

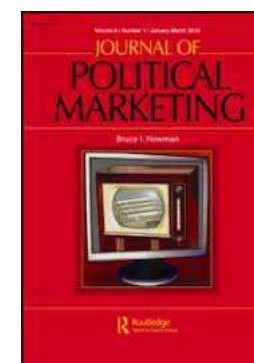
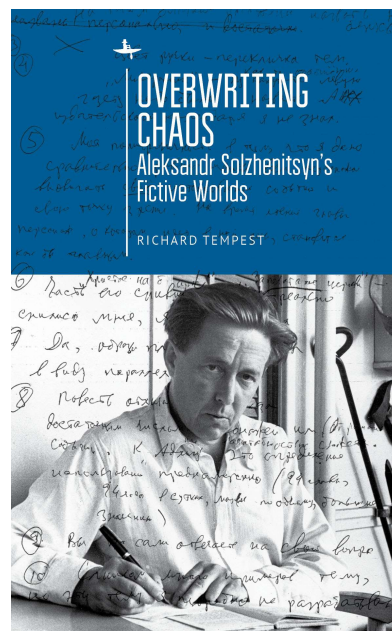
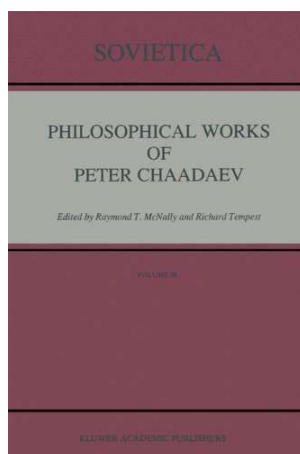
RUSSIA AND BLACK AMERICA

Lecture One

“Russia’s Black American *Other*”

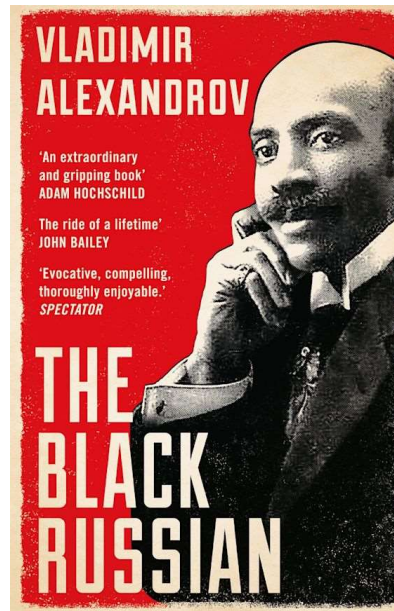
Tuesday, February 27

My professional trajectory and how it led me to teaching and writing about the Black American – Russian dialogue



Voices and Stories

L-R: Alexander Pushkin poses pensively in St. Petersburg (even if only in the artist's imagination), an image of Frederick Bruce Thomas graces the cover of his biography, Robert Robinson shares his expertise on a Soviet factory floor, Andrea Lee gazes enigmatically into the camera (there are not more than a dozen photos of her on the internet), James Patterson reminisces about his star turn as a Russian poet in his Washington D.C. apartment



Martin Luther King Jr. “I Have a Dream” speech of August 28, 1963 is a **national text**. In his journey as a preacher, thinker, and liberation leader King found inspiration in Tolstoy’s writerly love of life (*War and Peace*, 1867) as well as his spiritual quest (*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, 1894)



In 2009, President Obama's first inauguration was attended by an estimated 1.8 million people, considered a record for the National Mall, one of this country's **national spaces**. President Trump's inauguration in 2017 drew a smaller crowd. Both Obama and Trump are **charismatic** leaders, as was Dr. King, but there can be no **charisma** without an audience



An earlier national text: the Gettysburg Address by President Lincoln of November 19, 1863, which explicitly designated the battlefield in question as a national space

Executive Mansion,
Washington, _____, 1863

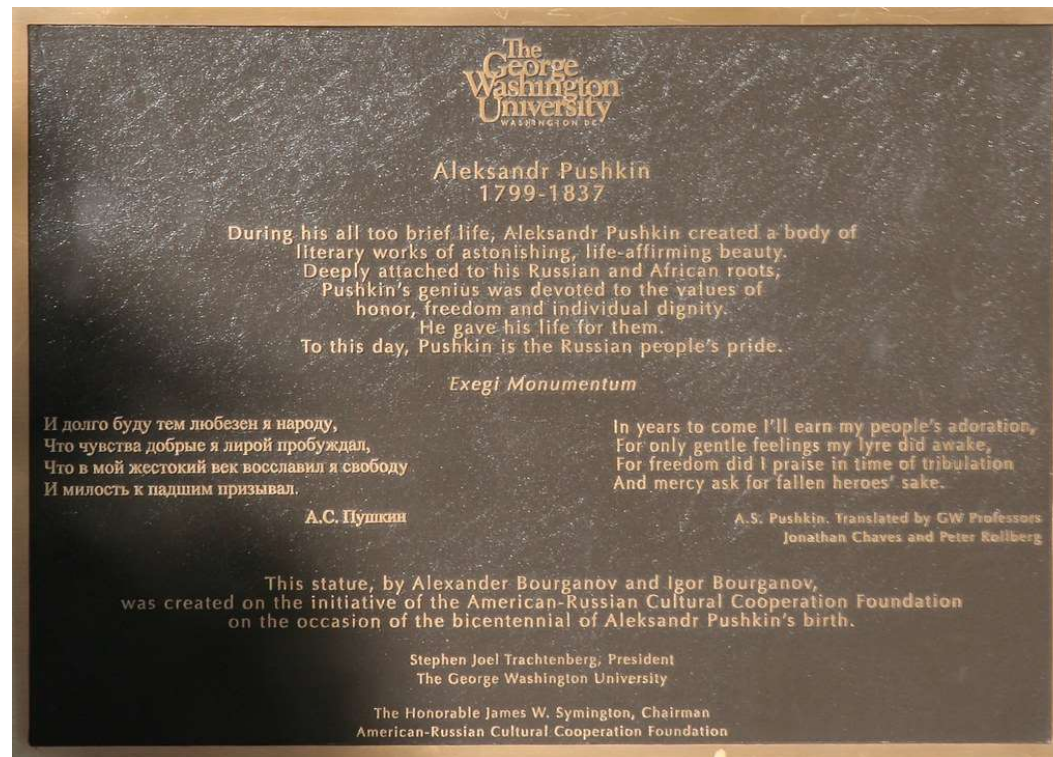
Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that "all men are created equal."

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting

The Pushkin statue at George Washington University in Washington, DC was dedicated on September 20, 2000



Alexander Pushkin's poem "Exegi Monumentum" (1836) is a Russian national text



African-American cultural discourses focusing on Russia and the Soviet Union, as exemplified by (clockwise from top left) W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, and Angela Davis



The Self and the Other

To characterize a person, group or institution as “other” is to place them outside the system of normality or convention to which one belongs oneself. [...] If a woman is other, then that which is particular to the experience of being a woman is irrelevant to “how things are,” to the defining conventions by which one lives. If members of a given racial group are collectively seen as other, then how they are treated is irrelevant to what humanity demands — because they are other and not human.

Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 124

Othering (or *otherization*) occurs when a dominant racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural group defines, or codes, another group, or its individual members, as being essentially different, or dangerous, or exotic, or “cute.” Patriarchal, i.e. traditional, attitudes to women are an example of othering, and so are racism and xenophobia of every kind.

Sex, gender, masculinities, and femininities:
Aleksandr Deineka, *Dancers in Harlem* (1935)



Here is a Russia-to-America cultural transfer of a certain vintage.
Gus Hall and Angela Davis ran for President and Vice President respectively on the
Communist Party USA ticket in 1980 and 1984



The Russian Federation is the successor state to the Tsardom of Muscovy, Russian Empire, and Soviet Union. With a land area of 6.602 sq miles, Russia occupies 11% of the earth's landmass. Much of the country's territory, however, is uninhabitable. Russia's population is 143 million and falling, while its GDP at \$2.240 trillion (2022) places it in the world's top ten economies



For African Americans, the Black Church has been a source of collective identity from the time of slavery into the twenty-first century



Under the tsars and emperors, the Russian Orthodox Church stood at the core of Russian statehood and the Russian sense of self. The Soviet Union pursued a policy of “scientific atheism,” persecuting clerics and religious believers, sometimes savagely, at various times in its history



Significant myth

A secular substitute for religion. Promises not individual but collective immortality, as in Hitler's statement about "the nothingness and insignificance of the individual human being and [...] his continued existence in the visible immortality of the nation." Quoted in Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

People are judged, positively or negatively, not as individuals but members of a given racial, ethnic, political, or social group

Claims to be scientific

Gives its believers a reason to kill and to die

Morality is situational, not absolute

A source of uplifting or terrifying stories that possess strong narrative value

Since 2000, the Russian government has restored the Church to a central position in the state and assigned it a defining role in Vladimir Putin's "Russian World" geopolitical project



Totalitarianism

A system of government, based on a revolutionary ideology = **significant myth**, that demands the individual's unconditional obedience in both the public and private sphere. Unlike authoritarian regimes, totalitarian ones aim to control not just one's behaviors, but even one's thoughts. Examples: Soviet Russia/the Soviet Union (1917-c. 1956), Fascist Italy (1922-45), Nazi Germany (1933-45), the Chinese People's Republic (1949-c. 1978), Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia) (1975-79)

Every totalitarian state generates its own unique discourse (= language + ideology + power)

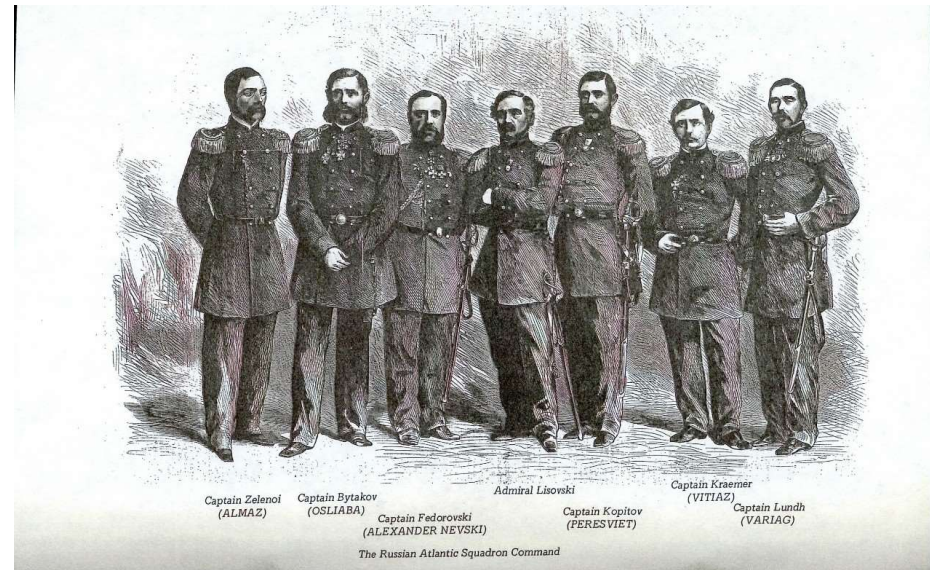
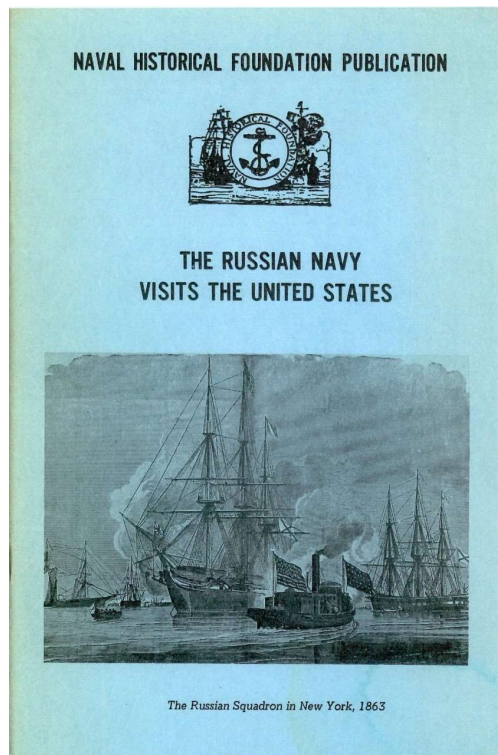
"Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State." Benito Mussolini

"Within the Revolution, everything; outside of it, nothing." Fidel Castro

Emperor Alexander II of Russia (reigned 1855-1881). His Emancipation Manifesto, which freed Russia's serfs, was issued on March 3, 1861, almost two years before President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. L: Alexander II in his study; R: Boris Kustodiev, *The Emancipation of the Peasants* (the Reading of the Manifesto), 1907



During the American Civil War Russia was the only great power overtly sympathetic to the Union, even while Alexander II was engaged in the brutal suppression of a rebellion in his Polish provinces. Then as now, geopolitics could be full of contradictions



Cassius M. Clay (1810-1903), a Republican politician from Kentucky and a passionate Abolitionist. He served as Minister to Russia on two occasions, retiring from that position in 1869

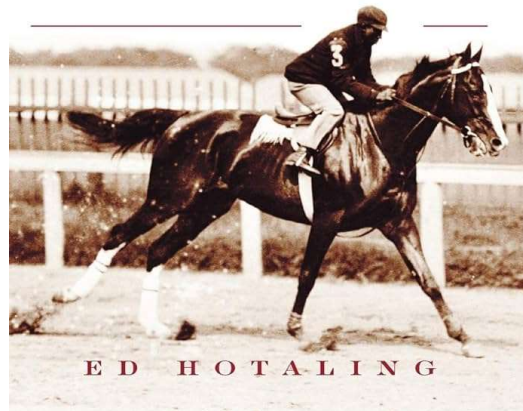


African American jockey Jimmy “Wink” Winkfield (1882-1974) won numerous races including the Kentucky Derby (1901 and 1902) and subsequently rode for Emperor Nicholas II of Russia. He lived in Russia until the revolution, after which he settled in France

“One of the most extraordinary stories in sports history.”
—LAURA HILLENBRAND, AUTHOR OF *SEABISCUIT*

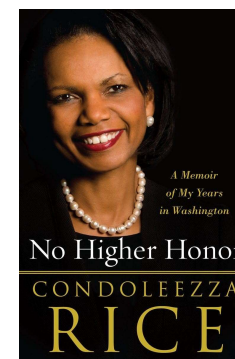
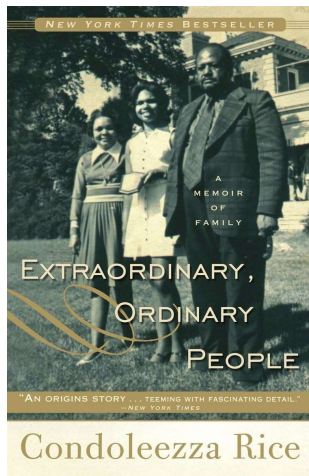
Wink

THE INCREDIBLE LIFE
AND EPIC JOURNEY OF
JIMMY WINKFIELD



Ed Hotaling, *Wink: The Incredible Life
And Epic Journey of Jimmy Winkfield*
(New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004)

Former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is a Russia specialist and a fluent Russian speaker. Her memoirs *No Higher Honor* (2010) and *Extraordinary, Ordinary People* (2011) are worth reading, with the latter book offering an often moving account of how her family background shaped her life's choices and successes



Russian rap star Timati (Timur Yunusov) with President Vladimir Putin



Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Timati and his business partner Anton Pinsky acquired the Russian branch of Starbucks, which they renamed Stars Coffee, possibly in a nod to the rap artist's original Black Star record label and commercial brand



St. Tropez, France: a high-end resort on the French Riviera celebrated in Timati's notorious video...



...“Welcome to St. Tropez” (lyrics)

- Get fresh, gotta stay fly
Get the jet I gotta stay high
High up like a la la la
Ain't nothin' here that my money can't buy
Dolce, Gucci and Louis V
Yacht so big I could live in the sea
You for real you can't see me
In these Euro frames the whole world change
Mad bitches so much broads
Feelin' like when I wanna fuck them all
Get mad brain in my very fast car
Ferrari V12 Maranello on my arm
Ladies can't resist the charm
Haters, kiss the ring of the Don
And we do this all day, welcome to St. Tropez
- Whoa, party now
Too much money in the bank account
Hands in the air make you scream and shout
When we're in St. Tropez
Whoa, party now
Spending money in a large amount
Hands in the air make you scream and shout
When we're in St. Tropez
- Welcome to St....

Timati, “Welcome to St. Tropez” (video)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wD4xIYhgxhY>