BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: AMERICANS AND SOVIETS AFTER THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the ways that migration and the ongoing legacies of imperialism shaped the United States’ engagement with the world in the early twentieth century. It focuses on interaction between Americans and Russian Soviets during an era marked by both multidirectional migration and the increasing deployment of American power abroad. In the decade after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Americans attempted to transform Russia through military occupation, humanitarian work, and the spread of cultural and industrial products. *Between Two Worlds* shows that such ventures were not unilateral extensions of American values and interests. Russian émigrés, workers, and refugees substantially affected American programs and even core questions about the United States’ role in the world and what it meant to be an American. This research also shows that rather than precursors to the cold war, American approaches to Russia were part of the history of early twentieth century imperialism.

Chapters trace these interactions through a series of case studies. A chapter on economic connections engages histories of international business, labor, and migration during Ford Motor Company’s Russian operations. A study on cultural interaction examines the circulation of filmmaking techniques and sentimental narratives in the Russian and American motion picture industries. Soldiers’ on-the-ground encounters in the context of overlapping U.S. and Russian development projects are the focus of a chapter on the Allied military occupation of North Russia. A chapter on humanitarian intervention explores American famine relief projects in Soviet Russia and the pathways they opened and foreclosed for migrants. An epilogue follows the circumnavigation of a group of refugees and aid workers through outposts of U.S. empire. Highlighting movement and multidirectional interaction, these histories challenge pervasive narratives about Americans and Russians as nationally, ideologically, and culturally divergent.
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Introduction – American Empire, Migration, and Bolshevik Russia

In 1919 a Russian peasant named Ivan with arms the length of the Neva River, heels as wide as the Caspian steppes, and 150,000,000 heads – one for each of his countrymen – waded across the Atlantic Ocean to fight hand-to-hand against a gigantic Woodrow Wilson whose top hat was the size of the Eiffel Tower. Their clash erased countries; some ran to Ivan with outstretched hands, others headlong to Wilson, but no middle ground was left, and everything turned crimson red or whiter and whiter white. The shattering confrontation between the head of capitalist America and the Russian people, imagined by Soviet futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, presaged many visions of a bipolar conflict between two giants that would later come to dominate understandings of the relationship between Soviet Russia and the United States.¹

But were Soviet Russia and the United States fundamentally at odds as Mayakovsky imagined, destined to face off in an epic battle that would wash across and divide the entire world? The poet’s actual journey across the Atlantic to visit the United States five years later suggested a different narrative about the way that Americans and Russians interacted and pointed to different pathways of connection. Unlike Ivan, Mayakovsky could not walk right up to Chicago. Because his Soviet citizenship made it difficult for him to obtain a visa to enter the United States, he traveled a circuitous route that included stops in Havana, Cuba, and Vera Cruz, Mexico, before crossing the border into Laredo, Texas. Mayakovsky met with workers in Detroit and Chicago. In New York, Russian émigrés of various stripes were particularly keen to meet him. For his own part, Mayakovsky saw the United States not as an inevitable foe of Soviet

Russia but rather in some ways analogous to Russia’s past and in others to its potential future. While American workers lagged behind Soviets in generating revolutionary activity, Mayakovsky, like many Soviets, saw American technology and industry as models that would be used in the development of a new socialist world. Noting that American advancements had been achieved on the backs of workers, the poet also explained the present state of the country as a product of the way the United States interacted with the world, arguing that “the United States established the right to call itself ‘America’ by force, by means of dreadnoughts and dollars, putting fear into neighboring republics and colonies.” A poem he wrote during his visit imagined a future geologist reconstructing the America Mayakovsky saw from the Brooklyn Bridge: “He will say: ‘So this is the paw of steel that united the seas with the prairies, and it’s from here Europe strained to the West, having scattered Indian feathers to the winds.’”

Mayakovsky’s impressions during his visit to the United States provide more useful avenues for understanding engagement between Americans and Russian Soviets then an epic battle. The journey took him through Russian migrant communities, sites marked by the legacy of American imperialism, and centers of American technology, industry, and culture. His travel account suggested many possible paths for how Russians and Americans might relate to each other. Taking this variety of potential paths as a starting point, *Between Two Worlds* examines interaction between Americans and Russian Soviets during an era marked by both multidirectional migration and the increasing deployment of American power abroad. In the decade after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Americans attempted to transform Russia through armed occupation, humanitarian work, and the spread of industrial and cultural products like those that Mayakovsky had admired on his trip. Although scholars have emphasized such

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ventures as part of the expanding reach of American efforts to shape places around the world, this dissertation demonstrates that these were not one-way projections of American power. Russians including émigrés, workers, and refugees substantially affected American programs and even core questions about the United States’ role in the world and what it meant to be an American. Migrants like the Russian-Americans Mayakovsky met in New York and Detroit were not just the objects of humanitarian aid or the fuel for manufacturing projects; they were central in producing and challenging these endeavors.

This dissertation also argues that rather than precursors to an epic cold war conflict, American approaches to Soviet Russia were part of the history of American imperialism. Echoing Mayakovsky’s poetic recognition that the “paw of steel” reaching across the North American continent had done so “having scattered Indian feathers to the wind,” I trace the ways that American efforts to shape Russia relied on narrative and material legacies drawn from prior and ongoing imperialism in the American West and overseas. Many Americans felt that the kinds of relationships that Mayakovsky noted had created “‘America’ by force” in its late nineteenth and early twentieth century interactions with “neighboring republics and colonies,” might be extended to places like Russia. They proposed that the mix of violence, benevolent uplift, and economic and cultural advancement that had aimed at shaping populations in and around the United States could also be used to direct Russia’s future.

These focuses on migration and imperial visions to transform Russia offer a history of connection that departs from cold war narratives that describe Americans and Russians as nationally, ideologically, and culturally divided. Scholars of the history of American foreign relations have tended to study American-Russian relations through the lens of the cold war,

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relying on mid-twentieth-century assumptions about ideological conflict and a bi-polar struggle between natural enemies to interpret events in the early twentieth century. In his seminal 1952 history of U.S.-Russian relations, William Appleman Williams wrote about “the conflict of two destinies” which became focused on ideological factors after 1917. Williams argued that the American approach to Russia formulated soon after the Bolshevik revolution was a “policy of antagonism” designed from the outset to destroy the Soviet government. The core features of this oppositional stance represented “the birth of containment,” according to Williams, and lasted from 1918 through to their cold war rearticulation. In the second half of the twentieth century, histories of Soviet Russia tracked changes in the American-Russian relationship, so that while antagonism was emphasized for contemporary political and ideological reasons, analyses of the “convergence” of American and Russian patterns of development were produced during periods of thawing tensions.

After the end of the cold war, many histories of United States-Russian relations have continued to emphasize political and ideological conflict, often with an eye towards the origins and continuities behind cold war policy. From the Bolshevik Revolution onwards they describe two fundamentally opposite paths that seemed to make conflict between Soviet Russia and the United States inevitable. At the same time, buttressed by increased access to Soviet archival

material, studies of American foreign policy makers, diplomacy, military and covert intervention, and U.S. Russian experts have also shown that Americans attempted to connect with and influence Russians following the Bolshevik Revolution in key ways. Some diplomats tried to find common ground through which American and Soviet leaders might come to terms with each other. Russian experts in the United States discussed the efficacy of deploying American modernization programs in Russia. Policy makers and military officials tried to intervene openly and secretly in unfolding events in Russia. Many American political, economic, and military decision makers saw “constructive possibilities” for American engagement with Soviet Russia, assuredly acting with the belief that Russia’s government and economic system could be modeled on those in the United States and that interventions on behalf of the process would gain important access to Russian markets.

These analyses of potential connections in some strands of diplomatic proposals, intellectual currents, and high level policymaking suggest the need for a broader reevaluation of interactions between Americans and Russian Soviets. This dissertation focuses on a cluster of connections that drove relations between Americans and Russian Soviets. It looks to a broad range of voices to understand how Americans and Russians related in the context of national and global changes in imperial power, migration, cultural production, and systems of labor. I argue that the decade following the Bolshevik revolution was marked less by clear boundaries between Soviets and Americans than by prior and potential connections. This approach challenges

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9 Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*.
entrenched ideas about cold war opposition that have continued to assume that, despite particular veins of connection, the histories of the United States and Soviet Russia are better understood as nationally, ideologically, and culturally divergent. Instead, I highlight on-the-ground interactions during economic, cultural, military, and humanitarian projects that connected Americans and Russians in the interwar period.

In particular, *Between Two Worlds* uncovers the key roles of Russian migrants who affected American approaches to Russia, ideas about the United States’ role in the world, and the meaning and boundaries of American citizenship. This method challenges the assumed distinctiveness of national and cultural groups that underlays studies focused on fundamental separations between Americans and Russian Soviets and that continues to characterize many international and comparative histories. *Between Two Worlds* also shows that rather than precursors to cold war animosities, American approaches to Russia in the decade following the Bolshevik revolution were part of the history of late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperialism.

This introduction outlines how migration and imperialism offer new interpretations of the way that Americans engaged with the world during the interwar years. Focusing on the role of migrants offers an on-the-ground and bottom-up approach that shows the value of incorporating a broader array of voices in the history of international relations. People who moved between Soviet Russia and the United States in both directions reveal that these two emerging worlds overlapped. Transformative projects, cultural ideas about difference and similarity, and processes of inclusion and exclusion in each country arose in interaction with each other, not in isolation, half a world apart. This insight challenges the assumption that developments in each place were internal, bringing quintessentially national, domestic processes like the “American system” of
factory production and the construction of “100 % Americanism” during the post-World War I red scare into transnational history. Situating American approaches to Russia in the history of imperialism provides a way to understand these interactions in their contemporary context rather than as cold war antecedents. This approach also offers a new understanding of the trajectory of American imperialism. The failure of Americans’ efforts to shape Russia in many of the ways they envisioned shows the limits of U.S. power in the interwar years and calls attention to the halting extension of American empire across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Migration and American Global Engagement**

*Between Two Worlds* places migration at the center of the history of ways that Americans and Russians engaged with each other in the decade after the Bolshevik Revolution. People who crossed between Soviet Russia and the United States were not outliers to the main story even though they often traversed and occupied geographic and cultural locations at the borders and on the fringes. They were often both the primary targets and the primary producers of economic, military, humanitarian, and cultural engagements. Migrants inhabited spaces in the center of national geography and economic and cultural production like Ford factories at Highland Park and Nizhny Novgorod in addition to moving through ports, consulates, and customs houses at the edges. They not only traversed national and ideological boundaries; migrants were also the mobile bodies through which national and ideological difference was proposed, defined, enforced, transgressed, and disrupted.

This study treats migrants as key actors in the history of international relations. This approach yields two major advantages over diplomatic histories of the American-Russian

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relationship. First, it traces people who moved between locations, rather than imagining them from afar. A recent essay on the state of scholarship on American-Russian relations suggests that despite many good studies of “diplomatic, economic, and intellectual connections between the United States and Russia/the Soviet Union…few have examined … Americans’ actual experience of the country.”12 This dissertation joins studies of Soviet interactions with visitors from the United States and histories of American representatives on the ground in Russia that have begun to trace specific instances when personal interactions inside Russia had substantive effects on relations between the countries.13

Beyond filling this gap, my focus on people who moved between Russia and the United States is part of a growing body of transnational histories and research that internationalizes United States history. This work focuses on movement and connection between territorial and cultural boundaries around nation-states, and in doing so, questions the historical construction of such divisions.14 Understandings of the role of the United States in the world and the boundaries of Americanness were produced and deployed in Soviet Russia as well as in the United States,

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13 See for example, Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to Soviet Union, 1921-1941 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Frank Costigliola, “Kennan Encounters Russia,” in Chatterjee and Holmgren, eds. Americans Experience Russia.
but they were often crucially created in the movement between these places. By positioning transnational movements at the center – rather than at the edges – of historical processes like the construction of what it meant to be American, this research challenges the assumed distinctiveness of cultures and national groups that underlay histories focused on the cold war oppositions that would later be said to separate Americans and Russian Soviets.

Second, a focus on migrants and other people at or near the bottom of hierarchical power relationships adds a broader range of voices to this history. Scholars of American-Russian relations have focused on an elite subsection of individuals who traveled between these countries. Diplomats, intellectuals, and experts had a lot of power to shape approaches to Russia, but they represented only a small fraction of the people who participated in American-Russian interactions. Although they often left fewer records behind, the movements of migrants dwarfed the movements of diplomats and officials. Investigating migrants, expands our understanding of the scope, locations, and meanings of meetings between Americans and Russians. In the same vein, I have read material in business, film, government, military, and humanitarian organizations’ archives with an eye towards people who executed engagements between the United States and Russia on-the-ground, rather than the individuals who sent them. In order to explain the role that the United States played in Russia during military intervention in the Russian Civil War, I prioritize American soldiers’ accounts of interaction with Russian peasants and soldiers, not official orders, commanders, or policy documents. Tracing the expansion of American business and economic interests to Russian markets and the appeal of American models of work and industry for Soviets requires enquiry that looks beyond central planners and corporate offices to the workers on factory floors.
This shift in perspective offers a new way to understand the driving forces of international engagement. While migration has been understood as the target of foreign policy, manufacturing projects, and humanitarian programs, I argue that migrants were central in enabling, as well as challenging, these endeavors. Russian-born migrants in Detroit worked to create the “American” products and manufacturing methods that Ford Motor Company sold in Russia. Russian émigré actors, writers, and directors played key roles in the production of films that explained the Bolshevik Revolution to Americans and offered explanations of the American-Russian relationship to audiences around the world. Migrants from the Russian Empire fought with the American Expeditionary Forces that attempted to occupy and reshape North Russia. They served as crucial linguistic and cultural translators and as models of Americanization who proved the value of bringing Americanness to Russians. Prior migrations of Russians to the United States also underlay the ability of U.S. humanitarian workers to create and execute famine relief operations in Russia. Migrants paid for remittances, identified potential repatriates, and drew on familial and business relationships to staff operational positions in Russia.

Tracing the interactions of moving Americans and Russian Soviets who met, clashed, and shaped each other in a variety of geographic, social, and cultural locations also allows for a reevaluation of histories of the “image” of Russia in the United States and of the way that Russians “imagined” America. Postcolonial critiques of cultural theory, new transnational interpretations of cultural history, and studies of imperial knowledge production and power relationships have challenged the assumptions about distinctiveness of cultures and notions of cultural “totality” tied to separate national groups that underlay attempts to understand the

cultural history of “American attitudes” toward the Soviet experiment. Ideas about national and cultural differences, and perceived similarities, were not produced from half a world apart. Instead, they were created, enacted, and challenged through embodied interactions. American workers, filmmakers, soldiers, and relief agents scrutinized, supplied, battled, and even built portions of the emerging Soviet project, while Soviet migrants and travelers to the United States observed, critiqued, produced, and appropriated notions of Americanism that were defined in part through interactions with Russian Bolsheviks. This dissertation challenges scholarship on cultural production and U.S. foreign interests by showing that American representations of Russia were not created apart from Russian narratives and people.

Beyond the creation of ideas and images, I also focus on the production of actual people as Americans and Soviets. Aid workers, soldiers, and factory managers applied ideas about national belonging in practice. The mobile individuals they defined and shaped also moved between these categories, fell outside of them, challenged understandings of Americanness and Sovietness, and utilized national identities on their own terms. For example, the idea that Russia was an untapped market for American goods, and the process of producing products and bringing them to Russia shaped individual workers and work and life practices on a daily, bodily level in both countries. American soldiers thought Russia could be like the United States because they saw peasants in North Russia who resembled American pioneers, and because they saw such transformations happen: Russian migrants serving as U.S. soldiers became Americans in battle.

16 Filene, Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 5.
These approaches can also enable us to reevaluate historical narratives that have understood American reactions to the Bolshevik Revolution as part of an anti-radical, anti-immigrant “red scare” that took place in the United States following the First World War. The importance of these events and their ultimate meanings were not bound within the borders of the United States but also shaped, and were crucially shaped by, events, people, and cultural productions in Soviet Russia. Conversely, seemingly Russian developments following the Bolshevik Revolution commonly had transnational, and in some cases profoundly American, dimensions. While Americans produced speeches, movies, novels, and textbooks about Americanism and Bolshevism, Bolsheviks, workers, filmmakers, and writers in Russia watched these developments and the movies that depicted them, and sorted out portions of “Amerikanizm” that they planned to harness in producing a new socialist world. Applying the insights of transnational and imperial history to the red scare allows us to see events often analyzed as a domestic political crisis in a global context. Indeed, we can see that the boundaries separating domestic politics and a domestic crisis were themselves the focus of contest and revision.

Programs for the separation of Americanism from Russian revolutionary changes took place in colonial territories, as well as in the United States proper. Guard duty to secure American homes from Bolshevik soldiers fell to troops stationed above the Arctic Circle. Plans to protect the United States from dangerous and undesirable Russian immigrants were laid and executed in cities like Constantinople.

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The restriction and exclusion of Eastern European and Russian immigrants, anarchists and radicals, those who might become public charges, and other groups from entering the United States was not merely a reflection of red scare attitudes inside United States borders. These changes were part of new barriers to the migration of people based on growing ideologies of nationhood and racial difference that also took shape in Europe and in settler societies like Canada and Australia. Combining the history of red scare anti-immigrant and anti-radical sentiments with the history of migration and American global engagement allows us to see that in film, battle, business, and humanitarianism, restrictive constructions of American national belonging overlapped in both complementary and competing ways with an expansive sense of Americans’ role in the world and a belief in the universality of American brands of government, values, work, culture, and belonging.

The Bolshevik Revolution took place at a moment of a paradigmatic shift in the history of world migration, when “proletarian mass migrations” gave way to what became “a century of refugees.” While hundreds of thousands of people from the Russian Empire migrated to the United States each year in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, following new immigration restrictions set in 1921 and 1924 the number was limited to a few thousand. The way that Americans related to Russians was affected by this shift in addition to the sea change of revolution. Americans attempting to understand what Russia and Russians meant to the United States had to grapple with revolutionary changes in government, political ideology, and the meaning and practice of work, but also with rifts in the way, numbers, and reasons that people

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21 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, 443.
moved between the two countries. Appreciating changes in global migration history allows us to approach questions about United States-Russian relations, Russian immigration to the United States, and the anti-immigrant red scare in the United States in new ways.

I trace cultural productions and programs to restrict migration that have been described primarily as defining differences inside the United States, to show how they also created new connections that crossed and transformed national and ideological distinctions. Not merely about narrowing the definition of Americanism, they were also about how Americanism could expand to encompass new modes of connection with places like Soviet Russia. This finding suggests that there was more at stake in red scare narratives than exclusions of those constructed as un-American and a shrinking of the boundaries around Americanness inside the United States, because they also suggested ways that Americanism could grow to help Bolsheviks abroad, in which the roles and boundaries of the United States should expand in the world.

A focus on migrants as central actors in the history of American and Russian relations offers not only a new analysis of the formative role of on-the-ground connection, it also provides new insights about the key ways that the United States engaged with places like Soviet Russia in an era when scholars have focused on the “Americanization of the world.”23 Studies of the proliferation of American economic and cultural engagement with sites around the globe in the first part of the twentieth century have often focused on the spread of American technology, goods, and culture abroad. This dissertation joins recent work that has challenged the “Americanization of the world” paradigm by recognizing how these processes also transformed

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the United States. Furthermore, using insights from the comparative study of imperialism, I uncover the key roles that Russians in Soviet Russia and in the émigré diaspora played in producing American attempts to affect Russia. Armed occupation, relief work by non-governmental agents, the sale of automobiles and manufacturing methods, and the production and spread of American silent cinema were not unilateral projections of American power. They were multivalent projects that were substantially shaped by Russian Soviets. Emphasis on the story of the one-way spread of “Americanization” has obscured the ways that these projects relied on and often collided with the migration – both into and out of the United States – of people and their complex and shifting national and ideological affinities.

**American Empire and Bolshevik Russia**

Many in the post-Great War moment envisioned American liberal internationalism as an alternative to both an imperialist past that some saw breaking away with the fall of Ottoman, German, and Russian Empires and to the new world proposed by revolutionary socialism. Calls from American politicians, humanitarian agencies, cultural producers, manufacturers, and military personnel for the extension of American principles to new places and peoples deployed these understandings of distinct difference between American worldviews and those of Bolsheviks and imperialists, often relying on comparison as an argument for the United States to extend its involvement. At the same time, these projects relied on the notion that American models would be applicable universally, an “astonishingly smooth projection of historical American principles into a global future,” writes Thomas Bender, that “translated American

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25 For an argument that links the export of American consumer goods with the import of foreign workers see, Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues.*
ideals and interests ever so easily into presumed universal human ideals.” In practice, however, assertions of universalism cominged uneasily with stark forms of differentiation. American models would transform peoples around the world but not evenly or simultaneously. Hierarchical variances including race, civilization, and nationhood meant that groups of certain types, in certain locations, and under certain forms of government would have to catch up to Americans over time and under intense tutelage and coercion. Despite contemporary comparisons to other kinds of imperialist programs meant to distinguish the benevolence of United States actions in the world, these visions were continuations of longstanding ideologies and practices of American imperialism that justified past and ongoing efforts at intervention and control of lands and peoples and proposed new places and ways that Americans would affect the world.

Russian Bolshevism offered an alternative model for the interaction of people around the globe to build a path to a future world. But Soviet Russia also offered a place where Americans could potentially extend their own visions for a progressive and connected world, in which American interests were the interests of humanity. Many Americans who traveled to Russia argued that with an extensive outlay of American technical assistance, training, and management, Russian manufacturing, work practices, and the lives of workers could be transformed on the American model. Peasants, merchants, and other villagers lived and worked “like in pioneer days in America,” but they could be led under the forceful guidance of American soldiers, or through a taste of American abundance delivered by aid workers, to abandon Bolshevism and work toward a future that looked a lot like the present-day United States. Motion pictures made by filmmakers born in the United States and Russia linked these

aspirations directly to past and continued American imperialism. Films tied visions for the ways that American political ideals, family life, and emotional connections might shape Russians to stories that romanticized the violent extension of American control in places like the American West and the Caribbean basin.

These contentions are inspired by studies that investigate the intimate imbrications of American culture and empire\(^{27}\) and new approaches to the study of imperialism in a range of places and times.\(^{28}\) The American-Russian relationship has not been the focus of recent scholarship on American imperialism in the first part of the twentieth century.\(^{29}\) But I argue that methodologies from the study of imperialism, recognition of the ways that American interaction with Russia relied symbolically and materially on prior and contemporary imperialism, and analysis of the ways that Americans acted imperially in engagements with Russia and Russians are crucial to understanding the American-Russian relationship in this period.\(^{30}\)

Placing the American-Russian relationship in the context of the history of imperialism highlights questions about power that are sometimes absent from studies of transnational flows of people, goods, and ideas. Instead, analysis attentive to imperial relationships has called


\(^{28}\) For some foundational examples, see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Frederick Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley, Calif., 2005); Antoinette Burton, ed., After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation (Durham, N.C., 2003).

\(^{29}\) For notable exceptions see Encountering the Enigma and Choi Chatterjee, “Transnational Romance.” Some scholars analyzing diplomacy and great power politics have placed American efforts to intervene militarily and economically in Russia as part of competition with Japanese imperialism in the region. See for example, Betty Unterberger, America’s Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956); Williams, American-Russian Relations, chapter 5 and 129.

\(^{30}\) For a useful discussion of the definition and use of “imperial” as it might be applied to new studies of the United States in the World see Paul Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” American Historical Review (December 2011), 1349. Another recent applicable definition suggests that “empires in this period were regimes invested in creating geographically expansive markets, politically portable forms of government, and civilizational identities that aspired to interconnectedness and interdependence,” Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “Empires and the Reach of the Global,” in Rosenberg, ed. A World Connecting, 300.
attention to the hierarchical and uneven power relationships that have shaped, limited, inspired, and been contested by movements across or between boundaries.\textsuperscript{31} Those who traveled between Soviet Russia and the United States did not flow freely across borders. Migration was limited by tumultuous selection processes that funneled people through very controlled channels. Some migrants were thrust across particular pathways, others clamored for access to certain routes and destinations. Rather than open transnational flows, these movements were both compelled by and occurred in spite of overlapping local and long-distance power relationships. Migrants faced restrictions based on national, ideological, racial, and gender boundaries that ranged from flexible to rigid.

My critique of the assumption that national, cultural, and ideological differences divided the histories of Americans and Russians draws on insights garnered from the study of the way that imperial knowledge and power has been produced and maintained. For example, the ideas and practice of imperial authority relied on “the notion that Europeans in the colonies made up an easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entity.” These assumptions were the foundation for “the related notion that the boundaries separating colonizer from colonized were thus self-evident and easily drawn.”\textsuperscript{32} However, scholars of the history of imperialism have shown that despite such claims, “The categories of colonizer and colonized are not fixed or self-evident categories.”\textsuperscript{33} Studies of the intimate interactions of bodies, the migration and relocation of imperial subjects, and the cultural production of categories like ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign,’ ‘metrapol ‘ and ‘periphery,’ have demonstrated that notions of the separation between groups of people and locations were at the center of justifications and strategies for the

\textsuperscript{31} Kramer, “Power and Connection,”1352-1353.
\textsuperscript{32} Ann Laura Stoler, \textit{Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 44.
production and maintenance of imperial power relations. They also crucially masked the key roles of colonized and sub-altern peoples, and groups in peripheral or foreign areas in producing, shaping, and challenging imperial knowledge and power relationships and notions of national, ideological, and cultural belonging.  

I have therefore directed particular attention in the following chapters to the ways that what often appeared as clear and natural distinctions between Americans and Russians, Americanism and Bolshevism, United States and Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic broke down, overlapped, and failed to account for the bodies, ideas, daily practices, and shifting national, cultural, and ideological affinities of people who often fell between or outside of categories of difference. I also highlight the formative roles played by people living in Russia and Russians in the émigré diaspora in shaping American ventures directed towards Russians, in producing American knowledge about Russia, and in traversing boundaries between national and cultural categories that were said to separate Americans and Russians. Russians were central figures even in the ‘heart’ of American projects like the manufacture of automobiles in Detroit, film production in New York and Hollywood, and American military units meant to combat Bolsheviks.  

Imperial histories also point to the body as an important site to investigate the development and contesting of power relationships, conceptions of hierarchical difference, and the creation and dismantling of assumptions about national and cultural distinctiveness. Recent histories have shown that the body and its intimate interactions, corporeal actions and affects,

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and movement across space has been the site at which imperial power relations have formed, unraveled, and been reworked. Furthermore, bodies are important to historical investigations of imperialism because bodies and bodily relations lend a compelling sense of naturalness, immutability, and undeniability to power relationships and conceptions of difference, imparting a particular sense of legitimacy and endurance that ought to be a primary focus of critical investigation and historicization. At the same time bodies have appeared in recent histories as a disorderly and anxious terrain where knowledge about difference unraveled as often as it took shape.\textsuperscript{36} I explore, therefore, how the bodies of automobile workers, refugees, and soldiers who moved between Soviet Russia and the United States were the targets of campaigns to identify and impose Americanness and Sovietness, and also how attempts to track and shape individuals as Americans, as Bolsheviks, or as Russians often failed to encompass or direct the complex and shifting national and ideological belonging of those who fell in-between clear categories.

While drawing on the work of scholars who have explored the United States’ imperial endeavors in the early twentieth century, this dissertation also contributes to this growing field by positioning Soviet Russia as an important site for thinking about the orientation of the United States’ global interactions in this period. Russia was a focus of American interest and activity that has been overlooked by scholarship on interventions in places like the Philippines, the Caribbean, and Latin America.\textsuperscript{37} Incorporating American approaches to Russia into the history


\textsuperscript{37} For example, Mary A. Renda, \textit{Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Cultures of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Renda argues that “the military occupation of Haiti… was one of several important arenas in which the United States was remade through overseas imperial ventures in the first third of the twentieth century.” She cites U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Nicaragua, China, and the
of American empire will allow us to give the ways that Americans acted imperially towards
Russia serious critical attention. But it also reveals that the legacies of U.S. imperial endeavors
in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played an important part in forming new
potential power relationships between Americans and places like Soviet Russia. U.S. interactions
with Soviet Russia were often linked culturally and symbolically to locations like the U.S. West
and occupations in places like Haiti, and materially and strategically to places like the
Philippines.

For example, when YMCA leader Thomas Martin wrote the historian Frederick Jackson
Turner from Honolulu after an inspection survey from Vladivostok to Moscow to Vologda and
back in August 1918, he drew on Turnerian conceptions of the role of the United States in what
became the U.S. West and American imperialist arguments that had explained and justified
occupations in Latin America and the Caribbean to propose an American role in Russia. He
argued that similar intervention in Soviet Russia would impose order and teach American style
government and institutions, “They are singularly lacking in political ability for self-government
…They invariably admire the man with the big stick who is in a position to wield it over their
heads,” he wrote, arguing to Turner “that it was America’s duty to civilize this eastern
frontier.”38 The ongoing legacies of imperialism provided more than ideas for American
intervention in Russia. The Philippines, for example, became a key material location for United
States-Russian connections. Many of the American military regiments sent to intervene in the
Russian civil war in Siberia came directly from the American military occupation of the
Philippines, but not Russia. On the intervention in Russia see Foglesong, America’s Secret War Against
Bolshevism. While Foglesong has positioned the intervention in Russia in the context of Wilsonian interventions in
places like Mexico, the notion of the conflict as a “secret war” elides the formative cultural influence and impacts
that scholars have uncovered surrounding such interventions at other sites.
38 Quoted in Norman E. Saul, War and Revolution: The United States and Russia, 1914-1921 (Lawrence: University
Philippines where they had been stationed at Fort McKinley.\(^3^9\) Often American diplomats, YMCA, and Red Cross workers in Russia came from positions in the Philippines.\(^4^0\) Russian refugees attempting to move between Russia and the United States ended up in places like Manila when they were caught between the consolidation of Bolshevik control of Russia and new restrictions on the migration of Russians to the United States.

While analysis drawn from the study of imperialism will make important contributions to our understanding of American-Russian relations, the fields of imperial history and the comparative study of empires will also benefit from a more complete addition of the American-Russian relationship. The inclusion will challenge our understanding of the trajectory of American imperialism. For example, while Americans and Russians sometimes engaged with each other on highly uneven footings, in other respects they also “long coexisted in a tense parity” that included a range of stances from alliance to antagonism.\(^4^1\) While histories of imperialism have often traced the successful extension of long distance power relationships and the effects of imperial power on shaping, moving, and coercing colonial populations, this study of the way that Americans acted imperially with regard to Russians joins postcolonial critiques and other new approaches to imperial history by emphasizing the halting, incomplete, and fractious limitations that characterized attempts by imperial powers to influence and control peoples and places around the globe.

Attention to on-the-ground actors who moved between the United States and Soviet Russia provides a vantage point that highlights the fissures and limitations in American visions for Russia. On-the-ground realities differed from bird’s-eye visions for the way that Americans

\(^{39}\) Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 144.

\(^{40}\) Saul, *War and Revolution*, 322, 336.

\(^{41}\) Chatterjee and Holmgren, “Introduction,” in *Americans Experience Russia*, 4.
might shape the world. Practices for distinguishing Americans and Russians, transforming
Russians on an American model, and producing and maintaining a distinct American identity
often failed in applied deployments. This was particularly the case on the level of the individuals
who were meant to carry out plans and whom such plans were meant to affect.

Attention to the aspirations, potentials, and projects that never fully materialized is
important for understanding this moment in the United States relationship with the world which
is often described with a narrative of ascendancy of the United States role on the world stage
following the First World War.\textsuperscript{42} However, while Americans attempted to intervene militarily to
shape the outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution, and American humanitarian projects aimed to
“stem the tide of Bolshevism,” these efforts did not succeed in halting or reversing the spread of
Bolshevik power or the adoption of Soviet socialism in Russia.\textsuperscript{43} Studies of these events instead
suggest the limits of American power to affect places like Soviet Russia. They show that, as in
American engagement with Europe in the interwar years, “Americans overestimated the
universality of their formulas,” particularly as they might apply to Russia.\textsuperscript{44} Rather than a
smooth and growing expansion of the United States’ role in the world over the course of the
twentieth century, as some Americans envisioned and as historians have often assumed,
engagement with Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution is instead an example of the
halting, incomplete, and reversing spread of United States’ political, economic and cultural
power.

\textsuperscript{42} For an argument that emphasizes the limits of American power to affect the international order, particularly by the
end of the 1920s, see Frank Costigliola, \textit{Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations

\textsuperscript{43} Herbert Hoover quoted in Bertrand M. Patenaude, \textit{The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to

\textsuperscript{44} Costigliola, \textit{Awkward Dominion}, 267, 164.
The lens of the history of imperialism can also usefully enable us to understand the interactions between the United States and Soviet Russia in the context of Russian imperial history and emerging Soviet imperialism. William Appleman Williams summarized American-Russian relations as “the conflict of two destinies – both expanding and both avowedly manifest.” Indeed both Soviet and American visions for the world were understood as universally applicable programs for society that history would eventually bring to all peoples. Scholars who have compared the Russian and American empires have pointed to a series of similarities including the settlement of a shifting and less densely populated “frontier” and the ostensibly “land-based” or “continental” expansion of both polities in contrast to “overseas” empires. Both the Soviet and American empires deployed rigid forms of hierarchical power relationships to internal and external groups and forms of difference while promoting progressive agendas, ideals of equality, and plans for civilizational uplift.

However, we have to be wary of these kinds of comparisons because comparison is not only a contemporary scholarly project; it was a historical project as well, taken up by actors attempting to understand and justify violent and coercive interventions. Imperialists and their critics have both relied on comparisons between imperial projects to cast their intentions and actions as justified through their connection to past imperial trajectories or as more benevolent, more powerful, or otherwise exceptional. The imperial goal of the categorization of peoples

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along hierarchies was an “explicitly comparative” project. The comparisons that were relied upon for the creation of hierarchical taxonomies have long worked to make – and still make – certain kinds of comparisons possible and left others unavailable or incomprehensible. Indeed, the ways in which some imperial histories are rendered comparable to the exclusion of others is a process that has a history of its own. The U.S., Russian imperial, and Soviet projects each used comparisons with other empires as the basis for ideologies of “exceptionalism” that explained and justified the distinctiveness and benevolence of their own forms of interaction with the world. Political leaders in both the United States and Russia argued that their own plans for re-envisioning the world, including the self-determination of peoples, would replace aging empires.

It was through precisely these kinds of comparisons that Americans explained violent attempts to transform the Russian people in a way that made them seem clear and natural. Comparisons based on ideas of national, ideological, and cultural difference and similarity led many Americans to see Russia as distinct from the United States, but not irrevocably so. They imagined Russia’s future as equivalent to the history of the United States so that Russian differences would ultimately be transformed through benevolent yet violent impositions. When Russia was viewed like the Old West, in silent films and in soldiers’ diaries, it was more than a nostalgic reference that masked the violence of America’s own history of territorial growth, it was a suggestion for a potential contemporary and future relationship in which Russia might become like the United States, but not without drastic military, economic, and cultural

50 Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*.
51 Stoler, “Intimidades of Empire,” in *Haunted by Empire*.
intervention of the kind required at other contemporary locations of United States engagement and occupation. This notion of the American past as an explicator of events in Russia is a persistent image even in recent histories of American-Russian relations that continues to perform the work of professing the applicability of American visions for Russia and justifying their deployment, while both alluding to and obscuring their deep connection to the history of American empire. One recent history goes so far as to assert that the speed with which American relief agents entered Russia “might be compared to the Oklahoma land rush” and that the resettlement of the Russian émigré diaspora was “comparable in some respects to the unforced movement of eastern, southern, and Midwestern Native Americans to the Great Plains.”

Soldiers, filmmakers, aid workers, and factory managers understood and explained their efforts to transform Russians and Soviet Russia by using these kinds of comparisons. Meanwhile some critics of American intervention in Russia utilized imperial context and comparison to question U.S. actions and motivations. Senator William Borah, who contested American internationalism following the world war, argued against proposals for intervention into the government and economy of Soviet Russia by tying them to U.S. imperialism in the western hemisphere which he also opposed. He suggested that they “would have reduced Russia to a condition not dissimilar to that of Haiti at the present time, under the military rule of the United States.” Weeks after American and Allied troops landed in Archangel, the People's Commissary of Foreign Affairs placed the counter-revolutionary invasion critically in the

54 Norman E. Saul, *Friends or Foes?: The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921-1941* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 57-58, 97.
context of British and American imperialism. They called for an end the occupation there and in Siberia and also for the liberation of Ireland, Egypt, India and the Philippine Islands.56

Exploring connections between the American and Soviet projects to transform lands and peoples as part of new visions for the world offers a method that can overcome some of the pitfalls of comparison.57 Such an approach also engages with recent studies that have begun to reassess the emergence of Soviet Russia in comparative and transnational perspective, and to address Soviet endeavors to engage with the world in this period. Several recent studies of Soviet Russia have placed developments there within the broader context of “European modernity,” arguing that the Soviet project was an alternative but parallel branch of European-wide projects in welfare, education, and societal reform.58 However, recent work has also begun to suggest that, more than separate and analogous, these “alternative modernities” were linked by the circulation of practices and experts who moved between projects in Soviet Russia and elsewhere. Indeed it was, in part, because the Soviet project was marked by such similarities that it inspired interest from observers and participants from across ideological and national boundaries.59

Historians of Soviet engagement with the world have also moved to place longstanding questions about the relationship between “Russia and the West” more centrally into the investigation of Soviet history. For example, in the early Soviet period, longstanding American and European views of Russians as backward, mysterious, Asiatic, and uncivilized were

challenged by Bolshevik plans for modernization, overcoming backwardness, and catching-up and overtaking Europe and the United States. Scrutinizing the ways that concepts like backwardness were created and deployed as justifications for particular kinds of connections between Americans and Russians enables us to see overlaps between Soviet and American projects that arose not merely on parallel in each place but through prior and ongoing connections.

Both Russians and Americans who engaged with Russia grappled with overlapping visions of Russia as in between the west and the east, as both the object of European colonization and an imperial power in its own right. While Bolsheviks called for the use of American technology and industrialization methods to leap beyond western powers into a socialist future, they also utilized American narratives about and methods for the consolidation of control over indigenous and colonial populations to bring civilization to people in peripheral areas and in Central Asia. Settlers who moved within the Russian Empire to colonize Siberia drew on ideas about the American settlement of the west. Many workers and other migrants who moved to Soviet Russia following the revolution in the hope of building a new socialist world imagined a project that would be comparable to the earlier project to build an ideal American republic.

Soviet ethnographers looked to Native American reservations as a model. Like American visions for extending universally applicable values, institutions, and products to people who would be able to adopt Americanism as they developed on a hierarchical scale of civilization,

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60 David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 24-25. See also, Engerman, Modernization from the Other Shore.
62 Hoerder, Cultures in Contact , 329.
Soviet views of the world also utilized a hierarchical ordering of peoples and nations on a developmental scale.64

These developments were not parallel and discrete; they relied closely on each other. Even efforts to disavow connections between American and Soviet projects overlapped with each other. Soviet approaches to outsiders included both “new forms of engagement and heightened ideological and security measures to limit contagion.” American interaction with Soviet Russia also combined new kinds of interaction with restrictive limits on immigration and new cultural and ideological restrictions on what constituted Americanness in order to limit the influence of Bolshevism. While Soviet planners attempted to balance the acquisition and assimilation of economic and technological advancements of capitalist countries like the United States with a repudiation of capitalist societies, American projects attempted to assimilate and Americanize Russian immigrants while repudiating their potential cultural and ideological influence on the United States.65 Focusing on links between these efforts that have often been obscured by scholarship on the parallel but separate and competing development of two world powers, Between Two Worlds describes these as connected imperial projects.

Chapter Outline

In order to demonstrate the ways that on-the-ground connections shaped the American-Russian relationship and to understand what these connections can tell us more broadly about American engagement with the world in the early twentieth century, the chapters that follow offer four case studies. These investigations of economic, cultural, military, and humanitarian projects are not meant to be an exhaustive account of American-Russian interactions, but they do

64 David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 55-6.
65 David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 23.
provide examples of key engagements between Americans and Russians in the decade after the Bolshevik Revolution. Highlighting movement and multidirectional interaction, these connections also correspond to the predominant ways that Americans saw themselves stepping out onto the world stage following the First World War and to examples of American projects in Russia that were particularly salient from Soviet perspectives.

The first chapter engages histories of American business, labor, and migration in a study based on Ford Motor Company operations. The expansion of Ford into Soviet Russia has been understood as part of a unidirectional spread of American economic power and cultural forms abroad following the First World War. This chapter goes beyond the automobiles and manufacturing methods that were sent from Ford facilities in Detroit to the emerging automobile industry in Soviet Russia by examining the multidirectional flows of workers that underlay and sometimes collided with Ford’s system. Workers, managers, engineers, and cultural, technical, and disciplinary knowledge moved between these countries in both directions. Efforts to define, track, and shape workers as Americans, Russians, or Bolsheviks throughout Ford Company operations in each county were understood as integral parts of constructing the products and methods that Ford sold. Many of those who worked in Ford facilities fell in between and contested these classifications, often defying attempts to create an efficient and homogeneous American workforce. In Russia too, these encounters produced more than Russian and American automobiles: they created people and ideas that crossed between the boundaries of being American and being Russian Soviet.

“Fordizm” became a popular watchword and near-synonym for industrialization, mass production, and efficiency. Used interchangeably by Soviet commentators and workers with phrases like “American tempo” and “American efficiency,” the concept was understood as a potentially valuable component of building a new socialist world.
Recorded in Ford Motor Company archives and related cultural documents, these multidirectional movements suggest that rather than separate and alternative projects, Ford’s burgeoning system to transform manufacturing and workers lives in Detroit was linked to the Soviet revolutionary project to recreate life and work.

The second chapter examines American and Russian silent films about encounters between people in the United States and the new world wrought by the Bolshevik Revolution. Created at a crucial juncture that saw many possible paths for relations between Soviet Russia and the United States, American films cast the drama of revolution as individual love stories that often crossed and transformed national and ideological boundaries. They also used developing conventions of the Western genre and sentimental narratives from imperial romance stories to explain a sentimental power relationship that cast Russia like previous sites of American imperialism. Such films made American responses to Bolshevism, including military and humanitarian interventions in Soviet Russia, make sense to viewers by presenting them as part of an imperial outlook that tied them to stories about intervention in places like the Caribbean and the Philippines and to stories about the consolidation of control over territories and peoples like those of the American West. I argue that even as motion pictures strove to distinguish Americans and Bolsheviks, they called for connective action – for aid, for marriage, for transformation, for assimilation, for control – suggesting the kinds of affective attachments that could be forged to link Americans and Russian Soviets. I challenge previous scholarship on cultural production and U.S. foreign interests, by showing that American representations of Russia were not created in isolation from Russian narratives and people. Russians consumed American films, produced Soviet films about Americans, and even participated in creating Hollywood modes of representing Russia, revolution, and Bolshevism.
The third chapter ties cultural ideas produced in arenas like film to their on-the-ground deployment by examining U.S. soldiers from the American North Russian Expeditionary Force who intervened in Russia during the Russian Civil War. Based on the diaries, letters, songs, cartoons, and photographs produced during the U.S. military intervention, the study examines how American soldiers used intimate and violent interactions with Russian Bolsheviks to grapple with both their differences and similarities. In reading documents produced by these soldiers I focus on their sensory and bodily experiences of interaction with Russian people and places and I ask how entwined understandings of Americanness, masculinity, and Bolshevism produced in face-to-face encounters between Russians and Americans impacted individual bodies. I also situate the American military intervention in North Russia in the broader context of American imperial endeavors in other parts of the world. Rather than a “secret war” or a “sideshow” to World War I, the intervention made sense to soldiers on the ground as part of the way that the United States shaped populations in the American West and overseas using a mix of violence and benevolent uplift. Military intervention in Russia drew on both cultural and material resources developed during prior and ongoing imperial occupations.

A chapter on humanitarian intervention explores a massive famine relief project led by the American Relief Administration that, at its height, fed almost eleven million Soviet citizens every day. Moving food, clothes, seed, medical supplies, and American personnel and skills from the United States to Russia was meant, as director Herbert Hoover put it, “to stem the tide of Bolshevism.” However records of the ARA and other humanitarian organizations operating in Russia like the American Red Cross reveal a more complex program on the ground. Relief workers spent a considerable amount of time and resources sorting out and combining American and Bolshevik modes of relief and attempting to manage multidirectional movements of
individuals and their national and ideological affinities. While people, knowhow, and supplies were supposed to flow in one direction, the operation opened up pathways for repatriation, naturalization, and émigré and refugee migration from Soviet Russia to the United States. At a moment Americans saw an expanding role for themselves as humanitarians who would intervene on behalf of famine victims and refugees in places like Russia, these understandings of a capacious role for Americans in the world overlapped with new boundaries around Americanness and limitations that restricted who could migrate to the United States or become an American.

In an epilogue I trace refugees and aid workers who circled the globe in a vivid example of how connections between Russians and Americans were shaped by networks of American empire. The around-the-world voyage of an American Red Cross ship carrying Russian children shows the broad visions that many Americans had for how they might shape Russia and the world at large. The project marshaled considerable resources, including imperial circuits of military, humanitarian, and economic support that stretched from the western Pacific, to Latin America, to the North Atlantic. But the story of the journey also reveals the limited ability of Americans to affect places like Soviet Russia.
Chapter 1 – Assembling *Fordizm*: The Production of Automobiles, Americans, and Bolsheviks in Detroit and Early Soviet Russia

“Do it the Ford way because it is the best way,” read a slogan posted for workers at a mid-1920s factory site in the Soviet Union. In the country’s early years, “Fordizm” and “Fordizatsia” (Fordization) became fashionable watchwords and near-synonyms for industrialization, mass production, and efficiency. While American officials and politicians worked to draw sharp contrasts between “one hundred percent Americanism” and Russian Bolshevism during the post-World War I red scare, in the same historical moment workers in Russia often saw no contradiction in the appropriation of “Amerikanizm” and “Fordizatsia” as positive elements in the creation of a new socialist world. Soviet commentators and workers used “Fordizm” interchangeably with phrases like “American tempo” and “American efficiency.”

Children and entire villages were named “Fordson” after the Ford tractor sold in Russia. During the 1920s, dozens of books and brochures on Ford methods appeared in Russia, hundreds of conferences were held on Henry Ford and his system, and his books sold in large numbers.

According to Soviet officials, “the combination of Russian revolutionary sweep and American efficiency” would be a foundation of Soviet society. Americanism and Bolshevism were not oppositional; American techniques and skills like the assembly line and mass production that made up “the Ford way” could produce an “Americanized Bolshevism” that would enable the

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3 Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (New York: Doubleday, 1920); Ball, *Imagining America*.
Soviet Union to surpass the industrial achievements of the United States.\textsuperscript{5}

Historians have long assumed that the United States and the Soviet Union diverged along “alternative paths” in the years following the Russian Revolution.\textsuperscript{6} In this chapter, I argue that their relationship during this period is more accurately characterized as one of connection, overlap, and mutual constitution. I evaluate the history of the movement of people and ideas between the Ford Motor Company (FMC) and Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{7} Workers traversed pathways between the United States and Russia in multiple directions, and American managers and Soviet officials strove to cultivate productive connections. Cultural ideas like Americanism and Fordism were understood as potentially valuable components for building the emerging Soviet Union. Furthermore, “Fordizm” and the factories, assembly lines, and workers it conjured in the minds of Russians were not merely imagined from halfway around the world\textsuperscript{8}; notions of Americanism, Fordism, and Bolshevism were produced through face-to-face, embodied encounters between Russian Soviets and the people and programs of the FMC.

A focus on the people and cultural ideas that migrated between the two countries offers a new way to understand events previously framed as a one-way transfer of American industrial


\textsuperscript{7} This argument draws on recent scholarship that has interrogated the primacy of the nation in history by focusing on movements and connections beyond and between the territorial limits of nation-states. See for example, Thomas Bender, \textit{La Pietra Report} (Bloomington, Ind.: Organization of American Historians, 2000); Thomas Bender, ed., \textit{Rethinking American History in a Global Age} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). As summarized in a recent forum, “The claim of transnational methods is not simply that historical processes are made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions”; Isabel Hofmeyr, in “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” \textit{American Historical Review} 111, 5 (2006): 1441-1464, here 1444. See also Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way, “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis,” \textit{American Quarterly} 60 (Sept. 2008): 625-648.

\textsuperscript{8} For example, Lewis Siegelbaum has written, “The Detroit of the Soviet imagination had little to do with the actual city in Michigan” (\textit{Cars for Comrades}, 3). See also Ball, \textit{Imagining America}, ch. 1.
technology and goods to “backward” Russia. Ford’s efforts to sell cars, tractors, and industrial methods to Russia have often been interpreted in the context of the growth of American multinational corporations, and the “Americanization” of Europe and other parts of the world through the spread of American technology and products. American historians of the FMC have been explicit about the one way nature of the connection: “The relationship,” wrote Allan Nevins and Frank Hill in their massive three-volume history of the company, “was purely commercial: Russia bought and Ford sold.”

Recently, historians of the United States and the world have begun to question the narrative of American products and cultural forms flowing unidirectionally outward to Europe and the world over the course of the twentieth century. As summarized in a recent history of “the Americanization of the world,” scholars have interpreted these trends as part of the imperial expansion of American political and economic power overseas. In some cases, they have added

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9 I use “automobile” in this chapter to refer broadly to the range of motor vehicles that the Ford Motor Company produced including tractors, which comprised the bulk of the vehicles sold to the Soviet Union in the 1920s. I use “products” to denote material goods like equipment, parts, and vehicles, as well as the technical knowledge and industrial methods that the Ford Company sold.


an emphasis on the abilities of people at various global sites to reformulate the meanings and uses of U.S. cultural and commercial imports through a process of “creolization” that created an array of “cultural hybrids.”\textsuperscript{12} However, recent work has interrogated these “Americanization of the world” paradigms by asking how these processes also transformed the United States. In what follows, I extend this work to contend that “American” products were not suddenly transformed into “cultural hybrids” \textit{after} they arrived in Russia;\textsuperscript{13} in the case of Ford’s products and employees, and the ideas that circulated around them, they were already in important respects hybrids, fought over and coproduced at their creation in the United States. Russian migrants, for example, were a crucial part of a new industrial process in Detroit that not only made “American” products but also relied on an arduous and contested program of working out boundaries between “Americans” and “Russians.”\textsuperscript{14} What went abroad to places like Russia, including products, industrial methods, and people, were not simply “American” in some deep rooted or timeless sense; they were new and the results of intense struggle, and were created within an ordeal of contact and boundary making that also took place inside the United States.\textsuperscript{15}

While scholars have examined how American products and cultural forms often acquired new, Soviet meanings and uses in Russia, they have left unexamined the phases of the process


\textsuperscript{14} In arguing this, I intend to link two kinds of “Americanization” that have remained separate in the historiography of the United States. The term has been applied separately to the spread of American culture and products abroad, and to the assimilation of immigrants. For a critique of this bifurcation see Hubert Bonin and Ferry de Goey, “American Companies in Europe: Issues and Perspectives,” in H. Bonin and F. de Goey, eds., \textit{American Firms in Europe: Strategy, Identity, Perception and Performance, 1880–1980} (Geneve: Libraire Droz S.A., 2009). For an argument that links the export of American consumer goods with the import of foreign workers, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, \textit{Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

\textsuperscript{15} For one proposal “that people, ideas, and institutions do not have clear national identities,” see David Thelen, “Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History” \textit{Journal of American History} 79, 2 (Sept. 1992): 432-462, here 436. Thelen suggests, “Instead of assuming that something was distinctively American, we might assume that elements of it began or ended somewhere else.”
within the United States. For example, Lewis Siegelbaum, in his study of the Soviet automobile industry, outlines how “the architecture of the ‘soviet detroits,’ the machinery, the layout of the shops, in many cases the parts themselves came directly from Detroit. So too did many of the engineers, the workers, and some of the directors.” However, Siegelbaum explores how these parts and the vehicles that they made up were not merely American—they ultimately became Soviet in important respects. The result was a Soviet automobile that was “cosmopolitan,” “of mixed parentage,” a kind of “hybrid” entity.16

If we expand our attentions beyond the flow of goods and technology outward from the United States, we find a history of both Russian and American workers, managers, immigrants, and return migrants moving back and forth, helping to build automobile factories in both Detroit and the Soviet Union. Like the hybrid vehicles that rolled off of Soviet production lines, the people who came together in the American and Russian factories were produced at the blurry juncture of two worlds, and it was often unclear to which they belonged. The words scrawled under “nationality” on their Ford paperwork said little more about their origins or affinities than the name “Red Putilov” revealed about a tractor assembled in Leningrad from a mix of American and Russian parts, ideas, and contexts.

I highlight here the overlapping co-production of automobiles, ideas about Americanism, Fordism, and Bolshevism, and new notions and practices of industrial life. I do so through an examination of sites of encounter, boundary making, and exchange in both the United States and Russia. Because scholars to date have emphasized unilateral transfers to Russia, I will emphasize how these processes also took place in, and significantly affected, the United States.

The FMC facilities in and around Detroit, Michigan were where these processes played

out among Russian migrants who encountered Ford’s Americanization programs in the early twentieth century. They also took place between Ford Sociological Department investigators, Ford English School instructors, and the Russians and Americans they sorted out, coerced, and tried to reformulate and put to work. During the 1920s, the Detroit facilities were also a destination for Soviet tourists who visited the United States to see the famous Highland Park factory, for Soviet students, workers, translators, and professors who came to learn about Ford products and methods at the Henry Ford Trade School, and for Soviet officials who maintained offices in nearby Dearborn through their U.S. purchasing agent, the Amtorg Trading Corporation.

I will also scrutinize events surrounding an official delegation of FMC managers who visited the Soviet Union in 1926. They offer an account of detailed engagement of Ford managers and executives with a variety of geographic, manufacturing, and cultural sites there, and their assessment of potential connections between the company and the USSR. Reports produced by these Americans, and by executives and engineers who visited the USSR in 1929, recorded their encounters with Americans and Russian-American migrants who after the Bolshevik Revolution had left the United States to help build the Soviet Union.

By considering these moments and locations within a single analytical frame, we can examine the creation of new modes of constructing workers and a sweeping vision for an industrial world in Detroit alongside the subsequent, connected project to build a new socialist world in Russia. In the first part of the twentieth century, both FMC employees and workers at manufacturing projects in the Soviet Union began to build utopian worlds grounded in a belief in the transformational power of industrial technology and methods. By assessing these events together, we can see that the narrative of one-way dispersion of American goods and technology
has presented Ford’s project, and the American system it was a frequent metonym for, as fully formed and successful, and the Soviet project as comparatively lacking and incomplete.\textsuperscript{17} By illuminating the blurry boundaries between these ventures, which also converged in Detroit, I reveal how both projects to create industrial societies emerged, overlapped, and shaped each other.\textsuperscript{18}

I begin with Ford’s fervent anti-unionism and rigid system of labor control, which made his “Ford way” seem to some like an antidote to the spread of Bolshevism in the United States. I will discuss how the FMC’s business relationship with the Bolshevik government began at the same time that the company was developing its anti-Bolshevik activities in Detroit. I then turn to ideas about work conditions and social life. Ford personnel visiting the Soviet Union to promote business connections often stressed that work conditions and social life fell short of their standards, but we will see that the arrangements of work and life that seemed natural to them had only recently become normal in Detroit itself. In fact, one facet of FMC’s efforts to produce an efficient and enviably successful industrial system was to produce new modes of everyday work and life. These were not readily accepted by either Ford workers or foreign observers, who were often shocked by the goings on in Ford’s Detroit facilities, which some called “something startlingly new.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Siegelbaum describes this problem of measuring Soviet industry and industrial products against contemporary American industry as “the creeping imperialism of Western standards”; \textit{Cars for Comrades}, 8.
\textsuperscript{18} Recently scholars of the Soviet Union have employed a comparative perspective to argue that Soviet socialism can be understood as an alternative form of European projects of modernity. See, for example, David L. Hoffmann, “European Modernity and Soviet Socialism,” in David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., \textit{Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000). For one proposal that we should understand these projects instead as part of “entangled modernities” through a transnational approach, see Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History,” \textit{Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas} 55, 4 (2006): 549–55. For a discussion of the earlier “convergence model” of scholarship on Soviet industrialization, which emphasized similarities with the West, see Lewis Siegelbaum and Ronald Suny, “Conceptualizing the Command Economy: Western Historians on Soviet Industrialization,” in William Rosenberg and Lewis Siegelbaum, eds., \textit{Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
\textsuperscript{19} Mary Nolan, \textit{Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany} (New York: Oxford
Next I will look at Ford’s ambitions to put these new modes of industrial work and life into action both in Detroit and abroad, in conjunction with Soviet interpretations of how Fordizm might be used to help build the Soviet Union. I will follow this with a discussion of the blurry process of boundary making around categories like “American,” “Russian,” and “Bolshevik.” FMC personnel deployed these categories as a basis for factory production in Detroit and business operations in the Soviet Union. The company’s halting attempts at marking distinction often failed when they collided with individuals who, due to their origins, affinities, or geographic locations, fell between these categories.

**Ford Motor Company and Bolsheviks**

In 1919, during the period of anti-Bolshevik anxieties in the United States that historians have called the “Red Scare,” the FMC joined federal officials and politicians in drawing and enforcing sharp distinctions between “one hundred percent Americanism” and Russian Bolshevism. For example, one prominent politician’s treatise *Americanism versus Bolshevism* explained, “Americanism means increased production and increased prosperity for all; Bolshevism stands for destruction.”

Ford produced films that presented this formulation, such as a short cartoon that contrasted American producers with “Bolshevik-I.W.W. rats.” In it, a farmer resembling Uncle Sam stands behind bags of corn representing the products of “American Institutions.” A bounty of produce is, he says, “the results of our fine labor.” When a “varmint” rat labeled “Bolshevik I.W.W.” enters through a hole in the wall, the farmer hits it with a shovel and tosses it out the window, declaring, “Bolsheviks are the rats of civilization.” As he waves good-bye to the audience, the message “Animated by Ford” appears. The film’s

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20 Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism*, 283.
broader message was clear: American institutions like Ford’s system of mass production could produce an abundance of goods and a better life based on mass consumption; “increased production” meant “increased prosperity for all,” but only if Bolshevists’ meddling was eliminated.21 [See Figure 1.1]

During the Red Scare, Ford Motor deployed undercover operatives in its Highland Park factory who targeted Russian and Eastern European migrants and anyone who admitted to being or was rumored to be connected to radical organizations. Their task was to identify and remove “Bolshevik” workers from tool rooms and assembly lines. Those so identified were paired at work with firmly “American” workers “opposed of Socialist, Bolshivicism, and Radicalism.” Off the job, they were surveilled, and many were transferred or removed from their positions, or simply deported in collaboration with the federal government.22

For instance, special agents of the Department of Justice arrested one worker, Russian immigrant Nicolai Mansevich, inside Ford’s Highland Park plant for possessing “revolutionary and anarchist literature.” After a search of his home found the attic “arranged for a meeting of the Union of Russian Workers,” Mansevich was deported for “teaching the overthrow by force or violence of the Government of the United States.”23 To many American observers, Ford’s incredible factory was at the forefront of defending the United States from the radical threat. For them, one recent history noted, “Highland Park stood as a bulwark against Bolshevism.”24

However, these actions reveal only one component of Ford Motor’s relationship to “Bolsheviks” during 1919 and the decade that followed. In practice, determining precisely who

24 Brinkley, Wheels for the World, 249.
was a Russian, a Bolshevik, or for that matter an American was a fraught and often impossible process. Furthermore, during the same summer that Ford was producing anti-Bolshevik cartoons and deploying undercover operatives on its factory floors, the company contracted to sell its first volume shipment of automobiles to Russia. \(^{25}\) Even as Ford executives worked to identify and deport Russian Bolsheviks in Detroit, in the spring of 1919 they met there and in New York with Bolshevik government representatives. \(^{26}\) That same year, when New York’s Lusk Committee stormed the New York City office of the Russian Soviet Bureau as part of their anti-radical roundup, they uncovered, not a Bolshevik conspiracy to foment radical revolution, but rather agents of the new Soviet government working to arrange a meeting with Henry Ford in Dearborn, at which they hoped to discuss buying automobiles and “the social aspects of the regeneration of Russia.” A letter from the Russian Soviet Bureau in New York, now preserved in Henry Ford’s correspondence, carried a similar message; it spoke of “something else than the purely commercial interest your firm may have in Russian trade.” “We believe,” it read, “we could make you understand that Soviet Russia is inaugurating methods of industrial efficiency compatible with the interests of humanity.” \(^{27}\) Just two years later, the Ford Company would be selling thousands of Fordson tractors to the Soviet Union each year, but first Ford automobiles had to be produced in Detroit—an effort more arduous than simply identifying “Bolsheviks” in the plants. During the same period when Soviet officials began deploying a new vision for humanity based on “industrial efficiency,” the FMC created and attempted to implement a new vision and practice for industrial work and life.

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\(^{25}\) Correspondence and contracts related to the sale are located in BFRC, accession 49, box 1, Amtorg Trading Corp., 1946 (also 1919–1920).

\(^{26}\) The Ford Company also appears to have sent one representative to Russia; see “Departmental Communication, Jan 2nd 1919,” in BFRC, accession 62—Henry Ford Office Subject and Name File 1919, box 109, Folder—Russia.

A New Normal and a New Disease

Henry Ford’s idea was straightforward, especially when expressed in his short spurts of folksy wisdom: Ford Motor would make a lot of cars, and cheaply enough so that even autoworkers could buy them. Simple on its surface, the plan in action required Ford and the FMC to sweepingly transform key aspects of industrial and social life. Workers on the factory floor would have to become accustomed to a new way of doing things that Ford thought necessary to attain the extreme efficiency of assembly line mass production. A system of rigid control of the shop floor and coercion of workers was designed to create a homogenized and highly disciplined workforce capable of repetitive, de-skilled tasks. Their lives outside of work would also be reshaped—a particular kind of home life was required if Ford workers were to maintain maximum efficiency on the job. The company had to instill in immigrant workers a specific set of relationships to their earnings, savings, and spending if they were to become industrious Americans capable of consuming automobiles. As historian Stephen Meyer has argued about the implementation of FMC’s “five dollar day” labor policy, these two projects—creating a new brand of efficient industrial workers, and reshaping workers’ home lives—were intimately linked. “The company,” he writes “attempted to change an immigrant worker’s life and culture to its preconceived ideal of an ‘American standard of living,’ which it felt was the basis of industrial efficiency.” According to Meyer, “In the eyes of Ford, his officials, and his factory managers, a workman’s efficiency in the factory and his home and family environment were thoroughly intertwined.”

The five dollar day profit sharing program was introduced in 1914. To participate,

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28 Stephen Meyer, The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908–1921 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 6, 123. While notions of mass production and the assembly line that came to be recognized as hallmarks of Ford’s system were not new, when used in conjunction and implemented systematically they produced fundamental transformations in work expectations and practices (see ibid., 10–11).
workers had to follow onerous requirements intended to reshape broad aspects of their lives so as to construct a homogenous, American, efficient workforce capable of performing routinized tasks. Ford created a Sociological Department staffed with inspectors charged with monitoring workers both inside and outside the factory. The company observed and managed how workers saved and spent their new salaries, where and with whom they lived, their marital status, and whether they sent money to relatives abroad. A careful balance of thrift and rest was required, based on a particular vision of the middle-class home. Certain leisure activities, or cohabitation outside of marriage, squandered a worker’s wages. A working wife, or the subletting of space to boarders, deprived a worker’s home life of comfort and relaxation. The Americanization components of these programs targeted immigrant workers, and included attendance at Ford English School classes in which workers learned about both American citizenship and English language. A particular focus was vocabulary that workers would need to fulfill the “role as the head of an ‘American’ family unit.” For example, subjects included “The Man Washing.” At the heart of these FMC programs to create a certain kind of worker was the construction of a particular notion of an American home and family, and a specific kind of man. Writing of Henry Ford, Samuel Marquis, head of the Sociological Department, suggested that automobiles were “the by-products of his real business, which is the making of men.” “Mr. Ford’s ambition,” advertised a promotional pamphlet called Facts from Ford in 1920, “is ‘to make men,’ as against the simple making of machines and money.”

The company’s interventions were often drastic; within days of a worker starting at Ford, the Sociology Department might violently expunge his family’s home and all of their

possessions. Take the case of one Russian peasant, Joe Kostruba, who found a job at Ford three years after arriving in the United States. Two days after he began work a Sociological Department investigator determined that the attic apartment where he had been living with his wife and six children was “a filthy, foul-smelling hole.” The investigator moved immediately “to help them to make a start toward right living,” providing Kostruba a large loan against his future wages and “a liberal amount of soap … with instructions to use freely.” The Ford investigator then “had their dirty, old, junk furniture loaded on a dray and under the cover of night moved them to their new home. This load of rubbish was heaped in a pile in the back yard, a torch was applied and it went up in smoke.” A promotional report produced by the department about the transformation wrought by the FMC upon this Russian immigrant family concluded triumphantly, “There, upon the ashes of what had been their earthly possessions, this Russian peasant and his wife, with tears streaming down their faces, expressed their gratitude and thanks to Henry Ford, [and] the FORD MOTOR COMPANY. . . .”

But in fact workers in Ford factories questioned the new way of working and its costs, and some described Ford’s methods in terms of insanity or disease rather than normality. Henry Ford declared in his book of aphorisms, “Reasonable work is natural,” but some workers at his plant complained that the new mode of work was so abnormal that it created new diseases. It was, wrote one, “no place for a sane man.” A new kind of nervous condition found among Ford workers was referred to as “Forditis.” While “Fordizatsia” (Fordization) in Russia signaled the efficiency that would help create a new world for workers, assembly line workers in Detroit used the word to denote a malformation in their bodies wrought by Ford’s efficiency methods.

32 BRFC, accession 940, box 17, FMC—Labor—Radicals—Sociological Department, “Human Interest Story, Number Nine.”
34 Meyer, Five Dollar Day, 41, 65, 166.
“Fordization of the face” referred to the pained and twisted expressions that became stuck on the features of workers who spent day after day trying to clandestinely communicate in circumvention of FMC’s rule of total silence on the floor.\(^35\) According to one historian of labor organizing at Ford, “the Ford Face” was like “a human mask” with no expression and vacant eyes. It was created in conjunction with the “Ford Silence,” a lack of human voices that produced an eerie quietness despite the screech and grind of machinery.\(^36\)

Travelers from abroad who toured the Highland Park plant commented on the shocking newness of Henry Ford’s ideas, methods, and operations. “In Detroit Germans found something startlingly new,” historian Mary Nolan writes, summarizing travelers’ reactions to the Ford works.\(^37\) Soviet futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, who toured the plant during his 1925 trip to the United States, was stunned to hear no voices there. “There is just a universal, serious hum,” he wrote. “The faces have a greenish tinge, with black lips, like at a film shoot.” Mayakovsky’s critique of the plant connected family life with the practice of efficiency: “In Detroit, you find the highest divorce rate. The Ford system gives its workers impotence.”\(^38\)

The experience of workers in Detroit and comments from visiting observers of Ford’s methods, suggest that efforts to create a new normal mode of factory work and life were highly contested, and even shocking to many. Indeed, in their efforts to transform workers Ford programs were in many respects more aspirational than successful. By the mid-1920s, FMC had abandoned plans to reconstitute workers through a “paternalistic” mix of incentive programs and social coercion, in favor of forceful physical intimidation and factory spies. The Sociological

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\(^{37}\) Nolan, Visions of Modernity, 30.

Department was eclipsed by the Service Department, tasked with suppressing radicalism and unionism through “anti-labor terror.” However, FMC tried to promote both the new mode of assembly line factory work and the consumption of the automobiles it produced as a new “universal” standard for Americans and for peoples around the globe.

Ford’s Model-T was said to be the “Universal Car” and his Fordson the “Universal Tractor,” marketed as affordable to all people and amenable to all conditions. But these were not the only Ford products that were to be universally applicable in the United States and abroad: “Our principles, I hold, are universal,” said Ford “and must lead to a better, wider life for all.” When Ford managers boarded a steamship in New York in 1926, setting out to assess the possibility of bringing the company’s vehicles and whole factories for their production to the Soviet Union, they were bearing more than an automotive product. Their ideas about normal industrial production and the normal lives of industrial workers were steeped in the world that the Ford Company and its ethnically and nationally diverse workforce had been creating in Detroit over the previous decade. [See Figure 1.3]

Observation and analysis of Soviet workers’ lives outside the factory was a crucial component of the Ford mission to Russia because it was believed that such factors would be telling indicators of their factory performance. For example, while Ford managers who toured the USSR explained that the social system erected by the Bolsheviks was unsuccessful in many respects, they concluded sarcastically that it had “admirably succeeded in destroying all family life” and “purposely taught disobedience to children.” They reported, “the average worker in the USSR today … is much better off than he was before the Revolution,” but lamented, “The worker has too much leisure time under this new system, especially during work hours.”

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delegation paid keen attention to how workers spent their leisure time, and reported not only on home life but also on worker’s clubs, the role of women, marriage laws, prostitution, and the rearing of children.

Their investigations were structured around similar topics and concerns as those that occupied Ford probes into the lives of immigrants in Detroit. It was impossible, they reported with concern, for Soviet workers to accumulate personal savings under a system in which “the whole scheme has been planned to prevent the accumulation of personal wealth.” This worry mirrored the focus of Ford investigators in Detroit on establishing and tracking workers’ efforts to build personal savings. Furthermore, while among the first corrective tasks undertaken by investigators in Dearborn had been to provide a new Russian immigrant hire and his family with “a liberal amount of soap … with instructions to use freely,” delegates to Russia were quick to note “the extremely strong odor of unwashed bodies which fills the air, as the average workman rarely changes his clothes after work and baths are seldom indulged in.”

Ford delegation executives and managers evaluated the potential for future business with Russia using the same ideas about control of the labor force and efficiency that were being created and resisted in Detroit. “They have no control over the workmen,” wrote the Ford managers, “and therefore are unable to operate their plants on anything near an efficient basis.” These understandings of normal industrial work and living conditions for workers ultimately structured the contracts for both Ford assistance to Soviet automobile production projects and Ford workers sent to Russia to work on factory construction and operations. When skilled Ford

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41 BFRC, accession 1870, box 1, Report of the Ford Delegation to Russia, 104–6; BRFC, accession 940, box 17, FMC—Labor—Radicals—Sociological Department, “Human Interest Story, Number Nine.”
42 BFRC, accession 1870, box 1, Report of the Ford Delegation to Russia, 38. Americans working in Soviet factories during the time of the Five-Year Plan often echoed such critiques, also without acknowledging ways that “control over the workmen” was never complete or uncontested in the United States. For examples, see Schultz, *American Factor*. 
workers were sent to work in an auto plant built with Ford technical assistance at Nizhniy Novgorod between 1929 and 1932, their contracts called for guarantees of “normal living conditions of comfort and rest.” Correspondence between FMC and Albert Kahn Inc. Architects, advising ways to negotiate the language of agreements for Ford workers going to the USSR, suggests that the term “normal” as utilized in such agreements was in dispute, and that contract writers had to be careful about what exactly the term meant. “In Paragraph No. 3,” wrote Louis Kahn to a Ford representative, “after your wording ‘expected of a normal traveler,’ I would suggest adding the words ‘in the United States.’ Otherwise they will expect your men to travel as a normal Russian traveler.”

Boris Shpotov, a Russian historian of the FMC, has argued, “Every American manufacturing system, including that of Ford, could work effectively in other countries only at strict observance of all rules and norms: uninterrupted inflow of raw materials, skillful engineering, good factory management, disciplined and well-trained workforce, etc. In the USSR such conditions were mostly absent.” However, Ford managers evaluating conditions in the USSR did not employ, as they imagined they did, a timeless set of “universal” norms for good management, workforce discipline and training, and uninterrupted flow; rather, they were standards of industrial work and its connection to living conditions that had only recently been conceived and striven for in Detroit. Far from a set of “universal” principles that would self-evidently lead to “a better, wider life for all,” these new norms were contested in Detroit and between the FMC and the workers and planners they interacted with in Soviet Russia. In fact,

45 Shpotov, “The Case of US Companies in Russia-USSR,” in American Firms in Europe, 442.
46 Ford, 365 of Henry Ford’s Sayings, 24.
while Henry Ford endeavored to create a new routine of work and new Americanized lives for
workers in his Michigan factories, some of his employees abandoned his vision so they could
instead participate in creating another kind of new society on the other side of the world.

**Between Two Utopian Projects**

“Soviet automobiles,” historian Lewis Siegelbaum writes, “were born amid dreams of a
technological utopia.” But as we have seen, so were American automobiles; Henry Ford had a
dream for a new world based on mass production and mass consumption. He proclaimed that
“Machinery is the new Messiah,” and according to commentators he envisioned a “new thinking
and new doing … bringing us a new world, a new heaven, and a new earth.” Again, Ford and
many of his enthusiasts thought that not only his products but his “Ford way” of organizing
work, family life, and the social world would better the lives of people everywhere. According to
one biographer of Ford, “For him the metaphor of the melting pot included not only the
homogenization of foreigners in America, but the mechanization and standardization of all
people all over the globe. Men would be mass produced.” The outlook that historian Greg
Grandin has called Ford’s “international utopianism,” which he developed leading up to the First
World War, became reconfigured in the 1920s as the basis for a series of projects to organize
communities of work and life outside of Detroit. Ford built lumber towns in Michigan’s Upper
Peninsula, planned a vast new municipality at Muscle Shoals in northwest Alabama, and initiated
a sweeping project to create a rubber production settlement called “Fordlandia” in the Brazilian

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47 Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades*, 3.
Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Picador, 2009), 41–42.
jungle. Ford projected the outlines of a future in which animals would be unnecessary for either plowing or food; machines would take over both functions, as tractors replaced draft animals and soybeans were processed into milk and other foods that had once come from livestock.\textsuperscript{50}

That many of these projects never materialized, and others ended in dismal failure, reminds us that the Ford Company’s many programs to produce a new world of mass production and consumption were always only aspirational. Ford’s sales of tractors, car parts, and technical assistance to the Soviet automobile industry all took place within this larger, often quixotic frame. This calls into question past depictions, by Ford executives and scholars alike, of Ford’s dissemination of products and production knowledge to Russia in terms of mastery and inevitability. For example, though both groups have highlighted the small number of tractors and low volume of their production in the Soviet Union as these exchanges began in the early 1920s, FMC’s own tractor production had started only a few years earlier, when it built and sold just 254 tractors in 1917.\textsuperscript{51} If Ford’s view for “a new world” and the Soviet endeavor to create a new society each presented utopian visions, they were both very much projects in the making.

Although Ford managers maligned the status of management, worker conduct, and other conditions of Soviet factories, in some cases work practices there served as positive examples that Ford facilities ought to emulate. In the same year that Ford officials toured Soviet factories and agricultural sites, Ford’s employee newspaper criticized foremen and workers in Detroit who lagged behind when compared to the Soviet model for prevention of workplace accidents and injuries. “Soviet Russia is taking Safety seriously,” the Ford News declared. “Are we in American taking it as seriously as it deserves?”\textsuperscript{52} This company periodical was not alone in looking to Russia as a model. Many Americans thought that elements of the system being

\textsuperscript{50} Grandin, \textit{Fordlandia}, 45.
\textsuperscript{51} Nevins and Hill, \textit{Ford: Expansion and Challenge}, 685.
developed in the Soviet Union could be detached from socialist politics and deployed in the United States. American agriculturalists who traveled there as technical experts may have been largely indifferent to “the Soviet way of life,” as one account claimed, but they were deeply inspired by Soviet plans for industrial-scale agriculture, and felt that lessons learned from Soviet experiments could transform American large-scale wheat farming.53

Despite such instances, many observers envisioned the Soviet project, and that of Americanism and Fordism, as the “two available models for economic and social modernity,” as Mary Nolan has noted in her study of ideas about Fordism in Germany. One German traveler wrote after visits to both the United States and Russia in the 1920s that they were “the two poles of the contemporary era.” Others interpreted the two models in less oppositional frameworks, even suggesting that Americanism and the sort of technological efficiency represented by Fordism offered a more useful model for a socialist Germany than did the example of the Soviet Union. In Germany, Nolan argues, “Bolshevism and Americanism were seldom posited as simple alternatives.” Many Russian and European workers and writers thought Americanism and Fordism were compatible with socialism and that a socialist society could perfect Ford’s practices and ideas.54

In the Soviet Union, Fordism was deployed excitedly and widely in a variety of contexts. “‘Fordism’ is the most popular term among our labor organizers,” wrote Mayakovsky after returning to the Soviet Union from a trip to the United States in 1926.55 According to Siegelbaum, Fordism “deeply impressed Marxist theoreticians, the technical intelligentsia, the

54 Nolan, Visions of Modernity, 8, 26; Siegelbaum, Cars for Comrades, 2; Rogger, “Amerikanizm and the Economic Development of Russia.”
55 Mayakovsky, My Discovery of America, 95–96.
Fordizm’s popularity in Russia was related to a broader enthusiasm for ideas about the scientific management of industry and the potential for new technology and methods to transform work and life, which also took hold in Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century. Like advocates of Fordism elsewhere, many Soviet commentators highlighted the potential for scientific methods and industrial technology to bring about material abundance.

Ford wanted to bring people in places like Russia “a better, wider life” through the mass consumption that would be offered by mass production, but Soviet planners and citizens were already developing a new Soviet mode of consumption, which they saw as the basis of a new socialist world. Many Bolsheviks thought such ideas would be key components of the transformations that the revolution would bring about, and America and Ford often figured as an exemplary model for the Soviet application of scientific management. In the travelogue A Ford Crosses Soviet Russia, the American university professor George Counts observed, “The present vogue of America in Russia is no doubt due in part to the fact that to a peculiar degree she exemplifies the spirit of science in industry.” After driving around the Volga river valley in a Ford purchased through Amtorg, Counts concluded that, American and Soviet ideological differences aside, when it came to a shared belief in the application of science to industry “these

56 Siegelbaum, Cars for Comrades, 2.
59 Schultz, American Factor, 2, see also 49–50, 134, 216.
two great republics are walking in harmonious step.”

Nonetheless, even ardent enthusiasts continued throughout the 1920s to debate what Fordizm meant for Soviet Russia and how it might be interpreted, spread, and adopted by Soviet workers. Excitement about Ford varied across urban and rural divides—intellectuals and technical specialists saw Fordizm as a method for organizing industrial efficiency, while peasants admired Ford as an inventor. By the mid-1920s, the study and application of scientific management principles was widespread enough to support several academic and technical journals and a series of labor schools and institutes. There was even a schism between different branches of proponents of the field of study dedicated to nauchnaya organizatsiya truda—the scientific organization of labor.

Soviet efforts to apply American industrial techniques like Fordism to industry encountered varied reactions among workers, factory directors, commentators, and planners. At times they met ambivalence—praised for technical advantages but critiqued for their social meanings. While Soviet citizens sometimes “talk[ed] about the Ford enterprise almost as though it were an entity that could be transposed, without any changes, to the socialist system,” as Mayakovsky observed, they, like observers elsewhere, more often advocated reshaping elements of “Fordism” that they felt could be separated from unwanted aspects of the Ford

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system and applied toward different ends. In his article on Fordizm in the Big Soviet Encyclopedia, Alexei Gastev, a prominent advocate of the scientific organization of labor, acerbically criticized the “cruel exploitation” that characterized Ford’s “social concept.” But he also highlighted useful elements of Fordizm like “continuous flow,” and “rhythm” of work that, he explained, “now have a widely recognized role in the organization of production” in the socialist system. One skeptical parody of popular enthusiasm for American ideas echoed Ford’s plans to replace farm animals with industrial machines. “We are far behind American technique!,” it mocked, “In America, mechanized chickens lay cooked eggs—soft-boiled, medium, and hard boiled—according to one’s desire. In America, electrified cows give for the choosing—boiled milk, butter, sour cream, whipped cream. We bend our heads in esteem.”

In some cases, Fordist and American ideas, organizations of industrial work, and engineers on the ground in Soviet Russia faced significant obstacles and even active resistance. One account of three hundred American specialists who had been working in the Stalingrad tractor factory for over three months lamented their lack of progress in imparting “American methods of work” to the Russian workers. A reporter for the daily newspaper Za industrializatsiiu (For industrialization) explained that some workers had “systematically hindered the work of American experts” and “young Russian specialists conducted a campaign against the work of the Americans.” One worker who “openly declared that he would not work with the Americans” explained, “We made the revolution ourselves, and we ourselves will establish industry.”

63 Mayakovsky, My Discovery of America, 95–96; Nolan, Visions of Modernity, 12; Maier, “Between Taylorism and Technocracy,” 60.
64 A. Gastev, “Fordizm,” Bol’shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya (Moscow: Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya 1933), 131–35.
65 “Shantazh ne udalsya,” Za industrializatsiiu, 23 May 1931, quoted in Schultz, American Factor, 198.
66 K. Rustavelli, “Ne dlia togo my tratim valiutu, chtoby inostrannye spetsialisty sideli slozha ruki, usilit’ internatsional’noe vosпитание на заводах,” 22 Aug. 1930, Za industrializatsiiu. See also Schultz, American Factor, 20, 147; Bailes, “American Connection,” 441–42.
Soviets who promoted the adoption of elements of Ford’s work methods did not feel that they had to be separated from a wider program to reshape workers’ lives, and they often described Amerikanizm and “the Ford way” as more than a system for industrial work. In the Soviet press, for instance, according to historian Jeffrey Brooks, it figured “not as an economic model but as a human one, for a new type of person.” Soviets talked of creating “Russian Americans” throughout the 1920s, and “the phrase ‘Russian Fords’ was used to refer to active groups of workers and managers.”

Visions for crafting a new kind of man through Ford’s system in the United States and Soviet attempts to utilize Ford methods both required worker training, broad cultural changes, and new conceptions of labor discipline. At the core of each project was the transformation of migrant peasants into industrial workers habituated to the customs, values, and rhythms of factory life. Adoptions of these transformational goals in the two countries were more than merely parallel developments; they were co-produced. Techniques as well as the managers and engineers who applied them moved between the United States and Soviet Russia, and so did people they tried to refashion into disciplined factory workers. As in the case of the Russian migrant Joe Kostruba, peasants from Russian villages were often the targets of such programs in automobile factories in Moscow and Nizhniy Novgorod, but also in Detroit. Ford employees who visited or worked in automobile factories in Russia and grumbled about undisciplined workers with “unwashed bodies,” or who were “right off the farm,” echoed complaints about the migrant populations, many of whom were Russian peasants, whom Ford personnel tried to

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68 Schultz, American Factor, 55.
fashion into a new kind of worker in Detroit. Although Ford programs purported to be Americanizing immigrant workers, Soviet workers in early-twentieth-century Russia were also exhorted to maintain a particular balance of leisure, rest, and hygiene that would form the basis for not only work and citizenship but also a wholly new kind of person, a “New Soviet Man.”

This similarity was a key factor that drew Soviet admirers to the American model as a particularly pertinent example. The American path to industrialization that underlay Ford’s system had hinged on the successful transformation of a largely rural population and unskilled migrants into a trained and disciplined factory workforce. Advocates for adopting techniques of Fordism and American scientific management of industry, like Gastev, who developed training programs and headed the Central Institute of Labor, argued that Ford’s Highland Park factory could be viewed as a training center that modeled the cultural transformation of agricultural people and migrants into skilled workers.

In both countries, efforts to apply Fordism as a system for recreating industrial production and fashioning new kinds of people targeted migrants for transformation, but prior migrations also played a role in the circulation of information between Soviet and American engineers, workers, and academics. During the 1920s, Amerikanskaia tekhnika was just one of the notable American technical journals read in Soviet Russia, and had more than five thousand subscribers. Published in Russian in New York, it was founded by the Association of Russian Engineers in America, a group that included engineers trained in Russia before they migrated to the United States.

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69 BFRC, accession 1870, box 1, Report of the Ford Delegation to Russia, 104–6; BFRC, accession 1870, box 1; Henry Schram to Mr. Falland, 30 June 1932, BFRC, accession 390, box 87.
70 See, for example, Catriona Kelly, “The Education of the Will: Advice Literature, Zakal, and Manliness in Early Twentieth-Century Russia,” in Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., Russian Masculinities in History and Culture (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
71 Gastev, “Fordizm”; Schultz, American Factor, 2, 49–50, 134, 216; Stites, Revolutionary Dreams, 154.
72 Bailes, “American Connection,” 437.
The idea that Ford facilities should be models for the development of Soviet training programs inspired and often required the movement of people. In addition to the Ford personnel and other engineers and technical specialists who traveled from the United States to lecture, manage facilities, and build equipment and products, hundreds of Soviet workers, specialists, and teachers traveled to Highland Park in the second half of the 1920s to observe and participate in Ford training and methods. In 1926, the first group of about fifty of what the Ford Company called “Special Russian Students” arrived in Detroit to study the factories, model farms, and methods, as well as tractor and automobile maintenance and repair. Contracts to sell Ford parts, automobiles, and technical assistance to Soviet Russia, signed in 1929, stipulated that fifty Soviet engineers, foremen, and workers per year would study Ford’s methods and plants in Detroit, and several hundred visited during the agreement’s duration.73

Again, prior migrations of workers from Russia to the United States provided a foundation for Ford efforts to train Soviets, sell technical knowledge to Soviet Russia, and approach new markets in Russia and elsewhere. Among the students at the Henry Ford Trade School in the mid-1920s were many migrants from Russia and the former Russian Empire that Ford personnel identified as good prospects to become sales agents, roadmen, and instructors who could profitably return to areas throughout the Soviet Union to work on the company’s behalf. For example, one student, “a Russian citizen” born on a farm outside Kiev, had been living in the United States for three and a half years when he began training at Ford in the summer of 1925. The student was still in the process of obtaining U.S. citizenship papers, was rated highly in his Ford coursework, and was able to speak Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, and Chinese (having resided for a time in Harbin, Manchuria). He was considered for positions

73 For the contract, see BFRC accession 531, box 1, Amtorg Trading Corp Agreements General 1929–1935. See also Schultz, American Factor, 170.
supporting a range of Ford’s expanding international operations. In addition to work in Soviet Russia, these included jobs in Copenhagen as tractor department head for the Ford Polish division, at a prospective plant in Yokohama, Japan developing business in the Manchurian territory, and as an instructor training Soviet students at Detroit factories. Records pertaining to such trainees remind us that enthusiasm for Fordism and American models of scientific management in Soviet Russia, and the aspiration to expand Ford operations in Detroit to areas like the Soviet Union, grew in a period marked by multidirectional migrations of workers and technical knowledge that underlay such exchanges.

Mutual beliefs that technology and scientific approaches to production would transform work and life, and the disciplinary regimes designed to achieve drastic changes and utopian goals, not only ran parallel in Soviet Russia and the United States, but also emerged from and inspired formative connections. Yet, despite such overlaps, meaningful differences were starkly apparent to workers in both countries, and to the Ford personnel who traveled between them. Frank Bennet, a former Ford employee hired to supervise production of Ford vehicles in Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod, succinctly recorded the crux of the difference he found in Soviet autoworkers, iterating an observation often made by Americans working in Russia: “they were slow in comparison to what we do,” but they “always referred to [the factory] as ‘our’ plant. It was, ‘We are doing this,’ or ‘That’s what we are going to do in the future.’”

Raising productivity through labor discipline was a critical component of the emerging Soviet industry, as it was in Ford’s Detroit facilities, but the meanings of discipline and productivity were different in Russia. When workers discussed what made a good manager, both in the Soviet press and in party meetings, they called for factory directors to strike a balance

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74 For student records see BFRC, accession 774, Henry Ford Trade School Student Records Series [1919–1927], Foreign Student Records.
75 “Frank Bennet Oral Reminiscences,” 133, BFRC accession 65, box 5 Folder—Bennet, Frank—Final.
between increasing production and defending workers’ interests. As historian Diane Koenker observed in accounts from the first years of the New Economic Policy, the promise offered by new forms of Soviet industrial life meant that workers valued these features in a factory, and those managers who fostered them “out of conscience, and not from compulsion.”76 While the meaning of industrial work differed across locations and ideological lines, so did the kind of worker conjured by proposals for a new kind of Ford Man and those for a new Soviet Man. Unlike the homogeneous, coerced, de-skilled, and interchangeable workers that Ford hoped to create, the worker imagined by Gastev and other Soviet enthusiasts for elements of Fordizm was “an active, sentient, and creative part of the productive process.”77

These new, utopian meanings for work had limits in Soviet Russia. Ultimately, many workers there acquiesced to or even actively supported an emerging system that, in exchange for increased living standards, increased labor discipline and productivity and limited potential forms of workers’ collective, participatory political roles.78 Meanwhile, while Russians grappled with how Fordism might fit into open questions about how to construct the Soviet Union, Ford workers in Detroit were inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution and imagined ways in which socialism could reshape work and life in factories in the United States. For a variety of workers, both migrants and U.S.-born, the Bolshevik Revolution was a harbinger of transformations to come, and many employees at Ford’s facilities “tied their hopes and dreams to the creation of a new social and economic order.”79

Thus the meanings of Fordism that circulated between the United States and Soviet

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77 *The Ford Man* was the name of one of Ford’s employee periodicals; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 153.
Russia were multivalent and contingent on more than geographic location. During the 1920s, ideas about industrial work and life, technological promise, and the material abundance promised by mass production and mass consumption overlapped as often as they diverged, and the same was true of the people who enacted these ideas and brought them together in places like Ford’s factories in Detroit. While some Russian Soviets strove to combine “American” qualities with socialism to create a new kind of person, in Detroit Ford’s efforts to create a new industrial world deployed programs to mark elusive boundaries between Russians and Americans, especially after the rise in labor unrest that followed the Russian Revolution.

Who Counts as Whom? Immigrants and Return Migrants, Americans and Soviets

If Ford imagined, longed for, and attempted to forcibly construct a homogenous workforce, the actual collection of laborers who filled his factories was very heterogeneous. In 1920, for instance, the promotional pamphlet Facts from Ford listed “Sixty Different Nationalities Working in the Ford Factory.”80 In the fall of 1914, a survey of the national origins of the Highland Park labor force found 3,771 workers, or about 29 percent, had been born in the United States, while “Russians” numbered 2,016, or 16 percent.81 A report produced in 1917, after the plant and its labor force had grown tremendously, found that, of just over forty thousand workers, a little over half were foreign-born immigrants.82

And yet, while each of these reports listed precise numbers of “Americans” and “Russians,” the actual numbers of workers and, more basically, the qualities that made one

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80 Facts from Ford, on 56, 58, 60 are photographs of a representative worker of each of the sixty nationalities, in BFRC accession 951—Ford Non-Serial Imprints, box: Fa-Few.
American or Russian, are impossible to tell. As outlined above, FMC did not simply employ Americans and immigrants, but struggled to transform individuals in one category into those of the other. This process was challenged by the very workers it was supposed to alter.

Americanization programs not only constantly, coercively redrew boundaries between “American” and “Russian,” but did so selectively. For example, in the 1917 survey, “American” employees meant “whites,” a category that included both U.S.-born citizens and naturalized immigrants, but was separated from sub-categories for “Blacks” and “Indians.”

Still harder to determine is what the category of “Russian” employees indicated. The Russian Empire, which employees counted at Ford in early 1917 would have arrived from, was itself heterogeneous and multinational. Those who migrated from the empire often fit uneasily into FMC’s categories. Sometimes they were identified as Russian, and sometimes by ethnicities and nationalities that made up the Russian Empire, like Latvian or Ukrainian, or peoples that the empire only partly controlled, ranging from Polish and Finnish people to Manchurians. Furthermore, it is clear that those classified as “Russians” did not include “Jews,” who were categorized separately regardless of what part of the empire they had migrated from. Therefore, there were probably considerably more people working at Ford who had migrated to the United States from these areas than were labeled “Russian” in company records.83

Ford Motor did not merely try to sort out Russians and Americans for record keeping and statistical purposes; personnel also had to apply a murky identification process on the factory floor. In practice, attempts to categorize workers who were “Russians” were combined with efforts to identify, neutralize, and remove “Bolshevik” workers during the Red Scare, and more broadly to identify and intimidate workers who were socialists, trade unionists, or merely

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83 “Educational Statistics. Home Plant,” 12 Jan. 1917, BFRC, accession 572, box 27, Folder—#12.5, Employee Morale, Living Conditions, etc. See also the section of “Educational Statistics” on Religion, which lists all the “Russians” as practicing various varieties of Christianity with no Jews.
inefficient to prevent their disrupting production. The company often lumped together as potential threats radical workers who might disrupt production through bombings, unionists who might try to organize the workforce, workers categorized as Russian, and slacking or shirking workers. Written reports produced by a Ford Service Department employee who identified himself as “Operative 15” provide a rich record of the halting and capricious process used to identify these overlapping threats and to define and identify Russians and Bolsheviks. Operative 15 was placed undercover as a worker in various capacities at Ford’s Highland Park plant, where he observed, questioned, gained confidence of, and reported on employees. He also followed workers clandestinely after hours, and spent time with them outside of the plant, attending social gatherings and taking notes on meetings, such as one at which workers met to protest American military intervention in the Russian Civil War.84

The conflation of Russians, trade unionists, Bolsheviks, and inefficient workers often encompassed so many employees that it seemed that nearly everyone fit into the expanding category. “Ninety per cent of the Russians are Bolshevic,” worried the operative, and “ninety per cent of the tool makers were … pretty good Bolshevic.” One report illustrates the combined efforts of operatives’ activities, which were aimed simultaneously at disciplining workers, increasing efficiency, and identifying Bolsheviks. It lists all of the “No. 3 Shift” workers in the Box Factory, with various numbers of stars drawn next to many names. The operative wrote that three stars, “Indicates men that kill time in the toilet and wash before bell rings”; two stars, “Indicates Men that throw stock or scrap at others”; while one star, “Indicates I.W.W. and Bolshevic agitators.”85

Operative 15 had difficulty determining which workers that he knew to be “Russians”

84 BFRC, accession 572, box 29, Folder—FMC—#128-Espionage-Operative 15 Reports, “July 16th 1919.” When quoting from these reports I have retained misspellings and alternative spellings such as “Bolshevik.”
were “Bolshivic,” and so he had to rely on the other workers to make the connection for him. Some eagerly identified “radical Bolsheviks,” like one informant who argued heatedly “that every body that believes in Bolshevism that they ought to burn them to a stake, or throw them in jail for life.” However, this strategy was sometimes unsuccessful, as recorded in a conversation Operative 15 had with two Italian workers who operated nailing machines: “When ever a Russian passes them,” he reported, “they yell out, ‘Hello Bolshivic.’ I asked them, What does Bolshivic means? Both replied we just fooling with them, we call all Russians that, I spoke to several Russians yesterday and today but met no success in meating a Bolshivic.”

These documents record not only ways in which Ford Service Department personnel tried to understand the boundaries between Americans, Russians, and Bolsheviks, but also efforts by Russian-American migrant workers to define and reformulate their own statuses and affinities, particularly following the Bolshevik Revolution. In April of 1920, Operative 15 reported on one worker who planned to leave for Russia. Born in Poland in 1892, the worker identified himself as a Russian-Pole. He had first come to the United States in 1911 and since 1913 had worked for FMC for seven years. Having aroused suspicion by telling Operative 15 that he did not invest his bonus pay in Ford Certificates, the worker then explained that he intended to go back to Russia soon. “I asked him, ‘Was he coming back to the U.S.?’ … He replied indeed not, to HELL with this country, he was going to live under the Soviet Government.”

Several Russian migrants told of similar plans to leave for Russia. Another worker, identified in reports during the summer of 1919 as Alex Fedorinekio, had been living in the United States “ten and a half years” and working at Ford for seven and a half years since 1912, but he did not intend to apply for citizenship because he “expect[ed] to go back to Russia some

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86 Operative 15 Reports, “September 5, 1919,” and “July 24, 1919.”
87 Operative 15 Reports, “April 7, 1920.”
time.” Many of these workers explained that they were only waiting to save enough money for their return passage, and that they hoped to leave as soon as possible. Several even declared that they would prefer to be deported to Russia so they could get back sooner. One Russian migrant explained, “They had threatened to deport him two or three times each week while he was in the Army, he told them to deport him, he said he is going to Russia as soon as he gets the fare.” Another recounted his plan to arrange for deportation in collaboration with a friendly “U.S. Government immigration officer who deports the Comrades.”

While Operative 15 assumed each of these workers was clearly “Bolshivic,” he got a range of replies when he asked each “was he a Bolshivic?” One worker produced “his credential proving that he is a Bolshivic,” while another answered that “all workers are Bolshivc.” Others gave more nuanced responses, like one who replied that “he was a Communist Socialist but not a Democratic Socialist,” and “a member of the Union of Russian Workers.” Still others replied they “did not believe in Bolshivic[s].” The questions of whether Russians were Bolsheviks and whether Russian migrants would become Americans and efficient and stable Ford workers were of primary importance to the Ford Service Department. But these reports also suggest that these categories lacked clear boundaries. Some Russian migrants crossed categories to become the naturalized citizens that the FMC counted as Americans, or to become the Americans who Operative 15 described as “against Organize[d] labor and Bolshivc[s],” but many migrants never planned to become Americans, and some who had lived in the United States for over a decade had decided in 1919 or 1920 to return to Russia. \(^{89}\) [Figure 1.4]

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\(^{88}\) Operative 15 Reports, “July 25, 1919,” and “April 7, 1920.”

\(^{89}\) Operative 15 Reports, “October 1 1919.” Russian-American Ford workers were not alone in choosing to migrate back to Russia. According to one estimate, more than half of the Russian immigrants who came to the United States returned to Russia between 1908 and 1923; Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11. These statistics are also plagued with problems to do with shifting boundaries of various national and ethnic groups of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and in separating out “Hebrew” migrants.
Those Russian migrants who stayed to work in Ford’s Detroit factories may also have shifted their ideas about and affinities toward Russia following the 1917 Revolution. As Mayakovsky observed of Russian immigrants working at the Ford plant he toured in 1925, “In the main, these are former paupers—Russians who speak only dreadful ill of Russia, having arrived here about twenty years ago, and are therefore well, or at least tolerably, disposed towards the Soviet Union.”

Even those Russian-American migrants who chose to leave the United States and their jobs in Detroit often had further, later interactions with the FMC. Many would keep working in automobile production in the Soviet Union and some interacted with Ford managers and executives who toured the USSR in 1926 and 1929. In 1921, 123 Russian-Americans who had worked at the Highland Park factory but then returned to Russia formed an *artel* (cooperative association) that took over the operation of the AMO *(Avtomobilnoe Moskovskoe Obshchestvo)* automobile factory in Moscow based on their claims to knowledge of Ford’s “mass production” and “assembly-line methods.” When Ford Motor’s delegation of managers and executives arrived in 1926 they were surprised to find Russian-Americans who had returned to the Soviet Union working in the AMO Truck Factory, “A subforeman,” they reported, “approaching us with the question ‘How are things at Dearborn’ said he was formerly employed at the Tractor plant there and that approximately 75 of the mechanics had formerly worked in the United States.” Touring an auto-plant during his trip to the Soviet Union in 1929, Ford executive Charles Sorensen had a similar series of encounters, “As we went around everybody stopped work to have a look at us,” he later recalled, “much to my surprise I heard a few of them shout out, ‘Charlie, how are you?’ I discovered that some of these men had been working in our

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90 Mayakovsky, *My Discovery of America*, 93.
92 BFRC, accession 1870, box 1, Report of the Ford Delegation to Russia, 50.
Highland Park plant in Detroit.” Here, the idea that American automobile production was sent to Russian auto-plants becomes especially inadequate, obscuring as it does the fact that many of the same individuals worked on both sides of this exchange.

These interactions and the histories of migrants who returned to Russia reveal that boundaries were also drawn around Americanness and Bolshevism there. Bolsheviks made similar determinations about the meanings of national and ideological belongings among workers who came from the United States to participate in building up the Soviet automobile industry, even when they had been born in Russia or had come because of an affinity for the ideals of the Bolshevik project. For example, a leader of the Russian-American AMO artel was excluded from the Bolshevik party and labeled a “hanger-on” because of his background, despite his having abandoned the United States to live permanently in Russia and work for Soviet industry.

FMC’s 1926 delegation to the USSR, and visits by executives and engineers in 1929, left documents that show how the sorting out of Russians and Americans was also problematic there. In 1926 a man named Harold Ware visited the delegation while it attended the “Tiflis Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition” in Georgia. Ware was a well-known agriculture activist who organized agricultural projects in both the United States and the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s. According to the delegation’s report, Ware was “Manager and Founder of the Russian

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93 BFRC, accession 65, box 66, Oral Histories—Sorensen—“Amtorg” Final, 7. See also Charles Sorensen, My Forty Years with Ford (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1956), 197.
94 A parallel history involves return-émigrés—those who after the revolution left Russia to live and work in the United States but decided to go back to the Soviet Union after experiencing life in America. For an analysis of Soviet press accounts of these migrants, see Brooks, “The Press and Its Message,” in Russia in the Era of NEP, 238.
96 Ware later worked for the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and was also the namesake of the “Ware
American Reconstruction Farms,” a cooperative that had recently received two Fordson tractors.
Ware had left the United States in the early 1920s to join the Soviet project, “he having been a quite prominent I.W.W. here in the States.” He approached them to discuss their mutual interest in what they called “the Service Problem,” which required making more tractor service stations, spare parts, and trained service technicians available in the Soviet Union. “He had some excellent ideas as to how service should be organized,” they reported, “and made known his willingness to have his farm designated by the Government as an official Service Station for Fordson Tractors.”

However, the Ford representatives were wary of Ware’s propositions because they did not know how to sort out just who he was. Who, for example, were the other members of Ware’s cooperative farm? The delegation learned that about thirty of its other members had also left the United States, and that these “Americans” had changed in important ways since their arrival. “The American ladies and gentlemen associated with Mr. Ware,” read the report “have fully adopted Soviet social customs insofar as marriage is concerned. Two young ladies whom the delegation met had acquired husbands on the signature basis,” they explained, referring to the relative ease of obtaining a Soviet civil marriage. Ware himself had been a “prominent I.W.W.” who had rejected the United States for the Soviet Union, but now “he stated that long ago he had abandoned the sentimental reasons which brought him to Russia.” Perhaps his shifting loyalties...
merely reflected his indecisiveness: “Mr Ware appears to be an intelligent man, although a
dreamer,” they explained, “His head is too full of new ideas to the detriment of the old ones upon
which he has embarked. He has a reputation of not being able to stick to anything he
commences.” Ware was “supposed to be pro-Bolshevik,” and his partners in cooperative farming
had clearly become Soviet in important respects, but the delegation ultimately decided Ware was
still an American, not a Russian, and not a Soviet. They could not recommend his farm as an
official Service Station for Fordson Tractors because, the Ford representatives said, Russian
agricultural groups would become jealous “if we as Americans recommended … another
American.” They decided not to even visit Ware’s farm because they did “not wish our work to
be thrown out of gear by appearing to favor outsiders and at the same time incur the enmity of
the Russians themselves.”

Ford personnel thus cast Ware as an “outsider” in the Soviet Union, as apart from “the
Russians themselves,” despite his role as the head of a cooperative Soviet agricultural
community and he and his partners having “fully adopted” the “Soviet social customs.” In doing
so, they stressed their ambition to mark boundaries between Russians, Soviets, and Americans as
a basis of business operations. The example of Harold Ware reveals that categories like
“American,” “Russian,” and “Soviet,” were as inadequate for explaining people’s affinities or
presence in the Soviet Union as they were in the United States.

Ultimately, these encounters reveal that comprehending and recognizing Americanness
and Russianness was a murky and capricious endeavor throughout Ford’s operations from
Detroit to Soviet farms. Never self-evident, these categories were hazily redefined and deployed,
especially when they collided with individuals at the blurry junctures between the United States
and the Soviet Union. The roles of Americans and Russians in producing automobiles,

98 BFRC, accession 1870, box 1, Report of the Ford Delegation to Russia, 145–52.
manufacturing methods, and ideas about Fordism were rarely discrete. The contested processes of boundary making around these categories also reveals that the “American” products and technical knowledge created in Detroit were assembled by a heterogeneous mix of people belonging to, or falling in between, a range of uncertain and shifting categories that included “Russian-American.” Meanwhile, when Ford managers brought industrial technology and products to Soviet Russia, they brought them to factories which were built and staffed by an assemblage of American and Soviet parts, people, and ideas, including migrants from the United States and Russian Soviets who styled themselves “Russian Americans” or “Soviet Fords.” Many had already blended their own sense of Fordizm and Amerikanizm with the socialist project long before Ford managers assessed the prospect of bringing them these ideas in the mid-1920s.

This history, in which boundaries between “Russian” and “American” and other categories like “Bolshevik” were fraught and always under construction, disrupts the narrative that “American” products, cultural forms, and industrial methods were transferred to Russia. Workers, engineers, teachers, and technical knowledge circulated in multiple directions, often without discreet origins or self-evident end points. Emphasis on one-way technological transfer and the spread of “Americanization” has obscured the ways that these movements relied on and often collided with the migrations—both into and out of the United States—of people with complex and shifting national and ideological affinities.

Proponents of Fordism in both the United States and Soviet Russia had a mutual belief that technology, scientifically organized mass production, and mass consumption could transform society, and they each pursued programs to construct new cultures of work and life. They often relied on comparisons and sometimes suggested vital commonalities between the two
projects. But many also insisted on identifying and accounting for crucial differences between American and Soviet people and practices. These efforts at distinction sometimes proffered divergent meanings of work and transformation, and they inspired wrenching yet unreliable redefinitions of categories of people and ideas. Frequently, though, Russian and American efforts to draw the outlines of a new social world overlapped, and were advanced via migrating and visiting Americans and Soviets. This historical moment was marked less by clear boundaries than by previous and potential connections. Scholars have emphasized alternative, parallel, or connected paths to describe the histories of the United States and Soviet Russia during this period. Each approach must recognize that multidirectional migrations were frequently the basis for contemporary explanations of similarities between Fordism, Americanism, and the Soviet system, for attempts to define, recognize, and account for crucial distinctions, and for proposals for future circulations of people, products, and ideas.
Figures

Figure 1.1: Two frames from “Uncle Sam and the I.W.W. – Bolsheviki Rat” (Ford Motor Co., ca. 1919). Courtesy of the National Film Preservation Foundation and the National Archives.
Figure 1.2: Russian Family Recently Emigrated to Detroit, Michigan, 1917 (FMC Sociological Department) Photographic vertical file series, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan.
Figure 1.3: A Russian advertisement collected by Ford managers on their 1926 trip to the Soviet Union not only promoted the Fordson as “the universal tractor,” but also envisioned the machine reshaping broad aspects of Russian agriculture, transport, and industry. Suggested uses included powering water and oil pumps, sawmills, and even lighting in addition to potato digging, threshing, and plowing snow. Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan. Accession 1870, Box 1, Report of the Ford Delegation to Russia.
Figure 1.4: Fordson Tractor Assembly Line, Ford Rouge Plant, 5 April 1919, Photographic vertical file series, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan
Chapter 2 – When Bolshevism Was a Love Story: Empire, Attraction, and Connection in American and Russian Silent Film

In the film *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919), an American soldier returned from the Great War and a social worker attempt to build an experimental utopian society in a resort-hotel on an island off the coast of Florida. Norman and Barbara are motivated by their attractions to each other and to a better world formed in the interests of humanity. At the conclusion, however, Barbara is in the clutches of a Russian radical who has taken over the community and declared a Bolshevist regime. U.S. Marines invade the island to restore order, storming past Saka – an American Indian who has erected his tipi in the jungle outside the commune. The soldiers prevent the Bolshevik leader from sexually assaulting Barbara under the auspices of free love, and the reunited couple renounce their experiment and declare their intentions to become “good citizen[s] of the old U.S.A.” and to get married. “Soon we’ll … run a social experiment in our own little home,” says Barbara. In the last shot, Norman lowers the red flag flying over the island, and replaces it with the American flag carried by the invading troops.¹ [See Figures 2.1, 2.2]

The final moments of the film may at first appear a jumble of disconnected strands and images. What did an American couple’s marriage have to do with a Bolshevik revolution? Why did an Indian chief in a tipi figure prominently in a story about a Bolshevik experiment? And why would an American military invasion of a coastal island conclude a film about the potential for radical Russian reorganizations of work and life to take root in the United States? But such connected stories, found in an array of silent films produced in the United States during the 1920s, did make sense together. They presented a coherent and salient framework for

¹ *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919) Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (also released as *Shattered Dreams*). When referencing films that I personally viewed I cite the location of the film for the first reference. Films that are not available to view or that no longer exist are indicated by citations to other material.
understanding a set of overlapping domestic and global concerns that arose in the United States following the First World War and the Russian Revolution. In this chapter, I explore the development of a powerful set of correlations between narratives about Russia and Bolshevism; American imperial visions of military intervention, conquest of the West, and control of overseas territories; and contentious questions about marriage, family, and emotional attachment.

Recognizing how these national and transnational concerns overlapped in silent films offers a new way to understand the development of exclusionary constructions of “100% Americanism” that historians have argued formed in relation to the specter of domestic and immigrant radicals during the post-World War I Red Scare. Film historians have characterized silent pictures about Russia and Bolshevism as “social problem films” that “engaged in debates about American social and cultural life,” but these debates were not distinct from contemporary questions about the role of the United States in the world. In order to understand what films like *Bolshevism on Trial* meant in the contexts they were viewed, we must acknowledge that these settings were shaped not only by domestic debates about labor and capital, sex and consumption, but also international and transnational contexts of revolution, migration, and intervention. These contexts are important because films about Russia and Bolshevism produced during and after the Red Scare were about more than defining differences inside the United States. They were also about new potential connections that could cross and transform national and ideological distinctions.

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Looking beyond the domestic United States reveals how the dozens of American feature films that addressed these concerns were part of a developing outlook that presumed a growing role for the United States as a global imperial power. These cultural narratives were not only about narrowing the definition of Americanism. They were also about how Americanism could expand to encompass new modes of transnational and imperial connection with places like Soviet Russia. Motion pictures proposed an array of potential and often ambiguous meanings, created interests in Russia and Bolshevism, and ultimately drew attention towards Russia as an attractive site for thinking about cultural and political questions like U.S. imperial ambitions, the role of the New Woman and female sexuality, and humanitarian uplift. Film narratives often relied on and affected existing and emerging understandings of difference. But even as they strove to distinguish Americans and Bolsheviks, they called for connective action – for aid, for marriage, for transformation, for assimilation, for control – rather than for separation. This finding suggests that there was more at stake in Red Scare narratives than exclusions of those constructed as un-American and a shrinking of the boundaries aroundAmericanness inside the United States. The same stories also suggested ways that Americanism could grow to help Bolsheviks abroad and ways that the roles and boundaries of the United States should expand in the world.

As I explore below, these moving pictures used emotion to highlight new ways that Americans might connect with people in Russia. American films about Bolshevism elicited sympathy, deployed sentimental narratives, provoked outrage, and tugged at heartstrings. They created, in the words of Soviet director Lev Kuleshov, “tensed, interested figures who jumped up from their seats.”

An analysis attentive to the emotional connections suggested by films helps to answer the question of how the newly emerging Soviet Russia came to be an attractive place for

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the focus of American goals, worldviews, and action. In official, commercial, and popular capacities, people in the United States had long been attentive to Russia as an ally, a vast potential market, and an arena for the playing out of romantic fantasies. The world war and revolutions in Russia brought first a prospective democratic partner and then a dramatic and radical turn that confounded and captivated many American observers. In the aftermath, burgeoning reinterpretations of the United States’ potential role in the world suggested that the new Russia and the United States’ expanding global outlook would surely overlap or collide in some profound way. Films created at the juncture of these trends offered an opportunity for American viewers to explore potential connections to the Soviet people.

Evidence from these films is also important because it suggests that American stories about Soviet Russia, and the actions they inspired, are part of the history of American empire. Russia was an orientation of American interest and activity that has been overlooked by historians focused on interventions in places like Latin America, the Philippines and the

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Caribbean.⁷ Including the new ways that Americans oriented themselves towards Soviet Russia as part of the United States’ imperial outlook is vital because it enables us to understand how potential connections to Soviet Russia relied on outlooks towards these other sites of U.S. imperial endeavors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, films that made Soviet Russia an attractive focus were based in part on narrative frameworks that previously interwove sentimental attraction with violent power relationships to explain an imperial mode of connection to the American West and to places like the Caribbean and the Philippines.⁸

Understanding American silent films that attempted to grapple with the emergence of Soviet Russia and what it meant for Americans as more than simply national stories about social problems within the United States also reveals that these narrative connections and their meanings and material consequences were not produced and consumed within the United States alone. They were created by and inspired circulations of people, films, and their affects that moved between Soviet Russia and the United States. In this chapter I therefore also examine the Soviet silent films featuring American themes and characters that emerged alongside – and crucially, in connection with – American films about Russian themes and characters. While, in important respects, both the American and Soviet film industries developed nationally and culturally specific cinemas in this period, they did not do so in isolation from each other.

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⁷ For example, Mary A. Renda, Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Cultures of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Renda argues that “the military occupation of Haiti… was one of several important arenas in which the United States was remade through overseas imperial ventures in the first third of the twentieth century.” She cites U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Nicaragua, China, and the Philippines, but not Russia.

Movement of ideas, techniques, films, and people between these enterprises must be examined and accounted for. Attention to the transnational movements between these industries is especially important in the 1920s, when Russian émigré filmmakers made new careers in Hollywood and American films were often the longest running and most popular films shown in the Soviet Union.9

These contentions draw on and revise recent studies that have explained how the construction of American foreign interests was closely tied to cultural productions like films.10 My argument builds on some of the fundamental premises of this work in cultural approaches to the history of the United States and the world. Particularly, it relies on the idea that cultural texts like film produce meaning and interests rather than merely reflecting them, and the notion that cultural narratives are an important part of the set of beliefs and assumptions that work to make relationships between people in the United States and people in other parts of the world “make sense in a given moment.”11 For example, I argue that films like Bolshevism on Trial did important cultural work to make military intervention abroad make sense as a response to revolution in Russia and radical changes in the United States. This study, however, extends

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11 McAlister, Epic Encounters, 6.
previous work by suggesting that we have to ask what these powerful cultural formations surrounding the American relationship with revolutionary Russia meant to Russians, how Russians participated in the construction of these cultural products, and what Soviet cultural formations raised and responded to the same questions from outside of the United States? These processes did not emanate only from the United States and move only in one direction. Russians were not only imagined by American filmmakers; they also consumed American films, produced Soviet films about Americans, and even participated in creating images of Russians in American films.

Considering Russian films, perspectives, and people reveals that the construction of U.S. interests never took place in isolation from the people and places they were directed towards. Cultural and political interests, which historians have shown are “intimately and inevitably intertwined”\(^\text{12}\) were produced in a world where political ideas, cultural formations, and the people who drove them stubbornly and continuously crossed borders, overlapped, and collided. This chapter therefore rethinks the intersections between American culture and U.S. foreign interests by tracing some of the ways in which they were both refracted abroad and materially and symbolically affected by the people and places they purported to depict. Interests and meanings surrounding American silent films about Russia were intimately and inevitably intertwined with Russian silent films about Americans.

The first portion of this chapter traces some of the ways that American films made issues surrounding Russia and Bolshevism make sense to viewers by presenting them as part of a global-imperial outlook. This vision tied stories about Russian radicals and places in Soviet Russia to stories about military and humanitarian intervention in places like the Caribbean and Asia and to stories about the consolidation of control over territories and peoples like those of the

\(^{12}\) McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, xi.
American West. Attention to narratives about empire in American films also enables an exploration of the ways in which Russian films in the 1920s also grappled with potential connections between Americans and Russian Soviets, questions about colonial peoples and spaces, and narrative and technical strategies for the consolidation of control over spaces and peoples of the former Russian Empire through stories told on film. The following section of the chapter examines how American films about Bolshevism and Russia narrated questions about revolution and global politics through individual love stories. While emotions were a target of filmmakers who used new techniques to inspire audience reactions, they were also a popular subject of both American and Soviet motion pictures. Connecting issues like revolutionary radicalism, labor unrest, military deployment, and colonization with concerns about sexuality, marriage, emotionality, and consumer desires, these films also suggested the kinds of affective attachments that could both address individual and societal disorder in the United States and link Americans and Russian Soviets at home and abroad. The chapter culminates in a final section that suggests the need to examine connections between the Soviet and American film industries rather than merely comparing them. While connection between Americans and Russian Soviets was an important theme in films made in both countries, connections also played a central role in the production of films as filmmaking methods circulated in both directions, American stars visited Russia, Russian directors visited Hollywood, and emigration from Russia to the United States had a formative impact on both industries.

**American Silent Films about Bolshevism and the Imaginative Spaces of U.S. Empire**

American silent films were commercial products that were thought to open pathways for American economic and strategic interests around the globe. They were also cultural products that proposed a role for the United States in the world. As commercial products, films produced
in the United States began to dominate the world market for the first time during and after World War I when European film production was hindered by the material and economic conditions of the war. Filmmakers, government officials, and business interests in the United States saw the opportunity to spread American films to areas around the globe as a chance to spread American ideals, to create goodwill towards the United States, and to promote the sale of American products in new markets abroad. A 1925 *Saturday Evening Post* article, “Trade Follows the Film,” argued that films could no longer be brushed off as “simply an amusement and a relaxation and a form of entertainment” because they generated demand for American goods, realigned trade patterns, and shaped international relationships. Woodrow Wilson contended that film was assuming a central role in both “the development of our national life” and in “the presentation of America’s plans and purposes” abroad. The ascendancy of U.S. film production in the world market after the war placed American films in a unique position to present plans and purposes; between 75 and 90 percent of films shown in most countries in the interwar period were made in the United States. In Russia, American made films made up just under 60 percent of those shown in theaters in the mid-twenties and they were by far the most popular among audiences.

Historians have traced this marketplace dominance and the contemporary “assumption that movies not only sold themselves but also sold desires for the products and lifestyles they displayed” to audiences abroad. But these films also sold desires “about America’s plans and purposes” in the world when Americans watched them inside the United States. In the 1920s,

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14 Edward G. Lowry, “Trade Follows the Film,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 198 (November 7, 1925), 12-13, 151, 158.
while American films were conquering foreign markets and quickly becoming the most popular and most frequently watched films in Russia and around the world, Russia also “invaded” American film. Russian themes, characters, and questions became a central component of American cinema at the moment when American motion pictures marched in force onto the world’s stages.

Filmmakers who understood their pictures as both commercial and cultural products incorporated grand cultural messages into films in order to reshape and expand their potential markets. For example, Thomas Ince, a prominent director, producer, and studio mogul wanted to transform westerns from low-brow amusements in order to make movie-going a more genteel experience that could appeal to a wider national and international audience, one that would particularly include more women. He did so by mixing Wild West spectacle with lofty themes focused on the emergence of the United States as a new global imperial power. Promoting a new role for the United States in the world, Ince felt, would elevate his pictures and widen their commercial appeal.

As cultural products aimed at people in the United States and around the world, American silent films about Bolshevism and Russia drew on and developed narratives of American engagement with spaces and peoples under a range of forms of U.S. imperial control. They also proposed imaginative ways that modes of U.S. empire, and the narratives that

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20 The concept of trade following the film was understood at the time in Soviet Russia and was utilized as an argument in favor of developing an “export cinema.” Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 61. On some of the ways that motion pictures in an earlier period both “helped make the world accessible to American power abroad and to the gaze of audiences at home” see Kaplan, “Birth of an Empire,” in *Anarchy of Empire*, 150.

supported them, might be extended to real and fictional spaces in other parts of the world. First they relied on and redeployed genre conventions, themes, plots, characters and images in film, literature, and other cultural forms that depicted, developed along with, and often materially and ideologically supported U.S. imperial endeavors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among these were the Western genre in film and fiction which had already developed well recognized modes of depicting and naturalizing the conquest of peoples and the space that became the American West and other locations, and the imperial romance story drawn from American and British fiction that sentimentalized subjugation and control of colonial peoples and territories. Stories of each type were redeployed to understand the role of American imperial power and reach in relation to places like Russia. Second, American films about Russia and Bolshevism depicted military, economic, humanitarian, and other interventions in Russia and in other “Bolshevik” communities, and in doing so posed a response to Bolshevism and radical revolution in the United States and abroad that relied on an outlook that presumed a growing global imperial role for the United States.

The way that film narratives knitted together potential spaces, past and present, into an imaginative vision of U.S. empire encompassed both of these modes. Films used the tools of cultural imagination to transform spaces in Russia into spaces that could be intelligible as locations for the exercise of U.S. imperial action and power. They also relied on the places that had already come to be understood as within U.S. imperial auspices in the popular imagination, like Caribbean islands, and which held a special place in cultural images of empire such as the American West. In doing so, they offered a way in which Soviet Russia could be made intelligible, outlining connections that could make proposed U.S. interactions with Russia

understandable to viewers. Offering well-rehearsed symbols, sentiments, and stories that could make Russia make sense to viewers, films about Russia and Bolshevism from this period tied American approaches to Russia to modes of depicting the American imperial past and developing global outlooks for potential imperial futures.

Films like *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919), which featured a American Indian bodyguard camping in a tipi outside a Bolshevik colony on a tropical island off the coast of Florida, and a military intervention by U.S. marines to retake control of the colony and raise an American flag, mixed together genre elements and images of imperialism from various times and locations in order to narrate a Russian led Bolshevik Revolution and an American response. It was based on the novel *Comrades* by Thomas Dixon, the author who wrote *The Clansmen* which was adapted for the D.W. Griffith film *Birth of a Nation*. *Bolshevism on Trial* was a highly promoted and critically well received production released at the height of the Red Scare. The film entwined concerns about domestic social movements, gender and familial conventions, and the movement of Russian radicalism to the United States with contemporary questions about overseas military power and the role of the U.S. in protecting and policing global sites, producing the seemingly domestic struggles in an imperial frame and suggesting an outlook that would encompass both. [See Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3] By suggesting that an experiment to see whether Bolshevism could become a suitable mode for reorganizing work and life in the United States ought to be corrected by the intervention of an American military force, and by setting the experiment and the

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23 The film broke box office records at Loew’s theaters in New York City. *Moving Picture World*, 17 May 1919, 1058. For examples of promotional posters see *Moving Picture World*, 19 April 1919, and 17 May 1919. Promotional campaigns included controversial plans to “surreptitiously plant big red flags in conspicuous places and then hire American soldiers to tear them down” and suggestions for dressing up promoters “like a Bolshevist” with “whiskers” and “a satchel to carry, labeled ‘Bombs.’” For critical reactions to promotional stunts see *New York Call* 19 April 1919, 1 and 25 April 1919, 4.
intervention on a coastal island, the film blurred violent responses to Bolshevism inside the United States and violent military interventions abroad.

The character Saka, an American Indian played by Chief Luther Standing Bear, furthered the connection between the film’s narratives about social revolution and the past and future of American empire. The protagonist Norman’s old family friend and bodyguard, Saka travels to the island but remains on the edges of the social experiment. He appears in several scenes that set the question of the appropriateness of Russian Bolshevism for people in the United States in the context of tropes of civilization and barbarism.²⁴ [See Figures 2.4, 2.5, 2.6] When it is first suggested that Saka join the experimental colony to look after Norman, Saka replies, “Me tame Indian – no like um Red.” The scene is an example of the way that the film frames the actions of the most “Red” characters as outside of the civilized world that even Saka has joined as a “tame Indian.” Later, Saka becomes an ambiguous measure of reasonableness against which the actions of the colonists are weighed. When forms are given out to the participants so that they can write down the professions they might most usefully occupy, Saka alone discards the new system of labor by crumpling up his form. Told earlier that “everyone is going to work to feed everybody else” in the new social order, Saka rejects the idea: “Indian must feed self- must plant – hunt – or die. White man same,” he argues. As the colony takes a radical turn focused on liberalizing marriage rules and extending the revolutionary project “over the world” under the leadership of a radical who we later find out is a Russian agent, Saka decides to move out of the colony. “Preferring the wildness of nature to the wildness of man” explains an intertitle as Saka

pitches his tipi in the jungle. Here, Saka and his tipi marked several overlapping edges, including those between a tropical jungle and a white settler colony, and those between a radical new organization of work, life, and marriage and the naturalized social world that revolutionaries sought to supplant.  

Saka also figured as a representative of American individualism who stood opposed to the collectivism of Bolshevism. Because his stance against communal living, labor, and property occurs at his encampment on the frontier between the American colony and the wilderness, the position evoked the breakup of collectively held Indian lands into individual allotments that was still in progress in many parts of the American West. Resonating with the moral of *Bolshevism on Trial*, that process figured in popular narratives as a transition from misguided collectivism to a recognition of individual work, life, and family units that would provide a path to civilization and to U.S. settler control of territory.

The apparent unexpectedness of an American Indian in a story about contemporary social issues, revolution in Russia, and the extension of American power overseas was not unique to *Bolshevism on Trial*. The appearance of characters like Saka as “anomalous Indians,” seemingly out of place in silent film settings were, as historian Philip Deloria has shown, part of the cultural narratives that “helped white Americans lay claim to a separate world, one from which Indian people were to be excluded.” At the same time, Saka’s appearance on the island conveyed more than a symbolic figure drawn from past American conquest. When Standing Bear traveled as part of the production to the coastal island, advised the filmmakers on tipi construction, and built his

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25 The in-between position of Saka was somewhat more nuanced than many melodramatic stereotypes of Indians in silent westerns, but his depiction as a transitional figure echoed popular formulations. On the development of formulaic depictions of Indians in American film see Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); For later depictions of Indians as “radical others” who should be both “imitated and repudiated” in allegorical Westerns about the American war in Vietnam see, Armando Jose Prats, *Invisible Natives: Myth & Identity in the American Western* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 256-265.
tipi between the jungle and the film’s Bolshevik colony on camera, he created an image of an Indian as a mobile and active figure who shaped contemporary social and political issues.26

* Bolshevism on Trial* proposed a measure of congruence between the frontiers that separated wilderness from white settler colony; collective work, life, and family from individualism and monogamy; radical revolution from the naturalized capitalist social order. The delineation of these frontiers with the image of a “tame Indian” on the boundary relied on the work of literary and popular narratives that had previously linked the projected locations that might become part of an American overseas empire to the consolidation of control over a U.S. continental empire at a moment when the continental frontier had supposedly closed.27 In this model, the invasion of the marines was part of an established history of U.S. empire building, but it could also be an old solution for a new problem: military intervention and imperial modes of power would also provide the resolution for radical revolution whether it happened inside the closed frontier of the North American continent, in the areas that had already been partially knitted into U.S. imperial spheres of influence like nearby islands, or in new arenas that might fall under an expanding global-imperial role for the United States like Russia. *Bolshevism on Trial* was one of several dozen popular films that interwove these questions and potential solutions in the decade following the First World War.28

As one historian of film has noted, American films about Russianness during the 1920s drew on the narratives of “transition from barbarism to civilization which had previously been “codified in the American Western” film genre. Oksana Bulgakowa has argued that these particularly American reinterpretations differed from the representations of Russianness and the

27 Kaplan, “Romancing the Empire,” in *Anarchy of Empire*, esp. 94.
Russian Revolution that developed in European film capitals in France and Germany in the 1920s, some of which, for example, emphasized modernist narratives of the new Soviet state. American films instead focused on aspects of common stereotypes of Russians as “wild savages” which both lumped Russians together with images of “other exotic oriental barbarians,” and tied them to sentimental images of savages in American Western films.29

Films about Russia, revolutionary radicals, and Bolshevism also relied on sentimental narratives that viewers were growing used to seeing in Westerns and other kinds of popular fiction about the spread and consolidation of U.S. power over lands and peoples. Theorists of the ways that cognition and emotion function in film viewing have argued that genres, like the Western genre, can play a role in organizing and triggering emotion and directing viewers’ attention because of the way that they present filmic events and details in a rubric that subsumes them into recognizable categories and narrative formulas. Sentimental themes found in genres like western films and in family melodramas including, for example, stories of virtue in distress or separation and reunion, provoked similar emotional experiences and their incumbent modes of concern, interest, and attachment when audiences encountered them in pictures about Russia and Bolshevism. Viewers of films about Russia that redeployed the emotional categories and focuses of story lines popularized by Westerns would then have been presented with familiar emotional states that would have highlighted particular details, connections, and meanings and cast them as particular objects of concern.30

Popular narratives about American romantic and political adventures in Russia also drew on an established literature of imperial adventure fantasies. As Choi Chatterjee has shown in an

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analysis of popular American fiction about Russia in the half century leading up to 1917, romances staged in Russia deployed narrative conventions of contemporary American and British imperial fiction so that Russia often functioned like other imperial spaces such as the Western frontier. They often cast Russia, for example, as a place like the American West where a hero’s manliness could be restored or fortified. Novels typically portrayed romantic adventures in either glamorous aristocratic Russia or exciting revolutionary Russia starring an American hero or heroine who saves the day, rescues and marries their Russian lover, and brings their new spouse home to the United States where, whether a cultured noble or idealistic radical, they are transformed and placated in a new American domestic life.\(^{31}\)

American motion pictures that depicted interventions in Russia and other global sites, and blurred the distinction between violent responses to Bolshevism in America and violent intervention abroad, were part of the on-screen context that surrounded movies about potential Bolshevik radicals in the United States. Film historians have argued that images of Bolsheviks threatening America in both conservative and liberal leaning films helped to legitimize state sponsored violence and government repression of domestic radicals by presenting these as on-screen solutions to the problem of Bolshevism.\(^{32}\) However, these films also legitimized violent anti-Bolshevik intervention abroad, and they produced a meaningful context for American involvement in Russia. These were also overtly presented as solutions to the question of Bolshevism and more broadly suggested by the kinds of attachments films pointed to in their narration of the interplay of Americans and Bolsheviks.

Soldiers of the American North Russian Expeditionary Forces, who took part in the American military intervention in the Russian Civil War, also drew on the literary and film genre

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conventions of the western, and on military images that were circulating at several U.S. imperial sites in order to recast the Russian landscape and people as part of the space and time of the American West. American soldiers in Russia could watch American films at least two nights each week at headquarters in Arkhangelsk, and moving pictures were also shown in that city at the YMCA and at the American Convalescent Hospital. Soldiers listed Western film stars like William Hart and Dustin Farnum as among their favorites at these screenings in addition to the typically cited stars like Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and Charlie Chaplin. When they fought Bolshevik soldiers or interacted with Russian peasants, American soldiers in Russia drew on the same kinds of narrative links built in contemporary films, tying the Russia they saw to the American West: Americans called Bolshevik fighting styles “savage” and like “indian warfare.” “Like our Indians they are,” wrote one soldier. Meanwhile, soldiers cast social conditions as similar to those “in pioneer days in America,” writing that Russian peasant houses were “the very counterpart of the American Indian buck and squaw home.”

The Allied military intervention in North Russia and Siberia was itself the specific topic of at least a half a dozen feature films released in the United States in 1918-1919, and the subject of comedy shorts like *A Sammy in Siberia* (1919) starring the highly popular Harold Lloyd. In the film, Lloyd plays an American soldier stationed at a U.S. military outpost in Siberia. After becoming lost from his unit he encounters a Russian girl who has fled from an attack by Russian soldiers on her family’s home. Quickly bonding over Lloyd’s character’s fear of a harmless dog, the couple laugh and embrace before Lloyd rescues her home from the Russian detachment though a slapstick series of vase smashings and head conkings. Aside from the snow, overcoats,

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34 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds. *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 176.
and scene where Lloyd tastes vodka and fearfully tries to shoot the jug, the film might easily
have been one of Lloyd’s many short Western comedies. These often involved the Lloyd
character coming to the rescue of a local girl and her father plagued by a villainous gang, for
example *Billy Blazes, Esq.* (1919) produced in the same year. Both the short about Russia and
the Western short starred Lloyd as the hero, Bebe Daniels as the girl whom he rescued, and
Harry “Snub” Pollard as the villain – sporting the same thick mustache in his roles as Western
outlaw and Bolshevik military officer. *A Sammy in Siberia* simply transported the familiar
Western scene, family in peril, and slapstick rescue to a snowy cabin in Siberia.35 [See Figures
2.7, 2.8, 2.9]

Many more films featured characters who were returned soldiers of the military campaign
in Russia, or military interventions against Bolshevism in other sites like the experimental
Bolshevik colony launched by Americans in *Bolshevism on Trial*. Filmmakers interwove
documentary and newsreel footage of American troops during the interventions in North Russia
and Siberia into fictional films about Russia or revolutionary radicalism, lending them an aura of
authenticity. Newsreels of scenes from the Russian revolution and the American military
intervention were major draws for theaters that claimed the best or exclusive coverage.36
Fictional films were also promoted alongside documentary footage such as when the *New York
Times* “Coming Pictures” column described footage of the American intervention shot by the
Bureau of Pictures of the Red Cross in Archangel and Murmansk alongside Universal’s

*Billy Blazes, Esq.* (1919) available on *The Harold Lloyd Comedy Collection* New Line Home Video DVD, 2005.
Shull, *Radicalism in American Silent Films*, 76.
36 A full page ad in *Moving Picture Weekly* July 21, 1917, 35, announced the Russian Revolution as a “scoop” for
the newsreel Universal Animated Weekly. Reprinted in Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of
announcement of the completion of *The Right to Happiness*, a film about twin sisters separated as babies and raised apart by a capitalist American and a Russian revolutionary.\(^{37}\)

These films were not entirely new in suggesting Russia as a place where problems could be solved by military intervention of the kind used at other U.S. imperial sites. At least one motion picture explicitly connected Russia to U.S. military campaigns and occupations of the Spanish-American War as early as 1910. In *A Ward of Uncle Sam*, a Russian émigré to the United States fights with great distinction in the Spanish-American War. After returning to Russia, he is imprisoned there as an alleged conspirator. At the urging of his mother, the American Ambassador in Russia cables the Secretary of War about the issue and because he remembers the Russian émigré’s exemplary service he sends a gun boat, an admiral, and a company of marines to Russia where they secure the veteran’s release.\(^{38}\)

Films produced during the 1918-1920 U.S. military intervention and throughout the 1920s also built narrative bridges between the deployment of force in Russia and previously established U.S. imperial power. However, films produced at the height of the Red Scare in the United States made links between military intervention abroad and the question of domestic unrest and anxiety about radicalism especially salient. In *Common Property* (1919), an American cavalry troop must put down a mob in the Russian city of Saratov after a Bolshevik decree nationalizes women as common property. When the Russian protagonist Pavel cannot save his American wife and their daughter from being distributed to other men, U.S. troops intervene to rescue the American and battle the Russian mob raised by the commotion.\(^{39}\) The picture drew on the story of the nationalization of women in Russia during the revolution, which

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\(^{37}\) *New York Times* June 8, 1919.  
had become a popular element of American films about Bolshevism. The narrative tied concerns about radical revolution abroad to anxiety about gender disorder at home, as discussed in greater detail below.

American films during the 1920s also portrayed Soviet plotting, aggression, and intervention, in the United States and at other sites such as the Caribbean, Latin America, and China. An early incarnation of this type of film, *For the Freedom of the East* (1918), justified the American military intervention in Russia via a plot about preventing a similar situation in China. Here the specter of combined scheming of Bolsheviks and German Huns that was often cited in popular explanations for the Allied occupations in North Russia and Siberia resurfaces as the wartime and postwar evil-doers join forces to provoke revolution in China. In the end, the cooperation of a democratically inclined Chinese princess skilled in martial arts and an American secret service agent prevent the plan to raise a revolutionary Chinese army to help conquer lands for Bolshevism. The film made the connection between the fictive potential battle in China and the real military excursion in Russia more overtly by including newsreel footage of the actual American soldiers in Vladivostok which it explained would help defeat the “horde of Huns and Bolsheviks.”

The connections proposed by these films were often chronologically and geographically wide ranging. *Perils of the Yukon* (1922), a fifteen part Western serial, reached back in history and North in location to tie these themes of military intervention, the consolidation of control over territory, and the recasting of Russian spaces as comparable to the American West to a story about the acquisition of the territory of Alaska from Russia. Like *A Sammy in Siberia* and other

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pictures about Russia, the film felt like a Western in the snow and presented a plot led by an American Western hero’s quest to win a Russian heroine.\footnote{Larry Langman, \textit{A Guide to Silent Westerns} (Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 1992), 330.}

Another half dozen films produced in the United States in the latter half of the 1920s featured Soviet-inspired revolutions in Germany (\textit{Isn’t Life Wonderful}, 1924), Italy (\textit{The Only Thing}, 1925), China (\textit{Shanghai Bound}, 1927), and a Caribbean island (\textit{The Adventurer}, 1928).\footnote{Shull, \textit{Radicalism in American Silent Films}, 133.} \textit{The Adventurer}, directed by Russian émigré Viachetslav Tourjansky, combined western-style action with a plot centered on the potential for Soviet interference to disrupt the stability of American-controlled projects in other areas of the world. In the film, a gold mine on a fictional island in the Caribbean called Santo Diego is managed by a Texan engineer played by a popular actor known from westerns, whose love interest is the daughter of the island’s president. Moscow-directed Russian agents, including one posing as a local bull-fighter who wants to kidnap and marry the hero’s girl, organize a revolution and seize control of the gold mines. As in earlier films about Russian revolutionaries, the western hero has to save the girl from Bolshevik sexual advances and overturn the revolution, but here an American engineer simultaneously protects American resources and commercial interests along with the ruling regime and residents of Santo Diego from radical revolution and Soviet interference.\footnote{Copyright Descriptive Material Collection, Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, LP25461; “The Adventurer,” in \textit{American Film Institute Catalogue of Feature Films} available at \url{http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=2502}; Langman, \textit{A Guide to Silent Westerns}, 4. Shull, \textit{Radicalism in American Silent Films}, 17, 137-8, 275.}

In these films we can see not only the extension of American ideas about the direction and location of U.S. imperial ambitions towards Soviet Russia, but also the ways in which Soviet foreign intervention began to become a reason for directing protective American interests to other locations in the world with the goal of preventing the spread of Russian communism. These
cultural productions set an early precedent for the cultural framework surrounding conflicts that would later link American global interests to the containment of Soviet influences.\(^\text{44}\)

**Americanism and Empire in Soviet Silent Film**

The American Western genre and American cinematic methods for provoking emotions in viewers were not only adapted by American filmmakers in reimagining spaces of Russia for American audiences, they were also highly influential in new Soviet forms of filmmaking. Prominent Soviet film director Lev Kuleshov wrote a formative essay on the popularity of American films in Russia and on the potential role and use of American methods in Soviet filmmaking, which he titled “*Amerikanschina*” (Americanism or Americanitis).\(^\text{45}\) Kuleshov dismissed fear among some officials about the popularity of American films and argued that American adventure pictures offered useful techniques and models for the development of a new Soviet cinema. Among these were the movement and speed of American film, the hero – who ought to be modeled on heroes in American films, – and the happy ending (so foreign to Russian film that it was transliterated as *kheppi end* rather than translated) which ought to reward the audience’s sympathy for the hero.\(^\text{46}\)

Kuleshov was particularly concerned with the way that American films were the most effective at eliciting audience reaction in response to action on the screen, creating what he called “tensed, interested figures” among viewers. “The public especially feels American

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\(^\text{44}\) Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*. Officials grew increasingly alert about actual machinations to extend Soviet control in this period. A 1923 report from U.S. operatives stationed in Riga warned that the Moscow-directed Comintern was active in a wide range of countries including “Germany, Eastern Europe, Great Britain, Spain, Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, India, China, and Japan.” Coleman to Hughes, November 8, 1923 *Foreign Relations of the United States:1923*, II, 771, cited in John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 107-108.

\(^\text{45}\) *Amerikanschina* is sometimes translated as “Americanism” and sometimes translated as “Americanitis” to capture the sense of negativity implied in the Russian suffix –:*schina*. For a discussion of this and related uses in Soviet film commentary see Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 50.

pictures,” he argued. Kulshov highlighted the way that American detective and adventure films condensed movement and heroism into a rapid sequence of scenes composed of individual images showing only the most essential elements of action. The lesson for Soviet filmmakers was not just in these individual pieces which he called “American shots” but in the way that the successful effect and the meaning could be derived from the juxtaposition of these fragments in relation to one another, that is through the technique of montage. Rather than fearing the influx of popular American films, Kuleshov wanted to harness their essential movement, rapidity of action, and heroics to their maximum effect. Soviet filmmakers could use these to affect audiences full of “interested figures” too.

Kuleshov would apply the themes and methods based on observations of American movies outlined in “Amerikanschina” two years later in his film The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks (1924). The film tells the story of an aptly named American, Mr. West, the president of the Y.M.C.A., who travels to Soviet Russia despite warnings of the barbaric and dangerous Bolsheviks. Although he brings along a gun-toting cowboy bodyguard named Jeddie (no more out of place in Soviet Russia then the Indian Saka in a tropical Bolshevik colony), his briefcase is stolen upon his arrival by a nefarious gang. West is soon kidnapped by the gang, who disguised themselves as the fearsome Bolsheviks depicted in the New York magazine they find in West’s briefcase. The American is seduced and tricked by a countess, subjected to a hasty mock trial, and duped into paying thousands of dollars for his release. Ultimately, he is rescued by “real Bolsheviks” who take West on a tour of Moscow’s splendors and convince him of the greatness of the Soviet state. Mr. West is handily converted in his opinions of Bolshevism and the film concludes after he sends a telegram home to his wife:

48 Nyeobychaiiinye priklyucheniya mistera Vesta v strane Bol’shevikov (1924), available on Landmarks of Early Soviet Film, Flicker Alley DVD, 2011.
“Greetings from Soviet Russia. Burn those New York magazines, and hang a portrait of Lenin on the wall. Long live the Bolsheviks!” [See Figures 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13]

The film echoed the techniques of American filmmaking, referenced figures like the cowboy, and parodied American images of the Bolshevik, but, it also worked through many of the same questions presented by American films as they applied in the Soviet context. For example, like the American pictures it poked fun at, *Mr. West* also grappled extensively with intertwined questions about the adoption of new social and cultural norms, popular representations of external and internal enemies of the state, and the working out of what the Bolshevik revolution and socialism meant for Russia and for people like the American Mr. West during a period that saw the possibility for many potential paths for the Soviet state and for its relationship with Americans.49

Moreover, while parodying conventions of American-style detective and western genres, the film also exploits the structures and techniques of the American movies it ridicules with quick paced chase scenes and slapstick physical comedy. Combined with its focus on the place of internal threats like Nepmen and bandits, and external threats like foreigners and American power, the film is both a record of the influence of American cultural forms on Soviet cultural productions and also a commentary on such influences and what they might mean for Soviet Russia. *Mr. West*, therefore, not only utilized American genre and methods, it mocked American themes and filmic conventions and, through parody, attempted to turn the common notion that Russia ought to be dragged out of its ‘backwardness’ through Americanization or westernization

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on its head. Instead, it offered a story in which real Sovietness was at the vanguard of civilization in comparison to both America and to symbols of Russia’s past.⁵⁰

Soviet filmmakers reused, critiqued, and reformulated narratives and techniques of American filmmaking and images of American imperial culture, but they also developed a new genre and way of looking at colonial and potentially colonial spaces in film. The connections between “unsettled” lands in outlying locations of the Russian Empire and the American West had a history in Russia before the arrival of American films. Some Russians, for example, young settlers in the mid-nineteenth century, had already connected Siberia with the American West, styling themselves as “freedom-loving pioneers” who were settling a “vigorous land” just as, they said, colonists had done in America.⁵¹ Russian images of colonial spaces took on new meanings at the dawn of the Soviet period. As historian of Soviet film Emma Widdis has argued, the image of wide open spaces of Russia and peripheral areas of the former Russian Empire also held a special place in Soviet film and popular imagination as the space “from which a new world was to be constructed.”⁵²

As American filmmakers, government officials, and popular beliefs maintained that American films could make people around the world desire American products and an American way of life, Bolshevik planners proposed that peasants in disparate villages would be linked to Bolshevik influences and brought into new Soviet ways of thinking through a process that the Bolsheviks called *kinoficatsiia* (cinefication), a motion picture campaign that would “instill in

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⁵⁰Nancy Yanoshak, “Mr. West Mimicking “Mr. West”: America in the Mirror of the Other,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 6 (2008): 1055, 57-8, 61.


peasantry … a desire for a different way of life.”53 *Kinoficatsia*, particularly as it was directed towards the village and spaces in the periphery, proposed that film could be at the forefront of plans to produce a revolutionary new Soviet way of living and could crucially consolidate control over and knit together a new, unified Soviet space.54

Moreover, while American films about Russia and Bolshevism drew on techniques and narratives that had helped consolidate and sustain imperial control over spaces like the American West, Russian Soviet filmmakers also drew inspiration from methods and themes developed to introduce and consolidate Bolshevik control of regions that formerly composed the Russian Empire.55 *Agitpoezda* were agitational trains that traveled between large towns and through rural areas to transport *agitki* - short agitational films that addressed key issues in a direct and visual presentation. They were, according to Soviet film historian Richard Taylor, “to act as the standard bearers of revolutionary agitation, moving wherever they were most urgently required.” These trains (and also barges) loaded with films and equipment not only went out from the cities to provinces to present messages to peasants and ethnic minorities and stitch together disparate spaces; they also brought back footage shot at these locations which was edited by Lev Kuleshov and other future leaders of Soviet film production. These filmmakers gained their early experience in the industry by working on these projects to educate and incorporate populations in the Russia peripheries, a foundation that had a significant impact on their later work. Taylor, for example, argues that “the *agitka* genre had a decisive influence on the stylistic development of the Soviet film,” most particularly in the “essence of economy and dynamism in visual

53 Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin*, 68.
55 A. Katsigras, *Kino -rabota v derevne*, (Moscow: 1925)
presentation of material” that was required to convey effective messages simply and quickly in the target settings of *agtiki* and which were later utilized in the formation of distinctive Soviet montage techniques. Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s, then, like American filmmaking discussed above, utilized techniques that had previously been developed and honed for producing and explaining the consolidation of control over territories and their populations.

Furthermore, Soviet cinema developed a new film genre that both drew on and reconfigured the American Western. These films, which came to be called “Easterns,” because they depicted Russia’s east and Central Asian locations to the south east, often deployed Muslim themes and characters, and utilized genre conventions of Westerns. They became a distinct variant of Soviet melodramatic and adventure films beginning in the 1920s and would become an important and very popular genre of Soviet film in later years that would continue to depict the consolidation of the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War in what became the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union. These films utilized but also readapted conventions of orientalist narratives deployed by other empires (and by American films that depicted Russia) to cast the East as backward and in need of modernizing intervention.

Russian orientalist thinkers and imperial practitioners had long grappled with the ambiguous position of the Russian Empire as in between the East and the West, sometimes operating as a colonial power in its own right and sometimes under the influence of Western European powers. This “delicate matter,” wherein Russia appeared to be both colonizer and colonized, which was mocked in Soviet Eastern films and later highlighted by historians, was

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also a key theme in a variant of American films about Russia and particularly about Russia’s “East.” This set of American silent films cast the events of the Bolshevik Revolution inside Russia in the setting of Russia’s East in a way that visually and narratively reordered the Russian space as comparable to the American West. These films, which included *The Volga Boatman* (1926) and *The Cossacks* (1928), reflected the ambivalences that had long characterized both Russian narratives about the influences of Western powers in Russia and Russian influences in the East. They addressed ideas about Russian backwardness and projects to overcome the backwardness of non-Russian territories of the Russian Empire.\(^{59}\) These ambivalences had also been reflected in American popular fiction that exoticized Russia as a backward underdeveloped land of glamorous romances and privileged nobility.\(^{60}\) Indeed, since at least American Wild West shows of the late nineteenth century, American cultural productions about figures of the Russian “frontier” like the Cossack had been characterized by this ambivalence. As Thomas Barrett has shown, the Russian Cossacks featured in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows were perhaps cowboys, and perhaps Indians. The ambiguous “products of half civilization,” as the *Chicago Tribune* in 1893 called Cossack performers and other members of the “congress of rough riders of the world,” mirrored the ambivalent position of cowboys as both civilizers and outside of civilization. Whether cowboys or Indians, they were coming from a place in Russia that was very much like the American West.\(^{61}\)

American films that portrayed the Bolshevik Revolution in the setting of the Russian East were, like the cultural narratives they drew on, stories about “the Russian character as a barbarian gradually adapting to civilization,” a trajectory sustained in part by the lumping

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60 Chatterjee, "Transnational Romance, Terror, and Heroism," 755-6.
together of Russian peasants with “exotic oriental barbarians,” Gypsies, and Tartars. But also like imperial romance novels, Wild West performances, and Russia’s own narratives about the Russian East, they frequently featured ambivalence rather than a clear trajectory, offering more complex images than a single “Russian type.” Russians (such as those in the dinner and ball scene in the *Volga Boatman*) were also the elite nobility of a civilized life that looked a lot like a cocktail party in Southern California. They were also the just administrators of a new social order, such as those on the tribunal at the end of the *Volga Boatman*, who solve a love-triangle and exile the officer of the Russian nobility and tie his former princess to the Bolshevik boatman. In the end, the boatman overcomes both his toilsome origins among Tartar fortune tellers and the Russian nobles. He eschews the sexual conquest and violence displayed by both groups, and becomes a deserving leader of battle for a new Russia.

These ambivalent portrayals of Russian figures as sometimes exotic barbarians and sometimes elite nobility, sometimes the objects of European and western colonialism and sometimes the colonizers of peoples in Russia’s East, were present in both Russian cultural productions and in American films during the 1920s because of movements between the two industries and in part because Russian émigrés had an important role in creating the narratives about Russians that were depicted in films made in the United States. In fact, ambiguities over the portrayals and meanings of Russian figures in American films were part of the reason that Russian émigrés played such a significant role in their production. The ambiguous overlaps between images of colonization and racialized foreignness, and between civilization and barbarism that enabled the same mustached actor to play a Western outlaw and a Bolshevik army officer in Harold Loyd’s short comedies, also enabled Russian actors to play a variety of roles

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including cowboys and Indians, revolutionary radicals and Imperial generals, villains and lovers. Russian émigré actors and filmmakers lent authenticity to American films that deployed themes about empire and romance to understand what was happening in Russia. Filmmakers used the same kind of allusion when they cast figures like Luther Standing Bear in western films as actors who built tipis between civilization and barbarism and as advisors in tipi construction.

**Emotion, Marriage, and Bolshevism in American and Russian Silent Films**

American silent films about Bolshevism presented viewers with attractive ways to engage with Soviet Russia by featuring transnational romances that suggested new connections between Americans and Russian Soviets. Many of these films wove their narratives through romantic adventures, stories of love between an American and a Bolshevik revolutionary, between a relation of the Czar and a U.S. soldier, or between a Russian immigrant radical and a factory owner’s daughter. Indeed, as often as the resolution to the threat of Bolshevism at home or abroad took place in a factory or a military conquest, it was just as likely to take place in the hearts of the leading man and woman. These films cast the drama of revolution as individual heterosexual love stories that often crossed and transformed national, ideological, and class boundaries. In doing so, they not only drew distinctions between Americanism and Bolshevism; they also suggested the kinds of attachments that could be forged to link Americans and Russian Soviets.

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While often not the primary subject of a Soviet silent film, romance did feature prominently in some of the popular pictures of the period. Like American films about interpersonal romance that used individual relationships as stand-ins for larger questions about changes in society or international relations, some Soviet films produced during the 1920s also foregrounded affective connections, including those between Americans and Soviets, as a way to narrate the events and issues of the newly emerging Soviet society. One such film was *The Cigarette Girl of Mosselprom* (1924), a romantic comedy in which a girl who sells cigarettes on the street in Moscow must choose between three love interests; a filmmaker, a bookkeeper, and a rich American industrialist. More often, Soviet films suggested that romantic love was not supposed to get in the way of revolutionary action. The moral of many of these encounters was revealed in plots in which, according to Soviet film historian Denise Youngblood, “Passionate love between communists and non-communists had to end in the violent death of the latter.”

When American films focused on affective attractions, love getting in the way of revolutionary action was often precisely the point. Motion pictures that depicted questions about Bolshevism and revolutionary radicalism in Russia and the United States through individual love stories often functioned to neutralize broader movements and social conflicts which individuals might otherwise have seemed a part of. These movies suggested that solutions might not only be found on the level of society or nation, but also in the realm of individual choice and desire. Films that depicted the revolution in Russia through love stories such as *A Woman in the Web* (1918) in which an American businessman’s son loves a Russian princess, and *The World and Its Woman* (1919), in which an American engineer’s daughter loves a Russian prince, not only presented a way that American individuals and the United States might interact with people in

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66 *Papirosnitsa of Mosselproma* (1924), available on *Landmarks of Early Soviet Film*, Flicker Alley DVD, 2011.
Soviet Russia, they also circumvented questions about socialism, ameliorated the potential disruptiveness of class conflict, and suggested the mutability of differences by foregrounding romantic connection. They often did this by pathologizing revolutionary desires; by highlighting the role of emotion in individual love stories and in creating or preventing attachments to Russia, revolution, and sexual or political deviance; by positioning consumption alongside modes of engagement like war and humanitarianism and consumer desire alongside romantic and political desire; and by suggesting heterosexual marriage as the glue that could secure personal success, familial ties, American organizations of work, life, and government, and new transnational connections between the United States and Russia.

Marriage was at the heart of the ways that films explained how difference could be transformed into mutual bonds. It could tie revolutionaries or Russian immigrants to the established American social order. These themes echoed narratives in American popular fiction about Russia leading up to the 1920s, in which marriage could calm fervent revolutionary ideals and endings relied on one American and one Russian who emerge as a couple and “settle down to a placid and domesticated existence.”

*The Right to Happiness* (1919) offers perhaps one of the most sensational stories of the connection between marriage and Russian revolutionary radicalism. The story depicted an American millionaire living in Petrograd with two very young twin daughters. When a pogrom in the nearby Jewish quarter of the city produces turmoil and a fire in the family’s home, the twin girls are separated in the commotion and the father is only able to recover one daughter whom he brings back to America. The other girl, it turns out, is raised by a Jewish family in Russia and “grows up a Red revolutionary.” Later sent to the United States as a radical provocateur, she

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doesn’t know that she is agitating among the workers at her own father’s factory. In the end, the divergent upbringings and their attendant beliefs bring dual outcomes of fulfillment in marriage and violent death. The American, capitalist-raised daughter marries well while her Russian Bolshevik sister is shot by the very mob she worked to incite.⁷⁰

Despite its extraordinary plot and promotions that billed the film as “the greatest love story ever told”⁷¹ and the lead actress Dorothy Philips who depicted both adult twins as “America’s Greatest Emotional Actress”⁷² the picture seems to have been unconvincing to some. One reviewer noted that while “its intention is to set up the fact that love is stronger than hate,” “the story is unconvincing, dripping with crude sentimentality” with an ending that left all the characters “shouting nonsense about love.” The reaction suggests that while audiences may have been unmoved by the caricatured terror of onscreen Bolsheviks they were also sometimes equally skeptical of the overwrought sentimentalism of some of the love stories that were used to narrate the drama of Americans’ encounters with revolutionary Russia.

However, such narratives in American film unquestionably had substantial cultural cachet and box office staying power. Stories that tied Americanism to heterosexual marriage and family structure; linked Bolshevism and Russian radicalism to vivacious, communal sexuality and detachment from family; and ended in the sexual assault or violent death of female radicals continued to serve as central plots for film after film.⁷³ The pictures tied two sets of popular thematic trends together. They foregrounded emerging images of the New Woman, questions of female sexuality, women in the workforce, and patterns of consumption, and tied those themes to

⁷⁰ Shull, Radicalism in American Silent Films, 86-88, 97.
⁷¹ Variety, Sept. 5, 1919.
⁷² Shull, Radicalism in American Silent Films, 97.
⁷³ For example in 1919 and 1920 alone The Red Viper, The Volcano, The Uplifters, The New Moon, Common Property, Dangerous Hours, Bolshevism on Trial, The World and Its Woman, Hawthorne of the U.S.A. and several more.
narratives of Russian Bolshevism, foreign agitation in domestic radicalism, and revolutionary violence.

*Bolshevism on Trial* offers a paradigmatic example. At the outset, the film explains that Barbara, the social reformer, is motivated by powerful filial drives in her desire to ameliorate social ills. As we see Barbara kissing and hugging small children on the steps outside a building and then caring for an elderly woman in bed, an intertitle explains that “Barbara’s unconscious motive is a motherly sympathy for those unable to care for themselves.” Her suitor Norman entreats her to leave the work of caring for others to charities, but to Barbara the couple’s affection and her work of caring are closely linked: “But we must remove the cause of these conditions,” she tells him, “If you love me you should help me.”

For Norman, the question of joining the Bolshevik experiment Barbara proposes as a solution to social conditions is also a question about attachment to familial ties. A scene with his father presents the decision as a choice between home and family on the one hand, and joining the radical plan on the other. Both Barbara’s tendency to draw on filial attachments as a motivator for revolutionary radicalism and Norman’s turn from family obligations towards participation in a Bolshevik colony are pathologized in the film. “But the girl’s gone crazy,” protests Norman’s father when he expresses interest in attending a speech Barbara will give outlining her plans. When Norman tries to shake his Dad’s hand before setting out to join the chance to build a new social order, his father refuses, exclaiming “Not until you come back sane.”

Barbara presents her plan to remove the causes of social inequality, formed in conjunction with the radical Wolff (who we later learn is the Russian-Bolshevik agent Androvitch), to an audience of interested parties at a meeting. The plan presents a need for
audience involvement in addressing social issues, the potential for radical reorganizations of society, and the adaptation of Russian solutions for American society. Perhaps more important here, it also offers a particular mode of involvement. The audience at the organizing meeting is called on to participate in Barbara and Norman’s plans for social change as not only social activists and colonial settlers, but also as consumers. The meeting’s leaders explain that “the one spot on this earth where we can be free with real freedom” is the island colony “with its lovely hotel, built for a winter resort.” Indeed, Wolff explains the plan to the audience as a paradise of consumer goods and leisure: “We shall have balls and festivities where overalls will be changed for dress suits and the girl in calico shall wear satin.”74 Once on the island, consumption is at the center of the participants’ desires for forging their new lives both in settlement and in labor.

“My must be a front room,” “I’ve got to have mine with a bath!” exclaim the colonists as they are assigned rooms at what used to be a hotel front-desk. As labor assignments are given out in another scene, we see a large audience in an auditorium writing down the careers they are most suited for while the colonies’ leaders stand on a stage. “Leading woman – musical comedy,” writes one audience member/colonist on her piece of paper. “Sixteen men and woman want to go on the stage,” laments Norman, counting the submissions from the front of the auditorium. In these scenes, where meeting audiences participate with the potential for radical reorganizations of work and life in the United States through consumption, they share much in common with the audiences watching in movie theaters. The picture suggested both crowds share intermingled desires for the betterment of humanity, a cure for social ills, the attraction of participating in the movies, and the aspiration to dance the night away in a cocktail dress or a dinner jacket.

In the end, the failure of the utopian colony, which has taken a radical turn towards Bolshevism bent on world domination, is a failure of consumer satisfaction, socialist arrangements of work and pay, and an attempt at the radical reorganization of love and marriage. When Wolff (secretly the Russian-Bolshevik Androvitch) has successfully taken over political leadership of the colony, he declares that old organizations of marriage and family no longer apply: “The marriage laws will no longer bind us. Divorce will be on application. The State will raise the children. I promise absolute freedom,” he exclaims to wild applause from his audience. The plot turn took up the common theme in popular discussions and American films about the Russian Revolution which claimed that Bolshevism meant a dangerous brand of sexual freedom and breakdown of families because women were supposedly being redistributed by the state in Russia. Narratives of marriage as the connective answer to revolutionary social unrest in the U.S. and radical revolution abroad usually played as a crucial counterweight to the sensational story of the “nationalization of women” in Russia that formed the basis of several films and captured American popular imagination in the years immediately following the revolution.75

Barbara and Norman finally decide they have made a mistake and resolve to abandon the Bolshevik experiment and instead to “run a social experiment in our own little home.” It soon becomes clear that Wolff declared the new regime so that he could divorce his wife and make Barbara his “consort.” When she refuses, he attacks her, and Norman must come to her rescue precisely as the U.S. soldiers invade the island to replace the red flag with the American flag. “Now what about your ideals, boy?,” asks Norman’s father. Aside from returning to the U.S.A. and “being a good citizen” Norman replies that “I have only one ideal now.” Looking longingly at Barbara, he shakes his father’s hand, reforging his filial connections, announcing his marriage, and reaffirming his citizenship in the same moment.

75 For example, The New Moon, Common Property, The World and its Woman, Dangerous Hours.
The tendency among films to connect gendered images, American ideals, and notions of sexual and familial stability, with the protection of America from the spread of Bolshevism paralleled efforts by U.S. government officials. At the end of 1918, Variety reported that David K. Niles, chief of the motion picture section of the U.S. Department of Labor, had written a letter to film producers about the potential for labor themed films to affect “the minds of the I.W.W. and Bolsheviki of this country.” Niles argued that the best method of using film “to stabilize labor and help bring about normal conditions” would be the depiction of positive examples of workers who exemplified masculine Americanism. “To portray the villain of a photoplay as a member of the I.W.W. or the Bolsheviki is positively harmful,” wrote Niles in the letter “while, portraying the hero as a strong, virile American, a believer of American institutions and ideals, will do much good.”

While Niles’ letter suggested that positive depictions of American manhood in film could help prevent the spread of Bolshevism in the United States, American filmmakers also focused on constructions of American womanhood. [See Figure 2.14] Debate about revolution and radicalism often played out through female characters, as when twin girls raised in each regime met corresponding ends. However, while women were powerful symbols of Americanness and the existing social and sexual order in many films, they were not merely symbols. Women viewers were often the targets of films’ emotional messages. Some motion pictures called on women to engage with issues related to Russia as political, familial, sexual, and humanitarian actors. Narratives that tied notions of womanhood to Americanism also had practical and political consequences for women in the 1920s. For example, ideas about politically active women as an un-American stepping stone for radical revolution fed conservative attacks that

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limited the effectiveness of female reformers and the expansion of social welfare programs
during the red scare.\textsuperscript{77}

Niles’ focus on strength, virility, and stability as components of a positive heroic image
of masculine Americanism echoed powerful cultural constructions in this period that tied ideas
about national security to gender and emotion.\textsuperscript{78} Gendered conceptions of emotion, normality,
and susceptibility to radical influences were important themes in American motion pictures about
Russia and Bolshevism. Films pathologized emotionality as the potential vulnerability that could
open Americans to Bolshevik influences. Therefore, while emotions were an important part of
the way that viewers interacted with films and through which films directed attention towards
certain ways of looking at Russia and Bolshevism, emotions were also a central topic of the films
themselves. Indeed motion pictures showed emotionality as the thread that linked political
deviance, sexual deviance, and pathology but also as the tool that could tie individuals to
domesticity, marriage, and the American social and economic order through affective
attachments.\textsuperscript{79}

The working screenplay for the film \textit{Americanism (versus Bolshevism)}, later retitled
\textit{Dangerous Hours} (1920),\textsuperscript{80} shows consideration of the portrayal of both Bolsheviks and
“American workmen” with careful attention to the gendered and emotional features that would
signal Americanism and Bolshevism. For example, actors who were to play “strikers, with an
honest grievance” as an intertitle described them were, according to the script, meant to be the
“good looking types of strikers… use very good specimens of American workmen in this scene.”

\textsuperscript{78} Nielson, \textit{Un-American Womanhood} and “What’s a Patriotic Man to Do?”
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Dangerous Hours} (1920), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division
Meanwhile, the screenwriter’s instructions for casting actors to play the Bolsheviks in the same scene suggested that they be

composed of men and women who would not work under any circumstances. Many of them are slightly foreign in appearance and all are of the group of so-called “Intellectual”, by this I mean that the men are pale and anemic and the women also; there should be a general air of unhealthiness both mentally and physically about the majority of them.81

In the film, the protagonist John King was meant to be neither of these two types but a well-off, educated American who wanted to help workers but was being duped by ideas from Russia. According to the script, King was naïve, conveying in his physical appearance “a great deal of boyishness.” From his clothing and presentation, the audience was meant to understand that the character was “dressed in his conception of a workman’s garb.” “It should be carefully shown,” the writer explained, “that while King may be dressed as a workman he does not look like one, he resembles rather an actor playing a workman’s part.” The distinction was key, because King was not meant to possess the same orderly nature and bodily qualities of masculine Americanness that guided the exemplary workers in the strike scene. Instead, King’s gendered vulnerabilities to Bolshevik influence were to be both physical and emotional. “From the looks of you,” a judge tells King after he is arrested at the strike, “fighting tyranny is a soft job. You’ve hands like a woman.” Meanwhile King was to appear sincere in his desire to help workers but also “of an ardent, impulsive nature, easily excited.” Here emotional vulnerability was a central characteristic in setting up King’s vulnerability to Bolshevik influences, in contrast with the specimens of American workingmen; what an intertitle warned was his “misguided zeal” was only misguided, King’s character was meant to show, because it was zeal to begin with.

The same emotionality was a central component of the character of Sophia who would help lure King into support for the Bolshevik cause. Described in the script as acting

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“hysterically,” “ecstatically,” and “declaiming dramatically,” Sophia was “a rebel against… Civilization”… “the unhealthy product of the old World, and so-called modern thought.” King is enthusiastically taken with her but an intertitle tells us that he is misguided in succumbing to her emotional display – “Translating the feverishness of her shallow, thrill-craving soul as the Sacred Fires of the New Womanhood.” The moment highlights the way that the film depicts emotion as obfuscating the true motivations of radicals and misdirecting an earnest desire to help workers. It also points to the way that constructions of womanhood were tied in these films to emotionality, sexuality, and radicalism. The screenplay characterizes Sophia and her female Bolshevik compatriots as highly sexualized but also as adopting a disingenuous affect. “I do not mean that the women are necessarily vicious looking; they are not prostitutes in the full sense of the word, but are believers in the creed of free love and utter lack of moral restraint,” explained the screenwriter, laying out a close up shot of the “women types,” he continued: “They all deem it necessary to affect a studious, intellectual air and are of the droopy spineless type.”

The narrative that “honest” American workers with American values, and people interested in aiding social causes were merely being duped into violence and radical action by Russian agents or disingenuous Bolshevik agitators was often combined in this way with the popular figure of “the vamp” who used her sexuality to seduce men to her way. In this scenario, “strong, virile American” manhood was literally what protected workers and the nation from the seduction of revolution, as political radicalism and sexual radicalism became entwined and embodied in the dangerous allure of the female vamp.82 [See Figure 2.15]

Dangerous Hours contrasted Sophia, whose open sexuality, radicalism, and feverishness translated to King as “New Womanhood,” with May, the other love interest who an intertitle described as “A magnificent type of clean American womanhood.” While the screenplay depicts

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82 Shull, Radicalism in American Silent Films, 89.
Sophia as overly emotional, it describes May as “above all things sensible.” While Sophia lives with radicals in Greenwich Village who believe in free love, May is linked closely to the familial ties and obligations that King’s radical work with the Bolsheviks has pulled him away from. While Sophia uses her sexuality to influence King, the screenwriter indicated that “It is very important to understand that May does not flirt with King, she is too honest to do this and too wholesome.” As one film historian has noted, Dangerous Hours outlined a “dynamic … between “new womanhood” and the “clean American woman” and between the disloyal and the loyal American.” But the picture was also about how loyalty was healthy and normative while radicalism was pathological and about the affective ties that could transform a protagonist from one category into another. While King’s disloyal actions and initial attachment to Sofia and the Bolsheviks are shown to be misguided detours from his familial and national obligations, his underlying desire to aid workers in struggle is not itself called into question, and King is not beyond redemption. Like Russian revolutionaries married abroad, and Bolsheviks on distant islands or domestic factories, each of whom were brought into the American family through affective connections, King too could be tied to the social order and healthy Americanism via love and marriage.

While the roles of emotions in history and in film viewing have become recent objects of scrutiny for scholars, the emotionality of these films was a concept that had strong resonance for film practitioners, observers, and audiences in both the United States and Russia during the 1920s. The emotional power of film was a key dimension of how film critics, those critical of film, government projects to utilize film to influence audiences, and filmmakers in both the United States and Russia during this period understood the medium of cinema and its effect on viewers. Film critics often rated the emotional impact of films in reviews. Advertisements

83Rosenbloom, "Toward a Middle-Class Cinema," 562.
geared toward theater operators highlighted emotional appeal in their marketing campaigns. Researchers in the United States began in this period to attempt to systematically understand the emotional impacts of films on viewers. Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia during the 1920s made emotions a subject of intense scrutiny and imbued them with important political significance.

Government projects in both the United States and Soviet Russia attempted to harness the emotion-producing power of cinema in projects at home and abroad. For example, U.S. programs initiated by the Committee for Public Information and the innovative Soviet programs to distribute films on “agitational trains” each cited the emotional role film could play in affecting peasants in areas outside of Bolshevik control in Russia’s East during the Russian Civil War. Leading filmmakers endeavored to theorize the role of emotion in cinema. Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein, for example, attempted to understand the crucial role of emotional response in film viewing and how it could be cued using particular production techniques in his 1924 essay “The Montage of Cinema Attractions.”

In part, the emotional appeal of these films responded to audiences’ desires for entertainment. “Soviet audiences,” like audiences elsewhere Denise Youngblood reminds us, “went to the movies for entertainment,” and filmmakers in Soviet Russia “struggled to make films that were both Soviet and entertaining.” These were overlapping rather than divergent projects because a new kind of Soviet cinema, they argued, would not only serve the vitally

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86 James D. Startt, “American Film Propaganda in Revolutionary Russia” Prologue 30, no. 3 (Fall 1998); Taylor, Politics of the Soviet Cinema.
serious goal of contributing to a new Soviet way of living but would also offer audiences a new Soviet kind of levity and happiness. “The victorious class wants to laugh with joy,” explained a Bolshevik activist who later headed the Soviet central film agency, “That is its right and Soviet cinema must provide its audiences with this joyful Soviet laughter.”

In the United States, motion pictures in the 1920s were only a portion of an “evening’s entertainment” that often included attractions ranging from vaudeville performances to interactions with others in the audience. Historians of American silent film have often interpreted this context as part of the way that these films made issues of the day into leisure – silly rather than serious – transforming hard issues and struggles into romance and entertainment. Dramatic representations of the events in Russia “made the Russian Revolution safe for American audiences by making it merely a movie,” wrote one contemporary observer, while comedies turned Bolshevism into a farce, “burlesqued and made to appear ridiculous,” according to a film historian. Even powerful systems of ethnic difference and wrenching changes like assimilation of immigrants could, according to this ameliorative model, be made-over by the movies which “transformed an ordeal into play, desire, and fantasy.”

It would however be wrong to interpret these narratives, and their emotional impact, as merely entertainment because they both showed and affected real questions of daily life and often elicited material responses and even violence. Take for example, the story of one theatergoer who cheered for the Bolsheviks at a screening of Bolshevism on Trial in New York

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89 Boris Shumiatskii, *Kinematografia millionov. Opyt analiza* (Moscow, 1935), 249, quoted in Taylor, *Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, 47. Shumiatskii was also the proponent of a project to create a “Soviet Hollywood” after a trip to the United States in the mid-1930s.
City and was beaten-up by others in the audience. Moreover, American films about Bolshevism did indeed transform the Russian Revolution and pressing questions of radicalism into farce and fantasy, but like the Soviet films that were meant to create both desire for a new way of life and the laughter that new Soviet people deserved, American cinema also intertwined comedy and melodrama with new productive desires. “It provides a lesson, as well as amusement,” reminded local advertisements for *Bolshevism on Trial*. The recasting of threats as entertaining stories did not simply reduce or remove concerns; it often created new ones, suggesting that the burlesque world of Bolshevism could be an arena for American adventure, that the violence that could quell revolution at home could do the same overseas, and that the Americanism which would provide the concluding and happy alternative to the ordeal of class conflict in the United States could be expanded to produce a happy ending abroad as well.

**Moving Pictures, Moving People: Emigration and other Movements between Russian and American Silent Films**

In the American film *The Last Command* (1928), a former general in the Russian Imperial army ends up as an extra in a Hollywood movie being directed by an émigré who was previously a Russian revolutionary. The story about the production of a film within a film not only narrates the way that Americans negotiated the telling of the Bolshevik Revolution to American motion picture audiences, it places Russian individuals in key positions in crafting meanings out of events in Russia for American film. The critically acclaimed film, directed by Josef von Sternberg and featuring a performance that earned actor Emil Jannings the very first

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92 *New York Call* Sept. 9, 1919; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 145.
93 See for example, *Ludington Daily News* [Ludington, MI] (Sept. 21, 1919).
94 *The Last Command* (1928) available on *3 Silent Classics by Josef von Sternberg*, Criterion Collection, 2010. The plot was based in part on an encounter with a real life general of the Russian Imperial Army waiting in line at a casting call for extras wearing his full military uniform. “In New York,” *Pittsburgh Press* (May 7, 1929), 20.
Academy Award for Best Actor for his role as the Russian general, highlights the importance that movements of themes, techniques, people, and motion pictures themselves between Russia and the United States played in the formation of films in both countries during the 1920s.

We must be attentive to the movements of films across different places because, as recent research into the cultures of film viewing and the history of cinema has revealed, where and with whom a film was viewed mattered a lot. Historians of working class film viewing experiences in the United States, for example, have argued that cultural effects of motion pictures during the 1920s relied at least as much on the audience interactions, occupation of new types of urban spaces, consumption of movie posters, and other social practices of attending pictures as they did on the content of the films themselves. Moreover, as one film historian reminds us, the experience of watching a film in the 1920s was very different from at “any time before or since.” Film viewing varied wildly across different venues like the working class neighborhood theaters and the emerging central film palaces in the heart of cities, between urban and rural settings, and indeed even between particular showings of a film in the same place. While today we may imagine films as static texts once produced, in the 1920s filmmakers and theater operators treated them as works in progress and spectators encountered them more like live shows. Directors often cut and recut films after their initial release to change or sharpen their meanings. Theater operators commonly removed scenes or entire reels from films to suit their audiences, reshape meanings, or simply to fit in the program of entertainment on a given night. Because no projection speeds had been standardized, operators projected pictures at an array of speeds – an effect that could make a mundane scene dramatic or a staid moment appear comedic. Musical accompaniment could vary from a single piano to a full orchestra and often relied on the skills

and interpretations of the performers, resulting in a variety of moods and cues that could also affect a film’s meaning and viewers’ reactions.\textsuperscript{96} Movement across space to different viewing sites and the context at different sites was a constitutive part of producing and experiencing the film that was shown.

Indeed, the very texts of the films themselves were multi-vocal, offering the potential for a range of readings and meanings even before they took to the shapes lent by various contexts of audience, speed, edits, music, and location.\textsuperscript{97} Some film producers had firm ideas in mind for how their pictures should be interpreted, as evidenced in the detailed descriptions of intended meanings for images contained in the \textit{Americanism} screenplay. But writers, directors, and production companies had little success in controlling the meaning of films once audiences interacted with them.\textsuperscript{98} Evidence also suggests that viewers of these films were aware of the multiple meanings and possibilities for interpretations they presented. In a union hall in Seattle, for example, a labor spy listened in on a conversation about \textit{The New Moon} (1919) during which one worker explained to another that, “They now have started a campaign of pictures to create hatred between Russians and the American working men, but I think we will be too wise for them this time… instead of the pictures making us hate the Russians we will like them better.”\textsuperscript{99}

In Russia, where years of war, revolution, and civil war had severely impacted the work of the film industry and the meanings and goals of cultural production, the conditions of film

\textsuperscript{96} Koszarski, \textit{An Evening’s Entertainment}, 9, 13, 41, 56.
\textsuperscript{97} Here I follow Charterjee’s reading of American fictional narratives about Russia in which she argues that “rather than study American popular fiction about Russia as a series of static texts containing an American master narrative about Russia I see them as a locus of dynamic activity that gave voice to many discourses, elite and popular, national and international, and native and immigrant.” Charterjee, “Transnational Terror, Romance, and Heroism,” 775-776.
\textsuperscript{98} See, for example, Enstad, \textit{Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure}, 176, Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grass Roots,” 124.
\textsuperscript{99} Quoted in Ross, \textit{Working-Class Hollywood}, 146.
making and viewing were in many respects a world apart from those in the United States.\textsuperscript{100} When American films circulated to Russia, they were shown in a context that was often materially and culturally very different from any of the diverse modes of motion picture viewing in the United States. However, Russian film viewing was like American film viewing in that place and context mattered, rural and urban dichotomies prevailed, and films themselves were interactive, variable, and multi-vocal texts. While the movements films underwent often reshaped their meanings, the transport of films between nations also conditioned the training of young filmmakers. Many of the Russian filmmakers who gained their initial experiences working on \textit{agitki} also learned filmmaking from serving as editors who cut and reassembled imported American films to make them more suitable for Soviet audiences.\textsuperscript{101} One particularly drastic example of reediting was the transformation of Cecil B. Demille’s \textit{Male and Female} (1919) into a Soviet film retitled \textit{Fragments of a Shipwreck}. The American picture about a British aristocrat’s daughter and a butler who fall in love after a shipwreck on a deserted island was thoroughly recreated when transported to Russia. Through editing and new intertitles, it became a story about an American millionaire and Imperial Russian émigrés cast out by revolution through Constantinople where hunger drove them to work as servants.\textsuperscript{102}

The material differences and the output of content between Russian and American film industries were also produced, to a significant degree, by the movement of people and films between these locations. Emigration crippled the Russian film industry by vacating it of key players and technical knowledge, but it also opened up new potentials and possibilities for young filmmakers to fill major roles with drastically new ideas. Emigration led to shortages of trained

\textsuperscript{100} Kenez, \textit{Cinema and Soviet Society}, 31-34, 68-74.  
\textsuperscript{101} Youngblood, \textit{Movies for the Masses}, 51.  
actors, technicians, and directors, and war, revolution, and tight resources of the new state led to material shortages like a lack of film stock and equipment. But these deficiencies created conditions that resulted in innovations, including some that placed early Soviet filmmaking at the vanguard of international cinema in the 1920s. Lev Kuleshov and the members of his film workshop developed and tested new theories and practices of filmmaking born out of shortages of resources and personnel. Kuleshov’s group intentionally utilized individuals with no training or experience as actors whom they called naturschiki. They experimented with ideas about film despite the lack of available film stock by making fil’my bez plenki or “films without film.”

This work produced insights into filmmaking and the nature of silent film – such as the idea that traditional acting mattered less than the way shots of actors’ expressions were edited together – that ultimately became recognized internationally and important in the making of motion pictures in the United States.

Despite challenges due to lack of personnel and material resources, Soviet officials and filmmakers took seriously and put great hope in the power of film to transform humanity. In a period in which resources were scarce and when the aim was to build a whole new society, the Bolsheviks devoted substantial attention to film as a central facet of the program to create a new Soviet system of work and life and a wholly new Soviet person. The kinofikatsiia and agitpoezd campaigns were both major outlays of resources and key parts of the Soviet strategy built around the belief that “the new cinema would create a new reality.” While American filmmakers were impressed and influenced by innovative Soviet filmmaking, Soviet filmmakers and commenters felt that American trends and methods could be a formative part of the new Soviet cinema that would help to create a new Soviet world. Kuleshov’s “Amerikanschina” and other articles

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104 Koszarski, An Evening's Entertainment, 130.
105 Taylor, Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 125, 127.
published in Russian cinema trade journals suggested that American cinema presented both a
challenge in a battle for attracting audiences and a possibility to use the most entertaining
American stories and techniques while giving “entertainment its special, social purpose.” 106

Some film-goers in Soviet Russia also combined the popular attractiveness of American
themes and motion pictures with their own sense of the emergence of a Soviet way of life. In one
memoir, written by a Komsomol (communist youth organization) member, access to films – and
particularly films that depicted the American West – was central to a young vision of the benefits
brought by a new socialist world. “There was even a movie theater in which one could be
whisked off to the alluring life of the American prairies,” the boy later wrote about the changes
that took place in his town in the mid-1920s, “For me this was already a sort of conquest of the
Revolution.” 107

Several mid-twenties popular Soviet pictures, including Kuleshov’s The Amazing
Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks, worked to combine American film
entertainment with Soviet goals and meanings. 108 While American films were the most popular,
longest running, and numerous films screened in Soviet Russia in the mid-1920s, many Soviet
films drew on and mocked American films’ themes and methods while attempting to utilize and
learn from their popularity. Films such as Mr. West not only incorporated filmmaking techniques
and storylines but the idea of the popularity of America movies itself as a feature plot element.
The Douglas Fairbanks movie The Thief of Baghdad, which was so popular in Russia that it
displaced screenings of the Eisenstein masterpiece Battleship Potemkin, became the inspiration

Griffith’s and other Americans’ filmmaking methods on early Soviet cinema see Vance Kepley, Jr. “Intolerance and
the Soviets: a Historical Investigation” in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds. Inside the Film Factory: New
107 Nikolai Bocharov, “Off the Beaten Track,” in Institute zur Erforschung der UdSSR, Soviet Youth: Twelve
108 For a list of American films shown in Soviet Russia during the 1920s see E. Kartseva, “Amerikanskie nemye
fil’my v sovetskom prokate,” Kino i vremya 1 (1960), 193-325.
for a series of Soviet screen parodies, including *A Thief, but not from Baghdad* (1926) and *The American Girl From Baghdad* (1931).\(^{109}\)

The Soviet film *One of Many* (1927) combined live action, animation, and documentary material to parody the popularity of American films and movie stars among Russian audiences. In the film a Russian girl wishes she could go to the United States and meet her favorite stars like Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. In a dream, she visits a Hollywood set, where she meets Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, and other stars, and gets to be rescued by the thief of Bagdad and Zorro (another popular Fairbanks character).\(^{110}\) *A Kiss from Mary Pickford* (1926) told the story of a worker in a Soviet cinema who was in love with a famous Soviet film actress.\(^{111}\) The actress ignores him, but after a chance encounter with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks at a Soviet film studio during which Pickford kisses him on the cheek, the worker becomes a local celebrity and gains the affections of the Soviet actress. The film utilized newsreel footage of the actual tour taken by Pickford and Fairbanks of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1926 mixed together with fictional scenes. Both relying on and poking fun at the popularity of American film stars in Soviet theaters, the comedy suggested the ways that attractions between individuals in Soviet Russia may have overlapped with attractions toward romantic narratives and stars in American motion pictures. Other Soviet silent films treated popular American cinematic narratives more critically. *The Forty First* (1927) drew on romantic adventure stories of the kind that appeared in U.S. films about American and Russian romances and love affairs between Russian Reds and Whites. However, the film, which featured a romance between a Bolshevik sharpshooter and a White Army soldier, revised the happy resolution of many American motion pictures. In the end,


\(^{111}\) *Potselui Meri Pikford* (1927). A copy donated by Mary Pickford is held in the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division.
the Soviet sniper chooses her loyalty to the revolution over her affection for the White soldier and he becomes her forty first kill.\textsuperscript{112}

The popularity of American films in Russia and the circulation of American themes and filmmaking methods to Russia were accompanied by the movement of new Soviet methods and films to the United States. Soviet avant-garde films like Eisenstein’s \textit{Potemkin} astounded and compelled the attention of American filmmakers.\textsuperscript{113} Promotional materials produced by Sovkino, the Soviet central film agency, and their American distributor Amkino related to American releases of Soviet films like \textit{Battleship Potemkin} highlighted the influences that Soviet filmmaking was already having on major players in the American film industry. One packet promoting \textit{Armored Cruiser Potemkin}, for example, quoted stars like Emil Jennings (who played the general in \textit{The Last Command}) and Douglas Fairbanks (the star of the most popular films screened in Russia in the 1920s) asserting that \textit{Potemkin} was “the greatest film ever made.”\textsuperscript{114} According to promotional packets, Fairbanks told \textit{The New York Times} that after watching the film he concluded that “The Russians are the finest picture makers in the world. Americans … are not in it with them.” Other advertisements for Soviet films shown in the United States likened them to milestone productions in American cinema, and attempted to tie film depictions of the revolution in Russia to familiar narratives of the American past. One flyer promoted Eisenstein’s film \textit{October}, which was released in the U.S. under the title \textit{Ten Days that Shook the

\textsuperscript{112} Jeff Peck, “The Heroic Soviet on the American Screen,” \textit{Film and History} 9, no. 3 (1979):62-63.


\textsuperscript{114} “Armored Cruiser Potemkin: A “Sovkino” Production” in Collection of Sergei Eisenstein Materials, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
World, as “The Russian ‘Birth of a Nation,’” because it was a story of “The heroism and pathos of the beginning of the Russian Republic.”

Like American films shown in Soviet Russia, Soviet films screened in the U.S. were often altered to change meanings or to attract audiences. The Soviet comedy about social and sexual relations in the home, *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, was sometimes retitled *Bed and Sofa* and sometimes *Menage a trois* for U.S. audiences. The 1923 film *Kombrig Ivanov* (Brigade Commander Ivanov), which contained both a love story and a critique of trends in Soviet society that threatened to undermine the Revolution, was retitled *The Beauty and the Bolshevik* for its release in the United States and edited to remove anti-religious themes. Some audiences were still attracted to the film’s Soviet origins: an advertisement in the *Daily Worker* noted both that it was “made in co-operation with the Red Army,” and “enthusiastically applauded by more than ten thousand people” during a two week run in New York. While sometimes the ideological intent behind reediting films for U.S. audiences was clear, such as when the execution scene in *Potemkin* was in one case moved after the mutiny instead of serving as its instigator, in other cases it is unclear whether films were retitled or reedited by the Soviet film agency or by American distributors. Despite such instances, Soviet films like *Potemkin* not only offered a powerful new film aesthetic that captivated filmmakers; they also shaped the image of Russians on American screens. Soviet silent films presented audiences in the United States with heroic images of Soviet life and gripping portrayals of the Bolshevik Revolution and the new path for

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115 Collection of Sergei Eisenstein Materials, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
117 *Chicago Daily Worker* (Sept. 26, 1924), 4.
the socialist state that pointed to alternate ways of understanding what these events meant for Russians and Americans.\textsuperscript{119}

While Soviet films shown in the United States influenced American filmmakers and posed alternative narratives about the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution and the new Soviet Russia to American audiences, Soviet filmmakers also traveled to Hollywood and took part first hand in the creation of American motion pictures. Sergei Eisenstein made an often discussed trip to the United States in 1930. After a failed attempt to work with Paramount on several potential projects, Eisenstein ultimately abandoned Hollywood to try making a film in Mexico. Other prominent Soviet filmmakers and writers also traveled to California with ambiguous results.

Boris Pilnyak arrived in Hollywood in the summer of 1931 to collaborate on a film at MGM. In \textit{Okay}, an account of his time in the United States, Pilnyak critiqued the American film industry and his experience attempting to participate in the creation of an American film about Soviet Russia. With an acerbic eye for the themes that had dominated motion pictures made in the United States during the previous decade, Pilnyak explained that “The products of the American film industry are well known.” “About fifty percent,” he wrote describing U.S. motion pictures, “are devoted to bandits and cowboys. The others are devoted to the rest of American and global well-being, where the triumph of virtue is necessary and preferably expressed in a legal marriage.” “Hollywood is located precisely in the Wild West,” Pilnyak noted, “and Hollywood has not forgotten its forefathers.”\textsuperscript{120} Pilnyak clashed with Hollywood producers and story writers as they worked together on a film that was supposed to be about an American engineer named Morgan and his love interest Tanya. Morgan travels to Soviet Russia to learn about the planned economy and Tanya is being deported to Russia because she is a communist

\textsuperscript{119}Woll and Miller, “East Europeans and Russians,” in \textit{Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television}, 204; Peck, “The Heroic Soviet on the American Screen.”

\textsuperscript{120}Boris Pilnyak, \textit{Okey: Amerikanskii roman} (Moscow: Federatsiya, 1933), 129.
and a strike leader. 121 In his recounting of the proposed plot, which he characterized as “perfect nonsense,” Pilnyak highlighted the way that the story about American interaction with Soviet Russia utilized techniques and narratives drawn from Westerns, hinged on the provocation of emotions, and required a resolution where “American and global well-being” were found in a necessary romantic connection between the hero and his ultimately-Americanized communist lover. In a climactic chase scene where the protagonists Tanya and Morgan attempt to escape to America, Pilnyak mockingly explained that “Spectators should be choking from excitement. Will they catch up? not catch up? exactly like in Indian pictures.” 122 Ultimately, the collaboration faltered over the meaning and inclusion of this chase scene and resolution. While Pilnyak waffled in his account about whether the Hollywood filmmakers were motivated by political ideology or by a failure to understand the meaning of what was really happening in Soviet Russia, he also astutely observed the way that American filmmaking stubbornly attempted to mediate stories about Russia with a fixed set of narrative tools – the chase, the Indian and cowboy, the individual romance – that had become entrenched by the time he arrived in Hollywood.

Émigrés who left Russia for the United States during and after the turmoil of revolution and civil war played an integral role in the formation of films produced and viewed in the United States. Russian migrants were crucial players in forging screen images of Soviet Russia. Beyond shaping the symbolic role that Russia occupied in film narratives, they also acted as key

121 Interestingly, Tanya’s national origin was remarkably mutable during the planning process for the film as Pilnyak and the other writers concocted several versions wherein Tanya was an American, a Russian émigré to the States, had never been to America, or was a Russian who had lived for a time in the U.S. Pilnyak, Okey, 151.
122 Pilnyak, Okey, 149, 148.
individuals from the beginning of the production process to the interpretation of films’ meanings through audience interaction.123

In a significant Russian community that arose in the 1920s in Hollywood, Russian émigrés became social figures in the lives of other Hollywood filmmakers. Émigrés shaped the community as restaurateurs, workers, and entertainers who aroused a popular flowering of Russian cultural forms like dance and music.124 Some lives of local Russians seem to have mirrored and even influenced plot lines in Hollywood movies about Russian migrants’ interactions with America. One émigré, who worked as an extra in the film *The Last Command*, had a real life riches-to-rags refugee story that paralleled the plots of many American films. A “Lieutenant-Colonel and Commander of the First Regiment of the Imperial Guard Artillery” when he lived in Russia, he had become a hairdresser in a Hollywood beauty shop. A sociologist, George Day, whose 1930 doctoral field work focused on the Russian émigré community in Los Angeles, interviewed another Hollywood resident whose story read like many of the romantic adventures of Russian-Americans on movie screens. “This young technology graduate was floundering around,” Day summarized, “until his marriage with an American girl. This act stabilized him … his attitude toward America changed from hearty dislike to affection.” Deploying a narrative that was analogous to the naturalization of marriage as the conclusion that resolved instability and acrimony between Russians and Americans on both international and interpersonal levels in motion pictures, Day concluded that, “Naturally the marriage influences

123 This assertion stands in stark contrast to other accounts of the way that films about areas of the globe have created images of other peoples and corresponding American interests. For example, Melani McAlister has argued that “immigrants were not a significant factor” in creating American popular images of the Middle East and that “Arabs played a largely symbolic role in American culture.” McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 38-39. See also, Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.
his attitude toward this country.”125 Day argued that the Russian community also had a substantial effect on residents in Hollywood generally. “The impacts of Russians on Americans that are occurring daily in Hollywood and vicinity are fostering more appreciative attitudes among the Americans,” he explained, citing Russian influences on mediating the “swift nervous tempo” of American life in Hollywood and even in reshaping modes of “family and domestic relations” and “affectionate relations” among Americans.126

Russian migrants and Americans who had been to Russia also shaped the meaning and interpretation of films as audience members who affected the experience of watching motion pictures about Russia. Particularly in working class film viewing cultures during this period, audience participation and interaction played a key role in film viewing experience and the ways that films affected spectators. While some working class audiences rejected and reworked the significances of depictions of Russia for ideological reasons, other viewers who had traveled from Russia drew on their own intimate knowledge when interacting with films in the United States. This was especially important because, as one film historian reminds us, “the immigrant audiences often knew a great deal more about Russia than the people who made the films.”127 In many cases this disjuncture led to fervent critiques of representations of Russians and of Russian participation in producing such images.128

This kind of personal knowledge about Russia among migrants not only influenced interpretations of finished films; it was also an asset sought by American filmmakers. In films like *The Last Command*, Russian émigrés played roles in the film and Russian advisors seem to have had a significant influence on the creation of the plot, even to the point that references to

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events in Russia and details most likely familiar only to Russian viewers were included, according to a reviewer for a Russian language émigré newspaper. These influences had an ambiguous role; in some cases Russian participation in filmmaking allowed Russians a central role in posing new stories to American and global audiences and in other cases Russians corrected inaccuracies in portrayals of Russian culture or events. In other moments, however, people who had formerly lived in Russia were also, as historian of Russia Olga Matich puts it, “complicit in commodifying their Russianness and participating in the simulation of Russian authenticity on the silver screen.” In some cases this process allowed Hollywood stock-types and plot lines about Russia to gain credibility even when they had little parallel to events or people in Russia. As Choi Chatterjee has shown in her analysis of Russian emigres’ role in producing narratives about Russia in American romance novels, the role of émigré writers ultimately increased the effectiveness of American knowledge about Russia, lending cultural productions “an aura of authenticity and deep expertise.”

The various ways that people who had lived in Russia, whether White émigrés, working class immigrants, or Soviet visitors, affected the creation of American motion pictures about the Bolshevik Revolution, Americans’ interaction with Russians, and new forms of Soviet life and culture were diverse, but ultimately ambiguous. Russian Soviet filmmakers were at the cutting edge of the new art form, cultural leaders in their own right who would influence film industries in places like the United States. At the same time, Russian actors and extras could be one kind of mutably ethnic type among many who were able to play revolutionaries or imperial generals, cowboys or Indians, lovers or villains. While many émigrés who settled in Hollywood’s Russian community did so only as a temporary respite before they expected to return to their

130 Chatterjee, “Transnational Romance, Terror, and Heroism,” 776
131 Holmgren, “Cossack Cowboys, Mad Russians.”
homeland once the revolution they had fled was overturned, other Russians who affected American filmmaking strove to make events in Russia, and the potentials of the new Soviet world being created there, make sense to American viewers in a very different light.

What is clear is that films themselves, filmmaking techniques, movie narratives about interactions between Russians and Americans, people who made motion pictures, and people who watched them moved in both directions between Soviet Russia and the United States in the 1920s. These movements were an important constitutive part of films about Americans and Russians and the ways they might relate to each other.

Despite the difficulty of untangling the ultimate causative effects of these circulations, understanding the role that people, films, and narratives from Russia played in the creation of American films about Russia and in generating attractive stories about the meaning of American and Russian interactions offers important advantages over an approach that might merely compare American and Russian silent films as separate and “culturally specific.”132 Film scholars have described Soviet filmmaking in the 1920s as an “alternative” mode of motion picture that offered an important challenge to the dominance of American cinema, but it wasn’t merely alternative. Highlighting transnational movements helps us understand that these modes of filmmaking arose in connection to each other.133 Attention to the imperial contexts that underlay the movements between American and Soviet filmmaking especially enables us to understand thematic similarities and the creation and circulation of ideas about difference and connection.

132 For argument in favor of comparing and contrasting American and Soviet film industries in a later period, see Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, Cinematic Cold War : The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010). Shaw and Youngblood argue that “the American and Soviet film industries had culturally specific stories to tell during the Cold War and told them in culturally specific ways,” Shaw and Youngblood, Cinematic Cold War, 7.
133 Sklar, Movie-Made America, 155.
Because film narratives about American-Russian interaction relied on modes of producing and justifying violent power relationships through stories about sentiment that had previously explained American imperial action in what became the American West and in overseas areas like the Caribbean, the Philippines, and Latin America, they reinforce our understanding of the deep links and continuities between nineteenth century continental imperialism, overseas imperial endeavors in the period surrounding 1898, and the interventions and cultural deployments that characterized the United States’ interaction with an expanding range of areas in the world following the First World War. The ways in which narratives about Russia were tied to imperial narratives that justified and naturalized conquest in the past also reminds us that comparison as a methodology worked to produce such narratives. Comparison, in this light, is a fraught methodology for understanding how American silent film can be related to Russian silent film because it is not only a contemporary scholarly project but was also a historical one often taken up by imperial actors to produce and justify power relationships. Exploring connection rather than comparing particularly highlights interaction, mutual constitution, and unevenness. For example, Russian émigrés shaped American films about Russia; these films and the emigration of people who helped make them substantially affected Soviet films; this process was in some cases extremely uneven in its impact on each place. But connection may also be a more useful method for understanding this history in light of the fact that comparison was frequently utilized as framework for justifying American occupation, violence, and uneven power relationships between the United States and Soviet Russia in this

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134 Several scholars have suggested the need to redress the historiographical “bifurcation” that has separated nineteenth century continental expansion, overseas territorial annexation at the turn of the century, and US military intervention and economic imperialism in the twentieth century. For example, Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire; Streeby American Sensations; Wexler, Tender Violence; Amy Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
period and in the context of U.S. imperialism generally. The cultural work initiated by these film narratives ultimately inspired and justified substantial and often violent connections, attracting audiences in the United States towards ways of imagining Soviet Russia and helping them make sense out of American actions that included military intervention and a massive humanitarian program in Russia which are the subjects of the following chapters.

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Figures

Figure 2.1: U.S. soldiers carrying an American flag invade the Bolshevik controlled island colony off the coast of Florida at the conclusion of *Bolshevism on Trial*.

Figure 2.2: Saka, Barbara, and Norman discuss their response to the radical turn that has overtaken the colony by the fire at Saka’s tipi in the jungle.
One of several full page advertisements promoting *Bolshevism on Trial* described a violent battle with “an outgrowth of” an “exploited empire” not only for America but for “the world” and promised that you could “screen the answer in your theater.”
Figure 2.4: A drawing of tipi construction by Luther Standing Bear that was included in his autobiography. “I have seen probably all of the pictures which are supposed to depict Indian life,” wrote Standing Bear, “and not one of them is correctly made.” Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), plate opposite page 14, quote p. 285.

Figure 2.5: Chief Standing Bear as Saka, crumples the paper on which participants in the island colony in *Bolshevism on Trial* are meant to write the occupation for which they are most suited.

Figure 2.6: Saka assembles his tipi in the jungle outside the colony after a Russian Bolshevik seizes control. The preceding intertitle reads: “Preferring the wilderness of nature to the wilderness of man.”
Figure 2.7: Harold Lloyd hits Harry “Snub” Pollard with a vase to save Bebe Daniels in the Western comedy short *Billy Blazes, Esq* (1919)

Figure 2.8: Harold Lloyd as an American soldier during the military intervention in the Russian Civil War opposite Bebe Daniels as a Russian woman in the Siberian snow in *A Sammy in Siberia* (1919)

Figure 2.9: Lloyd defeats the villain, a Russian Bolshevik soldier played by Harry “Snub” Pollard by dropping a vase on his head in the comedy short *A Sammy in Siberia* (1919).
Figure 2.10: Mr. West (meant to look like American star Harold Lloyd) peers fearfully around his car after his initial arrival in the land of the Soviets.

Figure 2.11: A “real Bolshevik” takes Mr. West on a tour of Moscow.
Figure 2.12: Cowboy Jeddy, played by Soviet film director Boris Barnet, uses his lasso.

Figure 2.13: Cowboy Jeddy fires his gun while riding a droshky down a snowy street in Moscow.
Figure 2.14: One of the many advertisements for *Bolshevism on Trial* printed in *Moving Picture World* (April 19, 1919) showed Columbia as a militarized woman protecting America from Bolshevism.

Figure 2.15: An advertisement for *The Red Viper* (1919) in the *NY Dramatic Mirror* (8/28/19) showed the red female vamp threatening to lure a worker to red radicalism via romantic connection.
Chapter 3 – “A Man’s Size Job:” Imperialism, Embodiment, and Transformation in the American Military Intervention in North Russia

In winter of 1919, Sergeant Silver Parrish of the American North Russia Expeditionary Force killed several Bolsheviks, danced at the wedding ceremonies of Russian peasants, counted their Singer Sewing Machines, laughed at Russian women’s undergarments, and burned an entire Russian village to the ground while its inhabitants looked on in tears. The American soldier, sent as part of an Allied intervention during the Russian Civil War, did not understand why he was fighting in Russia after the conclusion of the Great War and he circulated a petition questioning “interference in the affairs of the Russian people with whom we have no quarrel.” Without a clear sense of what his soldiering was meant to accomplish in Russia, Parrish observed living conditions, workplace and agricultural methods, and social gatherings and he carefully noted the ways that Russian people clothed, fed, cleaned and carried themselves. After identifying Bolshevism with his own union activity through close interactions with Russians, Parrish even concluded in his diary that “in fact I am 9/10 Bolo my self.” Despite uncovering essential similarities that connected him to the people he was sent to battle, the “B” Company soldier from Bay City, Michigan decided that Russians were hard working but “ignorant,” with “the heart of a childe.” He argued that the people of Russia needed something from him and his fellow soldiers: the American sympathy found “in the heart of a real man.”

A record of one American’s intimate, violent, and ambivalent series of encounters with Bolsheviks and Russia, Parrish’s diary was emblematic of the ways that American soldiers attempted to grapple with the purpose of their varied interactions in North Russia. This chapter reevaluates the military intervention by taking seriously the ways that soldiers on the ground

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1 Silver Parrish diary, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. I have retained original spellings, capitalization, and punctuation from published and unpublished materials, including mistakes and transliterations of Russian words.
dealt with the work of soldiering and its meaning. I argue that close attention to soldiers’ own interpretations offers evidence for a new analysis of their actions as part of the history of U.S. imperialism. This is a departure from histories that have tended see the military expedition in the context of the First World War, as an aberration that is difficult to explain, or as the opening volley of the cold war. Troops on the ground considered strategic arguments for the deployment in relation to the waning fight against the German Empire; they thought about how their battle might relate to other conflicts; and they recognized that American interests included opposition to the Bolshevik Revolution. But many soldiers understood their actions in Russia with reference to American military occupations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rather than in relation to the Great War or an inevitable clash between Americans and Russians. Their undertaking was not an anomaly. The wider pattern of United States military intervention in areas around the globe, much of which was taking place simultaneously, provided a wealth of resources that U.S. troops could use to make sense of their mission.²

This approach shifts focus from diplomats, politicians, and commanders to the military personnel who carried out occupation on the ground. Through an examination of the diaries, drawings, poems, photographs, and published memoirs of the soldiers of the American North Russian Expeditionary Force, I argue that these men described a program for Americans to transform Russians in order to shape their future. I explore the ways that United States troops in

² This contention draws from scholarship such as Mary Renda’s study Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940, in which she argues that “the military occupation of Haiti that began in 1915 was no sideshow. It was one of several important arenas in which the United States was remade through overseas imperial ventures in the first third of the twentieth century.” Renda cites interventions in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Nicaragua, China, and the Philippines, but not Russia. A partial list of interventions by United States armed forces taking place during the time U.S. troops were in North Russia excluding covert actions, routine stationing, and military units in territories that became U.S. states would contain at least 15 simultaneous deployments. See Richard F. Grimmett, “Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2009,” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010) and Mary P. Chapman, “Armed Actions Taken by the United States Without a Declaration of War, 1789-1967” (Department of State, Historical Studies Division, 1967).
North Russia drew on cultural resources that undergirded American military occupations aimed at reshaping populations in the American West and other territories.

Like analysis of contemporary silent films about the relationship between Americans and Russian Bolsheviks, close attention to the interventionist project soldiers described shows a history of connection as well as an oppositional “war against Bolshevism.” Soldiers mixed reactions to the Bolshevik revolution with sentimental narratives about the conquest of lands and peoples in places like the U.S. West. They believed that even with Bolshevik guns aimed across opposing trenches these two groups were not on fundamentally divergent paths. Many who served on the ground with the American North Russian Expeditionary Force (ANREF) called for ongoing connections rather than for separation and opposition. They suggested close interaction and guidance that would lead the Russian people and even Bolshevik soldiers to become more like Americans.

The events captured in Parrish’s small notebook in muddy terrain above the Arctic Circle were emblematic of the ways that American soldiers combined beliefs about national, ideological, and cultural difference with an abiding conviction that powerful differences could be transformed to match American ideals and interests. Parrish and his fellow soldiers relied on the identification of differences in order to justify their violent project of transformation. They worked to separate themselves from Russians via hierarchies of race, gender, nation, and civilization. At the same time, the proposed transformation of Russian Bolsheviks into Americans required the acknowledgment of similarities between the groups. Soldiers believed in the universal applicability of American ways of work, life, battle, and national belonging.

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Universalism and difference both lay at the heart of Parrish’s contention that the sympathy of the “real men” who made up the expedition could transform Russia’s childlike heart on the American model. These approaches to Russians relied on ideas that animated the transformation of colonial populations as well as assimilationist schemes to transform immigrants in the United States, including Russian-American auto-workers. Like automobile production efforts and other U.S. projects in Russia, ANREF soldiers attempted to mark their actions as uniquely American even though they relied heavily on local Russians and Russian-American migrants who had previously moved between the two countries.

While close attention to soldiers’ own interpretations offers evidence for analyzing their actions as part of the history of imperialism, recent histories of empire point to the bodies of soldiers as important sites to investigate the development of power relationships, conceptions of hierarchical difference, and the creation and dismantling of assumptions about national and cultural distinctiveness. I therefore focus on how bodies were at the center of the American project to identify difference and transform Russians. Soldiers used the clothing, facial hair, posture, and even smells attached to bodies to categorize Russians and Bolsheviks. These aspects of bodies were also often the primary targets of transformational projects. Bodies often lent a compelling sense of naturalness, immutability, and undeniability to power relationships and conceptions of difference, but the body and its intimate interactions were also a disorderly and anxious terrain where knowledge about difference unraveled as often as it took shape.4 American troops struggled to maintain and carry themselves in particular ways to personify Americanness, and their efforts to distinguish corporal differences frequently failed.

In the sections of this chapter that follow, I trace American soldiers’ understandings of their mission in North Russia and of the relationships that they developed on the ground. I argue that American soldiers’ plans to shape the local population were part of the history of United States imperial interventions. I explore the ways that troops drew on cultural resources that had helped inspire and explain American military actions aimed at conquering and transforming the American West and other territories. They argued that while Russians were behind on a civilizational hierarchy, they could be made to be more like Americans through forceful guidance. Next, I show how gendered bodies were central to the proposed project of transformation. I investigate the ways that troops identified, shaped, and performed difference and similarity between Americans and Russians on the bodily level. They did so through the daily practices of hygiene, dress, and battle, but also in elaborate theatrical performances, songs, cartoons, and sporting events. I then describe the tenuousness and ultimate failure of the mission soldiers described. Americans did not affect Russians in many of the ways they anticipated. Ideas about difference and similarity could not adequately account for the bodies soldiers encountered or the complex national and ideological affinities even among their own units. Finally, I place their project in the context of the Russian Civil War as one of several competing projects to transform the Russian people.

Our Monroe Doctrine: Intervention in Russia and American Imperialism

As world leaders signed the Armistice that ended the Great War and met in Paris to discuss the terms of a peace that would reshape the international system, redraw borders, and mark an end to a conflict that saw the crumbling of empires, American soldiers were defending gun emplacements, building blockhouses, bandaging fresh wounds, and digging in for a winter
campaign of bitter fighting against Bolshevik forces in North Russia. “Doubtless in the general hilarity over peace, we were forgotten,” speculated a collection of soldiers in a chapter devoted to Armistice Day in their collaborative memoir *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks*. “After all,” they opined “who had time in these world stirring days to think of an insignificant regiment performing in a fantastic Arctic side show.”\(^5\) The significance of their performance was a topic of preoccupation for American troops in North Russia, particularly in the context of the end of the Great War and debates over dramatic visions for a postwar world. Enlisted men were told that their mission was to guard supplies from falling into German clutches in the waning months of the Great War.\(^6\) According to this story, the military endeavor in Russia was indeed a “side show,” an afterthought of the world war. In this framework, the campaign might have been an extension of the ideals that Americans fought for in the conflict that some thought would end future wars: to extend democratic principles and the idea that peoples should choose their own governments to places like Russia. Or, it might have represented a failure of such principles, an encroachment on a nation that was determining its own path.

Understanding the intervention in North Russia in these contexts was difficult for soldiers and for commentators who found the occupation an uneasy fit with what some scholars would later call the “Wilsonian moment” taking shape at Versailles.\(^7\) “We have fought to make the world safe for democracy,” went the logic of one critique, “Does that mean it shall be safe for

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\(^6\) For close attention to this narrative, see George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations 1917-1920, Volume II: The Decision to Intervene* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1956).

\(^7\) For the argument that the Versailles moment looked different to anticolonialist leaders outside Europe than it did to Wilson and other Allied leaders, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). The moment also looked different on the ground in North Russia.
democracy everywhere but in Russia?”⁸ According to John Cudahy, a Lieutenant in the 339th Infantry of the U.S. Army, when the soldiers of his unit arrived in North Russia, “Not one of them was deeply agitated by the emotion of ‘Making the world safe for Democracy.’”⁹ His military adversaries seemed to agree. A pamphlet left by Bolshevik soldiers for the Americans attempted to build on the unease among troops trying to understand the purpose of their mission. “It is true we do not want the kind of democracy that Woodrow Wilson wants to make the world safe for,” the publication explained, “we are building a new kind, a better, cleaner kind.”¹⁰

Soldiers in North Russia grappled with contradictions surrounding the concept of “self-determination” that became apparent in their own mission. For many, the idea that intervention in Russia’s civil war was simply a side show or an extension of the conflict in Europe did not hold up. They questioned the tenets of liberal internationalism that had placed their boots on the particular ground they attempted to occupy. But they also deployed some of its core logics to propose a reconfigured mission, one that could be explained more easily in the context of American imperialism than in the kind of great power diplomacy playing out in France.

For many Americans in North Russia, a set of cultural ideas that had justified the violent interjection of American values and modes of life into areas including the U.S. West, Cuba, and Mexico offered a rationale for their presence and daily work. Frazier Hunt, an American correspondent for the Chicago Tribune and other newspapers who reported from the fighting fronts in North Russia observed that soldiers on the ground “figured out their own theories on the intervention.” According to Hunt, they developed “an idea of intervention and interference high

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⁹ John Cudahy, Archangel; the American War with Russia, by a Chronicler (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1924) 48-49.
¹⁰ “Bolshevik lure Archangel troops,” New York Times (14 April 1919). See also the very similar wording in “British and American Workingmen!” (1918), Hoover Institution Political Poster Database, Poster ID RU/SU 1530 (http://hoohila.stanford.edu/poster/).
above the commonplace ideas of money, power, or national interest” based on the assertion that Americans would “help [local Russian peasants] out of darkness.” 

Soldiers’ letters, diaries, and memoirs echoed the idea that they replaced a lack of understanding about the mission’s purpose and knowledge about the situation in Russia with their own conceptions of a grand endeavor. Like immigrants who could assimilate into American culture and colonial populations who would one day embody American ideals, the Russian people could, through careful guidance and the benevolent application of violence, be transformed on the American model. “We are not here to conquer Russia, but to help her” explained John Cudahy. 

Some soldiers specifically called for a policy explanation that more clearly placed the mission in North Russia in the context of the United States’ broader imperial ideology and strategy. “Where is our Monroe Doctrine?” asked a petition written by an American officer who wanted policy makers to articulate a meaningful justification for involvement in Russia.

According to a note written by another officer who confiscated the document, it “was widely circulated among the American troops at the front and the men consider that it fully covers their ideas regarding the reasons why American troops are kept here.” Some soldiers who supported their deployment to Russia drew on the history of United States interventions in the Western Hemisphere as an example that they felt should have been followed more completely in Russia. “[Wilson] either should have sent a large force of Americans into North Russia – as we did into Cuba – a force capable of doing up the job quickly and thoroughly, or sent none at all,” contended another group of soldiers. 

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Not all soldiers agreed that the military campaign represented a potential extension of the kind of interventionist role the United States had claimed for itself in the Western Hemisphere. The list of grievances on the petition that invoked the Monroe Doctrine also showed that some questioned the extent to which Russia could be understood as comparable with more established arenas of American action. It pointed out the inconsistency with which such justifications had been applied in other cases. “If we stood by, while Mexico was torn by revolutions, the sanctity of our borders violated and Americans murdered, on what basis is our presence here justified?,” questioned the pamphlet. Some soldiers concluded that Russia was not part of the sphere of influence of the United States. “If we want to stop a revolution,” wrote Sergeant Carleton Foster in a letter to his mother, “let us go to Mexico. That is at home.” Even though some soldiers rejected the idea that Americans should try to determine the outcome of events in Russia, they often implicitly agreed with the conceptions of benevolent violence, humanitarian uplift, and civilizational hierarchies that underlay imperial interventions. They applied these principles to Russia even though they were outside of the formal scope of their mission.

Historians have long focused on the popular question among soldiers of the American North Russian Expeditionary Force: “Why did we go to Russia?” A sampling of the titles of some of the works on American intervention in Russia – *Russian Sideshow, America’s Secret War, The Unknown War, the Midnight War* – reveal that historians have agreed with the captain who wrote in a mocking tone that perhaps the men were indeed part of an “insignificant regiment performing in a fantastic Arctic side show.” Accounts attentive to the perspectives of soldiers have highlighted the troops’ critique of their deployment past the Armistice, and indeed many soldiers argued after November 1918 that if their battle was an extension of the Great War they

15 “Facts and Questions Concerning the NREF.”
16 Sgt. Carleton Foster, letter to mother, National Archives, Record Group 120, Entry 1537, Field Censorship Folder. Keene, *Doughboys*, 148.
ought to demobilize too. But historians have overlooked the ways that many soldiers understood their actions with reference to American military occupations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rather than in relation to the First World War. Others have read cold war views back into the conflict, describing it as an opening volley in the confrontation between two world powers based on fundamentally oppositional ideologies. But neither the narrative of an afterthought of the war in Europe or that of a prelude to cold war can explain why soldiers called for their own Monroe Doctrine that could support their continued deployment in Russia. Neither explains how United States soldiers made the leap from a military occupation with unclear purpose to a mission based on the idea that Russians could become like Americans. Taking the arguments made by soldiers and the cultural resources they used to develop them seriously by placing this intervention in the context of American imperial interventions means understanding how these connections made sense to soldiers. Rather than a side show, an anomaly, or a secret war, the intervention should make more sense to historians as part of the continuous, uneven, and halting extension and withdrawal that long characterized the history of American empire.

Custer and Dewey at Arkhangelsk: The Culture of U.S. Empire in Russia

The troops who made up the 339th Infantry were trained at Camp Custer in Michigan, built in 1917 to mobilize troops for the Great War, but named after the nineteenth century cavalry officer known popularly for his role in the Indian Wars. When the first contingent of American troops arrived in North Russia, they came as one soldier noted, on the “cruiser

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18 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 103.
Olympia – Dewey’s flagship at Manila Bay.” The names were, to a certain extent, coincidental. But they were also indicative of a set of cultural cues that were useful for soldiers who were grappling with their role in North Russia. Troops were steeped in an array of cultural and material resources that pointed to connections between their own campaign and military campaigns aimed at consolidating control over the U.S. West and other territories like the Philippines.

Indeed, the understanding among many soldiers on the ground about what they were doing in North Russia was much closer to the explanation offered by the Harold Loyd film, *A Sammy in Siberia* – a western transported to the Russian tundra – than it was to those offered in speeches about self-determination or in official orders. Cultural depictions of Americans in film had direct relevance to the soldiers who saw them in Russia. Soldiers compared their actions to those in movies and used motion picture plots and themes to explain what was happening around them. The battle at Bolsheozerki, for example, in the words of one account “was a one reel thriller.” [See Figure 3.1] “And a romantic thread in the narrative would be the story of Sistra Lebideva, the alleged Bolshevik female spy,” wrote Captain Moore and his co-authors, transforming an incident involving a Russian nurse into a plot fit for many of the films that romanticized American intervention in Russia. Some speculated that American films screened in North Russia were bolstering the local reputation of U.S. troops. “More than rumor spread through that North country, attributing wonderful powers to the Americans based on some Douglas Fairbanks exploit,” Moore’s memoir claimed, “Can it be that the enemy heard some of these rumors and were unwilling at times to go against the Americans?”

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Narratives about the American West, including those that circulated in popular films, had a special resonance for soldiers and in reports that described the purpose of the campaign. “American Heroes in Arctic Zone Fight Like in Old Indian Wars,” declared a typical dispatch from an American position on the Onega River. Like films, novels, and Wild West shows that portrayed Russians as sometimes cowboys and sometimes Indians, soldiers on the ground placed Russians using multiple Western similes. In some moments they interpreted Russia as a landscape of “boundless resources” like the U.S. West and Russians as the pioneers who would tame the land. The troops who collaborated on the memoir The History of the American Expedition wrote that “The soldier saw a people struggling with nature as he had heard of his grandfathers struggling in pioneer days in America.” They remarked that “Buffalo Bill's men never had anything on these Russki drivers” who drove their sleighs. The same soldiers also saw the people they encountered in North Russia as “aborigine… like our Indians…untouched by the progress of civilization.” Some houses were “wigwam-like… the very counterpart of the American Indian buck and squaw home that our grandads had seen in Michigan.” In this interpretation, American soldiers in North Russia were “doing much the same sort of garrison duty that the regulars did on the western frontier posts forty years ago during the Indian campaigns.”

These overlapping interpretations placed Russians in the rubric of the American West while also maintaining a useful ambiguity surrounding where Russians stood in the hierarchy of civilization. Often soldiers focused on marking hierarchical differences that pointed to Russian

backwardness – “Fundamentally, Archangel is a primitive center of primitive beings,” wrote Cudahy. However, they just as frequently weighed differences against the essential similarities between themselves and their Russian counterparts. The co-authors of *The History* highlighted this stance in their description of the same city, “American soldiers from the fighting fronts found Archangel … was a half-modern, half-oriental city, half-simple, half-wicked, with the gay along with the drab, with bright lights along with the gloom.”

The in-between character of Russians in this interpretation was critical. When soldiers used cultural resources drawn from mythologies of the American West to understand their mission they reconciled the tensions between marking differences and noting underlying similarities by recasting the Russian present as equivalent to the American past. For example, while he was billeted in a Russian farm house Corporal Fred Kooyers of Company E noted in his diary that “the family were twisting and spinning flax into linen the same as our Grandparents did.” “Campaign in Archangel District Like Early Days,” agreed one of Frazier Hunt’s dispatches from the front where American soldiers were “still carrying on an old-fashioned Indian warfare against the Bolsheviki.” While the authors of *The History* said soldiers “saw a people struggling with nature as he had heard of his grandfathers struggling in pioneer days in America,” they also imagined that the “half-starved tribes” must “wonder how long it will be until someone opens the way for the alleviation of their misery.” In such instances American soldiers interpreted the status of the Russian people as equivalent to the formative stages of the American past. A timeline of civilizational development clearly separated Russians from Americans but not irrevocably so. With American intervention and guidance that “opens the

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26 Diary of Fred Kooyers in George Albers Papers, folder 1, item 1, page 13, Polar Bear Expedition Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Hereafter abbreviated “folder-item.page, UMBHL.”
27 “Indian tactics used by Yanks,” *Los Angeles Times* (2 February 1919), 17.
way,” Russians could become like Americans. This concept, used similarly to justify and maintain imperial power relationships at other sites, and assimilationist schemes inside the United States, meant that crucial differences between Russians and Americans could be overcome in time and with American tutelage. While differences measured on a hierarchy of civilization made the need for help from an American intervention apparent, the essential similarities between Americans and Russians supported the belief that American modes of life were universally applicable.

A good example is the way that soldiers highlighted the differences that they saw between Russian village life and modern America by pointing to what they saw as uncivilized gendered divisions of labor. Like Americans in the U.S. West who used cultural differences in the roles men and women performed in crop cultivation and other work as justifications for the conquest and transformation of native populations, American soldiers in North Russia frequently pointed out the tasks that Russian “native” women performed in work and daily life.29 These observations were used to demonstrate that “the life and customs” of the Russian people embodied “a broad simplicity which is unlike the social atmosphere” of the contemporary United States.30 Several American soldiers described a reversal of familiar male and female working roles among the Russian peasantry wherein “the women have better heads for business and better muscles for farming than have the men.” Others agreed that while the men “seemed to do a great deal of nothing … the women worked constantly and did everything that was done.”31

30 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 161.
31 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 161, 72; York, Romance of Company "A", 32; Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 17.
to one characterization of the sharp distinctions between the manhood of American workers and
that displayed in Russian village life, “It is all very pleasant, but it is no life for the solid business
man or the industrious laborer.”

American manhood required the responsibilities that came
with working and serving as provider; meanwhile advancement for the Russian people –
corresponding to the development of American history – would involve the further maturation of
Russian manhood relying in part on the American mode of separation and stratification of male
and female spheres of work.

Soldiers developed these beliefs about the Russian people and the potential role for
Americans intervening in Russia by combining the cultural frameworks they brought with them
with on-the-ground interaction and observation. Soldiers bolstered their assertions by
highlighting the formal study and informal knowledge gathering they undertook there. Like other
imperial actors, ANREF troops played the role of amateur ethnographers, devoting large sections
of their memoirs and personal diaries to descriptions of the “Land and its People” that included
cultural observations and detailed geographic, agricultural, and technical accounts.

Published memoirs provided ethnographic descriptions of the Russian people “for those Americans in
whose minds Russia is represented largely by a red blank.” Several American soldiers also
produced ethnographies for practical use during the occupation. These studies proposed that
questions about Russia could be answered by studying its people and land as a subject of inquiry
on par with the American past. Soldiers stationed in Arkhangelsk or who, like Walter McKenzie,
spent part of the intervention in an American Red Cross hospital in the city, could study the
Russian language in courses and through textbooks. Books on the history of Russia could be

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33 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolshevik*, 156-165. 72, Arkins,
1-4-9, Silver Parrish diary 1-1.29-1-1.30, UMBHL.
34 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolshevik*, 158.
borrowed from the YMCA. There were also formal debates held over questions like the purpose and duration of the intervention and lectures on topics like “Hopes and Fears for Russia,” and “the Russian Problem.”

Part of the logic that Russia could be transformed along American lines relied on marking similarities in features of the natural world especially landscape and geography. Soldiers deployed a string of similes in their geographic observations that supported a sense of equivalency and familiarity in spite of manifest constructions of foreignness. When Americans described the area of North Russia they often remapped its geography by relating it to the space of the United States. The Dvina River, for example became “the great Mississippi of North Russia.” “The total area [of the Province of Archangel] is six times that of the average American state,” wrote Cudahy. A special bulletin published by the National Geographic Society and distributed to American troops in Archangel helped to map the North Russian landscape onto American geography “West and east, the distance across the Archangel district is about that … from New York to St. Louis, or from Boston to Charleston, S. C. … Yet there are not many more people in these great stretches than are to be found in Detroit, Mich., or San Francisco or Washington.” The pamphlet also set the intervention in Archangel in a long-term history of interventions in the region, describing it as the target of tenth-century Norsemen and an expedition by Alfred the Great. Later the pamphlet situated North Russia in the story of British imperial endeavors, explaining that English sailors used Archangel as a stop while searching for a “north-east passage to India.”

35 American Sentinel, December 17, 1918; Arkins, 1-4.9, Silver Parrish diary 1-1.27 – 1-1.35, Walter I. McKenzie diary, Walter I. McKenzie papers, 2-1.21, 2-1.24, 2-1.30-2-1.33, 2-1.35, UMBHL. For language study see also Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 71.
36 Cudahy, Archangel, 41.
37 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 41-42.
Other soldiers imagined the geography of Russia as American by recreating cityscapes and landscapes as American amusement parks. “Archangel resembled nothing so much… as Luna Park in winter time,” wrote Harry Costello likening the city to a section of Coney Island during the off-season.38 For him, Arkhangelsk was not so much a modern city as it was amusing. In *The History of the American Expedition*, snow covered trees became “decorated Christmas trees” and the Russian forest became a “fairyland” and an “enchanted toyland.”39 These recastings depicted Russian land and cities as less real, less serious than American spaces, and childlike by comparison.

The conclusion of many of these informal studies was an understanding of what one group of soldiers called the “comparative non-development of this region.”40 While at least one theory proposed differences in climate as an explanation, generally soldiers focused on descriptions of cultural, social, and political practices that they felt had held back Russian development.41 The lesson was that Russians could change these practices as a means of advancement, that the American model taught by U.S. soldiers would offer them the best pathway, and that Russians wanted to transform themselves along American lines. “Although [American doughboys] were not all interested in the Russian civil war at the beginning, they did learn that the North Russian people's ideal of government was the representative government of the Americans,” explained the soldiers who authored the *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*.42

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38 Costello, *Why Did We Go to Russia?*, 15.
41 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 75.
42 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 54.
American soldiers had a very clear understanding of the progression that would be necessary for Russians to modernize their country. Cudahy felt that Russians should have a political culture similar to “enlightened, high-spirited America… but Russia is not America,” he explained, pointing to needed changes: “Nor has she America’s schools, nor America’s great railways, nor the public press of America.” The lieutenant argued for Russians to adopt American-style education, infrastructure, institutions, and a greater degree of national consciousness.43 Political enlightenment of the kind that kept American radicalism in check could be imparted to Russia as a way to defeat Bolshevism, a project that would perhaps be more effective than a military assault on the Bolshevik army. News reports produced by Americans in North Russia agreed that the education of the Russian peasantry would provide a more effective defense against Bolshevism than violent fighting. “Peasant is Slav Hope, Must Lead Russia not Kick Her,” explained one national news article, “Bayonets are Declared Useless Against Bolshevism; Education Need.”44 Another account based on interviews with American troops in North Russia and headlined “Allies Must Provide a Square Deal for the Natives,” explained that “Food, seed, farm machinery, railroad equipment, money, credit, teachers, doctors, and advisors are needed.” It went on to assert that “bolshevism… is not something you can take in your hand and crush. It is as invisible as a fever… and no number of bayonets will be able to drive it out.”45

[Figure 3.2]

In an article written in North Russia, “a hundred miles from civilization” and published in the Chicago Tribune, Russians were generally passive and willing to accept all that America

43 Cudahy, Archangel, 19, 11. See also, Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 110.
44 “Peasant is Slav Hope, Must Lead Russia not Kick Her…Bayonets are Declared Useless Against Bolshevism; Education Need,” Los Angeles Times, February 4, 1919.
45 “Truth, Honesty, Only Cure for Russian Crisis, Allies Must Provide a Square Deal for the Natives,” Chicago Tribune, February 11, 1919.
wanted to make them. The peasant sled driver interviewed in the article “had the faith of a child,” and reportedly told the American journalist: “I am only an ignorant peasant and don’t know anything about what Russia should do, but I know of your American help.” He “had swung the whole of his people’s responsibility over to American responsibility” according to the article, pleading for all Russian people that “we want to be like America.” When read as a reflection of American attitudes towards their role in Russia rather than an accurate reproduction of a peasant’s opinion, this article is representative of the pervasive attitude that the country was fundamentally in need of American assistance and formative guidance.

This special relationship between Russians and occupiers was not extended to all Allied troops, but was purportedly limited to American soldiers. “The population took this occupation quite calmly on the whole and rather welcomed American troops,” according to one recounting, “the average Russian has a soft place in his heart for America but loathes an Englishman with a bitter loathing.” Soldiers said Russians particularly wanted American help, and also that they were especially well-suited for intervention that would put them on the American pathway of development. Although the Russian people, wrote Cudahy, “are unsophisticated folk, incredibly ignorant…” they were also “gentle, quiet mannered, sweet natured souls… and very responsive to kind treatment.” U.S. soldiers often combined ideas about America’s role in the world with ideas about American manhood in order to describe the relationship between men in the American military and the Russian people as akin to that of a father and children. Cudahy wrote that the Russian peasant had “the handsome physique of first unsullied manhood, and the credulous eyes of a child.” This was a gendered relationship that formulated the American soldier as a paternal figure responsible for the protection and education of the Russian people,

46 “We Want to Be Like America,” Chicago Tribune, February 4, 1919.
47 York, Romance of Company “A”, 44.
48 Cudahy, Archangel, 43, 213.
while acknowledging a latent, potential Russian manhood that could be unlocked through American guidance.

The view that American troops had a special protective and supportive relationship with the Russian people characterized by constructive superiority was the basis for the widespread practice of labeling of Russian helpers and companions as “mascots.” [See Figure 3.3] For example, while stationed in Ust Padenga, Company A “accumulated the two half grown little Russkis who clung to us through thick and thin thereafter.” The company likened these “two mascots” to their other mascot Annabel, a captured pig who “seemed to leave her native haunts with regret” but provided much amusement before she was eaten as part of Christmas dinner. Company A fed and cared for the young Russians and gave them uniforms, turning them into miniature mock-ups of American soldiers. The same group used a Russian boy about sixteen years old as a scout. Despite the fact that the young Russian executed orders that took him behind enemy lines and showed daring in the face of enemy gunfire, the Americans made light of him, recalling that “No one could help admiring the youngster’s dash and ‘A’ Company took him in as a sort of a mascot.”49 Similar to the recasting of Russian cities and forests as American amusement parks, the practice of defining Russian children as mascots made their personhood less real and designated their purpose as entertainment even when they filled military functions and faced real danger. This popular cultural practice drew on and supported the formulation that Russians were in need of American help, less manly but perhaps capable of American-style manhood.

Relationships that Americans had with Russians whom they imagined as mascots were a kind of play but also a kind of violence that relied on gendered and racialized power relationships. While some posited a campaign of uplift as a more effective alternative to the

49 York, Romance of Company "A", 59, 143, 60-61, 63, 47.
bayonet, soldiers who adopted these paternal stances towards the Russian people did not do so as a substitute for the violence of military occupation. The narrative of benevolent intervention for the betterment of the local population developed by soldiers was itself a type of violence that had been used to justify attempts to transform peoples in other imperial occupations. As Mary Renda has described the paternalism of U.S. troops during the occupation of Haiti, “It was a form of domination, a relation of power, masked by its reference to paternal care and guidance, but structured equally by norms of paternal authority and discipline. In this sense, paternalism should not be seen in opposition to violence, but rather as one among several cultural vehicles for it.”

Like American soldiers who occupied Haiti and characters in American films who explained violent intervention in Russia with stories of romantic connection that mixed sentiment with violence, troops in North Russia described their own acts of violence as consistent with the paternal character of their mission. Published memoirs and many more unpublished writings of soldiers described scenes in which American troops burned entire Russian villages as part of their paternal relationship with the Russian people. *The History of the American Expedition* and Cudahy give similar accounts of the burning of Upper Toulgas, which mixed expressions of compassion and pity with justifications derived from assertions of superiority. The local peasants lived “simple … lives” and only lost “meager possessions” in the fires. Americans described peasants watching their homes burned as submissive, reconciled to violent domination, but unable to make sense of the campaign that destroyed their homes. “Most of the men looked on in silence, uncomprehending resignation on their faces, mute, pathetic figures. Poor moujiks! They didn’t understand…” the account continued, describing the male villagers.

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Under the framework of paternalism that rationalized similar events during several American military occupations, burning a village was a way to protect its people from Bolshevik occupation. The fact that this story was related in at least two published memoirs, which strove to present the experience of the intervention in North Russia to the public, highlights the coherence such actions had with soldiers’ understandings of themselves as manly and benevolent guardians of childlike Russia’s best interest rather than brutal occupiers. American soldiers who recorded similar events in their diaries also comingled expressions of compassion and violence, so that the American role in Russia was articulated as a specific kind of violence rather than a lack of violence. Sergeant Silver Parrish described the burning of a small village in his diary as a matter of military duty that required compassion. Meanwhile, he also distinguished the setting of homes on fire from types of violence that he refused to include in acceptable soldierly conduct. According to Parrish’s diary, when he and the fifteen men under his command approached the village to burn it, “Women opened fire on us + we had to advance with out firing on them.” Firing weapons at women was, for Parrish, outside the bounds of military duty and unacceptable. However, he wrote that “then We Burned the Village + my heart ached to have the Women fall down at my feet + grab my legs + Kiss my hand + Beg me Not to do it But orders are orders + I was in command then of the 15 men who went across that field so I done my dutie.” Other diarists felt the necessity to record these types of incidents in their diaries along with notations of their support for the people whose homes they were destroying. Edwin Arkins related a similar account of the forced evacuation of Vistavka adding that he gave a family “one of my blankets to help keep baby warm, as it is snowing and very cold.”

These moments were important to Arkins, Parrish, and other American soldiers and they recorded them in diaries and included them in published reports of their experiences because

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52 Silver Parrish diary, 1-1.18, 1-1.19, UMBHL. Arkins, 1-4.24, UMBHL.
they served to articulate the meaning of their actions during the intervention for themselves and for the American public. These events were expressed rather than suppressed by soldiers because they helped to understand the violence of military occupation by imbuing such actions with a benevolent project: helping Russia, not conquering her as Cudahy had put it. They showcase the ways that the use of sentimental connection, close face-to-face contact, and logics of civilizational uplift served as a camouflage for brutality and domination.

These accounts are also significant because descriptions of peasants’ resigned faces and “pathetic figures” were characteristic uses of the body as a primary resource for defining difference. Soldiers used such opportunities to observe and discuss bodies in order to make sense of what they were doing in Russia, and also to understand themselves as American men.

**Push Out Your Chest: Embodiment and Difference**

Explaining the difference between Russians and Americans was a daily, personal, and highly corporal process that struck right to the core of soldiers’ own sense of themselves as Americans and as men. American soldiers had to shape and carry their bodies in particular ways to fulfill the mission that they saw in front of them, and they had to develop and deploy keen abilities to read Russian bodies they encountered. In daily life, soldiers employed cultural ideas about national, ideological, racial, and civilizational hierarchies on a practical, immediate, bodily level.

United States troops described the difficulty of maintaining their Americanness during the military intervention as hard work, requiring constant struggle and a certain degree of masculine ability. “In Russia nothing was American,” wrote one soldier, Harry Costello, in his memoir *Why Did We Go To Russia?*, which was based on a series of national newspaper articles
he wrote in 1919. Marking hierarchical differences that could explain what troops should be
doing in Russia relied on the construction and reconstruction of what it meant to be American
based on an ongoing project of comparison. “Remembering to be sanely American when
civilization lay seven thousand miles away;” according to one memoir, “Oh, it was a man’s size
job, and they were men who did it.” The entwined processes of self-identification and
difference-making were intricately imbricated with the conduct of daily life. ANREF troops
relied on everything around them to mark themselves as American men, from material items of
everyday life like clothing and food, to the Russian land and air, to styles of houses, burial, and
battle. Many of these efforts to define, track, produce, and hold onto Americanness took place at
the level of soldiers’ individual bodies.

“Hold up your chins and push out your chests and bear your arms proudly when passing
among the Russian people,” American officers instructed soldiers during “typical… march
orders” given out at the old Smolny barracks before U.S. troops invaded the Pinega Valley.
Officers told the men that carrying their bodies in this way would “make Russians respect your
military bearing.” But such a performance would be legible to Russian civilians and to Bolshevik
soldiers in different and effective ways. In the face of properly arrayed American bodies “the
treachorous Bolo sympathizers will be compelled to wipe off their scowls and will fear to try any
dirty work,” while in response to the same stances, “The loyal will breathe more freely because
you have come.” The two readings of the same soldiers’ bodily bearing were crucial to the
mission at hand because the projection of power had to evoke not only military conquest but also
the vision of benevolent uplift that soldiers saw as the important result of their intervention.

“And further, just as important,” these march orders stated, “remember not only to bear
yourselves as soldiers of a powerful people, but bear yourselves as men of a courteous, generous,

53 Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 19-20; York, Romance of Company "A", xv.
sympathetic, chivalrous people. Treat these simple people right and you win their devoted friendship.” Soldiers had to be mindful of important hierarchical distinctions between themselves and the Russians they would interact with, but they also had to balance the process of differentiation with a crucial reminder of the universalizing sentiments that underlay their particularly American ability to transform Russians. “Respect their oddities. Do not laugh at them as do untactful soldiers of another nation,” officers commanded, “You will discover likable traits in the character of these Russians. Here, as everywhere in the world, in spite of differences of language and customs, of dress and work and play and eating and housing, strangers among foreign people will find that in the essentials of life folks is folks.”

Soldiers observed bodies and social practices to weigh difference against Americanness in order to identify people around them and to understand themselves and their purpose as Americans. For example, when Frank Douma entered a new village he utilized cleanliness and education to classify the people on a scale from Bolshevik to American with Russian villagers somewhere in between. After arriving at one village where his company intended to build a new outpost, Douma remarked that “The people in this town are very dirty and very ignorant. Most of them are Bolos.” Bolsheviks could also be distinguished from Russian civilians by their lack of decorum as in one diary entry that Douma wrote after his company occupied Shagovara: “The people seem very bold and brazen. All of them are Bolos I guess.” According to these formulations Americans were more clean, educated, and disciplined, qualities that enabled them to maintain a distinct Americanness in an arena where identification was a murky process. Beard styles were a particular point of observation. While facial hair could identify different “types of

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54 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 118.
55 Douma, 1-1.7, UMBHL.
56 Douma, 1-1.14, UMBHL.
Russian soldiers,” a photograph of a “doughboy shaving” in a memoir emphasized American grooming habits.57 [See Figures 3.4 & 3.5]

These beliefs and the tools for identification they supported also had implications for the maintenance of American lives in a warzone. According to Costello, “It was next to impossible at any time to tell a bolsheviki from any other Russian.”58 The delineation of Bolsheviks from other Russians was essential for American soldiers who had to distinguish between a person they ought to attack and a person whom they might be billeting with at night. “Had a big scare last night,” wrote Frank Douma in his diary, “A company of Cossacks came up unexpectedly and we mistook them for Bolos.”59 Such confusion was constant. While Americans strove to classify Russian people generally, they lamented that anyone they encountered could be an enemy.

“Aside from the roving bands of the so-called army which might turn up anywhere at any time,” reported The Romance of Company “A,” “every peasant on the road might be a sentry or a spy. As one chap put it, ‘You can’t tell by the look of a Russian if he’s a Bolo.’”60 Moreover the similarities of the heavy winter clothing worn by nearly everyone in North Russian confounded the American desire to differentiate among types of people and even the ages and sexes of Russians. An account in Red Cross Magazine reprinted in a memoir asserted that “all sexes and ages look alike in these reindeer parkis.”61 “They were a hardboiled looking lot,” agreed The History, “They wore no regulation uniform, but were clad in much the same attire as an ordinary moujik – knee leather boots and high hats of gray and black curled fur. No one could distinguish them from a distance, and every peasant could be Bolshevik. Who knew?”62 [See Figure 3.5]

57 Costello, Why Did We Go To Russia?, 80.
58 Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 51.
59 Douma, 1-1.7, UMBHL.
60 York, Romance of Company "A", 34.
61 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 116.
62 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 110.
The process of distinguishing between Russians and Russian Bolsheviks was exacerbated by the fact that the difference between the two groups was largely imagined by American soldiers. Bolsheviks were Russians with a particular ideological alignment, or Russians who had simply been forced into the Red Army. Furthermore, because Bolsheviks were envisioned as Russians who were sneaky and prone to disguise and disingenuous spying it seemed likely that people identified as Russian villagers could be Bolsheviks masquerading as civilians. “Natives seem to be glad we are here,” wrote Gordon Smith in his diary, “but you can never tell. Bolos leave plenty of spies behind when they retreat.” Indeed, a Russian could easily be transformed into a Bolshevik by American observations alone, a process that Edwin Arkins of Company C recorded with a tone of regularity when he listed in his dairy among the mundane daily recollections of one December day that a “Russian school teacher, whom we are taking lessons from arrested as Bolshevik spy.”

In addition to observing beards, types of clothing, and particular behaviors, a primary and particularly visceral bodily resource that Americans used to identify and interpret Russian people and places was their sense of smell. For Americans in North Russia, smell was a primary marker of Russian inferiority that denoted a lack of cleanliness and other characteristics of civilization. “Fundamentally, Archangel is a primitive center of primitive beings,” explained Cudahy, “Instinctively, it is a dirty hole. Hopelessly, it is a filthy place, where noxious stenches greet the nose and modern sanitation is unknown.” According to The History of the American Expedition, “the Russian idea of sanitation and cleanliness” was the cause of daily sickness and

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63 Smith, 1-1.5, UMBHL.
64 Edwin L. Arkins Diary, 1-4.19, UMBHL.
66 Cudahy, Archangel, 42.
death among American troops. The account described “the Russian custom of keeping the doors and windows of their houses practically sealed during the winter” as the root of foul smells, a sign of “their utter disregard for the most simple sanitary precautions,” and the cause of a flu epidemic. While Russians seemed resigned to such conditions and a “fatalist” approach to disease, American medical officers made it their task to “combat the epidemic” and Russian notions of cleanliness by highlighting smell as an important indicator of Russian style sanitation.67

The American fascination with Russia’s smells appeared in the most popular poem produced by American soldiers in North Russia “The Creation of Russia,” which was reprinted in several memoirs, became the title of a book of poems about the expedition, and was later sung as a song at veterans’ reunions. In the poem, when the world was created “all the wreckage and tailings/ And the sewage and scum of the scump” were used to make Russia “on the shores of the Arctic/ A Great International Dump.” The poem describes “the Hairy-chinned Ruskies” who “do everything backward,” and who rather than having a national character have a “National Smell.” According to the poem, this was not only one element of the American experience in North Russia – it was the most distinct, “My strongest impressions of Russia/ Got into my head through my nose.” “The Creation of Russia” groped for every tangible element of difference from mud to air. The process of differentiation depicted in the poem – based on visual cues like facial hair, olfactory cues like smell, and other cultural cues indicating Russian backwardness – worked to

construct American superiority so that the U.S. soldier would leave North Russia both “A sadder and wiser young chap.”\textsuperscript{68}

Focusing on a “National Smell” as the major feature that united Russians also evoked one of the reasons that U.S. soldiers were so focused on identifying and describing marks of American identity. Soldiers believed that clearly identifiable, vibrant, shared national characteristics were part of what set Americans apart from Russians. The Russian people could not be expected to form a consensus on their own about their future because, as Cudahy put it: “Russia is not a nation, it is an immense, unwieldy empire.” Despite the “undreamt-of potentialities” he saw there, Cudahy explained that these could never be realized “without authoritative, united control or direction,” because the Russian people were “entirely unconscious of any national entity.”\textsuperscript{69}

Americans imagined that their clean shaven faces, hygienic and nutritional practices, and the gait, shape, and stance of their bodies set them apart from Russian peasants and Bolshevik soldiers. In a cartoon drawn by Company A member “Bug” Culver and pasted into the back of another soldier’s diary, a masculine American with a thick physique, hairy legs, and shoes deals a blow to a lanky, crook nosed, and fearful Bolshevik. [See Figure 3.6] The cartoon shows that the ways Americans dressed their bodies, held their bodies in interactions, and performed with their bodies in battle were key indicators of difference. Illustrating a clear superiority in strength and demeanor, the boxer representing the United States applies power, but within the accepted rules and circumscribed level of violence allowed inside the boxing ring. The trope of these figures boxing was more than metaphorical. Most soldiers of the 339\textsuperscript{th} Infantry had participated

\textsuperscript{68} Rodger S. Clark, The Creation of Russia: And Other Rhymes of the A.N.R.E.F. ([Jackson, Mich.]: Bay Printing Co., 1931), 4-5; Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 34-35; Moore, Jahns, and Mead, ed., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 164; York, Romance of Company "A", 24.

\textsuperscript{69} Cudahy, Archangel, 11.
in boxing programs at Camp Custer as part of their training. There, “boxing instructors provided living illustrations of the courage, virility, self-reliance, and self-control that recruits imagined, and officer and noncommissioned officers told them, successful soldiers possessed.” The instructor at Camp Custer told his classes that “After a man has boxed a few rounds he knows what this means and he stands up and takes what is coming to him if he is any kind of man.”

Lessons about the relationship between boxing, soldiering, and masculine ability were only some of the many efforts by soldiers to use their bodies to enact difference and understand the purpose of their deployment. Others included a series of organized performances that staged beliefs about Americans and Russians. In these shows, U.S. soldiers combined performances as Russian characters with traditions from minstrel performances. They dressed up in Russian clothing, used blackface, buck and wing dancing, and other staples of minstrelsy, and reformulated military songs and performances to critique the intervention and question their occupation of Russia while consolidating their American identity and confirming a place for Russia in a hierarchy of racial and national difference.

Company A’s minstrels performed a parody of the popular wartime song "Throw No Stones In the Well that Gives You Water," which encouraged men to “stand up and fight” in the Great War. The original lyrics declared “All lands forever united. Democracy on every shore. Freedom for all, Answer the call. Humanity’s at stake Will you stand to see it fall?” The revised lyrics, retitled “Hard Luck” were sung to the same tune and included the lines “We weren’t drafted to come up here in Russia, We were drafted to go to France. We weren’t intended to fight the Bolsheviki –Why don’t you give the boys a chance?”

70 Quoted in Keene, Doughboys, 41.
military mission in the mode of a minstrel show perhaps placed the critique of American intervention in Russia on firmer ground. The culture of blackface performance had been used for decades in the United States as a tool of Americanization that allowed immigrant groups to display American nationalism and gain access to the ranks of American identity by joining in the project of keeping other racial groups out.\footnote{72 Michael Paul Rogin, 

While American soldiers who put on minstrel shows in North Russia used the argument that the intervention was an inappropriate extension of the Great War’s mission to fight for democracy, they simultaneously used the cultural practices that furthered violent domination of groups in the United States and performed a proposal for their extension to Russia. A production called “Snow Bound Minstrels” performed on March 1, 1919 at Ust Vaga on a makeshift stage made of hard tack crates combined minstrel techniques with performance as Russian characters. Props and costumes “were borrowed from Russian citizens and added much merriment to the performance.” The show was “a big success” according to a review in the American Red Cross paper *The American Sentinel* published in Arkhangelsk. “The mere sight of old friends attired in the astonishing shirts and coats and baggy trousers of the Russki native was enough to start a gale of laughter from ‘gallery to pit,’” according to another account.\footnote{73 York, *Romance of Company "A"*, 119, 120. “Minstrel Season Now On, A and I Companies BOTH Have Best Shows in North Russia,” *The American Sentinel*: No. 15. (22 March 1919), 3.}

“Snow Bound Minstrels” and a series of similar performances put on by a number of groups of American soldiers in North Russia combined masquerade as Russians with well-rehearsed racial masquerade that some of the soldiers had performed themselves in the United States. One of the show’s organizers, Max Troutner, was well known among the troops as part of the Lowney Brothers minstrel band that traveled throughout the United States in the early
twentieth century. Troutner’s “long experience at this kind of work has made him a master at the ‘Black Face Comedian’ game,” according to an account by members of his company, “His make-up was of the best.” Other acts included James Oxley’s song “Hard Luck” that critiqued the deployment of troops to Russia combined with buck and wing dancing, a style popular among blackface minstrels. Another show at Beresnik that took place after weeks of a strong Bolshevik offensive was “much like the other shows (all blackface).” [See Figures 3.7 and 3.8]

These minstrel performances had an afterlife that moved well beyond the makeshift theaters in which they were initially performed. Soldiers published accounts of the showcases in their newspaper in Arkhangelsk that were circulated among troops and their families and friends. They drew cartoons that combined commemorations of the show with questions about the purpose of their mission. Several memoirs contained detailed remembrances of minstrel shows in Russia that wove these performances deeply into the broader narratives of the intervention and its ultimate purposes that soldiers created. The “Land and the People” section of The History of American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, for example, contained a series of photographs that seem disjointed, but which illustrate a racialized and gendered conception of the potential transformation of the Russian people along an American model. The first photographs include a Russian “Market Scene” in which the reader is told to “Note Primitive Balances Weighing Beef” and a picture of a Russian woman washing clothes in a frozen river (a sight which seemed an omnipresent fascination of American observers); the series concludes with a photo of a Company “I” minstrel show at the Y.M.C.A. in Arkhangelsk in which American soldiers performed variety acts in blackface, as well as a photo of American Red Cross women preparing Christmas

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74 Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, Ragged But Right: Black Traveling Shows, Coon Songs, and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz (University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
76 York, Romance of Company "A", 137.
stockings for the troops. These photographs are displayed in an order that suggests a narrative of civilization and racial uplift, one that begins with primitive Russian economic and social practices and ends with American assertions of white-masculine superiority and women in an appropriate supportive role. This photographic story, and the ethnographic portrayal of the Russian people and landscape that it accompanied, depicted the racial and cultural backwardness of Russians while also demonstrating the possibility and necessity of the protection and education provided by their paternal American occupiers.

One historian of minstrelsy has argued that the American nationalism that formed in the mass culture of the United States in the early twentieth century was “a popular expression that emerged (by way of the frontier myth on the one hand, blackface minstrelsy on the other) not to free oppressed folk but to constitute national identity out of their subjugation.” The troops of the American North Russian Expeditionary Force utilized these tools to grapple with their mission and their own identities. For soldiers who adopted Russian costumes or blackface in order to enact cultural narratives about difference and those who watched them in audiences, such performances were more than stories because clothing, facial adornments, and other physical markers of identity had a tremendous power for soldiers in everyday lives. These showcases rejected the project to occupy North Russia as a sideshow to the war in Europe but embraced it as part of the history of the production of the American nation through the uneven spread of hierarchies of difference via cultural practices and military violence.

Like the minstrel show in the United States that Eric Lott has argued “arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies” while it also “ruthlessly disavowed its fleshy investments through ridicule and racist lampoon,” these performances relied on close contact and attention to

78 Rogin, Blackface, White Noise, 18.
the Russian bodies they mocked. Soldiers who performed national differences also revealed their intimate knowledge of Russians and their personal histories of close interaction. They not only drew laughs about what made Russians different, they also showed the permeability of the lines that divided them from the people whose clothes they had borrowed. The “Snow Bound Minstrels” may have tried out Russianness on stage, but they also embodied the potential for individuals to cross national and cultural boundaries. This possibility for transformation cut to the core of their assertions about Americanness and Russian development.79

9/10 Bolo Myself: Boundaries and Transformations

The American project to understand differences and similarities between Americans and Russians and to use them to give meaning to the intervention in North Russia relied on a narrative about transformation. Soldiers of the ANREF proposed that with a mixture of benevolent violence and guidance the Russian people could become like Americans. Put into action, the project did achieve some actual transformations. News accounts particularly focused on Russians who had migrated to the United States and then served as part of the American forces in Russia. Reports held these soldiers up as models who proved the possibility of such transformations on the individual level. But the potential for cultural, national, and ideological change that was at the heart of the mission soldiers laid out for themselves also revealed the tenuousness of the American project to deploy a careful balance of marked differences and hierarchically arranged similarities. Such transformations could cut both ways, and the soldiers who wanted to turn Russians into Americans found that maintaining control over the process of defining Americanness required intense struggle. Even the prospect of holding on to one’s own

American qualities – “remembering to be sanely American” – could be tenuous, and some U.S. soldiers could become Bolsheviks themselves.

Like other American projects in Russia, the intervention relied on individuals who had moved between the two countries. The 339th Infantry “included a large number of men who were immigrants or first-generation Americans from Eastern European nations” of the former Russian Empire. Soldiers’ accounts pointed to the important role Russian-American soldiers played in providing key local and cultural knowledge to the U.S. military occupation. These men were particularly crucial because of their language skills. “We were fortunate in having with us a great number of Russian born men, who of course were our interpreters,” asserted *The History*. For example, the Russian-born Corporal Nicholas Allikas, an interpreter for Company A, conveyed important messages to groups of Russians and was particularly useful in tense situations. While working to secure the cooperation of a contingent of Cossacks during the American retreat from Ust Padenga, the captain in charge “explained forcibly” what he wanted done “using Allikas as interpreter and a very business-like appearing gun for emphasis.”

Depictions of American identity and manhood often included the many immigrant nationalities that were represented in the United States’ troops. Soldiers’ memoirs that focused on distinguishing Americanness also acknowledged the fact that many members of the American military forces in North Russia were born in other parts of the world. “To call the roll,” *The History of The American Expedition* explained, “would evidence by the names of the men and officers that the best bloods of Europe and of Asia were all pulsing in the American ranks.” Immigrant soldiers who fought with the American forces proved that they could display the same

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80 Willett, *Russian Sideshow*, 18.
81 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 76.
“courage and ‘guts’ and manhood” as Americans born in the United States through “bravery in battle and fortitude in hardships of cold and hunger.” These soldiers proved on the individual level that the qualities of Americanness and American manliness were transferable to immigrants who had demonstrated their abilities to be like Americans in battle. Published memoirs and newspaper accounts based on reporting from North Russia focused particular attention on the heroic deeds of Russian-born Americans. For example, one praised Private Cwenk as heroically killed in action because he “refused to quit his post, though mortally injured.” The story of a “Russian Boy, From Chicago” who was “Hero of Snows,” was told by national newspapers in similar terms. “Frank Silkaimis, born in Russia and who had caught the beautiful spirit of America” volunteered for a dangerous mission that resulted in his death. He “Braved Death to Save Comrades” because “in his heart was his love for America’s ideals.” These accounts, which utilized stories about assimilated Russian-Americans as examples, demonstrated that Russians were indeed able to exemplify American fighting masculinities and even embody American ideals once they had benefited from the reformatory influence that American civilization imparted.

While Russian-Americans served as evidence of the potential for Russians to transform into Americans on the individual level, local Russians could also become Allied fighters. In many cases, platoons consisted of combinations of American soldiers and Russian volunteers. Frequently these included many more Russians than Americans; for example a contingent sent to clear the Pinega Valley and occupy the town of Karpogora consisted of “Lieut. Higgins with thirty-five Americans and two hundred and ten Russian volunteers.” Training Russian soldiers to

83 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 52.
84 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 76.
fight in Allied units mirrored the process of transformation that soldiers envisioned for the Russian people at large on a smaller, more immediate scale. “Russian troops very difficult to discipline along sanitary or hygienic lines and have no idea of cleanliness,” wrote J. Carl Hall, a U.S. medical officer.86

American soldiers groped for ways to tell the difference between allied Russians and Bolsheviks using clothing, mannerisms, smell, and facial hair as potential indicators, but ultimately the process of identification proved elusive. Bodies, it turned out, were a poor gauge of ideological alignment. Bolsheviks were hard to distinguish from other Russians; local Russian peasants could be supporters of – or fighters in – the Red Army, White Army units, or Allied units. Some switched loyalties and positions or were fighting on behalf of a group they did not support. The Bolshevik army reportedly forced Russian civilians to join their ranks. These Russian villagers “were made to attack by the real bolshevist who, stationed in the rear with machine guns, had them ready to turn on those poor fellows the instant they showed signs of faltering.”87 Americans described forced conscription of Russians into the Red Army in contrast to the American manly ability to stand up for oneself: “every respectable person looked upon the Bolsheviks as a gang of cutthroats and ruffians, but they were all bullied into passive submission… We tried to fancy America ever being brow-beaten and cowed by an insignificant minority… and we gave the speculation up as an unworthy reflection upon our country.”88

[Figure 3.10]

Generally, however, Americans had a hard time recruiting locals to fight in combined Allied divisions against the Bolsheviks. In at least one case, American soldiers had to convince Russian allied units to fight using physical force – what one account called the “bomb and bullet

86 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 81, 86, 99.
87 Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia, 40.
88 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 110.
argument” that resulted in the deaths of several allied Russian soldiers. Russians who fought in local White regiments had to confront the same uncertainties about the rationale and potential duration of American and Allied interventions that U.S. soldiers faced. Russian soldiers did not know the degree of support they would receive or how long it would last before intervention troops might withdraw. Faced with the growing certainty of Bolshevik control of the country and the region, many abandoned the Allies and joined the fighting on behalf of Red Army forces. According to some reports, by the time American and Allied forces withdrew from North Russia, many of the locals who initially opposed the Bolsheviks came to regard the interventionist forces with derision and ultimately supported the new regime.

The difficulty in cultivating and indeed even identifying allegiances among various groups in North Russia often challenged soldiers’ beliefs that Russians needed and wanted to be transformed on the American model. Russians who were fighting in allied units alongside American soldiers were sometimes Bolshevik agents attempting “to gain sympathizers among the American soldiers,” a result that seemed especially to have been the case with “many who said they were forced to serve with the Bolsheviki despite their objections,” who had upon capture “volunteered and were accepted… into the new Russian battalions formed here to fight with the Allies.”

While attempts by U.S. troops to define and track loyalties and differences among Russians often failed, so did efforts of soldiers who tried to understand and maintain a distinct Americanness in Russia. Marking these differences was difficult because national, ethnic,

89 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 20, 177-178.
civilizational, and even ideological distinctions were cultural and social constructs that did not correspond to identifiable, consistent dissimilarities.

For example, American soldiers pointed to the way that Bolshevik soldiers comported themselves in battle as a key marker of difference, but they also engaged in the kinds of fighting that supposedly set Bolsheviks apart from and behind Americans. Americans classified Bolshevik fighting as “savage,” “strange,” “cave-man stuff,” and “like a wolf pack.” Bolsheviks fought more like ancient or American Indian warriors than like civilized Americans who displayed “heroism and coolness.” While Bolsheviks were said to terrorize Russians with indiscriminate violence, forced conscription at gunpoint, and cruelty, Americans “won the confidence” of the Russian people with their “faithful representation of American ideals of manhood and square deal and democratic courtesy.” Several accounts highlighted the fact that Bolsheviks “wore white clothing as camouflage” which Americans counted as one of their many “wily” tricks and disguises. A photograph taken by the United States Army Signal Corps showing a dead Bolshevik soldier wearing a white hooded jacket and propped up against a building while an American held his jacket for emphasis was reprinted in multiple soldiers’ memoirs as proof of such sneaky tactics. Remarkably, U.S. soldiers used this photograph, which could be read as evidence of American brutality or disrespect for killed combatants, as evidence of Bolshevik savagery. [See Figure 3.11]

American soldiers argued these approaches were a key marker of difference, but U.S. troops also wore white camouflage, pilfered prizes from dead bodies, and deployed battle tactics that they called “guerilla warfare.” According to one headline on a dispatch from North Russia

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reprinted in a newspaper, “Yanks” also used “Indian Tactics.”94 Captain Moore and the authors of The History explained that as the campaign wore on “more and more Americans began arranging ‘booby traps’ and dummy machine gun posts in the woods.” Troops rigged guns with leaking buckets of water tied to mechanisms that pulled the trigger at regular intervals as water dripped out. “Through the woods we strung concealed wires and sticks attached to hand grenades, the slightest touch of which would cause them to explode.”95 Practices like looting bodies that were said to make Bolsheviks uncivilized were also commonplace among U.S. troops.96 The Field Diary kept by members of Company H contained a copy of an operation order which commanded that “White smocks will be worn by attacking troops.”97 [See Figure 3.12] Indeed, the same soldiers who criticized differences in fighting tactics also frankly admitted that Bolshevik warfare was ultimately of “a character which will bear safe comparison with our own.”98 “Some of their troop movements in the snow,” confessed Costello, “were really wonderful pieces of military maneuvering.”99

These contradictions show that despite efforts to identify cultural, national, ethnic, military, and political differences, Americanness was as frequently a mutable identity as it was a transferable one. Indeed, Americans could easily become Bolsheviks, as soldiers had seen in the radicalization of some workers in the United States. Costello also claimed that some of these Americans had joined the Red Army: “In the ranks of the Bolshevik army which we opposed were many radical soap-box orators from America.”100 Americans who saw their underlying purpose in occupying North Russia as the transformation of Russians along American lines had

94 See also “Fight Indian style in North Russia New York Times (30 December 1918); “Indian tactics used by Yanks,” Los Angeles Times (2 February 1919).
95 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki, 194.
96 Stewart, White Armies of Russia, 195-6.
97 Co H Field Diary, Edward Flaherty papers, 1-1.6-1-1.7, UMBHL.
99 Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 15, 41-42.
100 Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 90.
to confront a fissure in their belief in the universal applicability of American ideals and practices, one that struck even deeper than a failure to impart Americanness to Russians: the potential transformation of soldiers among their own ranks into Bolsheviks. While some Americans argued that the real outcome of the intervention would be won with education and not bayonets, others contended that the force they were fighting was also a battle of transformative ideas rather than munitions. “Their propaganda, in fact, was hurled at us with a force as great as their shells and their bullets,” wrote Costello. Propaganda distributed by Bolshevik soldiers could potentially “lure” American troops across ideological lines, lead to low morale, and even cause desertion and mutiny.

Leaflets left by Bolshevik soldiers in bundles along the patrol paths frequented by American soldiers impugned the narrative of benevolent uplift that the occupying forces saw as the purpose of their intervention in Russia. One such publication asserted that “You soldiers are fighting on the side of the employers against us, the working people of Russia. All this talk about intervention to 'save' Russia amounts to this, that the capitalists of your countries, are trying to take back from us what we won from their fellow capitalists in Russia.” American soldiers were not battling to protect or to foster the adoption of American ideals according to the Bolshevik appeal, which argued that “You are kidding yourself that you are fighting for your country.” Instead, Bolsheviks called for occupying soldiers to identify as fellow workers across lines of national difference. “Can't you realize that this is the same war that you have been carrying on in England and America against the master class,” read the pamphlets which implored U.S. troops

101 Costello, Why Did We Go to Russia?, 37.
to rethink their mission in Russia “you hold the rifles, you work the guns to shoot us with, and
you are playing the contemptible part of the scab. Comrade, don’t do it!”  

Bolshevik troops used makeshift billboards set up across rivers from American
encampments, orators sent to give speeches from nearby bridges, and numerous publications to
sway intervening soldiers, and Americans responded in several ways. For some, the ability of
American troops to reject these appeals reinforced their difference from Russians. “The
preponderant reason why the Americans would never be swayed by this propaganda drive lay in
their hatred of laziness and their love of industry,” argued Costello. The soldiers of the 339th
Infantry were “immune,” “propaganda proof,” because they were “hardy sons of the middle
west.” The authors of *The History* agreed that because they “could not be fooled” by
Bolshevik appeals, “American men showed a real stamina.” American soldiers saw an American
heartiness in their ability to reject “propaganda” messages of all kinds including those that came
from the United States, such as the message that Bolshevism was a “dragon… about to devour
civilization.”

Several accounts in newspapers, soldiers’ memoirs, and War Department reports claimed
that a supposed mutiny among U.S. troops was a direct result of Bolshevik successes in shaping
their sentiments. The mutiny involved a group of Americans who either hesitated or outright
refused to follow an order to mobilize, questioning the nature of their mission in Russia in
general. A letter written by the Secretary of War explaining the event suggested that “It is worthy
to note that the questions that were put to the officers by the men were identical with those that

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103 Quoted in Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 221. See also “British and American Workingmen!” (1918), Hoover Institution Political Poster Database, Poster ID RU/SU 1530 (http://hoohila.stanford.edu/poster/).
104 Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 127. Kooyers, 1-1.8, UMBHL
105 Costello, *Why Did We Go to Russia?*, 45-47.
the Bolshevik propaganda leaflets advised them to put to them.”

Explanations offered by the War Department and news accounts focused on both the influence of contact with Bolsheviks and the “Slavic genesis” of a number of men in the unit in question. The group was said to be particularly susceptible to Bolshevik influence because it was “made up of men of Slavonic origin to an unusually large extent” according to a *New York Times* article based on interviews with American army officers. These officers asserted that “soldiers who could speak Russian, would not only be capable of reading Bolshevist literature but that its effect on them would be more impressive, because of their early training and racial inclinations.” This article depicted an array of levels of preparedness to withstand propaganda among different ethnic groups ranging from “men with Russian and other Eastern European names” to those with “English, Irish and other Western names.” In doing so, it portrayed a scale with Russian susceptibility to Bolshevism on one side and American ability to guard against such appeals on the other. The account also reinforced the idea that even Russian men could overcome these “racial inclinations” through American “training.”

Some accounts from soldiers explained that the supposed mutiny was a misunderstanding. These claimed that a soldier at the center of the incident had merely failed to understand orders because his Polish background meant his English was weak. Other soldiers rejected both of these explanations, arguing that it amounted to “a cruel slur upon the manhood of the American soldier” in general. They invoked the Americanization these soldiers exemplified in battle, explaining that, “The first three men who died in action were Slavs. The Slavs who went from Hamtramck and Detroit to Europe made themselves proud records as

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107 Quoted in Moore, Jahns, and Mead, eds., *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 226.
110 Costello, *Why Did We Go to Russia?*, 78-80.
fighters. Hundreds of them who had not been naturalized were citizens before they took off the O. D. uniform in which they had fought.”

Despite the oft cited claim that what made American soldiers American was their rejection of Bolshevism, some like Sergeant Silver Parrish agreed with the arguments made by Bolshevik soldiers. “I know Beter,” Parrish wrote in his diary “they are Working men trying to through off the yoke of Capitalism + gain for them Selves + families.” Identifying the cause of Russian Bolsheviks with his own union activity in the United States, Parrish concluded that “after being up here fighting these people I will be ashamed to look a union man in the face.” “In fact,” Parrish declared, “I am 9/10 Bolo my self.” Along with other men in his unit, Parrish drew up and circulated a petition to protest conditions and to request a reason for the American mission in North Russia that was signed by dozens of soldiers in his platoon. Other groups of soldiers also organized formal protests and petitions questioning key tenets of the mission in Russia, including the soldiers who wrote “Facts and Questions Concerning the NREF.”

But while Parrish indicted the intervention’s attack on the working men of Russia, and sympathized with the cause of the Bolsheviks, he also agreed with the cultural logics that led many of his fellow soldiers to see intervention to transform the Russian people as a helpful necessity. “These are surely a down Trowden people,” Parrish declared, “and are Sorely in Nead of a good friend.” Like many American soldiers Parrish observed and recorded the cultural customs, social roles, agricultural practices, clothing, and other conditions of local populations, weighing them against American standards. He helped organize a Minstrel Show to put on “the first time we see Civilization.” The disparity between what he was used to in America and the conditions he encountered in Russia “would make your heart ache,” Parrish wrote. He found that

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112 Silver Parrish diary, 1-1.1, 1-1.42, UMBHL.
although he identified with much of the project advocated by Bolshevik soldiers these differences he had observed called for a connection between himself and the Russian people but not one on wholly equal terms – a connection prompted by the emotional identification of mutuality, but governed by a sentimental power relationship: the condition of the Russian people, Parrish wrote, “only prompts Sympathy (in the heart of a real man).”  

Soldiers who rejected many of the arguments in favor of the military intervention in Russia’s civil war still drew upon the cultural resources and deployed the cultural practices that inspired and justified American attempts to reshape lands and peoples in Russia and at a range of global locations. These included soldiers who sang that they “weren’t intended to fight the Bolsheviks,” and soldiers like Sergeant Parrish who felt that he had much in common with the Bolsheviks he was fighting. Even when they critiqued military intervention they proposed in argument and in action that the underlying tenets of American projects of conquest and transformation could be extended to North Russia.

In the end, the American project to define and demarcate differences between Russians and Americans as a basis to justify intervention and transformation was largely unsuccessful. National, ethnic, civilizational, and even ideological distinctions that soldiers attempted to latch onto were cultural and social constructs that did not correspond to identifiable, consistent dissimilarities. Although U.S. soldiers in North Russia created a project of assisted transformation that they saw as directed towards Russians and instigated by Americans, they found that people born in Russia were essential actors on behalf of the project as translators, holders of local knowledge, fighters, and local collaborators. The best examples of the success and potentials of the program they fashioned were individuals who fell in between the categories of Russian and American. While Americans attempted to make use of a combination of

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113 Silver Parrish diary, 1-1.2, 1-1.26-27, 1-1.44, UMBHL.
difference-making and universalizing sentiments to transform Russians by making them like Americans, they often found that the Americanness they wanted to impose and that they used to understand themselves was mutable.

The bodies of American soldiers and the Russian people they met were the means of constructing and enacting ideas about differences and similarities between Americans and Russians and also the sites targeted by projects. Clothing, facial hair, bodily smells, stance, and carriage had to be carefully observed and monitored to mark identities and preserve lives in a warzone. Because American practices of bodily care and deportment were instructional and transferable, corporal differences could serve as justification for drastic and violent attempts to control and change Russian bodies. Americans also had to produce and maintain their bodies in certain ways in order to preserve and project their own Americanness. While U.S. soldiers used self-presentation and observation of others’ bodies as tools of soldiering and identity making in the basic conduct of everyday life, they also recorded and disseminated this process among themselves and for others in diaries, songs, cartoons, publications, photographs, and elaborate stagings. Performances invited participation in renderings of difference and enhanced their legibility. However, the elusiveness with which bodies and individual bearings could be shaped, performed, and understood, and the transformational project at the heart of such readings left the qualities assigned to distinguish American bodies tenuous and even potentially mutable.

Ultimately, American soldiers in North Russia failed to defeat the Red Army militarily, failed in their attempt to prevent Russians they encountered from sympathizing with Bolshevism, and failed in their proposed extension of American institutions, politics, and economic and cultural practices to most Russians in Arkhangelsk Province. The rubrics of hierarchical difference and similarity they used as the basis of their project failed to identify the bodies or
loyalties of the soldiers and civilians they worked with and against. Understandings of
Americanness that underlay the project to combat Bolshevism and transform the Russian people
also ultimately failed to encompass the national and ideological affinities of the soldiers who
composed the units of the American North Russian Expedition. Recognition of these failures is
an important counterweight to the predominant narrative that describes the expanding power of
Americans to confront crises and shape the outcome of events around the world – especially
through military force – over the course of the twentieth century. In fact, when positioned in the
context of the Russian Civil War, the mission proposed by American soldiers was only one of
several competing campaigns to shape Russia.

The American Mission in Russian Contexts

The Allied intervention in North Russia opened an additional front at one edge of a
multisided conflict. The Bolsheviks held central Russia, including the primary urban industrial
areas, while several different White armies attacked from the west and east, including another
Allied force that landed in the Russian Far East.\textsuperscript{114} As Americans in Arkhangelsk Province
gained and lost battle positions in the winter of 1918 to 1919, North Russia was one of several
areas under varying degrees of Bolshevik or White control. Soldiers there faced an engagement
that was in many ways characteristic of the other areas of fighting. Civil War fronts in general
were geographically fluid and mobile. Battle lines between groups were frequently unclear, and
fighting mixed the efforts of Bolsheviks, non-Bolshevik socialists, an array of supporters of the

\textsuperscript{114} On the Siberian intervention see Betty Unterberger, \textit{America's Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920: A Study of
National Policy} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956); Kennan, \textit{The Decision to Intervene}; Foglesong, \textit{America's
Secret War against Bolshevism}. 
Imperial regime and democratic Provisional Government, foreign interventionists, and local or regional groups of peasants.\textsuperscript{115}

Positioning the fighting undertaken by Americans in North Russia in the broader context of the Russian Civil War reveals that soldiers on all sides asked questions about identity, imperialism, and the meaning of violence. While Red, White, and Allied armies battled over different visions for the social and political organization of Russia, combatants across skirmish lines from each other drew on overlapping ideas about the transformation of occupied local populations to define their actions. The emphasis American soldiers placed on trying to understand the goals of their military mission and how their own sense of themselves fit in to the battles taking place in North Russia were in many ways analogous to the experiences of other Civil War participants.

The problems of everyday fighting in a conflict characterized by shifting battle lines and loyalties were also shared across armies. American troops strove to pinpoint what made them different from Bolsheviks, had a hard time identifying the differences between Bolshevik soldiers and other Russians, and often complained that Red Army soldiers masqueraded as local civilians. Red Army units in North Russia had similar difficulties distinguishing between their own members and potential interlopers. Aleksandr Samoilo, the commander of Red Army forces in North Russia, complained in an order to his men in September 1919 about “shady characters who have infiltrated the ranks of the Red Army” and who had been robbing local peasants in the guise of Red Army soldiers.\textsuperscript{116}


\textsuperscript{116} A. A. Samoilo, \textit{Dve Zhizni} (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Ministerstvo Oborony Soyuza SSR, 1958), 230.
Like war fronts, people were extraordinarily mobile during the Civil War, moving both
geographically and across social categories.\textsuperscript{117} American soldiers during the intervention were
not alone in having trouble identifying social and political differences among those they
encountered and questioning their own bonds to their military unit and to the Russian people.
Groups across Russia experienced the Civil War as a process of the “repeated redefinition” of
identities and social bonds.\textsuperscript{118} Forces on all sides comprised soldiers who participated because of
a variety of motivations and who supported the missions of their units in various degrees. The
Red Army and the several competing armies saw soldiers express dissatisfaction with the
meaning and practice of operations including through desertions and mutinies.\textsuperscript{119}

American soldiers worked to understand their position in North Russia through the
context of other American military interventions. Red Army soldiers also placed the Allied
presence in Arkhangelsk in their own sense of the history of attempts by Western powers to
control other areas of the world. United States troops did not use the term \textit{imperialism} when they
drew on the techniques, justifications, and cultural resources that had animated American
projects of intervention and control. But Bolsheviks made American and European imperialism a
central target of their revolutionary project. The Allied interventions during the Civil War were a
prime example of imperialist efforts to roll back the workers’ revolution.\textsuperscript{120} In one well-known
depiction by the leading Bolshevik poster artist during the Civil War workers, soldiers, peasants,

\textsuperscript{117} Sheila Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on the Civil War,” in Koenker, Rosenberg, and Suny, eds., \textit{Party, State,
and Society in the Russian Civil War}, 3-5.
\textsuperscript{118} Leopold H. Haimson, “Civil War and the Problems of Social Identities in Early Twentieth-Century Russia,” in
\textsuperscript{120} Evan Mawdsley, \textit{The Russian Civil War} (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 45.
and sailors join together under the banner, “Death to world imperialism,” to slay the giant monster coiled around Soviet industry.\textsuperscript{121} [See Figure 3.13]

Local and national visions of Arkhangelsk and the Russian North mixed critiques of foreign imperialism in the region with understandings of the area as a Russian imperial borderland. Just as silent films about the Russian East dealt with a longstanding tension between Russia as under the influence of Western European powers but also as a colonial power in its own right, Red and White soldiers and Russian civilians often drew on both conceptions to understand the conflict in North Russia.\textsuperscript{122} The Red Army commander in the region, Aleksandr Samoilo, reflected this dichotomy when he wrote about North Russia. He argued that the northern region was the front from which “imperialists intended to encircle and strangle Soviet Russia.” But Samoilo and other soldiers sent to the North from Russia’s industrial urban centers also envisioned the area as an immense undeveloped, underpopulated region that, as Samoilo wrote in his memoir, “represented for me a special attraction” because of its “pristine places” and “plentiful natural wealth.”\textsuperscript{123}

In the decades before the revolution, regional elites had argued that Arkhangelsk was treated like a colony of the Russian Empire: used for the exploitation of economic resources by central authorities, but otherwise neglected. This status was particularly resented because unlike peripheral regions in the east and south, the area had been part of Russia since it was colonized in the twelfth century. Local merchants and intelligentsia critiqued both the White forces, who they argued just wanted to use the region as a launching-pad to recapture the rest of Russia from Bolshevik control, and the Allied occupiers whom they saw as similarly exploitative. A regional

\textsuperscript{121} Dmitri Moor, “Death to World Imperialism,” (RSFSR, 1919), David King, \textit{Russian Revolutionary Posters: From Civil War to Socialist Realism, From Bolshevism to the End of Stalin} (London: Tate Publishing), 22-23.


\textsuperscript{123} Samoilo, \textit{Dve Zhizni}, 211, 207.
newspaper, *Russkii sever* (Russian North) expressed outrage that “Allied diplomats and commercial agents” tried to gain “concessions to exploit the region’s natural resources.” The same regional elites though, described what they saw as a backward province that needed to catch up to the rest of Russia.¹²⁴

The groups of belligerents who were trying to control North Russia each faced shifting identities and loyalties and each used conceptions of imperial contexts to understand the conflict. They also each proposed ways to transform the region’s population that overlapped in key ways. The mission to transform the local population that was conceptualized by American soldiers on the ground drew from the cultural and material contexts of American imperialism in areas around the world, but it was not entirely different from other transformative projects taking place in North Russia. A broad spectrum of educated Russians including both Marxists and non-Marxists would have agreed that much of the population, particularly peasants who comprised the vast majority, had to be transformed through interventions by agricultural experts, education, and integration into national economic and political life.¹²⁵

During the Civil War, anti-Bolshevik socialists in the region wrote in their local newspaper *Vozrozhdenie severa* (Revival of the North) about the need to bring the “population out of apathy.” Local socialist leaders frequently complained that the area people were “dark” and “crude.”¹²⁶ Provincial elites, intelligentsia, and merchants involved in foreign trade had been promoting a regional vision for North Russia throughout the early twentieth century. Like American interventionists, they discussed “the need to overcome the province’s

backwardness.”127 Through the Civil War period that saw a White regional government, allied occupation, and ultimately Bolshevik control, regional elites advocated a program to transform the backward province through cultural and economic development. They attempted to boost local economic activity and promoted the reform and expansion of local educational institutions because they wanted “to raise the general cultural level of the local population – a necessary precondition for a more dynamic development of the region.”128

The Bolshevik vision for inhabitants of the region was transformative as well. The revolution in social and cultural life they envisioned strove to replace broad aspects of peasants’ daily life, from manners and hygiene practices to religious beliefs.129 In the long-term, Bolsheviks planned to break down village social organizations, peasant market economies, and customs of family land use and ownership in order to collectivize agricultural production. On an immediate military level, Civil War victory would also require the broad transformation of the countryside and the enlistment of peasants on behalf of a sweeping revolutionary project.130

While Americans seized on the lack of a sense of nationhood among the Russian peasants they encountered, anti-Bolshevik activists in the area also contended that peasants had a narrow, local identity.131 They complained that it was difficult to persuade peasants to join battles outside of their immediate districts because peasants were interested in an individual village and not in the idea that “each village was part of a greater whole.”132 Many Bolshevik planners held similar views about peasants’ lack of a sense of themselves as part of broader collectives. Red Army units that were initially organized around, supplied by, and fighting nearby a local village had

130 Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War, 1-2.
131 Novikova, “A Province of a Non-Existent State,” 123.
much greater success recruiting peasants than subsequent efforts to muster peasants on a national scale to fight at great distances from their homes. Joseph Stalin argued to other leaders at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919 that it was not possible to mobilize peasants to fight on behalf of workers, or for the idea of socialism. Instead, he concluded, “our task … is to make them fight against imperialism.” Encouraging peasants to join in the fighting was not only crucial to the potential military success of both White and Red armies – each side saw participation in mass warfare as a central part of the process that would civilize peasants by transforming them from passive subjects focused on local life to conscious citizens enlisted in the building of national or socialist projects.

Posters and leaflets that used visual images and cartoon stories to persuade peasants to join in the fighting with the Red Army and in the project to create a new Soviet Russia often cited the threat of foreign imperialism. One poster that linked imperialism to the ongoing oppression of peasants by capitalism showed a peasant at a plow with several capitalists crushing his back. On the top of the pile was an American capitalist in a top hat made of the U.S. flag. [See Figure 3.14] The caption implored, “Peasants! If you do not want the Anglo-French-American capitalists to come and enslave you… - go sign up for the Red Army and protect Soviet Russia.” The task of enlisting peasants was crucial to Bolshevik victory. The Civil War Red Army was predominantly composed of peasants and it relied heavily on the peasantry for

133 Quoted in Joshua A. Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 129.
food, transport, clothing, and labor. For Bolsheviks, therefore, success in the Civil War required the broad mobilization of peasant support.\(^{136}\)

However, like American troops who often relied on local peasants but were also wary about depending on a peasant’s ability to fight in battle, R.S.F.S.R. recruitment posters depicted a circumscribed role for peasants as revolutionary fighters. One 1919 poster told peasants that they “must possess a rifle as well as a scythe.” It called for “universal military training” as the “guarantee of victory.” But in the image the peasant actively uses his scythe while his rifle remains slung across his back – even as a unit of soldiers marches to battle nearby. A soldier in the background instructs a group of peasants but they each hold farm implements, not guns. As all of the peasants in the poster are looking down to the earth, every soldier is looking up into the distance and perhaps into the future as well.\(^{137}\) [Figure 3.15] The same ambivalence about the role of peasants as potential fighters on behalf of the revolution surfaced in a contradictory poster produced in the same year. “Peasant! Give weapons to the Red Army,” it entreated over a picture of a peasant handing an armful of rifles to a soldier about to race into battle, “it will better protect you, your welfare, and land.”\(^{138}\)

Just as American soldiers thought that they could have a transformative effect on the Russians they encountered, they expected military service in the U.S. Army itself would reshape immigrants of various national and ethnic backgrounds into American men. In Russia too, military service had long been understood as “a transformative agent” that would erase ethnic differences. The Red Army was initially composed predominantly of ethnic Russian workers from industrial centers, but service was still thought to induce vital transformations including the

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\(^{136}\) Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War, 1-2.


moral education of soldiers and the improvement of backward peasants. In late Imperial Russia and after the Bolshevik Revolution, peasants were seen as particularly susceptible to moral and political influences. This vulnerability had been a concern before the revolution to many Russians who saw the peasantry as a symbol and source of the Russian nation. But the ostensible fragility of peasant beliefs appeared as an opportunity to Bolsheviks, just as it did to American troops who envisioned that their contact with local peasants could stimulate their eventual development. Bolsheviks described peasants as “benighted little brothers” who could mature through the tutelage of workers and soldiers so that over time even class differences could be erased. Like the program of transformation proposed by American soldiers, Red Army plans to shape the peasantry described by historian of the Russian military Joshua Sanborn combined “racialist, essentialist assumptions and universalist assimilationist ones.”

Despite the assertions of provincial elites, socialist reformers, Red Army commanders, and intervening troops, peasants were not apathetic, apolitical, or merely targets of transformative projects. What the American troops saw as mutable loyalties, an unwillingness to fight, and evidence of immaturity and unmanliness on the part of local peasants was, in the broader context of the Civil War, characteristic of a widespread trend during the first years of the fighting. Many peasants in the North and in other regions struggled to avoid the bloody conflict and particularly tried to avoid or even sabotage military conscription. Moreover, peasants often did look beyond their villages to the wider world, and they shaped successive attempts at

139 Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation, 64, 74, 83, 87.
140 Erik C. Landis, "Who Were the “Greens”? Rumor and Collective Identity in the Russian Civil War," Russian Review 69 (January 2010), 31; Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War, 311.
the formation of local governments. Far from passive, historian Aaron Retish writes that, “Peasants engaged, adopted, and resisted interventionist and transformative projects.”

Conclusions

In a broad sense, competing visions for the transformation of North Russia drew from common beliefs in western societies about human history and cultural difference. Like many Americans and Europeans, educated Russians who supported or opposed the Bolshevik revolution were likely to believe in the “stadial progress of civilizations;” that different peoples developed at different rates but generally passed through analogous historical stages. The American idea that Russians living in Arkhangelsk Province were living in ways that were roughly equivalent to the ways that earlier generations of Americans lived in the U.S. West; that ultimately they would progress on a fixed historical path to live like contemporary Americans; and that the process could be accelerated through close contact with Americans, education, and violent coercion was hardly distinctive. The same set of beliefs animated American projects in colonial territories but also the Marxist theories of historical development that drove Bolshevik planners. The Soviet project, like liberal democratic projects in Europe and North America, sought to categorize, manage, and reshape large populations on behalf of a “rationalist ethos of progressive social intervention.”

Despite these shared contexts, there were vital differences between American and Bolshevik plans to reshape peasants in North Russia. Like the projects to recreate the lives of

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143 Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, 64.

workers on and off the factory floor that both Ford Motor Company managers and Soviet planners organized in Russia, these campaigns were motivated by different meanings for transformation. The significance of the violence exhibited by each army is indicative of the distinction. American soldiers conceptualized their violent acts as benevolent applications of their paternalist relationship to local Russians. As in other U.S. military interventions, paternalism was a kind of domination despite its gendered and racialized invocations of support and guidance. Even when Americans professed to perform violence on behalf of its victims the acts were assertions of superiority and tools to normalize control.145

Bolshevik soldiers, such as the commander of the Red Army forces in North Russia, also conceived of violence as benefiting the targets of violent action. Samoilo ordered his troops and “all who know about the Red Army,” to remember “that our bayonets bring freedom and protection of the poor.”146 Throughout Russia, Red Army soldiers were encouraged during the Civil War to be violent and to understand violence as part of the cleansing process that would usher in a new social world. Readers of an article in the Cheka (Soviet security forces) newspaper in 1919 were told that “everything is permissible for us, for we are the first in the world to raise the sword not in the name of enslaving or oppressing someone, but in the name of the emancipation from anger and slavery of all.”147 The violence of Red Army soldiers was also part of a transformative project – one that was meant to recreate the lives of soldiers who performed it on their own behalf. As one RSFSR poster explained it, the Red Army soldier’s violence would break the Americans and other foreign invaders bought by capitalists so that “after every war was over, he himself became a master of a new good life.” The cartoon showed a new Red Army recruit single handedly crushing an American in a cowboy hat and other

145 Renda, Taking Haiti, 15.
146 Samoilo, Dve Zhizni, 229-230.
147 Quoted in Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation, 175.
foreign invaders with his handgun, rifle, feet, and artillery shell. In the next frame he sits outside reading a book with his wife, child, and dog. In the background are a school, a library, and the local soviet. His performance at war enabled him to create the new institutions and life for himself.148

The fight between the Bolsheviks, interventionists, and various White armies during the Russian Civil War is often framed as a battle between revolutionary change and the internal and external forces that tried to prevent it – that is, “between progress and reaction.”149 But both interventionist and Bolshevik armies saw themselves as transformative agents of progress. Like U.S. and Soviet economic programs and silent film fantasies, the work of military campaigns in Russia can be understood as competing visions for Russia’s future that drew on overlapping and often complementary notions of modernization and staged civilizational development.

The programs were in many respects more parallel and less mutually constitutive than those in economic and cultural spheres; soldiers aiming weapons across trenches were in a position less conducive to collaboration than workers on assembly lines or filmmakers who traded techniques. But some soldiers did propose overlapping visions for a shared future, including Bolshevik troops who called on interventionist forces to identify with class connections and the aims of a workers’ revolution across national boundaries and battle lines. Many American soldiers also looked for similarities between their own goals and those of Red Army forces, favoring universalist notions over those that marked national and cultural differences. Some, like Silver Parrish, came to share, in some measure, in the conception of

transformative progress that animated Bolsheviks. They ultimately mixed conceptions of American-style progress for local peasants with a vision of the future that included class solidarity that crossed national boundaries and military lines.

Even among soldiers who continued to view Bolshevik troops as bitter enemies and socialist revolution as the antithesis of American progress, it would be misleading to understand their ideal proposed outcome for Russia’s future as entirely separate from the new world that Bolsheviks anticipated. Rather than abstract visions articulated from the distant capitals that would later be described as the two poles of the cold war world, these transformative projects, and the men who carried them, clashed on the ground on muddy battlefields. In particular, examination of American soldiers’ use of corporal aspects of daily life like bodily smells, grooming practices, and carriage of bodies reveals that the formation of such projects relied not only on abstract ideas about civilization and modernization, but decisively on interaction and close contact.

The project advocated by American soldiers shows how on-the-ground actors shaped the direction and reach of the United States’ role in the world and the ideologies of modernization, civilization, and American identity that often supported interventions. Such conceptions of the Russian people, and particularly the tensions between core national and cultural differences and universalist notions that underlay proposed transformations, were also key themes discussed by American experts on Russia in the academy and in government offices.¹⁵⁰ However, in an era often characterized by the extension of state power, particularly in the mobilization of citizens on behalf of large military projects, the writing and activities of U.S. troops in Russia reveal instead the flexibility of the ideas that states used to mobilize support for war. State apparatuses in the United States, Russia, and elsewhere grew tremendously in the early twentieth century and

¹⁵⁰ Engerman, Modernization from the Other Shore, Chapter 5.
focused new kinds of state power and scientific knowledges on producing soldiers, and indeed citizens in general, with particular kinds of bodies, beliefs, and obligations to the state. But the U.S. military intervention in North Russia failed to conscript soldiers’ support for some visions of Americans’ role in the world, while simultaneously inspiring men to act on others.\textsuperscript{151} This mixed result is an example of what historian Christopher Capozzola has noted were wartime roles for citizens in relation to the state that were often “muddled- and up for grabs.” Rather than evidence of the steady growth of state power and the expanding exertion of American power in the world, the uncertain roles of American soldiers in North Russia meant that, like the domestic groups Capozzola describes, they were “wartime Americans engaged in lurching and ambivalent expansions and contractions of state capacities.”\textsuperscript{152} Soldiers in the Russian mud sometimes went far beyond the military goals authorized by the U.S. state. They also embodied the limits of the potential for U.S. efforts to affect the outcome of events in Russia – limits that experts failed to predict and that ongoing programs for U.S. intervention in the following decades failed to acknowledge.

Although U.S. soldiers could not determine the outcome of the Russian Civil War, another group of Americans, acting on behalf of a project that mixed non-governmental and government goals and resources, attempted to help and transform Soviet Russia only a few years later. Like the military intervention, the efforts of humanitarian organizations to intervene in a famine that gripped much of the Russian countryside reveal Americans’ growing sense of their power to shape the world. Yet they also reveal the limited reach of such projects when faced with moving people who crossed national and ideological boundaries.

\textsuperscript{151} Renda, \textit{Taking Haiti}, 17-18, 28-29.

Figures

Figure 3.1: Captain Joel R. Moore, one of the authors of *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki* pictured mocking Bolshevik soldiers with a “Bolo Commander’s Sword Taken in Battle of Bolsheozerki.” United States Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection 7-3.1, UMBHL. *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 189

Figure 3.2: An American soldier distributes food to Russian children. Originally labeled “Young Russians getting Left-Overs” by the photographer, this picture was captioned “Thankful for What at Home We Feed Pigs” when it was published. Michigan Historical Collections topical photograph collection, 1-21.1, UMBHL. *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 48.
Figure 3.3: This photograph of a Russian boy and a bear cub taken by the United States Army Signal Corps in North Russia was captioned “Mascots” when reprinted in a memoir. *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki*, 224.

Figure 3.4: This photograph captioned “Advanced Post R[ail] R[oad] Front. Doughboy Shaving” was presented in contrast to photographs of Russian peasants with beards. Costello, *Why Did We Go To Russia?*, 80.
Figure 3.5: This collage of photographs depicts the confusing process of identifying difference among “Types of Russian Soldiers.” The accompanying caption explained each individual as representative of a different “type.” For example: The photo on the top left: “This man is educated and knows what duty means…” The bearded individual in the top row: “this man is a splendid type of the Russian Moujik soldier.” The similar looking man on the bottom left: “A Bolshevik.” Donald C. Thompson, Blood Stained Russia (Leslie-Judge Co, 1918), 200.
Figure 3.6: A masculine American with a thick physique, hairy legs, and shoes deals a blow to a lanky, crook nosed, and fearful Bolshevik - but within the accepted rules and circumscribed level of violence allowed inside the boxing ring. 

Signed “Bug” Culver, Russia, 1919. Hugh D. McPhail papers, 6-21.1, UMBHL.
Figure 3.7: A cartoon drawn by “Bug” Culver showing Max Troutner of Company A dressed in blackface and asking “How come I here?! Sir Mr Captain.” York, *Romance of Company “A,”* 72.

Figure 3.8: “Minstrels of ‘I’ Company Repeat Program in Y.M.C.A.” *History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolshevik,* photos following page 160. United States Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection 10-7.1, UMBHL
Figure 3.9: Company A at Ust Padenga Front, Corporal Allikas, fourth from the front January 7, 1919. United States Army Signal Corps photograph collection 5-18.1 UMBHL.

Figure 3.10: “Bolshevik prisoners going down one of the streets of Archangel, Russia under American guard. Oct. 16, 1918.” United States Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection 3-6.1, 1-1.23, UMBHL.
Figure 3.11: The original caption for this image, written by a U.S. Army Signal Corps photographer, read: “A Bolshevik shot by an American guard at outpost No. 1 at 3:00 a.m. on the morning of January 8, 1919; When an enemy patrol of seven men attempted to creep up on the outpost position. This picture was taken to show the white cloak, which all the members of the patrol wore to conceal their movements in the snow…” Caption from “List of Official U.S. Photographs Illustrative of the Activities of the North Russian Expeditionary Force,” United States Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection 1-1.23, UMBHL. Photo from United States Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection 6-1.1, UMBHL.

Figure 3.12: “Back from Patrol.” This image showed U.S. soldiers wearing white smocks with hoods for camouflage. History of the American Expedition, plate after 192.
Figure 3.13: “Death to World Imperialism.” (RSFSR, 1919), reprinted in David King, *Russian Revolutionary Posters: From Civil War to Socialist Realism, From Bolshevism to the End of Stalin* (London: Tate Publishing), 22-23
Figure 3.14: A peasant at a plow with several capitalists crushing his back, topped by an American in a U.S. flag top hat. The caption implored, “Peasants! If you do not want the Anglo-French-American capitalists to come and enslave you…. go sign up for the Red Army and protect Soviet Russia.” Detail from “Krestyane! Yesli vy ne hotite, chtoby prishli anglo- franko- amerikanskiye kapitalisty i porabotili vas,” (Moscow: All-Russian Central Executive Committee, 1919) Russian State Library, Digital Library http://search.rsl.ru/en/catalog/record/6688611)
Figure 3.16: Detail from [Untitled strip cartoon poster] Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, Publication of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers', the Red Army, and the Cossacks' Deputies (Moscow, 1919) in National Library of Scotland, Woodburn Collection of Soviet Posters, http://digital.nls.uk/74921376
Chapter 4 – Borders of Relief: Repatriation, Refugee Migration, and American Humanitarian Work in and out of the Russian Famine of 1921

When American humanitarian workers intervened in a famine that began in the Volga River region of Soviet Russia in 1921 they imagined that food, supplies, know-how, and professional relief agents would move in one direction: from the United States to Russia. Indeed the flow of materials was enormous. The American Relief Administration, just one of the U.S.-based groups involved, transported nearly one million tons of food, clothes, seed, and medical supplies from the United States to Russia in less than two years. At its height the ARA program was feeding almost 11,000,000 Soviet people daily.¹ In this chapter I examine the movements of people that surrounded and enabled this humanitarian program and I argue that these migrations tell a multidirectional story that has been missing from our understanding of humanitarian intervention.

Histories of interwar humanitarian projects have shared the assumption that relief work was a unidirectional project. Like contemporaries, they describe humanitarian interventions like the ARA work in Soviet Russia as one-way projections that not only moved food aid from the United States, but also extended American values, power, and interests. These narratives hold that Americans built on ideas, practices, and networks of people and support created in progressive reform movements, public health campaigns, women’s reform movements, and philanthropic organizations in the United States, in Europe, and in transatlantic partnerships and expanded them after the First World War to new places and purposes. In the postwar moment, Americans saw both increased need wrought by violence and destruction and a new role for themselves as operators on the world stage in general and as humanitarians in particular. New

international markets for American goods, new applications for American political and social values abroad, and a growth in professional positions for Americans with experience and skills in areas like relief work all expanded outwards.²

However, in this chapter I argue that this story of outward expansion needs to be reevaluated in key ways. If we trace the roles of migrants, émigrés, refugees, and repatriates that moved across the borders of humanitarian interventions we can see that such projects were multisided, multidirectional, and substantially affected the United States – even shaping core questions about what it meant to be an American.³ This attention to multidirectional movements is important because it revises our understanding of the growing role of Americans on the world stage following the First World War. At a moment Americans saw an expanding role for themselves as humanitarians who would intervene on behalf of famine victims and refugees in places like Russia, these understandings of a capacious role for Americans in the world overlapped with new boundaries around Americanness and limitations that restricted who could migrate to the United States or become an American.⁴ Americans projected themselves as citizens of a global power who could shape places like Soviet Russia at the same time that new restrictions limited the scope of American citizenship at home.

Examining new restrictions on American national belonging as a constitutive part of new extensions of the American role in the world also situates U.S. barriers to migration in their international context. Histories of immigration restriction have tended to portray these new limitations as the result of the politics of nativism, eugenics, and anti-Bolshevism inside the United States.\(^5\) In Chapter 2, we saw how silent films that addressed these issues combined a narrower sense of what people and values constituted Americanism with a call for new emotional and practical connections abroad. Humanitarian work often required a balance between opening a broader role for Americans to move in the world and affect people while attempting to close off the potential for the movements of others to change Americanness itself.

Taking the narrative of American humanitarian intervention beyond the notion of a unidirectional extension of American power, ideas, goods, and agents requires situating what is often told as an American story in a global context that saw broad changes in the ways, reasons, and directions that people moved across the world.\(^6\) American humanitarian work in the famine in Soviet Russia between 1921 and 1923 and the migrations of people tied up with the execution of relief aid took place in a moment characterized by large numbers of people moving due to war, political dislocations, and hunger, but also during a crucial global restructuring of the limits and pathways through which people could migrate. The breakup of Russian, Ottoman, and Austrian empires spurred a rise in the control of borders, the regulation of national belonging, and the international documents and bureaucracies to maintain them.\(^7\) Attempts to facilitate and

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to contain the movements of people bumped up against new immigration restrictions that limited
the migration of Russians to the United States as part of national origins quota systems that
began in the early 1920s. Russian citizenship laws frequently held competing claims to the
individuals who moved between Soviet Russia and the United States during the humanitarian
intervention. Revolutionary changes took place in the meaning and practice of Soviet citizenship.
Rules for the naturalization and denaturalization of citizens, drastic shifts in the jurisdiction of
territories of the former Russian Empire, and massive dislocations of people left some stateless,
document-less, and unable to either stay in temporary locations or to travel to other countries.⁸

ARA attempts to grapple with migrations that surrounded famine and relief work in
Russia did extend the reach of Americans’ attempts to aid those affected by humanitarian crisis,
but a focus on multidirectional movements of people within and across famine areas, national
borders, and boundaries of nationality and ideology suggests the limits of this extended reach.
U.S.-based projects to move and care for refugees marshaled and moved considerable resources,
including imperial networks of military, humanitarian, and economic support that ringed the
globe, but they also marked the uneven ability of Americans to affect places like Soviet Russia.

This chapter makes four main contentions about humanitarian intervention drawn from a
focus on multidirectional movements of people that stemmed from and often enabled famine
relief work. In the first section, I explore the assumption that humanitarian intervention
represented the work and character of a particular national group. While relief agents saw their
efforts as a specifically American project and even understood humanitarianism as “a peculiarly
American vocation,” as one historian has put it,⁹ I argue that the creation of “American”
humanitarian aid was a difficult process that required the separation of various American and

⁹ Patenaude, Big Show in Bololand, preface and 31-32. For the argument that humanitarian intervention became a
particularly American endeavor in this period, see also Irwin, Making the World Safe.
Soviet personnel and methods for relief. Despite desires for an American program, relief relied on networks forged by Russian migrants and a predominantly Russian staff. Second, I show that the complex movements of refugees both within and out of famine areas of Soviet Russia complicated the ARA vision of delivering aid to a local population in need. Relief workers were supposed to be helping local Russians in particular areas, but most people they encountered were on the move: across space and across categories of nationality or ideology.

In the third section of the chapter I argue that humanitarian intervention did not just move relief workers and supplies to Russia. Relief operations opened up pathways for repatriation, naturalization, and émigré and refugee migration from Soviet Russia to the United States. The program was formally linked to a plan to extract Americans from Russia. These efforts required a complex process of sorting out Americans from Russians, identifying potential Americans in Russia, and transforming and transporting individuals from one category and location to the other. Records of attempts to repatriate Americans in Russia reveal that citizenship and national belonging were tenuous and difficult to identify in a moment marked by tumultuous and multidirectional movements of people between geographic locations and national and ideological affinities. American humanitarian aid created new opportunities for some individuals to migrate based on claims to potential status as Americans, but relief workers also limited the access of other Americans and Russians to migration and assertions of cultural and legal nationality. Determinations about belonging and potential citizenship that were tied up with humanitarian aid had important consequences for individual migrants but were also key factors in plans to produce a new Soviet state and for reconciling an Americanness that could expand to deliver relief abroad while contracting to limit access to U.S. shores.
The fourth portion of the chapter details how the growth in American projects to aid people across international boundaries was closely tied to new efforts to limit the boundaries of the American nation. I focus on Constantinople, a primary exit point for refugees, where ARA officials had to balance universalizing humanitarian sentiments with practices of differentiation and exclusion which they felt were necessary to identify, feed, and move refugees. There, a widening role for Americans to aid the hungry and homeless both overlapped and crossed purposes with a new restrictive sense of what it meant to be an American and who might be able to become one.

Making Relief American

American Relief Administration programs in Soviet Russia required an ongoing process of sorting and laying claim to people, practices, and ideas in order to make relief “American.” Run by a small administrative staff who traveled from the United States, the relief effort relied on a large Russian work force, a mix of American and Soviet methods, and the critical knowledge and methods of previously active networks of Russian migrants. The bulk of the workforce that executed relief was born in Russia. There were about 300 American ARA workers in Soviet Russia while the Relief Administration employed 120,000 Russian staff to implement its programs.10 [See Figure 4.1] Producing the small number of Americans who managed the large Russian staff required an active process of construction. Only a certain kind of American citizen was able to participate in the project. ARA policy allowed only natural born and no naturalized citizens on the administrative team in Russia, and the State Department said it would issue no passports to travel to Russia with the ARA to naturalized citizens and especially

10 David S. Foglesong, The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64. See also Patenaude, Big Show in Bololand.
not to naturalized Americans who had been born in Russia. Part of the reason that organizers wanted to field a group of natural born U.S. citizens for positions abroad was because American citizenship obtained through naturalization was tenuous for those returning to their country of origin. U.S. citizenship laws limited the time naturalized citizens could spend abroad in the country they came from without invalidating their naturalization oath, which included a promise that the individual had intended to reside permanently within the United States.

The policy was not applied uniformly. Some top ARA officials were naturalized Americans, and some documents advocated a more specific reading of the State Department’s intentions, such as one letter in which the word “Russian-” with a hyphen was penciled in before the word American so that it explained that “naturalized [Russian-] Americans” would not be allowed passports to serve with the ARA in Russia. Even this lax interpretation was not always maintained in practice. For example, one ARA staffer who had lost his passport traveling from Odessa to Kiev explained when applying for a new passport that he was born in Moscow and naturalized in New Jersey in 1902.

Russian staff who executed ARA programs in Russia were both relief workers and recipients of relief. Jobs with the ARA gave Russians access to resources and food which were, especially in famine districts, otherwise difficult or impossible to obtain. Because of rising prices for food items and a shortage of food supplies to purchase, the salaries of ARA Russian staff were supplemented with pay in commodities and food packages. Referred to with the Russian term *paiok*, which means both “allowance” and “ration,” these payments meant that Russians

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11 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens - Box 437, Folder 18 – Passports, American Relief Administration Russian Operational Records, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA (hereafter “ARA” Box.Folder).
14 Boris Bogen to Quinn ARA Moscow, August 5, 1922, New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Liaison Division, American Consul at Riga, ARA 51.4 - American Passports.
who worked for the ARA were recipients of support through employment and direct food relief in addition to constituting the bulk of the workforce that executed the coordination and delivery of aid.\textsuperscript{15}

Although they were managing a large staff of Russian Soviets in Soviet Russia, ARA administrators attempted to craft a specifically American labor system that rejected Soviet practices for protection and benefit of workers. According to at least one Russian critique of the ARA’s labor practices at its Moscow office, managing Russian staff in the American manner meant discarding Soviet rules about length of the workday, paid time for maternity leave, funerals, and vacations, and the firing of workers who attempted to organize in pursuit of better working conditions.\textsuperscript{16}

The Americanness of relief efforts was also predicated on differentiating between and mixing American and Soviet modes of relief. The ARA advocated the dispersal of temporary food relief for the most vulnerable groups, particularly children, and rejected relief aimed at long term-goals or broader reconstruction. This was specifically an anti-Bolshevik approach. In other areas of ARA relief work in Europe during the war, the organization also focused on “acute need” first, but then followed up with reconstruction aid. In Soviet Russia, ARA leaders precluded assistance related to reconstruction and economic growth until after “the demise of Bolshevik rule,” because they did not want to support the Bolshevik regime.\textsuperscript{17}

Soviet relief goals, such as those coordinated by the All-Russian Commission for Aid to the Starving (\textit{Pomgol}) and the programs of other international relief agencies, saw longer-term

\textsuperscript{15} Frank Macy Surface and Raymond L. Bland, \textit{American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period; Operations of the Organizations under the Direction of Herbert Hoover, 1914 to 1924} (Stanford University, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1931), 253.


concerns like reconstruction and planting for upcoming seasons as crucial parts of famine relief efforts. A report produced by the State Economic Planning Commission of the Council for Labor and Defense of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR), for example, recommended efforts like the improvement of roads, irrigation, the regulation of the flows of rivers and streams, large excavation projects, and electrification programs. The report also highlighted the need for better farm implements and agricultural machinery both to modernize practices and to replace massive declines in livestock and horses that resulted from famine conditions. This Soviet mode of relief proposed that these long-term constructive strategies should take precedence over the kind of immediate food aid advocated by ARA administrators. “You must not think of the present merely,” Soviet leader Mikhail Kalinin supposedly told a group of peasants who were starving to death “I ask you to think of the future.”

Within the United States, the ARA strove to distinguish its relief work from a panoply of humanitarian, religious, and political groups who also attempted to organize relief aid for Soviet Russia. The ARA, which was a semi-private organization led by the Secretary of Commerce and largely government funded, tried to get other relief agencies to work and distribute aid only through the auspices of its own programs. A range of groups that wanted to support the socialist project in Russia were directly attacked by the ARA, which countered their appeals to the public and arguments for giving relief aid with insistence that the American Relief Administration and its affiliated organizations were the only channels through which aid could be efficiently and fairly delivered with truly American aims in mind. Often the groups that the ARA attempted to

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19 Quoted in Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 112.

marginalize from relief efforts advocated for more comprehensive forms of relief that included reconstruction, acquisition of tractors and other machinery for Soviet farms, and other long term programs that envisioned relief work as part of a broader effort to support the future of Soviet agriculture. These discussions about methods and motives for relief, and particularly conflicts over the relative merits of temporary relief versus programs for reconstruction, reflected competing visions of Russia’s future.

Like other American projects in Russia, famine relief relied on the prior migration of people from the Russian Empire and emerging Soviet republics to the United States. Both the hiring of Russians into ARA staff positions and some methods for the funding and delivery of relief supplies required an extensive network of connection between Russian migrants in the United States and their relatives, friends, business partners, employees, and coreligionists in Russia. The food remittance program, a system for enabling individuals and groups in the U.S. to purchase relief supplies for particular individuals and groups in Soviet Russia, relied almost entirely on the prior existence of large numbers of people inside the United States with connections to Russian famine victims.

Networks of connection created by Russian émigrés in the United States and by the earlier movements of Americans in Russia fostered job placements with the ARA. Often, prior migration to the United States facilitated the placement of returned Russian-American migrants in staff positions. For example, as ARA programs were ramping up in the spring of 1922, the director of the New York County chapter of the American Red Cross wrote to the ARA administration in New York on behalf of “two very good young Russian women who spent their

21 New York Office Subject File, Relief Organizations 1922, ARA 91, 92.
22 Engerman, Modernization from the Other Shore, 104, 08.
early life in America and who returned to Russia with their family in 1912.” The women had already worked with the American Red Cross during the war, and their previous connection to individuals in the agency enabled the appeal for jobs with the relief project. The letter argued that they “would be admirable workers” but also that “just now they are in very urgent need.”

Business efforts in Russia had also produced connections that were tapped to appeal for jobs for individuals in Russia as work, as paths to strengthen American-Russian connections that were already initiated, and as forms of aid. A Russian woman employed in the ARA New York offices got administrators to contact the ARA Kiev office to arrange for a job for her sister who had American corporate office experience from former employment at the Columbia Gramaphone Company offices in Petrograd. A New York attorney endeavored to arrange an ARA staff position for his former Russian translator who also carried a recommendation from a correspondent for the Chicago News. The attorney argued that the interpreter’s prior service to Americans in Russia meant that the relief project owed him particular assistance. “He really deserves something at the hands of the Allies, and of Americans,” claimed the lawyer “I am sure he could be trusted and would be of real assistance in the American Relief Work.” Both professional and personal networks connected individuals like these who were linked by multidirectional travel and migration between Russia and the United States.

These networks of connection were causes of anxiety to Soviet security agencies, the Cheka and the GPU. “Who were in fact, the members of the ARA?” was a crucial question asked

23 Letter from Miss Frederika Farley, Director American Red Cross, New York County Chapter, to Frank Page, American Relief Administration, New York City. April 26, 1922 and reply dated April 27, 1922. Russian Famine Relief Contributions and Contributors File, General Offers of aid, ARA 426.7 - Personnel. Requests for positions in Russia.
by Soviet security agencies. As Russian historians of the relief operation have noted, Soviet security officers suspected the ARA members were also acting as foreign intelligence collectors and noted that a majority of the American administrative staff were former military officers.  

Reports prepared by Soviet secret police in the Kazan district explained that of ten ARA staff members there, six had served as soldiers, two had fought specifically in support of White armies, and three purportedly had worked for either American or British intelligence agencies. If, as some suspected, the ARA was an advance operation preparing for anti-Soviet military action, this mix of staff would have, the report argued, provided a balanced mix of personnel in support of that mission.  

Which Russians the ARA recruited and why was also a crucial question for Soviet security agencies who worried that the ARA selection of service workers focused on “circles of the former aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, counter-revolutionary-minded intellectuals and former White officers.” While ARA programs deployed networks of connection between Russian émigrés and Soviet Russians to staff positions in their relief apparatus and relied in part on Russian-American relatives of famine victims to send food remittances back to Russia, the Soviet secret police worried about the high percentage of recruits and recipients of aid parcels who “were relatives of American emigrants” because these networks of migration were thought to favor certain groups of Russians with potentially anti-revolutionary sentiments over others. Meanwhile, state security apparatuses in the United States also concerned themselves with the makeup of relief organizations’ staff and goals for relief. The FBI and the DOJ spied on...
Americans inside the United States who advocated and engaged in forms of relief for Russia that were understood as un-American.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite their reliance on networks of connection built by prior travels of Russians to the United States and Americans to Russia to help staff positions in their relief apparatus, ARA officials often expressed shock when individuals they encountered on the ground evidenced the tremendous mobility that characterized the life histories of people even far into the interior of the rural Volga valley. In the village of Ormaly, where Kazan District Supervisor J. Rives Childs stopped on his way to Elabuga in December 1921, he was taken aback at learning that the manager of the local “American kitchen” “had been in America before the war, on board a cruiser which had put in at Newport, RI.”\textsuperscript{31} In the volost of Staro-Studenetsko the following May, Childs came up against the multiple previous interactions a young Russian may have had with Americans when he encountered a man in the office of the local soviet “attired in the blouse of an American soldier.” A fellow ARA staffer speculated that the young man had likely been a Red Army soldier at Archangel who had found the shirt among the supplies abandoned there after the American withdrawal. To their surprise, another US-Russian military encounter, unknown to them, was the source of the blouse’s arrival in the Volga river valley. The man explained that he had been among “the forty-five thousand Russian prisoners of war whom the American forces had liberated in their advance into Alsace-Lorraine in 1918” and that the American army had provided them with supplies including uniforms.\textsuperscript{32}

Highlighting the links fostered by migrating Russians that underlay ARA famine relief operations, the role of Russians as staff who executed relief efforts, and the multivalent and multidirectional interactions between Russians and Americans that characterized the project is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30}Engerman, \textit{Modernization from the Other Shore}, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{31}Childs and Cockfield, \textit{Black Lebeda}, 95.
\item \textsuperscript{32}Childs and Cockfield, \textit{Black Lebeda}, 137.
\end{itemize}
important because these movements and connections help undermine narratives of “abjection” that frequently characterize famine victims and refugees as “without history.” Far from passive recipients of American humanitarian aid, Russians played key roles in executing relief operations and their active histories as migrants and the networks of connection they built were foundational factors in the ARA’s ability to approach those affected and moved by the famine. The notion, then, that this kind of humanitarian mission consisted of individuals of one national group going to help those in another nation is inadequate to describe the process that produced relief aid. When the American Relief Administration arrived in Russia, the organization encountered and attempted to utilize a well-established string of interconnectedness. The prior movements of Russian-Americans and other migrants were crucial components that underlay the implementation of relief efforts. 33 American administrators in Russia often failed to recognize the extent that they relied on migrants to produce relief aid but the migrations of a variety of groups quickly came to be seen as a defining feature and problem of the famine.

**Shifting Ground: Refugee Movement and Directions of Relief**

The number of migrants in motion in and out of the areas of the former Russian Empire leading up to the First World War, during the war, and after because of the revolution, civil war, and famine was tremendous. By the time that the ARA began to intervene in Soviet Russia to aid famine victims and attempt to understand and to some extent address the movement of refugees they were entering a storm of migration. As one historian described humanitarian projects to

intervene in the refugee situation, “Usually, these efforts were like using bedroom sheets to block a hurricane.”

While displaced people had long traveled from place to place, after the First World War refugees emerged “into general view” as a category of people and as an international problem that was new in both the scope of the mass movement of people and in the appeals they and groups acting on their behalf made to the international community for assistance. Huge numbers of people in the Russian Empire became displaced during the war, many had not been settled by 1917, and numbers of people in motion rose in the following years. Deserting soldiers, former prisoners of war, and sick and wounded soldiers moved away from war fronts; civilians who had been pressed into wartime industrial work left for home. Opponents of the revolution, those who fought on its behalf, and those rendered homeless by Civil War fighting were set in motion. Roughly two million Russian subject refugees between the World War, Civil War, and famine migrated away from Russia to Europe, China, and points throughout the world. Many of these were opposed to Soviet rule but many more left for a variety of nonpolitical reasons. While millions moved abroad, most of those made refugees by the Revolution and Civil War moved within the areas of the former Russian Empire. They moved in every direction: “trainloads of refugees criss-crossed” Russian territory, according to one account. Refugee movements due to the famine often overlapped or crossed paths with the movements of war refugees and other migrations.

37 Lohr, Russian Citizenship, 145,47.
38 Marrus, The Unwanted, 58.
ARA workers tracked shifting trends in the movements of peoples into and out of the famine regions, some of which they could attribute to their own intervention. Initially it seemed that the distribution of food would stem the movements of people who traveled in search of food, but frequently refugees also migrated to reach food distribution centers. Areas which had had large percentages of their population leave during the end of 1921 and the middle of 1922 began to see former refugees return “at news of the distribution of the corn and seeds.”

ARA observers took special note of the fact that refugees moved in every direction rather than over a clear and unidirectional course. “The refugee movement seems unsystematized,” lamented one medical unit report, “as many appear to travel from east to west as from west to east; some have Russian cities as their destination, others are traveling to Siberia, Poland, Latvia, etc.” A map of refugee movements echoed these characterizations, showing arrows pointing into and out of regions, to and from cities, and crossing paths in every direction. [See Figure 4.2]

While about two million Russian refugees migrated to other places in the world in the turmoil before and during the famine, many refugee movements also took place within the boundaries of Soviet Russia as the ARA map suggested. An official Soviet government report on the “Movements of Famine Population” within the area of Soviet Russia estimated that over seven hundred thousand people migrated out of the famine area to other areas of Russia in the second half of 1921 alone.

The internal movements of refugees were the first characteristics of the famine that ARA workers described when they arrived in the region. J. Rives Childs, who was the ARA Kazan

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40 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 125-27. 125-127. On refugees who left their farms at the height of the famine and began to return as relief arrived and conditions stabilized see National Information Bureau. Commission on Russian Relief, The Russian Famines, 14, 19.
41 Refugee Movement – Medical Report, October 1921. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.4 – General
42 “Evacuation of Population from Famine Area,” and “Information as to Movements of Famine Population” New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.4 – General
district supervisor, wrote in his diary on his first train into Kazan from Moscow that “we
commenced to enter the borders of the famine area where the pinch of hunger and disease was
visibly evident on almost every side.” Childs explained that hunger looked like, “small Russian
railway stations into which hundreds of refugees from the famine-stricken villages were
crowding with all their earthly possessions.”43 “Americans arriving in Kazan,” according to one
account, had “their first personal contact with the famine” when they met large groups of people
gathered at railroad stations, attempting to leave the famine region.44 Masses of moving people
were the archetypical famine scene described in journals and diaries. Frank Golder, a historian of
Russia at Stanford University and an ARA “special investigator” sent to assess conditions in the
famine region in advance of relief operations, explained that “A real famine picture,” was not an
American kitchen or a food line or a failed crop in a field, it was “People with sacks on their
backs, hanging on to the sides of the train, stealing a ride under the cars and on the roofs.”45 He
described refugees waiting for trains and boats, overloading trains, piling off of trains moving in
many directions. “Hundreds of refugees, from various points of the Volga and other famine
districts, are hanging around the station,” wrote Golder at a stop on his way to the Caucasus,
“going here or going there because they have heard that somewhere there is food to be had.”46
[See Figures 4.3, 4.4]

At the Kazan station, Childs described the refugees as “numberless,” “hovering… like
alarmed and stricken birds of passage.”47 Descriptions by ARA officials like Childs often erased
the trajectories of refugees’ journeys by describing them as if they existed timelessly in mid-

43 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 23.
For refugees as first impression see also Golder and Hutchinson, On the Trail of the Russian Famine, 29 and the
testimony of Vernon Kellogg in Russian Relief: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 33.
45 Golder and Hutchinson, On the Trail of the Russian Famine, 214.
46 Golder and Hutchinson, On the Trail of the Russian Famine, 199.
47 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 25.
flight without origins or destinations. Refugees struggling to depart from the Kazan rail station were, according to Childs, “moving aimlessly about with no other apparent objective than to depart the famine stricken area.”48 One ARA medical report agreed that “Many refugees appear to have no destination in view or any plans for their future; they say they are going where they can find food, a rather hopeless search.”49 Refugees waiting for boats at a Volga river landing near Bogorodsk were “nomadic… waiting endlessly to go anywhere and everywhere.”50 One ARA publication explained that “a movement of a population away from the famine stricken area of the Volga” was due to the “naturally nomadic disposition” of peoples in the region.51 The motion of refugees was often naturalized in accounts by American relief workers who could do no more to explain or address refugee movements then they could the movements of “birds of passage” or “herds with the wild staring eyes of troubled animals.”52 “They will continue to wander thus,” wrote Frank Golder in his journal in a similar vein, “until frost and typhus relieve them of their misery.”53 “They are like guests caught at night in a burning hotel,” Golder lamented, employing a more human but more violent metaphor after several months touring famine areas “running here and there to find an outlet where none exists.”54

When ARA relief workers arrived in a village they were likely to encounter a wide array of moving peoples rather than a clear resident population tied timelessly to the particular place as they envisioned. Arriving at the Kazan railroad station in September 1921, Golder wrote in his

48 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 72.
49 Russian Unit Medical Report, April-May 1922. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.4 – General
50 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 120.
51 ARA N.Y. Bulletin February 1923. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.4 – General
52 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 25.97.
53 Golder and Hutchinson, On the Trail of the Russian Famine, 83.
54 Golder and Hutchinson, On the Trail of the Russian Famine, 203. On American Russian experts’ constructions of Slavic peoples as nomadic see Engerman, Modernization from the Other Shore. Refugees who did not move were also explained by notions of “fatalistic…Slavic nature.” ARA N.Y. Bulletin February 1923. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.4 – General
journal that “In and about the station are a great many refugees who had been brought here from
the Russo-German front in 1915, and who had since found a home in the villages of Kazan and
Ufa, but are now because of the famine, trying to make their way back to their original home.”
Golder recorded a conversation he had with “one poor woman who came to see us” whose
husband and oldest son had died in the war. She said that she had been sent to Kazan with her
younger children and had been living in a nearby village. However she explained that “Lately the
natives of that village had departed for Siberia, leaving her with the other poor refugees to shift
for themselves. There was nothing for them to do but start for their old home…”55 Here relief
agents who were investigating the people in an area they planned to provide with relief found
that the people they had expected to be there were gone and that the people there were from
elsewhere and were attempting to leave as well. Moreover, the migrating individuals and groups
they encountered defied the categorizations of nationality, region, and locality that a study of the
famine region and its hungry residents required. How could these Americans plan to feed
Russians in a particular area when the peoples in famine areas were in such flux and even
Russianness was difficult to pin down? Golder wrote in his journal that “I asked what her
nationality was and she replied, with tears in her eyes, that she did not know; at one time she was
a Russian, but was recently informed that she is a Pole, but would rather be a Russian.”56

While Americans who traveled to the Volga Valley as part of the ARA project were
supposed to help local Russians in particular areas, most people they encountered were on the
move – both physically and often across categories of nationality or ideology. Relief workers
saw themselves as purposeful travelers approaching local populations in specific places, but the
people they encountered in and out of the famine area evidenced extraordinary mobility that

dwarfed the movements of relief agents. As motion across geographic space formed a defining characteristic of the famine for refugees and aid workers, motion across categories of belonging through repatriation and international migration also became a key component of the famine relief project.

**Making Americans out of Relief: Repatriation**

When the ARA negotiated with the Soviet government to deliver relief supplies to Russia, they made the ability to repatriate Americans inside that country a key condition of their humanitarian work. The agreement negotiated between ARA officials and Soviet officials in late August 1921, known as the Riga Agreement, explicitly connected the ARA’s offer of relief to the guarantee that Soviet authorities would allow the ARA to “facilitate the departure from Russia of all Americans so desiring.” This was not a minor part of the agreement; the entire program of relief hinged on the concession that Americans in Russia could be identified and repatriated to the United States. The stipulation was “the absolute sine qua non of any assistance on the part of the American people,” read the agreement, which also warned that “the A.R.A. reserves to itself the right to suspend temporarily or terminate all of its relief work in Russia in case of failure on the part of the soviet authorities to fully comply with this primary condition.”

Soon after the accord was signed, notices from the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs were published in the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia* announcing that American citizens would be given the opportunity to leave the RSFSR and providing instructions on how to provide

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57 Gatrell, *Making of the Modern Refugee*, 8;
documentation of citizenship to get visas.\textsuperscript{59} The very enactment of the humanitarian project, then, was tied to the identification and movement of Americans in the Soviet Union. The repatriation program, like other components of famine relief, linked vital determinations about the composition of the American citizenry directly to the project of humanitarian aid. Far from a straightforward process, ARA administrators in Moscow, New York, and various Russian districts, and State Department officials in Washington and consular offices in places like Riga, Latvia attempted to assemble an ad-hoc system for not only repatriating Americans in Soviet Russia, but also answering broad questions about American national belonging on-the-ground in day-to-day operations.

The ARA project in Russia was not alone in relying on links between humanitarian intervention and the sorting out and movement of individuals from distressed areas to the United States. In fact, the identification and movement of potential repatriates was frequently tied logistically to the movement and coordination of relief throughout U.S. efforts during and after the Great War. For example, initial organization of relief programs soon after the outset of the war in France and Belgium in the fall of 1914 was coordinated by the same individuals who had just concluded a program to repatriate tens of thousands of fellow Americans who had become stranded in European war zones. Herbert Hoover had just finished supervising a repatriation program when he was tapped to lead the initial ARA relief efforts in Belgium.\textsuperscript{60}

In order to find and repatriate U.S. citizens in Soviet Russia, the ARA acted in semi-official capacities in the absence of formal U.S. diplomatic recognition of the RSFSR.\textsuperscript{61} ARA

\textsuperscript{59} The articles are quoted in translation in Charles E. Hughes to Herbert Hoover September 26, 1921, Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, ARA 433.1 - Repatriation of American citizens.
\textsuperscript{60} Curti, \textit{American Philanthropy Abroad; a History}, 229,32.
\textsuperscript{61} The ARA was not the only group who acted in such a capacity in the vacuum of formal diplomatic relations. For an account of how the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee drew on the ARA pattern to coordinate with the State Department and fill diplomatic roles to move and resettle people, see Jonathan Dekel-Chen, "An Unlikely Triangle:
officials acted sometimes as non-governmental agents, sometimes in close collaboration with
State and Commerce Department and U.S. Consular officials, and they sometimes filled the role
of diplomatic, consular, and immigration authorities themselves. In principle, the ARA worked
out a scheme with the State Department that let relief agents take care of all the work locating
and moving people inside of Soviet Russia where no official U.S. agents could operate.
American Consuls and State Department officials would take over once the repatriates had
reached exit points like Riga, Warsaw, or Constantinople. In practice, however, it was confusing
for ARA staff to tell what they could or should be doing. A typical case involved Morris Tolciss,
a naturalized American, his wife, and his daughter who was born in New York. After the brother
of Tolciss’s wife appeared at an ARA office in New York with his certificate of naturalization, a
staffer who was coordinating repatriation efforts was unclear how to proceed. “How far should
we go,” he wondered, “…to get in touch with the Tolciss family and assist them to reach Riga or
Warsaw? Are we in a position to admit or take responsibility of deciding whether the Tolciss in
Moscow is the same Tolciss mentioned in these naturalization papers or not?” What’s more, the
staffer lamented that there were many such cases waiting to be handled and that they did not
know what procedures to use.\textsuperscript{62} Indeed cases like the Tolciss family and the kinds of questions
they raised came up many hundreds of times as the ARA attempted to find and repatriate
Americans in Russia.

Files about repatriation produced by the ARA would be frustrating if viewed from a
perspective that understands individuals as static members of national groups or emigrants or

\textsuperscript{62} Sept 21, 1921 to Christian Herter Office of the Secretary, Dept of Commerce. Russian Famine Relief
immigrants moving clearly from one state to another. Often the case files lack clear answers to questions historians (and border guards and customs agents) ask about migrating individuals such as place of origin or destination, attachment (familial or emotional) to persons in previous or potential locations, or claimed or assigned motivations for travel or return. Migrants commonly lacked the documentation that helpers and handlers required. The changing and contradictory national, ideological, and familial affinities of individuals and their complex histories of residence across shifting geographic locations defied the kind of classification that helpers and handlers craved. As records formulated when potential repatriates passed through places like ARA district headquarters, ARA offices in Moscow, or the U.S. consulate in Riga, they are snapshots of the mid-point of journeys that followed many paths and directions and did not usually record locations of prior departure or potential arrival. While the story of the movements of a repatriated American citizen might be expected to both begin and end in the United States, more often these cases followed a multiplicity of trajectories and even included paths that both began and ended in Russia. They are therefore particularly useful for understanding the ARA’s humanitarian intervention and the repatriation program as having taken place in a moment of flux between national and ideological groups, characterized by motion across and between boundaries.

These records highlight how the movements of people who were wrapped up in the famine relief project were multidirectional, but also why they cannot be characterized as a free flow of people across borders. Migrations were produced and limited by the tumultuous selection and funneling of people through very controlled channels. Some migrants were thrust across particular pathways, others clamored for access to certain routes and destinations. Rather

63 Baron and Gatrell, Homelands, 2.  
than open transnational flows, these movements were both compelled by and occurred in spite of, overlapping local and long-distance power relationships. Limits to mobility were structured by geographic location, birthplace, prior movement, and familial connections. Pathways for migration bumped up against national, ideological, racial, and gender boundaries ranging from highly flexible to rigid and which were often shifting because of the movement of bodies. Furthermore, migrants contested and subverted attempts to find, count, and move them. While Americans imagined that both potential repatriates and refugees desired return or admission to the United States, individuals sometimes fought and rejected such impositions.65

Processing repatriation cases was a monumental undertaking. Even when U.S. citizenship could be clearly established, and individuals could be located among a population moved by war, revolution, civil war, and famine, they still had to be transported across wide swaths of territory, often in multiple jurisdictions, and moved through several emigration and immigration bureaucracies in Russia, other countries they passed through, and the United States. In most cases however, it was not clear at all who could claim U.S. citizenship, how they could prove it, and what the ARA could do to help them. Each case presented unique challenges. “As I understand it, the real Americans can leave Russia,” wrote an ARA administrator coordinating the repatriation plans with Hoover’s offices at the Commerce Department. “Of course,” he added in another letter, “the difficulty that comes to mind is that every one of these cases will have some peculiarity in it and we cannot expect to have everything in order.”66

The project of identifying “real Americans” in Russia and moving them to the United States was far from straightforward. U.S. citizenship could be lost in a variety of ways, including

65 Baron and Gatrell, Homelands, 6.
66 Perrin C. Galpin to Clarence C. Stetson, Office of the Secretary, Dept of Commerce, November 5, 1921; Galpin to Stetson Sept 28, 1921, Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File ARA 433.1 - Repatriation of American citizens.
through marriage, naturalized citizens staying too long in their country of origin, an inability to prove citizenship status, and through application to local Soviets for Soviet citizenship. Soviet citizenship rules also held competing claims to subjects born in the territory of the former Russian Empire and more recently under the new Soviet government. The potential for American citizenship, or citizenship itself could also be gained through marriage, other familial bonds or, the actions of family members, or also through the acquisition of exit and entry visas and U.S. immigration quota rules that allowed fixed numbers of particular Russians to become American each year. In the process of identifying and moving current and potential U.S. citizens, the ARA created Americans, and individuals used the humanitarian intervention to transform themselves into Americans. In other words, given the uncertainty over who was and was not American, the ARA did not simply relocate American citizens; it played an active role in determining citizenship. Often individuals’ national origins, prior geographic movements, and ideological affinities were unclear, and Americanness as both a tenuous legal condition and as cultural claim, as an identity, had to be constructed out of partial facts, sworn statements, and accidents of birth.

In many cases, individuals claimed citizenship but had lost their papers during years of travel, war, revolution, and movement. A woman “claiming to be an American medical missionary” who had come to Russia from China wanted help returning to the United States but had no documentation and said her U.S. passport was deposited with the Soviet Government.  

Because assertions of citizenship often relied on affidavits, claims of relation, and stories about past movements and intentions, petitioners collected endorsements and made claims on ideals of good citizenship practices and values such as service in the armed forces, established American family life, and business success. These claims frequently mimicked the promises and

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supporting guarantees that made up declarations of intention to become a citizen, and naturalization statements made to officials in the United States.\textsuperscript{68} A letter on behalf of one man petitioning to have his son brought over argued that “Sam Kilstoff is a Russian born \textit{American citizen}. He is at present employed in the Los Angeles Creamery Co. here, has no Bolshevik tendencies, is a hardworking, capable man of good reputation and well received.”\textsuperscript{69} In another example, a U.S. Congressman from Pennsylvania wrote to the ARA on behalf of two of his constituents, the brothers Morris and Joseph Winestein, who he argued “are law abiding citizens of Pittsburgh and entertain the highest character endorsements. They are thrifty, home loving men and should be aided in reuniting with their families, which have been torn asunder through death and starvation in Russia.” “I am sure the children will never become public charges,” the congressman wrote, “because the parents have sufficient means to support them properly, - in accordance with American standards.”\textsuperscript{70} The ARA New York office agreed to help find and repatriate the Winestein children in Odessa even though only one of the brothers, Morris, was a naturalized citizen. The other brother Joseph, they decided, could still have his children brought over as long as he could “supply evidence that he has declared his intention of becoming an American citizen, and when and where…”\textsuperscript{71}

Sometimes even when papers could be provided, they were an assemblage of official and unofficial documents, written in English and Russian, and of U.S., Soviet, and Russian imperial origins. This meant that names in each location did not match up - a reality that sometimes had to be overcome to secure the right of citizens to migrate and in other cases could be used by

\textsuperscript{68} See Hill, \textit{Handbook on Citizenship}.  
\textsuperscript{70} Letter from Guy E. Campbell, US House of Representatives 32\textsuperscript{nd} District, Pennsylvania November 15, 1922 to Galpin, ARA. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 437.3.  
\textsuperscript{71} Campbell to Galpin November 12, 1922; Haskell to ARA, NY May 1, 1923 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 437.3.
migrants to manipulate repatriation channels. Abraham Agranow, who was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in November 1922, utilized his new status to get the ARA interested in the case of his children Morris and Louis who were living in Moscow with their uncle. Although born in Russia and living in Russia, the children became eligible for repatriation when their father was naturalized. However while their father’s name was Agranow on his papers, the children’s names were sometimes listed as Morris and Louis but on their Russian documents they were named as Moishe and Leib Agranowitz. Their uncle meanwhile used the last name Agranowvitch.72

Individuals who had been born in Russia, then been naturalized as citizens in the United States, and then moved back to Russia for more than two years (or any foreign state for five years) might have lost their U.S. citizenship and become subject to the presumption that their original naturalization was fraudulent, unless they had returned for specific reasons. Because years of war, revolution, and civil war curtailed the ability of many people to travel, petitioners sometimes explained that despite having passed many years in Russia they had never intended to stay long outside the United States. Normally, American consular officers made determinations in unclear cases but because they could have no contact with people inside Soviet Russia, representatives from the ARA assumed a key role in the task of sorting out which Russian-Americans could still claim to be Americans despite extended residence in Russia.73

In coordination with the U.S. consular office in Riga, for example, the ARA helped work out the case of a Mr. Rosin who had been born in Russia and then lived for seven years in the United States becoming a naturalized citizen before returning to Russia in 1905. Based on the information Rosin gave to the ARA which was passed on to State Department officials through

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72 Russian Famine Relief Immigration and Evacuation File 1921-1923, ARA 433.4 - Repatriation of American citizens
73 Charles E. Hughes, Secretary of State, to Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce, November 4, 1921. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, ARA 433.2 - Repatriation of American citizens
the Consul in Riga, it was decided that the man was “not in a position to overcome the statutory presumption that he has ceased to be an American citizen.” This meant that the ARA would not provide Rosin with documentation that would enable him to leave Soviet Russia, but if he and his family somehow reached Riga on their own, and convinced the officials there that he intended to move permanently to the U.S. this time, they were told that they might receive a regular immigration visa for travel to the U.S. Meanwhile, Rosin’s attempt to solicit help from the ARA to return to the U.S. would lead to the formal eradication of his U.S. citizenship: the State Department wrote to the ARA explaining that because they had received the information that Rosin returned to his country of origin and established permanent residence there, “thereby bringing upon himself the presumption of fraudulent naturalization, the Department is requesting the Department of Justice to institute proceedings seeking to cancel Mr. Rosin’s naturalization.”

When people inside the United States petitioned the ARA on behalf of their relatives, individuals in question often had to be located at great lengths. Sometimes the ARA was asked to find people who had been out of contact with relatives for years and even to transform people who had never been to the United States, like Moishe and Leib Agranowitz, into American citizens. One man, John Schmitt of Philadelphia, entreated the ARA to help find his children in Russia. He had come to the U.S. from Russia in 1908, leaving his wife and two children to live with his father in Saratov, and had since been naturalized as an American citizen. Schmitt’s wife had died during the war and his father had also died recently. All of his “brothers were killed by the Bolsheviks during the war,” Schmitt wrote, and he had not heard any news from his children.

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74 Third Assistant Secretary of State to ARA NY April 30, 1923. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 426.7
75 Form for persons claiming citizenship through naturalization of husband or parent 1919, Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, ARA 433.1 - Repatriation of American citizens
since then. Requesting that the ARA help to locate his children and bring them to the United States, Schmitt could only suggest that his wife’s sister’s husband had a brother who owned a dry goods store in Kammishen and that perhaps if found the man “could possibly give some news as to the whereabouts” of his children.76

Potential repatriates who were in Soviet Russia often had a great deal of difficulty in reaching the ARA apparatuses to appeal for assistance. Individuals usually had to secure permission from local authorities to travel. Getting to regional offices, ARA headquarters in Moscow, and to ports of departure or overland borders also required a substantial amount of funds, resources, and a basic level of bodily health that many refugees lacked.77 For those who were able to reach the ARA authorities in a location like Moscow for assistance, the cost of travel from Moscow to Riga and then for a steamship journey from Riga to New York was several hundred dollars.78

While people in Soviet Russia who had never been to the United States could become American citizens through the repatriation program because of their familial ties, the ARA also had to manage citizenship changes surrounding new familial bonds: Americans and Russians who married in Russia during the ARA intervention could also gain, or lose, American citizenship. At least a dozen ARA relief workers who had come from the United States married Russians while they were conducting relief work. During the first year that the ARA was working in Soviet Russia, U.S. citizenship laws granted American citizenship to women who married male American citizens. In these cases, for ARA workers to bring their Russian wives to the U.S., they still needed to have the Soviet government recognize the change in citizenship

77 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 145.
78 Russian Famine Relief Immigration and Evacuation Rile, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens ARA 434.11.
status for Russian spouses and allow them to leave Soviet Russia. ARA administrators advised their colleagues on the best way for Russian brides to be transformed into Americans eligible to depart from Soviet Russia. To do this the wife had to note the intention on the marriage certificate when it was acquired and then register with the local soviet authorities for a document granting her the right to reside in Russia as an alien and stating that the woman was an American citizen. Subsequently the wife could use the document as acknowledgement from the soviet government of her new status and then obtain visas and travel just as her husband would. ARA Kazan District supervisor J. Rives Childs noted both the casual ease and relative frequency of such marriages in his diary, which recorded his own marriage and that of another American ARA officer in Kazan in the spring of 1922. Despite the fact that these two men represented a fifth of the American ARA officers in the Kazan District, the “unusual spectacle of the marriage of an American to a Russian,” as Childs described it, was strange enough to draw a crowd of over a thousand onlookers.79

However, after the passage of the Cable Act, also called the Married Women’s Independent Nationality Act, which changed U.S. citizenship rules regarding spouses of citizens, the ARA’s assistance for couples seeking such transformations became more tenuous. As a memorandum circulated to ARA staff to explain the act put it, “under a statute which went into effect September 22, 1922, no alien woman acquires American citizenship by marriage to an American citizen.”80 ARA leaders decided the organization should still take “informal action” and “use its good offices in endeavoring to secure the release of these women” but that “it will not press the cases in view of the fact that these women are no longer recognized by us as

79 Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 111-113. Child’s was also able to secure the departure of his Russian wife’s mother when he left Soviet jurisdiction in the spring of 1923. Childs and Cockfield, Black Lebeda, 183.
American citizens.” As in the cases of other potential Americans with familial ties to natural born or naturalized U.S. citizens, the ARA did continue to advise and assist its staff members to bring their Russian spouses to the U.S. albeit with greater difficulty. Often this meant long delays waiting for a new immigration quota year to begin before Russian spouses could obtain visas.

Sometimes marriage ties made individuals in Russia into American citizens even though they had not seen or heard from their spouse for years and had no knowledge of changes in citizenship status. A couple from Toledo, Ohio for example, asked the ARA for help repatriating the wife’s mother who had lived her whole life in Kiev. The mother, they explained, “is an American citizen as her husband was an American citizen at the time of his death some years ago in Detroit.” This was the case despite the fact that the mother “is probably not aware of the fact that she is now an American citizen.”

While prior to the Cable Act, a spouse’s activities in the United States or a marriage to an ARA staffer could make a Russian into an American citizen or provide her with a pathway for migration to the United States, sometimes marriages worked against the hopes of individuals to migrate and even transformed some American citizens into Russians. The cases broke down along gendered lines because U.S. citizenship laws both before and after the Cable Act gave priority to male citizens as family heads. Wilhelmina Wetch was living in Odessa in “a very precarious condition” according an ARA staffer who explained her repatriation case. “Inasmuch as she is in possession of her birth certificate from Bismark, N.D.” the ARA worker ventured, “we anticipate no difficulty in securing her release from Russia.” However, upon further

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81 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, ARA 431.8 - Instructions concerning Russian wives of American citizens
82 New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Liaison Division, American Consul at Riga, ARA 51.4 - American Passports
83 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 434.11
84 Cott, Public Vows, 165.
inquiries the ARA announced that they could not help the woman. “It would appear to us that
your sister is a Russian subject owing to her marriage with a citizen of that country,” they wrote
to her brother in North Dakota in April 1922, “We are sorry that this matter is outside our
jurisdiction.”

Although familial ties were often the basis for individuals requesting help from the ARA
for others in Russia and could in many cases be used by the ARA to help people migrate,
sometimes family connections made people want to stay in Russia despite the ARA’s advice.
The ARA office in Moscow worked to repatriate a woman named Cecelia Gaertner who had
received permission to depart Soviet Russia but wanted to bring her two nephews who were both
Russian citizens with her. An ARA administrator explained to Gaertner’s sister Alice in
Brookline, Massachusetts, that the woman should abandon the children if she wanted to return to
the United States. “Moscow advising drop them and go at once,” he summarized in a cablegram.
However, to the dismay of ARA staffers working on the case, it turned out that “Miss Gaertner is
quite unwilling to quit Russia unless she may be accompanied by her two nephews.” Ultimately
the ARA was able to secure permission from Soviet authorities for the children to leave, having
“rendered all possible unofficial aid,” but they were not able to get American visas for the
children because the Russian immigration quota for the year had already been filled.

Soviet citizenship and naturalization laws and citizenship practices of the former Russian
Empire held competing claims over individuals whom ARA personnel attempted to repatriate.

85 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 437.4
Disputes over the citizenship status of children of such marriages or of migrating parents were also a complex issue. For Soviet rules see Golfo Alexopoulos, “Soviet Citizenship, More or Less: Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (2006), 504, Lohr, *Russian Citizenship*, 134.

86 Dailey to Mrs Alice L Gaertner Brookline, Mass. November 14, 1922; Quinn, ARA Russia to ARA NY 30 March 1923- Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, 434.14
other countries. Therefore, when individuals born in Russia who migrated to the United States obtained U.S. citizenship they always remained Russian citizens in the eyes of both the Russian Imperial and Soviet states. When the ARA attempted to repatriate even those naturalized Russian-Americans which it found to be clearly American citizens, these people were still understood as Soviet citizens by the Soviet authorities who in their eyes had only agreed to allow the repatriation of American citizens. Soviet authorities especially pressed back at the way that ARA administrators attempted to make determinations about disputed citizenship statuses despite their agreed upon role as humanitarian relief workers. “The People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs is sorry to state that it cannot recognize the right of the ARA to decide questions of international law even if the latter are debatable,” wrote an official in the Commissariat’s Anglo-American Department to ARA headquarters in Moscow, “Such matters are usually referred to representatives of governments who are authorized to take up questions of this nature and settle them.”87

The ARA was able to repatriate many of these individuals through negotiations with the office of the Representative, Plenipotentiary of the RSFSR With all Foreign Relief Organizations and the Visa Department, of the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, but Russian authorities maintained that “Russians naturalized in the United States and their families will not be recognized as American citizens; they will be able to travel only as Russian citizens.” It was often more difficult for naturalized Americans who had been born in Russia to obtain the paperwork necessary to leave Soviet borders or even to obtain permission from local Soviet

87 Gregory Weinstein, Anglo-American Department, People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to ARA Russian Unit, Moscow 17 October 1921. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Liaison Division, American Consul at Riga, ARA 51.6 - Soviet Government
authorities to leave the areas where they resided. It seems that in some cases men of military age had particular difficulty securing permission from local Soviets to leave the country. Uncertainties about the statuses of individuals who had moved into and out of the region in a period marked by shifting territorial borders and revolutionary changes in government persisted even when practical parameters for the movement of Americans out of Russia were generally agreed upon. For example, ARA administrators and Soviet officials at the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs had to trade information and discuss nuanced questions like “whether the Soviet Government regards as still Russian, persons who were born in territory formerly part of Russia, (but now no longer part thereof; for instance, Poland and Lithuania), and who, having emigrated to the United States and acquired American citizenship, happen to be at the present moment within the limits of the Soviet Republic.”

Sometimes the ARA reached deliberately beyond its mandate to repatriate American citizens and worked to facilitate the migration of Russian subjects who did not claim to have U.S. citizenship. The case of a woman named Margaret Arronet provides an illustrative example. Arronet was employed by the ARA at Petorgad and Kazan and later served as a clerk in the Administrative Division in Moscow. She had traveled to the United States after the Revolution to study civil engineering at Cornell where she became engaged to an American engineering student. Working in Russia for the ARA and “still a Russian subject,” Arronet hoped to migrate to the United States. Despite her ARA connections, the move was difficult. Even if Arronet

88 New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Liaison Division, American Consul at Riga, ARA 51.6 - Soviet Government
89 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 436.28
90 ARA Russian Unit, Moscow to Gregory Weinstein, Anglo-American Department, People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, 11 October 1921. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Liaison Division, American Consul at Riga, ARA 51.6 - Soviet Government
could secure permission to leave Russia, she would have to navigate restrictive U.S. immigration rules in order to enter the United States. 91

Cases like hers fell outside the jurisdiction of aid workers who were explicitly excluded from attempting to move Russian subjects to the United States. In reality, however, determining the difference between an American and a Russian, aligning prospective movement to the rules and requirements of emigration and immigration in the respective nations, and executing migration was a thoroughly complex, often capricious process that the ARA actively coordinated. The geographic location, national origin, or legal limitations upon individuals who petitioned the ARA for such help or whom the organization took it upon itself to assist in moving were often not the dominant factors enabling or preventing such movements. In cases where citizenship of individuals could not be established, the ARA sometimes abandoned claimants to their own devices, but sometimes collaborated with consular and state department officials “to use…unofficial good offices” to enable people to migrate. 92

Unofficially, consular officials and ARA administrators admitted that they had “been authorized to use…discretion in granting visas to inhabitants of Russia…” 93 Indeed, in Arronet’s case, which was not atypical, the ARA was deeply wrapped up in securing and facilitating her migration. In cases like hers, the organization lent and transferred money on migrants’ behalf, purchased steamship tickets, and worked with Soviet authorities to secure permission for the departure of even Russian citizens and to acquire exit visas. They also coordinated travel plans and communicated on behalf of migrants between Soviet and U.S.

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91 Perrin Galpin to Charles Michelson, NY World Washington Bureau, June 1, 1922. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, ARA 431.9 - Requests for information and aid for immigration to the United States (letter A)
92 For example, Department of State to Sam Schindler, Brooklyn NY November 13, 1922. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 436.15
93 Hurley, American Consul Riga to Coolidge, ARA Russian Unit Moscow, December 8, 1921. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Liaison Division, American Consul at Riga, ARA 51.3 – General
government offices, steamship companies, U.S. consuls outside of Russia, other parties to travel arrangements, and American relatives or friends. The ARA even arranged for arrival plans stateside, including planning with Customs House officials in New York for dock passes so that ARA officials or friends and relatives could meet boats upon arrival.

While the ARA frequently brushed aside requests for help in migrating to the United States from Russian subjects, they often breached Russian and U.S. rules, treaty obligations, and their own policies on the question. When they limited such activities to the repatriation of American citizens, they also crossed between official and un-official capacities, and stepped in and out of U.S. and Russian rules governing emigration and immigration. Agreed on boundaries for ARA repatriation activities were often transgressed, poorly understood even by top officials, and difficult to adhere to in practical application.

It must be noted that while the ARA assumed that Americans, potential Americans, and many Russians would want to immigrate to the United States, individuals often baffled them by resisting such categorizations and expectations. Potential repatriates did not inevitably desire to move to the United States. Nick Kreekonoff of West Virginia wrote to Hoover asking for help in locating his ten year old U.S.-born son in Samara so that he could be brought to the United States. The ARA had an emergency passport issued for the boy and successfully located him in Pedegorneye and provided him with food and temporary lodging. However to the dismay of ARA staff and the boy’s father, the boy did not want help migrating to America; he ran away and the ARA was unable to locate him again.94

Another good example comes from the case of four children named Duchowitz who appeared in a children’s refuge home in Moscow claiming to be Americans. The children

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explained that they had been born in the United States but had come to Russia with their mother who had died in Samara in the previous spring of 1921. The ARA located their father Vasili Duchowitz in Washington State, expecting that he would want them brought back to the United States. The father’s reply, written in Russian, frustratingly ran counter to their project. “You ask me, why I do not bring my children to this country,” wrote Duchowitz, “I sent them money before… I try to help my children, but it is not my fault, that I am poor. I cannot work hard, I get sick. If I would have money enough I would leave myself for Moscow.” “Tell them, I am alive and well,” Duchowitz requested, “Tell them, I will do my best to earn enough and come to Moscow.”

Ultimately, determinations about who these individuals were and where they fell among shifting citizenship boundaries were vitally formative for specific people who appealed in these cases to migrate, but also had high stakes for Soviet Russia as an emerging project for social organization and as a nation. Soviet citizenship policy meant much more than a set of rules demarcating who could live in the country. These questions and their application in practice were understood as providing the basis for the emergence of a new Soviet person and for the development of a new Soviet world itself. As one historian of Soviet citizenship laws reminds us, “Official instructions described the way that Soviet citizens would be, how they should act, and what they should feel.” Soviet citizens themselves would be the supporters and enactors of state goals, fulfilling key obligations to the Soviet project. Who was and who was not a member of the Soviet state and the obligations and practices that such membership meant were at the heart of the project underway in Soviet Russia.

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95 Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Repatriation of American Citizens, ARA 434.5
Soviet rules about citizenship were also in flux during the years that the ARA was attempting to identify and move Americans in Soviet Russia. While the RSFSR initially continued some Russian Imperial citizenship practices like asserting that Russians naturalized abroad continued to be Russians, the new Soviet polity and its rules for inclusion and exclusion were also meant to instantiate a radical break from the past. Rather than demarcating citizenship based on nationality or territory, the Soviet state would unite the working classes of all countries.\textsuperscript{97} The 1918 constitution of the RSFSR had provided for the naturalization of international workers who wanted to become part of the new socialist project, and foreign workers residing in Russia could be granted citizenship through application to local soviets. In practice, however, immigration and naturalization were limited by war and famine. Visa restrictions gave preference to groups like skilled workers, and suspicion of foreigners shaped the execution of these policies especially with respect to return migrants. Later, certain classes of former subjects of the Russian Empire and Soviet citizens living abroad who had rejected the Soviet state lost their citizenship status through an involuntary mass denaturalization.\textsuperscript{98} What were in theory initially relatively open policies in regard to citizenship for workers and supporters of the revolutionary project were limited by control of immigration processes by state security agencies and ultimately by policies that, as in the United States and elsewhere during the interwar period, became increasingly intolerant of dual loyalties and cross border movements.\textsuperscript{99}

Decisions about the movement of people and which ones were or would become American citizens were also at the heart of questions about the United States as a nation that were undergoing crucial shifts in the first years of the 1920s. New legislation passed only a few

\textsuperscript{97} Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less," 490, 492.
\textsuperscript{99} Lohr, \textit{Russian Citizenship}, 160. Sergei Kishkin, \textit{Sovetskoe grazhdanstvo} (Moscow: Narodnyi komissariat iustitsii RSFSR, 1925)
months before the ARA operation in Russia began in 1921 created quota restrictions for groups of particular national origins for the first time, limiting their migration to the United States based on a prewar estimation of the composition of the U.S. population.\textsuperscript{100} Immigration restriction advocates who promoted the legislation argued for the exclusion of “the undesirable races of eastern and south-eastern Europe” from entering the United States and becoming part of the American nation because they “were thought to be ‘so alien, so ignorant, and so helpless.’” Flows of these migrants were purportedly “sometimes said to have their headquarters in Warsaw, sometimes in Constantinople,” both primary exit points for Russian political refugees and Russian migrants fleeing famine conditions.\textsuperscript{101} Advocates for the use of quotas to exclude immigrants along racial lines notably cited Russian refugees as an example of the potential migration that ought to be checked. Prominent eugenicist Madison Grant asserted that “When the Bolsheviks in Russia are overthrown, which is only a question of time, there will be a great massacre of Jews and I suppose we will get the overflow unless we can stop it.”\textsuperscript{102}

Questions about who was or who could become an American overlapped in meaningful and practical ways with questions about the emerging “peculiarly American vocation” of intervening in the care of famine victims and refugees in and out of places like Soviet Russia. As national origins quota legislation took shape in the Quota Act of 1921, whether refugees would receive special status outside the quota system was a part of the debate about the design of the new restrictions. A 1921 Senate report on proposed “Emergency Immigration Legislation” included a provision that would allow the Secretary of Labor to admit immigrants in excess of restrictive national quotas “when, in his opinion, such action is justifiable as a measure of

\textsuperscript{100} Higham, \textit{Strangers in the Land}, 308-11.
\textsuperscript{101} Lake and Reynolds, \textit{Drawing the Global Colour Line}, 312.
\textsuperscript{102} Quoted in Higham, \textit{Strangers in the Land}, 306.
humanity.”"103 In Congressional debates on various exemptions to quota limitations in the bill that became the Quota Act, the situation in Russia was the only example used in the discussion over a proposed exemption for “aliens who are fugitives or refugees for political reasons.” Would membership in the communist party in a country where it was outlawed allow communists to enter the U.S. under the provision? And wouldn’t such refugees be subject to deportation from the United States for the same reason? Would “all the people in Russia,” several congressmen wondered, “who are opposed to the government of Lenin and Trotski be permitted to come in?” Representatives grappled with overlapping concerns for the potential American role in helping refugees from “the good deal of turmoil in the various nations of the earth” and the sense that the “flood tide” of refugees must be prevented from entering the United States at a “time when we are trying to preserve American institutions” from influences like “bolshevists.” The final speech before a vote rejected the exemption for refugees, given by House Majority Leader Frank Mondell, concluded that the preservation of a restrictive sense of Americanness was more important than an expanded American role in providing for refugees. “What shall it profit America,” the leader intoned to applause, “if she shall afford asylum to all the earth and lose her own soul.”104

Such questions arose at a moment that was important for not only drawing new boundaries around potential Americanness that refashioned the ability of migrants to enter the United States and become citizens but also at a moment where Americans were defining a role for themselves in the world as humanitarians. While the repatriation of Americans and potential

Americans inside Soviet Russia was tied to the very execution of the ARA’s humanitarian program, ARA efforts to implement famine relief amidst the management of refugee movements inside and outside of Russian geo-political boundaries also reveal a complex and multidirectional process at the borders of relief that shaped the composition of the United States and understandings of its role in the world.

**Making Americans out of Moving Russians: Refugees in Constantinople**

As some ARA officials came to see refugees moving within the Russian famine region in all directions as a defining feature of the famine, they also directed their attention to groups of people – also understood as refugees – who had crossed outside of Russian borders but were still in need of relief. At Constantinople, a major exit point for migrating Russians, the collection of Russian refugees streaming into the city seemed to present a particularly acute problem. There, a number of people who had fled Russia during the Revolution and Civil War for political reasons were joined daily by more people fleeing famine conditions. This particular makeup of people, Russians outside of Russia, presented the ARA with a special case because many were subjects of the Russian Empire who fled the Revolution or lost the Civil War and had become stateless with the establishment of the RSFSR; the place they were from no longer existed. The problem in Constantinople, as the ARA staff who worked there saw it, was about much more than where these people would get food. “It was deeper than that,” as one report put it, because the issue was not just temporary food relief; “some permanent solution” had to be implemented. Aided and housed in some degree by Allied army forces occupying Turkey, the time for such temporary conditions was running out; according to one report it was “clear the great number of Russians in
Constantinople must be evacuated before Peace is concluded. Where are they to go?"\(^{105}\) In conjunction with a collection of international organizations including the League of Nations, the American Red Cross, and the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Fund, the ARA spearheaded a plan that would link funding for the temporary feeding of Russian refugees in Constantinople to “the condition that a way should be found to evacuate them to countries where they could find work and would gradually be absorbed in the economic life of the place to which they were sent.”\(^{106}\) [See Figure 4.5]

Over 150,000 Russian refugees came through Constantinople between 1920 and 1923, including tens of thousands who came simultaneously as part of defeated armies during the Civil War.\(^{107}\) Because many of these people had left a Russian state that no longer existed, and could not return to Soviet Russia or did not want to obtain Soviet citizenship, they often lacked valid identity papers and were not nationals or subjects of any government that might allow them to enter or give them passports to travel elsewhere. This condition of statelessness made it difficult or impossible for refugees in Constantinople to apply for visas to migrate to other locations or to enter other states if they did have the means to reach them. In a foundational moment for its emerging activities, the League of Nations declared the popular Norwegian arctic explorer Fridtjof Nansen its High Commissioner for Russian Refugee Relief. Nansen created a new international identity document which came to be called the “Nansen passport,” which his committee issued to Russian refugees on behalf of the League of Nations. The passport would be

\(^{105}\) New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, Box 86, Folder 6 - Constantinople, General
\(^{106}\) The American Relief Administration in Constantinople, September 8, 1922. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.6 - Constantinople, General
\(^{107}\) April 22 press release, New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, Constantinople, ARA 87.1 – General; Marrus, The Unwanted, 59-60; Surface and Bland, American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period, 269,106-07.
used to verify individual identities and could also help enable travel to and perhaps also
resettlement in countries where it was recognized.108

These circumstances meant that “the Constantinople problem differs from any other relief
work undertaken by the ARA,” according to one memorandum, because usually the ARA
operated within and with the help of the apparatuses of nation states, that is, “the work of the
ARA has always been among nationals and geared towards a government machine.” Perhaps
unique among other ARA programs geared specifically to populations tied to nation-states, the
problem itself was far from exceptional. “Statelessness was a common condition in interwar
Europe,” as one historian reminds us.109 The ARA worked to facilitate the resettlement of the
Russian refugees in Constantinople because the particular situation of these displaced Russians
meant that, as one memorandum put it, “evacuation is the cheapest form of relief.” But it was
also understood that a deeper and more thorough kind of relief was required for Russians in
Constantinople, because they were stateless. “These are indeed refugees,” wrote the ARA’s top
administrator in Constantinople invoking the implication of statelessness that would eventually
characterize use of the term in contrast to its frequent contemporary application to people
moving even within Russia to flee violence or hunger, “so the problem…should mean much
more than saving their bodies.110

In order to tackle the problem of displaced Russians waiting in Constantinople, the ARA
worked in conjunction with the League of Nations to try to get various countries to accept
numbers of refugees for resettlement. Assuming that the United States would be among the most

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108 Lohr, Russian Citizenship, 149; Marrus, The Unwanted, 52,86-89,94-95.
109 Alexopoulos, “Soviet Citizenship, More or Less,” 499.499; Mark Mazower, Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth
America,” American Quarterly 57:3 (September 2005), 727-749; Catheryn Seckler-Hudson, Statelessness: With
Special Reference to the United States (Washington, DC: Digest Press, 1934).
110 Arthur Ringland, Memorandum for Admiral Bristol – October 12, 1923. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And
Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Russian refugees in Constantinople, ARA 440.7 - Reports
desirable destinations for potential migrants, ARA administrators planned to move a portion of the Russian refugees to U.S. ports. In doing so, the relief workers found that their humanitarian goals collided with U.S. immigration rules in ways that could be either inhibiting or mutually supportive. Hoping to gather potential migrants that he felt would make the best candidates for entry and absorption into the United States, Arthur Ringland, the ARA staffer who headed up the Constantinople project, proposed a plan that would “intelligently select immigrants for America.”

The process of selecting potential Russian migrants and aiding them in travel to the United States tied together simultaneous questions about the American nation and how it would be composed via immigration and the American nation and its changing role on the world stage. The program and the questions it raised show how new limitations and restrictions on American identity created by immigration restriction legislation overlapped with new extensions of the American role in the world through humanitarian initiatives.

Ringland and his coworkers developed a system wherein a “board of American examiners” utilized a standardized examination questionnaire to gather data on and rate refugees for potential aid in migrating to the United States. They developed a detailed questionnaire that was based on elements of the Army Intelligence Tests Alpha and Beta – early standardized testing implements created for use in sorting American military personnel during the Great War. The selective sentiments behind the plan drew from the same ideas about race, national character, and Americanness that were animating the push for greater immigration restriction in the United States. Standardized tests used during the War were already being repurposed to aid

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111 Ringland to Walter Brown June 4, 1923 New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, Constantinople, ARA 87.1 – General
in evaluating immigrants for entrance in the United States at American ports, and for the potential detection of Bolshevik tendencies among workers in factories on the U.S. west coast.\textsuperscript{113} Eugenicists pointed to data from the wartime application of the same tests to sort Army recruits, which showed that soldiers born in Slavic countries scored significantly lower on average than those born in the United States.\textsuperscript{114} The same data was used in 1924 to support the eugenic rationale for limiting immigration quota restrictions based on the 1890 census rather than a later population count in the first report where a proposal for the more restrictive formula emerged.\textsuperscript{115}

The system of examination, what Ringland called “selective immigration,” would ensure that only particular types of refugees would receive help in migrating to the United States. As Rear Admiral Mark Bristol, the commander of the U.S. Naval detachment in Turkish waters who coordinated aspects of the program with the ARA, explained in a telegram to Secretary of State A.W. Dulles, the evaluation system meant that “We can certify that the above refugees will make excellent citizens” because they “have been recommended to [the] consulate only after individual examination before this committee composed of representatives of American organizations here.” According to his assessment, “they are of [a] type in striking contrast to unselected immigrants now entering the United States because of present stupid immigration laws which afford no adequate safeguards at [the] source from entry of Bolshevists, thieves, prostitutes, and clever degenerates.”\textsuperscript{116}


\textsuperscript{114} Higham, \textit{Strangers in the Land}, 275.


\textsuperscript{116} Bristol to Secretary of State, Washington 13 June 1923. Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Russian refugees in Constantinople, ARA 440.2 - Evacuation File, United States, Russian refugee relief society
In some ways U.S. immigration restriction legislation interfered with Ringland’s proposed plan to select individuals and move them to the U.S. as a basis for relief operations in Constantinople. The consulate in Turkey could only grant 50 visas weekly, so even if the number of refugees they wanted to move fit within the Russian quota for the year, they had to be moved in batches over time rather than all at once unless a special dispensation could be agreed upon. This caused a number of serious roadblocks. Transportation could not be contracted in bulk to save costs. The idea that resettlement was cheaper than indefinite feeding and support was mitigated by the fact that refugees had to be fed while waiting for resettlement. Allocating visas over time put refugees in competition with Russian migrants obtaining visas at other U.S. consulates who also were trying to reach U.S. shores before the yearly quota for Russians was full. In some cases at least, the goal of evacuating Russian refugees from Constantinople to the United States could work around the quota system, for example by classifying children born to Russian refugees during their time in Constantinople under the Turkish quota.  

In other ways, though, the operation in Constantinople ran parallel to systems for restricting some migrants from reaching the United States. Proposals for the humanitarian evacuation of Russian refugees in Constantinople were about more than opening pathways for movement to the United States; facilitating the movement of certain groups of refugees as part of humanitarian mission was specifically designed as a means to inhibit the movement of other groups. At the core of Ringland’s plan for selective immigration was the idea that selected individuals could fill up quota positions so that other types of potential migrants could not move to the United States. “I am worried,” Ringland wrote to the ARA Europe director Walter Lyman.

Brown, “because of the influx here of thousands of Jews of the most obnoxious type, planning to
go to America on the first ships in June and thus absorbing the quota.”118 In another letter to
Brown, Ringland explained how he had “undertaken immediate steps to select the ‘pure
Russians.’ And believe me they will be ‘pure’ for I am heartsick of the ‘impure’ that are flocking
here…” Conveying the urgency with which he was moving to execute his plan to be ready for
the beginning of the new quota year when it began in July 1923, he contended that “we must get
busy at once or the ‘impure’ will crowd us out.”119 Discussions about promoting certain
migration and limiting the movements of others often employed eugenicist and particularly anti-
Semitic appeals of the kind that animated simultaneous immigration restriction proposals in the
United States.120 Ringland saw his own efforts as being in direct competition for Russian quota
spots with other aid organizations like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and he cited a sense
of “surprise that the United States freely admitted so many Jews from Russia because many of
them were being deliberately sent to America to spread Bolshevist propaganda.”121 The idea, put
in more general terms, was that if “highly desirable immigrants” could be funneled into U.S
ports they could block at least some of “all the riff-raff entering our country” from obtaining
quota spots.122

Russians in Constantinople critiqued the plans of the ARA and other international
organizations to direct their resettlement and rejected the logic behind attempts to organize their
movement. Instead, a committee established among the Russian population in Constantinople

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87.1 – General
87.1 – General
120 Higham, Strangers in the Land, 270-86, 309.
121 Arthur C Ringland, Memorandum on Evacuation of Refugees to America, Arthur C Ringland, “Re Immigration
to the United States” New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, Constantinople, ARA 87.1 – General
122 Ringland to Haskell, March 13, 1923. New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, Constantinople,
ARA 87.1 – General
argued that restrictions on their travel ought to be abolished and Russian organizations
themselves ought to cooperate to plan their evacuation and settlement in other countries. As in
the case of potential repatriations planned by the ARA, Russian refugees in Constantinople
rejected ARA assumptions that they would want to migrate to the United States if given the
opportunity. “From the point of view of the refugees, America is the most desirable destination,”
assumed one ARA worker in a report “because of its resources, because of its number of
established Russians from whom they could secure help, and because of its ability to absorb
those who would be able to work.” However, a survey by the Russian Committee in Turkey
found that the United States ranked only third on a list of countries where Russians in
Constantinople hoped to migrate, with more than five times the number of people hoping to
move to Serbia as those hoping to move to the United States.

Ringland and the leaders of other aid groups who collaborated on the plan for selective
immigration thought they had developed a novel idea as they attempted to shape the make-up of
the population of newest Americans at their source. In fact, their program was conceived in a
period marked by a constellation of American attempts to extend the goals of immigration
restriction by affecting emigration from European points of departure.

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124 Russian Committee in Turkey, Materials concerning the evacuation of Russian refugees from Constantinople (Constantinople, November 1922). New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Refugees, ARA 86.6 - Constantinople, General
Ultimately, the planning and execution of refugee resettlement in Constantinople was part of a broader moment in which the United States was redefining its interactions with the world through both immigration restriction and an expanding role for humanitarian intervention. Narrowing the boundaries around American citizenship and national identity sometimes overlapped with and sometimes crossed purposes with a growing notion of Americans’ position in international projects like humanitarian work and the care and resettlement of refugees. Defending his system of selecting refugees for assistance in migrating to the United States against charges that some of those chosen were “refugees who purely from the point of view of the U.S. would not make good citizens,” Ringland explained to the ARA New York office that humanitarian motives behind refugee evacuation sometimes bumped up against attempts to use refugee resettlement as an opportunity to create a particular kind of Americans. “I am sorry that a bungle was made on some of the convoys — that is, the sending of some undesirables,” Ringland lamented, “Dealing with the hopes and fears of human beings is about the hardest job that I have ever tackled.” 126 Actors on the ground often had a wrenching time balancing the deep empathy they felt for individuals in need, the universalizing sentiments that underlay humanitarian motives for relief, and the practices of selection and differentiation that made up the practical task of identifying, feeding, and moving people. Broad questions about the composition of the United States and its role in aiding migrants in places like Constantinople crossed on a practical level for relief workers who grappled with overlapping and yet often divergent programs of helping Russian famine victims, sorting out Russians and Americans, and attempting to facilitate or steer their movements.

126 Frank Page to Ringland November 27 1923; Ringland to Page November 19, 1923, Russian Famine Relief Immigration And Evacuation File, 1921-1923, Russian refugees in Constantinople, ARA 439.8 – Correspondence
Conclusion

Although large quantities of food and supplies were transported from the United States to Soviet Russia during the Volga famine, the movement of less than 300 relief workers who brought them represents only a small part of the history of moving people who produced the relief project. A focus on the tenuous movements of migrants because of, or despite, powerfully controlled pathways offers a different way to understand this moment of humanitarian intervention which is frequently framed in the context of the spread of American economic power and cultural ideals but also as part of the triumph of apparatuses of the nation-state like increasing policing of migration, physical borders, and citizenship. Placing the movements and immobilities of migrants at the center of the story of humanitarian intervention also challenges the assumptions that humanitarian relief meant that one clearly defined national group traveled to help another sedentary, bounded and fixed national group. Far from the “voluntary giving by one people to another,” as one seminal work summed up the assumption of national and cultural distinctiveness that has long undergirded the history of American international humanitarianism, the ARA project in Russia drew on extensive overlaps between these peoples and both deployed and attempted to erase distinctions between them.127 The “one people” who gave aid to another had to be actively constructed as distinct and was separated out through great difficulty, even as universalizing ideas underlay the motives of humanitarian agents and the potential for individuals from one group to become part of the other.128 Moreover, these programs were part

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128 On the dual uses of discourses of difference and universality in American humanitarian projects see Rosenberg, "Missions to the World: Philanthropy Abroad."
of a process of changing the composition of the American people through repatriation, naturalization, and refugee migration which were tied to the process of delivering aid.

Both expansive and restrictive notions of the way that Americans would interact with peoples and places in the world can be seen in the complex process of defining and enacting a distinctively “American” relief effort that was central to the intervention on behalf of Soviet Russians. Such connections are most clearly identifiable at the borders of relief efforts; at the locations and moments where the boundaries between who and what were American and who and what were Soviet were far from apparent. The identification and movement of people within and across national boundaries were closely tied with efforts to describe and control the movements of food and supplies that were at the heart of the relief effort. Aid delivery and the conduits of migration were deeply interconnected, and each crossed into and out of boundaries of geography, nationality, and ideology.
Figure 4.1: ARA Headquarters Staff at Moscow, Russian Personnel
ARA Russian Unit – Box 395 Photographs, ca. 1921-1923
Figure 4.2: Map of Russia Showing Refugee Movements
ARA, New York Office, Subject File, 1919-1924, Maps, Box 32, Folder 1
Figure 4.3: Refugee train passing through Alexandrovsk
ARA Russian Unit – Box 395 Photographs, ca. 1921-1923

Figure 4.4: American National Red Cross, Box 181, Folder 10- Russia Reports, 1920-1922, Hoover Institution Archives
Figure 4.5: View of Russian refugee immigrants boarding the SS Canada leaving from Constantinople or Smyrna, Turkey and bound for the United States
Charles Claflin Davis Visual Materials Collection, Harvard University
Epilogue – “Home by America:” The Petrograd Children’s Colony and the Pathways of American Empire

In late 1918, American Red Cross workers in Siberia gathered several groups of children, totaling about one thousand in all, who were living along the Ural Mountains and took charge of their care. The groups of young Russians had been organized by a committee of their parents in Petrograd and sent away from the city for the summer in order to escape food shortages. Accompanied by educators, servants, and other adult supervisors, the children had been cut off from communication from their homes in Petrograd as battles between the Red and White armies had moved into the Ural region. Despite noting that the children’s groups were accompanied by an array of caretakers, and well aware that “the American Red Cross ha[d] no legal relation of guardianship to these children,” the “American Red Cross immediately interested itself,” claiming both a “moral obligation” and a response that would be “entirely humanitarian.”

American practices of cleanliness, daily routine, eating, clothing, and education were important parts of the imposed program of Red Cross aid. But as the civil war brought advancing Bolshevik control, moving the Petrograd Children’s Colony, as it came to be called, was the central technique that ARC officials used to care for its members.¹ ARC workers first consolidated groups into a single “colony,” then moved the children eastward across Siberia to Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, and then to Vladivostok, where they were housed in a military barracks off the coast on Russian Island while U.S. and Allied military forces occupied the city.

¹ “Facts About the Petrograd Colony Cared For By The American Red Cross in Siberia,” and League of Red Cross Societies, Headquarters Geneva, “Help Us to Restore these Children to Their Parents” Hoover Institution Archives, American National Red Cross (hereafter ANRC), Box 132, Petrograd Children’s Colony, General, 1918-1920, 1988.

After more than a year holding the Petrograd Children’s Colony in its custody, the American Red Cross determined it was time to return the young Russians to their parents in Petrograd, as U.S. military forces were withdrawing from eastern Siberia. They never considered the possibility of turning the children over to local Soviet authorities despite demands from the Soviet Government, and they abandoned the option of rail travel along Red Army controlled railways through the heart of Bolshevik Russia. The American Red Cross instead planned to execute what they called “the biggest accomplishment of its kind that has ever been undertaken by any relief organization in the history of the world.”² They decided to charter a Japanese cargo vessel called the *Yamei Maru*, retrofit it with ventilation, water systems, and living quarters to house about 800 children, and sail east from Vladivostok to reach Petrograd via an around the world voyage. Taking the Petrograd Children’s Colony “home by America” as the expedition’s leader American Red Cross Major Riley Allen described the scheme, meant a journey from eastern Siberia to Japan, San Francisco, through the Panama Canal, to New York then across the Atlantic to Brest, France, and north to Finland, where there would be easy access to return the children to Petrograd. [See Figure 5.1]

What may appear as a circuitous route made very clear sense to American Red Cross administrators in 1920 when they decided to return the colony to Petrograd. Many ARC workers in Siberia had come from Pacific pathways themselves, arriving from projects in areas containing well established American military and humanitarian presences like the Philippines. Major Riley Allen, for example, left Hawaii to serve with the Red Cross mission in Siberia. As American military forces and auxiliary aid groups like the ARC and YMCA were abandoning Vladivostok

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to Soviet control, administrators who had assumed charge of the colony saw a pathway east that led across a well-supplied, funded, and securely American network of military bases and regional and local branches of American humanitarian societies as the clear choice over what appeared to them as an unsecure, Bolshevik controlled overland route through which they would not be able to rely on an established network of U.S. occupation and relief.

The American Red Cross plan to move the Petrograd Children’s Colony around the entire globe encountered many of the same issues that American Relief Administration workers faced attempting to define and move bodies in and out of Russia. To what extent could American modes of care and of moving refugees be distinguished from Bolshevik modes, and what was at stake in the difference? Like other American projects in Russia, what was described by humanitarian workers as a vitally American operation was actually carried out by a small number of American administrators and a large Russian staff. The adults who cared for the almost 800 children on board the Yomei Maru consisted of 16 Americans and 79 Russians.3 Which Russians might potentially become Americans, and how should American relief workers facilitate or limit their migration? Like American relief during the Russian famine, the journey of the Petrograd Children’s Colony opened up pathways for Russians to migrate permanently to the United States. About ten percent of the Russian personnel who traveled with the colony entered the United States with permission from the Immigration Bureau, including one who was offered a scholarship from the Y.W.C.A., some who had family in New York, a woman who planned to marry an American engineer she had met in Siberia, a few who had obtained visas from the

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3 Minutes of meeting of Department Heads, July 1, 1920, ANRC 132.1 Petrograd Children’s Colony, Minutes of meetings of Special Committees, 1920. Among the 782 Russian children were many who were not “strictly Russian” including “15 Polish children, 28 of Jewish blood, 8 Letts, 5 Estonians, two French and one each Lithuanian, Finnish, Persian, Swiss and English.” “Facts about the Petrograd Children’s Colony Homeward-Bound Expedition,” ANRC 139.9 Petrograd Children’s Colony, Facts about the Petrograd Children’s Colony, report.
American Consul in Vladivostok, and one who had the Red Cross apply for entry on his behalf. Several of the older children remained illegally in New York after running away from the ship before departure. The American Red Cross also faced the kinds of questions that animated American military, cultural, and economic engagements with Soviet Russia. Could Russians—particularly those charged with the nation’s future—be taught American style cleanliness, education, efficiency, manhood and womanhood, and resistance to Bolshevist appeals? Through these kinds of transformations, would Russians choose Americanism over Bolshevism? The ARC faced these questions in a set of locations that have often fallen beyond the pathways between Washington, DC and Moscow that have bound much of the history of American-Russian relations. [See Figure 5.2]

The Panama Canal, for example, was a location where Americans and Russians sorted differences and cared for each other. Identifying such conduits should change our understanding of the history of American engagement with Soviet Russia. The global circumnavigation of the Yomei Maru offers an opportunity to trace how the reach and retraction of American military, economic, cultural, and humanitarian intervention and occupation at a range of global locations shaped the pathways through which people moved between Russia and the United States. Indeed, it offers only one particularly compelling example. The journey of the Petrograd Children’s Colony was not the only voyage that moved Russian refugees through locations marked by American occupation and military and economic power.

Another example can be found in the journey of a flotilla that evacuated thousands of White Russian military personnel and civilian refugees from Vladivostok in the fall of 1922 under the command of Russian Imperial Navy Admiral Oskar Stark. Like refugees and White Russian émigrés attempting to move away from Russia at exit points like Constantinople, many

4 “Log of the Expedition at New York” ANRC 138.1, Petrograd Children’s Colony, “Yomei Maru” Log of the Trip
of the migrants on the flotilla found themselves stateless and in search of potential paths through which they could migrate. After moving through a series of East Asian ports, the flotilla transferred a large portion of its refugees to Shanghai. From there, hundreds traveled to Manila in early 1923.5

The plan was concocted because the refugees could not enter the United States since the Russian immigration quota for the year had already been filled and the new quota year did not begin until July. Landing in the Philippines would allow the U.S. military, American humanitarian organizations, and the U.S. controlled Philippine Insular Government to deliver relief and facilitate the movement of refugees in a space located outside the boundaries of restrictive U.S. immigration laws. Under the escort of an American cruiser, about a dozen ships in the flotilla carried over 800 Russian refugees to Manila Bay in February of 1923. The U.S. Governor General of the Philippines arranged to house the refugees at an American naval base at Olongapo and the Philippine Headquarters of the American Red Cross supplied the groups with food and clothing. The American Relief Administration also contributed a cash fund to be used to feed Russian refugees in Manila, but officials lamented that the cost of feeding Russians in the Philippines was much higher than the cost of meals they were preparing for famine victims inside Russia. The Red Cross also attempted to find local employment for the refugees, placing some in work in Manila and about ninety men at work on hemp plantations at Mindinao. Rather than waiting for entry to the U.S., some left for Australia and other ports in the Pacific. About one hundred Russians decided not to seek entrance into the mainland United States at all, staying to work at the jobs they found in and around Manila. 527 refugees sailed for Angel Island on a U.S. army transport the following summer, but they did not all enter the United States under the

Russian quota. Two had been born in the Philippines so they could enter as Filipino immigrants, and nineteen refugees were turned away as ineligible by immigration authorities at Angel Island.6

The journey of the Petrograd Children’s colony also moved along a route that was structured by the reach of American military and humanitarian organizations. Like ARA officials in Constantinople and aid organizations serving Russian refugees in Manila, ARC workers tried to combine relief programs for feeding and clothing refugees with projects to both enable and control the movement of refugees. In each of these locations, networks of military occupation and humanitarian care that formed as part of an expanding vision and practice of American engagement with the world sometimes ran parallel to and sometimes crossed purposes with hierarchical practices of differentiation and restrictive boundaries that limited movements of certain people to the United States.

The administrators in charge of the Petrograd Children’s Colony Expedition relied heavily on material support, technical expertise, space for lodging, transportation, food, clothing, security, and entertainment provided by the United States Army and networks of local and regional American Red Cross chapters in the United States, and in occupied territories including the Philippines and the Panama Canal Zone. “It is pleasant to remember,” wrote Riley, the head of the project, from on board the Yomei Maru, “that at every American port where we touched the organization and facilities of the American Red Cross and the personal efforts and interest of

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its officers and members were entirely at the disposal of the Expedition.”  

Before leaving Siberia, conversations via cable with the Philippines Chapter of the American Red Cross in Manila discussed the kinds of clothing they could supply, despite the fact that few warm garments of the kind needed in Siberia were manufactured in Manila.8

In San Francisco the army provided living quarters at Fort Scott. The General Manager of the Pacific Division of the American Red Cross coordinated the details of the group’s arrival including arranging for a special order from the Commissioner of Immigration that allowed the children to leave the vessel for a stay in San Francisco.9 The Junior Red Cross Pacific Division in San Francisco collected donations for the colony that included fruit, candy, toys, hats, hair ribbons, garters, and knickerbockers.10 Local Red Cross chapters arranged entertainment for the children and a tour of Golden Gate Park. [See Figure 5.3] As the colony passed through the canal at Panama, the Balboa Canal Zone Red Cross facilitated arrangements of supplies and their loading onto the ship, and arranged a special after hours visit from the quarantine inspector expediting passage through the locks. The Ladies of the Canal Zone Chapter brought 50 gallons of ice cream as well as mangoes, pineapples, and bananas which were fed to the children on board because only American personnel were permitted to go ashore in the zone.11 In New York the group was housed at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island. Housing and feeding arrangements during the stop were made by the Atlantic Division of the American Red Cross, while the New York Country Chapter of the American Red Cross pitched in to provide entertainment and tours.

8 ANRC 143.10 American Red Cross in Siberia, ARC Chapters, Philippines Chapter, Manila
9 Frederick C Monroe, General Manager to George Filmer, Manager, Pacific Division ARC San Francisco July 21, 1920. ANRC 132, Petrograd Children’s Colony, General, 1918-1920, 1988
10 “List of Donations for Russian Children To Junior Red Cross Pacific Division San Francisco California,” August 4, 1920 ANRC 132.4, Petrograd Children’s Colony, letters to and from San Francisco relating to Yomei Maru stay there
11 Wednesday August 18th, 1920. ANRC 137.16 Petrograd Children’s Colony, “Yomei Maru” Log of the Trip
Hardly a moment spent by the Petrograd Children’s Colony was not choreographed by sets of committees of local and regional Red Cross chapters. All of the food, clothing, lodging, and even coal, water, and supplies to power the ship were obtained through an array of Red Cross resources.

The idea that the young Russians who traveled as part of the Petrograd Children’s Colony would gain a particular impression of the United States through these orchestrated engagements was a vitally important part of the program of their voyage. During the period of ARC control of the colony, the children had been taught English and other American school subjects and they came to enjoy American motion pictures. They learned American standards of hygiene and discipline, and were provided with “what they needed most to help them to become real men.”12 But the children also had to be taught about what the Red Cross was doing for them and about the humanitarian way that Americans were engaging with them and the world. Tours of San Francisco, the Panama Canal, and New York were feature events in the presentation of this message, rather than simply stopovers. “The Golden Gate was indeed a gateway for these children long lost from their home and friends,” wrote Riley to the Mayor of San Francisco, “a gateway into new happiness, new friendships, new enjoyments, and new visions of the world.”13 “For all of these children,” Riley wrote, the trip would be “their first glimpse of America” and ARC workers had been preparing them for what they ought to expect and what it ought to mean to them. “We used to talk with them of our plans of taking them home by America,” he explained, so that they “expected tall buildings, busy streets, great factories, huge wharfs, stately

12 History of Barrack No. 4 From: Sister Kourgousoff To: Dr. Davison. June 21, 1920 Russian Island Colony, ANRC 132.2, Petrograd Children’s Colony, History of Barrack #4 1919-1920
13 Letter from Chief Executive Petrograd Children’s Colony Expedition, ARC to Mayor James Rolph San Francisco, California. August 5, 1920. ANRC 132.4 Petrograd Children’s Colony, letters to and from San Francisco relating to Yomei Mary stay there
public edifices.” Upon arrival in San Francisco the children were apparently “greatly impressed with the efficiency of the street railway service.” Riley wrote that several children had told him that what made the greatest impact on them were the “personal contacts and friendships” forged with Americans they had met. In Panama the children were given special lessons about “the history of the building and the engineering of the Canal.”

These impressions were important to the ARC administrators who worked hard to set up contacts and events with Americans and particularly Russian-Americans of a particular kind in order to shape the “new visions of the world” that America would present to the children. This required the identification and differentiation of types of Russians living in the United States who might favorably affect the children, by making them feel welcome, by sharing Russian cultural connections, and by confirming the Red Cross’s plans to move and care for the children as appropriate and humanitarian. At San Francisco, a “Program of Entertainment Given at the Civic Auditorium By Russian and American Children” designed for the group presented Russian folk dancing, Cossack dancing, and singing by Russian community members framed by opening and closing pieces by an American orchestra and a troop of Boy Scouts acting as ushers.

While these interactions presented a vision of Russian and American cultural interaction to the children, ARC workers also tried desperately to protect their charges from Russians in the United States who offered the colony an alternative vision of American humanitarian efforts. The difficulty was, as Riley put it, “we have been and still are in the midst of difficulties caused by the activity of the radical Russian elements here.” Planning for an evening of entertainment

15 Wednesday August 18th, 1920 and Thursday August 19th ANRC 137.16 Petrograd Children’s Colony, “Yomei Maru” Log of the Trip.
16 “Program of Entertainment Given at the Civic Auditorium By Russian and American Children,” August 3, 1920. ANRC 132.4 Petrograd Children’s Colony, letters to and from San Francisco relating to Yomei Mary stay there.
provided by the Russian community in New York required special arrangements coordinated with the Department of Justice Secret Service group who feared the effects of radical Russians who critiqued the American Red Cross as oppressors. Like economic, cultural, military, and humanitarian projects, the ARC relied on the classification of types of Russians that might affect the Children’s Colony program in different ways.

At its core a project for the movement of Russian refugees, the expedition was frequently characterized by restriction and confinement. On the military base that housed the Colony on Staten Island, the children were kept under armed guard behind high fences. “Both children and Russian personnel soon grew restless under the necessary Military guard,” according to the log book of the expedition, but it was thought necessary to protect them from Russian radicals who were attempting to gain access to the group. Indeed the children’s own objections to the security arrangements were due “no doubt, to the propaganda against the ‘interning at a Military Camp’ as some of the radical critics of the Red Cross, took occasion to express it.”17 “The children have been besieged by [radicals] at every turn,” lamented one log entry, “and as it is obviously impossible for us to shut the children entirely off from the Russians of New York there are bound to be many opportunities for careful and astute propagandists to reach the youngsters.” At an evening planned with the New York Russian community that drew a crowd of thousands to Madison Square Garden, the radical Russian views of the Red Cross’s work with the colony were announced in full force. Among the speakers was Ludwig Martens, representative of the Russian Soviet Government Bureau in New York, who made an “open declaration that the American Red Cross was exploiting the children in various ways.” Addressing the thousands of New York Russians and the members of the Children’s Colony, “Martens declared that the

17 “Log of the Expedition at New York” ANRC 138.1, Petrograd Children’s Colony, “Yomei Maru” Log of the Trip
Soviet government would take all measures to remove the children from the hands of the Red Cross, and send them directly to Soviet Russia.”

Indeed why the Yomei Maru was taking such a circuitous route rather than delivering the children directly to Petrograd had become a contentious issue among the members of the colony since about the time they were passing through the Panama Canal. Many of the children vocally rejected the Red Cross’s plans: some signed a petition demanding a revised route and others even ran away from the group when it stopped in New York and France. While the Soviet Government had repeatedly called for the immediate return of the children to Soviet custody, a Red Cross worker explained to the children that despite the deep sacrifices necessary for the American public to fund the Red Cross in the difficult period after the war, Americans were willing to donate money for the care of the children until their own government was ready to receive them. For ARC decision makers, the duty “to fill our moral obligation to the best of our ability” reached beyond national difference and jurisdictional divides, outweighing the fact that the children were “citizens of Russia and …the present Russian Government is insistent upon the return of all the children with as little delay as possible.” The American Red Cross placed relief efforts and the movement of refugees beyond the bounds of political considerations in relations between nations. “The undertaking is entirely humanitarian” as one ARC official explained it, “and therefore should not be considered on the basis of official or commercial relations with the Soviet Government.”

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18 September 6, ANRC 136.2 Petrograd Children’s Colony, Allen, Riley Chief Executive, Petrograd Children’s Colony Exp., 1920
20 Thursday August 19th ANRC 137.16 Petrograd Children’s Colony, “Yomei Maru” Log of the Trip
21 “Peculiar Position of American Red Cross” The Red Cross Bulletin Vol. 1 no. 19 Riga December 24, 1920
22 Letter to Major Riley Allen, Acting Commissioner for Siberia, ARC, Vladivostok from Tokyo, March 12th, 1920. ANRC 132.2, Petrograd Children’s Colony, History of Barrack #4 1919-1920
Despite such claims, the effort to move and care for the members of the Petrograd Children’s Colony were thoroughly entwined with the power relationships that shaped American interaction with the world. Investigating the pathways that Russian refugees traveled through places like Manila and Panama is a crucial part of understanding the American role in the world during the interwar period. They highlight how interventions like the Children’s Colony project, and their incumbent movements of people, were linked to established and growing projects of U.S. imperialism and their networks of support in Central America, the Philippines and other places. American imperialism in the Pacific and in Latin America materially and logistically supported American projects to aid Russians in the early 1920s.

Understanding American humanitarian work and aid for refugees in this context helps to overcome a division in the historiography of international humanitarian projects that has tended to see relief projects as either “beneficent agents of uplift or as instruments of U.S. imperial power and capitalist hegemony.” These strains in the history of humanitarianism were not mutually exclusive. Individuals engaged in projects like the Petrograd Children’s Colony Expedition utilized ideas about “uplift” drawn from experience and narratives of previous and ongoing imperial projects. Children required Red Cross intervention because they were “dirty and untidy,” “discipline was entirely unknown,” and they “were not used to obey… they were rude and impertinent,” and also because they would benefit from exposure to American practices, values, and people and to American visions of the world. As we have seen, these logics of intervention also underlay American military occupation of portions of Russia and efforts to reshape Russian workers in both Soviet and American factories. Moreover, efforts to

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24 From: Sister Kourgousoff To: Dr. Davison. June 21, 1920 Russian Island Colony. ANRD 132.2, Petrograd Children’s Colony, History of Barrack #4 1919-1920
care for the group of young Russians and to return them to their parents, like other projects to aid
famine victims and refuges and the movements of people they required and provoked, and like
narratives of aid produced by filmmakers and soldiers, relied on an existing global network of
imperial actors and recourses and the kinds of stories that long justified and naturalized their
deployment.

Blending programs for uplift with the exertion of imperial power, cultural narratives and
humanitarian practices that overlapped care with control and violence, were important parts of
American military, economic, and humanitarian projects in and out of Russia and at places like
the Philippines and Latin America. ARA workers in places like Constantinople were not alone
when they utilized practices of differentiation and exclusion which they felt were necessary to
identify, feed, sort, and move refugees while grappling with how to balance them with the
universalizing sentiments that underlay humanitarian aid. Such techniques for counting and
categorizing people as a means for both benevolence and discipline were integral components of
the knowledge production and population regulation apparatuses of American imperial projects
that attempted to produce order and control out of apparent chaos across a range of U.S.
interventions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and at ports on U.S. shores.25

Recent histories of American international humanitarian work following the First World
War have agreed that such projects can be understood as extensions of progressive programs
inside the United States and the outgrowth of a “transatlantic” progressive community. Studies of
the expansion of American institutions, commercial power, and progressive reform to Europe in
the interwar years have also described cultural and economic programs in Russia as extensions of
these initiatives. Scholars have likewise framed military intervention in the Russian civil war as

25 For example, Vicente L. Rafael, White Love and Other Events in Filipino History (Durham: Duke University
an afterthought of military engagements of the First World War. But the route of the Petrograd Children’s Colony is an example of how these projects relied on and built up a global network that stretched far beyond the North Atlantic. *Between Two Worlds* has shown that connecting the history of American-Russian interactions to the history of American imperialism enables us to see interactions outside of European and North Atlantic centered visions of the international system in the interwar years. A reassessment of American interaction with Russia in the context of American imperialism reorients these histories (and assumptions about American power) by highlighting instead the way such developments often occurred through pathways of connection that moved across the Pacific, or through imperial engagements in Latin America and the Caribbean.26

These links had a long history by the time American Red Cross workers and Russian children sailed around the world in 1920. The multidirectional pathways that ideas, practices, and justifications for intervention crossed belie narratives that foreground transatlantic extension. For example, some advocates of intervention in Cuba in 1898 who described the project as a humanitarian mission cited U.S. humanitarian interventions at the edges of the Russian Empire in the 1890s as a justification for the claim.27

Scholars have suggested the need to redress the historigraphical “bifurcation” that has separated nineteenth century continental expansion, overseas territorial annexation at the turn of


the century, and United States military intervention and economic imperialism in the twentieth century. Between Two Worlds traces ways that the United States’ approaches to Russia and an increasing range of areas in the world following the First World War were deeply linked to the narratives, practices, and resources that produced and justified American imperialism historically. In doing so, this dissertation reinforces our understanding of the continuities across two centuries of American imperialism.

Placing American interactions with Russia in this history of American imperialism means taking seriously the ongoing ways that legacies of the removal of native peoples, slavery, the subjugation of colonial populations, and assimilationist transformation of immigrants, for example, continued to support the attempted application of American power in places like Russia in the twentieth century. These legacies persisted in affecting the production of what it meant to be American even as the process was carried out on the decks of a circumnavigating Japanese cargo ship or in locations like Vladivostok or Arkhangelsk, Russia. This persistence can be seen, in the minstrel performances soldiers used to understand their efforts in North Russia, in the film cowboys who battled bandits on the streets of Bolshevik Moscow, and in the idea that Philippine-made clothing could warm children in Siberia. While naturalizing elements of nineteenth century imperialism as “domestic” projects, or features of “continental” expansion posits that they were clear and inevitable parts of what eventually became the United States, highlighting the tenuous and halting nature of American attempts to shape places like Russia reveals that the histories of American “expansion” were not smooth or inevitable. These histories continued to play important cultural and material roles in American projects in Russia.

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Tracing journeys like that of the Petrograd Children’s Colony can also tell us something about the trajectory of the role of the United States in the world throughout the twentieth century. The symbolic and material connections between engagement with Russia and ongoing interventions in places like the Philippines should revise our understanding and periodization of what scholars have recently called “the global cold war” – that is, the way that conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in the second half of the twentieth century played out not as a binary struggle between two powers alone but through a competition for influence, alliance, and markets in the Third World.29 This argument has worked to revise longstanding conceptions of a bipolar contest centered on Europe by casting intervention in the Third World as the central feature of the cold war. Recent work that follows this approach has traced the ideological conflict at the root of the multi-sited battles of the cold war back to 1917 and earlier – but scholars have maintained that “American-Soviet conflict became global only in the 1940s.”30 Between Two Worlds further revises bipolar conceptions of American-Soviet interactions, by showing that early conflicts and connections between Americans and Soviets took place in and relied upon a range of locations that spanned the globe. Like cold war developments that played out in battles for influence in spaces of the Third World, US-Russian interaction in the 1920s, and particularly competing visions for American and Soviet futures, were often located in places like the Philippines, Central Asian republics, or “peripheries” as close as Siberia and the American West.

Between Two Worlds endeavors to re-entangle what later came to be seen as two poles that were by nature nationally, culturally, and ideologically distinct by highlighting overlap and

mutual constitution instead of binary opposition. A focus on transnational movements and on-the-ground interactions, like those that inspired the *Yomei Maru*’s around the world journey, allows us to see the ways that what later appeared as clear and natural distinctions between Americans and Soviets were historically contingent and fragile. Far from self-evident, the idea that Russian Soviets and Americans were from fundamentally different worlds would not have made sense to Major Riley and many of the people examined in the preceding chapters. Cold war ideas about a bipolar conflict had to be constructed from a number of potential alternatives. Divisions within Soviet society and the international communist movement, for example, had to be overlooked in order to construct a monolithic notion of Soviet ideology. Overlapping ideologies that were often understood as applicable to both countries, including Fordism, self-determination, and Americanization, had to be disentangled and reimaged as oppositional. Work practices, artistic styles, modes of care, and even individual bodies had to be identified or refashioned as American or Russian Soviet. Both the notion that Americans and Russians were different and the marking, moving, and maintaining of individual bodies as American or Russian, were ongoing projects which often frayed or failed when they bumped up against moving people and their complex and shifting national, ideological, and cultural affinities.

These processes required the deployment of new regimes of belonging and distinction, including a belief in the Americanization of peoples abroad and the assimilation of immigrants at home. Cold war binaries were later based on linked erasures of the histories of attachment, migration, mutual constitution, and persistent connection that spanned attempts at boundary drawing and separation. These views had to compete with longstanding beliefs in Russia and in

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the United States about the unique connections and mutuality that linked Americans and Russians which suggested an entwined and common future.32

American Red Cross efforts to move and care for the Petrograd Children’s Colony reveal the broad role that Americans asserted for themselves in the care, refashioning, and movement of peoples in places like Russia and around the world. They also remind us of the ways that such visions collided with restrictive ideas about which people from places like Russia might be considered Americans even when they resided inside the United States. In part, the Children’s Colony project represents the expansive and growing reach of the power of American institutions to move and affect places and peoples in the years following the First World War. Marshaling networks of military, humanitarian, and economic support that ringed the globe in the early 1920s, Americans attempting to aid refugees were able to command considerable resources, transverse incredible distances, and project a vision of the way Americans helped those in need that could operate beyond the reach of national, diplomatic, and ideological boundaries. But the journey of these Americans and Russians also marked the sharp limits of Americans’ ability to influence places like that between Vladivostok and Petrograd. The Colony had traveled around the entire world to avoid turning the children over to local Soviet authorities as American troops abandoned the occupation of the Russian Far East. However, after navigating the full reach of outposts of American power stretching from the western Pacific to the North Atlantic, they ultimately delivered the children to a Soviet committee at the Finnish border where they boarded a train for Petrograd. The limited impact of the voyage, if any, suggests the variegated, uneven,

32 This is a theme running throughout the long history of U.S.-Russian interaction; see for example Norman Saul’s multivolume work on Russian American relations. See also Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 90; Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 273. For overlapping uses of these ideologies in German visions for modernization see Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
and often ineffectual spread of the idea that Americans uniquely commanded “a gateway into new happiness, new friendships, new enjoyments, and new visions of the world.”

The circumnavigation of the Petrograd Children’s Colony was emblematic of the gap between Americans’ broad visions of their role in the world in the years after the First World War and the narrow effects of economic, cultural, military, and humanitarian programs. The incomplete, hesitant, and ultimately failed extension of American visions for the transformation of Russia were not, as some historians have argued, the result of a failure of will among leaders to carry the application of American power to Russia. Nor were they the result of a lack of resources, or a need for secrecy because of low public support for intervention. Rather than accepting contemporary assertions that the United States could control the outcome of the Russian Civil War, create and support anti-Bolshevik campaigns, predict and affect the course of the revolution, and secure the economic and political future of a post-revolutionary Russia in an American image that would favor American trade and investment, we must acknowledge that American projects often could not produce these results. The understanding of the United States’ role in the world that supported these efforts and a belief in their efficacy can, however, tell us something about how interventions in Russia fit into the broader history of American interaction with the world in this period.

These failures to reshape Russia were not an anomaly in the generally successful or generally consistent exertion of U.S. influence; that Americans thought Russia might be like the

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33 David Foglesong has argued that intervention in Russia was not a “peculiar departure from a policy of nonintervention” but neither was the failure to meaningfully secure U.S. objectives. David S. Foglesong, America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 4-7, 297. Williams makes the same argument – that intervention was an extension of the policy of using American military and economic power to create and support governments fashioned on an American political and economic model but that a popular desire for peace restricted the efforts, William Appleman Williams, American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947 (New York: Rinehart, 1952), 158-159. On the persisting belief that Americans would capture a post-Bolshevik Russian market see also Christine A. White, British and American Commercial Relations with Soviet Russia, 1918-1924 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
American West or the Philippines should not appear strange because it never came to pass. Rather, such failures should call into question the success and completeness of the narrative of expansion of American power in general. Although the consolidation of control over places like the American West have appeared smooth, natural, and successful to historians and to historical actors who thought they might be expanded to places like Russia, such projects were also aspirational, limited, halting, and incomplete.\textsuperscript{34} This history, often told as a narrative of natural destined expansion, was perhaps more prominently characterized by fits and starts, withdrawals, and inconsistency. The United States attempted to engage in a wide variety of imperial ways at a range of different sites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In many cases, the United States did not fulfill plans to incorporate new locations into American political, economic, or cultural influence.\textsuperscript{35} A more complete recognition of this history would mean that interventions of the kind that Americans planned for Soviet Russia were in some ways quintessential examples in the history of American empire.

\textsuperscript{34} For histories of the ongoing inability of the U.S. settler state to control or in certain instances even affect native groups see Kathleen DuVal, \textit{The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Pekka Hämäläinen, \textit{The Comanche Empire} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Ned Blackhawk, \textit{Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{35} As one survey of empires notes, Cuba remained nominally sovereign, the Philippines were occupied and overseen for half a century, Puerto Rico was labeled a “commonwealth” and remains a dependent territory, the Panama Canal was named a “zone” and administered for over 75 years, and Hawaii became a state. A long list of other locations faced military interventions with results ranging from extended occupation to replaced governments. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, \textit{Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 321-322.
Figure 5.1: The path of the Japanese freighter chartered by the American Red Cross to transport Russian children from Vladivostok to Petrograd
Figure 5.2: The Petrograd Children’s Colony on the deck of the *Yomei Maru*
American National Red Cross, Box 132, Folder 19 Hoover Institution Archives
Figure 5.3: The Petrograd Children’s Colony touring Golden Gate Park in San Francisco
American National Red Cross, Box 132, Folder 19 Hoover Institution Archives
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