

# Russia and Black America

Why *Yes We Can* Passed Russia By,

Or,

The Promise and Peril of Charismatic Leadership  
(With a Few Additional Remarks and Observations)

Tuesday, April 16

The People's Friendship University of Russia Named After Patrice Lumumba was founded in 1960. Located in the outskirts of Moscow, it was attended by students from the developing and decolonizing world



December 18, 1963. African students march to the Kremlin to protest against the alleged murder of a Ghanaian attending medical school in a town near Moscow. The placards read, “In your country, we are breathing polluted air” (on left) and “This horror must never be repeated.” The event was inspired by the anticolonial struggle in Black Africa and the civil rights movement in the United States



The students arrive at the Spassky Gate, a storied national space which is the main entrance to the Kremlin. Estimates of the crowd varied from 150 to 700 people. This was the first political protest in Moscow since the 1920s



Communist oppositionists demonstrate on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution



Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev meeting a member of the public at the Spassky Gate on May 31, 1988. But is that a young, touristy Vladimir Putin on the left?





Martin Luther King Square in south-west Moscow. Named after the celebrated civil rights leader in 1990. King's emphasis on mass non-violent social action belonged to a tradition originally associated with Leo Tolstoy and his followers

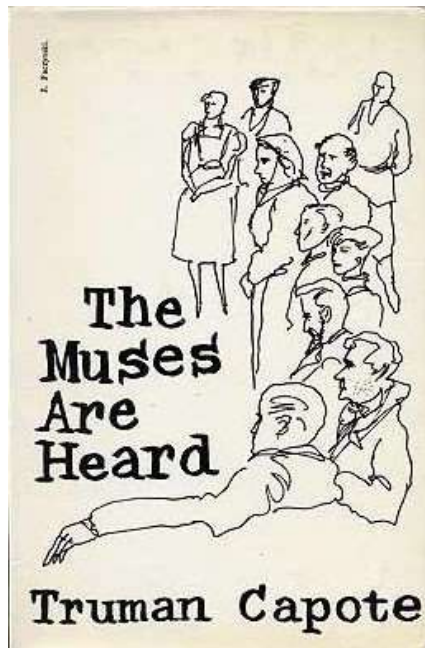


A 2018 performance of George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* at the Through the Looking Glass theater of St. Petersburg. This work constituted an important Black America-to-the-Soviet Union cultural transfer at the height of the Cold War

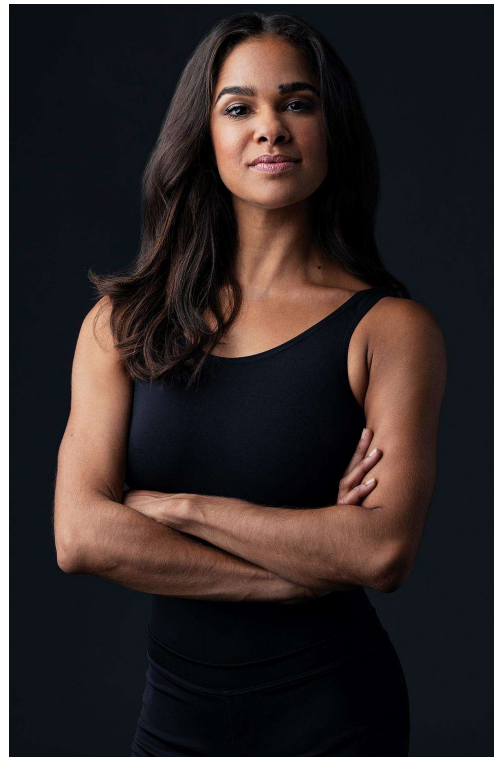




In 1955-56 a group of African American performers, the Everyman Opera Company, toured Leningrad and Moscow delighting and shocking Soviet audiences with their performance of *Porgy and Bess*. For more about this, see *The Muses Are Heard* by Truman Capote, who accompanied the theater on its visit. This essay originally appeared in *The New Yorker* under the title “Porgy and Bess in Russia” (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1956/10/27/porgy-and-bess-in-russia-the-muses-are-heard>)



Misty Copeland, Principal Dancer in the American Ballet Theater, has criticized racist practices in Russian balet



...as in the Bolshoi Theater's 2015 staging of *La Bayadère*



The Internet Research Agency troll factory in St. Petersburg, operated by the late Yevgeny Prigozhin. Its dissemination of fake news and social media posts, particularly during the 2016 US election campaign, demonstrated the efficacy of this form of asymmetric warfare





Russian interference in the 2016 election targeted specific categories of voters, among them African Americans. More than 66% of IRA Facebook adverts, like this bogus item, referenced race

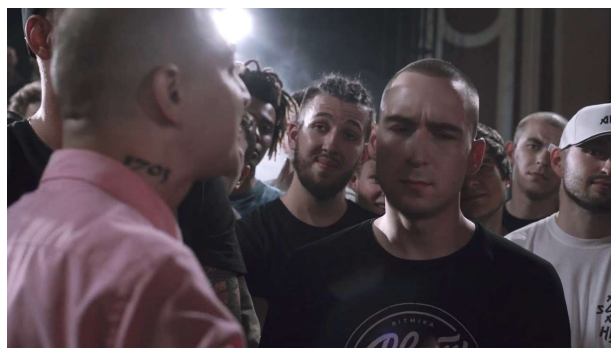
 **Black Matters** added an event.  
July 6 at 9:55am · 🌐



**JUL 17** **Rally In Memory Of Eric Garner**  
Jul 17 - Jul 18 · 202 Bay St, Staten Island, NY 10...  
484 people interested · 134 people going

★ Interested

Oxxxymiron (Miron Fyodorov), Noize MC (Ivan Alexeyev), and Bianka (Tatyana Lipnitskaya)





Bianka (Tatyana Lipnitskaya), 37, whose 2007 hit “Pro leto” (“About Summer”) cemented her fame as “The Queen of Popular Russian R & B”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hhG8jAl7qE>



Noize MC and Staisha, “Mercedes S666 (Make Way for My Chariot)” (2010) is a protest song about a notorious car crash in Moscow involving the limo of Anatoly Barkov, a Lukoil company vice-president, and a car carrying Olga Aleksandrina, a doctor who was the driver (and Staisha’s sister), and Vera Sidelnikova, a distinguished obstetrics professor



Noize MC, “Lenin Has Risen” (2016)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBQR-ol5PjI>

A photo of the Oxxxymiron vs. Slava KPSS aka Gnoiny rap battle in 2017  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4rvTMBCJD0>) (L).

The parallels with the concluding scene in Eminem's movie *8 Mile* (R) are obvious



Oxxxymiron's 2021 track "Agent" jibes at the Putin government's foreign agent legislation which the authorities use to tar and silence political opponents

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlSAGssgqYs>



August 7, 2014, Moscow. President Barack Obama's 53rd birthday is celebrated with racist laser image beamed onto the façade of the US embassy building





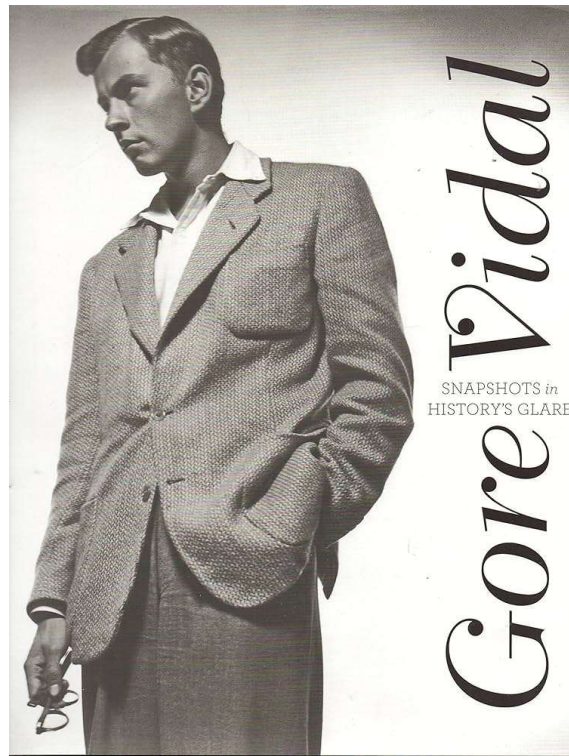
Vehicle belonging to a Russian energy company displaying a mass-produced “Obama Is A Schmuck” sticker...



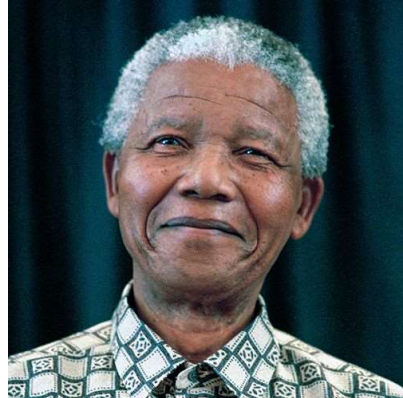
...and an anti-smoking poster which warns, “Smoking kills more people than Obama, and he is killing lots of people”



“Politics is just showbusiness for ugly people” (Gore Vidal)



## The five categories of charisma



Two pairs of shades...

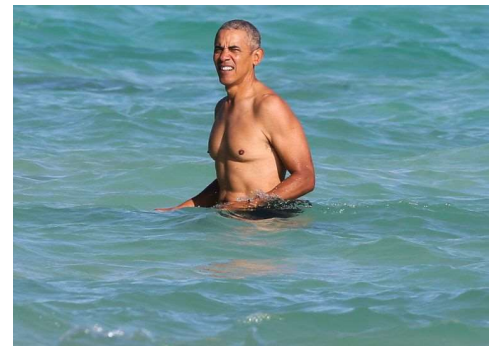




...and two sets of sixpacks



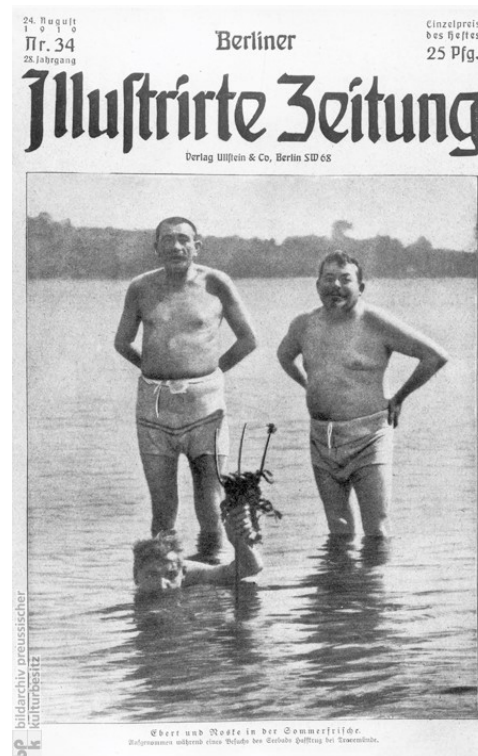
President Putin, 65, vacationing in Siberia in August, 2017



Former President  
Obama, 60, during  
his Hawaii  
Christmas vacation  
in December 2021



This 1919 photograph of German Reich president Friedrich Ebert (R) and his minister of defense, Gustav Noske, shocked contemporaries



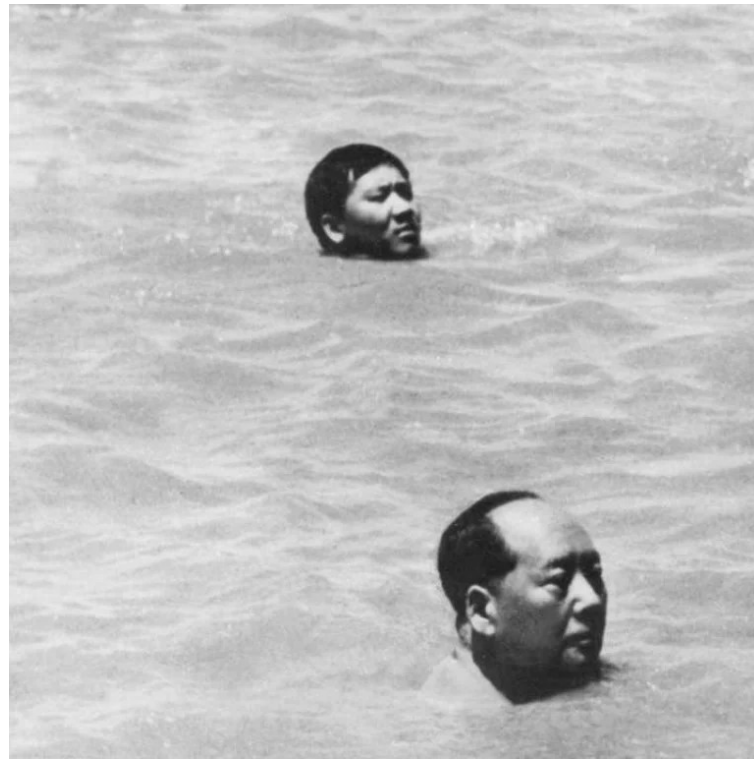
Benito Mussolini was the first modern political leader to bare his body to the cameras as a matter of policy



President John Kennedy meeting admirers in Santa Monica, CA



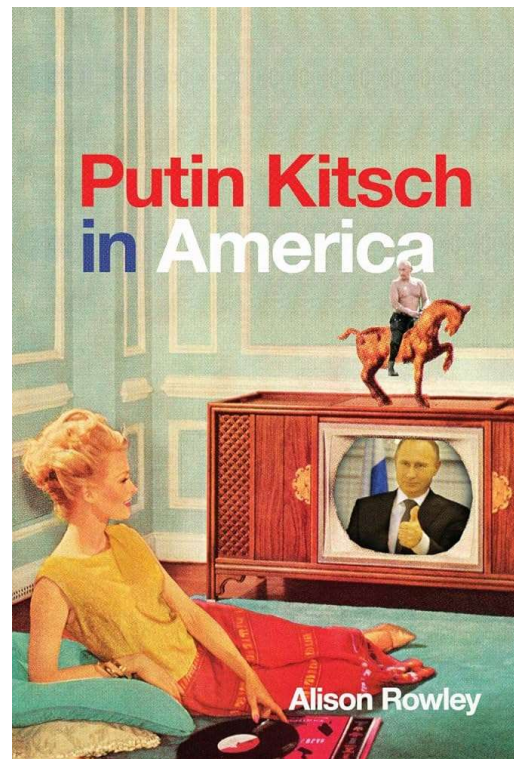
Chairman Mao swimming the Yangtze river in July 1966 as he launches the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution



Prime minister Vladimir Putin (R) and President Dmitry Medvedev fishing, August 2011



L: this 2019 study is a witty exploration of how Putin's persona and body became part of popular and commercial culture in the United States. R: in my 2022 book review, I tried to show that our fascination with Russia's president is more about us than it is about him





University of Illinois graduate and war reporter Terrell Starr,  
“Black America’s Russian translator”

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## Covering Ukraine And The 2024 US Presidential Elections As A Black Correspondent

 **Room 108N, North House,  
1 Devonshire Place, Toronto**

 **March 19, 2024  
2:00PM-4:00PM**

**IN-PERSON EVENT**



**TERRELL J. STARR**  
FOUNDER AND HOST OF  
BLACK DIPLOMATS  
PODCAST

Check out this 2022 interview with Starr!  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4iaBbeOXDA>

