a handful of rich Americans. “The exhibit is good—I wouldn’t say anything against it, but I don’t want to forget the bad aspects. Our Soviet achievements are for our use; that is, available to all. And yours?” “There are a lot of interesting things but everything is made for the upper classes, not for the common people –a bunch of lies,” wrote a visitor from Donetsk.¹²²

At another exhibition, Soviet visitors did not dismiss American claims outright but still questioned their validity: “Guides in the home area were repeatedly asked, ‘Are these goods really sold in the stores, or were they only produced for the exhibit? Can ordinary people buy them?’”¹²³ In this case, Soviet visitors not only questioned whether the exhibit was merely propaganda, but also projected their own worldview: most Soviet exhibits contained goods that were not readily available to the general public. As a rule, audiences in provincial cities voiced more defensive responses to American exhibitions

¹²¹ Ibid, p.10.

¹²² NA 143/1 p.14.

¹²³ NA P142/5/32 p.7.

than people in Moscow or Leningrad. “We have it too,” “Ours is better,” “America is good – USSR is better,” were the most common remarks. Most likely this was due to more “common” people, having little information about the outside world, attending exhibitions in provincial cities.¹²⁴

Similarly to the 1959 Moscow Exhibition, Soviet visitors at later American exhibitions also responded negatively to abstract art. At the 1961 *Plastics: USA* Kiev exhibition, for instance, the abstract art portion of the exhibit produced by far the most hostile reaction from Soviet visitors, with a consistent disapproval rating of over ninety percent. Most visitors objected on the basis that art should be more realistic, educational, and accessible to the masses. Those expressing the harshest criticism compared abstract art to “monkey smearing.”¹²⁵ However, the same exhibit received a more sympathetic response from an audience in Moscow, where close to half the people had a positive reaction to abstract art.¹²⁶ This contrast highlights differences in opinion and understanding between the ordinary and the more culturally-sophisticated visitors. It is likely that those overly critical of modern American art simply imitated official statements, thus signaling effectiveness of official propaganda on this issue.¹²⁷

Exhibits did produce a fair number of misunderstandings that resulted in comical or at times tense situations. For example, one American agricultural exhibit featured a number of life-sized stuffed pigs. As a sort of a joke, organizers made the pigs out of

¹²⁴ NA P142/5/48 p.3, 143/1 p.7.

¹²⁵ NA P142/5/32 p.10.

¹²⁶ NA P142/5/48 p.i.

¹²⁷ For example, watch former U.S. Embassy cultural attaché talk about Khrushchev’s negative comments about American avant-garde art during 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOl2imi10Q0>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

calico fabric with flower patterns. The reaction of Soviet visitors, however, was not one of amusement. One American guide recalled:

Why do you have your pigs in *fitochka*, why are they flowered? And so it was like, well it's just a joke. And they'd think well this is just not funny, you think we think pigs look like them, and we're like, no, of course not. But it was quite offensive to people. People really got on our case about that."¹²⁸

At another exhibition, it was the American football showcase that caused mass confusion and even produced some negative reactions about the game among Soviet visitors.

““American football is murder,” “Three or four players must be killed every game,” and “How many casualties do you have per game?” were typical of the response. One visitor compared the game to a “lynching party.”¹²⁹

During 1961 *Plastics U.S.A.* exhibition in Kiev the guides made a list of strange questions asked of them by Soviet visitors. Some of the more remarkable include: “Do they permit capitalism in the USA?” “Do Negroes speak English?”¹³⁰ “How old is the average American horse?”

“How successful would a Russian woman be on a Nevada love ranch?”¹³¹ One Soviet visitor stated that Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin killed themselves because they were forced to work for months without stopping so the music company owners could make more money.¹³²

Sometimes, questions dealt with American topics that received a lot more coverage in the USSR than in the U.S. Such was the case with Dean Reed, a uniquely Eastern bloc phenomenon. Little known in the United States where he was born, Dean Reed was wildly popular in the Soviet bloc countries, particularly Eastern Germany. He

¹²⁸ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110535.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹²⁹ NA P142/5/32 p.8.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ P142/42/10 p.6.

¹³² Ibid, p.19.

developed an image of a country singer who protested against various injustices of the Western world--an image that the Soviet bloc leaders enthusiastically supported. As a result, American guides were forced to field questions about Dean Reed's recent arrest in Minnesota where he was involved in a protest over power lines.¹³³

Face to face with Americans: exhibit guides

Overall, American guides were the real stars of the exhibitions and as a result they received the most positive and energetic reactions from Soviet people almost everywhere they went.¹³⁴ A majority of the comment books contained some praise for American guides, complimenting their openness, friendliness, and ability to speak Russian.¹³⁵ The only negative comments about the guides referred to their limited knowledge of the exhibit's subject matter.

A majority of the guides were American university students in their early 20s, who either had graduated or were completing their studies. They came from all over the United States and a variety of academic majors, from journalism to Asian studies. Usually, the only thing they had in common was their interest in the Russian language. Most found out about the program through the State Department, others from USIA posters that read "Go to Russia and get paid for it too."¹³⁶ In order to qualify for the program applicants had to pass a language assessment exam and an interview, testing their knowledge of current events and ability to answer a great variety of questions.

¹³³ NA P142/47/33 p.26.

¹³⁴ P142/42/10, 143/1.

¹³⁵ P142/42/10 p.5.

¹³⁶ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110519.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

USIA chose guides based largely on their language ability. Therefore, most had little idea about the subject matter, and people with no previous knowledge of the subject had to become relatively proficient within a short period of time. “We were taught about berry production and swine herding,” recalled one guide from *Agriculture: USA* exhibit, who had no prior experience with agriculture.¹³⁷ Since guides alternated among various sections of the exhibit, they had to know something about everything that was presented at the exhibit, further complicating the situation. And frequently, the guide’s poor grasp of the subject matter showed and was consequently the weakest part of the exhibition program according to comments from Soviet visitors.¹³⁸

Besides being interpreters, serving as citizen ambassadors, and having to learn about the numerous subject matters presented at the exhibit, USIA expected the guides to set up and take down exhibition stands. Building the exhibit was no easy task. It took around two weeks to set up and one week to take down, and required some grasp of the stand’s blueprints and carpentry skills.¹³⁹ Considering that some of the exhibitions traveled to five or more cities, this added a significant load to their already busy schedule. And at times these extra duties were not simply tedious but dangerous as well. “The first week I was there I think I got a shock every day I was working,” remembered one guide who also had the job of assistant electrician.¹⁴⁰

Once the exhibits opened their doors, the general reaction of Soviet people to American guides was friendly and warm. Meeting a real live American was one of the main goals for most Soviets attending exhibitions. USIA recognized this fact, and

¹³⁷ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110535.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹³⁸ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110529.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012, NA P142/47/33 p. 6, NA 143/1.

¹³⁹ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110890.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

consequently selected ordinary students, and not specialists, to serve as guides. Because the guides were not official employees of the United States government, they did not have to adhere to any official policy of the U.S., nor were they expected to do so by the USIA. USIA officials wanted the guides to know what official policies were, but they were free to express their own opinions on any subject. And it was this honesty and openness of the American guides that impressed the Soviet citizens more than anything else, since they were used to censoring their own opinions if they deviated from the official line.¹⁴¹ “There was always credibility about the guides because people were telling their own stories,” noted a former guide.¹⁴² Another guide, in talking about some Soviet visitors trying to get the official stance of the American government by asking all of the guides the same questions, remembered that:

they found that they would get, for the same question, 23 different answers from the 23 various guides. Often times, [the answers] were very critical of one or another of the U.S. government’s official policies. To me, there was no more powerful example of American democracy than this sort of illustration to Soviet citizens -- that there is no government line and that we make up our own minds.¹⁴³

In their interactions with the guides, Soviet visitors were usually courteous and friendly. Most simply wanted to have a face-to-face conversation with Americans, and few behaved in an antagonistic manner. When certain people did harass the guides, “the crowd would silence them. They would say like, ‘oh quit bothering her,’ ‘leave her alone,’ ‘she’s answering the questions,’ and ‘go away.’ So there was really a lot of good feeling that you could evoke just by being a normal sort of human being and smiling and responding to the questions,” recalled an American guide.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110519.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴² <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴³ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110530.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110535.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

Often, Soviet visitors invited the guides to their homes. “There was no end to the invitations. They didn’t have a lot of material things, but when they invited you to be their guest, the tables would just be laden with everything from wines to vodka to cognac, to all kinds of food imaginable,” noted one of the guides.¹⁴⁵ Another remembered that “given Soviet hospitality at the time, which often included a lot of vodka and everything else – I mean people would really put on the spread. You had to be careful because you had to go back to work the next morning.”¹⁴⁶

Such hospitality, however, came with certain risks. For associating with foreigners, Soviet citizens risked questioning by the KGB. They could be reprimanded, or even lose their jobs. One guide recalled,

certainly in the 1960s and the 1970s – that if someone was seen meeting with Americans at the exhibit, or it came to the attention of the authorities, especially the KGB back then, that they were meeting, or God help you, you were having Americans over to your home – they might get called in by the officials and asked why they were spending all this time with Americans. There was a real suspiciousness about meeting with us.¹⁴⁷

While the Soviet government frowned upon any contact between Americans and Soviets during and outside exhibitions, the level of enforcement varied. At one exhibition, guides reported almost no home invitations in Minsk and numerous daily invitations in the Ukraine.¹⁴⁸ This difference in enforcement most likely depended on several factors such as the current state of U.S.-USSR relations and the attitudes of local party and security officials.

American guides were also not completely free from official oversight. Given the fact that most guides were young, U.S. authorities had to set a few rules regarding interaction with Soviet people. And guides faced consequences if their contact with

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110890.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110523.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Soviet people assumed a more intimate character. In several cases, U.S. government removed some guides from exhibitions for “being a little too loose.”¹⁴⁹

Negative perceptions about America

As we have seen in discussion of official propaganda, Soviet authorities had success portraying certain areas of American life in a negative light. As a result, Soviets held persistent negative opinions about the U.S. on issues of unemployment, racism, and crime. Visitor reactions further underscored the endurance of these views.

Unemployment

The topic of unemployment in the United States ranked the highest among all negative comments about America from Soviet visitors. This was true at the 1959 Moscow Exhibition, and again several years later at an exhibition in Kiev where it accounted for nineteen percent of all comments.¹⁵⁰ The trend continued into the late 1970s where the issue of unemployment still dominated discussions of American economic system among Soviet visitors.

Influenced by the Soviet media’s portrayal of America as a dog-eat-dog country, people often asked questions about social safety nets in America, with majority of the Soviet people having the idea that in America the unemployed were simply thrown out on the street and forgotten. Some wondered why American unemployed did not come to the Soviet Union for work.¹⁵¹ Most Soviet visitors thought unemployment levels were

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110535.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ NA 142/1/15 p.11, P142/5/32 p.17.

¹⁵¹ NA P142/47/33 p.21-22.

always high in the US, and when American workers lost their jobs, they sank into permanent poverty.¹⁵² Thus, the general opinion among the Soviet citizens attending American exhibitions, based mostly on reports from domestic mass media, held that American cities were drowning in starving unemployed workers who had little hope of bettering their situation.¹⁵³ This conception was revealed in questions such as “Do you have many suicides because of unemployment?” and statements such as “Your unemployed workers are left to starve to death.” Most did believe American guides about the wide availability of unemployment benefits, but many struggled to accept the size of American unemployment compensation, some asking “If you get that much, why do you bother to work at all?”¹⁵⁴

This view of American unemployment changed little in the twenty years since the 1959 Moscow exhibition, and most Soviet visitors in the late 1970s still saw America as a land of a few millionaires and millions of hungry workers out on the streets. Much like other questions about America, however, Soviet visitors’ questions about American unemployment did not reflect simple curiosity. The Soviet press devoted a lot of time to that particular subject and now the Soviet people wanted to know what Americans had to say about it. In this way, some Soviets were using the vehicle of the exhibit to test the truthfulness of the official Soviet press.¹⁵⁵

Racism

¹⁵² NA P142/27/144 p.9-10.

¹⁵³ NA P142/5/32 p.19-20, NA P142/47/33 p.23.

¹⁵⁴ NA 142/7/1/ p.9.

¹⁵⁵ NA P142/47/7 p.20-22.

As we saw earlier the question of racial discrimination was usually the second most popular negative topic of discussion, behind unemployment, among Soviet visitors. It was the eighth most frequent topic overall, and second in the negative comment category, at the 1959 Moscow exhibition.¹⁵⁶ At the *Plastics U.S.A.* exhibition in Kiev in 1961, American racial issues accounted for eight percent of references to American domestic issues.¹⁵⁷ The percentages were roughly the same for other cities visited by the same exhibition. The same was true almost twenty years later, for the *Agriculture U.S.A.* exhibit in 1979 that toured many Soviet cities.¹⁵⁸

For example, at the August, 1961, *Plastics U.S.A.* exhibition in Moscow, repeating sensational stories from the Soviet press, Muscovites asked whether blacks continued to be lynched in the South and why there were still separate facilities for blacks and whites.¹⁵⁹ Several years later, many in the audience at the Minsk Architecture: USA (July-Aug. 1965) expressed strong interest in U.S. racial relations. They wondered whether Negroes had the same employment and education opportunities as the whites, or simply why Americans did not like Negroes.¹⁶⁰ Racism towards African and Native Americans in the U.S. came up often as a subject of conversation more than a decade later at the *Agriculture: U.S.A* exhibition in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (Dec. 1978). Not realizing that this was outdated information, people often wondered why blacks were lynched, not allowed to eat at the same restaurants or attend the same schools as the whites.¹⁶¹ Some Soviet visitors associated American racial relations with violent conflict,

¹⁵⁶ NA 142/1/15 p.vi.

¹⁵⁷ NA P142/5/32 p.17.

¹⁵⁸ NA P142/47/33 p.25, P142/7/1 p.11.

¹⁵⁹ NA P142/47/7 p.24.

¹⁶⁰ NA P142/27/144 p.7-8.

¹⁶¹ NA P142/47/33 p.25.

but most thought that Black Americans faced wide spread discrimination and lacked the same opportunities as White Americans.¹⁶²

If we examine these statements in a proper context, however, we see that Soviet questions about racism in America were not so much an expression of anger or outrage, but simple curiosity—and perhaps even approval of discriminatory practices. Indeed, when Soviet citizens came in contact with people with black skin color (often, students from Africa) they were inclined to be just as racist as they imagined Americans to be, or even more so. For example, at the *Plastics U.S.A.* exhibition in Moscow in August, 1961, American guides noted that:

Curiously, many of the Muscovites who claim that racial prejudice is a negative force in American society appear themselves to be afflicted with this disease. Unlike Kievans, they have less frequently been willing to admit it. Among young people, and particularly university students, there is without question a real current of anti-African feeling. During the stay of PLASTICS U.S.A. in Moscow, several visitors reported that numerous incidents, including fist fights, have occurred between Muscovites and Africans here, and that resentment against Negroes who date Moscow girls is especially high. And one young man announced to a guide, “Do you know why I like Americans so much? Americans hate Negroes.”¹⁶³

American guides at the 1965 Minsk exhibition noticed many openly racist statements coming from the visitors, although not as many as at the same exhibition in Leningrad. When informed that Tbilisi was exhibit’s next destination, one elderly man stated that there they “will see our Negroes!” “Asked if Negroes and Americans associate in the US, the guide replied that Negroes are Americans, to which the old man replied, “Yes, but really, aren’t they crude...?” Conversations with African students in Minsk

¹⁶² P142/7/1 p.12.

¹⁶³ NA P142/5/48 p.19-20.

confirmed the presence of intense racism that made “their social and educational relationships... extremely difficult.”¹⁶⁴

Apparently Soviet visitors feelings towards black people remained largely unchanged when Agriculture U.S.A. exhibit toured the Soviet Union in late 1970s.

American guides at the Rostov-na-Donu exhibition in April, 1979 commented that:

Although visitors were fairly cautious about making public statements critical of the Black African foreign students, they often confided privately, or expressed in the company of friends, negative attitudes toward Black people. Under these circumstances a number of Rostovites unhesitatingly volunteered information that they did not like the Black students, or any Blacks, and thought virtually all Russians, regardless of what they said in public, felt the same. They were particularly disgusted and appalled to see Russian girls with the African students; Russian men very often labeled these girls prostitutes, declaring that they went out with the Africans in order to get desirable Western goods from them. Russians often characterized the Blacks as insolent, spoiled, and wild.¹⁶⁵

There were also reports of violent clashes between Blacks and local Rostov youth, even a mention of a murder of a black student a few years before the exhibition. But according to black students the violence towards them in the city was rare, although they did exercise certain precautions.¹⁶⁶ The same year, visitors to the Moscow exhibition expressed similar sentiments, some commenting that “it was just as well the Negroes were kept in their place in the U.S., as they were no doubt insolent and wild and uncultured,” others stated that “We don’t like Blacks here either.”¹⁶⁷ “There seems to be too many pictures of Negroes. Do they like to be photographed?” wrote one Muscovite in a

¹⁶⁴ NA P142/27/144 p.7-8. A letter to authorities written by a Soviet university student from Odessa in 1968 further confirmed such reports. He wrote: “Among international students, black students are treated the worst. They are called “blackasses” and are considered to be cruel, unclean, and have a high sex drive. Stories of assaults on blacks are very popular. The phrase “I would hang those black bitches” is heard frequently. They are accused of spreading syphilis and girls who have any relations with them are treated worst than prostitutes.” See RGANI f. 5 op. 60 d. 48 l. 142.

¹⁶⁵ NA P142/47/13 p.11.

¹⁶⁶ NA P142/47/13 p.12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p.22.

comment book, an unmistakably racist comment to anyone familiar with the Soviet mentality.¹⁶⁸

Even simple curiosity about African Americans by Soviet visitors was at times expressed in a rather crude way. One black American guide ended up quitting the exhibition because of the manner in which some of the Soviets approached her. Several times, for example, people came up and “would sort of poke her and say, ‘Is this skin real?’” Others simply refused to believe that she was “just American,” and “not African somehow.”¹⁶⁹

The level of racism among Soviet visitors seems to have differed depending on the ethnicity of the individual and his/her location. In Dushanbe, for example, Soviet visitors, who were mostly of Slavic origin, expressed a more pronounced dislike of “darker peoples,” due to their close interaction with the indigenous Tajik population.¹⁷⁰ Here a number of visitors combined material from Soviet press with personal feelings, remaining oblivious to the contradictions in their views:

[D]irected racist remarks against Africans and American Blacks. One moment they would be asking a guide in accusing tones about why there is discrimination against Negroes in America, the next they would declare righteously that there used to be a lot of African and Asian students in Dushanbe, but almost all of them were sent away because “those people are insolent and wild, they don’t behave like human beings.” Visitors would from time to time sidle up to the guide to confide that they did not like Negroes either and we Americans were right to hate them!¹⁷¹

Soviet minorities attending American exhibitions appeared to have a more positive view of blacks in America. Georgians at the 1961 exhibition in Tbilisi, for example, were more sympathetic to the American blacks than were visitors in Kiev or Moscow. A USIA report stated that, “Perhaps a part of an explanation of this reaction

¹⁶⁸ Что то много негров на снимках. Они, что, там любят фотографироваться? - NA 306/1043/2.

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110890.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ NA P142/47/33 p.25.

¹⁷¹ NA P142/47/33 p.16.

grows out of what appears to be a feeling among Georgians that they too are an oppressed people. On several occasions, Tbilisians have complained privately about the arrogance of the Russians in Georgia.”¹⁷² A statement by a visitor in Minsk confirmed ethnic tensions by referring to Georgians as “our Negros!”¹⁷³ The level of hostility towards blacks seems to have been lower in places that had few black residents, as was the case in Volgograd.¹⁷⁴

Crime

Along with unemployment, and racism, many Soviets brought up the problems of crime in America. Specifically, many were fascinated with

the issue of “crime in the streets.” They asked if Americans carry guns, if they learn martial arts or other systems of self-defense, or if they just stay off the streets after dark, out of fear. Many Soviets wanted to establish, to their satisfaction, just how dangerous American cities are. Some people had picked up scraps of information about the Mafia and organized crime, and with a mixture of fascination and horror, asked if Mafia hired gangsters to kill people – and if the killings were done in gruesome ways.¹⁷⁵

Several others wondered whether lack of universal identity cards and internal passports contributed to high crime rates as criminals were free to commit crimes and then change their identity with ease.¹⁷⁶ Others felt that unrestricted sale of guns, violence on TV and in movies, and unemployment (all information taken from official propaganda) were leading causes of high crime rates in America.¹⁷⁷ As a result, the Second Amendment of American Constitution received the most attention from Soviet visitors at the 1976 *U.S.A*

¹⁷² NA P142/6/59 p.9.

¹⁷³ NA P142/27/144 p.7-8.

¹⁷⁴ NA P142/7/1 p.12.

¹⁷⁵ NA P142/47/33 p.24.

¹⁷⁶ NA P142/47/33 p.26.

¹⁷⁷ NA P142/42/10 p.25.

– *200 Years* exhibition in Moscow.¹⁷⁸ “Can you really just walk into a store and buy a gun?” was the most common question.¹⁷⁹ Some wanted to know “if the Mafia still shoots down people with machine guns from moving cars.”¹⁸⁰

Visitors in Minsk thought of American cities as overrun with crime, and openly wondered if residents could walk the streets at night. Others suggested that as many as thirty percent of Americans live in the slums.¹⁸¹ Muscovites also thought of America as a country of high crime rates, and some “imagined America as completely overridden by gangsters, bandits, and hoodlums, and could not imagine how any American managed to live to maturity.”¹⁸²

Reactions to American foreign policy

Normally ordinary Soviet citizens cared little about international events and their interest “waxed and waned in direct proportion to local media attention.”¹⁸³ This observation underlines the importance of domestic mass media in forming the worldview of the average Soviet person. Overall, “the collective impression of the guides was that the [...] man-in-the street was preoccupied with domestic affairs impinging directly on his day-to-day existence.”¹⁸⁴ Having little say in the makeup of policies of their own political system, Soviet citizens thought that foreign policy was best left to the government.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p.4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p.25.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ NA P142/27/144 p.9-10.

¹⁸² NA P142/47/7 p.24.

¹⁸³ NA P142/16/160 p.10.

¹⁸⁴ NA P142/16/160 p.10.

¹⁸⁵ NA P142/7/1 p.2.

At times, however, when the Soviet mass media focused its attention on certain international events, Soviet citizens took an interest and expressed views at American exhibitions. Soviet press coverage of the Vietnam War yielded some typical questions were: “What does the guide think of the war in Vietnam? What do the American people think of the war? Are the American soldiers volunteers? How much do they get paid? Do the American people know about the atrocities committed by the South Vietnamese Army?” Few other foreign policy issues received similar level of attention, or did so only in connection with Vietnam.¹⁸⁶

Similarly, visitors’ knowledge of the U.S. domestic affairs closely followed the Soviet press. Many in the crowd espoused negative opinions about President Lyndon Johnson, holding him responsible for the situation in Vietnam. There were frequent comparisons between John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, with the majority opinion that Kennedy would not have gotten involved in Vietnam in the same way as Johnson. Some visitors went as far as stating that Johnson “had a hand in assassination of President Kennedy.”¹⁸⁷

Over a decade after his assassination, JFK was still greatly admired by many among the Soviets at the exhibit. “Why did you kill your President?” was one of the more frequent questions. Admiration for JFK, however, was not based on any specific policies but on rather superficial assumption that he represented a “noble martyr” killed by the power- and money-hungry segments of American political establishment--a version of events perpetuated by the Soviet media.¹⁸⁸ Many visitors asked the guides personal

¹⁸⁶ NA P142/27/144 p.3.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.5-6.

¹⁸⁸ NA P142/47/33 p.22-23.

opinions on who they thought killed JFK, and some pointed to it as proof of corruption and disorder in American society.¹⁸⁹

In reality, the Soviet media was again the key player in shaping Soviet visitors' opinion about American presidents. While by the 1970s a majority of Soviets saw JFK as a positive figure killed by the reactionary and exploitative forces, this was not the case during his actual presidency. At the 1961 exhibition, for example, visitors' comments about Kennedy became more and more negative as tensions over Berlin mounted during the run of the exhibition.¹⁹⁰

The same situation prevailed in the 1970s. Initially, many Soviets saw the election of President Jimmy Carter as a positive step in Soviet-American relations. At the simulated voting booth at one 1976 American exhibition, Soviet visitors had a chance to vote for American President. Almost all voted for Carter.¹⁹¹ As relations between the two countries soured, Soviet visitors' attitude changed. At later 1970s exhibitions, a majority of the Soviets had a negative view of President Jimmy Carter, "considering him to blame for worsening of Soviet-American relations," stated USIA report.¹⁹²

Many asked whether it was true that Carter had been a farmer before becoming president, and were very surprised when the guides answered in the affirmative. This reaction reflected assumptions Soviet visitors made about comparative access to power in the US and the USSR. They did not think it strange that one of their own leaders, Nikita Khrushchev, could come from a peasant background.¹⁹³ It is likely that election of a peanut farmer as American president simply did not hold up well with the popular Soviet

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ NA P142/5/48 p.23-24.

¹⁹¹ P142/42/10 p.5.

¹⁹² P142/42/10 p.5.

¹⁹³ NA P142/47/33 p.21-23, P142/47/7 p.20-22.

belief that America was run by Wall Street interests, thus arousing much curiosity and doubt.

East vs. West: comparisons between the two countries

Soviet citizens' desire to understand where their country stood in the wider world inevitably invited frequent comparisons between America and Soviet Union. As we saw earlier this usually resulted in endless questions about American standard of living – salaries, houses, cars...etc. at a vast majority of American exhibits. Soviets wanted to see if their limited knowledge about America was true and how the American standard of living compared to their own.

Direct comparisons, voiced in public, which reflected badly on the Soviet Union, however, were rare. At the agricultural exhibit, for example, Soviet people got quite defensive when comparisons between USSR and the U.S. pointed out deficiencies in Soviet agriculture. In public, faced with negative comparisons Soviet visitors countered that the Soviet system was relatively young and the fact that Soviet Union suffered a lot of damage during World War II. In private conversations, however, they also frankly admitted that Soviet agriculture had many deficiencies and had a long way to go until it caught up with America.¹⁹⁴ Similar episodes occurred at other American exhibits.¹⁹⁵

The issue of travel restrictions, however, was an exception. Soviet visitors asked if American citizens could travel freely around the U.S., between U.S. cities, and whether they had internal passports. How easy is it to get out of the U.S., they inquired; can an average American go to Europe if he has the money? Such questions highlighted the

¹⁹⁴ NA P142/47/33 p.10.

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110533.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

high level of frustration with numerous domestic and international travel restrictions placed on its citizens by the Soviet government. This showed even among those loyal to the regime in most other respects, “You know, the one thing wrong with this country is that you can’t get out of it; you can’t travel,” complained one party official.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

Starting with Moscow in 1959, American exhibitions in the Soviet Union proved very popular with the Soviet public. Over more than three decades close to five million Soviet people came from all corners of the country to get a glimpse of real America and Americans. These exhibitions introduced the Soviet people to numerous aspects of America: books, photography, plastics, agriculture and more. From the American side the goal of the exhibitions was to familiarize the Soviet public with the American way of life and American culture. In other words, it sought to provide the Soviet people with an American point of view. Soviet reaction to the exhibits, however, showed that in this respect the program fell short of its intended target.

The exhibition initiative did establish some formal and informal contacts between ordinary Americans and Soviets, but it appears that little changed in the way that Soviet people perceived America. While overall reactions from Soviet visitors were mostly favorable and many voiced a strong desire for more Soviet-U.S. cooperation, attempts by American guides to convey more complex ideas about the U.S. largely failed because of

¹⁹⁶ NA P142/27/144 p.13.

the “almost total inability of Soviet visitors to view American society except in the conventional Marxist framework,” concluded USIA report.¹⁹⁷

In general, Soviet visitors had a hard time relating to aspects of American life that had no equivalent in the Soviet Union. American political system for example, was viewed as “confusing” and “weak,” as evidenced by federal vs. state problems over desegregation of schools in Little Rock. Frequently, Soviet understanding of American politics “represented little more than a projection of their own experience with the Soviet system onto the American scene. Several visitors asked whether Americans were permitted to vote, and if so, who they were required to vote for. One found it unbelievable that the President could not compel the people to adopt his political programs,” noted USIA reports.¹⁹⁸

This trend is best exemplified by an incident at the 1979 *Agriculture: USA* exhibit in Rostov where one of the Soviet security guards got drunk and told American staff that he was instructed to report on the American guides and “I would say, frankly, that in my opinion, the guides don’t understand their society very well; they don’t explain capitalism correctly...”, meaning they did not portray it in a negative enough light. In other words, when confronted with a different view of American system, instead of changing his opinion the guard interpreted it as a mistake on the part of American guides.¹⁹⁹

The exhibits program did not have the desired effect of changing the Soviet mindset about America, or teaching Soviets about American way of life. It did, however, create a more personal connection between the two people when Soviet visitors had a

¹⁹⁷ P142/15/119 p.i.

¹⁹⁸ NA P142/15/119 p.i,5, P142/5/32 p.25.

¹⁹⁹ NA P142/47/13 p.4.

chance to meet and talk with American guides. Thus the programs' main effect was "in blunting some of the worst Soviet propaganda about what the United States was really about," noted an American guide years later.²⁰⁰

Another important conclusion that can be drawn from Soviet reactions to American exhibitions is that lack of outside information and official propaganda played a major role in shaping the worldview of average Soviet citizens. The effects of propaganda, however, differed depending on the topic. Soviets tended to be more skeptical of official propaganda regarding matters that touched them directly: the availability of consumer goods, salaries, freedom of movement, and freedom of the press. Soviet people had first-hand knowledge of these issues and the majority was not satisfied with the situation. Therefore, they were less likely to believe official propaganda and see America as ahead on these issues. Matters that had little effect on Soviet peoples' day-to-day lives, such as Soviet and American foreign policy and U.S. domestic policies, elicited from exhibition visitors mostly a reiteration of the official government stance. Moreover, few Soviets had access to non-official information on these topics. Thus, more often than not, Soviets were more likely to side with official information sources in those matters.

The location of the exhibit and the status of inter-country relations also influenced Soviet attitudes towards America. Major cities like Moscow and Leningrad had more access to outside information and generally had a higher level of education and therefore exhibits elicited a more nuanced approach towards America from visitors. Visitors in more provincial cities on the other hand saw America more in line with official propaganda.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/110528.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²⁰¹ P142/7/1 p.2-3.

Soviet reactions to America also depended on the state of U.S.-USSR relations. In times of normal relations, as indicated by the official media, Soviet visitors tended to have more goodwill towards the U.S. In times of heightened tensions between the two superpowers, most Soviets saw America as pushing the Soviet Union into an unnecessary arms race, fueled by the American military-industrial complex. The Soviet Union, in their eyes, wanted only peace but was forced to defend itself against American provocations. Despite this, many hoped for more cultural, educational, and economic contacts between the two countries.²⁰² In other words, Soviets largely stuck to official view that American business interests wanted war with the Soviet Union while American people wanted peace.

²⁰² NA P142/47/33 p.30.

CHAPTER 4: Soviet Youth and the West

Introduction

Perhaps no segment of the Soviet population embraced America (wrapped in an idea of a mythical West) more than the young people in the period immediately following World War II up until the collapse of the Soviet system in the early 1990s. Officially, the post-World War II Soviet system offered its young people two roads in life.¹ If a person worked hard and followed the Communist Party's leadership, he or she would be rewarded with a happy and a comfortable life. This was the path of a true Soviet person. The other, the anti-Soviet road, led to a life filled with debauchery, laziness, and often crime. There was little doubt which road the Soviet government wanted young people to choose.

In this chapter, we will see that starting with the late 1940s, certain segments of Soviet youth attempted to chart a different path: one outside official boundaries, yet still grounded in a socialist worldview. And America, as Soviet youth saw and defined it, became a tool in the quest to first define their identities and eventually achieving much larger social significance in the late Soviet period. In addition, Soviet youth's gravitation towards American popular culture and consumer products highlighted the fact that in many ways the official Soviet definition of quality life was too narrow for a number of

¹ Here I use the phrase "post-World War II" not to signal change over time but to establish the period that is covered in this chapter.

Soviet young people because it ran contrary to basic human qualities such as free self-expression, sexual exploration, and desire for creature comforts.

In describing these phenomena, Juliane Furst correctly and persuasively argued that post-war Soviet youth resisted state attempts to dictate “what it meant to be young and Soviet,” mostly using manner of dress and music to challenge the state monopoly on social framework.² In this chapter I will also argue that in the early years of the Khrushchev period Soviet youth used many of the same methods, although on a wider scale, to form a separate generational identity. In other words, they strove to define themselves as independent agents capable of forming their own ideas about their own and their country’s future.

Soviet youth’s use of American and Western goods and symbols signaled their search for identity or in case of young adults desire for better living standards and show of status. And for most, this was not a rebellion against the Soviet state on any ideological ground, as a majority were still patriotic Soviet citizens. Indeed, Soviet adolescents and young adults desired and used Western consumer and especially cultural goods more than Soviet adults, yet their view of their own country did not differ drastically from those of adults, in that a majority did not want to switch from Soviet style socialism to American style capitalism.

By the late sixties American and other Western symbols and goods, while still denounced in official media, became more widespread and more accepted among the youth and Soviet population in general. By then, however, as Soviet society developed greater appetite for consumerism, Western symbols developed new identities as status symbols signaling their bearers’ access to money and deficit goods.

² Furst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, 2.

As other scholars previously pointed out, in the minds of Soviet youth, America and the West were not based on anything concrete.³ For them, Western music, fashion, and symbols often carried their own meanings, grounded in reality of Soviet, and sometimes, regional or even private life. As Sergei Yurchak put it: “It [the idea of the West] was produced locally and existed only at the time when the real West could not be encountered.”⁴ Judging by a few examples from previous chapters, when the real West was encountered in the form of information from foreign visitors, Soviets tended to simply ignore it and preserve their own version.

When I talk about Soviet youth I mostly refer to people who underwent a process of adolescent identity formation, primarily between the ages of 12 and 24. While there are numerous theories of identity formation, here I will use one from the more established work by a noted developmental psychologist Erik Erikson who described this age period as one of greater independence and increased interface with the outside world.⁵ It is here that some among the Soviet youth chose to use Western clothes and music to assert their identity from one prescribed by the state while younger children tended to follow the official line.⁶

³ Yurchak, 158-206.

⁴ Ibid, 159.

⁵ Erik Erikson, *Identity, youth, and crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

⁶ Evidence is limited but Zhuk, 149-150, Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation*, 35 and Shipler, 114 offer some examples of younger children having an almost literal interpretation of official propaganda. Another telling example comes from a British lawyer who traveled to the Soviet Union in order to attend the Gary Powers trial in 1960. While visiting a Soviet school, he witnessed the following conversation in a class for 8-10 year olds. ““Have you?” Nina [author’s friend] appealed to a small boy, “ever seen a capitalist before?”

“Only in a picture,” said the boy. “It was a picture from a paper. This one is different.” He pointed to me as if I were an inanimate object.

“How different?”

“That one was very fat. [referring to portrayal of all capitalists as fat in Soviet propaganda]”” See Byford-Jones, 146.

Stylish Ones: some post-war trends among Soviet youth

As I already mentioned in earlier chapters, post-World War II Soviet Union saw an influx of Western goods brought in by soldiers returning home from Europe. These included all kinds of trophy items from various parts of Europe, and especially Germany. They included not only furniture, cars, music, and clothing but also films that, such as the American Tarzan movies, became extremely popular among the Soviet population especially the younger generation.⁷

Besides American movies, a certain segment of Soviet youth adopted eccentric clothing styles and danced to American music. Official Soviet press labeled them *stiliagi*, or style chasers. Often these youth identified themselves as following American trends, yet in reality their style had little resemblance to real America. Primarily this was a result of their isolation from any outside information about America. What little they got was second hand and already highly mythologized. In fact, as Mark Edele pointed out, *stiliagi* did not copy pre-existing styles from abroad, even though they called some of them American (*shtatskie* – literally meaning “from the States”), but invented their own.⁸ Despite little connection to real America, position of “American” style at the top of *stiliagi* hierarchy was significant because it also showed that America was seen as the clear leader in an alternative, or counter-culture, universe. In other words, those (in this case *stiliagi*) sought to establish unique identity through the use of symbols that were separate from, or ran counter to, those deemed acceptable by Soviet officials, America represented the strongest such symbol.

⁷ For example, Frederick Starr mentioned Soviet officers bringing jazz records from East Berlin in the immediate post-war years – Starr, 223. For other examples, see the chapter on unofficial information.

⁸ Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 50, H. 1 (2002), 50.

In a similar vein, some among the *stiliagi* openly proclaimed their preference for America over the Soviet Union.⁹ However, since they knew little if anything at all about the object of their love, such statements again pointed to the fact that for these youth America was simply a way to stand out from the crowd. According to Edele this was also a process by which the children of the Soviet elite sought to differentiate themselves from the lower classes of Soviet society.¹⁰ Edele also argued that, in part, *stiliagi* phenomenon arose out of the need for young Soviet males to recapture masculine identity denied to them because they did not serve at the front during World War II.¹¹ This point, however, is more problematic because the *stiliaga* trend was quite diverse.

American/Western styles in the immediate post-war period were confined to a limited group of those who had money, time, and more importantly high ranking parents who provided a sense of protection for youth voluntarily breaking social norms.¹² Eventually, the trend spread to working class youth who, lacking material means of the upper classes, whom they referred to as those “from Gorky Street,”¹³ had to make their own clothes and relied on public transportation instead of driving a car.¹⁴ Moreover, at least some working class *stiliagi* had no particular allegiance to a set style or music, changing both frequently depending on the fashion of the moment.¹⁵

⁹ Ibid, 42.

¹⁰ Ibid, 38.

¹¹ Ibid, 58-59.

¹² Shiraev and Zubok, 19-20; Edele, 58.

¹³ One of the main streets in the center of Moscow, currently Tverskaia street. At the time some *stiliagi* referred to it as “Broadway.”

¹⁴ Recollection of one self-described working class *stiliaga* - http://vk.com/wall57741583_7. Accessed April 22, 2012. Juliane Furst also mentioned examples of *stiliaga* trend among working class youth; see Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 283.

¹⁵ Recollection of one self-described working class *stiliaga* - http://vk.com/wall57741583_7. Accessed April 22, 2012.

As I noted in my discussion of American movies in the Soviet Union, the main reason for high popularity of American, and other Western movies, especially among the youth, was a desire to escape the grim post-war Soviet reality.¹⁶ Movie images of normal life, adventure, and consumer abundance offered an escape from high crime, food shortages, and abysmal housing conditions where a majority of the population lived in communal apartments with numerous families forced to share tiny decrepit living spaces, kitchens and bathrooms.¹⁷ In describing the period between 1948 and 1953, historian Donald Filzer wrote that “life was still basically a struggle to survive.”¹⁸

Children had it especially hard. Many had to forgo a carefree childhood by working at factories during the war. After the war, millions lost track of, or were left without, their families.¹⁹ It is no wonder that millions of Soviet children embraced American Tarzan as their hero by getting Tarzan haircuts and imitating his jungle call. For those in the slightly older age bracket, American style fashions (how they saw them), but mostly American jazz music, became means to break away from their reality, and carve out a private space of their own, if just for a few hours. “A pack of Marlboro cigarettes or a jazz recording purchased on the black market brought them a little closer to the sounds and smells of America and helped them, if only briefly, escape the sulfuric odor of brown coal and the incessant drone of socialist polemic,” noted a scholar of Soviet rock music Timothy Ryback.²⁰

¹⁶ For more on post-WWII social conditions in the Soviet Union see: Zubkova, *Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo*. Also, Filtzer, *Soviet workers and late Stalinism*.

¹⁷ Ibid. Filtzer, especially Chapters 3, 4.

¹⁸ Filtzer, 115.

¹⁹ Ibid, 151.

²⁰ Ryback, 10.

These developments did not go unnoticed by Soviet authorities. As part of general anti-foreigner (mostly aimed at the United States) campaign of the late 1940s-early 1950s,²¹ Soviet officials launched a number of propaganda campaigns specifically targeted at Soviet youth with foreign music and dress being the primary targets. Consequently, the period saw a fierce anti-jazz campaign.²² Children's animated cartoons denounced American style clothes, dancing and music as foreign to Soviet people, and called for the public to shame and ostracize individuals following these trends.²³ Print publications also sought to single out such young people as "strange" and out of step with normal Soviet behavior.²⁴

Early on, the call for public shaming of those deemed too foreign had some effect, with those dressing in Western style colorful fashions receiving the brunt of public indignation. One *stiliaga* recalled receiving frequent comments such as "Young man, aren't you ashamed of yourself, walking around looking like a parakeet?" or "Look, some kind of monkey," while riding the public transport.²⁵

By the early 1950s, the state turned to using youth organizations in the fight against *stiliagi*.²⁶ However, not all *stiliagi* were treated this way. Vasilii, a young Moscow factory worker and secretary of the factory Komsomol organization, remembered few if any official repercussions or negative comments from his peers about his self-described *stiliaga* lifestyle. According to Vasilii, for him, the stylish lifestyle was short-term and part-time. He mentioned dressing up only after work to go to the dances,

²¹ See the chapter on official propaganda.

²² Ryback, 11-12. Also see Starr, Chapter 10.

²³ For example see 1949 cartoon, *Foreign Voice (Chuzhoi golos)* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-T7xwuTxgU>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²⁴ Edele, 39.

²⁵ Quoted in *Ibid*, 43.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 42. Yurchak, 171-172.

although sporting a *stiliaga* haircut even during work hours.²⁷ Therefore, it appears that official as well as public concern with *stiliagi* centered largely on the more devoted followers of the trend. Although as we will see later in the chapter, anti-*stiliaga* campaigns of the Khrushchev period sometimes went too far, forcing authorities to rein in overzealous local officials.

The Soviet press frequently denounced *stiliagi* as anti-Soviet in their manner of dress, dancing, and general attitude towards life. In large part, this tied in with intense anti-Western campaign of the late Stalinist period. The sight of Soviet adolescents dressed in colorful clothes and dancing to Western music ran contrary to official portrayal of Western culture as cheap and vulgar and in direct opposition to good and wholesome Soviet values. Despite official labeling of the trend as anti-Soviet and proclamations of love for America over their Soviet homeland by some *stiliagi*, we should not take these statements at face value. Instead, for most Soviet youth participating in the *stiliagi* trend this was likely a search for a unique self-identity, a process that often involves standing out from the crowd. In fact, differentiating themselves from the “gray Soviet masses” was one of the main *stiliaga* traits.²⁸ For many others, like above-mentioned Vasilii who did not take the trend too seriously, the stylish lifestyle was simply a cool thing to do, something to brighten-up the otherwise hard life of the post-war years.

Therefore, *stiliaga* associations with the West--a West of their own imaginations--was not an act of siding with America against the Soviet Union as a system of

²⁷ http://vk.com/wall57741583_7. Accessed April 22, 2012.

²⁸ Edele, 40. Also see “Dvizhenie stiliag...” at <http://www.stilyagispb.ru/9-dvizhenie-stilyag.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

government. In actuality, *stiliagi* stayed away from all things political.²⁹ For them the West was the mythical “other,” which was better, in the vaguest sense of the term, than the boring Soviet life for the upper class Soviet youth³⁰ and better than the difficult Soviet life for majority of the others.

In addition, it is here that we start to see normalization of denounced behavior, often tied to consumption of Western popular culture, among the Soviet youth. In writing about the “last Soviet generation” Alexei Yurchak rightly noted how many among the Soviet youth did not see themselves as the negative and anti-Soviet characters listening to Western music and dressing in Western fashions, described in the Soviet press. Moreover, according to Yurchak, the press chose to write about the most out of the ordinary and extreme cases. In turn, this led to further normalization of such practices because majority did not identify with these portrayals.³¹ “[B]y focusing its attacks on an isolated phenomenon, the state made the more common and less extreme manifestation of Western symbols and tastes appear even more natural and congruent with the identity of a good Soviet person,” wrote Yurchak.³²

We can easily apply Yurchak’s analysis to earlier decades. “In reality, his face was human,” remembered one former follower of the trend upon seeing a *stiliaga* in Perm’ in 1960, referring to frequent depictions of *stiliagi* as monkeys in official press.³³ Already mentioned Vasili is another good example because he did not see a contradiction

²⁹ Ibid, 58.

³⁰ In one example, a young Irish woman attending 1957 Moscow Youth Festival wrote about meeting a young and rich Soviet man whom she described as desperately seeking excitement that is provided by foreign things, especially jazz; see Belfrage, 22-26.

³¹ Yurchak, 170-181.

³² Ibid, 175.

³³ “Malenkie zlye Amerikanttsy” at <http://www.stilyagispb.ru/137-malenkie-zlye-amerikancy.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

between being a *stiliaga* and head of the factory Komsomol organization, direct opposites by official standards.

Talking about my generation: West and Soviet generational conflict

The Khrushchev period, while usually associated with a loosening of official restrictions in most spheres of Soviet life, the so-called “Thaw” period, saw increased condemnation of anyone thought to be imitating a Western lifestyle. This was especially true of the Soviet youth. These condemnations in part echoed a growing concern over World War II’s effect on Soviet children; authorities and many ordinary Soviets made direct and indirect associations between one’s consumption of Western culture such as fashion, music, movies and criminal activity.³⁴ In large part, the battle over the “West” was also a generational conflict. Any display or suggestion at liking something Western by the younger generation “amounted to a betrayal of the older generation’s sacrifice and suffering during the war,” noted David Caute.³⁵ While he wrote about Western art, the same statement could be easily applied to most Western influences of the period.

The general post-Stalin relaxation saw the Soviet population increasingly exposed to the outside world. The 1957 Youth Festival in Moscow was one of the more important events where Soviet young people got a chance to personally meet and talk with a number of their peers from other countries. During the festival, besides friendly chit-chat, young Soviets managed to listen and dance to new music, see different clothing styles as well as purchase goods from foreign visitors.³⁶ An American visiting the Soviet

³⁴ Caute, 458-460. Furst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, 254-257.

³⁵ Caute, 220.

³⁶ Magnusdottir, 207-217.

Union in 1960 reported some instances where conversations with Americans during the festival changed household dynamics among younger Soviets after they heard that American husbands helped their wives around the house.³⁷ Furthermore, close interaction between Soviets, mostly women, and foreigners of the opposite sex brought about increased discussion of sexuality in the Soviet state.³⁸

The 1957 Youth Festival did have a significant impact on Soviet youth's perception of itself, at least for those who were involved in it one way or the other. It was, however, a one-time event. On the other hand, Western radio stations, Voice of America being the most famous, started broadcasting into the Soviet Union in the late 1940s and continued until the break-up of the country in the early 1990s.³⁹ These broadcasts had a significant impact on Soviet adolescence - "it was the young people who became the first regular listeners of the Voice of America or the BBC. It was the youth who casually strolled the beaches of Black Sea resorts with their radios loudly broadcasting news from Washington and London, alarming passersby," wrote Vladimir Shlapentokh.⁴⁰

It was not the news, however, that interested them.⁴¹ A majority listened for entertainment purposes, specifically to American music such as jazz.⁴² Moreover, by this time Western music was no longer confined to one segment of Soviet youth. "By the mid-1950s, it was not simply the iconoclastic *stiliagi* who were indulging in decadent Western music. Loyal and industrious socialist men and women, the models of the

³⁷ Fischer, 101.

³⁸ Kristin Roth-Ey, "Loose Girls' on the Loose?", 75-95.

³⁹ I discuss the issue of Western radio in much more detail in my chapter on unofficial information.

⁴⁰ Shlapentokh, *Soviet public opinion and ideology*, 138.

⁴¹ Open and loud listening of Western broadcasts was clearly a gesture of rebellion, a wish to stand out-- much like *stiliagi* wearing colorful clothes in public.

⁴² See my discussion of Western radio in chapter on unofficial information.

socialist upbringing, not only danced to but also publicly defended the “ape culture” coming from the West,” stressed Timothy Ryback.⁴³

Perceptions about the West became central to trans-generational debate about what it meant to be Soviet. Many of those who participated in the war saw adoption of Western music, fashion and other symbols from the West as somehow a rejection of the Soviet system that they fought so hard to preserve. “We didn’t need obscene paintings or boogie-woogie at Stalingrad!” wrote David Caute, capturing the sentiment of the older Russians.⁴⁴ Interestingly, many of those who lived through and participated in the war had no such reservations in years immediately following World War II. “The newspapers said that American people donated clothing for Red Army officers. Where is it?” asked one veteran in 1946.⁴⁵ “We have lots of American clothes and foodstuffs, but who receives it?” complained a 78-year-old woman in a letter to Kliment Voroshilov, a high-ranking member of the Politburo.⁴⁶

So why was it acceptable to ask openly for American clothes during and immediately following the war, and then look at them as an anti-Soviet phenomenon a few years after? Partly this can be explained by severe goods shortages in years following the war, but also by the changing status of America in official propaganda. U.S. was a close ally during the war and some of those feelings carried over into immediate post-war years. The onset of the Cold War and intense anti-American campaigns of the late 1940s and early 1950s turned America into Soviet Union’s greatest enemy. Consequently, for those youth trying to separate themselves from the “grey

⁴³ Ryback, 17.

⁴⁴ Caute, 220.

⁴⁵ Zubkova, *Sovetskaia zhizn’, 1945-1953*, 328.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 82.

masses,” America became the best way of accomplishing this goal. On the other side, those who strongly identified with the Soviet state saw any use of American/Western symbols as a rejection of that system. In other words, people with intense opinions about the Soviet reality, positive or negative, used America (and the West more generally) as a tool to showcase their beliefs.

Somewhere in the middle were a majority of the people who did not see things as black and white. For them, listening and dancing to American music did not mean their disapproval of the Soviet state; neither did wearing an American style jacket or dress. As I mentioned in the section on Western broadcasting, most of those listening to Western radio did so because they were not getting enough information and entertainment from domestic radio, not because they wanted to overthrow the Soviet government. The 1962 movie *Lenin's Outpost (Zastava Il'icha)*,⁴⁷ not released in its full version until 1990s because of its frank depiction of Soviet youth, highlights this point. In the movie, young people from all walks of life, for the most part committed to the Soviet system, frequently danced to American music during street and apartment parties. In the movie, listening and dancing to American tunes was simply not a major issue. Not once did the young characters discuss their choice of music as being an act of rebellion or having any political message.⁴⁸

In fact, the only time the theme of Western influences came up was within the context of generational conflict. In one scene, a female character challenges her father's

⁴⁷ Originally the censored version of the movie was released in 1965 under the title *I Am Twenty (Mne dvadtsat' let)*.

⁴⁸ On an interesting side-note, the movie showed young people treating their participation in May Day parade as a social event with little connection to the meaning of the actual holiday. Therefore, it appears that the process where official rituals took on meanings other than official ones among the participants started earlier than suggested by Alexei Yurchak, who wrote about the Brezhnev period; see Yurchak, 121.

assumptions that her generation is somehow going down the wrong path by saying: “So sometimes they show us foreign movies and let us buy foreign clothes once in a while.” By this, she meant that she did not see these things as necessarily a negative phenomenon. Stephen Bittner also described what he called a “fathers and sons”⁴⁹ generational split over Western music in the Thaw period.⁵⁰

The issue made it on to the national center stage in 1960 when local authorities in resort town of Sochi arrested and disciplined several young people for being *stiliagi*. National leadership, wishing to tone down the anti-*stiliagi* campaign, directed publication of an article denouncing overzealousness of Sochi officials.⁵¹ The article, published in *Izvestiia* on 24 October 1960, criticized Sochi authorities for going too far by printing a picture of one of the offenders who simply wore a red shirt with an umbrella pattern. Furthermore, *Izvestiia* pointed out that the woman arrested over her *stiliagi* pants, in fact bought them at GUM (the central department store in Moscow).⁵²

Resulting comments divided along generational lines. Letters in support of the Sochi officials, written largely by older individuals, denounced the dress code of offending parties as anti-Soviet. One letter stated that these fashions carried over to the Soviet Union by the “not so fresh winds from the West.”⁵³ Another claimed that these were “American aesthetics” and when *Izvestiia* article talked about freedom to wear what

⁴⁹ A reference to Ivan Turgenev’s 1862 novel dealing with generational issues of the period.

⁵⁰ Bittner, 67.

⁵¹ The year 1960 seems to have been the pinnacle of the campaign, possibly a response to growing concern over juvenile hooliganism that was tied to Western influences (for more on this see Brian LaPierre, “Redefining Deviance: Policing and Punishing Hooliganism in Khrushchev’s Russia, 1953-1964” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2006)), and in order to combat Western influences from 1959 American exhibition in Moscow as well as to raise awareness of Western espionage shortly after the U2 incident. In one extreme example, Ronald Hingley, professor of Russian studies at Oxford, reported being taken for a *stiliaga* and kicked out of a dance venue in summer of 1960 and told “We don’t allow your sort in here;” see Hingley, *Under Soviet Skins*, 51.

⁵² RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 139 l. 62.

⁵³ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 139 l. 65.

you want they must have been talking about “American freedom.” Many others seconded the statement by pointing out that socialist morals regarding a dress code, as well as aesthetics, were different from those in the West, with one person writing: “we are against those who think themselves exceptional and try to prove this by wearing unusual clothes and thus standing out from the collective mass of good Soviet people.” Finally, one letter went as far as to suggest that if not opposed now, foreign influences will destroy the Russian spirit in the country.⁵⁴

Obviously, many older Soviets saw any new (that is to say, different) fashion, or music or other manifestations of consumer culture even ones sold in Soviet stores, as pro-American and therefore somehow dangerous to Soviet way of life. “They believed the United States was an enemy that wanted to deprive them of their hard-won gains. Therefore, these individuals continued to respond favorably to the themes – promoted unflinchingly by the propaganda--that endorsed xenophobic isolationism and the Soviet way of life and thinking”, wrote Eric Shiraev and Vladislav Zubok in describing what they called the “old middle class of Russia (bureaucrats and employees of service industries in particular), as well as the bulk of peasantry and blue-collar workers.”⁵⁵

On the other side there were those who defended *Izvestiia* article, a majority of them young people. Many reiterated *Izvestiia*'s point that these were perfectly acceptable fashions openly sold in many Soviet clothing stores. And finally, it was nobody's business what kind of clothing people wore, with a number of letters sarcastically asking

⁵⁴ RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 139 l. 65 – 95.

⁵⁵ Shiraev and Zubok, 23-24.

whether they should send in pictures of their clothes for approval before coming to Sochi.⁵⁶

Of course the main issue here was not the style of a person's pants but perception of foreign things as harmful to and incompatible with the Soviet way of life among many members of the older generation. At the same time, these examples saw many in the younger generation easily combine cultural products from the West, such as music and fashion, with their sense of being productive members of the Soviet system. The West, American being its most obvious representative, was used by both generations to define their ideas about what it meant to be a Soviet person.

The topic of generational differences continued into the late 1960s and even became a centerpiece of November 1967 *Life* magazine. The *Life* article, titled "Battle of Generations" featured pictures of "Westernized" Soviet youth and talked about the new generation's desire to find their own way of building a socialist society, in which, according to the article, they still strongly believed.⁵⁷

An increase in hooliganism, or petty crimes, in the mid-1950s, also played a significant role in growth of anti-Western feelings among the general population as well the Soviet government. Official propaganda portrayed the hooligans as young and uncultured, choosing drinking, smoking and partying over useful socialist labor.⁵⁸ For the most part, *stiliagi*, and others who chose to dress or wear their hair in Western fashion and listen to Western music were depicted in similar colors. A 1956 propaganda film

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ It is possible that in talking about the Soviet youth the article was in part influenced by the growing American counter-culture - wearing different clothes, listening to different music, espousing different sexual morals. Therefore, the article can be seen as an expression of hope that Cold War would slowly fade away once younger generations came to power.

⁵⁸ LaPierre, 51-60.

showed *stiliagi* dress and act similar to hooligans, and at one point using the words interchangeably.⁵⁹ Another propaganda movie from the period compared the world of Western fashions and rock and roll to the world of shadows and back alleys. Participants in this shadowy underworld chose restaurants, drunkenness, debauchery, vulgar entertainment and crime instead of the normal life of worrying about exams, honest work, and starting a family—that is, expected Soviet behavior (see Illustration 15).⁶⁰ In a similar fashion, an *Izvestiia* newspaper described a hooligan as someone who “organizes a gang near some dark doorway.”⁶¹



⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4mDYumxSA>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶¹ Quoted from January 1956 *Izvestiia* newspaper in LaPierre, 55.

A world of shadows vs. a world of light (Illustration 15)⁶²

In no uncertain terms, official discourse on the subject offered Soviet youth two roads in life. One, paved with Western goods, money, restaurants, alcohol, debauchery, and crime, led to the “dark side,” in this case literally. If not vigilant, one could easily fall victim to a Western plot to corrupt the Soviet youth, something they had already done to their own children, claimed Soviet propaganda. A Kiev Philharmonic soloist in an interview published in a Ukrainian newspaper observed:

[P]opular music in the West was an insidious weapon used by the imperialist to dull the senses of young people and turn them into killers ...who could bloodily hurl napalm onto Vietnamese farms and villages.⁶³

The other path included school, honest work, consumption of appropriate cultural products (that is, ones approved by the state), good friends and family. This road took one to the bright world of honest and rewarding socialist lifestyle.

Furthermore, domestic media emasculated both male hooligans and *stiliagi*, suggesting they fell far short of Soviet masculine ideal. The media portrayed *stiliagi* as having lost touch with their masculinity by ridiculing their haircuts that were so long that people could not tell whether the person was a boy or a girl.⁶⁴ One film showed *stiliagi* wearing women’s scarves.⁶⁵ Hooligans, according to official media, were cowards who picked on the weak, first ones to “shove a woman, to insult a child,”⁶⁶ but quickly ran

⁶² Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4mDYumxSA>

⁶³ Quoted in Caute, 465.

⁶⁴ See 1956 propaganda film available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTIKJ_GZgA. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶⁵ For example see movie *Foreigners (Inostrantsy)* – 1961.

⁶⁶ Quoted from January 1956 *Izvestiia* newspaper in LaPierre, 55.

away when confronted by a strong male hand.⁶⁷ Women associating with such characters were sometimes labeled as promiscuous,⁶⁸ although they were much more likely to have been characterized as victims having been caught up with the wrong crowd.⁶⁹

Official propaganda dehumanized both hooligans and *stiliagi*. “When will you become human?” a mother asks her *stiliaga* son in 1961 movie *Foreigners (Inostrantsy)*. Western music and fashions were frequently compared to that of monkeys or other animals (see Illustrations 16).⁷⁰ And hooligans frequently compared to “predatory animals.”⁷¹ Films used words usually reserved for animals when describing this “dark” sub-culture.⁷² The world of shadows was in clear opposition to the world of “real [that is, Soviet] human values” and officials called on the rest of Soviet society to “make humans out of shadows.”⁷³

⁶⁷ See early 1960s propaganda movie available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4mDYumxSA>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶⁸ For example see movie *Foreigners (Inostrantsy)* – 1961.

⁶⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4mDYumxSA>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁷⁰ In 1961 movie *Foreigners (Inostrantsy)*, *stiliagi* are shown listening to animal sounds while describing it as American music. Also see various caricatures of *stiliagi* in *Krokodil* magazine: <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/sashenka2005/post139837209/>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁷¹ LaPierre, 62-63.

⁷² 1956 official propaganda movie available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4mDYumxSA>. Accessed April 22, 2012. For example, word *koposhit'sia* means “to putter around” or “dig through things”. Judging by intonation of the narrator and context of the movie, the word is more appropriate when describing rodents such as rats or mice.

⁷³ Ibid.



Soviet followers of Western trends on the pages of *Krokodil* magazine (Illustration 16)

As a last resort, Soviet authorities tried to combat Western trends by inventing domestic counterparts. For example, in order to battle the jitterbug and later the twist, Soviet officials tried inventing “socialist dances.”⁷⁴ In another instance, the Komsomol tried to upgrade youth clubs and host entertainment nights to counteract Western influences. However, a majority of these attempts to “domesticate” Western music did not achieve desired results. For example, at one Komsomol club in 1966 “the events proved so boring that guards were employed to keep the young people from fleeing the

⁷⁴ Ryback, 29, 53-55.

club before the events ended.”⁷⁵ Not all of these efforts ended in failure. Sergei Zhuk found that in the 1960s Soviet efforts to co-opt Beatlemania by sponsoring local groups that sounded like the Beatles, but with Russian lyrics, found some success.⁷⁶ Another notable exception was Dean Reed, an American singer who achieved popularity in Soviet bloc countries in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly among the younger demographic.⁷⁷

Heavy censorship and official criticism intensified the “forbidden fruit” factor. Some young people listened to Western music because it was illegal and frowned upon.⁷⁸ In most cases, foreign music was simply much “cooler” and more exciting than its domestic counterpart, regardless of the quality. A group of Americans traveling through the Soviet Union in the 1970s reported seeing music numbers by Irish and Soviet groups during the same concert where the Irish group was given a much warmer reception by the young audience even though Americans thought the Soviet group better of the two.⁷⁹ When asked their opinion of traditional Russian music by a British journalist in 1963, a young man, speaking for the group, responded

that traditional music was all right in its place at feast days and official celebrations but that he and his generation had had enough of it. "I could murder the fellow who wrote that song about the Ukrainian looking at the towel his mother had given him," he added. "It's really terrible stuff. Not contemporary”⁸⁰

The Soviet state sought to define behavior and lifestyle appropriate for Soviet youth. As we have seen from the examples above, many young people did not agree with

⁷⁵ Ibid, 107.

⁷⁶ Zhuk, 84-85.

⁷⁷ I briefly mention Reed in the chapter on official propaganda. For a more detailed account of Dean Reed please see books by Laszewski and Nadelson.

⁷⁸ Belfrage, 76.

⁷⁹ NA P142/47/33 p.20.

⁸⁰ Van Der Post, 131.

official vision, not seeing Soviet values as opposed to wearing Western style clothes and listening to American music.

In this respect, despite the overall success of official propaganda in shaping public perception about the United States, here it clearly failed in its goal of convincing a majority of Soviet youth that Western cultural products such as popular music and fashion were anti-Soviet. There were a number of reasons for this failure.

For the average Soviet person, it was nearly impossible to verify most information about America without actually going there. Here, however, young Soviets could see their friends listening and dancing to American music. These friends did not wish to overthrow the Soviet government or kill their loved ones for money. They were not hooligans, criminals, anti-Soviet, or uncultured savages. For the most part they were loyal Soviet citizens who just wanted to find their place in the world, or escape their boring and sometimes difficult lives. Young Soviets could not check official claims on American unemployment or racism. They did, however, see that official propaganda about the dangers of American clothes and music did not correspond to reality.

Furthermore, official portrayals of *stiliagi* as a small and marginalized group of criminally-inclined misfits often turned out to be quite the opposite in real life. In fact, a majority of Western goods and trends came into the country via Soviet soldiers serving abroad or children of the Soviet elite whose parents had the opportunity to travel outside the country. These Golden Youths were often at the forefront of Western trends.⁸¹ In

⁸¹ Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 41; Ryback, 21. Belfrage, 22-26. I borrow the term "Golden Youth" (zolotaia molodezh) from Edele who mentioned that this was a "term used by contemporaries to describe the children of the absolute top of Stalinist society," See Edele, 38.

1952, one Soviet youth witnessed how “a KGB [officer’s]”⁸² daughter flew up and down in a wild boogie-woogie” at party in Moscow.⁸³ In 1958, a jazz band led by a son of a police major caused a wild commotion at a Moscow concert by playing rock and roll music.⁸⁴ Clearly, official depictions of Westernized youth as degenerate outcasts did not go well with images of Golden Youth participating and sometimes leading the very things their parents condemned.

We should not, however, overestimate Soviet youth’s acceptance of Western trends, or those who followed them, in this period. Most did not see those engaged in such activity in the overly negative light of official media. It, however, did not mean that young people welcomed or sympathized with this phenomenon. A team of Soviet sociologists led by Boris Grushin conducted a large (about 18 thousand participants) public opinion study of young Soviet men and women between the ages of 15-30 in the early 1960s. The study revealed that respondents saw “followers of Western trends” as the second-most negative trait effecting younger generation, behind alcohol abuse.⁸⁵

The study also showed that a negative attitude towards Western trends corresponded to level of education. Those who did not finish high-school saw it as a problem at twice the rate of people with higher education.⁸⁶ Interestingly, there was little difference between residents of large cities, except for Moscow, and people living in rural

⁸² In his article Edele uses the phrase “KGB boss’s daughter”, perhaps unintentionally implying the girl’s father was the head of the KGB. In the original, Vassily Aksyonov, the author of the article, stated that the girl’s father was “a high-ranking KGB officer;” see Vassily Aksyonov, “Aksyonov in America: Hating (And Loving) the U.S.A.,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 11:5 (Winter 1987), 161-169.

⁸³ Edele, 41.

⁸⁴ Ryback, 30-31.

⁸⁵ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 182.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Again, one should be careful in assuming that all of those with low levels of education condemned Western trends. Along with earlier example of Vasilii, a factory worker, there were reports of Soviet port and other factory workers (occupations with traditionally lower levels of education) dressing up in what at least some people determined to be *stiliagi* style clothes, *Ibid.*, 175.

areas in their view of *stiliagi*.⁸⁷ In fact, rural respondents' negative attitude towards *stiliagi* was tied for the lowest with Muscovites. This can be explained by greater preoccupation with alcohol abuse in rural areas (as can be seen from the survey), lower numbers of *stiliagi* in the countryside, and from rural residents' perspective, normal urban styles already looked strange, and the *stiliagi*'s style wasn't stranger.

A 24 year old carpenter from Urupinsk, town in southwestern Russia, provided an answer typical of those with lower level of education. Writing about negative characteristics of the younger generation, he stated:

[The main negative characteristics of younger generation are:] bowing before foreign fashions, empty music and dances. I know a few young people in my town who are happy not to study or work, instead living off their parents. Their manner of dress is laughable. They grow out long hair, muttonchops and beards, as if they just came from an uninhabited island. They are nowhere to be seen during the day, hiding like moles. At night you can find them at the movies, drama theater, or youth dances. In the Soviet Union their numbers are very small and I think in the near future we will teach them how to have respect for society and to work and live like the rest of their contemporaries.⁸⁸

A more moderate view came from a 22-year-old member of the Soviet military who stressed that he also liked to dress fashionably but some of his peers took it too far, making themselves look ridiculous by wearing "Texas pants" and outrageous ties.⁸⁹

Grushin team's findings closely parallel popular responses to official propaganda about the West among general population. As I mentioned in the chapter on official propaganda, one's educational level and access to outside information strongly corresponded to the level of trust they put in official media. We can clearly see this when Urupinsk carpenter's comments closely resembled denunciations of *stiliagi* in official media.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 164.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 169.

For-Sale Men: Soviet black-market and the West

Fast growing demand for all things Western among the younger generation, and the deficit of quality consumer good in general, created an extensive black market for such products. At the center of this underground economy stood a character called a *fartsovshik*.⁹⁰ The *fartsovshchik* was most likely young and male, although women participated as well.⁹¹ He dressed in Western style clothes, frequently hung out at restaurants, and had money to spend.⁹² One Soviet writer described his *fartsovshchik* friend in this way: “He was elegantly dressed. He did not look like a Soviet person, more like an American or a European – fancy tie, coat, pants, and a suit that he made himself from American blueprints.”⁹³

Furthermore, *fartsovshchiki* had their own language, one heavily permeated with English words because among *fartsovshchiki* America and American things were synonymous with good and quality. For example, in *fartsovshchik* argot, to treat someone in “an American way” meant to treat someone well. To have “an American supper” meant to have a good supper as opposed to having a Slavic, or bad, supper.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ The term appears to be a variation of the word *forsel'shik*, Russian version of English phrase “for sale,” often used by *fartsovshiki* when trying to buy goods from foreigners, see B. N. Timofeev *Pravel'no my govorim?* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1961).

⁹¹ Lee, 23-26.

⁹² For example see an interview with former *fartsovshik* in *Sovetskaia Belorussia* 7/16/2010. Available at <http://pda.sb.by/post/102736/>. Accessed April 22, 2012. Also, Pavel Romanov and Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, “Fartsa: Podpol'e Sovetskogo obshchestva potrebleniia,” *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*. 5(43) 2005. Available at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/43/ro12.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁹³ Quoted in *Ibid*.

⁹⁴ Michael Korovkin, “An Account of Social Usages of Americanized Argot in Modern Russia” *Language in Society* 16:4 (1987), 515.

These meanings had little to do with the actual way Americans treated each other and others, or the quality of American meals.

Frequently, *fartsovshchiki* came from privileged backgrounds; their parents occupied high-level positions within the Soviet hierarchy.⁹⁵ This was especially true of the decades immediately following World War II, the late 1940s-early 1960s, when few outside the elite circle had access to foreign goods, or a sense of invincibility due to official status of their parents. By the late 1960s, with the increase of foreigners coming to the Soviet Union and Soviets traveling abroad, the black market for foreign goods expanded, involving people from all walks of life.⁹⁶

Officially, the *fartsovshchik* occupied a space somewhere between *stiliaga* and hooligan, more stylish than a hooligan and more criminal than a *stiliaga*. One Soviet movie showed *fartsovshchiki* as almost comical figures, willing to adopt any style and listen to any music only because those things came from America. At the same time they were literally willing to tear clothes off the backs of foreign tourists.⁹⁷

In real life, the Soviet government did not see *fartsovshchiki* as a laughing matter. In anti-speculator campaign in 1961, Soviet court sentenced four currency speculators, activity often associated with *fartsovshchiki*, to death.⁹⁸ Others received a lesser sentence of twelve years in prison.⁹⁹ Extreme severity of punishment, however, was simply due to the show nature of the campaign.¹⁰⁰ In later years, *fartsovshchiki* acted quite openly,¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Interview with former *fartsovshchik* at <http://pda.sb.by/post/102736/>. Accessed April 22, 2012. Lee, 23-26.

⁹⁶ Romanov and Iarskaia-Smirnova.

⁹⁷ *Foreigners (Inostrantsy)* – 1961.

⁹⁸ Interview with former Moscow *fartsovshchik* Yuri Zakhar at <http://www.masterstudio.narod.ru/bucher/bucher6/farzovshik.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Apparently KGB began building a case against currency speculators as a response to complaints by several prominent foreign visitors that people wanting to exchange foreign currency pestered them during

and while still persecuted by authorities, they could often escape legal problems by bribing officials.¹⁰²

The vast majority of foreign tourists to the Soviet Union remembered having been approached by one of these characters. Ronald Hingley, visiting the Soviet Union from England in 1960, recalled:

It is rare to meet a tourist returning from Russia who has not been pestered in the streets to sell the clothes off his back, flog pound notes for six times their official value or buy ikons which, if not fakes, will probably be taken off him by a Soviet customs official at the border.”¹⁰³

Others reported being hassled for gum and ball-point pens.¹⁰⁴

Strong demand and limited availability of Western goods meant handsome profits for those who managed to engage in this trade without getting caught. American journalist Harrison Salisbury, working in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s, reported that “old, secondhand American records which wouldn’t bring a nickel at a Goodwill store in the U.S.A. can be sold in Moscow for twenty-five rubles [a large sum at the time] apiece.”¹⁰⁵ One Belorussian for-sale-man reported earning enough for a brand new car in two weeks in the early 1970s, as well as having enough money that his wife never wore a dress more than once.¹⁰⁶

their stay in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev himself weighted in on the sentence, seeing it as just - http://fisechko.ru/100vel/kaznei/99.htm#n_43.

¹⁰¹ Lee, 23-26. Bernard Newman, *Visa to Russia* (London: H. Jenkins, 1959), 95; Ray Pierre Corsini, *Caviar for Breakfast* (London: Harvill, 1967), 20.

¹⁰² Interview with former *fartsovshik* at <http://pda.sb.by/post/102736/>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁰³ Hingley, *Under Soviet Skins*, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Newman, 95. Corsini, 20. Lee, 23-26.

¹⁰⁵ Salisbury, *American in Moscow*, 112.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with former *fartsovshik* at <http://pda.sb.by/post/102736/>. Accessed April 22, 2012. While most Soviet automobiles were not expensive on paper one could not simply buy it without spending many years on official waiting lists. Therefore, purchasing a car (new or used) in a short period of time involved paying several times the official cost.

What motivated people to become *fartsovshchiki*? Soviet media suggested they did it out of sheer stupidity and blind admiration of the West.¹⁰⁷ In reality, money appears to have been the primary motivation for a majority of *fartsovshchiki*. “I wanted to live a normal [that is, comfortable] life,” stated one former *fartsovshchik* when asked about the reasons for choosing such a profession.¹⁰⁸ Others reported similar motivations.¹⁰⁹ Some *fartsovshchiki* claimed their lifestyle was a way of helping people obtain necessary goods, stand out from the crowd or experience the thrill of doing something illegal.¹¹⁰ While probably true in some cases, it is easy to imagine other ways for people to achieve similar results, if they were truly altruistic, they could have charged a lesser markup; or to gain visibility through legal means; or engaged in petty, but equally thrilling, violations of the law.

How did average people view these blackmarketeers? It is not hard to imagine that a number of young Soviets looked at them with admiration and jealousy, as they stood out from the crowd and lived a life of luxury. For many others, the “seller of deficit goods became class enemies, soulless and spiritless shysters,” wrote sociologists Pavel Romanov and Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova.¹¹¹ The resentment is not surprising, given that the vast majority of Soviet people could only dream of the *fartsovshchik* lifestyle. While working full-time jobs and taking care of their families, few Soviets had access to quality foreign goods, and even fewer had enough money to buy a car or eat out at restaurants. Consequently, the word speculator (*spekuliant*), usually associated with

¹⁰⁷ 1960s propaganda movie available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1W4mDYumxSA>. Movie *Foreigners (Inostrantsy)* – 1961. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with former *fartsovshik* at <http://pda.sb.by/post/102736/>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with former Moscow *fartsovshik* Yuri Zakhar at <http://www.masterstudio.narod.ru/bucher/bucher6/farzovshik.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Romanov and Iarskaia-Smirnova.

¹¹¹ Romanov and Iarskaia-Smirnova.

fartsovshchiki and the black market in general, became a common derogatory label for anyone perceived to have more money than the average person.

Times they are a changin': Soviet youth in late socialism

In 1968, in an unsolicited report to authorities, a Soviet university student described some aspects of the student life in Odessa in the following way:

- A majority of students prefer foreign radio. [Because it has] more detailed news and more interesting programs. Almost every room has a radio. A frequent expression among students is “But the “Voice” [VOA] said that...”
- Since Odessa is a big port, students see lots of foreigners and often admire anything Western. Phrases “from the States” are synonymous with the highest class.
- Common phrases heard among students – “Americans are smart people because they don’t have a communist party” and “Their unemployed live better than our engineers.”
- Students are eager to “fight for something”, so they fight for Western fashion and dances.
- Western movies such as the “Magnificent Seven” have a strong impact on Soviet youth, who often imitate them, because they have a strong hero characters.
- Student phrase “I don’t care if its socialism or capitalism as long as I am paid well.”
- Interest in sexuality is an area where Western influence is the strongest.
- Western women are considered prettier and better taken care of as opposed to our “cows.” The expression “free love” is popular.¹¹²

The information in the report is telling not just in frequent mention of Soviet students’ seeming admiration of the West, but also in highlighting the growth of consumerism and desire for a more comfortable and freer life among the younger generation. In talking about high salaries in America, desire for a large paycheck regardless of which economic system provided it, sexuality, and Western entertainment, a growing number of Soviet youth voiced their appetite for a life free of deficits in consumer goods, better and more

¹¹² RGANI f. 5 op. 60 d. 48 l. 133-152.

diverse entertainment, as well as more life-affirming goals.¹¹³ In other words, these students wanted a life that had a meaning, more choices, and to enjoy life, not struggle through it.

Already in the early 1960s, some among the younger generation began to notice greater preoccupation with material wellbeing among their contemporaries. “You only live once so take everything you can from life,” wrote a 21-year-old female student from Penza describing a certain attitude among some of her peers (especially women) in an early 1960s sociological survey.¹¹⁴ Others noted consumerism and lack of enthusiasm in Party activities and work.¹¹⁵ Issues directly related to consumerism, and preoccupation with material wellbeing and material things, made up five out of top ten negative traits of the younger generation, as seen by their peers in the above-mentioned survey.¹¹⁶

Adolescents were not the only segment of Soviet society increasingly preoccupied with material quality of life. A number of scholars identified similar trends in various other parts of Soviet society from 1960s to break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.¹¹⁷ For example, writing about 1960s Soviet generation’s infatuation with Ernest Hemingway, Vail’ and Genis noticed that Soviets liked what they perceived to be Hemingway’s attitude toward life rather than the insights from his writing. People copied his clothing style, abandoning the suit for the sweater in a rebellion of materialism over the world of only ideas because in Hemingway’s books people enjoyed life: food, fun,

¹¹³ For example, a 1976 KGB report on school age youth and university students pointed out that a number of Soviet youth thought social work in the country was too traditional and primitive, not allowing for full individual development; see “Analiticheskaia spravka KGB SSSR o kharaktere i prichinakh negativnykh proiavlenii sredi uchaisheisia i studen’cheskoi molodezhi,” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, No. 1, 1994, 207.

¹¹⁴ Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 168.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 168-176.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 180.

¹¹⁷ Millar, 53. Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, 76-79, Smith, 178.

and drink.¹¹⁸ *New York Times* correspondent David Shipler wrote of Soviet society in the late 1970s:

the qualities in America that the Russians came to admire were not those that many Americans hoped to export. A powerful lust developed for the material goods and popular styles of American society, a craving for the exotic artifacts of the consumer culture. In Moscow and other major cities a lucrative black market flourished in jeans, rock records, chewing gum, and American cigarettes. Faddish teenagers slapped English words into Russian slang and sported dungaree jackets with American flags sewn on the sleeves.¹¹⁹

The lives of Soviets in the Brezhnev period no longer revolved around the hardships of World War II and post-war reconstruction. If the previous generation could blame the war for their present day struggles and hope for a brighter future, by 1960s, the government was running out of excuses. As we have seen in the chapter on official propaganda, the authorities tried to divert attention away from consumer goods by promoting Soviet achievements in space, but it was a short-term solution.

Much like the post-war youth, however, the Brezhnev youth did not reject the Soviet system outright. Instead, they chose to simply graft desire for material comforts, self-expression, and a particular type (one outside the system) of entertainment and relaxation onto it.¹²⁰ “Just because we dig Jimi Hendrix doesn’t mean we are any less ready to fight for our country,” stated a Russian fan of rock music.¹²¹ A majority of Soviet youth were comfortable with the social benefits of free education and healthcare provided to them by the Soviet system, but wanted to dress better, live in their own

¹¹⁸ Vail’ and Genis, 54-55.

¹¹⁹ Shipler, 347-348.

¹²⁰ As if often the case, adolescents seek to find their identity outside the system, or at least what they perceive to be outside the system--in other words, a youthful rebellion. As far as general entertainment we must note that by the late 1960s, Soviet entertainment industry, particularly TV, did adjust to the needs of the people for better quality production. As Christine Evans showed, Soviet television programs in the 1970s put in a lot of effort to actively engage the audience; see Christine Evans, “Song of the Year and Soviet Mass Culture in the 1970s,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12:3 (Summer 2011), 617-645.

¹²¹ Quoted in Smith, 171.

apartments, have meaningful goals, and carve out their own space outside the one prescribed by the state.

Let us consider two examples of Soviet young people mentioned by Andrea Lee, an American graduate student who lived in Moscow for ten months in the late 1970s. Grigorii, our first example, was a journalism student who genuinely believed in superiority of Soviet system over the West. At the same time, he decorated his office space with Western advertisements, and listened to Western music - constantly playing Donna Summer's "Love to Love You, Baby" "to the delighted horror of his friends."¹²² Tolia, our second illustration, was a "Komsomol member so highly respected that he heads his own study group."¹²³ Being an active *Komsomol* member, however, did not prevent Tolia from being an avid consumer of things American, which except in some rare cases could only be obtained on the black market. He owned many pairs of American jeans and other clothing items, and in his apartment "bottles of American after-shave and mouthwash and can of American air freshener are artistically set out, like so many bibelots."¹²⁴ Both Grigorii and Tolia created a hybrid version of the Soviet Union that combined socialist principles with Western, primarily American, popular culture. In their version of the Soviet Union, one could listen to Donna Summer and wear Wrangler jeans while believing in eventual downfall of the corrupt and unjust system that produced them.

In the 1970s and 1980s, American things became status symbols, especially among the younger Soviets. If early *stiliagi* used brands to separate themselves within

¹²² Lee, 13.

¹²³ Ibid, 159.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

the group from those in other socio-economic classes,¹²⁵ by the 1970s, brands became a way for people to advertise their position within a wider society. Wearing stylish and difficult-to-obtain American clothes signaled that the wearer had money and/or connections. This was especially important for younger Soviets, who also used Western symbols to stand out. Noting a sociological study from the 1970s, Vladimir Shlapentokh wrote:

female teenagers in Moscow were asked whether they would date young men who did not wear jeans. To the great surprise of the Soviet sociologist who cites the data, the majority said “nyet.”¹²⁶

Young people, however, were not exclusive in using Western products as status symbols. For example, in 1982 movie *Private Life (Chastnaia Zhizn')*, the director of a large automobile factory smokes Marlboro cigarettes to underscore his high-level position. This example also showed that Soviets were developing a nascent recognition of Western brands. Already in the 1950s, *stiliagi* put Soviet cigarettes in Pall Mall and Camel packs for prestige.¹²⁷ In the late 1970s, some children of the Soviet elite defined themselves based on whether they preferred Levi's or Wrangler denim.¹²⁸

Imitation of Western trends and use of Western symbols was especially important among Soviet subculture groups such as hippies, rock and soccer fans, and *fartsovshchiki* whom we already mentioned. They frequently dressed, acted and listened to music just like they thought people did in the West. And when a rare opportunity presented itself, they tried to see if their mimicry was up-to-par. American tourists in the Soviet Union

¹²⁵ Edele, 38.

¹²⁶ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, 151. American journalist David Shipler recorded an incident where “One Russian cleaning lady was shocked when American woman threw away a *Lee* label of her jeans. The Russian took it home and attached it to her son's jeans.” See Shipler, 352.

¹²⁷ Edele, 42.

¹²⁸ Lee, 54.

often faced questions about current trends among American hippies and the latest gossip about the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.¹²⁹ Sometimes, without a proper context, Soviet followers of Western trends were either years behind the West or focused their energy on trends relatively unknown even in their country of origin.¹³⁰ Facing questions about contemporary American hippy culture from a group of Soviet hippies in the late 1970s, Andrea Lee recalled the following scene:

The faces of the group bent in toward me, their eyes searching mine ravenously. I felt a curious embarrassment as I tried to describe to them the changed temper of the seventies. It was a near-sad feeling, as if I were a bearer of tidings to an isolated group of believers that their leaders had lost the faith.¹³¹

Furthermore, possessing little concrete information about the things they imitated, young Soviets often created their own meanings. *Fartsovshchiki* and soccer gangs used English words and phrases that had little significance to people outside their groups, English or Russian.¹³² At times, local interpretations of the same thing differed depending on the city, and sometimes became the exact opposites of those popular in the West. For example, the heavy metal band Black Sabbath, whose members wore crosses, inspired religious revival among certain segments of Soviet youth in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine).¹³³ In the West, Black Sabbath was frequently associated with black magic and Satanism. In Moscow youth liked Black Sabbath because of its message of “defiance and aggression,” a meaning closer to one found in the West.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Kuhn, 98; Lee, 90-91; Smith, 469.

¹³⁰ Veil’ and Genis, 216.

¹³¹ Lee, 90-91.

¹³² For examples of *fartsovshik* argot see Korovkin, 515. For soccer gang argot see John Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* (Boston : Unwin Hyman, 1990), 29-66.

¹³³ Zhuk, 204-206.

¹³⁴ Bushnell, 81-89.

Raised in the Soviet Union, young people naturally adopted a lot of Soviet characteristics into their subcultures. In their groups, hippies in L'viv (Ukraine) incorporated elements from Communist Youth organizations.¹³⁵ Others, including political opposition groups, also borrowed organizational structures from official institutions.¹³⁶

Here we come to a rather obvious question: Why copy the West, especially America? Why not imitate India, or Cuba? In part, the answer lies in simple matter of availability. Western, largely American, content was most readily available for consumption by Soviet youth. VOA and RL broadcasted non-stop day and night to the Soviet Union, when young people tuned in to hear the latest jazz and pop music. Moreover, American music already had deep roots in Soviet youth culture, going back as far as the 1920s,¹³⁷ and jazz was one of the first popular music genres in post-war Soviet Union. American and British musical groups were the most popular and best marketed in the world, therefore when illegal music made it over Soviet borders it was likely to be from the U.S. or U.K. Another reason was that for Soviet youth, the West, especially America, lingered as the pinnacle of the dynamic, fun, dangerous, and trend setting “other”, the forbidden fruit that young often seek out.

How did Soviet authorities react to greater encroachment of American popular culture into the lives of Soviet youth? Soviet media showed Westernized youth of the period as lazy, materialistic, and their music and fashions as better suited for a crazy

¹³⁵ William Jay Risch, “Soviet 'Flower Children. Hippies and the Youth Counter-culture in 1970s L'viv” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005), 579.

¹³⁶ For more detailed discussion on the topic see Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 363.

¹³⁷ For more on this see Anne Gorsuch, *Flappers and foxtrotters : Soviet youth in the “roaring twenties”* (Pittsburgh : Center for Russian & East European studies, 1994).

house or carnival.¹³⁸ Unlike official treatment of *stiliagi*, however, these depictions rarely suggested criminal associations, and definitely had a more comical character than similar propaganda in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Soviet security institutions focused on different aspects of Western influences on Soviet youth. A secret KGB report from 1976 attributed Western influences to targeted propaganda campaign instigated by Western intelligence agencies, with the CIA leading the way. The report stated that by using radio, cultural exchanges, and other propaganda mediums, Western intelligence services sought to propagate disapproval of the Soviet government among youth. Young people were particularly vulnerable to Western propaganda because of their as yet unstable and rapidly changing worldview, added the report.¹³⁹

The KGB report also noted that a large number of these negative manifestations contained political overtones. In its conclusion it again underlined that the primary objective should be the prevention of “politically harmful” influences. Therefore, KGB saw proliferation of Western music, dances, and fashion as undesirable and harmful in general, but seriously harmful only when it inculcated political dissent.

On a local level, concerns over negative influences of Western pop culture sometimes lost out to temptations of personal enrichment. I already mentioned largely futile attempts to co-opt Western music by promoting Soviet bands with similar sound by authorities in the 1950s and 1960s. These failures, however, also showed that when Western music played during official youth functions it could bring in a hefty profit for

¹³⁸ <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/sashenka2005/post139837209/>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹³⁹ “Analiticheskaia spravka KGB SSSR o kharaktere i prichinakh negativnykh proiavlenii sredi uchaisheisia i studen’cheskoi molodezhi,” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, No. 1, 1994, 195-207.

organizers and officials alike. In his study of rock music in Dnepropetrovsk, Sergei Zhuk noted

Thus the first wave of cultural consumption in the 1960s, that involving jazz, demonstrated the ability of both Soviet officials and common consumers to make money on new music and build new entrepreneurial connections, which would become the foundation for a lucrative music business in the closed city of the 1970s.¹⁴⁰

In another example, in his work on Soviet hippies in 1970s L'viv, William Risch pointed out that "local party authorities in L'viv did not perceive hippies as a serious ideological adversary, even allowing them to gather literally on their doorstep."¹⁴¹

Therefore, it appears that despite authorities' view of American music and hippie lifestyle as undesirable, they did not come down too hard as long as they did not challenge the government's monopoly on shaping political discourse. Consequently, any expression with political overtones, even those that paralleled official statements, was quickly shut down. In 1971, for instance, a number of Soviet hippies planned a march from Moscow State University (MGU) to the American embassy in order to protest the Vietnam War. As soon as they unwrapped their banners denouncing American involvement in Vietnam the police hauled them off to prison.¹⁴²

Conclusion

For a large number of young people, the Soviet system simply did not offer enough choices that fit their particular quest for self-identity. As a result, they looked to places outside the Soviet borders, turning to Western dress, music, literature, and popular

¹⁴⁰ Zhuk, 78.

¹⁴¹ Risch, "Soviet 'Flower Children'", 579.

¹⁴² Bushnell, 115.

culture in general. Juliane Furst attributed this phenomenon to static nature of post-war Soviet system and ideology. She wrote:

Instead of contributing to the process of socialism through a continuous process of self-transformation and self-improvement, the later Soviet self had to wrap itself around static messages and petrified rituals. It had to fit, rather than to develop; it was expected to support rather than create. Of course, the occasional ideological campaign such as the Virgin Lands provided a valve for ideological romanticism and revolutionary-type self-fashioning.¹⁴³

In many ways this assessment is correct. We, however, cannot attribute it wholesale to the nature of the Soviet system. Certainly, Soviet society had fewer avenues for youthful self-expression than many of the Western countries, but as we have seen that did not prevent Soviet youth from carving out their own niches. Therefore, we should also view agency on the part of Soviet youth as part of a broader human condition, or as sociologist Thomas Cushman put it in his study of Soviet rock music:

expressions of Russian culture take on new meanings if we view them as instances which illustrate the more general, universal capacity of individuals to exert agency and control over structural conditions which limit and constrain them.¹⁴⁴

As I have shown in this chapter, the vast majority of the time Soviet youth's adoption of Western popular culture was not a struggle against the Soviet system. It was, however, a message that the system failed to address more existential needs of its younger members. Of course we might ask whether any system is equipped for such a task, considering rebellion against the system is often a major part in a search for self-identity.

¹⁴³ Furst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 294.

¹⁴⁴ Cushman, 2.

Conclusion

Events such as the 1957 Youth Festival, the 1959 (and subsequent) American exhibitions in Moscow, American radio broadcasts, music, movies, and consumer products undoubtedly had an impact on Soviet people's view of America.

But what kind of an impact? In other words, we must answer the question: Do people's use of, or preference for, foreign cultural or consumer products signal a rejection of the political or social system under which they are living? As I have shown, despite the significant presence of Americana in Soviet society and its apparently wide acceptance, American influences did not alter the core beliefs about America among a majority of the Soviet population in the post-World War II years (1945-1985).

Almost until the end of the Soviet Union, Soviet people saw America as a country with a high level of material wealth and Americans as having superb business acumen. Most also saw America as having achieved high standards in technological and consumer product spheres. The limited amount of information, however, often inflated these perceptions far beyond reality. Consequently, as we have seen in examples from American exhibitions, Soviets were frequently disappointed to find American products residing firmly in the realm of non-fiction. In the eyes of the Soviets, American wealth came at a price. They saw Americans as having chaotic and high paced lifestyles, high crime and lack of stability, as well as the absence of a social safety net and benefits such as free health care and education, all as a result of economic inequality. Soviet people knew that America provided better living conditions for its citizens, but few saw it as an

improvement over their safe and stable existence. However, people began to demand more from the government once the devastation and sacrifice of the World War II and post-war reconstruction began to fade in the 1970s. The work of David Ruffley, for example, has shown the greater focus on material wellbeing and demands for higher personal realization among young Soviet specialists in the 1970s and 1980s. Even so, these aspirations still remained within the confines of the Soviet system, and few called out for capitalism. Therefore, while acknowledging that America achieved better results in certain fields, particularly consumer technology and goods, most Soviets did not see the American system as inherently better than their own. To put it another way, despite attempts by the American government to promote American way of life through exhibitions, radio broadcasts, and cultural exchanges, Soviet people did not see the connection between high living standards in the United States and its social and political system.

It is here that we see why Soviet people managed to combine their loyalty to the Soviet system with their use and even admiration for American products. These things remained on the outer level of Soviet perceptions about the United States and never permeated core Soviet beliefs about unjust nature of American system. It was partly a matter of (perceived) quality—the US specialized in producing consumer goods, unlike the Soviet Union—and more attention was paid to ease of use and aesthetics. It was partly exoticism—these goods were distinctive, clearly different from Soviet-produced products. It was partly a safe challenge to the stultifyingly rigid Soviet official propriety—nobody could get into a lot of trouble for listening to Western music or wearing jeans. In this way, an affinity for American popular culture was rather like

making jokes about the Soviet system: diverting, a bit risqué, a safe way to comment on the inadequacies of Soviet officialdom, but without intending a serious challenge. And most of all, Western products and the model of America provided a way for Soviets to measure their own society against an international standard, and against its own promises, and to challenge their country to do better. Rarely did one's preference for American consumer or cultural products turn into a call for the overthrow of the Soviet government or radical changes to the values of social justice claimed by the Soviet system.

In his study of Soviet youth in the closed city of Dnepropetrovsk, Sergei Zhuk convincingly demonstrated that Western influences did indeed play a role in the emergence of anti-Soviet (as defined by Soviet officials) phenomena such as religiosity and nationalism. Yet, as we have seen, even while challenging aspects of the Soviet system by comparing them to the United States, Soviet citizens often reaffirmed Soviet patriotism and condemnation of the American socio-politico-economic system.

Therefore, the problem rests in the question of how do we characterize the term anti-Soviet? I and several other scholars of the Soviet Union, notably Furst and Yurchak, found that most Soviet users of Western cultural and consumer products did not see themselves as anti-Soviet. At the same time, many others, officials as well as ordinary citizens, had the opposite view.

From the official perspective, anti-American/anti-West campaigns in the early post-World War II period sought to solidify public support for the government's foreign and domestic policies that were being challenged by greater exposure to the West during the war. With tensions undoubtedly heightened by the onset of the Cold War, officials depicted American influences as seriously damaging to the Soviet state and Soviet way of

life. Eventually, under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, officials characterized their citizens' use of American products (consumer and cultural) in softer colors. Officially, such practices no longer posed direct threats but still signaled lack of vigilance to harmful influences to the Soviet way of life.

“I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace,” was the message communicated to his superiors by the Czech greengrocer who put up official posters in his window, according to Vaclav Havel.¹ As far as authorities were concerned, a Soviet person wearing American jeans and listening to the Rolling Stones (American products not sanctioned by officials) sent the opposite message by not behaving in a manner expected of him. In the later Soviet period, such a person was not necessarily a threat but certainly suspect in his allegiance to the Soviet way of life, as defined by authorities. Moreover, authorities also worried about Soviet people yearning for material things that the system could not provide.

Following the official lead, many average Soviet people saw the use of American products not approved by the state as somehow anti-Soviet behavior. In other words, their view of what it meant to be Soviet resided in the confines of the official framework. Deviations from this framework were considered as corroding to Soviet way of life.

Therefore, my study of Soviet attitudes and reactions to the United States has value in our continued attempt to understand Soviet people's debates about the nature of the Soviet state, its image, and its future, among themselves and with their government. America often served as a symbol in a variety of more personal issues ranging from self-

¹ Vaclav Havel, “Power of the Powerless.” Available at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/700>. Accessed May 17, 2012.

expression to grievances over compensation for work. It is clear that America, as representative of the greater West, figured prominently in these debates.

Despite their propensity to invoke “America” as a rhetorical device to challenge Soviet authorities, most average Soviets continued to view America within the framework of official propaganda, despite the availability and widespread use (especially in post-Stalin years) of unofficial information such as Western radio broadcasts. These findings suggest that the Soviet state managed to control the prism through which the people viewed America. Moreover, it raises questions about the extent and mechanisms in which radio broadcasts and cultural exchanges influenced Soviet public opinion.

For example, millions of Soviet people listened to Western radio broadcasts such as VOA and RL. My analysis, however, showed that high listenership did not imply that American propaganda to the Soviet Union achieved its goals of becoming a trusted news source and presenting American system as a better alternative to the Soviet Union. Indeed, many Soviets received information from American radio, yet without the ability to independently verify this information, most were just as skeptical of the American version as they were of the Soviet one. The same was true of American exhibitions. The focus of American propaganda on material prosperity in the United States simply reaffirmed something the Soviets knew from the days predating the 1917 October Revolution. At the same time, it did little to dispel the widely held view of America as a land of vast social inequality and American foreign policy as based on the need for war to maximize Wall Street profits. The cultural exchange showed Soviet people that America was not devoid of high culture, yet it did not change the perception of American culture as largely lowbrow, based on glorifying sex and violence.

Within these overall conclusions, the opportunity for further refinement remains. This dissertation touched briefly on issues of gender, profession, nationality, and geographical location in regard to reactions to America, but further research would permit refinements of my initial conclusions. These include findings suggesting that Soviet women, as mothers, were more receptive than men to official propaganda regarding peace initiatives which portrayed America as a warmonger and the Soviet Union as protector of peace.

In other examples, peasants appeared more willing than urban workers to accept the government's assertions regarding the United States, mostly due to lower education levels and limited availability of outside information in the countryside. At the same time, lack of information caused greater exaggerations of both official and unofficial statements about the United States. In addition, Soviet minority nationalities, especially those who are racially different from the Russian majority, readily incorporated the American racism narrative in discussing relations among ethnic groups in the Soviet Union.

This dissertation enables further comparative analysis, comparing and contrasting popular responses to the Cold War in the Soviet Union and the United States. Clearly, public responses reflect the context of the political and social systems in each country. For example, in both countries, people idealized in the "other" in regard to situations that were problematical at "home." So while Americans who struggled with problems of unemployment idealized Soviet full employment, Soviets who struggled with the availability of consumer goods idealized American comfort. In both countries, people imagined that women had superior rights. In both countries, the "other" was used less as a

model for future development than as a rhetorical device to challenge weaknesses in the current system. However, unlike American pop-culture in the Soviet Union, Soviet culture never became desirable or exotic among Americans, even among American youth who rejected the cultural norms of their elders. Further study will help to answer the question of why the cultural exoticism was unidirectional.

This project has significant implications for the receptivity of Russians today to American political, social, economic and cultural values. To what extent have the patterns and perceptions of the Cold War era persisted in contemporary Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union? How do they influence the current Russian government's interactions with the United States? In his statements, Vladimir Putin frequently has blamed the United States for inciting instability during 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia. This is evidence that in official statements America continues to play a role of chief adversary, although with more old-fashioned geopolitical terms replacing ideology.

In some ways, the Russian official rhetoric regarding the United States has been strikingly similar to those of the Soviet era. For example, Russian official statements on European based missile defense shield seek to portray Russia as a peaceful victim and the U.S. as a senseless aggressor. This is a tactic quite similar to Soviet Cold War propaganda that sought to convince the Soviet population that the Soviet Union fought only for peace while the United States thrived on its profits from war.

In other aspects, present day Russian attempts to influence public opinion differ from those of its Soviet past. Soviet era efforts to shape public opinion in regard to the U.S were based largely on rather unsophisticated depictions of America as a country

high-jacked by a small clique of profit-motivated “warmongers.” Such propaganda techniques required almost complete government control of all the media and restrictions on foreign travel--something the current Russian government is unwilling and unable to do considering the prevalent use of internet and satellite dishes.² The current Russian approach is undoubtedly taking lessons from the largely unsuccessful attempts by the Soviet government to prevent the population from listening to Western radio broadcasts during the Cold War. Therefore, the Russian government is intent on presenting its case for opposition to the American missile defense shield as having a scientific, rather than ideological, basis. For example, in laying out the scientific case for Russian apprehensions about the missile shield, Putin repeatedly pointed to the low level of rocket technology of North Korea and Iran--the two countries cited by the U.S. as possible nuclear threats.³ This approach is far more effective at influencing the views of the general public, as arguments based on science, despite their truth or falsity, are far more resilient under basic scrutiny.

Interestingly, Russian public reactions to the U.S. changed little from those in the Soviet days where people viewed the U.S. in contradictory terms, essentially blaming the U.S. for fomenting the Cold War, while simultaneously envying American living standards and holding generally positive feelings towards Americans as people. Similarly, current Russian public opinion polls define the United States primarily as a

² There is little doubt that the Russian government under Putin succeeded in pushing much of the official media towards the government line. Unlike the Soviet Union, however, the average Russian today has numerous alternative sources of information. Russians can readily access American news sources, such as CNN and see what American life is like through YouTube, commercial and educational websites, and entertainment media, via satellite television, the internet, and travel.

³ Putin stated that both North Korea and Iran basically possessed upgraded versions of the World War II German technology.
http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2001/06/18/0002_type63376type63380_28569.shtml Accessed April 22, 2012.

wealthy country, but one that imposes its worldview on the rest of the globe, and seeing the U.S. as the primary threat to global security.⁴

The Russian government's vocal concern over the proposed American missile shield and NATO expansion in early 2001 had a significant effect on public opinion. According to surveys conducted by the All Russian Research Center of Public Opinion (WCIOM), between July 2000 and February 2001, the number of Russians who saw American-Russian relations in a positive light declined by 11% to 59% of those interviewed. However, the survey indicates that this trend did not last, as by May 2001, 69% of respondents once again saw U.S.-Russia relations as "generally good."⁵ The instability of the negative feelings towards the U.S. is a possible indicator that the "base" feelings of the Russian public towards the U.S. are generally positive, being affected by certain statements from the Russian government, but only for a short period of time. The contradictory feelings are in line with previous largely positive views of Americans as people and negative attitude towards the American government.

May 2002 surveys found similar attitudes, where about 62% saw U.S.-Russian relations in a positive light.⁶ At the end of 2005, public opinion surveys showed that while the majority of those polled had a favorable opinion of the U.S., regardless of their party affiliation, most still saw the United States as a primary threat, both in military and

⁴ <http://www.levada.ru/om2008.html> Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁵ http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/601.html?no_cache=1&cHash=6c64426fcc Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁶ http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/247.html?no_cache=1&cHash=64413e326f Accessed April 22, 2012.

economic spheres.⁷ Moreover, there had been a decline in the number of people who viewed U.S.-Russia relations with optimism: 64% in 2003 to 54% in 2008.⁸

According to one public opinion expert, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians developed what was referred to as an “inferiority complex,” and now “viewed most world events through the prism of this complex.”⁹ For example, one commentator noted that Russians envied early American military successes in Afghanistan: “How is it possible that Americans accomplished in a few months what we could not accomplish in 11 years.”¹⁰ Russian attitudes toward the East European missile shield, therefore, should be viewed through the same prism. For the average Russian, the shield and the Russian government’s inability to do anything about it, conjures up painful memories of NATO’s bombing of Serbia, a historical Russian ally, in 1999.

In short, most Russians resent the loss of superpower status and tend to see American foreign policy as heavy-handed and arrogant. This was an opinion expressed by several experts during a 2007 discussion of American-Russian relations on *Ekho-Moskvy* radio station. One participant attributed the American stance concerning the European missile shield to periodic instances when America was “drunk with power.” Another expert noted that American proposals regarding the missile shield showed that Americans intended to dominate any discussion on the issue.¹¹

⁷ http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/2180.html?no_cache=1&cHash=040effddb0. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁸ http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/10432.html?no_cache=1&cHash=88db311008. Accessed April 22, 2012.

⁹ http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3190.html?no_cache=1&cHash=655e171857. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/9826.html?no_cache=1&cHash=c6ac029ff6. Accessed April 22, 2012.

Polls by other institutions studying Russian public opinion tend to support the general trends noted in the WCIOM surveys. For example, public opinion research by the Levada Center showed that the largest percentage of Russians viewed the U.S.-Russian relations as stable, yet more on the negative side, with some rather dramatic changes during open disagreements between the two countries (ex. EE missile shield, Georgian conflict).¹² At the same time, since 2000, the overwhelming majority of Russians see the American people in a positive light, suggesting that Russians view the American government and the American people as separate entities.¹³ This is a trend similar to popular opinion in post-WWII Soviet Union, where the Soviets saw average American people as being exploited by the ruthless alliance of Wall Street and Washington.

More recent events suggest that Russians see certain areas of possible cooperation with the United States. For example, much like Americans, Russians viewed “Islamic terrorism” as the primary threat to national and international security, but are sharply critical of the U.S. methods in the “war on terror,” suspecting the U.S. of using the war as a cover for global domination and undermining Russian security. For example, a 2008 Russian survey found that the largest percentage (40%) of Russians viewed the American cancelation of the East European missile shield as only temporary, and saw the original intent for the shield as an American desire for military supremacy over Russia.¹⁴ Moreover, another poll showed that a majority of the Russian population fully supported the government’s proposed military response in form of placing Iskander missiles in the

¹² <http://www.levada.ru/om2008.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ <http://www.levada.ru/press/2009100901.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

Kaliningrad region.¹⁵ Significantly, these views correspond to the Russian government's rhetoric on the subject, demonstrating that the population remains willing to accept the government's depiction of US goals rather than believing the US government's statements.

Polls show that Russian public opinion is strongly influenced by the official government position, conveyed through the mass media that is largely controlled by the government. These fluctuations in public opinion, however, are short lived and do not appear to have a significant permanent effect on the Russians view of the United States as a business and technological leader as well as generally positive attitude towards Americans as people. As a result, it is safe to speculate that while the Russian government significantly influences public opinion, significant deviations from "core" beliefs about America, both positive and negative, will remain short-lived and difficult to sustain.

Certain actions by the United States (for example, the East European missile shield), however, viewed as hostile by average Russians, will have long-term effects on public perceptions of the United States. In a brief survey¹⁶ of comments in articles regarding U.S.-Russian relations, I found that many Russians still view the U.S. as an adversary that does not have Russia's best interests in mind. For example, an article on the cancelation of the missile shield by President Barak Obama drew the common response that America is doing this out of their own interest by switching to more effective and cheaper alternatives. "USA never does anything against its interests. If they

¹⁵ <http://www.levada.ru/om2008.html>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

¹⁶ The survey, done in 2010 by the author, included around twenty articles from the Russian website mail.ru. A majority of the articles focused on the issue of U.S.-Russia relations. Specifically, issues surrounding the U.S. missile defense shield in Eastern Europe.

removed [missiles] from the Czech Republic, then they will put them in more advantageous spots – the sea, islands, etc. We need to follow their example and surround Europe and the U.S. with missiles,” wrote one reader.¹⁷ Most Russians consider their country the dominant player in the surrounding region, and view American military presence (such as the missile defense shield) as provocation that has to be forcefully countered. In other words, a significant part of Russians reactions to America is rooted in nationalism. Further studies will need to determine with more precision the extent to which nationalism contributed to Russians view of America, past and present.

As we saw, besides being a Cold War adversary and an inspiration for popular culture trends, America has also been a “mirror” for Russians to see themselves and their place in the world. Therefore, attitudes about the United States were ultimately attitudes about the Soviet Union itself. Limited access to outside information played a major role in this use of America as a measuring stick. The next question, then, is how has this sentiment changed now that Russia is firmly entrenched in worldwide information systems?

¹⁷ <http://news.mail.ru/politics/2906485/comments/?&page=2>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

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