

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**Czars, Encounters, and Misunderstandings: The Russian Empire in American
Travel Writing, 1891–1914**

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Writing, 1891–1914**

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Maksim Pelmegov

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Conclusion and Outlook

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This dissertation, like many before it and what likely would be the case for dozens after it, began with only a single thing – an idea. An idea that did not suggest at all what the end result would be. Throughout my PhD years it developed slowly and, in many instances, unexpectedly. Yet in the end it materialized, resulting in what I believe was a time-consuming, challenging, but also quite amusing academic project. Numerous persons and institutions deserve all the thanks in the world for the support provided in turning a simple idea into this thesis.

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Introduction

Research Goals

Boundless plains, vast rivers, pristine flora, exotic natives, villages and towns, peasants wearing colorful outfits and sipping tea, (dis)comfort, inspiration, confidence, irritation, and a puffing train crossing the enormous and mystical Siberia and carrying passengers from far-away America of all places. The sights that the visitors from another continent claimed they saw through the window of a train and the feelings they had were quickly turned into travel accounts. Within just three years (1901–1903) three books were published by Americans about the Trans-Siberian Railway, one of them under an intriguing title, *A New Way Around an Old World*. The content of these three travelogues became the subject of my first PhD conference.

This conference became symbolic as it defined the direction of my research. As the nineteenth century was coming to its end, the Russian Empire and the United States, so geographically distant from each other but also separated only by the Bering Strait, asserted themselves as two major powers. During the years preceding the First World War, both countries experienced significant economic, social, and cultural change. A considerable volume of scholarship exists on many aspects of Russian-American relations and contacts. However, from the available literature it was clear that, although scholars examined many types of primary sources, they paid comparatively little attention to travel writing, both ways.

Meanwhile, the Trans-Siberian Railway, built across half of Eurasia, was the embodiment of rapidly changing travel conditions and the experience of travel. Improvements in transportation and communication, including steamers, the swiftly growing network of railroads, and telegraph connections, significantly contributed to and in a way revolutionized the notion of traveling, increasing the mobility of people from various social groups, and allowing more of them to take a trip to any part of the world, whether for specific goals or simple pleasure. In turn, these developments not only contributed to the emergence of tourist infrastructure but naturally prompted a growing number of travelers to note down their impressions of foreign countries and publish them for the home audience.¹ Scholars point out that in this period published travel narratives were regarded as one of the major sources of information about faraway countries and peoples, along

¹ Nandini Das and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 108–10. Regarding the development of travel conditions and tourist infrastructure at the turn of the century see: Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750 to 1915* (London: Aurum Press, 1998), chap. 6.

with the press and literature. In the United States and more generally in the West travel writing became a respected, expanding, as well as profitable activity for travelers and publishers alike, and certain authors already made writing travelogues their profession.² Travel accounts often combined informational or scientific and literary value, appealing to an ever-increasing number of readers at home and allowing their authors, even common tourists who went abroad for the first time, to use their first-hand experience to position themselves as authorities about other parts of the world.³

A look into secondary literature also revealed that most scholars mentioned George Kennan's prominent study of the exile system, finalized in his two-volume *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891, hereafter referred to as *Siberia*). The general consensus regarding this account is that it was his key text that received domestic and international acclaim and had a decisive negative influence on the image of the late Russian Empire in Europe and the United States. My intention could be then summarized in one sentence – to examine what American travelers to Russia wrote after Kennan's publication until the First World War, the conflict that had profound consequences on the world and led to the collapse of the Russian Empire; and explore Russian travel accounts on America written at the turn of the century as well. However, the sheer amount of travel material from both sides and the limitations set on the length of the thesis eventually prompted me to focus solely on the American side, leaving the Russian part for later research. I hope to cover it on the postdoctoral level. Initially, I expected most American travel writing to be negative and thought that it would confirm the scholarly statements about the impact of Kennan's study of the exile system on the perception of Russia. However, as this thesis demonstrates, the nature of American travel writing about the empire from the 1890s to the First World War and even Kennan's own impressions of Russia in his published travel accounts are more complex than originally perceived.

The objective of this dissertation can be summarized as follows: to examine how American visitors to the Russian Empire presented the country in travel materials published between 1891 and 1914, the period of gradual emergence of modern mass tourism, taking into consideration the historical background. More specifically, the goals are to identify the major topics in their writings; to present how American travelogues resembled or differed from one another in their conclusions

² Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 74–75; Jill Steward, “‘How and Where To Go’: The Role of Travel Journalism in Britain and the Evolution of Foreign Tourism, 1840–1914,” in *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity, and Conflict*, ed. John Walton, Tourism and Cultural Change 6 (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2005), 39–54.

³ William Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11–15; Das and Youngs, *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, 114–16.

based on the social status of the traveler, the goals of the trip, knowledge of the language of the destination country, the region of one's travels, and other factors; to point out similarities and differences between turn-of-the-century travelogues and Kennan's writings on Russia along with earlier, post-Civil War American travel writing; and to explore how travelers reflected the culture of their home country by writing about Russia. In addition, in the subchapter related to the structure of the thesis, it is explained why regarding one specific region of travel it was decided to take into consideration examples of both American and Russian travel accounts.

The Existing Scholarship

Scholarship in Russian and English available for the purpose of the thesis can be divided into several categories. These include compilations of extracts from Russian and American travelogues, bibliographies of travel accounts written in both countries, theoretical works on travel writing, assessments of Russian-American relations and mutual images at the turn of the century, and monographs specifically about Russian and/or American travel writing. A general evaluation of the materials suggests that few scholars have touched upon the subject of this thesis. The topic of Russian travel writing on America is not sufficiently examined, either.⁴

Only two text compilations were identified regarding American impressions about Russia, and both were published a considerable time ago.⁵ Their scarcity is counterbalanced by the recent interest in creating bibliographies of travelogues, both American and Russian.⁶ They proved to be

⁴ Robert Allen's work, although covering Russian perceptions of American technology, agriculture, and Russian participation at the Chicago World's Fair, used only government-sponsored publications, and accounts of private Russian individuals were not considered. Similarly, Andrey Makurin wrote about mutual perceptions from 1904 to 1914 with the examination of the press and reports about the American economy and society made by Russian specialists who traveled there. Yet American or non-official Russian travelogues were beyond the author's scope of interest: Robert Allen, *Russia Looks at America: The View to 1917* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1988); Andrey Makurin, *SShA i Rossiya v nachale XX veka. Obshchestvo i ekonomika v otrazhenii rossiyskoy i amerikanskoy pechati* [The United States and Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Society and economy in the light of Russian and American press] (Saarbrücken: Palmarium Academic, 2013).

⁵ Francesca Wilson, *Muscovy: Russia Through Foreign Eyes, 1553–1900* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Eugene Anshel, *The American Image of Russia, 1775–1917* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974); As a side note, the two identified compilations of Russian travelogues about America were both published in the late 1980s, apparently to assist warming Soviet-American relations, see: Olga Hasty and Susanne Fusso, eds., *America Through Russian Eyes, 1874–1926* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Alexandr Nikolyukin, ed., *A Russian Discovery of America*, trans. Cynthia Carlile and Julius Katzer (Moscow: Progress, 1986).

⁶ Anthony Cross, *In the Lands of the Romanovs: An Annotated Bibliography of First-Hand English-Language Accounts of the Russian Empire (1613–1917)* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2014); Tat'yana Pecherskaya, ed., *Russkiy travelog XVIII – nachala XX vekov: annotirovannyi ukazatel'* [The Russian travelogue of the eighteenth – the beginning of twentieth centuries: An annotated bibliography] (Novosibirsk: Nemo Press, 2018); Harold Smith, *American Travellers Abroad: A Bibliography of Accounts Published Before 1900*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999); Harry Nerhood, *To Russia and Return: An Annotated Bibliography of Travelers' English Language Accounts of Russia from the Ninth Century to the Present* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1968).

especially useful in identifying the necessary material. The fact that three bibliographies were published in the last three decades reflects the more general contemporary interest in travel writing as a source and a separate discipline. Incited by the cultural turn in the humanities and the emergence of postcolonial studies and post-structuralism, from the 1970s onward a considerable amount of scholarly research appeared. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is seen as the foundational work that laid the basis for examining travel writing as the product of knowledge, power, and imperialism.⁷ The recognized works in travel writing studies include Mary Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* that introduced valuable terms like "contact zone," "capitalist vanguard," and "transculturation" when discussing Western travel writing about Africa and Latin America, while James Buzard's *The Beaten Track* described the formation of the "superior" traveler vs. "average" tourist rhetoric just as an increasing number of people were able to travel in the nineteenth century, often visiting the same major sites.⁸ Numerous theoretical compilations, articles, and monographs appeared in the last three decades, written primarily by English-speaking researchers and often related to empire-colony travel perceptions.⁹ There is an immense volume of works related to Russian-American relations at the turn of the century, and Norman Saul's *Concord and Conflict* is especially noteworthy as it provides a concise overview of major economic, diplomatic, and cultural contacts between the two countries.¹⁰ As for American and Russian travel writing proper, many works are primarily about travels from Russia and the U.S. to Western Europe, with ample attention given to intellectuals and novelists, from Mark Twain to Henry James on the American side.¹¹

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁸ Mary Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008); James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁹ Recent companions include: Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Alasdair Pettinger and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Carl Thompson, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Other general works are: David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing, The New Critical Idiom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing: From Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, trans. Catherine Matthias (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

¹⁰ Norman Saul, *Concord and Conflict: The United States and Russia, 1867–1914* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

¹¹ Cushing Strout, *The American Image of the Old World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); Stowe, *Going Abroad*; Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions of Europe in Classical Russian Travel Writing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005); Daniel Kilbride, *Being American in Europe, 1750–1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Susan Layton, *Contested Russian Tourism: Cosmopolitanism, Nation, and Empire in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021).

Although relatively few works deal with the American vision of Russia at the turn of the century or specifically American travel writing on the empire, it is worth discussing them in greater detail. What is especially notable is that, when dealing with the comments of American travelers about Russia, many of these accounts did not correlate them with Russian historical developments. In other words, it seems as if they took them at face value, overlooking simplifications or outright distortions made by the authors. By setting the discussed sources into a historical context, this thesis offers another, so far barely employed angle on evaluating and analyzing travel accounts.

I identified two works that dealt with American travel impressions on Russia. The pioneer study was published in 1938 by Anna Babey. While she sought to provide a wide survey of American travel impressions from the independence of the U.S. to the collapse of the Russian Empire, most of her book dealt with accounts written after the Civil War. Although her book is only one hundred and twenty pages long, Babey found an impressive number of accounts of all types, from book-length travelogues to articles, and divided all travelers to Russia into three major groups: diplomats, common sightseers, and those beyond these two groups, primarily those coming to the country to make economic, social, cultural, or sociological investigations or military observations. She focused on seven major topics that, in her view, were the most prevalent in American writings: the Russian absolute monarchy, the possibility of a revolution, religion, the peasantry, women, education, and the future of the empire. Babey made an important point on the necessity to look into the social background of travelers and try to identify their preconceptions of the country of their travels. She stated that at the turn of the century an increasing number of travelers attempted to go beyond descriptions of cities, sights, or upper classes and inquired into the social and economic conditions of Russian common people. Although Babey demonstrated that there were different views on the seven subjects offered, her general statement was that in the decades after the Civil War, “with America’s own maturity, her settlement of the western states, and her interest in imperialism, a sociological and economic criticism of Russia made a frequent appearance.”¹² The Russo-Japanese War marked a milestone since many commentators of the time switched to the topic of a possible political upheaval, including Socialists like Ernest Poole and William Walling, who visited Russia during the 1905 Revolution. At the same time, other Americans retained optimism about Russia and believed in its progress, especially those who ventured into Siberia and drew parallels with the American West. Some even imagined that

¹² Anna Babey, *Americans in Russia, 1776–1917: A Study of the American Travelers in Russia from the American Revolution to the Russian Revolution* (New York: Comet Press, 1938), 2.

Russians would have an especially bright future if they adopted American education, individualism, and, possibly, form of government. Despite enormous efforts put into the work, it is also visible that rather than conducting a thorough analysis, on many occasions she simply compiled citations from different authors on the seven topics identified. Some accounts mentioned in the bibliography were not given any attention in the text. And although her general conclusions and major topics are correct, this thesis shows that the turn of the century saw the emergence of new discourses, like comments on natives, Russian regional policy, or foreign affairs. Besides, Babey missed the topic of direct Russian-American interactions in the travel narratives.

Margarita Marinova explored two-way travel between 1865 and 1905 in *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing*.¹³ Her work focused on Russian and American intellectuals and writers.¹⁴ However, she did not take into consideration travel writing from other social groups, in a period when, as has been pointed out, travel had become more accessible. The discourses missing in Babey's work did not appear in her study, either. Marinova's major conclusion is that from the 1860s to 1905 both Russians and Americans visiting the other country entertained increasingly negative visions of each other, and despite the friendly diplomatic relations, mutual vilification laid the groundwork for the future "success of the Cold War's rhetoric of mutual hatred and exclusion."¹⁵ This thesis challenges her claim and attempts to demonstrate that the tendency in American travel writing was not wholly, or even increasingly, negative. Additionally, both monographs offered little regarding travels in Russia's faraway borderlands and the differences between travel impressions within European Russia and outside of it. With this in mind, this thesis shows that the area of travel within Russia did matter. The more negative discourses within European Russia, where the empire was frequently presented as backward compared to the West, were counterbalanced and complicated by statements in the empire's Asian areas after the creation of major railways, when it transformed into a creative force akin to Western empires. Finally, the two authors did not elaborate on how these travelogues reflected Americans and their culture, and this aspect will be discussed in the next section.

¹³ Margarita Marinova, *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing*, Routledge Research in Travel Writing 5 (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴ Marinova studied travels to Russia by Mark Twain, John Ross Browne, and Edna Dean Proctor in the 1860s and the 1870s, Isabel Hapgood's *Russian Rambles* (1895) as a result of her journeys in the late 1880s, and fiction by Abraham Cahan; and the depiction of the U.S. by writers Grigoriy Machtet, Pavel Ogorodnikov, Eduard Tsimmerman, and Vladimir Korolenko.

¹⁵ Marinova, *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing*, 152.

The following three works, which provided both valuable insights and inspiration, focused specifically on American perceptions of the Russian Empire in the decades before the First World War, with a partial overlap with the topics present in this thesis. The book titled *Modernization From the Other Shore* by David Engerman, although dealing primarily with the interwar Soviet Union, illuminated the perceptions of American commentators on Russia in the imperial age.¹⁶ Arguing that the three major factors that influenced American writing about Russians were the belief in the existence of national character (influenced primarily by secular Victorian values before the First World War), an enthusiasm for modernization along with faith in individual development and overcoming negative character traits, and the gradual formation of academic research institutions, the author presented how Americans, from travelers to diplomats and writers, engaged in discussions about Russia. Of particular interest is the content related to the 1891–1892 famine in Russia. He examined what Americans, including the relief officials, thought on its causes, concluding that most took a particularistic stance, blaming primarily the Russian national character rooted in geography and the peasant commune that made Russia inferior to the West. They differed only on the roots of Russian national traits, blaming mainly either the people themselves or the autocracy, and speculated whether Russian sloppiness, laziness, apathy, etc. could be overcome. However, in his discussion of tsarist Russia Engerman generally overlooked the role of religion, including in the perceptions of the relief commissioners. In fact, all the officials discussed in this thesis, including William Edgar and Francis Reeves (whose travelogue reminds one of a gospel) that Engerman focused on, offered a harsh criticism of the Orthodox Church and its influence on ordinary Russians, with its own share of misrepresentations. Engerman did mention that Reeves criticized Orthodoxy but added that ultimately he, like Kennan, blamed peasant deficiencies and calamities on “ruling authorities, the interlinked church and state.”¹⁷ His travelogue, however, suggests that he departed from Kennan’s criticism of the autocracy, going as far as composing a poem in honor of Alexander III. Besides, Engerman did not mention another commissioner, William Blankenburg, who was friends with Reeves and whose text the latter cited abundantly.

David Foglesong’s *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”* argues that as of the 1880s waves of American crusaders, from missionaries and journalists like George Kennan to academics and policy makers, have created and perpetuated the image of Russia as an “imaginary twin” or a “dark double,” reflecting on similarities between the two countries while labeling

¹⁶ David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), chap. 1.

¹⁷ Engerman, 46.

unsympathetic aspects of Russian life as signs of backwardness and simultaneously pushing for changes to modernize or “liberate” Russia according to the American model – on the economic, social, political, even religious level.¹⁸ Such a controversial attitude towards tsarist Russia was explained not only in terms of geopolitical tensions in East Asia or Russian reactionary actions and restrictions, but also in terms of changes within American society itself, which began to use the example of Russia to downplay its own internal problems and affirm its missionary role in the world. Foglesong outlined the importance, even primacy, of American religious traditions to understand the fluctuation in hopes and disappointments in remaking Russia. It is understandable that Foglesong applied his two terms to a limited number of zealous activists for Russian transformation rather than all visitors to Russia. His claim about the importance of a religious angle does have value when discussing turn-of-the-century American travelogues. Yet at least one thing seems to be unanswered – how come that Kennan, a major contributor to the “Russian freedom” campaigns in the U.S. and a constant critic of tsarism from the late 1880s, published a new edition of *Tent Life* in 1910 whereby he essentially undermined his own criticism? On the whole, it seems that a look at all of his travel materials might complicate the picture of Kennan himself.

Developing Foglesong’s ideas further, Russian scholar Viktoriya Zhuravleva wrote a monumental, thousand-page study related to both Russian-American relations at the turn of the century and the image of Russia in the U.S.: *Understanding Russia in the United States*.¹⁹ In addition to the conclusions of Foglesong, she identified the image of Russia in this period as a “constituting Other” for Americans and discussed major contacts and issues in bilateral relations. She stated that four types of discourses, often simplified but revealing the changes in Americans themselves, were present in American society regarding Russia that constantly struggled with one another. These were: conservative/pessimistic, liberal-universalist, radical/Socialist, and Russophile. Her chapter on the famine is impressive and covers all the relief officials that this thesis deals with. Yet in discussing the relief campaign Zhuravleva demonstrated the divisions of American opinion on Russia, but barely anything about the discords, from ethnic to regional, that the campaign revealed in the U.S. itself. And although her conclusion that the commissioners produced an ambivalent image of Russia is reasonable, Zhuravleva postulated that in the end they contributed rather to the Russophile discourse. However, from the perspective of travel writing and

¹⁸ David Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire:” The Crusade for a “Free Russia” Since 1881* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Viktoriya Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA: obrazy i mify, 1881–1914* [Understanding Russia in the United States: Images and myths, 1881–1914] (Moscow: Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy gumanitarnyy universitet, 2012).

comparison with other travelogues, I suggest that there are too many statements that can be interpreted as what Zhuravleva deemed to be a conservative discourse. The author also elaborated on the image of Siberia in the American mind, but this dissertation proposes a new angle of looking at it – from the position of anti-modernist sentiments.

Finally, this dissertation offers a modified take on the American discourses during the 1905 Revolution. All three authors discussed in the previous section focused only on the so-called “gentlemen socialists.” Even Zhuravleva, in her yet another extensive chapter, did not write much about other journalists who traveled to Russia and offered a narrative different from them. They wrote profusely about Ernest Poole, Arthur Bullard, and William Walling, including the latter’s monumental *Russia’s Message*.²⁰ However, all scholars apparently neglected the last of the “Four Horsemen” – Kellogg Durland. The analysis of his writings suggests a departure from some of their claims. While Engerman emphasized that these socialist activists saw Russians primarily through the lens of national character, Durland’s text offers another perspective. The acceptance of Socialist Revolutionary ideology, “civilization” discourse, and religion – these elements had just as powerful an influence on his outlook as the belief in national character. Durland indeed was influenced by religion, but, rather than, according to Foglesong, offering a vision of Americanization of Russia like other “gentlemen socialists,” his picture of the future of the empire was closely aligned to the Socialist Revolutionary vision rather than that of the American crusaders. And some of Durland’s claims may challenge a separate Socialist discourse established by Zhuravleva. They outlined the backwardness of the empire in his eyes and, despite pompous projects of the revolutionary future that could serve as an example worldwide, corresponded to the conservative discourse.

On the whole, the subject of American travel writing about the late Russian Empire has received but limited attention. This thesis not only seeks to expand the relatively small volume of scholarship on the topic but also offers new suggestions on the already studied topics in Russian-American encounters. Therefore, it (and, hopefully, the study of Russian travel accounts about America) promises to be a new and relevant addition to the understanding of Russian-American cultural dialogue and developments in both countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to the field of travel writing.

²⁰ William Walling, *Russia’s Message: The True Import of the Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1908).

Theoretical Background and Methodology

Most researchers involved in the field of travel writing have marked this genre as fluid and heterogeneous, involving and borrowing from many different narrative styles, genres, and techniques of writing, and blending facts of the journey with subjective impressions. Regarding the turn of the twentieth century, they highlight that just as travel became increasingly more accessible and convenient, travelogues became closer to present-day ones in content, combining facts with fiction; yet their authors presented the text altogether as an authoritative source of information for readers at home.²¹ The recent *Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* stated that “travel writing studies have proliferated, diversified and grown more historically nuanced and theoretically sophisticated” during the last four decades, refining and reexamining earlier discourses and priorities, while works by Said and Pratt remained fundamental for a contemporary researcher in travel writing studies. However, it also claimed that even these acknowledged works could not always be the major theoretical foundation, “often requiring recalibration if not outright revision in light of the specific local circumstances of individual travellers and their texts.”²² In addition, scholars still debate even the definition of the term “travel writing,” while works related to the era of late imperialism discuss empire-colony travel perceptions more frequently.

Before going deeper into theory and methods, it is necessary to briefly outline the definitions of “travel writing” and “travelogue” applicable to this thesis. It has already been pointed out that the definition of “travel writing” is the subject of continuous debates, and its nature depends on the historical period as well as categories and genres of material included in it, whether based on a real journey or fictional, ranging from ancient ballads and ship logs to maps and modern bloggers’ travel content. Without going too deep into scholarly debates, this thesis acknowledges the idea presented by Carl Thompson that travel “is the negotiation between self and other that is brought about by movement in space,” and that the product of this negotiation can be called travel writing.²³ He emphasized that to suggest an all-encompassing concept of travel writing would be almost impossible but proposed the following definition: “travel writing” can be understood as “a constellation of many different types of writing and/or text,” where every text can have “a variety of features or attributes that can make us classify a text as travel writing, and each individual text will manifest a different selection and combination of these attributes.”²⁴

²¹ Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–2; Korte, *English Travel Writing*, 8–9; Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 26–30, 88–90.

²² Thompson, *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, xvi–xvii.

²³ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 9–10.

²⁴ Thompson, 26.

Accepting this general definition of travel writing, however vague, it is important to correlate it with the content of specific texts examined in this thesis. American travel accounts written on Russia at the turn of the century were presented for the most part as first-person narratives where the author claimed to be the one who had seen the country personally and whose observations had really taken place. With this in mind, the definition of a travel account for the purpose of this dissertation is taken from the research of Jan Borm. Borm introduced the term “travel book” that he defined as “any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical.”²⁵ Thompson mentioned this definition and acknowledged this “modern” type of account as a major form of travel writing. This thesis uses the terms “travelogue,” “travel account,” “travel narrative,” and “travel book” interchangeably and according to Borm’s definition.

Coming back to the approaches used in the thesis, Said’s classic work is certainly valuable. Paying special attention to the representations of the Middle East by writers, poets, officials, scholars, and, no less importantly, travelers from the British and the French empires, Said outlined the formation of Orientalist discourse from the late eighteenth century. He defined Orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” and explored how the knowledge accumulated by Europeans provided imagery, vocabulary, and rhetoric to both define and rule the East.²⁶ Although Said introduced the American vision of the Orient only from the Second World War, his concept is more than applicable when discussing American perceptions of the Czar’s Central Asian possessions.

Ideas presented by Larry Wolff in his *Inventing Eastern Europe* proved to be equally relevant.²⁷ Wolff argued that in a way similarly to the “appropriation” of the East, Western scholars and travelers of the Enlightenment defined, mapped, organized, and overall invented both a geographic and a philosophical concept of Eastern Europe, including Russia, altering the older imaginary division of the continent between the south and the north. He stated that the most important concept was the “civilization”/barbarity dichotomy based on the overall scale of development, and Eastern Europe as a whole was placed in between them, without taking into

²⁵ Jan Borm, “Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology,” in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, Studies in European Cultural Transition 19 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 17.

²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

²⁷ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

consideration the diversity of its peoples and regions. He pointed out that “the Enlightenment’s idea of Eastern Europe was based upon neither definitive exclusion nor unqualified inclusion, but rather on the powerful prerogative of formulating that dilemma.” This ambivalent position of the region being neither equally “civilized” nor completely backward allowed Western Europe to claim its superiority, influenced later perceptions of the region, and continues to affect its image today.

As demonstrated throughout the thesis, Americans at times referred to Western Europe when exploring the Russian Empire, and some of them considered themselves part of the West when declaring the inferiority of certain Russian conditions or cultural customs. However, as shown in the last chapter, Russians were also prone to evaluating the U.S. through the lens of Western Europe. Thus, travelers from both countries did occasionally see each other with a third point of reference. In other words, the concept of “triangulation” introduced by David Vásquez in his study of Latin American identity and used by Balázs Venkovits in the thesis on the presentation of Mexico in Hungarian travel accounts from the early 1850s to 1910 (with Hungarians often making references to the U.S. when evaluating its southern neighbor), is of relevance here.²⁸

A final important concept was borrowed from Jackson Lears, a scholar who examined American anti-modernist thought, including in his *Rebirth of a Nation*.²⁹ He presented an overview of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era based on the idea of the nation’s longing and search for regeneration and revitalization after the Civil War. Just as the old ways and morality were increasingly transformed by accumulated wealth, immigration, urbanization, and technological change, many Americans felt increasingly out of place with these developments. Spiritual and psychological crises, fears of “overcivilization,” and longing for a real, genuine lifestyle became widespread. With the roots in Protestant ideas of revival and conversion, Lears explored how “American seekers merged Protestant dreams of spiritual rebirth with secular projects of purification” – from Populism and Progressive reforms to the calls for militarism and empire.

Considering that travel writing is a diverse field of study and that it requires a different perspective in case of major power travel encounters rather than empire-colony interactions, this thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach at the intersection of history, literary, and cultural studies and applies general methods of travel writing studies. Infrequently employed by travel writing scholars, this dissertation puts special emphasis on historical context in addition to

²⁸ Balázs Venkovits, “‘We Are Clearly Deceived at Home:’ Inter-American Images and the Depiction of Mexico in Hungarian Travel Writing During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., University of Debrecen, 2014).

²⁹ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

providing a general overview of contacts and relations between Russia and the U.S. at the turn of the century. Americans visited Russia on different occasions, whether as witnesses of key events in Russian history at the turn of the century or as visitors to various regions of the empire. Therefore, this dissertation employs a thematic and a regional approach simultaneously. It provides a biography of all travelers included, with an emphasis on their respective social backgrounds, knowledge of the destination country's language, and goals and means of travel. Travel accounts are examined primarily based on their major topics and their comparison with one another, along with evaluations of the independence and coherence of the texts and specific writing techniques.

Sources and Limitations of the Thesis

Both articles and book-length accounts are examined in this thesis. They were considered part of the primary source corpus if their major topic was travel, if they corresponded to the "travel book" definition given by Jan Borm, and if they were wholly or at least to a reasonable degree about a visit to Russia. This dissertation had to exclude memoirs, social or political treatises about Russia without the presence of travel, as well as the materials or official reports of scientific expeditions (however, the latter were consulted in some cases). It also leans toward travelogues written by Americans who were not permanent residents in Russia, since the latter's perception of the country alters fundamentally from casual or even frequent travelers, and since I am specifically interested in how the residents of the U.S. reflected their countrymen's culture. Finally, suggestions by contemporary travel writing scholars on the democratization of travel at the turn of the century and my, hopefully pardonable, desire to focus on authors or accounts who have not yet been thoroughly studied contributed to the conscious turn away from intellectuals or novelists (studied in plenty by Marinova, along with Stowe or Strout when it comes to Western Europe) in favor of members of other backgrounds during the era of developing mass tourism, such as doctors, engineers, businessmen, journalists, etc. Their texts reveal prevalent, maybe not as refined, but still important perceptions that echoed the American society at large. It was they who were perhaps the most "representative" travelers of this era in the volume of the published travel narrations, yet their writings are barely examined and are unfamiliar to the majority of both Russians and Americans of today. Even with these constraints, however, I identified no less than fifty American book-length accounts, along with a staggering number of articles. Naturally, this volume of material demanded selection.

Although there were travelogues depicting American tourist ventures in European Russia, in this thesis they had to be replaced by travel accounts responding to two major events in the empire at the turn of the century – the famine of 1891–1892, when individual Americans organized a relief campaign and sent five steamers with food and necessities to Russia alongside relief commissioners, and the 1905 Revolution. Although it is a painful compromise, the rationale for this is that both of these events were widely reported, and the number of Americans who were aware of them and naturally wanted to read about the impressions of those who personally traveled to Russia likely exceeded the number of those who read regular tourist travel stories. Besides, the travel narrations selected focused primarily on European Russia, essentially offering a two-in-one premium – to analyze both American response to major events in Russian history and American impressions of cities, villages, and people in European Russia. The three relief commissioners were the only authors I could find, whereas, as discussed in the previous section, in the chapter regarding the revolution I focused on so far ignored Kellogg Durland and another journalist, similarly not examined, who offered an opposing view from those of “gentlemen socialists,” thus allowing for a more balanced take on how Americans reported on the upheaval.

The major new tendency at the turn of the century was the rise of American journeys to non-European regions of the empire, including via the Central Asian and the Trans-Siberian railways, with the latter easily the subject of the largest number of book-length travel accounts on Russia published from the 1890s to 1914. In these two cases travel narrations were picked with a time gap in publication since they would reflect the extensions of the Trans-Siberian and the Central Asian railways and the new developments in Siberia and Central Asia, allowing for varying perceptions. Some of the accounts on these two topics offered only a brief narration or were overwhelmed with long geographic and economic descriptions. But, most importantly, I selected the texts by Bookwalter, Senn, Bates, and Curtis since they offered the most reflection on their own country and thus allow a productive analysis of both their perception of Russia and the influence of American culture and developments upon it. Lastly, in the last chapter Vanderlip was, just like in the case of the relief officials, the only American author I was able to find who provided a personalized, self-reflecting narration and was not subject to reporting to authorities or scientific community requirements. On the whole, I attempted to provide a broad picture of travel writing – immediate journalist reports, articles, and books, along with post-travel interviews and lectures in some instances – written by representatives of different backgrounds about different events and regions, with varying routes of travel and special circumstances in many of the cases. Finally, for

reasons indicated in the next section, all of Kennan's travel accounts, and not just *Siberia*, were studied in detail. This appeared to be the most reasonable selection for the scale of a dissertation. Nevertheless, there are some obvious omissions that must be addressed.

Women's travel writing is one of them. Although the turn of the century was marked by the growing mobility of women, in the identified corpus of sources the absolute majority were written by men (the same is true for the Russian side). To a degree, this imbalance can be attributed to the representation of new routes in non-European areas. As demonstrated in chapter 1, two major series of travel guides discouraged women from traveling beyond European Russia (at least alone) by pointing out dangers or the absence of anything of interest. Also, no female-written accounts were found related to the famine or the 1905 Revolution. Given the scarcity of women's accounts and the overall lack of research on the whole corpus of travelogues, they had to be left out. Instead, a comparison between examples of Russian and American women's travelogues as a separate chapter would be a more fruitful addition to the study of mutual Russian-American travel writing that I hope to complete at the postdoctoral level.

Two other limitations have to be addressed before moving on. I understand that I am dealing with travelogues, whether articles or books, as the finished or "polished" product that circulated among the readers. Meanwhile, researchers have persuasively argued that the published version could considerably differ from the actual impressions or travel notes taken by an individual throughout the journey. They demonstrated that the process of publication involved turning disjointed notes into a coherent manuscript while inevitably omitting certain details, or at times making up others. Other actors besides the author, such as editors, publishers, or even ghostwriters, could significantly alter the final publication.³⁰ The lack of access to archives and private notes of the discussed authors left me with no option but to study the published travel narratives themselves. However, it is the published materials and not private notes that circulated among the reading public and affected their understanding of the "Other;" therefore, they are undoubtedly an important source of study since they both change and reflect the home readership's culture.

An increasing number of American accounts of the period had visual materials in them. Scholars point out that, along with the formation of the American national book trade system and the general growth of printed materials and means of their distribution, the turn of the century saw momentous improvements in printing technologies, including typesetting (Monotype and

³⁰ Ian Maclaren, "Exploration/Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Author," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 5 (1992): 39–66; David Finkelstein, *The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), chap. 3.

Linotype) and the emergence of printing machines and machine-made standardized paper, which would all influence printing in the twentieth century. In the decades from 1880, the development of photomechanical and photochemical techniques made it possible to publish real photos on separate pages or even integrated into the text on the same page instead of lithographs or wood engravings. Along with the appearance of Kodak cameras in the late 1880s and the cheap Kodak Brownie in 1900, it is reasonable to assume that travelers could and did take an increasing number of photographs, and their accounts could boast of printed photos.³¹ As travel writing researchers point out, photos, giving extra weight to the supposed objectivity of travel impressions, often acted as important instruments in categorizing the world's peoples and regions. Compared to earlier types of visuals, photos contributed more than ever to the ideological construction of the "Other."³² Most American accounts of Russia in the examined period had illustrations, often dozens of them, while Kennan's *Siberia* and another travelogue covered in this thesis – a couple of hundred. Considering that showing too many images would take up a lot of space available for the thesis and the fact that most of the travelogues selected were not studied by scholars previously, the priority had to be given to texts rather than visuals. Nevertheless, a general and concise overview of the type, position, and possible interpretations of visual materials is provided regarding all the selected travelogues, with examples included in each chapter.

Thesis Outline and Its Structure

In his overview of Kennan's *Siberia*, Norman Saul, apart from stating that it brought "a decided push and a degree of permanence" to the negative image of Russia in America and Western Europe, also claimed that "from that time almost everyone traveling in or writing about Russia had to measure their perceptions against Kennan's."³³

While it is true that American travelers from the 1890s to the First World War often echoed Kennan, their perceptions reflected not only the conclusions in his study of the exile system but also in another major and generally overlooked travel account written by a young Kennan – *Tent*

³¹ On the development of technologies of printing and illustration see: Scott Casper et al., eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 3, *The Industrial Book, 1840–1880* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chap. 1; Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 4, *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 72–77.

³² Margaret Topping, "Travel Writing and Visual Culture," in *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Carl Thompson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 78–88; Peter Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel, and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); On the progress in photography technologies see: Graham Smith, *Photography and Travel* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), chap. 5.

³³ Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 289.

Life in Siberia, and Adventures among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia (1870, hereafter referred to as *Tent Life*) and its extended edition published in 1910, within the period in question. Based on Kennan's participation in the Western Union Telegraph Expedition (1865–1867) and his life among Russians and natives in the Russian Far East, *Tent Life* had been in print from 1870 until the early 1920s. The fact that this account (and not *Siberia*) was republished with extra material four decades after initial publication further underlines that it was continuously popular among American readers and that it should be given as much attention as the study of the exile system to understand the American perception of the Russian Empire. Kennan's three publications (1870 and 1910 *Tent Life* and the articles on the exile system turned into *Siberia*) shaped the range of subjects that most travelers going to Russia at the turn of the century would reiterate, and his contradictory thoughts about the empire and its people laid the basis for similarly ambivalent evaluations by later visitors. The influence of Kennan's works is undeniable since some later visitors openly mentioned him in their travelogues, responded to his claims or the images he created, or followed both *Tent Life* and *Siberia* in terms of structure (two examples are on display in chapters 4 and 7). Briefly, all three travel accounts, and not just *Siberia*, are crucial in understanding how Americans perceived the empire from the 1890s onwards.

Therefore, one of the chapters of this thesis delves into all three travel narrations by the major American expert on Russia of the time. It reveals the dynamic evolution of Kennan's perceptions and what I call the "dual vision" of Russia. In *Tent Life*, a young and devout Kennan displayed his experience with an evident parallel to the settlement of Western territories at home, and Russia was presented as "civilization" that was gradually assimilating exotic natives. Yet a few of his comparisons of Russia and America were not in favor of the former, while a portion of his comments on native life contributed rather to their misunderstanding. When he ventured into Siberia twenty years later to explore the exile system, he already knew Russian but also faced a painful spiritual crisis. He resolved it by embarking upon a zealous crusade in favor of abused political exiles, at the expense of seriously misinterpreting the Russian anti-tsarist movements. He developed a much more critical image outside of his examinations of penitentiaries. The empire on the whole was deemed outside of the real "civilization" that consisted of the U.S. and Western Europe. Unlike in *Tent Life*, Kennan on many occasions showed a self-confident attitude, pointing to the enormous economic potential of Russia and its resources and simultaneously the empire's failure to develop them, calling for the application of superior American know-how and business skills in developing Siberia. He went as far as suggesting that the well-educated and noble political

prisoners he met looked at the U.S. as a model to emulate. From the 1890s onwards, he engaged in a lifelong battle against tsarism. However, despite his continuous criticism of Russian absolutism, in the 1910 edition of *Tent Life* Kennan, in his sixties and with all his experience and expertise on Russian developments, revived the original narrative of Russia as a creative and “civilizing” force, discarding any criticism of the Russian monarchy, its treatment of exiles, or its inability to develop the country. What might be seen as a paradox can, perhaps, be illuminated when one takes into consideration that the aging Kennan grew conservative in response to the advent of modernity in his home country. Republishing his popular, decades-old tales of tough life in the north among natives seems to reflect his and the reading public’s discomfort about America’s development and longing for a frontier-era experience and polar travel that tested one’s character.

The travelers who came to the empire after Kennan reflected the growth of the middle class and the emergence of travel writing as a popular and respected genre, with one of the discussed visitors being a professional travel writer. However, they came primarily from Eastern or Midwestern states, similarly to most post-Civil War travelers. The common topics that figured in most travelogues correlated with those in Kennan’s accounts and earlier American travel writing on Russia. Apart from comments on travel conditions and conventional descriptions of nature, villages, or cities, the authors often made remarks on the Russian peasantry or other social groups like nobles or Cossacks, religion and the Orthodox Church, and Russian domestic policy (including the monarchy and the exile system). However, just as Russia embraced early industrialization, and railroads appeared in non-European regions, new topics emerged, including natives and Russian policy both in Siberia and Central Asia, while the old ones were debated and reconsidered. Naturally, those who visited Russia during the famine in the early 1890s and the 1905 Revolution presented commentary on the state of the country in those unique circumstances. Other accounts discussed the then relevant international affairs, especially in East or Central Asia, and thus reflected the growth of American attention to Asia and foreign relations in general.

The travelers who visited Russia after Kennan reiterated an ambivalent image of the empire in line with its “dual vision.” They continued to judge Russia through the lens of “civilization,” its development, and comparisons with the U.S. and Europe (triangulation) or more generally the West/East dichotomy. Those who witnessed the empire during the famine and the revolution and traveled mostly within European Russia evaluated the country based on triangulation with Western Europe more frequently and presented it as more backward or outside of Western “civilization,” similarly to Western evaluations of Eastern Europe shown by Wolff and like Kennan in *Siberia*.

Some of them echoed Kennan in presenting Russians as wishing to pursue the American way of development and/or offered advice on what Russians should do to overcome their problems. Yet the visitors who explored Asian regions, especially those who tried the Trans-Siberian Railway, drew constant parallels with the “taming” of the American West or the settlement of the American continent. These visitors echoed Kennan’s *Tent Life* in lauding the “civilizing” march of Russia and praised the development of those distant regions, thinking of the empire as part of the West, with a typically Orientalist discourse present in Russian Turkestan. Finally, another major point made in *Tent Life* was often reiterated, regardless of the circumstances, the region of journey, or thoughts about the empire in general – that Russians were inevitably hospitable to Americans and happy to see them. In sum, the image of Russia in American travel writing, both in Kennan’s narratives and those written later, was complex and ambivalent. This thesis suggests that the commonly repeated statement about the decisive negative impact of Kennan’s *Siberia* on the perception of the empire in the U.S. could and should be reevaluated. Besides, both *Tent Life* and *Siberia* are important if we are to understand the influence of his writings on the later thoughts about Russia among Americans.

Yet American travelogues on Russia revealed just as much, if not more, about the “Self” as the “Other.” A look at the content of the travelogues with the knowledge of Russian history in mind leaves one perplexed, as mistakes, simplifications, exaggerations, and questionable parallels were plenty. Many travelers revealed a Manichean look at Russia and the outside world in general, coupled with statements that revealed general unawareness of real developments. It transpires that, with the rise of their country as an economic leader and increasingly a major power in the world, in many cases they thought of their historical experience as a standard and projected it on Russia. Many of them, like Kennan in *Siberia*, outlined the empire’s rich resources that could be developed by U.S. businesses, acting as supporters of increasing American economic presence in Russia, regardless of the region of travel, showcasing what I call the “imperial view.” Although fewer travelers suggested a religious transformation of Russia, it is undeniable that, with many comments on Orthodoxy and its influence on common people, the American outlook on the empire had not only secular but deep Protestant roots, especially considering that the turn of the century saw monumental American missionary efforts to bring Protestant Christianity to the rest of the world.

The two major notions on American culture revealed by travel accounts seem to be its exclusionary character in that period and the struggle between modernist and anti-modernist beliefs. The majority of travel accounts were written by whites and Christians, often middle-class,

and, simply put, were intended for the same audience. The mere opportunity to travel abroad and publications on this experience served not only to mold how all Americans should perceive the world but to avow and reinforce the position of this group in American society at the expense of exclusion and derogatory remarks about others, ranging from immigrants and African Americans to Jews. In other words, travel did turn into knowledge, power, and the assertion of domestic authority. Few challenged strengthening beliefs in the hierarchy of races and cultures at home or the superiority of the more progressive and “civilized” West over the rest. And yet, some travel accounts about Russia, especially related to Siberia, showcase deep concerns of Americans about the developments in their country, ranging from excessive urbanization to the power of corporations and wealth. For all the rhetoric about American business opportunities and Russian development, for several authors the empire offered a sort of pre-modern space to get away from “overcivilization” in favor of a more genuine lifestyle, to find something resembling the traditions rapidly vanishing at home, and to search for personal, spiritual, and national rejuvenation.

I decided to divide the thesis into three parts and a total of seven chapters. The first chapter provides a background to American travel writing on Russia at the turn of the century – with an overview of Russian-American relations and contacts at that time and a brief discussion of topics and impressions in earlier American travel writing. It also attempts to identify the preconceptions American travelers had about Russia before visiting it based on two other sources – geography textbooks and tourist guides. The second chapter examines Kennan’s three travel narratives. It is included specifically to demonstrate that Kennan himself developed the “dual vision” that later travelers would adhere to.

The second part of this thesis explores American travels during the two key events in late Russian imperial history. In 1891–1892, Russia experienced a large-scale famine. Often forgotten today is the fact that Americans initiated an extensive relief campaign, ranging from cash donations to sending five steamers filled with foodstuffs and basic commodities. Alongside came relief officials whose task was to regulate and supervise relief distribution to famine-stricken areas in cooperation with the Russian government. Their publications on their visits to the Russian Empire became the first noteworthy and distinctive travel narratives after the publication of Kennan’s iconic piece in 1891. Chapter 3 examines writings by three relief officials – while newspaper editor William Edgar and businessman Rudolph Blankenburg reported on the famine to the then contemporary press, another entrepreneur involved in ecclesiastical work, Francis Reeves, published his book in 1917, with twenty-five years of hindsight. The three authors attended official

welcoming ceremonies organized by the Russian government and inspected villages struggling with famine. These commissioners presented the relief effort as genuine help to Russia and another sign of friendly Russian-American relations. They reiterated *Tent Life* in showing the sincere appreciation of American help by Russians and their sympathy to Americans. These officials challenged Kennan's political claims made in *Siberia* and praised the autocracy and its relief efforts.³⁴ However, on other occasions they deemed the empire backward compared to the U.S. and Western Europe. Most notably, all three authors linked the famine with the lifestyle of the peasantry, the majority of the Russian population, and argued that the peasants required paternal policy (up to drawing a parallel to former slaves in the U.S. for Edgar). They also offered a damning criticism of the influence of the Orthodox Church on common Russians while gravely misinterpreting its role both during the famine and in the everyday life of the population.

Chapter 4 delves into the 1905 Revolution, a major event when the Russian Empire faced severe unrest and instability, and its territorial integrity and political future were at stake. Two American reporters ventured into Russia to report on the situation. Stanley Washburn, a correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News*, sailed across the Bosphorus and in two weeks visited Odessa, Sevastopol, and Batoum (present-day Batumi in Georgia). One of the so-called "gentlemen socialists," Kellogg Durland, resided in the empire in 1906–1907, reporting for various magazines. Washburn deemed the revolution exaggerated, but his immediate telegraph cables had a sharp distinction from his regular mail and the book published several years after the revolution. Durland had a clear political agenda, and the structure and arguments of his book account resemble Kennan's *Siberia*. Yet he inverted Kennan's argumentation in favor of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, adopting their interpretation of the revolution and simultaneously inheriting their simplifications and serious misjudgments about Russia at the time of instability. He also misinterpreted several important Russian domestic issues. Despite different takes on the success of the revolution, both authors put Russia as alien to Western "civilization," even Durland, who, despite his socialist agenda, also made comments that presented the country as backward compared to the West.

The final section of this thesis consists of three chapters related to American journeys into Asian parts of Russia, just when the appearance of railways and the growth of towns and tourist infrastructure allowed for the exploration of those areas and altered the trend of traveling primarily

³⁴ Throughout this thesis, whenever the term "autocracy" is used, it stands for the Russian absolute monarchy or tsarist rule.

within European Russia before the 1890s. Many Americans, their country having built an extensive railroad system and transcontinental lines, developed a keen interest in the Trans-Siberian Railway (years of building: 1891–1916), one of the most grandiose infrastructure projects of the age. Consequently, many of them went to Russia specifically to try it out. Chapter 5 examines three travel narratives published at different phases of the railway's construction – those by businessman and philanthropist John Bookwalter (who explored Siberia and Turkestan in one go), military surgeon Nicholas Senn, and civil engineer Lindon Bates, Jr. All three marked the Trans-Siberian Railway as a major sign of Russia's successful development but drew questionable parallels between Siberia and the legacy of the frontier at home. Yet all of them entertained a peculiar duality in their impressions – while lauding Russia as a creative force and envisioning the great modernization of Siberia, they all longed for the pre-modern, whether the old agrarian past, pristine nature, or simple but genuine life among natives away from “civilization.”

Strikingly similar descriptions are revealed in chapter 6, which is dedicated to American visits to recently conquered Russian Turkestan. The examination of the Turkestan part of John Bookwalter's journey, along with a later trip made by the diplomat and already established professional travel writer and correspondent, William Curtis, again suggests that Americans viewed the Russian presence there as that of a creative force. Once again parallels to the American West were employed, even while Turkestan's colonization differed profoundly from both Siberian and American settlement. The two Americans offered an Orientalist discourse, differing from the British or French Orientalists discussed by Said only in giving their stamp of approval not to the imperial advances of their home country but to those of Russia.

The last chapter differs from the rest. Dedicated to the most distant territories of both countries, Alaska and the Far East, it examines both Russian and American travel accounts. The rationale for this is that this area was the subject of increasing attention of both countries at the turn of the century, at least to a degree due to a series of Gold Rushes and a new wave of scientific expeditions (some joint). This area was the space for mutual travel writing, and this chapter presents the only episode identified when a Russian and an American met each other in open waters, and both noted this encounter in their travel accounts. In addition, this chapter is perceived as the connecting link from American travel writing to possible future research about Russian travel impressions on the U.S. With this in mind, it deals with two accounts. American engineer Washington Vanderlip, Jr. conducted a series of gold-seeking expeditions across the Far East in 1898–1900 and published a book based on his experience. The second book was penned by doctor

Ivan Akifiev, a member of the joint Russian-American expedition to the Chukchi Peninsula in 1900 searching for gold, who actually explored the same areas and at the same time as Vanderlip and met with his crew. Akifiev's account, despite censorship, was far from being a dry official report and reveals much about the Russian national outlook. Vanderlip's account in terms of structure and writing bears a clear resemblance to *Tent Life*, and it was reviewed by Kennan in *The Outlook* four decades after his own adventures. His book focused on explorations and native life in polar areas, appealing to Americans with the depictions of real and tough polar lifestyle, and despite criticism of the exile system, Vanderlip echoed young Kennan in viewing the Russian presence in Northeastern Siberia as a force of "civilization." Akifiev's travelogue demonstrates that he too entertained the "imperial view," in terms of competition between the two powers for resources as well as influence on natives. It also reveals that, like Americans, Russians evaluated the U.S. through triangulation with Western Europe. However, Akifiev, to a degree due to the abrupt end of the joint expedition, drew mostly negative conclusions about America, up to stating the lack of "high" culture there compared to Europe. He wished to reinforce the empire's influence in the Northern Pacific by lambasting American presence and haughty attitudes toward local natives, while conveniently overlooking the same issues and attitudes among his countrymen.

This dissertation is written according to the 17th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, while the transliteration of Russian sources and literature adheres to the system of the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN). In the last chapter, Akifiev's text was translated to English personally by the author, unless stated otherwise. Prior to the submission of the thesis, articles based on chapters 6 and 7 were published in *Pro&Contra* (Central European Studies in Humanities) (vol. 7, no. 2, 2023) and the *Eger Journal of American Studies* (vol. 17, 2022) respectively. All exact dates mentioned in this thesis correspond to the Gregorian calendar rather than the Julian calendar (Old Style), which was used in Russia before 1918.

Part I

Chapter 1. The Background of American Travel Writing on Russia

Russia and the United States: Developments and Relations

From the final decade of the nineteenth century until the global conflict that marked the transition from modern to contemporary history, the Russian Empire and the United States experienced dynamic, controversial, and far-reaching changes. The two decades before the First World War mark the last years of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era in the U.S. While the beginning of the latter is commonly associated with Theodore Roosevelt assuming the presidency in 1901, the periodization of this crucial two-decade period (and, overall, the period from 1890 to 1920) continues to be the subject of scholarly debate. Nevertheless, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the consolidation of the country's status as a major economic power. It also strove to attain a more influential position on the world stage. The Progressive Era represented a response to the rapid transition of the U.S. into an increasingly urban and industrialized society, the high volume of immigration, sweeping technological developments, and material progress, involving the shifting meaning of religion, culture, and American citizenship and democracy, and provoking a plethora of reactions and anxieties about the incoming age of modernity. The progressive movement did not share a united ideology and produced different results, varying by region, class, race, gender, or ethnicity. Yet it reflected the mood for various improvements, incited by the development of professional education and intellectual and religious changes, including the emergence of Pragmatism, Social Gospel, and Protestant Fundamentalism. It began with local and state reforms, some of which emerged at the national level later and involved increasing government activity. This period remains “a minefield for scholarly interpretations,” and historians debate not only the nature and legacy of Progressive reforms but even the meaning of the word “progressive” and the movements to which it can be applied.³⁵

The developments in the Russian Empire in the last two decades before the Great War were equally dynamic and controversial. Naturally, this period continues to draw scholarly attention due

³⁵ The recent *Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* offers an insight into the economy, politics, society, and culture of the era, along with naming major contemporary scholarly works, Christopher Nichols and Nancy Unger, *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2017); For the general overview of the Progressive Era see: John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900–1920* (New York: Norton, 1990); For a Russian take on the period see: Vladimir Sogrin, “Progressivnaya era v SShA: sovremennoye prochneniye [The Progressive Era in the U.S.: Contemporary interpretation],” *American Yearbook*, 2011, 13–40.

to the collapse of the tsarist rule and the consequent Bolshevik Revolution, which fundamentally altered the course of Russian and world history. While Russia continued to be a predominantly agricultural country and an absolute monarchy with an estate-based society, the reigns of Alexander III (1881–1894) and Nicholas II (1894–1917) also witnessed industrialization, urbanization, as well as social and cultural changes that reflected the status of Russia as a multinational empire and provoked diverse public reactions to rapid change.³⁶ Periods of economic boom, including in the 1890s under the supervision Sergey Witte, with the adoption of the gold standard, the involvement of foreign investment, and the focus on heavy industry and railroad construction (including the Trans-Siberian Railway, the subject of chapter 5) had a striking contrast with one of the worst famines of the imperial era in 1891–1892 (chapter 3). Taking into consideration political stability, nationalism, and imperial goals, Russia focused on administrative, economic, and cultural integration of the periphery regions, including Siberia, Central Asia (chapter 6), and the Russian Far East (chapter 7). The policy of the empire ranged from the acceptance of local customs and traditions and the integration of local elites into the imperial power structure to aggressive attempts at Russification and the disenfranchisement of the empire’s Jewish population. Despite striving to ensure stability and integration, Russia was shaken to its core during the 1905 Revolution, another key event of the period that is addressed in detail in chapter 4. Altogether, the empire’s development was both diverse and inconsistent and reflected the debates about what constituted “Russianness,” assimilation, and integration as the country entered the twentieth century.³⁷

³⁶ The historiography on the late Russian Empire in the last three decades made a turn to the “new imperial history” with an emphasis on the heterogeneity, diversity, and contradictions of imperial development. While some contemporary works continue to look at Russia through the lens of modernization theory, others tend to focus on the new subjects, including Russian “space” of power, the complex relations between the imperial center and the regions, the personal experiences of imperial subjects, and the mutual images of the diverse peoples of the empire. See: Ol’ga Bol’shakova, “Krizis Rossiyskoy imperii 1890–1914 gg. v zarubezhnoy istoriografii [Western historical writing on the crisis of the Russian Empire, 1890–1914],” *Russian History*, no. 2 (2019): 158–71, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086956870004497-7>; Olga Bol’shakova, “Rossiya kak mnogonatsional’naya imperiya: itogi i perspektivy izucheniya [Russia as a multinational empire: research outcomes and prospects],” *Russian History*, no. 4 (2021): 163–77, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086956870016234-8>; Valentin Shelokhayev and Kirill Solov’yev, “Krizis Rossiyskoy imperii kak istoriograficheskaya problema [Crisis of the Russian Empire as a historiographical problem],” *Russian History*, no. 2 (2019): 142–57, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086956870004496-6>.

³⁷ Some works on nationalism and regional policy include: Aleksei Miller, *Imperiya Romanovykh i natsionalizm: Esse po metodologii istoricheskogo issledovaniya* [The Romanov empire and nationalism: Essay on the methodology of a historical study], *Historia Rossica* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006); Mikhail Khodyakov, ed., *Tsentr i regiony: ekonomicheskaya politika pravitel’sstva na okrainakh Rossiyskoy imperii (1894–1917)* [The center and regions: Economic policy of the government on the peripheries of the Russian Empire (1894–1917)], 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2021); Aleksei Miller, “The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation,” in *Nationalizing Empires*, ed. Stefan Berger and Aleksei Miller, *Historical Studies in Eastern Europe and Eurasia 3* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 309–68; Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); Valerie Kivelson and Ronald Suny, *Russia’s Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

The turn of the century also witnessed Russian and American expansion abroad. The United States engaged in the war with Spain and multiple interventions in Latin America, and its public opinion was divided in regards the imperial-like actions and the status of the inhabitants of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico, all taken from Spain. The U.S. also began to increasingly mark its economic interest in East Asia with the “Open Door” policy and became involved in Chinese developments along with other European powers. Russia similarly sought to increase its influence in Chinese Manchuria. By the time of the Russo-Japanese War, East Asia saw the first major point of geopolitical conflict between the two countries, even though President Roosevelt did contribute to negotiating the end of the war in Portsmouth. Both countries continued to be involved in East Asian affairs later. While the Russo-French alliance confirmed by 1894 and the formation of the Triple Entente by 1907 shaped the future stand-off in the First World War, the U.S. was not involved in the alliance build-up in Europe. However, Americans began to lean towards greater cooperation with the British Empire despite existing points of tension (such as boundary disputes in Alaska), and some of them welcomed the idea of Anglo-Saxon solidarity that also implied superiority over the rest of the world.³⁸

Two other major factors are often mentioned in connection with both bilateral relations and the change of the American perception of Russia. The reinforced disenfranchisement of the Jewish population in Russia and pogroms against Jews in the Pale of Settlement (with the worst in Kishinev in 1903 and a wave of pogroms in 1905–1906) caused up to two million Jews to emigrate, primarily to the United States. President Roosevelt even sent a petition to the empire’s foreign ministry to protest the Kishinev pogrom. Further friction between the two countries arose regarding the status and rights of naturalized Jewish Americans in Russia (the “passport question”), which became a pretext for the abrogation of the 1832 trade agreement in 1912.³⁹

However, neither geopolitical friction nor the abrogation of the trade treaty changed the relatively stable economic relations. The two countries competed on the agricultural and oil markets, while American exports and investments to Russia exceeded those from it. Cotton was the major subject of Russian imports, while American machinery (International Harvester, Singer, New York Brake Company, etc.) and insurance companies established a presence among Russian

³⁸ Paul Kramer, “Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (2002): 1315–53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700600>.

³⁹ Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 90–148, 827–40, 879–913; Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 236–40, 474–77, 567–84; On the condition of Jews in Russia, see: Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. 2, *1881 to 1914* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010).

buyers.⁴⁰ The trade balance between the two countries reflected the status of the U.S. as an economic and technological powerhouse, and although Russia had a bigger trade volume with Western Europe, the Russian elite and intellectuals had a continuous interest in American industry and technologies and their possible application at home.⁴¹ In the two decades before the war, many Russian specialists were sent to the U.S. to study its economy and society, with especially large numbers during the Chicago World's Fair (officially called the World's Columbian Exposition).⁴²

The Fair itself became symbolic as it represented America coming of age. While there is fair criticism regarding the representation or absence of African and Native Americans, the Fair was additionally an indicator of both American confidence vis-à-vis the rest of the world but also internal discord and cultural concerns.⁴³ These sentiments would influence the changing representation of other countries in written materials, including travel writing. Before proceeding to American travelogues about Russia, it is important to briefly explore what kind of preconceptions Americans developed before entering the empire, and what the common topics and impressions were in earlier American travel writing.

Earlier American Images of Russia and Possible Preconceptions

Mobility and travel both within the country and abroad played a paramount role in the formation of American culture and identity. The physical settlement and the appropriation of an enormous continent on a mental level were often the product of travel and travel writing.⁴⁴ With the developing tourist infrastructure and transportation, including steamers, railways, and the telegraph, more Americans could afford to go on a tour in the late nineteenth century, sparking

⁴⁰ Aleksandr Savoykiy, *Rossiia – SShA: 200 let ekonomicheskoy diplomatii (1807–2007)* [Russia – United States: 200 years of economic diplomacy (1807–2007)] (Moscow: RIA-KMV, 2011); Sergey Kalmykov, “Amerikanskoye predprinimatel'stvo v Rossii [The American enterprise in Russia],” in *Inostrannoye predprinimatel'stvo i zagranichnyye investitsii v Rossii: Ocherki* [Foreign business and investments in Russia: Essays], ed. Valeriy Bovykin (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), 243–88.

⁴¹ Hans Rogger, “Amerikanizm and the Economic Development of Russia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 3 (1981): 382–420, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500013426>.

⁴² Allen, *Russia Looks at America*, chap. 5. Hopefully, I will be able to examine their visits and written reports as part of Russian travel impressions about America in the near future. For now, it would suffice to say that the Fair in Chicago became the single most visited and described event by Russian travelers to America at the turn of the century.

⁴³ Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Expedition and American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), chap. 3; Daniel Miller, “The Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the American National Character,” *Journal of American Culture* 10, no. 2 (1987): 17–22, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1987.1002_17.x.

⁴⁴ John Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 4–10; Bendixen and Hamera, *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, 1–9.

disputes regarding tourism's influence on work ethic and Protestant values, the commercialization of famous sites at home, and the priority of domestic over international travel.⁴⁵

The decades after the Civil War saw the rapid growth of transatlantic travel. Western Europe continued to be the major region where a growing number of Americans traveled and with which they compared their home country, whether in intellectual works or travel accounts. American tourists became conspicuous figures in Europe just as they visited it with diverse goals in mind – simple pleasure, seeing famous or ancient places of interest, receiving education in major European universities, or social recognition and connecting with European nobility for the American upper class. Some of the Progressive reformers sailed across the Atlantic to learn more about Europe's coping with major social and economic concerns of the age. For others, travel represented an escape from alienating economic and social changes at home or a chance to assert themselves, as was the case for some women, Native and African Americans.⁴⁶ While American travelers drew a variety of conclusions about Western Europe depending on travel goals, social status, and other factors, some linked increasing tourist presence abroad with their home country's growing role in the world. Americans "registered the growing international power of the United States through the subject of transatlantic travel" and wrote increasingly sympathetic remarks about the British Empire. Some of them declared the superiority of Americans or Anglo-Saxons over continental Europe and went as far as to assume that America's duty was to spread democratic values and "uplift" other nations.⁴⁷ The rapidly increasing flow of American missionaries to all parts of the world in the decades before the global conflict testifies to the latter statement.⁴⁸

Compared to Western Europe, Russia was a less popular destination. However, Americans produced a considerable number of travelogues on Russia before the early 1890s, ranging from chapters from longer trips in Europe or around the world to book-length accounts and newspaper articles. Representing both genders but coming primarily from the upper and middle classes and the Northeastern or Midwestern states, they wrote about different subjects.⁴⁹ While many travelers

⁴⁵ See Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Strout, *The American Image of the Old World*, 111, 116; Stowe, *Going Abroad*, 4–8.

⁴⁷ Christopher Endy, "Travel and World Power: Americans in Europe, 1890–1917," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 4 (1998): 573–76, 583, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00139>.

⁴⁸ See William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chaps. 4, 5.

⁴⁹ Babey, *Americans in Russia*, 10.

made rather generalizing remarks, their travelogues nevertheless formed a part of “imaginative geography,” with which a new generation of travelers would venture into Russia.⁵⁰

For the absolute majority of travelers between the 1860s and the 1880s, major destinations were within European Russia. They entered the country through Poland or sailed on the Baltic or the Black Sea, and visited Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, and parts of Finland. Many went to Nizhniy Novgorod out of interest in the Russian national fair there.⁵¹ Other popular destinations included Crimea, southern cities of European Russia like Odessa, as well as the Caucasus. Travelers drew different conclusions on major cities in European Russia, often comparing St. Petersburg with Moscow, with some visitors claiming that Moscow was “more Russian” than the northern capital. Except for the Caucasus, the non-European regions of the empire were the subject of travel writing primarily during specific events. For instance, the two major accounts about Central Asia were produced following the Russian invasion of the region. One was penned by the journalist Januarius MacGahan and covered the invasion itself. The other was published by Eugene Schuyler, then the secretary of the American legation in St. Petersburg. He knew Russian and was a translator of Turgenev and other Russian literary works. Schuyler’s two-volume *Turkistan* (1877) focused on the native population and Russian policy in the newly occupied region.⁵² However, Schuyler’s fluency was an exception, and the absolute majority of other travelers did not know Russian or any other native language of the empire.

The topics that remained popular until the late 1870s were the life of the Russian nobility or the Imperial family, with some traveling to Crimea specifically to meet with Alexander II on his vacation. Most notably, Mark Twain described a meeting with him in his *Innocents Abroad*.⁵³ Other accounts also depicted the visits of the U.S. Navy or tours of prominent politicians (like former president Grant). The growing confrontation between the government and the revolutionaries in the late 1870s and the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 shifted the focus towards discussing

⁵⁰ I use the term “imaginative geography” introduced by Edward Said to emphasize the mental map of regions and cultures of the world that the author entertains upon entering the area of his travels. Said, *Orientalism*, 54–55.

⁵¹ The Nizhniy Novgorod Fair, dating back to the mid-sixteenth century, became the empire’s major fair in the second half of the nineteenth century. It lasted from late July to mid-September in the special “fair city” on the opposite side of the Oka River from the city proper. It was a center of wholesale trade, and the majority of articles were Russian domestic products, although there were goods brought by traders from Western Europe and Asian countries. While the fair contributed to the formation of modern business culture, the fairgrounds were also known for different entertainments offered to its visitors. The Sixteenth Russian National Fair was held there in 1896. See: Anne Fitzpatrick, *The Great Russian Fair: Nizhnii Novgorod, 1840–90* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); Sergey Shumilkin, *Nizhegorodskaya yarmarka [Nizhniy Novgorod fair]* (Nizhniy Novgorod: Ponedel’nik, 1996).

⁵² As shown in chapter 6, Schuyler’s account became a reference for one of the travelers in Russian Turkestan more than thirty years after its publication.

⁵³ Marinova, *Transnational Russian-American Travel Writing*, 55–64.

the nature of liberal and more radical anti-tsarist movements. The American, and more generally Western perception of Russian revolutionaries was influenced by the concept of Nihilism immortalized in Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.⁵⁴ The Siberian exile system, though discussed as early as the 1860s by the journalist Thomas Knox, was now becoming mainstream when an increasing number of people were exiled during the reign of Alexander III. While some Americans got to see and covered the coronation of the new emperor in 1883, such as the artist George Raum or the wife of a French citizen, Mary Waddington, accounts by journalists James Buel and clergyman James Buckley, among others, began to turn a more critical eye to the autocracy and its abuses (censorship, police, the treatment of Jews, etc.).

While American travelers wrote occasional remarks about Cossacks, women, the development of education, indigenous peoples of the empire, as well as Poland and Finland as the empire's distinct regions, the topics of the Russian peasantry and the Orthodox Church remained the most popular. The first post-Civil War accounts often compared the emancipation in Russia and the abolition of slavery in the U.S. and equated Russian peasants with recently freed African Americans, ignoring significant differences between slavery and serfdom.⁵⁵ Most Americans apparently thought of former serfs as the only peasant category, failing to mention other numerous groups, including state peasants, peasants belonging to the Imperial Family, etc.⁵⁶ Later accounts focused primarily on the appearance, food, housing, and the character of the peasants, often making

⁵⁴ Although the term appeared earlier, it was in the 1860s, with the publication of Turgenev's iconic novel, as well as writings by Dmitriy Pisarev, Nikolay Dobrolyubov, and Nikolay Chernyshevsky (*What Is to Be Done?*), when Nihilism acquired immense popularity and sparked bitter intellectual debates. With their dogma rooted in the intellectual ideas of the 1840s, Nihilists both reconciled and conflicted with the old generation. They were never a uniform movement, and, contrary to stereotypes, they were not about negating everything, even society or humanity at large. Rather, by negating certain current social features and customs that were seen as ills of society and remnants of the past, they sought to affirm their own picture of the Russian utopian future. Nihilists denied the idealism and sentimentality of the previous generation, but in a similar idealistic, almost religious, fashion put their faith in scientism, positivism, and materialism. They sought to break away with established traditions and authorities in favor of personal liberation (including in manners, dress, and gender relations), independent action, and dedication to what they believed to be public good. See: Kristian Petrov, "'Strike Out, Right and Left!': A Conceptual-Historical Analysis of 1860s Russian Nihilism and Its Notion of Negation," *Studies in East European Thought* 71, no. 2 (2019): 73–97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-019-09319-4>.

⁵⁵ Although both being a system of coerced exploitative labor with an undoubtedly arbitrary treatment of the dependent people, Russian serfs still were to a larger degree integrated in the legitimate framework and political system of the state (with the owner's land taking primacy in the legal construction of serfdom), constituted, unlike American slaves, essentially the core of Russian society and identity like their owners, and exercised their community and family-related traditions and customs, in a however limited way, before their landlords. See: Stanley Engerman, "Slavery, Serfdom and Other Forms of Coerced Labour: Similarities and Differences," in *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, ed. Michael Bush (London: Longman, 1996), 18–41; Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁵⁶ Prior to the emancipation in 1861, serfs constituted approximately one-third of all peasants in Russia, Natal'ya Ivanova and Valentina Zheltova, *Sosloynoye obshchestvo Rossiyskoy imperii (XVIII – nachalo XX veka)* [The estate society of the Russian Empire (the eighteenth – early twentieth centuries)] (Moscow: Novyy khronograf, 2010), 575.

generalizing comments about their loyalty to the Czar, piety, hospitality, but simultaneously ignorance, inclination to drinking, and bad hygiene. Few travelers described the more intimate peasant customs or traditions. Descriptions of the government policies towards the peasantry, communal land ownership, and economic conditions were still rare.⁵⁷ The generalized description of the peasantry was often coupled with similar assertions about other “types” of Russian people – officials, nobles, *droshky* (carriage) drivers on the streets, Cossacks, etc., while compared to Russians, less attention was paid to other ethnicities of the empire. As for religion, almost everyone emphasized the piety of the population and often talked about the organization of the Orthodox Church, its ceremonies, and religious dissenters (such as the Old Believers). Many compared the Orthodox Church with Catholicism, and some favored the former. From the late 1870s, however, travelers increasingly interpreted the spirituality of Russians as ignorance and superstition. Some writers criticized the support and legitimizing power that the state and the Orthodox Church gave to one another, going as far as to claim that together they deliberately kept their subjects uneducated.⁵⁸

These tendencies were counterbalanced by the increasing attention towards Russian intellectuals and art, most prominently literary classics, whose works were translated and published in the U.S.⁵⁹ The growing interest in Russian literature and intellectual thought was reflected in travelogues, with examples of accounts by the late 1880s that described visits to Tolstoy, such as those by a prominent translator of Russian literature, Isabel Hapgood, or clergyman William Newton. However, compared to the educated elite whose works and thoughts were considered to represent Russia in general, few travelers ventured into popular culture beyond already established tropes. In sum, these travelers often made sweeping remarks about the Russian “Other” without going into detail about different regions or ethnicities of the empire and tended to project the economic and social developments in their own country onto Russia; subsequently, their impressions combined positive and negative remarks.

Preconceptions of a traveler are a complex subject, depending on a particular individual and the culture of his or her home country. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they could be influenced by a myriad of sources apart from travel writing, ranging from press and

⁵⁷ Babey, *Americans in Russia*, 64–65, 72. Very few, even among turn-of-the-century authors, mentioned that the commune (*obshchinnoye zemlevladieniye*) was not the only type of peasant land use, with household tenure (*podvornoye zemlevladieniye*, based on hereditary entitlement to a certain land parcel only for one peasant family, without land redistribution within the village community) dominating in the western provinces of European Russia.

⁵⁸ Babey, 51–52, 57–58.

⁵⁹ Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 185–89, 320–30.

literature (including translations of writers from the destination country, as was in the case of Tolstoy for American visitors) to theater plays, lectures (which were popular in America back then), and even hear-say. It would be impossible to comprehensively cover how Americans planning to come to Russia would be predisposed to see it. Nevertheless, within the context of this thesis, at least two sources are worth exploring – geography textbooks and travel guides.

Textbooks contain basic assumptions about different regions of the world for the children to absorb. Of particular interest are American geography textbooks. Those written in the decades after the Civil War combined physical and political geography with basic ethnography and were often supplied with images or maps. A notable feature of geography books was the open racial division of the world among white or Caucasian, African, and Asian people – the latter in some cases incorporated Malay and Native Americans as the “red” race. The textbooks distinguished between “civilized” and “savage” nations, with “barbaric” and “half-civilized” in between. *Mitchell’s Modern Geography* explained that “civilized and enlightened nations are those which have made the greatest progress in morals, justice, and refinement, among whom the arts are constantly being improved and the sciences are diligently cultivated” and those that develop their agriculture and industry.⁶⁰ In this regard the white race was put above all others as “the most improved and intelligent of the human family,” Asians were behind them, while Africans were often labeled the least “civilized.” This hierarchy was also linked to the form of government – while less developed nations had tribal chiefs or absolute (despotic) monarchies, those at the higher stages developed laws, “learned how to take some of the power away from the monarch,” and turned their countries into constitutional monarchies or republics.⁶¹ Similar judgements were made about religion, with Christian nations recognized for “their superiority in civilization, mental culture, and refinement of manners.” Consequently, America was presented with the phrase, “in no other country in the world are the people so thoroughly under religious and Christian influence as in the United States.”⁶² Briefly, America and the West overall were presented as superior to the rest of the world based on political and economic developments that were also connected to race and religion.

⁶⁰ Samuel Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography, Physical, Political, and Descriptive: Accompanied by a New Atlas of Forty-Four Copperplate Maps, and Illustrated by Two Hundred Engravings* (Philadelphia: J. H. Butler, 1878), 35–38; On the subject of geography books in the second half of the nineteenth century see: John Nietz, *Old Textbooks: Spelling, Grammar, Reading, Arithmetic, Geography, American History, Civil Government, Physiology, Penmanship, Art, Music, as Taught in the Common Schools from Colonial Days to 1900* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), 229–32.

⁶¹ Jacques Redway and Russell Hinman, *Natural Advanced Geography* (New York: American Book, 1898), 36.

⁶² Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*, 45, 91.

In their descriptions of the Russian Empire, geography textbooks distinguished between European and non-European provinces. The empire was always described as a vast country, and its geography was divided between plains, steppes, forests, and northern desolate areas. Except for the Caucasus and Central Asia, its climate was presented as cold, especially in Siberia, which combined hot summers and cold winters. Textbooks often mentioned the availability of natural resources in Russia and described the development of agriculture, trade, and industries. Except for Moscow and St. Petersburg that were evaluated based on their beauty or urban development, other cities in European Russia or Siberia were usually mentioned in the context of their role in the empire's economy (for instance, Odessa as the major commercial port or Nizhniy Novgorod as the place of the national fair mentioned earlier). In Siberia tea trade with China and the fur trade were most often referenced.

Russia was inevitably presented as a primarily Slavic and Orthodox country and an absolute monarchy, while among the estates the focus was on the peasantry. Their emancipation in 1861 was mentioned, and some textbooks equated serfdom with slavery. The tone and quality of the remarks about Russian politics and general conditions varied. *Mitchell's Modern Geography* at one point praised the industrial and educational development of the empire and claimed that "for a hundred years past, Russia has been constantly enlarging her limits and increasing her national importance and influence."⁶³ But at the same time, it categorized Russian peasants as oppressed and ignorant, while the nobles lived in luxury. In addition, the textbook stated that "in European Russia all grades of crime are punished by transportation to Siberia."⁶⁴ Another textbook called the peasantry "rough and ignorant," but denied the horrors of the exile system and praised Russian colonization of Siberia as well as general material development. It postulated:

Separated from the steppes of Asia only by the Caspian Sea, and from the forests of Siberia by the Ural Mountains, Russia forms a connecting link between the Asiatic and the European world. Its dry steppes, its bazaars, its domes surmounted by both cross and crescent, are characteristic of the East, while the farms and villages, the gay, broad streets and Parisian fashions of its capital, belong to European civilization. Yet Russia is still new in that Old World, with extensive forests to be used, and broad acres to be cultivated.⁶⁵

Even this short overview displays a contrast in evaluating the empire in American textbooks. Often with an emphasis on its resources and opportunities for development, Russia had an unclear position between the superior West and the inferior East. The West/East dichotomy, racial

⁶³ Mitchell, 279.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, 38, 349.

⁶⁵ Mary Hall, *Our World, No. II: A Second Series of Lessons in Geography* (Boston: Ginn Brothers, 1875), 131.

hierarchy, the religious distinction of the Orthodox Church, and the concept of “civilization” that was based on the level of material and social development are the constructions with which an American traveler could be potentially predisposed to see the country.

It is natural to assume that American travelers likely consulted a travel guide before the journey to Russia or took it with them. A travel guide or a handbook represented a collaboration of multiple authors, from residents in a certain country to intellectuals, scientists, and diplomats. It offered itineraries, classified and evaluated places of interest and tourist infrastructure, and gave information ranging from the destination country’s historical and geographic overview to local customs and practical advice on what to visit and how to behave while abroad. By combining systematized information of the major places of interest with editorial advice, by the turn of the century guides had become a complex work, whose authors sought to present it as a comprehensive and impartial assistant for travelers both at home and abroad.⁶⁶ Modern scholars recognized the significance of travel guides and denounced their self-presentation as an objective source of information, examining them as a cultural and corporate product. The ambivalent nature of guides as “prescriptive and liberating, limiting and empowering” is reflected in debates regarding their impact on tourism and the perceptions of the world by their users.⁶⁷

Americans seeking to go to Europe were likely to use the two most prominent series of guidebooks – Murray’s *Handbooks for Travellers*, published in Britain solely in English, and the Baedeker series, originally in German but later published in French and English.⁶⁸ Alternatively, they could buy one of the domestic guides. One of the most popular series was *Harper’s Handbook for Travellers in Europe and the East*, in print since the early 1860s. *Harper’s* series, unlike the other two, did not have a separate book on Russia. Instead, it was combined with Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, and North America in one volume. Murray’s last, fifth edition on Russia was published in 1893 (mostly a reprint of the fourth edition printed in 1888 with updates on prices and a couple of new routes). Baedeker’s volume was published in English for the

⁶⁶ Alasdair Pettinger, “Guidance and Advice,” in *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Alasdair Pettinger and Tim Youngs (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 139–52; Nicholas Parsons, *Worth the Detour: A History of the Guidebook* (Stroud: Sutton, 2007), 185.

⁶⁷ Stowe, *Going Abroad*, 45–48; Victoria Peel and Anders Sørensen, *Exploring the Use and Impacts of Travel Guidebooks*, Tourism and Cultural Change 48 (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2016), 218–19; Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, 65–77.

⁶⁸ On the history of Murray and Baedeker see: Edward Mendelson, “Baedeker’s Universe,” *Yale Review* 74, no. 3 (1985): 386–403; Gráinne Goodwin and Gordon Johnston, “Guidebook Publishing in the Nineteenth Century: John Murray’s *Handbooks for Travellers*,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 17, no. 1 (2013): 43–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2012.747791>; Parsons, *Worth the Detour*, chaps. 8, 9.

first time in early 1914, while before that only French and German versions existed. This means that unless an American visitor knew one of these languages, Baedeker was of less use.

What follows is a brief comparison of the 1891 edition of *Harper's*, the 1893 edition of Murray's, and the 1902 third French edition of Baedeker to find out how they could shape the preconceptions of a potential traveler. All three guides suggested itineraries primarily in European Russia, including Poland and Finland, in addition to the Caucasus. The most common destinations included Moscow and St. Petersburg and their environs, Kiev, Odessa, cities on the Volga River, including Nizhniy Novgorod, Crimea, and major cities in the Caucasus such as Tiflis (present-day Tbilisi) and Baku. Published after 1900, Baedeker responded to the extension of the railways in the non-European provinces of the empire by elaborating upon travel in Turkestan and on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Apart from the descriptions of routes, cities, villages, and major places of interest along the way, the guides offered an introduction about the country and its people and travel advice.

Harper's guide was clearly intended for art enthusiasts since a considerable part of the section on Russia was dedicated to art collections in the Hermitage and the Winter Palace, along with lengthy descriptions of villas in St. Petersburg. It also introduced in detail the major sights in the Kremlin and Moscow museums. Unlike the other two guides, it provided little information on the Russian people themselves, instead describing the administrative division of the empire, its economy, and diverse geography, pointing to a cold climate and the richness in mineral resources. It gave a short overview of Russian history and praised the reign of Peter the Great, concluding that "since his time, up to the present day, when she has capped the climax of progressiveness, Russia has advanced in power and civilization."⁶⁹ While the guide praised St. Petersburg as equal to any other Western city, Moscow, despite its magnificence, was deemed "half Asiatic and half European." The advice regarding Nizhniy Novgorod's fair was to visit it within one day and not stay in local hotels due to their low quality. The guide also recommended hiring a local assistant to avoid being scammed and bargaining over the fair's prices, which were often unreasonable.⁷⁰ In the Caucasus, the advice was to buy a good outfit in advance, "as in this country all the modern appliances of civilization are wanting." However, most descriptions were neutral or positive, with praising remarks on Russian art. Another peculiarity was advice on arranging a visit to the Winter

⁶⁹ William Fetridge, *The American Travellers' Guides. Harper's Hand-Book for Travellers in Europe and the East: Being a Guide Through Great Britain and Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Switzerland, Tyrol, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Spain, and Portugal*, vol. 3, *Switzerland, Tyrol, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Spain, Portugal, and North America* (New York: Fetridge, 1891), 1487.

⁷⁰ Fetridge, 3:1523, 1534.

Palace. The guide urged travelers to write down “the United States” under their own name when ordering a ticket, since it “has considerable effect.”⁷¹ This and another couple of comments emphasized that Russians, including officials, were sympathetic to American travelers.

British Murray’s guide wrote less about the economy or resources but offered a lengthy overview of Russian history and many details regarding Russian cultural traditions. It also included the Russian alphabet and a small phrasebook. The historical overview praised the reigns of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Alexander I, and Alexander II, although the guide criticized the emancipation of the serfs for keeping the peasants tied to the village communities and overall impoverished and uneducated. Among other things, it postulated that the Scythians (nomads who roamed the steppes to the north from the Black Sea between the seventh and third centuries BC) were similar in character to Russians, namely “hospitable, courageous, good-humoured, contented, and immoderately fond of spirituous liquors.”⁷² Murray’s book warned that passport controls and customs upon arrival in Russia were strict, although the border officials were generally courteous. While the rail transport was described as slow but comfortable, the guide warned about discomfort when traveling on horseback through post stations.⁷³ In some cases, it tried to denounce common stereotypes, including the cold weather, and offered practical information about Russian cuisine, sports, and salons in “high society.” However, other remarks recycled common tropes about Russians as religious, hospitable, but also prone to drinking. Praising Russian literary works, the guide pointed to the lack of domestic scientific writing and presented the Russian economy as mostly agricultural. More importantly, at the end of the introduction Murray pointed out:

It should also be borne in mind that ladies will suffer some inconvenience in travelling off well-beaten tracks or in visiting small Russian towns, where the accommodation is as a rule exceedingly bad. Nor is there anything worth seeing in small Russian towns, as even the larger cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg excepted, have nothing to boast of or to attract the traveller beyond their past history, of which but few monuments are extant. The Caucasus and the Crimea, Finland with its romantic scenery and good fishing, and the two capitals of the Russian Empire, will long continue to be the principal objects of attraction. Journeys to Siberia, to Central Asia, to China, and to Persia, will be undertaken only by the more enterprising traveller, not by the tourist with limited time at his disposal.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Fetridge, 3:1495.

⁷² Thomas Mitchell, ed., *Handbook for Travellers in Russia, Poland, and Finland: Including the Crimea, Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia*, 5th ed. (London: John Murray, 1893), 1.

⁷³ The guides and travelogues of the period often used the terms “posting” or “post travel” that stood for the system of Russian long-distance travel based on post stations located at certain interval from one another on major routes. These stations provided horses, different types of horse-drawn vehicles, and drivers for both officials and individual travelers, while also serving as inns for rest. This thesis uses the term “post travel” when necessary.

⁷⁴ Mitchell, *Handbook for Travellers*, 79–80.

This passage not only differentiates between men and women, putting harsh restrictions on the mobility for the latter, but discourages a potential visitor from traveling beyond already established routes, labeling all non-European provinces (except the Caucasus) and many Russian towns as devoid of interest. Murray's book thus directly attempts to modify the plans of potential travelers and suggests that most of the empire is not worth visiting.

Baedeker's guide has many practical details, elaborating on how much money would be spent per day, what the prices were for all types of transport and facilities, and what items should be taken, in addition to providing information on money, weights and measures, calendar, etc. It offered the largest number of maps of Russian regions and cities. This guide gave information from the French point of view, stating that many among the Russian upper class knew French, but still advised to learn the basics of Russian or get a phrasebook. It postulated that Finland, Poland, and the Baltic provinces would not give an idea about Russia proper, and that even St. Petersburg, although a modern city, "does not have as national a character" as the "sacred" Moscow.⁷⁵ Like Murray, Baedeker claimed that due to the uniformity of most Russian cities and their atmosphere, getting acquainted with several would give an understanding of all of them, thus discouraging travel off the beaten track. It warned about passport and customs checks on the border; regarding travel, Baedeker deemed Russian railways slow and post travel uncomfortable, while hotels outside major cities and public bathhouses lacked comfort and cleanliness. In addition, it warned that one should not take paper money or send it in letters while in Russia, since cases of theft were not rare.

While this guide's summary of the empire's history and economy was superficial, it offered a revealing take on Russian customs and character. It praised Russian hospitality and informality in personal interactions (without reference to titles or calling everyone "monsieur" or "madame"). It advised a potential traveler to experience Russian operas, dancing, and music, which the people were fond of. On the whole, Baedeker deemed Russians "a vigorous race," whose character was influenced by the people's "wide nature" that made them carefree and indifferent to haste. While they were religious, the Orthodox Church, in the guide's view, often performed its duties mechanically, without caring about the deeper meaning of faith.

Regarding traveling on the Trans-Siberian Railway and in Russian Turkestan, potential danger was indicated. In Siberia, Baedeker suggested taking a revolver for the trip, while in Central Asia it warned about the extremities of the climate and recommended drinking only boiled water since malaria and other diseases were present there. While concerning train travel in Siberia the

⁷⁵ Karl Baedeker, *La Russie: Manuel Du Voyageur*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1902), xiii.

guide offered mostly general remarks on major cities along the way and their places of interest, in Central Asia it commented on local peoples. The Sarts, for example, were presented as colorfully dressed natives who loved gathering in local bazaars and drinking tea, but whose wives were “absolute slaves” of their husbands.⁷⁶ Other natives were also presented based on their status as settled or nomad, their activities, clothes, at times physical features, and the position of women. Although Samarkand was praised for its architecture, and in Bukhara the traveler was recommended to see its bazaar, in the latter city Baedeker warned that the population was “fanatic” and suggested staying away from local mosques. Overall, if Americans were to travel with these handbooks, they would likely stick to already established routes primarily within European Russia. The dangers outlined or lack of interest in far-away areas also served to discourage women from traveling beyond common routes, naturally affecting the disproportionately high percentage of travel accounts by men. The guides could also prompt travelers to generalize what they saw and judge it based on the West/East dichotomy. While *Harper’s* pointed to rich Russian culture and hospitality to Americans, the other two guides presented the empire and its people as exotic and claimed that seeing major places of interest would suffice.

The overview of bilateral relations, earlier American travel writing, textbooks, and guides serves to put the following chapters into historical context and outline the common images about the empire already present when Americans ventured into Russia at the turn of the century. However, the starting point of travel writing analysis has to be George Kennan, the first major American authority on Russia, and his writings. The popularity of his narrations at home, the fact that he published three of them in book form within forty years, and their influence on subsequent American travel writing suggest that it is crucial to examine them.

⁷⁶ Baedeker, 432. See chapter 6 for details on the definition of Sarts.

Chapter 2. Youthful Adventures and Tsarist Prisoners: George Kennan's Travels in Russia

Introduction

Explorer and journalist George Kennan (1845–1924) is inevitably mentioned in research related to contacts between the U.S. and the late Russian Empire.⁷⁷ Scholars focus primarily on his study of the exile system, and within it – mostly on Kennan's descriptions of prisons or his thoughts about the confrontation between the Russian autocracy and the revolutionary movement. It is often considered his key work that amplified already emerging negative visions of Russia in the U.S. and Western Europe.⁷⁸ However, his first travel account on Russia, *Tent Life*, published by young Kennan in 1870, and its extended edition (1910) are also of paramount importance. As for *Siberia*, scholars have virtually ignored Kennan's "travel" part of his journey and his remarks about Russia and its people made outside of the inspections of penitentiaries and meetings with exiles. The three travel narrations, published within a four-decade period, reveal the evolution of the "dual vision" of Russia by one of the most recognized American commentators on Russia of the age.

George Kennan's Biography

Born in Norwalk, Ohio, to a Calvinist family, George Kennan did not obtain a formal education, instead working on the telegraph as of age twelve and later during the Civil War. However, increasingly dissatisfied with this work and hoping for a more active lifestyle, he enrolled in the Western Union Telegraph Expedition and spent two years (1865–1867) in Northeastern Siberia surveying the route. As a result of his journey, Kennan published several articles in *Putnam's Magazine*, resulting in his *Tent Life*, which was in continuous demand during the next four decades. The book was finished and put into printing while Kennan again entered Russia, this time to journey across the Caucasus, without definite plans and with limited money, but looking forward to new adventures. He went from St. Petersburg and Moscow to Petrovsk (present-day Makhachkala) and explored villages in Dagestan and the major cities of the Caucasus. Based on his four months in Russia in 1870 he wrote a journal of his trip and later delivered a series of lectures about his adventures but published only a few articles.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 281–92; Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 166–89; Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore*, 30–32; Foglesong, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire"*, 15–23.

⁷⁸ The biography of Kennan written by Frederick Travis is the most comprehensive so far, see: Frederick Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865–1924* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990).

⁷⁹ The most detailed study of this journey was made by comparing Kennan's travel journal and articles, see: Frith Maier, ed., *Vagabond Life: The Caucasus Journals of George Kennan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

Then he temporarily turned away from traveling, working in the Union Bank of Medina and the Mutual Life Insurance Company in New York, before turning to journalism by joining the Associated Press and moving to Washington, D.C. Simultaneously in the 1870s Kennan underwent a spiritual crisis, attempting to reconcile his faith and science.⁸⁰ His knowledge of Russia, especially the Far North, was again in demand following the disastrous attempt of the American crew of the *Jeanette*, under Captain George De Long, to reach the North Pole through the Bering Strait in 1879–1881.⁸¹ Kennan delivered a number of lectures, including a notable talk to the American Geographical Society in 1882. He discussed Siberian history, refuted stereotypes about Siberia as a barren and desolate region, and claimed that, despite the catastrophe of the *Jeanette*, Arctic exploration by Americans should continue. A considerable part of his lecture was related to the exile system. He noted that it had been the subject of discussions in the West at least since the early nineteenth century, from the publication of the novel *Elizabeth; or, The Exiles of Siberia* (1806) by French writer Sophie Cottin.⁸² He evaluated the exile system based on Russian literature that he read on the subject matter as well as his alleged personal experience of encountering exiles in the 1860s.⁸³ He argued that, in spite of injustices and abuses in the past, now “a Russian convict, even in a Siberian mine, is no worse than that of convicts in Europe and America generally.” However, the exile system in the then present began to hinder the growth of economy and “civilization” in Siberia and the empire’s future development. Kennan concluded that “within the next quarter of a century, the exile system will either be greatly modified or entirely abolished.”⁸⁴

In 1883 Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (hereafter referred to as the *Century*), invited Kennan to again visit Russia to study the exile system. A brief trip to Russia in 1884 to collect preliminary materials and obtain government support, and fierce debates with historian and political activist William Armstrong in the winter of 1884–1885 about Russian conditions apparently doubled his determination to cover the subject. He signed the

⁸⁰ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 49–51.

⁸¹ See Leonard Guttridge, *Icebound: The Jeannette Expedition's Quest for the North Pole* (Shrewsbury: Airline, 1988).

⁸² As demonstrated by Phillips, the image of gruesome Siberian exile as the embodiment of Russian despotism and the praise of exiles as martyrs dates back to the first third of the nineteenth century. Cottin's novel was translated in major European languages and was followed by other writings – the memoirs of Poles, who were sent to exile after the failed rebellions in 1830–1831 and 1863–1864, the literary works of Russian writers (including *Notes from the House of the Dead* by Dostoevsky), and the essays of Russian opposition intellectuals in Europe. From the mid-nineteenth century the exile system began to be increasingly politicized and used by the West as a “mirror” to define itself in contrast to Russia, see: Ben Phillips, *Siberian Exile and the Invention of Revolutionary Russia, 1825–1917: Exiles, Émigrés and the International Reception of Russian Radicalism* (London: Routledge, 2022), chap. 2.

⁸³ Travis demonstrated that Kennan exaggerated about his interactions with exiles in the 1860s, Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 25–26.

⁸⁴ George Kennan, “Siberia. The Exiles’ Abode,” *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 14 (1882): 13–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/196467>.

contract with the *Century* and left from New York for Russia in May 1885. Kennan returned home in August 1886, having drastically overhauled his earlier views. His subsequent articles in the *Century* were collectively called the “Uncle Tom's Cabin” of the Siberian exile by the president of the magazine and created a furor among American and European readers. At the turn of the 1880s and the 1890s, Kennan engaged in a new, widely popular series of lectures across the U.S. about the exile system. The articles he wrote were eventually compiled into the two-volume book in 1891. His articles and lectures influenced the formation of the movement for “Russian freedom.” He supported the abrogation of the Russian-American Extradition Treaty, the struggle for which lasted for six years (1887–1893), and helped form the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom (SAFRF).⁸⁵ However, by the mid-1890s, with the decline of the movement and the ratification of the extradition agreement, he turned his attention away from Russian affairs.

In 1901 Kennan again entered Russia but was soon deported on the order of the Ministry of the Interior. After the start of the Russo-Japanese War, he traveled to Japan and tried to organize a propaganda campaign among Russian POWs, hoping to see significant political changes during the 1905 Revolution, but remained unsatisfied with its results. As mentioned earlier, in 1910 he republished *Tent Life* as an extended edition. He continued to hope for liberal changes in Russia but simultaneously grew to be more conservative on domestic issues of the time. He praised the fall of autocracy in March 1917 but never reconciled with the Bolshevik Revolution.⁸⁶ With this thesis focusing on his travel narrations, I discuss them chronologically and begin with *Tent Life*, penned based on his experience of working on the failed Russian-American Telegraph project.

Tent Life in Siberia (1870)

The idea of a cable across the Bering Strait and the Russian Far East to connect Europe with America gained momentum both in Russia and the U.S. in the mid-1850s, but eventually it was the

⁸⁵ Multiple associations were formed at the turn of the 1880s and 1890s in America and Britain to show sympathy for political exiles in Siberia and denounce the abuses of the Russian autocracy. Although most were short-lived, two of them existed for a longer period of time. The Russian-American National League, formed in 1887, aimed to rally the American public opinion against the ratification of the extradition treaty, arguing that it would allow the Russian government to capture political opposition residing in America, including Russian Jews. Most notably, revolutionary Sergey Stepniak-Kravchinskiy formed the SAFRF in Boston in April 1891 (soon after the creation of a similar society in Britain in 1890), and its membership included a number of former American abolitionists, social activists, and reformers. Although its impact was limited, for three years this organization printed the journal *Free Russia*. On the movement and Kennan's role in it see: Phillips, *Siberian Exile*, 81–99; Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, chap. 6; Dmitriy Nechiporuk, ““Chto amerikantsy mogut sdelat' dlya Rossii?": agitatsiya amerikanskogo Obshchestva druzey russkoy svobody i zhurnal 'Free Russia' (1891–1894 gody) [‘What can Americans do for Russia?’: Agitation by the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom and the magazine ‘Free Russia’ (1891–1894)],” *Historical Yearbook*, 2008, 137–50.

⁸⁶ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, chap. 8.

project of American entrepreneur Perry McDonough Collins that gathered support from President Lincoln and attracted the financial backing of Hiram Sibley and his Western Union Telegraph Company. The projected telegraph line was supposed to go from California through British Columbia, Alaska (then Russian), the Bering Strait, and the Russian Far East. The working groups, supervised by Colonel Charles Bulkley as the leader of the enterprise, were established along the planned route, employing Russians, Americans, and natives.⁸⁷

Kennan joined the Russian division of the project and, along with American members Richard Bush and James Mahood as well as Russian Major Sergey Abaza (the head of the Siberian section of the line) set sail on the Russian ship the *Olga* in July 1865 from San Francisco to Petropavlovsk (present-day Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky). From Petropavlovsk Bush and Mahood sailed to explore the western coastline of the Okhotsk Sea and the mouth of the Amur River, while Abaza, Kennan, accompanied by local Russians, natives, and a Russian-speaking American trader, James Dodd, traversed the Kamchatka Peninsula and went to the northwest. The travelers reached Gizhiga (known as the ghost town Gizhiginsk today, formed in 1752) in November. From there Abaza went to the northern coastline of the Okhotsk Sea, leaving Kennan, Dodd, and the group under Captain Charles Macrae (along with other groups that arrived later) to survey the route and make preliminary constructions from Gizhiga to Anadyrsk (present-day Markovo) with the help of local Russian and native labor. Kennan made most of his expeditions during the winters of 1866 and 1867 within the area between Okhotsk, Gizhiga (the base of the expeditions), and Anadyrsk, once going as far as Yamsk (see figure 8). When the news of the cancellation of the project reached the Russian Division in July 1867, Kennan collected the dispersed working groups, sold the equipment of the expedition, and went from Okhotsk to Yakutsk and then through Irkutsk to European Russia, reaching Moscow and St. Petersburg in January 1868.

Kennan offered his travelogue to readers both as a story about the telegraph project and an account about a distant and unknown region that was rarely “visited by civilized man.” The account is narrated chronologically and in the first person, though a couple of chapters are specifically related to certain trips or local natives. Before proceeding to its analysis, it is worth pointing out that in his early twenties Kennan did not know Russian or any of the native languages, which limited his understanding of the region. In most cases, he had to rely on locals or Americans who

⁸⁷ General overviews of the project include: Norman Saul, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763–1867* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 360–70; Nikolay Bolkhovitinov, *Russko-amerikanskiye otnosheniya i prodazha Alyaski (1834–1867)* [Russian-American relations and the sale of Alaska (1834–1867)] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), chap. 6; Rosemary Neering, *Continental Dash: The Russian-American Telegraph* (Ganges, BC: Horsdal and Schubart, 1989).

knew Russian (like Dodd) to collect information. Besides, the travels themselves were conducted primarily in winter when the climate allowed mobility, and during other seasons Kennan spent time mostly in Gizhiga. Nevertheless, it is his first arrival in Gizhiga and the expeditions that make up the bulk of the account, while Kennan wrote relatively little about what he was doing when the season did not allow for exploring the region.

Travel Conditions and the Landscape of the Far North

Kennan's travel experience and his impressions of the natural landscape of the distant region are interconnected. He and Abasa, Bush, and Mahood first sailed on the *Olga* from San Francisco to Petropavlovsk. The six-week voyage quickly changed his romantic preconceptions about sea travel. Witnessing regular fog and suffering from cold or damp weather and seasickness, he made sarcastic remarks about poets who praised the sea.⁸⁸ While he initially imagined the Kamchatka Peninsula to be barren and unwelcoming, he was surprised to see beautiful summer vegetation and landscapes upon arrival and paid special attention to local volcanoes, calling the Kluchevsky Volcano "the monarch of Siberian mountains."⁸⁹ His trip across Kamchatka during the summer and autumn involved horses, canoes, rafts, and sled dogs. Kennan complained that there were few roads in the modern sense and noted that the northern mountainous part of the peninsula presented challenges in traversing. Yet he enjoyed most of this trip, which reminded him of camp activities, and he made the following statement about the wilderness he witnessed:

Had I ever sailed down the Rhine, climbed the Matterhorn, or seen the moon rise over the Bay of Naples, I should have taken perhaps a juster and less enthusiastic view of Kamtchatka; but, compared with anything which I had previously seen or imagined, the mountain landscapes of Southern and Central Kamtchatka were superb.⁹⁰

This passage and his continuous praise of the summer scenery reveal a quick change in his initial preconceptions about Kamchatka (and Siberia overall) to a more positive evaluation, to a degree due to his lack of travel experience as well as the monotonous sea voyage.

Upon arrival in Gizhiga in November, he started his winter expeditions. In the area of Gizhiga and Anadyrsk he again traveled using deer and dogs and complained about the absence of roads. But now he visualized the scenery as a "snowy Sahara," claiming at one point:

⁸⁸ George Kennan, *Tent Life in Siberia, and Adventures Among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamtchatka and Northern Asia* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1870), 11, 20.

⁸⁹ Kennan, 111–12.

⁹⁰ Kennan, 87.

It was a land of desolation. A great level steppe, as boundless to the weary eye as the ocean itself, stretched away in every direction to the far horizon, without a single tree or bush to relieve its white, snowy surface. Nowhere did we see any sign of animal or vegetable life, any suggestion of summer or flowers or warm sunshine, to brighten the dreary waste of storm-drifted snow.⁹¹

It is visible that while in summer Kamchatka Kennan praised the landscapes and, in a way, romanticized his trip, the approach of the arctic winter visibly changed his notions, making him regularly write about hardships during his winter expeditions and the “empty” nature of the entire region during the rest of his account. Most notably, the area of the Anadyr River reminded him of a “frozen abandoned world where all the ordinary laws and phenomena of Nature were suspended, where animal and vegetable life were extinct, and from which even the favor of the Creator had been withdrawn.”⁹²

Kennan, however, still did not present the Siberian natural landscape one-sidedly. He denounced stereotypes about Siberia being completely barren since he saw the rapid growth of its diverse flora during short summers. He encountered an Arctic Aurora in the Anadyrsk area and dedicated several pages to its description. Fascinated by the phenomenon and connecting nature and divine revelation, Kennan concluded that anyone who was lucky to see it would be “lifted out of the atmosphere of his daily life into the immediate presence of God.”⁹³ He also saw a considerable number of fish in the region’s rivers, without which, in his view, almost no one except the nomad natives would be able to sustain themselves. On another occasion, he penned:

Scores of nights during our explorations in Siberia, we should have been compelled to camp without fire, water, or warm food, had not Nature provided everywhere an abundance of trailing pine, and stored it away under the snow for the use of travellers.⁹⁴

With the latter remark he acknowledged nature as a source of survival for locals and explorers alike, despite the discomfort he suffered from.

In sum, Kennan made a contrasting description of nature and travel conditions. However, despite the occasional beautiful scenery, the overall image of Siberia seemed to be a wild and mostly unexplored region with a lack of infrastructure, the fact that guaranteed distress for any traveler, especially during winter. To a degree this image would reappear in *Siberia*. His descriptions also indicate that he wanted to present himself to his readers as an experienced polar traveler, while a couple of his remarks reveal a connection to Kennan’s faith.

⁹¹ Kennan, 253.

⁹² Kennan, 311.

⁹³ Kennan, 331.

⁹⁴ Kennan, 268.

The Natives of Siberia and the Far East

A considerable portion of Kennan's account consists of descriptions of natives or interactions with them, with comments on their accommodation, appearance, clothes, beliefs, their activities as settled or nomad, their character, and occasionally their cultural traditions. The natives of the region led a self-sustaining nomadic, semi-nomadic, or sedentary life based on hunting, fishing, whaling, and reindeer herding; had unique beliefs, accommodations, and clothing adapted to the severe climate; and formed distinct cultures before the advance of foreign settlers. Still, information about them to the Western readership was produced primarily by explorers coming from outside the region.⁹⁵

He divided all natives of the region into three groups based on their origin (Native American, Chinese, and Turkish).⁹⁶ In the first group he included the Koryaks and the Chukchi, whom he described most extensively.⁹⁷ Yet his first encounter was with the native population of Kamchatka, the Itelmens, or, according to the name Russians adopted and widely employed in the nineteenth century, Kamchadals. Kennan saw Kamchadals as settled "semi-barbarians" living in villages along the rivers and the coastline of the peninsula. They engaged in fishing, agriculture, sable trapping, dog breeding, and active trade with Russians. Their faces reminded Kennan of Central Asians, and they often wore clothes made of pelts. Kennan appreciated their skills in fishing and dog breeding, their modern items gained from Russians, and their wooden houses (where he occasionally stayed), which were as good as those of "nine-tenths of the settlers upon the frontiers of our western States and Territories."⁹⁸ He wrote the following about the contact between them and Russians:

From the fact of their living a settled instead of a wandering life, they were brought under Russian subjection much more easily than their nomadic neighbors, and have since experienced in a greater degree the civilizing influences of Russian intercourse. They have adopted almost universally the religion, customs, and habits of their conquerors, and their own language, which is a very curious one, is already falling into disuse.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Leane, "Polar Travel," in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 361.

⁹⁶ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 321–25.

⁹⁷ Though there are continuous debates on the origins of the natives of Northeastern Siberia, the Chukchi and the Koryaks are generally considered to be the indigenous, autochthonal ethnicities. Together with the Itelmens they belong to the so-called Paleo-Asiatic ethnicities and make the Chukotko-Kamchatkan language family. Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2–3; Elena Bat'yanova and Vadim Turaev, eds., *Narody Severo-Vostoka Sibiri* [The peoples of Northeastern Siberia] (Moscow: Nauka, 2010), 12–15, 65–73.

⁹⁸ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 66.

⁹⁹ Kennan, 64.

This was a correct observation, as intensified contacts between the first generations of Russian settlers and many of the settled Itelmens living in the southern and western parts of Kamchatka led to remarkable changes. Widespread marriage, trade, joint expeditions, and Christianization – all had a profound impact on Itelmens who adopted Russian culture, language, and lifestyle. However, this interaction was a two-way street as many Russians implemented Itelmens’ fishing and hunting techniques, costumes, and to a degree native vocabulary. As a result, not only many Itelmens were, as Kennan pointed out, essentially Russified, but a large creole population appeared. Itelmens became divided between the less and the more assimilated, including creoles. The latter group adopted the name Kamchadals and identified themselves as separate from both the Itelmens’ old ways and Russians proper. The less affected indigenous population, although called Kamchadals by Russians as well, eventually managed to secure the name Itelmens.¹⁰⁰ Kennan’s praise of settled Kamchadal life and their interactions with Russians indicated his belief in Russia as a positive “civilizing” force and in the full assimilation as the result of the “civilizing” intercourse. But he did not acknowledge the more disturbing side of this process. Itelmens in the two centuries of Russian encounter suffered from clashes with nearby natives and Russians themselves, famines, and diseases (especially at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) that reduced their numbers from 12,000 before the Russian conquest down to 2,000 in the early nineteenth century; that made assimilation in many cases the sole option rather than a conscious choice.¹⁰¹

While lauding the level of “civilization” achieved by the Kamchadals, Kennan made generalizing comments on their character. He presented them as hospitable, good-natured, and friendly but also incapable of “rebellion or resistance to oppression,” unlike the nomad peoples in Siberia and Native Americans at home. Their songs were not militant compared to the music of Native Americans, confirming the assumption about their peaceful character and that they were “as faithful and forgiving as a dog.”¹⁰² With that he showed unawareness of the history of Itelmens’ rebellions, especially in the first half of the eighteenth century, as a response to the enforcement of *yasak* (fur tribute) and the abuses of the Russian administration.¹⁰³ Instead, he connected the status of a native ethnicity with their character, especially militancy.

¹⁰⁰ Bat’yanova and Turaev, *Narody Severo-Vostoka Sibiri*, 28, 146–54.

¹⁰¹ Il’ya Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya severo-vostoka Sibiri* [The ethnic history of northeastern Siberia] (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 96–102, 179–81; James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia’s North Asian Colony, 1581–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 143.

¹⁰² Kennan, *Tent Life*, 155.

¹⁰³ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya severo-vostoka Sibiri*, 97–98.

The contrast between nomad and settled Koryaks reinforces this claim. For Kennan, settled Koryaks living in the area of Gizhiga were ugly, their tents uncomfortable and dirty, and he presented them as dishonest, cruel, and prone to adopting vices of “civilization” from Russians and Americans, such as lying and drinking. Without describing anything else about their lifestyle or culture, Kennan declared settled Koryaks to be “unquestionably the worst, ugliest, most brutal and degraded natives in all Northeastern Siberia.”¹⁰⁴ While the initial negative impact of “civilization” on indigenous peoples was a common Western trope at that time, Kennan did not acknowledge that many settled Koryaks, especially those living in the northern areas of Kamchatka, had dynamic contacts with both Kamchadals and Russians, adopting many of their improvements, even housing similar to what Kennan praised when describing Kamchadals.¹⁰⁵

In contrast, nomad Koryaks received the most attention in his account, and he dedicated two chapters wholly to their lifestyle. Kennan praised their physique, clothes, and warm and comfortable tents (despite their odor). In Kennan’s view, they were independent from any governments or influences from the outside. He reasoned that although they were barbarians from an American perspective, they were so honest and dignified that he would unreservedly entrust his own life to them just as much as to “other uncivilized people whom I have ever known.” Their nomadic way of life was what distinguished them:

This wandering, isolated, independent existence has given to the Koryaks all those characteristic traits of boldness, impatience of restraint, and perfect self-reliance, which distinguish them from the Kamchadals and the other settled inhabitants of Siberia.¹⁰⁶

The Chukchi, deer-breeding nomads, were presented similarly to Koryaks, and together these “savages” were praised for their independent lifestyle as well as bravely resisting Russian invasion like Native Americans at home. However, linking nomad Koryaks to the Chukchi was an oversight. Not only did nomad Koryaks submit to the Russian government and *yasak* decades before Kennan’s expedition, but their relations with Russians and the Chukchi until the beginning of the nineteenth century remained ambivalent. In some cases, they went as far as helping the Chukchi against the Russians, but they also often perceived the Chukchi as deer breeding rivals and their raids as threats to their own existence, often asking for Russian protection and even fighting on their side against their northern neighbors.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 232.

¹⁰⁵ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya severo-vostoka Sibiri*, 186–88.

¹⁰⁶ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 182.

¹⁰⁷ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya severo-vostoka Sibiri*, 112–15; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 143–50.

Despite his praise for the nomad lifestyle, Kennan did not put himself on the same level with any kind of natives. On several occasions he noted their ignorance about modern items and technologies. A case in point was when Kennan depicted the amazement of the Chukchi in Anadyrsk when they saw an illustrated periodical with lithographs of people in it. He claimed that for them they looked like representatives of other species and even became objects of worship.¹⁰⁸

In connection with native beliefs, he described Shamanism as the “corrupted form of Buddhism” (clearly a false statement). Kennan was more correct in pointing out that native beliefs were influenced by the arctic climate and geography, although for him it was the sole factor, implying geographical determinism. Their practices remained strong, so that even waves of Christianization by the Orthodox Church did not fully overturn “the irresistible Shamanistic influence which is exerted upon the mind by the wilder, more terrible manifestations of Nature in these lonely and inhospitable regions.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, even at the end of the nineteenth century many of the natives of Northeastern Siberia, at best, combined Shamanist and Christian beliefs in a syncretic view of the world.¹¹⁰ But instead of conversion Kennan proposed another approach, arguing that wandering natives should experience “educational enlightenment and an entire change in their mode of life.”¹¹¹ With that thought he contradicted his own remarks about praising the nomad lifestyle for independence from any external influence and simply offered another way of “civilizing.” He sounded like American missionaries who also hesitated between only conversion and a commitment to a complete overhaul of lifestyle when dealing with Native Americans at home and non-Christians abroad.¹¹² And while praising nomad Koryaks, for him they lived in some sort of an intellectual cocoon, little bothered by outside events, and he concluded:

I found it almost impossible sometimes to realize, as I sat by the fire in a Korak tent, that I was still in the modern world of railroads, telegraphs, and daily newspapers. I seemed to have been carried back by some enchantment through the long cycles of time, and made a dweller in the tents of Shem and Japheth. Not a suggestion was there in all our surroundings of the vaunted enlightenment and civilization of the nineteenth century, and as we gradually accustomed ourselves to the new and strange conditions of primitive barbarism, our recollections of a civilized life faded into the unreal imagery of a vivid dream.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 326–30.

¹⁰⁹ Kennan, 211.

¹¹⁰ Mikhail Shilovskiy and Alexander Elert, eds., *Istoriya Sibiri: v 4 tomakh* [History of Siberia: in four volumes], vol. 3, *Novoye vremya (konets XVI – nachalo XX veka)* [Modern era (end of sixteenth – the beginning of twentieth centuries)] (Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo Instituta arkheologii i etnografii SO RAN, 2023), 410–11.

¹¹¹ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 215–16.

¹¹² Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, chap. 3; Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 9–11.

¹¹³ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 205.

On the whole, Kennan looked at natives with the picture of the American frontier in mind and fluctuated between the acceptance of the “civilizing” process as a progressive force and nostalgia for the independence and the purity of the natives who had no contact with “civilization” and whose authentic character and identity this “civilization” supposedly destroys. He to a degree adopted the widespread beliefs in geographical determinism that still affected the perception of Native Americans at home and other people who encountered a superior “civilization.”¹¹⁴ Some of his claims were quite observant and show that he wanted to present himself to the readers as a cultural anthropologist and an expert on native life. Other statements, especially regarding the native character, were superficial. As shown in the next two paragraphs, compared to natives Russia was seen as “civilization,” but with occasional hints of the U.S. being on an even higher level.

Russian Settlements

Kennan provided a contrasting description of the major Russian towns of the region. Upon his first arrival in Petropavlovsk, he saw a relatively small settlement consisting of a collection of log houses with an Orthodox church and a somewhat rundown local port. Kennan, aside from praising the scenery around the town, was surprised to find modern items in the house of the head of the port like a piano and photographs. He thought of these as “evidences of cultivated and refined taste in this remote corner of the world.”¹¹⁵ Yet he also noted:

It is not fairly a representative Kamtchadal town, for it has felt in no inconsiderable degree the civilizing influences of foreign intercourse, and shows in its manners and modes of life and thought some evidences of modern enterprise and enlightenment. It has existed as a settlement since the early part of the eighteenth century, and is old enough to have acquired some civilization of its own; but age in a Siberian town is no criterion of development, and Petropavlovski either has not attained the enlightenment of maturity, or has passed into its second childhood, for it is still in a benighted condition.¹¹⁶

Interestingly, Kennan referred to Petropavlovsk as a “Kamchadal” town. His perception aligned with that of many Russian outsiders who perceived everyone – the older generations of Russian settlers and the natives of Kamchatka, assimilated or not, as Kamchadals.¹¹⁷ Kennan visited this settlement after the end of the Crimean War, when it saw actual fighting with the British and the

¹¹⁴ See Robert Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 38–42.

¹¹⁵ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 33.

¹¹⁶ Kennan, 34–35.

¹¹⁷ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 97–98. What complicated the term “Kamchadal” even more is that older settlers, with decades of interactions with natives, came to perceive themselves as different from Russians. They often identified themselves with the settlement they lived in rather than Russian ethnicity, and some of the old settlers went as far as proclaiming themselves Kamchadals, joining the Russified Itelmens and creoles.

French navies. However, after the war Petropavlovsk, with the departure of its garrison, saw rapid depopulation, down to 300–400 inhabitants by the late 1860s.¹¹⁸ This passage shows that, while associating the first Russian town with “civilization,” Kennan perceived Siberia as rather underdeveloped, likely by comparing what he saw in Petropavlovsk with American towns. As if to prove that he added that the city lacked proper roads and had few places of interest. Later, after the *Olga* departed from Petropavlovsk with Mahood and Bush, leaving Kennan alone, he wrote that now “the last tie which connected us with the civilized world seemed severed.”¹¹⁹

However, the hardships of the expeditions and the experience of living in native dwellings reinforced his appreciation of Russian towns. After a long journey across the Kamchatka Peninsula, Kennan finally reached Gizhiga for the first time. He described how he at last got to rest in a “civilized home,” wear clean Western clothes, and eat proper food:

No one who has not travelled for three long months through a wilderness like Kamtchatka, camped out in storms among desolate mountains, slept for three weeks in the smoky tents, and yet smokier and dirtier yourts of the Koraks, and lived altogether like a perfect savage and barbarian – no one who has not experienced this can possibly understand with what joyful hearts we welcomed that red church steeple, and the civilization of which it was the sign.¹²⁰

He commented similarly upon arriving in Anadyrsk, where he saw a collection of four villages whose inhabitants were old Russian settlers, Russified natives, and occasional Chukchi traders. He praised his accommodation and enjoyed his comfortable living there.¹²¹ Thus, Kennan’s opinion about Russian towns improved, and he signified them as the sites of “civilization” and praised them compared to living among natives. The passage cited above additionally reveals that the presence of Christianity was also interpreted as a sign of Russia’s higher standing.

Later Kennan described how an American ship, the *Clara Bell*, accompanied by a Russian warship the *Varyag*, reached Gizhiga.¹²² It was August 1866; Kennan had already completed his first expeditions and was growing tired of the monotonous life in the settlement. The arrival of the two ships restored Kennan’s and his companions’ enthusiasm, but eventually the *Clara Bell* had to leave Gizhiga. Kennan was sad to part with its American crew. Despite noting the importance of Gizhiga as a settlement, he remarked:

It was a gloomy party of men which returned that afternoon to a supper of reindeer-meat and cabbage in the bare deserted rooms of the government store-house at Geezhega! We realized then,

¹¹⁸ Gurvich, *Etnicheskaya istoriya severo-vostoka Sibiri*, 207.

¹¹⁹ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 47.

¹²⁰ Kennan, 240–41.

¹²¹ Kennan, 281–84.

¹²² At the time Gizhiga was a settlement with a population of around 500, including many old settlers and creoles, largely doing fishing, hunting, and trade.

if never before, the difference between *life* in "God's country" and *existence* in Northeastern Asia.¹²³

From this and all other comments, it is clear that Kennan designated Russian locations as parts of "civilization" compared to native accommodations, but on a couple of occasions hinted at their own lack of it compared to the U.S. In sum, the Russian settlements in *Tent Life* represented a smaller case in point in the later formation of the "dual vision" of the country.

The United States and Russia in Personal Interactions

Kennan and other Americans were warmly welcomed in all Russian settlements, and the author described scenes of local life. He was genuinely curious about Russian culture, describing a marriage procession in Petropavlovsk that he found somewhat silly and the piety of the population and impressive chanting during a session in the Orthodox church in Anadyrsk. He found other things amusing, such as a Russian "black" bathhouse in the village of Kluchi or the superstitious belief in "Anadyrsk pain" among the residents of Gizhiga. The latter was presented as some sort of hypnosis that could be cured if a specific object was brought to the person under its influence. In Kennan's view, some women apparently used this as a pretext to get their husbands to buy the things they wanted, and he humorously concluded that these women were more ingenious than "all the Women's Rights Associations in Christendom."¹²⁴ He also wrote about the Orthodox Christmas festivities he witnessed in Anadyrsk, where he was invited to a dancing party and even tried to perform a Cossack dance. He admitted that "the pitch of excitement to which these natives work themselves up in the course of these dances is almost incredible, and it has a wonderfully inspiring effect even upon a foreigner."¹²⁵ While he truly appreciated the entertainment and the cordiality of the locals in Anadyrsk, he commented on the dancing session:

I have described somewhat in detail this dancing party because it is the principal amusement of the semi-civilized inhabitants of all the Russian settlements in Siberia, and shows better than anything else the careless, happy disposition of the people.¹²⁶

With this Kennan presented Russians as hospitable and happy-go-lucky, yet simultaneously their lifestyle and settlements were evaluated as somewhat inferior compared to the U.S.

¹²³ Kennan, *Tent Life*, 373. Italics in the original.

¹²⁴ Kennan, 358.

¹²⁵ Kennan, 297.

¹²⁶ Kennan, 298.

As mentioned earlier, Kennan noted the hospitality of the population in all Russian settlements. To a degree he attributed this to his status as an American. In the very beginning, he and Bush were welcomed by the local Russians in Petropavlovsk as if they were “American officials.” Bush connected the attention that Americans had received with “the discrimination and intelligence of Kamtchatkan society,” and Kennan penned that “prompt and instinctive recognition of superior genius he affirmed to be a characteristic of that people, and he expressed deep regret that it was not equally so of some other people whom he could mention.”¹²⁷ And even during the dancing party in Anadyrsk that Kennan enjoyed, he described an incident when he accidentally stepped on the foot of a local peasant. Despite evident pain, the peasant not only refused apologies but allegedly claimed that he felt proud of an American stepping on his foot. This led to the following conclusion:

I had never before realized what a proud and enviable distinction I enjoyed in being a native of our highly favored country! I could stalk abroad into foreign lands with a reckless disregard for everybody's toes, and the full assurance that the more toes I stepped on the more honor I would confer upon benighted foreigners, and the more credit I would reflect upon my own benevolent disposition! This was clearly the place for unappreciated Americans to come to; and if any young man finds that his merits are not properly recognized at home, I advise him in all seriousness to go to Siberia, where the natives will consider it an honor to have him step on their toes.¹²⁸

This passage combines an appreciation of Russian sympathy towards Americans with irony, which, together with earlier comments, can still be interpreted as an assertion of the inferior position of the locals.

As a whole, it looks as if young Kennan wished to reenact the American frontier experience in the ice and cold of Siberia, with its own share of stories about natives, settlers, small settlements, and the incoming of “civilization” with the spread of telegraph lines. While he idealized the nomad peoples in connection with Native Americans at home and acknowledged the less appealing influences of “civilization,” this did not shake his feeling of Russia being the “civilizing” power compared to native life. Despite showing genuine interest in Russians as well as describing their sympathies to Americans, occasionally Kennan used his interactions as a source of lauding his home country. He certainly contributed to the establishment of a parallel between Russian and American advances, a link which would be discussed in later chapters. Still, his discourse resembled both the Russian and American vision of their own natives – based not on who they

¹²⁷ Kennan, 38–39.

¹²⁸ Kennan, 297–98.

actually were, but as the alien “Other” who, whether as real or “noble” “savages,” were measured solely through the changing values, identity, and self-perceptions of the colonizing culture.¹²⁹

This account saw numerous reprints during the next four decades and essentially established Kennan as a prominent writer on Russia in the empire itself.¹³⁰ The domestic reaction to his account was overwhelmingly positive, with praise primarily for revealing such a distant and unknown region before the public eye with an engaging narrative full of humor. The *Atlantic Monthly* summarized that, “we must regret an occasional slip in grammar and redundancy and carelessness in style and statement, but we should be loath to part with a jot of the fresh human nature which might not have got into a book more carefully written.”¹³¹ *Tent Life* was also well-received in Britain, while the *Brooklyn Eagle* suggested that his book dealt a blow to the image of barren Siberia and the gruesome exile system.¹³² Without this account and the positive reputation it got in both countries, Kennan might have never been allowed to come to Russia to cover the exile system. However, in *Siberia* his initial conclusions underwent a considerable transformation.

Siberia and the Exile System (1891)

Two decades elapsed before Kennan’s next major visit to Russia, now under the contract with the *Century* to explore Russian prisons. He secured letters of introduction and the consent of the Russian administration. This means that Russian officials, considering the popularity of *Tent Life*, his public lectures, and the acquired knowledge of Russian by then, saw him as an authority on Russia and expected him to produce a fair study.

He arrived in Russia in May 1885 and left for home only in August 1886, traveling together with George Frost, an artist and a member of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition. He published thirty articles in total between June 1887 and October 1891 (excluding open letters). Twenty of them were related to the trip itself. The rest included six introductory articles concerning the development of the liberal movement until the early 1880s, the abusive treatment and living

¹²⁹ Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man’s Indian*, 27–30; Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 388–90.

¹³⁰ In 1891, the year of the publication of *Siberia* in book form, *Tent Life* was reprinted for the thirteenth time. By 1905 it had twenty reprints. It was also quickly translated and officially published in Russia in at least two editions in 1871 and 1872. It was republished in 1896, under the pretext that the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway (launched in 1891) finally allowed to bring Siberia closer “to the cultured world,” whereas before it began Siberia still corresponded to many of Kennan’s descriptions: George Kennan, *Kochevaya zhizn’ v Sibiri: Priklyucheniya sredi koryakov i dr. inorodtsev* [Tent life in Siberia: Adventures among Koryaks and other aliens], Translated from English [translator unknown] (St. Petersburg: I. I. Ivanov, 1896), 3–8.

¹³¹ “Recent Literature,” *Atlantic Monthly* 27, no. 159 (January 1871): 140; “New Publications,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1870, 2; “New Publications,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 21, 1871, 3.

¹³² “Tent Life in Siberia,” *Spectator*, December 17, 1870, 1509; “New Books,” *Brooklyn Daily Union*, November 14, 1870, 2.

conditions of political prisoners and their hints at resisting and establishing communication with each other while in prisons, and the Russian penal code. One of these articles was related to the description of the Petropavlovsk Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention in St. Petersburg. He was not allowed to visit the former and depicted it based on the testimonies of prisoners he met. He also wrote four articles on the Russian police, the system of censorship, the massacre of political exiles in Yakutsk in April 1889, and an account of his visit to Leo Tolstoy during his second entry to Russia. These ten articles were mostly excluded from his two-volume book published in December 1891.

Upon arrival in St. Petersburg, Kennan met with Alexander Vlangali, the assistant of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and “told him frankly and candidly” about his goals, secured the Ministry’s letters of introduction while already having three dozen letters of support from officials, the American diplomatic corps, but also from some of the opposition intellectuals, including Nikolay Yadrintsev, one of the leaders of Siberian regionalism.¹³³ Kennan met him in St. Petersburg but did not mention this meeting in the account.¹³⁴

From St. Petersburg the two travelers went to Moscow, and from there the trip would include going by train and steamers to Ekaterinburg through Nizhniy Novgorod, Kazan, and Perm. From Ekaterinburg onwards Kennan and Frost traveled mostly on horseback. With a detour to the south to the Altai region, the two reached Irkutsk in September 1885, the arrival being the break between the two volumes. Then they crossed Lake Baikal and explored the Trans-Baikal region, including the Nerchinsk mining districts. The two Americans then returned to Irkutsk in mid-December and, after a couple of weeks’ stay, went back to St. Petersburg. On their way, they explored prisons and met with exiles, officials, local businessmen, and scientists (figure 9 shows their route). From St. Petersburg Kennan and Frost went to London in March 1886 to rest and met with several Russian revolutionary émigrés. Frost became increasingly sick during the journey and went home, while Kennan again entered Russia with his wife in April 1886. During the second trip he traveled within European Russia and met officials, Russian liberals, as well as Tolstoy and Vladimir Korolenko, another prominent writer, before returning to the U.S. in August.

¹³³ Siberian regionalism (*oblastnichestvo*) was a social and ideological movement that consisted of a number of Siberian intellectuals and scientists (some of them were exiles at some point), with Yadrintsev and another activist Grigory Potanin as its leaders. They criticized the government for its inefficient and colonial-like policy in Siberia (including the exile system) in the press and writings and argued for the development of economic cooperation, education, and further political autonomy for Siberia. Secondary literature on the movement is shown in chapter 5.

¹³⁴ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 113, 161–62. Travis pointed out that his open declaration of goals to Vlangali was also not true.

Along with the first-person narrative Kennan covered specific questions of the prison system (exile by administrative process, police surveillance, the history of the political prison in the Kara area, etc.). Unlike his journey in 1865–1868, now he and Frost both acquired Russian, allowing them to directly talk with everyone they met and explore documents about prisons. Kennan was better prepared since he had letters of introduction and had already read literature on the exile system. With that said, neither his articles nor the book covered his second trip (after resting in London), except for an article about the visit to Tolstoy.¹³⁵

Travel Conditions and the Landscape of Siberia

Similarly to *Tent Life*, travel and nature were interrelated during the second journey. Kennan and Frost crossed the Ural Mountains in June by rail that went from Perm to Ekaterinburg (it was extended to Tumen during their stay in Siberia) and then used the Siberian tract and local roads to explore Western Siberia until reaching Irkutsk. Kennan praised the train part of the journey and was pleasantly surprised to find in this region “a railroad so well built, perfectly equipped, and luxuriously appointed.”¹³⁶ Initially, he also lauded the Russian post travel system for its flexibility, low price, and the availability of horses at local stations within a short riding distance from each other. The travelers compared the Ural Mountains to the Alleghenies and praised Siberian flora and fauna during summer. Kennan reiterated his claim against the stereotype of Siberia as a wild and desolate region and told his readers that to a foreigner, “nothing is more surprising than the fervent heat of Siberian sunshine and the extraordinary beauty and profusion of Siberian flowers.”¹³⁷ Upon reaching the Altai area he labeled it the “Siberian Switzerland” and dedicated one article to his explorations of Katun Ridge, constantly praising the scenery.

Upon arrival in Irkutsk, the two Americans sold their personal *tarantass* carriage and hoped to explore the Transbaikal area by changing horses and carriages at every station. This proved to be a grave mistake, and Kennan confessed his exasperation, with his error leading to constant hardships so that the two Americans “had little capacity left for the enjoyment of anything.” Both the lack of travel comfort and the incoming winter gradually turned the image of the Siberian landscape to that of an “empty” and barren space. Kennan concluded that his Transbaikal experience showed that “a more wretched, exasperating, body-bruising, and heart-breaking system

¹³⁵ For the description of his second entry to Russia, see: Travis, 137–44.

¹³⁶ George Kennan, “Across the Russian Frontier,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 1 (May 1888): 18.

¹³⁷ George Kennan, “Plains and Prisons of Western Siberia,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 2 (June 1888): 166.

of transportation does not anywhere exist.”¹³⁸ In addition, Kennan complained about the lack of proper accommodation in Eastern Siberia, claiming that “we did not see a civilized bed in the Trans-Baikal.” Upon finally reaching Tumen on his way back, he stated, “how delightful it was to move swiftly out of Tiumen [sic] in a luxurious railroad car only those can conceive who have traveled eight thousand miles in springless vehicles over Siberian roads.”¹³⁹

To sum up, there is a parallel between *Siberia* and *Tent Life* in the change of the season and the deteriorating impressions from travel comfort and nature, and Kennan used the depictions of hardships and tough climate to raise sympathy for the prisoners he met with. He was far from alone in complaining about travel in Siberia, as before the emergence of the Trans-Siberian Railway it caused constant hardships and frustration to both Russian and foreign travelers.¹⁴⁰

The Cities and Villages of European Russia and Siberia

Before entering Siberia, Kennan passed through Moscow and St. Petersburg but did not write about them at all. The first city he described was Nizhniy Novgorod. He arrived in the city in June when the fair (described in the previous chapter) did not operate, and was astonished to see the fair city, with its hotels, shops, and other facilities, completely empty. For him, the fair represented “a sort of intermittent commercial fever, in which an annual paroxysm of intense and unnatural activity is followed by a long interval of torpor and stagnation.” However, he noted that the infrastructure of the fair city had improved in recent years, while in Nizhniy Novgorod proper, despite the fact that its Kremlin looked rundown, he praised the main commercial street, claiming that “even the children seem to feel the spirit of trade that controls the city.”¹⁴¹

After Nizhniy Novgorod, in cities like Perm, Tumen, and Omsk, his descriptions often included unpaved streets, rows of log houses, and churches or other major buildings. These settlements were deemed uninteresting. In the book Kennan expanded on Ekaterinburg:

In external appearance Ekaterinburg does not differ essentially from the typical Russian town of its class. There are the same wide, unpaved streets that one sees everywhere in Russia, the same square log houses with ornamented window casings and flatly pyramidal tin roofs, the same high board fences between the scattered dwellings, the same white-walled churches with colored or

¹³⁸ George Kennan, “The Grand Lama of the Trans-Baikal,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 37, no. 5 (March 1889): 644, 649.

¹³⁹ George Kennan, “My Last Days in Siberia,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 42, no. 6 (October 1891): 819.

¹⁴⁰ Vladimir Morev and Anastasiya Moreva, ““Mezhdu osen’yu i snegom” dorog v Tomskoy gubernii net’: dorogi, sredstva transporta i osobennosti puteshestviya po Sibiri vo vtoroy polovine XIX v. [“There are no roads between autumn and snow’ in Tomsk province”: roads, means of transport, and features of travel in Siberia in the second half of the nineteenth century],” *Tomsk State University Journal*, no. 468 (2021): 146–53, <https://doi.org/10.17223/15617793/468/16>.

¹⁴¹ Kennan, “Across the Russian Frontier,” 8, 11.

gilded domes, and the same *gastiniy dvor* or city bazar. In the bazars of these Russian provincial towns you may find, if you search diligently, almost everything that the empire produces, and a great many things that it does not produce.¹⁴²

Thus, despite its mediocre appearance, he praised this city for its trade influence like Nizhniy Novgorod. He also noted many modern urban features and facilities, including museums, electric lights, newspapers (though censored), operas, and exhibitions. However, he added that “these evidences of culture and enterprise, judged by an American standard, may seem trifling and insignificant; but they are not so common in Russia as to justify a traveler in passing them without notice.”¹⁴³ Overall, Kennan’s commentary reveals that he was now judging cities based on their urban features and business prospects. While he complimented Nizhniy Novgorod for its commercial importance, the case of Ekaterinburg shows that he hinted at the overall inferiority of Russian cities compared to America.

In Siberia proper he continued to evaluate towns based on the degree of their urban and commercial development, praising Tomsk as the best Siberian city that could challenge even towns in European Russia in terms of enterprise and prosperity. Similarly, Semipalatinsk (present-day Semey in Kazakhstan), despite reminding him “of a Mohammedan town built in the middle of a north African desert” from the outside, was given a positive evaluation due to the richness of the local library, with American works present. In the Trans-Baikal region Nerchinsk was deemed to be the best “in point of culture and material prosperity,” and Kennan was impressed with the luxurious but deserted mansion of the prominent gold miner and philanthropist Mikhail Butin, who went bankrupt. However, he concluded that “such luxury would excite no remark in a wealthy and populous European city; but in the snowy wilderness of the Trans-Baikal, 3000 miles from the boundary-line of Europe, it comes to the unprepared traveler with the shock of a complete surprise.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, while in Siberia he also paid attention primarily to urban features and commerce and praised some cities, the description of Nerchinsk shows that his evaluation of cities was additionally based on triangulation with Europe. His preconception seemed to be that Siberian towns could only be a catch-up to America and Europe, and it found its expression in the evaluation of this far-away small Siberian town.

¹⁴² George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* (New York: Century, 1891), 1:37-38.

¹⁴³ Kennan, 1:36.

¹⁴⁴ George Kennan, “Adventures in Eastern Siberia,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 39, no. 1 (November 1889): 102.

The two Americans spent comparatively little time in Siberian villages, but Kennan outlined the absence of fences and individual farms, instead seeing peasants living and cultivating land together. While he underscored the fertility of the soil, he wrote the following about the villages he saw in Western Siberia:

There is in all of these villages more or less individual comfort and prosperity; but the Siberian peasant does not seem to take any pride in the external appearance of his premises, and pays little attention to beautifying them or keeping them in order. The condition of the whole village, moreover, indicates a lack of public spirit and enterprise on the part of its inhabitants. As long as an evil or a nuisance is endurable, there seems to be no disposition to abate it, and the result is the general neglect of all public improvements. Much of this seeming indifference is doubtless attributable to the paralyzing influence of a paternal and all-regulating government.¹⁴⁵

His comments show that now Kennan was more critical of neglected villages and passive inhabitants despite the soil's fertility, blaming the government. However, he did not expand on how exactly the authorities limited peasant self-government in Siberia. The government indeed sought to gradually expand its presence in the countryside, but there is evidence to suggest that until the late 1890s local *volost* self-government was quite autonomous, albeit due to the general shortage of officials in the vast region.¹⁴⁶ In other instances Kennan criticized the peasants themselves. He pinpointed their dependence on alcohol and lack of education.¹⁴⁷ In one of the preliminary articles he additionally commented on peasant religious superstitions, including kissing icons and the relics of saints in expectation of a miracle to happen, the customs that he perceived both as an unhealthy practice and a sign of ignorance. This was in contrast with the earlier praise of the Orthodox presence among natives in *Tent Life*.¹⁴⁸

Kennan described an episode when the Americans stopped in the village of Krutaya on their way from Tumen to Omsk. The entire population allegedly came out to see the foreigners, but Kennan stressed the general ignorance of the peasants since only a couple knew where America was. The continuation of the interaction was as follows:

A young man, however, who had happened to be in Omsk when the bodies of the dead members of the *Jeannette* arctic expedition were carried through that city, undertook to enlighten the crowd upon the subject of the Americans, who, he said, "were the wisest people that God had ever created, and the only people that had ever sailed into the great Icy Sea." One of the old inhabitants

¹⁴⁵ Kennan, "Plains and Prisons of Western Siberia," 168.

¹⁴⁶ Lev Dameshek and Anatoliy Remnev, eds., *Sibir' v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii* [Siberia as part of the Russian Empire] (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2007), 193–97.

¹⁴⁷ George Kennan, "Life on the Great Siberian Road," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 37, no. 2 (December 1888): 176.

¹⁴⁸ George Kennan, "The Russian Penal Code," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 35, no. 6 (April 1888): 882–83.

contended that Russian navigators had also penetrated the Icy Sea, and that although they might not be so "wise" as the Americans, they were quite as good sailors in icy waters.¹⁴⁹

Here Kennan used this encounter to praise his compatriots at the expense of locals. He presented this experience as commonplace during his journey to Omsk and conveyed the "feeling of intense pleasure and relief that one leaves such a village."

In contrast, in the book Kennan expanded on how in the village of Berel in the Altai region he stayed with a local peasant who had built his own farm from scratch, became prosperous, and was for Kennan a successful example "of the hardy Siberian pioneers who seek to escape from the burdensome restraints of government by migration to remote and unexplored regions."¹⁵⁰ With that he defined the settler colonization of the American West as a superior standard in contrast to the commune village life and state policies in Russia.

Overall, Kennan judged Russian and Siberian cities and villages through the lens of the American and European urban environment, trade, and rapid advances in agriculture in the American West at the turn of the century. Compared to *Tent Life*, when he praised Russian settlements compared to native tents, now they were given a more critical evaluation. Some remarks indicate that Russia was presented as falling behind America and Europe alike.

The Potential in Siberia

In contrast with *Tent Life*, Kennan now involved statistical data on the trade, volume of agriculture and industry, and general economic aspects of the regions, cities, and other places he visited. By describing the Nizhniy Novgorod fair, the city's trade volume, and the number of steamers plying on the Volga River he denounced claims that the Volga region was "half-civilized" and added:

The first thing that strikes the traveler on the threshold of southeastern Russia is the *greatness* of the country – that is, the enormous extent of its material resources, and the intense commercial activity manifested along its principal lines of communication.¹⁵¹

Thus, Kennan from the start pointed to profitable opportunities for American entrepreneurs in Russia and its rich natural resources, a definite change from his previous account.

However, while praising the commercial activity in the Volga region, in Siberia he mostly criticized Russian government policies in developing it, both due to the use of exile labor and general inefficiency. A case in point is his description of the economy in Tomsk province. Kennan

¹⁴⁹ George Kennan, "The Steeps of the Irtysh," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 3 (July 1888): 359.

¹⁵⁰ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 1:208.

¹⁵¹ Kennan, "Across the Russian Frontier," 11. Italics in the original.

outlined its rich natural resources but criticized censorship, the exile system in general, the limitations on local education, and corruption. He claimed that if the province was “in the hands of Americans” and ensured better government and private enterprise, it “might soon become as densely populated and as prosperous as any of our northwestern States.”¹⁵² A similar comment was made regarding Tobolsk province. The culmination of his critique was the visit to the Nerchinsk district silver mines owned by the Imperial Cabinet. He criticized the wretched local prisons, the living conditions of local criminal (not political) convicts used as forced labor, and the government’s inefficiency in developing the mines. He concluded:

The idleness of the convicts, and the failure of the authorities to do any one of the scores of things that needed doing, were the direct result, it seemed to me, of official indifference, incapacity, or lack of enterprise. An energetic American with plenary powers and a capital of \$10,000 or \$15,000 would take the 950 convicts imprisoned in the Nerchinsk silver-mining district, and in less than two years would have a new prison built at every mine in the whole region, and in less than five years would double, if not quadruple, the productive capacity of the mines themselves, without calling upon the imperial treasury for a single dollar in the shape of extraordinary expenditure.¹⁵³

His perceptions of the Nerchinsk mines were true-to-life, as they faced a serious crisis in profitability, aggravated by the exhaustion of available silver, the decrease of its price worldwide, and the appearance of more profitable private enterprise in the Transbaikal region that focused on gold and employed free rather than convict labor.¹⁵⁴ Still, it is visible that he imagined the appropriation of Siberia and greater benefits for the region if it was governed the American way. Compared to *Tent Life*, these comments offer a new mode of Kennan’s thinking about Russia. He now openly emphasized the available natural resources and regarded the private American initiative as a superior way of material development compared to government policies in Siberia. Together with the comments about cities and villages, he invited Americans to think of their initiative and overall level of development as superior to Russia.

The Natives of Siberia

Unlike in *Tent Life*, the contacts of Kennan and Frost with natives this time were less frequent but still noteworthy. On the way from Omsk to Semipalatinsk, they encountered an aul of Kirghiz (most likely Kirghiz-Kaisak or modern Kazakhs), describing it as a lonely set of *kibitkas* (tents)

¹⁵² George Kennan, “The Tomsk Forwarding Prison,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 6 (October 1888): 862–63.

¹⁵³ Kennan, “Adventures in Eastern Siberia,” 101.

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Gentes, “Roads to Oblivion: Siberian Exile and the Struggle between State and Society in Russia, 1593–1917” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2002), 410–14; Shilovskiy and Elert, *Istoriya Sibiri*, 3:435–36.

“removed from all civilized human interests.” The two Americans were invited into one of the tents. Kennan described how they were immediately offered kumis as a sign of hospitality. However, the interaction with the Kirghiz family inside did not go well. Frost wanted to make a sketch of a child of the family, but his mother took him away from his gaze, “imagining perhaps that her offspring was being mesmerized, paralyzed, or bewitched.”¹⁵⁵ Another major encounter was the meeting with a local lama and the Buryats during a short trip to Selenginsk (present-day Novoselenginsk) to visit the Tamchinsky *datsan* (Buddhist monastery) near it. The Americans were met and accompanied by a local Buryat chief of police who behaved in an extravagant way and consumed “insanity drops.” Yet upon the meeting with the lama, he quickly turned sober, asked the travelers to treat the lama with respect, and, disappointed with their status as simple Americans, decided to present the two to the lama “as deputies, if not ambassadors, of the great American Republic.” Kennan was impressed with Buryat religious ceremonies, yet he still described them as a display of “barbaric splendour.” While the meeting with the lama went well, similarly to *Tent Life* he pointed out native ignorance, claiming about the lama that “it seemed very strange to find anywhere on the globe, in the nineteenth century, an educated man and high ecclesiastical dignitary who had never even heard of America, and who did not feel at all sure that the world is round.”¹⁵⁶

However, these one-sided encounters were complicated by discourses absent in *Tent Life*. On his way back from Siberia, Kennan visited Minusinsk, where he praised the local museum that he visited with its founder, Nikolay Martianov. He lauded Martianov’s dedication to his museum and explored its rich ethnographic collections. In the book he emphasized his amazement at items possessed by the Soyots, a small ethnic group living to the west of Lake Baikal. He disagreed with Martianov who thought of them as “savages,” instead presenting them as “a long lost tribe of Asiatic cousins,” whose items placed these natives “high enough in the scale of civilization to teach social accomplishments even to the Siberians.”¹⁵⁷ It was the first time he put natives not only in an equal but superior position over the Russian settlers in Siberia, in contrast to praising Russia’s own “civilizing” influence in *Tent Life*. This apparently had to do not only with a critical attitude towards Russia itself but with his own shifted, less approving perception of settler-native encounters in America.

His visit to the Kachin (a subgroup of Khakas) living next to Minusinsk reinforces this notion. As a result of the encounter, Kennan expressed his disappointment because of their “semi-

¹⁵⁵ Kennan, “The Steeps of the Irtysh,” 364–66.

¹⁵⁶ Kennan, “The Grand Lama of the Trans-Baikal,” 658.

¹⁵⁷ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2:394.

civilized” settled status and their appropriation of Russian household items. He compared them to “American Indians that had abandoned their hereditary pursuits and dress, accepted the yoke of civilization, and settled down as petty farmers in the neighborhood of a frontier village or agency.”¹⁵⁸ A clear change from a recommendation to completely transform native lifestyle through “enlightenment” in *Tent Life*, this comment reflected Kennan’s (and by extension American) growing humanitarian sentiments towards their own Natives in the 1880s. These sentiments were nurtured by the perceived corruption in the Indian Office, failures of the reservation and land policies prior to the Dawes Act, and a widespread image of the impoverished and unfairly treated Native soon after their subjugation was largely complete. Sympathetic activists (Helen Hunt Jackson with her *Century of Dishonor*), organizations that connected the fate of Native Americans with the abolitionist cause (the Women’s National Indian Association and the Indian Rights Association), and Native Americans themselves (Standing Bear tour) molded the public opinion. Though by no means unanimous, a rising reformist wave reinforced the federal commitment to pursuing a full-fledged assimilation policy.¹⁵⁹

Despite these changed perceptions of natives in connection to the failures of Native American policies at home, when comparing them and Russian exiles, his sympathies lay clearly with the latter. In fact, he referred to his experience in the 1860s to condemn sending educated and refined exiles into “intolerable” banishment in Northeastern Siberia, among natives and their “wretched habitations.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, for all his reassessments, natives still were perceived as a different category from Russians themselves.

Russia, America, the West, and the East

As demonstrated so far, Kennan introduced new discourses related to the resources and potential of Siberia, praised American initiative compared to Russian attempts in material development, and was more critical of Russian villages and cities compared to *Tent Life*. The following remarks reveal another new aspect. In Ulbinsk, located next to Ust-Kamenogorsk, he met with local political exiles. Before bidding farewell, Kennan and Frost were accompanied by Populist (*narodnik*) Alexander Blek and young Apollo Karelin (then formally a student and later a writer and lawyer involved with anarchist theories). They allegedly asked the two Americans “not to forget them

¹⁵⁸ Kennan, “My Last Days in Siberia,” 809.

¹⁵⁹ Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 2–15; Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 132–37, 152–60.

¹⁶⁰ Kennan, “Life on the Great Siberian Road,” 173–74.

when we [the Americans] should return to ‘a freer and happier country.’” Kennan responded to this remark by affirming “that ‘in a freer and happier country’ we have not forgotten them, but think of them often, with the sincerest esteem and the most affectionate sympathy.”¹⁶¹ In one of the preliminary articles he described another episode when the exiles in the House of Preliminary Detention in St. Petersburg allegedly waved American flags made from available tools and clothes on the Fourth of July in 1876 “as an expression of their devotion to liberty and their sympathy with the rejoicings of a freer and happier people.”¹⁶² And in the book he expanded on a prominent exiled writer and Populist Felix Volkhovsky, who managed to escape to the U.S. in 1889. Kennan wrote how on a steamer which went away from Siberia Volkhovsky “turned his face, with reviving hope, towards the land where a personal opinion concerning human affairs is not regarded as ‘prejudicial to public tranquillity.’”¹⁶³ These remarks provide a new dimension in the image of Russia compared to occasional lauding claims about the U.S. in *Tent Life* – a deliberate construction of Russians who desire to follow the way of American development.

While in the Transbaikalian region, Kennan also made a detour to Kyakhta and Maimacheng (present-day Altanbulag in Mongolia) on the then Russo-Chinese border. In the latter city Kennan, Frost, and Russian official Sulkofsky paid a visit to the Chinese governor and had dinner in the house of a local merchant, with over a dozen dishes, all consumed with vinegar and rice brandy. Here Kennan described the windowless houses, ox carts, occasional Asian traders, and different Chinese “types,” who often ran away from the camera lens of the authors as if scared. He provided the following comparison:

It would be hard to imagine a more sudden and startling change than that brought about by a walk of two hundred yards from Kiakhta to Maimachin. One moment you are in a Russian provincial village with its characteristic shops, log houses, golden-domed churches, *droshkies*, soldiers, and familiar peasant faces; the next moment you pass behind the high screen that conceals the entrance to the Mongolian town and find yourself apparently in the middle of the Chinese Empire. You can hardly believe that you have not been suddenly transported on the magical carpet of the “Arabian Nights” over a distance of a thousand miles.¹⁶⁴

Thus, Kennan created a contrast between Russia and China, where the former still seemed more familiar. Yet, in Kyakhta Kennan stumbled upon people from America and Western Europe and was surprised to find himself “linked by so many persons and associations to the civilized world

¹⁶¹ George Kennan, “Exile by Administrative Process,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 5 (September 1888): 725.

¹⁶² George Kennan, “Russian State Prisoners,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, March 1888, 765–66.

¹⁶³ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 1:341.

¹⁶⁴ George Kennan, “A Ride Through the Trans-Baikal,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 38, no. 1 (May 1889): 73.

and to our homes” in this remote area. In this city he also noticed a used American watch on the local market that boosted his patriotism and satisfaction to see American products in such distant locations. From these remarks it is evident that now for Kennan real “civilization” consisted of the U.S., with its democracy and economic power abroad, and Western Europe. Russia, now supposedly looking at America as a potential example, was somewhere behind them. But even below Russia was the East that corresponded to the stereotypical image of the Orient.

Officials, Prisons, and Non-Political Exile

In the preface to the volumes, which to a degree corresponds to his “Reply to Criticisms” written after the publication of all articles in the *Century*, Kennan contended:

In the present work I have tried to deal fairly both with the Government and with the exiles. If the Government's contention is not always set forth as fully as may seem to be desirable, it is simply because most of the Government officials to whom I applied for information, both in Siberia and St. Petersburg, either manifested such a disinclination to talk that I could not pursue the subject, or else made such transparent and preposterous attempts to deceive me that their statements were merely grotesque.¹⁶⁵

Yet his subsequent account contradicts this opening statement. Many officials, especially in Siberia, did interact with him and provided him with much official material that he received and cited in his book. He was granted admission to the heads of different prisons, all the way to the director of the Main Prison Administration (formed in 1879), Mikhail Galkin-Vraskoy, in St. Petersburg. In writing about his strategy with officials Kennan's claims are also contradictory. He explained that his reputation as a pro-Russian journalist, his letters of introduction, his activities in cities which were not related to exiles (like visiting local museums), and boldly approaching officials in every major locality and overwhelming them with “information concerning our plans, purposes, and previous history” even before they were notified of the Americans' arrival all served to win officials' trust and avoid suspicion. Acting was also a major part of the appeal, especially when balancing between meeting political prisoners and officials in the same settlement. Yet he simultaneously pointed out, correctly, that many of them, especially in Siberia, were critical of the exile system and were happy to explain its wrongs to a foreigner. In the appendix of his book Kennan included a critical report on the exile system by the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia Dmitry Anuchin (in 1879–1883) to the Czar. He also recorded encounters during his trip when he,

¹⁶⁵ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 1:viii.

Siberian officials, and politicals met and sat together to discuss exile and other topics.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Kennan's claim that he had to playact in front of officials might be inflated. The statement about the unexpected arrival of the travelers similarly seems exaggerated, and as Travis demonstrated, in his journal Kennan pointed out that officials had often been aware of Kennan before they met with him.¹⁶⁷ Besides, Siberian newspapers reported on his travels, and the passport system that he adhered to meant that his whereabouts were reported to the local police and could be tracked.

Kennan tried to create a distinction between "honest and intelligent" Siberian officials, applied only to those who criticized the exile system in his narration, and those whose opinions contradicted those of the author. As an example, Kennan had a conversation with Captain Nikolin, the head of the Kara political prisons. Though, according to Kennan, he did criticize the exile system, he stated that the politicals in Kara had better living conditions than one might think and that the exiles themselves were often cunning and prone to smuggling. Yet Kennan dismissed his arguments by outlining his own experience with political exiles and stated that "much that he said was true; but the truth was so interwoven with misrepresentation that if I had been the ignorant and credulous tourist he supposed me to be I should have been completely deceived."¹⁶⁸ In other words, he presented officials who disputed his views as untrustworthy. He reinforced the decade-old image of deceitful Russian officialdom in foreign travelogues in the latter part of his account by including remarks related to probable surveillance of the two travelers on their way back home.

A major part of his account is related to the description of prisons and prison life. He described the *étape* system of transporting exiles, and the following penitentiaries – forwarding prisons in Tumen and Tomsk, three Irkutsk prisons (including Alexandrov Prison), Verkhneudinsk Prison, Krasnoyarsk forwarding and city prison, as well as Kara and Nerchinsk district prisons. He did mention visiting the Semipalatinsk prison but did not describe it. With few exceptions, his impressions, along with an impressive amount of material he collected, led to outlining the major drawbacks of all prisons – overcrowding, the lack of ventilation and sanitation, horrific living conditions even of the families of exiles who went with them voluntarily, scarce material support, and badly organized transportation. These conditions were worsened by the lack of improvements and slow reactions or indifference on behalf of the government, as well as the brutality of petty prison wardens or guards. In the end, the prison system resulted in misery as well as high mortality

¹⁶⁶ George Kennan, "Political Exiles and Common Convicts at Tomsk," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 37, no. 1 (November 1888): 31.

¹⁶⁷ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 165–66.

¹⁶⁸ George Kennan, "The 'Free Command' at the Mines of Kara," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 38, no. 3 (July 1889): 386–88.

and disease rates.¹⁶⁹ Kennan provided many touching scenes and the ways of prisoners' adaptation and resistance. His overall conclusion was, "the result of my investigation was a deliberate conviction that the suffering involved in the present method of transporting criminals to Siberia is not paralleled by anything of the kind that now exists in the civilized world outside of the Russian Empire," and he called for its abolition in favor of imprisonment in European Russia.¹⁷⁰

On the whole, he recorded the issues that historians generally agree on and of which the Russian reading public and officials were already aware.¹⁷¹ But he did not include even a brief comparison of the exile system with prisons at home, especially in the West and the South, or in other European countries, despite similar problems there. He also did not expand on the history of prison building in Russia, at least to show the tendencies in their quantity and quality.¹⁷²

It is also necessary to underline that his narration focused primarily on political exiles, with Kennan himself admitting that they represented a tiny minority of all exiles of Siberia.¹⁷³ Other groups of exiles (such as forced labor colonists or permanent settlers) were described primarily in terms of their transportation to Siberia, their living conditions in prisons and adaptation (including running away and becoming vagrants), as well as in the chapter regarding the negative influence of the exile system on the Siberian population. He argued that the locals were primarily complaining against the influx of unruly criminal exiles as opposed to political exiles with cultivated character or those convicted to hard labor in distant mines. Citing Siberian regionalist Yadrintsev, in the book, Kennan postulated:

It is manifest, I think, that when a flood of ten thousand vagrants, thieves, counterfeits, burglars, highway robbers, and murderers is poured into a colony, the class most injurious to the welfare of that colony is the liberated class. ... The honest and prosperous inhabitants of the country protest, of course, against the injustice of a system that liberates every year, at their very doors, an army of from seven to ten thousand worthless characters and felons.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ In the book Kennan added extra tables related to disease and mortality rate in Siberian prisons to strengthen his arguments about the decisively worse condition of the penitentiary system in Russia compared to the U.S.

¹⁷⁰ Kennan, "Life on the Great Siberian Road," 182.

¹⁷¹ For a recent example of a critical narration, see: Daniel Beer, *The House of the Dead: Siberian Exile Under the Tsars* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017).

¹⁷² The only study that stands apart from the critical narratives and emphasizes that, despite all its real problems, the tendency of Russian prison development was that of improvement, was made by Adams. See: Bruce Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863–1917* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

¹⁷³ Kennan, "Plains and Prisons of Western Siberia," 180; Kennan wrote that politicals made less than 1 percent of the whole number of exiles, and this seems to be fairly correct. As demonstrated by Gentes, with the exception of the aftermath of the Polish rebellion in 1863–1864, the politicals until the 1905 Revolution never made more than 2 percent of all exiles. Meanwhile, the total number of exiles in Siberia in 1885 was at about 264,000. See: Gentes, "Roads to Oblivion," 532; Alexandr Salomon, *Ssylka v Sibir': ocherk yeye istorii i sovremennogo polozheniya* [Siberian exile: The overview of its history and contemporary condition] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Sankt-Peterburgskoy tyur'my, 1900), 136.

¹⁷⁴ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2:459.

While this claim was correct and was supported in many Siberian newspapers and among local officials, his presentation of other groups of exiles was less personal than that of the politicals.

Travis has shown examples of Kennan's misrepresentation of data regarding prisons and non-political exiles and dramatization that did not correspond to the remarks in his private journal.¹⁷⁵ Yet at least one unmentioned case demonstrates a more serious distortion. Writing about the procedure of administrative exile, Kennan correctly noted that it was divided into exile performed on the government's order and exile by the decisions of the village or city communities either for detrimental and dangerous behavior or the community's refusal to readmit a person who had come back after serving his sentence in prison. He showed statistics of the total number of people exiled in 1885 and again correctly claimed that administrative exile made up half of all cases. He concluded (and this statement remained in the book) that this half was exiled "by a mere order from the Minister of the Interior."¹⁷⁶ Yet his own statistics demonstrate that the absolute majority of administrative exiles were banished to Siberia based on the resolutions of peasant and city communities rather than the government. In fact, at the turn of the century administrative exile indeed made up half of all exile cases to Siberia, but within it the exile on the government's order made up about 5–10 percent, the rest being by decisions of peasant and city meetings.¹⁷⁷ Kennan exaggerated the role of the government in administrative exile to Siberia and did not elaborate on exile by the decisions of village communities and cities. With that, he ignored a considerable part of what made the exile system. But the major impact of his study was its politicization as Kennan outlined his thoughts on tsarist rule and the revolutionary movement.

The Russian Autocracy and the "Anti-Government Party"

The most engaging part of Kennan's account is his meetings with political exiles – with interactions in Semipalatinsk, Ulbinsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Tomsk, Selenginsk, Chita, Minusinsk, and a brief encounter with political prisoners in Kara prisons. In one of the official documents, he uncovered

¹⁷⁵ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 161–69.

¹⁷⁶ Kennan, "Plains and Prisons of Western Siberia," 179; Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 1:79–80.

¹⁷⁷ Salomon, *Ssylka v Sibir'*, 44; Gentes, "Roads to Oblivion," 319, 388. As demonstrated by Gentes, the 1880s saw the increased use of administrative exile by peasant and town communities because of the increasing crime rates rather than political oppression.

that their number in Eastern Siberia in 1882 was four hundred and thirty.¹⁷⁸ He claimed that he met at least three hundred politicals, which seems to be an exaggeration.¹⁷⁹

In the appendix to the book account Kennan included a translated program of the Executive Committee of the People's Will (*Narodnaya volya*) and the letter of the Executive Committee to Alexander III after the murder of Alexander II in 1881, where they attempted to justify the assassination and called for immediate amnesty and the formation of a representative institution. This calls for a basic understanding of the Russian Populist movement (*narodnichestvo*), especially since the majority of political exiles Kennan encountered were tied to it.

It was influenced by several intellectual developments, including European ideas about utopian socialism, writings of Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Chernyshevsky, and the emerging idea of Nihilism described in the previous chapter, especially the obligation of sympathetic nobles and educated youth to help and serve “the people.” Populists considered socialism, best expressed in the idealized Russian peasant community, to be the ultimate form of justice and democracy. They hoped to leapfrog capitalist development straight to socialism based on peasant communal traditions, considering capitalism the source of general demoralization and a threat to peasant well-being. Their ideal was a social revolution, completed by the peasants themselves as the majority of the population and the leading social force, with the guidance and support of the Populists, to be followed by an equal distribution of the land among the peasant collectives. From the beginning Populists were divided over the way to encourage a popular/peasant uprising. Their ideas remained vague, but the movement grew to be more centralized from uncoordinated and scattered groups, ultimately in the form of a political group “Land and Freedom” (*Zemlya i volya*), formed in 1876. By 1879 some Populists gradually grew convinced that any idea of a social revolution had to be preceded by a political one, that is, the overthrow of the monarchy as the major obstacle, with the use of violence if necessary. Amid general political instability in the late 1870s, the “Land and Freedom” group broke up into two over tactics – the People's Will and the Black Redemption

¹⁷⁸ The data on the number of political exiles is very fragmentary and inconsistent, yet likely at around 2,500–3,000 became political exiles in 1881–1894. They were sent not only to Siberia, but also to distant provinces in European Russia, the fact that Kennan did not mention. The number of political exiles residing in Siberia in the 1880s was between 400 and 500, see: Larisa Roshchevskaya, “Zapadnosibirskaya politicheskaya ssylka v period reaktsii 80-kh godov XIX veka [Western Siberian political exile during the 1880s reaction],” in *Ssylka i obshchestvenno-politicheskaya zhizn' v Sibiri (XVIII – nachalo XX v.)* [Exile and socio-political life in Siberia (eighteenth – early twentieth centuries)], ed. Leonid Goryushkin (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1978), 148–49; Petr Zayonchkovskiy, *Rossiyskoye samoderzhaviye v kontse XIX stoletiya: (politicheskaya reaktsiya 80–kh – nachala 90–kh godov)* [Russian autocracy at the end of the nineteenth century: The political reaction of the 1880s – early 1890s] (Moscow: Mysl', 1970), 160–61; Gentes, “Roads to Oblivion,” 394, 508.

¹⁷⁹ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 146.

(*Chernyy peredel*), with the first organization intent on bringing down the autocracy by force and ultimately assassinating Alexander II.¹⁸⁰

Kennan provided a highly personalized narrative and aimed to strike a sympathetic response with his readers. He underlined the politicals' noble and cultivated character and their desire to make Russia a better country. In contrast, the government was regularly criticized for its treatment of political exiles (which in worst cases led to suicides or hunger strikes), denial of the rule of law and individual rights, police abuse, and the suppression of the freedom of speech, writing, and thought. He was correct in pointing out that many exiles were well-educated, since they included nobles, intellectuals, or former students, including women. Female political exiles took a prominent place in his narration. Kennan at one point suggested that these delicate, often young women, who reminded him of Sunday school teachers at home, in their opposition to the injustice of the government and personal resolution, "have shown a power of endurance and a stern inflexibility of character rarely found in men."¹⁸¹

Kennan's views of the opposition movement in Russia evolved, but, ultimately, he contributed to its serious misinterpretation. One of his early articles focused on the liberal movement until the late 1870s. He correctly noted that the opposition in Russia was diverse and suggested that they should stop associating it with Nihilism since it was a derogatory and simplifying term applied by the government to all of its critics, even to law-abiding liberals. He interpreted the "going to the people" campaign in 1874–1875 as a "remarkable, impulsive, generous but quixotic liberal crusade" to the villages primarily to help and educate the peasants.¹⁸² However, in reality it was a Populist, not a liberal, operation organized by a number of groups (most prominent being the Grand Propaganda Society), whose goal was to spread agitation materials among the peasants in the belief that it could incite a general revolt. The Populists indeed went to the villages and tried to live among the peasantry, but this campaign ultimately failed. They misunderstood the sentiments of the villagers and in some cases were detained by them and handed over to the police.¹⁸³ Kennan stated that the liberal movement "did not participate" in the violent struggle between tsarism and the Populists in 1879–1881 and offered cases when liberals tried to petition the government for change from above, including through the *zemstvos* (local organs of

¹⁸⁰ Nikolay Troitskiy, *Krestonostsy sotsializma* [The crusaders of socialism] (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo universiteta, 2002), 69.

¹⁸¹ Kennan, "The 'Free Command' at the Mines of Kara," 392.

¹⁸² George Kennan, "The Last Appeal of Russian Liberals," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 35, no. 1 (November 1887): 53–54.

¹⁸³ Troitskiy, *Krestonostsy sotsializma*, 149, 156.

self-government). But the examples he offered were those of left-leaning liberals, such as Ivan Petrunkevich in Chernigov *zemstvo*, who went as far as to suggest the replacement of the monarchy with a parliamentary republic. Kennan ignored the political divisions in the liberal camp and the fact that some liberal activists, including Petrunkevich, interacted with the Populists to find common ground, although mostly without success.¹⁸⁴

In the book he offered a separate chapter on the opposition in Russia that shows a change in his stance. While criticizing the government for branding all opposition in Russia as Nihilists earlier, he himself generalized it as “the anti-Government party,” the movement consisting of liberals, Populists, and terrorists. He did not reevaluate his thoughts on liberals, who, for him, “seek to prevent injustice or to obtain reforms by peaceful and legal methods.” He attempted to merge the Populists with them, claiming that “the objects which they seek to attain are the same that the liberals have in view, but they would attain them by quicker and more direct methods.”¹⁸⁵ Not only did this statement contradict the very emphasis on the social revolution in the program of the People’s Will that Kennan included in the appendix of his volumes, but he failed to acknowledge monumental changes in the Populist movement in the 1880s. After the assassination of Alexander II, the People’s Will expected a general revolt, but their hopes did not materialize, and in the next several years they were dispersed by the government, with the use of undercover police agents in the leadership of the party, such as Sergey Degayev. As a result, the Populist doctrine, and especially the tactics to achieve it, faced a serious crisis. Kennan, with his book published in 1891, did not write anything about the emergence of Legal Populism, a moderate wing of the movement. It did retain an ultimate belief in socialism but denounced political struggle and violence, sought the cooperation of the government in improving the welfare of the peasantry, and proclaimed that anyone truly interested in the fate of “the people” should come directly to them and focus on improving their lives step by step, with “small deeds.”¹⁸⁶ Other Populists eventually formed the core of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (discussed in chapter 4 below). In the appendix he republished excerpts from *La Russie Politique et Sociale* by Lev Tikhomirov, who, like Kennan, criticized the misuse of the word “Nihilist.” However, by the time of the book publication Tikhomirov switched from being a member of the People’s Will to a staunch monarchist and returned from Europe to Russia in 1889 after publishing his brochure *Why I am No Longer a*

¹⁸⁴ Troitskiy, 206–7.

¹⁸⁵ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2:434, 438.

¹⁸⁶ See: Gennadiy Mokshin, *Evolutsiya ideologii legal'nogo narodnichestva v posledney treti XIX – nachale XX vv.* [The evolution of the ideology of legal Populism in the last third of nineteenth – the beginning of twentieth centuries] (Voronezh: Nauchnaya kniga, 2010), chap. 4.

Revolutionary (1888). Kennan contributed to the misinterpretation further by not mentioning the advent of Social Democracy (as a fact, Georgiy Plekhanov, the leader of the Black Redemption group, gradually came to be one of the leading Marxist theorists).¹⁸⁷

Finally, it is significant that he tried to detach political terror (understood here as a tactic of resorting to systemic violence to achieve political goals) from Populism. Kennan argued that terrorists shared the same “principles and aims” as Populists and only differed from them in their methods. Although not approving of terror on the whole, he thought of their acts as a response to the abuses of the government:

Most of the Russian terrorists were nothing more, at first, than moderate liberals, or, at worst, peaceful socialistic propagandists; and they were gradually transformed into revolutionists, and then into terrorists, by injustice, cruelty, illegality, and contemptuous disregard, by the Government, of all their rights and feelings.¹⁸⁸

He also cited the results of research by an Italian professor who compared Russian and Italian revolutionaries and concluded that both were noble physically and psychologically. The professor’s results, in Kennan’s view, showed that Russian terrorists resembled rather “the early Christian martyrs than the French communists or the Chicago anarchists.” This view of radicalism, with the employment of religious narrative, formed a remarkable, even ironic, contrast to what Kennan thought of it when applied at home. He disapproved of the major railroad strike in the U.S. in 1877–1878, calling the strikers “more disgraceful” than the French Communists, did not support the Haymarket Square riot in Chicago in 1886, was concerned about growing unionism and socialism, and continuously lambasted unrest and violence as anarchism and a threat to private property, all the way to the Red Scare in 1919–1920.¹⁸⁹ More generally, he ignored the fact that early Russian Populism was influenced by Mikhail Bakunin’s collectivist anarchist theory, the ideology that promoted the complete elimination of any authority, alongside private property.

The way he presented Russian political terrorism, a very complex topic, also deserves serious adjustment, as he essentially supported the self-image of the Populists that they advocated during their trials. Kennan failed to talk about the early origins of the idea of terror, including the murder of the Czar, in the 1860s. He did not mention anything about the Ishutin Group and its most renowned sympathizer, Dmitriy Karakozov, who conducted the first assassination attempt on

¹⁸⁷ For the interconnections between Populists and Social Democrats in the 1880s, see: Norman Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement Under Alexander III* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁸⁸ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2:455.

¹⁸⁹ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 54–56, 69, 295–97, 364–65.

Alexander II in 1866.¹⁹⁰ The Populists, in fact, underwent a complicated evolution in their stance on political terror. Early Populists, even Bakunin, largely disapproved of it. Yet by the time the “Land and Freedom” group emerged revolutionaries accepted terror as a means of self-defense or revenge. Later, the members of the People’s Will acknowledged it as an instrument of destabilizing the government and inciting mass revolt. Kennan was correct in pointing out that the perpetrators of terrorist acts were often radicalized. But the cause of this radicalization was complicated, connected not only to government repression but also to the psychology of youth (the ideas of self-sacrifice, retaliation against perceived evil, and redemption connected with religious zeal) as well as to the failures of the Populists themselves to attain any significant success in inciting a popular revolt. Many of them grew increasingly disappointed with the potential of “the people” to rise against the monarchy and sought alternative means. To be fair, however, the autocracy indeed gave the public little opportunity to participate in political development. As a result, prior to the assassination of Alexander II some liberals and prominent writers of the time excused the first Populist terror acts, including the notorious case of Vera Zasulich in 1878; and Populist terror, although widely condemned after the murder of the Czar, influenced, and even inspired, later revolutionaries.¹⁹¹

Compared to the thoughts about revolutionaries described so far, his very first *Century* article, related to Kennan’s visit to Tolstoy, shows a significant divergence. Kennan visited him in his estate in Yasnaya Polyana in June 1886 and presented him the evidence about the horrors of the exile system, including testimonies from prisoners.¹⁹² Kennan’s overall impression was that while personally Tolstoy deserved respect, his philosophy of “non-resistance to evil by violence” was wholly unrealistic. No matter what Kennan said, Tolstoy refused to sympathize with political exiles on account of them resorting to violence, even though he did not deny the government’s wrongdoings. The encounter with Tolstoy made Kennan call Russians impractical and “childish,” and he developed this thought in his concluding remarks:

¹⁹⁰ Oleg Budnitskiy, *Terrorizm v rossiyskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii: ideologiya, etika, psikhologiya (vtoraya polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)* [Terrorism in Russian liberation movement: Ideology, ethics, psychology (second half of nineteenth – beginning of twentieth centuries)], 1st ed. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000), 33–35.

¹⁹¹ Budnitskiy, 44–48.

¹⁹² Tolstoy, in a way like Kennan, experienced a profound spiritual crisis at the turn of the 1870s and the 1880s. Spending the next decade in theological and philosophical searches, he outlined the basis of his new, syncretic Christian faith and morality in *Confession* (1884), *What I Believe* (1884), *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894), and his last major novel *Resurrection* (1899). With the desire to rid Christianity of unnecessary dogma, he advocated non-violence, minimalism, universal human love, altruism, while heavily criticizing the organization and practices of the Orthodox Church, especially its justification of violence against other nations alongside with the state. His views, pamphlets, along with the support of religious sects (most notably *Doukhobors*) ultimately led to his excommunication in 1901 but had an enormous influence in Russia and abroad.

When this national trait is united, as it is in the Russian character, with a boundless capacity for self-sacrifice, it brings about results which, to the American mind, are simply bewildering and astonishing. This characteristic which I have called “childishness” is no less apparent in the reasoning and the activity of the Nihilists than in the doctrines and the eccentric practices of Count Tolstoi. ... The Russian seems to throw himself with a sort of noble, generous, but childish enthusiasm into the most thorny path of self-denial and self-sacrifice, if he can only see, or think that he sees, the shining walls of his ideal golden city at the end of it.¹⁹³

Thus, whereas in later articles and throughout the entire book account he wrote nothing but sympathetic remarks about the exiles and the “anti-Government party,” in this early article he still referred to them as Nihilists and called them as impractical as Tolstoy.

This “impracticality” of the Russian character looks like one of the key pieces of the changed image of Russia. Whereas in *Tent Life* Kennan mostly juxtaposed exotic natives and “civilized” Russia, now he entertained a more negative and critical bias compared to his first account. He judged the empire, both the government and the people, as falling behind the rapid economic, educational, and cultural development in the U.S. as well as Western Europe. Besides, he now entertained an open “imperial view.” He outlined the rich natural resources of Siberia, praised American commercial presence in the region, and favored its potential increase.

His articles and lectures were well-received, although the two volumes sold rather badly at home in contrast to *Tent Life* and did not see any reprints or new editions in Kennan’s lifetime.¹⁹⁴ The reviews of the books, at least in the British and American press, were not without criticism. Many newspapers accepted Kennan’s study as totally trustworthy, with the *Philadelphia Times* eloquently concluding that “as a whole no more important work has appeared in many years, nor one so likely to have a lasting effect in promoting progress and good government.”¹⁹⁵ The *New York Times* straightforwardly proclaimed that “Russia is barbaric Europe.”¹⁹⁶ Several British and American newspapers analyzed Kennan’s account together with the travelogue by British traveler Harry De Windt, *Siberia as It Is* (1892), finding the former to be much more believable and the latter to be a sloppy attempt at the rebuttal of Kennan’s conclusions on exile navigated by Olga Novikova, a Russian monarchist journalist residing in London.¹⁹⁷ The two reviews that offered serious criticism were published anonymously in *The Nation* by Isabel Hapgood, a leading

¹⁹³ George Kennan, “A Visit to Count Tolstoi,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 34, no. 2 (June 1887): 264.

¹⁹⁴ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 174. The book was republished for the first time only in 1958 in a shortened form, with an introduction by George Frost Kennan, see: George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System: Abridged from the First Edition of 1891* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).

¹⁹⁵ “Siberia and the Exile System,” *Philadelphia Times*, November 27, 1891, 4.

¹⁹⁶ “Cruel Russia,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1891, 19.

¹⁹⁷ In the book Kennan added multiple comments on the superficial character of De Windt’s investigation, and in the appendix he attached the contents of public debates with him in the press.

American translator of Russian literature and a pronounced Russophile; and in the *Illustrated London News* that combined Kennan and De Windt together. Both reviews asserted that Kennan focused on a small number of politicals, did not talk about exiles sent by the orders of peasant communities and cities, and let his personal sympathies for politicals take over journalistic impartiality. The London periodical accepted his general prison observations at face value but implied that Kennan became biased in favor of revolutionaries. It called for moderation and concluded that De Windt's book, for all of its own bias, showed that prison conditions did improve since Kennan's visit.¹⁹⁸ Hapgood went much further, questioning Kennan's integrity by implying that he read critical books on exile prior to his trip and only waited for the right moment to alter his views. She deemed his travel hardships exaggerated, pointed to similar prison problems in the U.S., and accused Kennan of concealing the real crimes for which the politicals ended up in exile. She concluded that, while the problems of the prison system were undeniable, the Russian government was aware of them, and so Americans should not interfere with its plans to improve penitentiaries. However, her other arguments seem derogatory, as she asserted that the average Russian peasant lived hardly better than exiles, and that Russians were not suffering as much as imagined since they had a "mystical belief that suffering is a good thing in itself." In a separate column Kennan replied to Hapgood, rejecting all of her accusations.¹⁹⁹

Initially, a couple of Russian newspapers legally translated and published his first articles, but his later conclusions and political activism apparently disappointed the Russian government, and any further articles and the book were banned.²⁰⁰ Instead, his articles were translated in Europe and smuggled across the Russian border. The unrest during the 1905 Revolution in Russia prompted the state to relax censorship.²⁰¹ In turn, the years 1906–1907 saw a wave of uncontrolled publications, and Kennan's work was printed by multiple private publishers, but all in limited

¹⁹⁸ "Books on Siberia," *Illustrated London News*, April 9, 1892, 462.

¹⁹⁹ Isabel Hapgood, "Kennan's Siberia," review of *Siberia and the Exile System*, by George Kennan, *Nation* 54, no. 1385 (January 14, 1892): 35–36; (January 21, 1892): 55–57; George Kennan, "Mr. Kennan and Siberia," *Nation* 54, no. 1389 (February 11, 1892): 108.

²⁰⁰ Efim Melamed, *Dzhordzh Kennan protiv tsarizma* [George Kennan against tsarism] (Moscow: Kniga, 1981), 61–64.

²⁰¹ The temporary Statute on the Press terminated preliminary censorship of articles and books in all cities and made authors and publishers subject only to court procedures rather than administrative measures in case of breaching publishing laws (censorship before 1905 is discussed in chapter 7). However, some materials, including those calling for or implying the overthrow of the monarchy, continued to be seen as offence. See: Charles Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804–1906* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 218–26; Natal'ya Patrusheva, *Tsenzurnoye vedomstvo v gosudarstvennoy sisteme Rossiyskoy imperii vo vtoroy polovine XIX – nachale XX veka* [The censorship department in the state system of the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries] (St. Petersburg: Severnaya Zvezda, 2013), 330–35.

form.²⁰² One of them had an introduction by the already mentioned Felix Volkhovsky, and while he praised Kennan's narrative, he criticized the author's political conclusions. He stated that while Kennan was prone to assess the struggle only on political and moral grounds, the People's Will was not to be equated with liberals since the movement strove for not only political but also major economic and social changes.²⁰³ Only Sergey Saltykov, a publicist and member of the Mensheviks then, attempted to make a full translation, but only the first volume was published.²⁰⁴ Thus, Russians, whether revolutionaries who supported the revelation of their grievances and the brutality of the government to the domestic and Western audience, or common readers, retained an interest in his writings. Meanwhile, although *Siberia* was banned, *Tent Life* continued to be sold in Russia (with the new edition in 1896) and enjoyed demand in the U.S. Eventually, Kennan published a new edition that revealed yet another turn, or rather a comeback, in the image of Russia.

***Tent Life in Siberia* (1910) – Major Changes**

In the preface to the new edition, Kennan stated that he decided to publish a new edition since the original had always been in demand. Another piece of justification offered was that he finished the original manuscript in 1870 when he arrived in Russia to travel in the Caucasus, and the lack of time resulted in omitting the part about the return journey that he now included.

The new account is essentially the reprinting of the original, with the first thirty-five chapters having mostly cosmetic changes (changed transliteration of the geographical names, Russian and native settlements, and the names of Russian companions; the addition of syllables to all Russian words; and minor orthographic corrections). He also included several footnotes to explain the meaning of some specific words or Russian terms (tundra, *ispravnik*, etc.) and provided

²⁰² I identified at least eight printings of *Siberia* and eight separate publications of the preliminary *Century* articles. Most Russian printings were based on the translations of the articles typed in Europe around 1889–1890, before the entire series of travel articles or the two books were published. Consequently, they were from three hundred to four hundred and fifty pages long (compared to a thousand pages in the two volumes) and had no appendix materials, no illustrations, and only limited statistics. They did not include chapters 11–14 from volume two, including Kennan's thoughts on the political exiles in general.

²⁰³ George Kennan, *Sibir' i Ssylka: V dvukh chastyakh* [Siberia and the exile system: In two parts], trans. Ivan Kashintsev (St. Petersburg: V. Raspopov, 1906), xx–xxi.

²⁰⁴ Saltykov and Vladimir Burtsev, a revolutionary activist and publisher, contacted Kennan. The latter sent them his short biography and a few photos, which were not included in the original (mostly the portraits of the exiles whom Kennan met and the pictures of the exile colony in Srednekolymsk). The publication was based on the book and translated fully in accordance with the original. The Russian edition also included a couple of new documents in the appendix. Due to Burtsev's departure from Russia in 1907 and the resumption of the state's supervision over published materials, the publication of the second volume was abandoned. See: George Kennan, *Sibir' i Ssylka* [Siberia and the exile system], trans. Zinaida Zhuravskaya, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: S. N. Saltykov, 1906).

additional comments.²⁰⁵ The real value of the new edition lies in the six chapters added (over sixty pages in total) and the inclusion of visual materials.

The new chapters recount the receipt of news about the cancellation of the expedition and the subsequent journey across Russia. Kennan and another American, Price (who was not mentioned in the original until the very end), left Okhotsk in late October 1867 along with two Russians, Schwartz and Malchanski.²⁰⁶ The four traveled from Okhotsk to Yakutsk, and then to Irkutsk. After a week's stay in Irkutsk, they traveled by the Siberian tract to Nizhniy Novgorod, where they took a train to Moscow and St. Petersburg and arrived in January 1868.

Travis pointed out that in Kennan's travel journal during the expedition there were no remarks about the trip from the Far East to St. Petersburg, and that the content in the new edition resembles his lectures given later, in the early 1870s.²⁰⁷ Kennan also incorporated a couple of his articles from the *St. Nicholas* written in 1896–1897.²⁰⁸ However, it is still safe to say that the additions reflected his now fluent knowledge of Russian, his general experience and knowledge about Russia he had by 1910, and, finally, his perception of the Progressive Era at home. As outlined by Travis, Kennan came to be increasingly conservative and skeptical in his response to the new developments in American life, especially corruption (that he denounced in several muckraking articles) and immigration. In contrast to his evaluations of Russian “childishness” twenty years ago, in his sixties he implied that even all the Progressive reforms did not fundamentally alter the naiveté and simplicity of Americans themselves.²⁰⁹

Travel Conditions, Nature, and Natives

The first two subjects had few changes in the new chapters compared to the original. Before reaching Irkutsk, Kennan again complained about the lack of roads in Northeastern Siberia and the cold winter that brought hardships or real dangers, including an episode of capsizing a sleigh while moving on the ice of the Lena River. In Yakutsk he described the custom of getting passengers drunk before departure so that they would sleep at least during the first hours of an exhausting trip.

²⁰⁵ George Kennan, *Tent Life in Siberia, a New Account of an Old Undertaking: Adventures Among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 212. As an example, while in the original he noted that the nomad Koryaks and the Chukchi had a superstition against selling their deer to strangers, in the new edition he commented that “this feeling or superstition eventually disappeared or was overcome” and that these natives eventually sold many deer to Americans for transportation to Alaska.

²⁰⁶ Kennan did not mention the latter two in the original; he instead wrote that there were four Americans – him, Mahood, Leet, and Price – who remained in Okhotsk and intended to go across Russia.

²⁰⁷ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 35, 97–98.

²⁰⁸ Travis, 312.

²⁰⁹ Travis, 294–95, 298–301.

With both journeys in Siberia in mind, Kennan claimed that “the severest hardship of post travel in eastern Siberia in winter is not the cold, but the breaking up of all one’s habits of sleep.”²¹⁰ The winter landscape along the way was associated primarily with desolation. Nevertheless, Kennan also dedicated several pages to the phenomenon that he called “the Aurora of the Sea,” which he saw on the steamer the *Onward* that carried him to Okhotsk. He conveyed his fascination:

Not a single square foot of dark water could be seen, in any direction, from the maintop, and all the rigging of the ship, to the royal yards, was lighted up with a faint, unearthly, blue glare. The ocean looked like a vast plain of snow, illuminated by blue fire and overhung by heavens of almost inky blackness. The Milky Way disappeared completely in the blaze of light from the sea, and stars of the first magnitude twinkled dimly, as if half hidden by fog.²¹¹

While such awe-inspired description is similar to the poetic portrayal of the Arctic Aurora in the original, Kennan also dedicated a couple of pages to describing it as a scientific phenomenon. This means that he used his life experience to approach the natural wonders more seriously.

Several years prior to the new edition of *Tent Life* Kennan invested himself, as the writer for *The Outlook* at that time, in exposing illegal Native American land cessions. He wrote several muckraking articles that defended native ownership rights, including during the *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* case, likely with the influence of his experiences with Russian natives and sympathies to exiles who were abused by the government.²¹² Before departure Kennan and his companions had to sell all the equipment of the expedition in Gizhiga, ranging from axes and telegraph line to soap and baking powder. He noted that due to the scarcity of population it was impossible to get the full price of the articles, so to attract indigenous buyers they often had to sell them for minuscule money or natural goods, offering a premium of frozen cucumbers and “anti-scorbutics” for every purchased shovel. Simultaneously they tried to teach them how to make biscuits and use brackets. Kennan summed up the process as follows:

We directed all our energies to the creation of artificial wants in that previously happy and contented community, and flooded the whole adjacent country with articles that were of no more use to the poor natives than ice-boats and mouse-traps would be to the Tuaregs of the Saharan desert. In short, we dispensed the blessings of civilisation with a free hand.²¹³

²¹⁰ Kennan, *New Account of an Old Undertaking*, 458.

²¹¹ Kennan, 422.

²¹² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 154–55; David Wrobel, “Considering Frontiers and Empires: George Kennan’s Siberia and the U.S. West,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2015): 305–7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.46.3.0285>.

²¹³ Kennan, *New Account of an Old Undertaking*, 428–29.

The scenes of selling to local natives way more than they actually needed seemed to be a humorous but also self-ironic perception of Kennan and his group as aliens amid native life. Later remarks seemed to be more similar to the original book, but with a twist. On his way to Yakutsk, Kennan saw Yakut and Tungus (now known as Even and Evenki) settlements. Previously he wrote only passing remarks about these two peoples. He stayed in one of the Tungus camps and described them as deer-breeding nomads who were in charge of maintaining scarce local roads and gave deer and sledges to occasional travelers. Whereas in the original he praised wandering Koryaks and the Chukchi for their independent nomadic lifestyle, in the case of the nomad Tungus he did not make any positive remarks. For him, their tents looked dreary, the men looked wild, and he wrote that upon interacting with them “you can hardly realise that you are in the same active, bustling, money-getting world in which you remember once to have lived.”²¹⁴ His comments on the Yakuts showed a contrast to the Tungus. In the original he briefly wrote about the Yakuts as increasingly settled and Christianized, but without any assessment. Now he praised their status as settled and their “civilized” and comfortable houses, where one could have real food and rest, although he did not acknowledge that, like many other natives, Yakuts too were both nomads and settled.²¹⁵

He did not point out the impact of the vices of “civilization” on natives like in the original and was not as critical about the Russification of the natives as in the 1880s. In fact, Siberia and the Far East in the 1900s offered plenty of material for muckraking on the subject of government assault on native lands and rights (as will be shown in chapters 5 and 7 below). And yet, Kennan, with his defense of native rights at home, did not elaborate on these subjects. Although the structure of the new edition is understandable, whether intended or not, it retained two notions. First, the image of the native as an alien that was defined solely through its perception by Russian and American “civilization” and lived a static, unchanging life. Second, the image of Russia itself as a capable force in dealing with its natives.

Russian Settlements and “Civilization”

Kennan did not write anything about the abuses of the Russian government or the exile system in the revised edition, even though he could easily have added these subjects. He did not point to the enormous resources of Siberia and did not comment on the economic influence of the U.S. in

²¹⁴ Kennan, 448. He copied parts related to their description from his 1882 lecture to the American Geographic Society: Kennan, “Siberia. The Exiles’ Abode,” 29.

²¹⁵ Kennan, *New Account of an Old Undertaking*, 450–51.

Russia. The comparisons of Russia with the West or the East are also absent. Instead, upon arriving in Yakutsk, he stayed in the house of a local merchant and continued the narration as follows:

... We washed from our bodies the smoke and grime of Tunguse tents and yurts; put on clean, fresh clothes; ate a well cooked and daintily served supper; drank five tumblers of fragrant overland tea; smoked two Manila cheroots; and finally went to bed, excited but happy, in beds that were provided with hair mattresses, fleecy Russian blankets, and linen sheets. The sensation of lying without furs and between sheets in a civilised bed was so novel and extraordinary that I lay awake for an hour, trying experiments with that wonderful mattress and luxuriously exploring, with bare feet, the smooth cool expanses of linen sheeting.²¹⁶

Later, upon arrival in Irkutsk, Kennan presented himself and his companions as “Gothic barbarians gazing at Rome” when they saw the city and its establishments. In Irkutsk the travelers “plunged suddenly from a semi-barbaric environment into an environment of high civilisation and culture,” and it took time and effort to get used to the city and its “high society” after spending more than two years in the Far East.²¹⁷ While Kennan wrote little about his return trip from Irkutsk to European Russia, these comments constitute the essence of the new edition of *Tent Life*. The new version reinforced preference for “civilization,” of which Russia again became the symbol, whether because of a higher level of development or simply comfort compared to native dwellings and lifestyle. Similarly to the original, the book got only positive reviews, although this time regular periodicals were joined by a couple of specialized ones. The commonplace statement was that the 1870 version always remained popular, and the new edition was especially interesting, considering that by 1910 Alaska had become populated and that telegraph lines became a ubiquitous feature all over the world. The *Literary Digest* upheld that “the inimitable power of Mr. Kennan as a writer of descriptive prose renders this volume something like a classic in its presentation of a remote and almost inaccessible region,” while the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* advised all young Americans to read Kennan rather than fake travel stories.²¹⁸ However, some reviews pronounced that his book remained relevant because native life in Siberia had barely changed since the 1860s. One of them belonged to none other than a serious scholarly journal, *Science*.²¹⁹ Thus, Kennan, in one way or another, did contribute to the conservation of the American perception of Northeastern Siberia that he himself had helped to create.

²¹⁶ Kennan, 451–52.

²¹⁷ Kennan, 465.

²¹⁸ “A Guide to the New Books,” *Literary Digest* 41, no. 6 (August 6, 1910): 214; “Kennan’s ‘Tent Life in Siberia’ a Book Famous for Forty Years,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 2, 1910, 5.

²¹⁹ William Dall, review of *Tent Life in Siberia. Adventures Among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia*, by George Kennan, *Science* 32, no. 810 (July 8, 1910): 60–61.

Visual Materials

The three discussed narrations not only had varying conclusions about Russia but also reflected the development of printing technologies from the 1870s to the First World War, as pointed out in the introduction. In the first edition of *Tent Life* Kennan did not include any visuals at all except the full-page map of the journey and the proposed route of the telegraph. This choice probably reflected the costs of including visuals at that time and the fact that Kennan finished writing his account in Russia while preparing for the trip across the Caucasus.

During the second journey Kennan and Frost collected an impressive number of sketches and photos. Later Kennan organized a detailed photo album with pictures taken during his journey and the portraits of exiles he met. It served both as a personal memory and a key item of his later activism.²²⁰ However, in the articles and books the photos were apparently photolithographs or reproduced sketches. They are of different size, from small to full-page, both within the text and on separate pages, and are scattered across the text and mostly complement the current paragraph the reader is engaged in, helping him to visualize the text. The first eight articles (corresponding to the first volume) depict many landscapes (especially in the Altai region), general views of cities and villages, as well as pictures of peasant life and natives, primarily the Kirghiz. The visuals regarding miserable living conditions in prisons serve to complement the written descriptions, aiming to provoke a sympathetic response from the readers (figure 1). Another case in point is Kennan's description of the symbolic attachment of exiles to the boundary post that divides the European and Asian parts of Russia. For Kennan, "no other boundary post in the world has witnessed so much human suffering, or been passed by such a multitude of heart-broken people" (figure 2).

²²⁰ Maria Garth, "George Kennan's Photography Collection of Political Exiles in Labor Camps of Late Imperial Siberia," *Journal of Russian American Studies* 6, no. 2 (2022): 120–45, <https://doi.org/10.17161/jras.v6i2.18630>.



Figure 1. “A Family ‘Kamera’ in the Toms Forwarding Prison,” in George Kennan, “The Toms Forwarding Prison,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 6 (October 1888): 867.

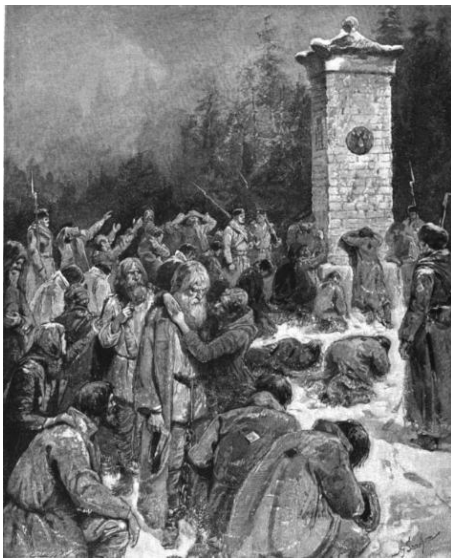


Figure 2. “The Boundary Post,” in George Kennan, “Across the Russian Frontier,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 36, no. 1 (May 1888): 2.

The articles that made up the second volume, apart from winter landscapes and cities, include pictures of snowy roads and difficult movement in carriages through them, and the hard life of local villages during winter, helping the reader imagine Kennan’s hardships and the general desolation of Siberia. The emphasis again lies on the even harsher life of exiles living in the Kara prisons and the Nerchinsk mines (figure 3). Yet Kennan also presented the portraits of Chinese “types” in Maimacheng. Some pictures show native life – their appearance (including face portraits), activities (like horse riding), and ceremonies, such as those of Buryats (figure 4). It is also visible that not a single picture shows Kennan himself, and all visuals present the subjects at a distance, allowing American readers to additionally visualize Russia and natives as the different “Other.” In the book he added many portraits of exiles that he talked about.



Figure 3. “Convicts at Work in One of the Kara Gold Placers,” in George Kennan, “The Convict Mines of Kara,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 38, no. 2 (June 1889): 173.

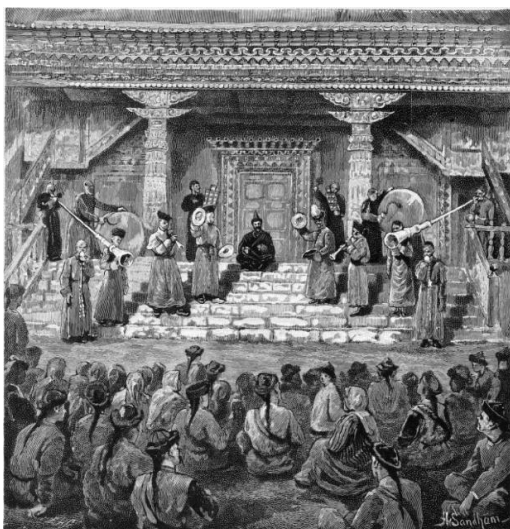


Figure 4. “Lamas and Their Musical Instruments,” in George Kennan, “The Grand Lama of the Trans-Baikal,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 37, no. 5 (March 1889): 652.

In the revised edition of *Tent Life* Kennan included a new map and a diverse set of drawings, lithographs, reproduced sketches made by Frost, and real photos taken by the Jesup North Pacific Expedition that Kennan got from the American Museum of Natural History. There are a total of around sixty visuals. Almost every chapter ends with a small drawing of native or the expedition’s own items, and in the last chapters some items were repeated for the second time, giving the sense

of somewhat poor editing (figure 5). The photos and lithographs are full-page and scattered across the text. While at times they logically follow the narration, in many cases they do not correspond to the narrative. The frontispiece shows a full-size portrait of Kennan standing in a heavy winter jacket, apparently to present himself as an experienced polar explorer. Frost's sketches depict the movement of deer and dog sledges led by natives or explorers as well as native items (like rugs). The majority of the presented visuals, however, depict natives. Most of the photos and sketches show Koryaks, both settled and nomad (figure 6), reflecting the original interest of Kennan in Koryaks. Besides, there are face portraits of the natives, which were likely taken by the Jesup expedition as ethnographic material (figure 7). Similarly to *Siberia*, all photos and lithographs presented natives and their life at a distance.

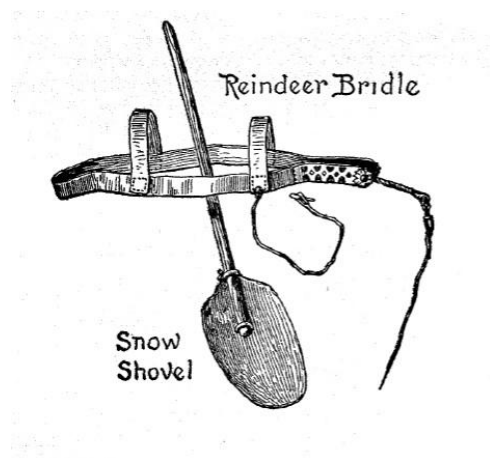


Figure 5. “Reindeer Bridle. Snow Shovel,” in George Kennan, *Tent Life in Siberia, a New Account of an Old Undertaking: Adventures Among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1910), 53, 426. (Note: the picture appears twice, at the end of chapters 6 and 37.)



Figure 6. “Interior of a Korak Yurt. Getting Fire with the Fire Drill,” in George Kennan, *New Account of an Old Undertaking*, 222.



Figure 7. “A Man of the Wandering Chukchis,” in George Kennan, *New Account of an Old Undertaking*, 312.

Conclusion

George Kennan dedicated three book-length travel accounts and dozens of articles and editorials to the subject of Russia throughout more than five decades and was one of the few American commentators of the period who learned Russian and thus could have a more intimate take on the country. This thesis acknowledges the flaw of not looking at Kennan’s other writings and archival materials for extra analysis. But if one takes into consideration solely his travel narratives that had a considerable reading audience in America, Europe, and Russia, they reveal a confusing yet also dynamic evolution in Kennan’s view of the empire. Young, devout, not knowing Russian but looking forward to a monumental northern undertaking, in *Tent Life* Kennan depicted the hardships of the explorations in Siberia, showed exotic natives, and presented Russia as a country friendly to any American and as the symbol of “civilization” akin to the U.S. and its colonization of its Western territories (although not without questionable comments). Such an image of Russia’s own frontier would circulate in reprintings of *Tent Life* during the next four decades, including all the inaccurate statements regarding native life. The early adventures in the empire molded his character, outlook, and offered a sense of belonging and reassurance after witnessing the bloodshed at home that barely ended by the time he departed for Russia.

Twenty years later, a mature Kennan, facing a serious spiritual crisis but armed with the knowledge of Russian and with a choice selection of letters of introduction, entered Siberia to explore the exile system. The intense preparation on Kennan’s part for the publication of *Siberia*

cannot be doubted. He did display real and undoubtedly shameful facts about the exile system, and for him the injustice he saw served to resolve his religious doubts in favor of humanitarianism and a lifelong crusade against the autocratic regime. Yet a considerable portion of the exile system remained uncovered, and, though his personal sympathies towards the exiles and their plight are understandable, they led him to promote a partial and flawed picture of the Russian revolutionary movement. A crusader in favor of political change in Russia, he remained vigilant, if not hostile, regarding attempts at inciting unrest and violence at home. Yet the way he wrote about Russia outside of the exile context is equally important. Kennan arrived in Russia at a time when his country was busy with the swift colonization of the American West and enjoyed rapid economic development. On too many occasions Kennan asserted his confidence, employing an “imperial view,” triangulation with Europe when outlining the empire’s retrograde status, and presenting Russians themselves as desirous of following the American way of development. While he disregarded the domestic American problems in the Gilded Age (except the policy towards Native Americans), some of his statements on Russian internal policy, just like its political system, contributed to the misunderstanding of Russia abroad.

And yet, while in *Siberia* Russia was presented in a more negative light, in the revised version of *Tent Life* Kennan largely returned to the perceptions of his youth, omitting most of his criticism. From the late 1880s until 1917 he remained a staunch critic of tsarism, yet, growing old, he seemed to become increasingly concerned about America’s old ways facing the age of modernity. From this angle, a return to the four-decade-old stories of exciting and character-testing adventures in the harsh northernmost corner of the world demonstrates not only an enduring interest in Russia but, possibly, a subtle anti-modernist statement of an aged journalist.

Kennan’s narrations, written throughout four decades, demonstrate the “dual vision” of the empire through the prism of development, “civilization,” West/East comparison, and changes in both Kennan as an individual and his home country. The importance of both *Tent Life* and *Siberia* becomes especially evident considering that the travelers after Kennan until the First World War would write on similar subjects and confirm or reevaluate many of Kennan’s claims. The next two chapters comprise the second part of this thesis, dedicated to the examination of American journeys to Russia during its pivotal historical events, and I start with the famine of 1891–1892, which broke out just when *Siberia* was being published in book form.



Figure 8. *The Area of Kennan's Travels in 1865–1867* [map]. In: George Kennan, *Tent Life in Siberia, a New Account of an Old Undertaking: Adventures Among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 32.

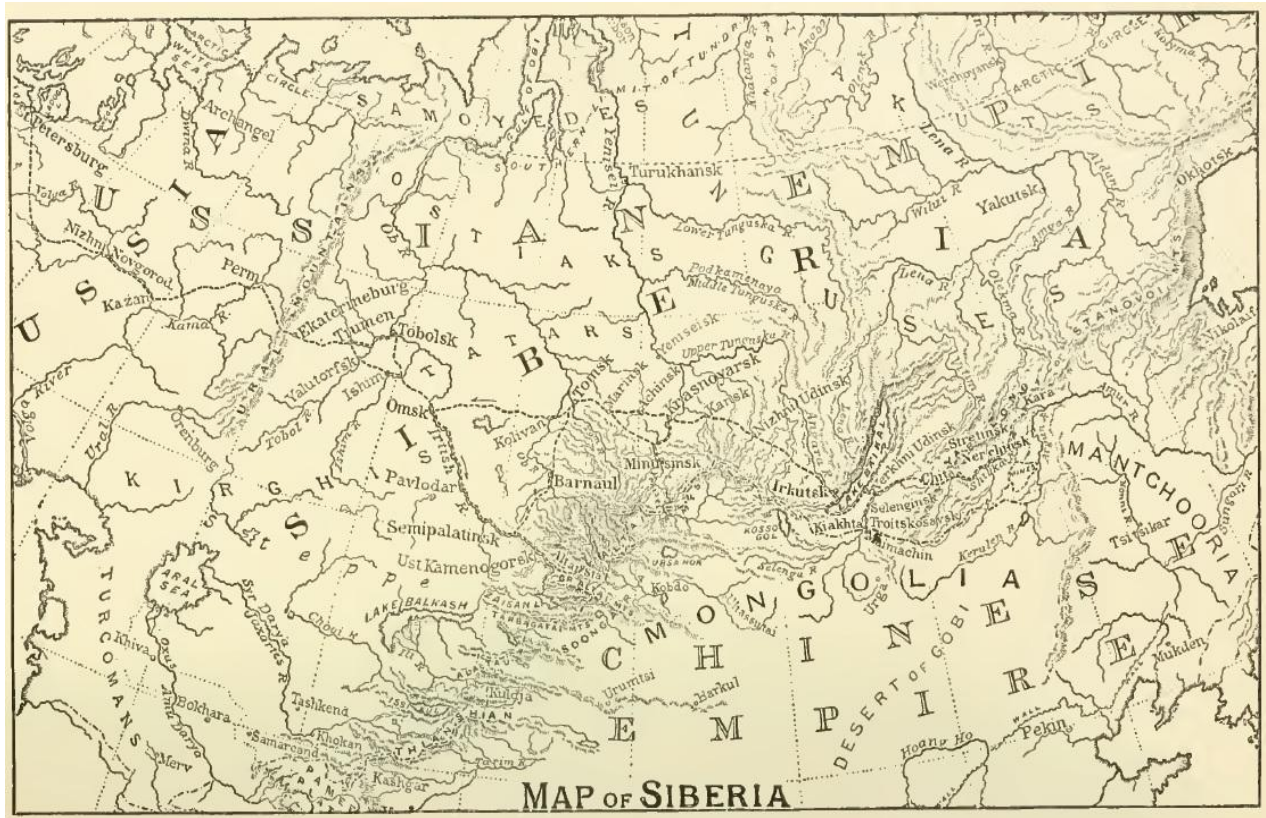


Figure 9. *Map of Siberia* [map]. In: George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* (New York: Century, 1891), 1:4.

Part II

Chapter 3. Rye Bread and Friendship: The Russian Famine of 1891–1892 and American Relief Officials' Travel Writing

Introduction

While the American efforts to help the famished in Soviet Russia in 1921–1923 are more known to the public and more deeply studied, it was thirty years before that when Russia for the first time met with large-scale American philanthropy. While the famine in 1891–1892 had a lasting impact on the development of American philanthropy and humanitarian campaigns, including the ones in Russia later, it also prompted a group of American relief officials to visit Russia, explore the country at the time of its internal crisis, and write travel accounts for the home audience. Based on their trips that are unique considering the circumstances, these commissioners tried to alter the image of Russia following Kennan's publication, especially its conclusions on the autocracy. They unanimously believed that the relief operation was yet another sign of friendly Russian-American relations and pointed out genuine Russian sympathies towards Americans, just like Kennan in *Tent Life* had. Yet they recalled the self-confidence of Kennan in the 1880s by presenting Russia as backward compared to the U.S. and Western Europe.

The Russian Crisis and the American Relief

The Russian Empire was still a predominantly agricultural country in the 1890s, and in 1891, following a summer drought, the southeast areas of the European part of Russia, from the Black Sea to the Ural Mountains, were hit by crop failure that was intensified by cholera and typhus outbreaks later in the same year. Twenty-three provinces were affected by reduced harvests, out of which seventeen suffered significantly, most notably the Volga region.²²¹ In these provinces, where around thirty-five million people lived, between 375,000 and 400,000 people died, either from malnutrition or diseases.²²² To mitigate the crisis, the Russian government initially introduced a ban on the exports of rye in August and all other agricultural products in October-November, as well as preferential tariffs for transporting food to suffering regions, tax exemption, and a public

²²¹ Petr Bechasnov, ed., *Statisticheskiye dannyye po vydache ssud na obsemeneniye i prodovol'stviye naseleniyu, postradavshemu ot neurozhaya v 1891–1892 gg.* [The statistical data on giving seed and food loans to the victims of crop failure of 1891–1892] (St. Petersburg: Tsentral'nyy statisticheskiy komitet Ministerstva vnutrennikh del, 1894), 1, 4.

²²² Richard Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891–1892: The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 171.

works program for unemployed and impoverished peasants. In late fall the central authorities launched a comprehensive relief program, allocating funds to *zemstvos* to purchase bread, seeds, and other foodstuffs. The *zemstvos* were additionally authorized to collect information on the scale of the famine, deliver, and distribute the purchased supplies among the village communities in coordination with the local authorities. To complement and regulate agencies and individuals responsible for private charity, the Special Committee on Famine Relief was formed in November, with heir Nicholas (the future Nicholas II) at its head. While it is not possible to account for all private aid, the total state expenditures to tackle the famine are estimated to be 150–160 million rubles (around 75–80 million dollars), with around thirteen million people receiving relief, most of them in the winter and spring of 1892.²²³

There is a consensus among researchers that the immediate cause of the famine was meteorological. They also agree on the uneven character of the famine and underline that even within one province significant differences existed in the wealth and condition of the peasant population, as well as in the harvest gathered during the 1891 season.²²⁴ Yet recent scholarship offers diverging views on the underlying causes of the crisis, with references to the state of Russian agriculture, peasant administration, land ownership, taxation, exports, and food consumption by the peasantry. Many scholars write about the famine not as a separate issue but in connection with the general economic and social policies of Russia at the turn of the century. They use the famine to make arguments related to the empire's domestic successes and failures, intellectual and social unrest, and ultimately the causes of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and even of 1917. As Simms demonstrated, these debates go back to polarizing discussions within Russian society, among intellectuals, and in the then contemporary press regarding the roots, severity, and even the outright existence of famine as opposed to simply crop failure.²²⁵

Debates focus on the emergence of the “agrarian crisis” in post-emancipation Russia, which led to the famine but supposedly was not resolved after it occurred and proved to be a major destabilizing factor for the autocracy in the twentieth century. Many Soviet, Western, and modern

²²³ Bechasnov, *Statisticheskiye dannyye*, 7, 42–43, 62–63.

²²⁴ Viktor Kondrashin, “Sel'skoye khozyaystvo Rossii i agrarnaya politika samodержaviya v kontse XIX – nachale XX vv. [Russian agriculture and the agrarian policy of the autocracy in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries],” *Economic History: Yearbook*, 2020, 418; Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, 2; Steven Wheatcroft, “The 1891–92 Famine in Russia: Towards a More Detailed Analysis of Its Scale and Demographic Significance,” in *Economy and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1860–1930: Essays for Olga Crisp*, ed. Linda Edmondson and Peter Waldron (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 62–63.

²²⁵ James Simms, “The Impact of the Russian Famine of 1891–92: A New Perspective” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1976), 78.

Russian scholars argue that the emancipation of serfs in 1861 left considerable land to the nobility and their privileges intact, and the rapid increase of the peasant population during the following decades led to the reduction of available arable land for single peasant families in European Russia. Besides, increasing taxation (especially indirect) and the state's focus on industrialization at the expense of agricultural development contributed to the low living standards of the peasantry, which, in turn, led to indebtedness, increasing peasant inequality, and often disproportionate sales of foodstuffs abroad. Others argue that state agricultural policy did not favor small-scale agriculturalists and preferred to support noble or large-scale landholders.²²⁶ Those who analyze Russian food policy point to the inefficient preventive anti-famine measures of the government.²²⁷ Thus, the proponents of the “agrarian crisis” argue that Russian economic policy often left the majority of the peasants vulnerable to malnutrition or outright famine in the case of bad crops.²²⁸

Other scholars refute these arguments, claiming that Russian agriculture, as the major sector of the economy, was developing steadily from the 1880s onwards, and its productivity output was enough for the average yearly population increase. Besides, while the development of agriculture was slower in the traditional agricultural regions, it expanded greatly in the southern parts of European Russia, the Baltic and the Caucasus provinces, as well as Siberia. These authors focus on other positive modernization marks, including industrial development, the gradual transfer of lands through purchase from the nobility to the peasantry, and the growing marketability of Russian agriculture along with its increasing role on the international market. In sum, they deny claims of an “agrarian crisis” and point to the fairly successful economic development of the empire.²²⁹ In

²²⁶ Taisiya Kitanina, *Khlebnaya trgovlya Rossii v kontse XIX – nachale XX veka. Strategii vyzhivaniya, modernizatsionnyye protsessy, pravitel'stvennaya politika* [Russian bread trade in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries. Strategies of survival, modernization processes, government policy] (St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin, 2011), 395–97; Andrey Anfimov, *Krest'yanskoye khozyaystvo Evropeyskoy Rossii, 1881–1904* [The peasant economy of European Russia, 1881–1904] (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 232–33.

²²⁷ Angelina Rogozhina, “Golod i prodovol'stvennaya politika Rossiyskoy imperii v kontse XIX – nachale XX vekov [Hunger and food policy of the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries],” *Nauchnyi Dialog*, no. 4 (2021): 434–35, <https://doi.org/10.24224/2227-1295-2021-4-423-437>.

²²⁸ Sergey Nefedov, *Istoriya Rossii: faktorny analiz* [History of Russia: Factor analysis], vol. 2, *Ot okonchaniya Smuty do Fevral'skoy revolyutsii* [From the end of the Time of Troubles to the February Revolution] (Moscow: Territoriya budushchego, 2010), 444; Kondrashin, “Sel'skoye khozyaystvo Rossii,” 441–42; Eric Johnson, “Demographics, Inequality and Entitlements in the Russian Famine of 1891,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 1 (2015): 117, <https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.93.1.0096>; Aleksandr Ostrovskiy, *Zernovoye proizvodstvo Evropeyskoy Rossii v kontse XIX – nachale XX v.* [Grain production of European Russia in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries] (St. Petersburg: Poltorak, 2013), 248, 275–83.

²²⁹ Boris Mironov, *Blagosostoyaniye naseleniya i revolyutsii v imperskoy Rossii: XVIII – nachalo XX veka* [The welfare of the population and revolutions in imperial Russia: Eighteenth – early twentieth centuries], 2nd ed. (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2012), 471–74, 538, 556; Paul Gregory, *Before Command: An Economic History of Russia from Emancipation to the First Five-Year Plan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 54; Raymond Goldsmith, “The Economic Growth of Tsarist Russia 1860–1913,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 9, no. 3 (1961): 441–75.

connection with the famine, some emphasize a relatively effective relief campaign by the government, undertaken on a large scale for millions of people, and argue that it was the intellectuals of the day who created an exaggerated image of its consequences and blamed the autocracy as the main cause of domestic failure.²³⁰

The famine marked a unique juncture in Russian-American contacts before the First World War, as it brought into life a large-scale humanitarian campaign by American individuals. Rumors of the famine began to circulate in the American press in July 1891, and the first local attempts to organize relief followed in the fall.²³¹ It became a nationwide movement by December and consisted of several campaigns in different states, most significantly in Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania, especially Philadelphia. Various organizations and newspapers promoted the relief, ranging from the New York Chamber of Commerce and the American Red Cross to periodicals like the *Northwestern Miller* in Minneapolis, the *Davenport Democrat* in Iowa, and the *Christian Herald* in New York. In January 1892 the National Russian Famine Relief Committee was formed, with John W. Hoyt as its chairman. Consisting of senators, State Governors, philanthropists, and bishops, the Committee took a coordinating role. The relief included cash transferred through diplomatic channels, the Red Cross, or private relief groups in Russia. Americans also collected flour, wheat, corn, and other foodstuffs that were transported throughout the first half of 1892 to Russia on five steamers collectively called the “Famine Fleet” (the *Indiana*, the *Missouri*, the *Conemaugh*, the *Tynehead*, and the *Leo*). The total value of foodstuffs and cash donations is estimated to be around one million dollars or two million rubles, which was the largest relief effort in Russian history up to that point coming from a foreign country.²³²

At the time of the relief campaign negative visions of Russia were gaining momentum, including the controversy over Kennan’s exposé of the exile system, the growth of negative sentiments towards the Russian autocracy and its policy to Jewish residents, as well as the launch of the “Free Russia” movement in the U.S. and the ongoing campaign against the extradition treaty (discussed in the introduction and the previous chapter). In spite of this, the relief was organized and delivered. One of the major factors in favor of helping Russia was that many Americans still visualized the history of continuous friendly ties between the two countries and interpreted relief as returning the favor for the supporting visit of the Russian Navy to the North during the Civil

²³⁰ Simms, “The Impact of the Russian Famine,” 341; Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, 173–76.

²³¹ James Simms, “Impact of Russian Famine, 1891–1892, Upon the United States,” *Mid-America* 60, no. 3 (1978): 172.

²³² Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 115; Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 355–56.

War. The humanitarian and religious spirit of Americans and the touching scenes of suffering presented in the American press also strengthened calls for and the willingness to provide aid.²³³

However, the relief campaign in the U.S. still became a source of conflict. Some questioned the scale of crop failure, while another of the popular counterarguments was that charity should “begin at home.” More importantly, according to scholarly literature, both on the political and individual level, some Americans questioned the internal political and social system of Russia, raising doubts about the Republic aiding a despotic absolute monarchy that unlawfully banished people to Siberia and mistreated its Jewish population. Others criticized the Russian government for its corruption and inefficiency in tackling the famine, while Jewish Americans were reluctant to help those who discriminated against their compatriots.²³⁴ Some argued that Americans should not aid the government and instead send relief directly to the people via private Russian charities (such as the committee organized by Leo Tolstoy), the Red Cross, or through British or American diplomatic or private channels. These arguments had an effect on the debates in Congress over the resolution introduced in January 1892 by Senator William Drew Washburn from Minnesota, which would have authorized the Secretary of the Navy to spend 100,000 dollars for the transportation of foodstuffs. The resolution, despite its support by President Harrison in his message to Congress and success in the Senate, was defeated in the House.²³⁵ The Congressional and individual debates over sending help to Russia thus brought forward the question of the internal condition and political system of the country to which aid is transferred, and Americans were put in a convoluted dilemma over helping Russia.²³⁶ Still, the “Famine Fleet” was accompanied by about a dozen American officials responsible for the delivery and supervision of relief. Some of them produced travel accounts and so joined the discourse about Russia.

Authors and Their Travelogues

I identified three American relief officials who went to Russia and published their travel impressions. The first is William Edgar (1856–1932), editor of the *Northwestern Miller*, a weekly milling and grain industry periodical in Minneapolis.²³⁷ Working from his youth in sales and for

²³³ Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 214, 233; Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 338–39.

²³⁴ Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 217–18.

²³⁵ Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*, 103–7.

²³⁶ Curti, 283–85. A similar dilemma would take place three decades later at a time of a major famine during the Russian Civil War, when individuals and Congressmen clashed on the subject of the necessity to help starving people amidst the Bolshevik takeover of the country and appropriation of funds by Congress for relief purposes.

²³⁷ Harold Smith, “Bread for the Russians: William C. Edgar and the Relief Campaign of 1892,” *Minnesota History* 42, no. 2 (1970): 54–62.

printing companies, he became associated with this paper in 1882 and gradually turned it into a recognized authority for Midwestern millers and flour buyers. Residing continuously in Minneapolis, he remained a lifelong adherent of the Episcopal Church, taking part in the affairs of St. Paul and St. Mark Episcopal churches. He continued editing the journal until 1924 and assisted in organizing American relief to Belgium during the First World War. He got his initial relief experience in Russia, and he was recognized as the first to organize a massive relief campaign with the help of the *Northwestern Miller*. He sent telegrams offering relief to the Russian minister in the U.S. in late November 1891 and, after it was accepted, published his relief proclamation on 4 December in the periodical. He became a member of the Minnesota relief committee and, cooperating with Governor William Merriam, railroads, and telegraph companies, he secured, according to his own statistics, around 5.4 million pounds of donated foodstuffs, mostly flour and some cornmeal.²³⁸ Edgar was then selected, along with Charles McCormick Reeve, the owner of the Holly Flour Mill in Minneapolis, and Edmund Phelps, a prominent Minneapolis merchant, to administer the distribution of the relief supplies from the *Missouri*, which sailed from New York to Libau (modern Liepaja in Latvia) from 16 March to 3 April of 1892. He reported on his journey in his weekly and wrote articles for other periodicals, contributing one piece to the *Forum* and several articles to the *Review of Reviews* (both British and American editions). He compiled most of his reports for the *Northwestern Miller* and the sole article to the *Forum* together in *The Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892*, published in 1893.

Another travel account printed shortly following the visit to Russia was *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892* (1892) by Rudolph Blankenburg (1843–1918).²³⁹ Blankenburg, a Philadelphia entrepreneur and later its mayor, reported for Philadelphia newspapers – the *Public Ledger*, *The Times*, and *The Inquirer*, and later he combined his articles without any changes into this pamphlet. He was born in Barntrop, Germany, in a family of a minister of the German Reformed Church. In 1865 he immigrated and eventually settled in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Beginning as a salesman in the textile business of William H. Horstmann & Sons, he was later involved in textile manufacturing and dry goods sales and set up his own

²³⁸ William Edgar, *The Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892: Some Particulars of the Relief Sent to the Destitute Peasants by the Millers of America in the Steamship Missouri; a Brief History of the Movement, a Description of the Relief Commission's Visit to Russia, and a List of Subscribers to the Fund* (Minneapolis: Millers and Manufacturers Insurance, 1893), 70. The report made by Hoyt after the end of the American relief campaign states that around 5.9 million pounds of aid was sent, see: John Hoyt, *Report of the Russian Famine Relief Committee of the United States* (Washington, DC: Rufus H. Darby, 1893), 13.

²³⁹ Clinton Woodruff, "Blankenburg, Rudolph," in *Dictionary of American Biography*. Barsotti–Brazer, ed. Allen Johnson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929).

company in 1875. Soon he began to associate with the Philadelphia Society of Friends as well as take part in the political affairs of the city. He was one of the founders of the Citizens' Permanent Relief Committee of Philadelphia, which was established in 1878. It was responsible for various relief tasks, dealing with the flood in Johnstown, Philadelphia, in 1889, and later for overseas relief activities. Blankenburg also took part in the activities of the Citizens' Committee of One Hundred. Later he was nominated county commissioner in 1905 as a non-partisan, and in 1911 he was elected Philadelphia Mayor as a member of the third Keystone Party (though backed by Democrats). Yet his early relief experience made him a representative of the Russian Famine Relief Committee organized by then Philadelphia Mayor Edwin Stuart, and he was sent to accompany the *Indiana*, the first of the "Famine Fleet" steamers, which was also dispatched to Libau, leaving from Philadelphia (22 February – 16 March 1892). Blankenburg traveled with commissioners Anthony Drexel, Alexander Williams Biddle, and William Grundy, also Philadelphians. The *Indiana* carried approximately 2,130 tons (4.26 million pounds) of flour according to Hoyt's report, while Blankenburg estimated it to be five million.²⁴⁰

The third travelogue was published twenty-five years after the famine, in 1917, by Philadelphia businessman Francis Reeves (1836–1922) under the title *Russia Then and Now, 1892–1917*.²⁴¹ Born in Bridgeton, New Jersey, Reeves worked from his youth in banking and sales in Philadelphia and became a member of the wholesale grocery company Reeves, Parvin & Co. In the 1870s and the 1880s, he got involved in administrative and educational projects in Philadelphia, serving on the municipal reform in The Citizens' Committee of One Hundred, on the Presbyterian Board of Education, and the Philadelphia Board of Public Education. He also held the position of the ruling elder in the Wakefield Presbyterian Church of Germantown, Philadelphia, and the superintendent of its Sunday school. Like Blankenburg, he became a member of the Citizens' Permanent Relief Committee of Philadelphia, and the two stayed on friendly terms throughout the following decades. In the early 1890s he, similarly to Blankenburg, became a member of the Russian Famine Relief Committee. He was sent on its behalf to supervise the *Conemaugh*, which sailed from Philadelphia to Riga (23 April – 13 May 1892) and carried, according to Hoyt's commission's report, around 2,652 tons (5.3 million pounds) worth of foodstuffs and necessities.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Rudolph Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892: Letters from Russia to the Philadelphia "Ledger," "Times" and "Inquirer"* (Philadelphia: Russian Famine Relief Committee, 1892), 21; Hoyt, *Report*, 13.

²⁴¹ Francis Reeves and Samuel Jones, *1700 to 1900, Ancestry and Posterity of Johnson Reeves, Born October 16, 1799, Died July 19, 1860: And a Memorial Sermon* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane and Scott, 1900), 25–26.

²⁴² Hoyt, *Report*, 14.

All three travelogues follow a similar pattern, presenting events in chronological order. None of the authors knew Russian, which limited their overall understanding of the country, even if at times the authors were accompanied by Russian members of the Special Relief Committee who knew English. The mission itself, with restrictions on time and the places of visit, set limits on what they could observe. Besides, Reeves' account was published twenty-five years later, during the First World War, most likely in response to the renewed interest in Russia. His long-lasting friendship with Blankenburg also allowed him to copy several excerpts from the latter's account.

The Background of the Relief Operations

While it has been stressed that Americans were divided over the question of helping Russia, especially in connection to its government, in order to understand the travel impressions of the authors it is important to gain a deeper perspective on the context in which both Edgar's campaign and Philadelphia relief operation materialized.

The public disputes over the existence of famine and the need for relief apparently turned into confusion caused by the overflow of news from distant Russia (including through European channels) or led to outright misinformation. Philadelphia newspapers continuously published remarks and interviews on the question of relief, claiming, for instance, in January 1892 from a London source that the Czar still denied the fact of famine and, therefore, "is either willfully blind to the situation in his Empire, or that the true condition of the peasants has been kept from his knowledge," ignoring the formation of the Special Relief Committee in November 1891 led by the Czar's heir and the fact that the first relief funds by the government to the provinces facing crop failure were appropriated as early as June.²⁴³ In another interview, "an eminent Russian official" claimed that those on top in Russia are "Nihilists in disguise" and leading the country to a fall. Meanwhile, a peasant uprising in the famine areas might be imminent, and if the Russian army was to suppress the unrest, it would leave western parts of Russia open to attack by Germany and Austria-Hungary, which would not hesitate to occupy those territories.²⁴⁴ Even on the eve of the departure of the *Indiana* to Russia, a month after the Russian Famine Relief Committee began its work, a small column in the *Philadelphia Times*, the journal which consistently published the committee's proclamations for help, made an obvious overstatement that the relief to Russia "is really intended to be stored in the national granaries as a preparation for war."²⁴⁵

²⁴³ "No Famine, Says the Czar," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 7, 1892, 1; Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, 40–41.

²⁴⁴ "Many Dangers Threaten Russia on All Sides," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 8, 1892, 1.

²⁴⁵ "Is Russia Buying Grain for War?," *Philadelphia Times*, February 21, 1892, 3.

Apart from disputes over the need for relief, which led to a certain degree of sensationalism, the campaign to help Russia showed tensions present within American society itself. In Philadelphia a clear indication of this was a scandal over choosing Blankenburg, an ethnic German, as a relief commissioner. Robert Adams, Jr., the future Congressman from Pennsylvania and the former U.S. minister to Brazil, publicly argued that Blankenburg would not be a "persona grata" in Russia due to strained Russian-German relations and asked the Russian Famine Relief Committee "to reconsider its action and substitute some native-born citizen" and to ensure that it would be American nationals who would come to Russia.²⁴⁶ Though it was true that at that time Russia and Germany clashed in a tariff war (ended with a trade treaty concluded in 1894), the statement that Blankenburg was not welcome in Russia due to his ethnicity proved to be incorrect by his own travel impressions. Instead, it resonated with a surge of nativist sentiments in the U.S. at the turn of the century and renewed conflicts over citizenship.

Edgar's writings for the *Northwestern Miller* embody the conflict between unity and division. As the editor of the weekly and the spearhead of the movement, Edgar evidently had to convince his compatriots to provide help, and a considerable portion of his editorials written during the relief campaign in the winter of 1892 made it to his book account. As an example, he reprinted a part of his appeal of 4 December, in which he urged Americans to donate not "as Protestants or Catholics, as Christians or Hebrews" but simply "in the name of humanity" and as to "show a sense of the benefits which the good God has showered upon them." To those who deemed the scale of the famine in Russia exaggerated, Edgar offered a sharp contrast between his home country (where he claimed the harvests challenged the transportation system) and the devastation in Russia that seemed "like a grim, gaunt fairy tale, of years long passed; of conditions which advancing civilization have made impossible," adding that at that very moment Russians were reduced to eating "hunger bread" and that "the poorest dog which hangs about the city streets of America can pick up better food than the Russian peasant clamors for."²⁴⁷ In other words, he clearly appealed to both religious and philanthropic sentiments of Americans and offered direct parallels of plenty and poverty to encourage American unity in providing relief. He continued to emphasize that the famine in Russia was real, at one point reprinting public letters on the scale of distress from people worthy of public trust, Leo Tolstoy and his wife, Sophia. Though focusing primarily on humanitarian aspects, he offered an extra business rationale (a chance to promote American

²⁴⁶ "Bertie Breaks Out Again," *Philadelphia Times*, February 21, 1892, 4.

²⁴⁷ Editorial, *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, December 4, 1891, 781.

agriculture in the world) to ensure wider support of the movement.²⁴⁸ He certainly saw himself as the head of the united national undertaking, lauding the people's efforts at the end of his campaign and writing that "nowhere else but in America could such an undertaking be successfully carried out in a few short weeks" without any government help. And although Philadelphia sent its steamer quicker, Edgar claimed that its campaign was supported primarily by the rich, whereas his was more egalitarian and thus more "characteristically American."²⁴⁹

And yet his editorials reveal a degree of conflict and much about Edgar's personal outlook on the world. Edgar praised Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas for their donations that embodied the generosity and the pioneer character of the "new west."²⁵⁰ In contrast, he entered into a dispute with *The Nation*, a major New York periodical, and John De Witt Warner, a New York State Representative. Both argued in favor of sending money rather than foodstuffs on steamers and helping the people directly as opposed to cooperation with the Russian government. Edgar asserted that such course of action would be impractical, and that his weekly was more competent in discussing relief and general economic matters. Revealing sectional divides, he ironically concluded that "with many such economists and statesmen as *the Nation* and Mr. John De Witt Warner has the good Lord seen fit to endow our country."²⁵¹ The British Empire was also commented upon after Christopher Furness, a member of the British Parliament, publicly suggested offering British vessels for transporting relief while simultaneously claiming that the whole idea of relief was British. Clearly irritated, Edgar blasted that while "in England the American is regarded as the quintessence of cheek," the British Isles have "distinguished citizens who can give the average American points and still beat him."²⁵²

Edgar was moved to comment on Russian politics even before his travels to Russia. In one of the editorials, he directly approached the question of public distrust of the Russian government. He acknowledged that Kennan's writings had a certain impact on spreading negative sentiments and admitted that he was "undoubtedly honest" in his revelations. Edgar asserted that Kennan "does not attempt to lay the blame for the cruelty of the Siberian exile system on the tsar or on any particular man or party," disregarding the overall significance and regular criticism of the autocratic

²⁴⁸ William Edgar, "A Grand Movement," *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, December 11, 1891, 817; "Russia's Distress," *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, January 8, 1892, 43.

²⁴⁹ William Edgar, "Current Comment," *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, February 12, 1892, 228; Editorial, *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, February 26, 1892, 301.

²⁵⁰ William Edgar, "Current Comment," *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, January 8, 1892, 40.

²⁵¹ Editorial, *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, February 5, 1892, 189.

²⁵² Editorial, *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, February 19, 1892, 265.

regime in his *Siberia*. That deduction led to proclaiming the certainty that the Czar actually wished well to his subjects and did everything to tackle the famine. As for Russian policies towards Jews and “Nihilists,” they, like European attitudes to their own respective outcasts, could be understood through the poor and alien lifestyles they brought to America, ones that altogether “certainly do not make us yearn for any more of their kin.”²⁵³ Edgar went as far as debating *Free Russia*, the press organ of the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom (the creation of the latter was supported by Kennan).²⁵⁴ He blamed its editor for the lack of pragmatism regarding sending relief and concluded that “we imagine that Russia is a thousand times better off under the Tsar than she would be if ruled by such impractical theorists as those he worships and reveres.”²⁵⁵

The brief analysis of the two relief campaigns served to point out that, while Americans were certainly divided over helping Russia, they reveal a great deal about conflicts present among Americans themselves. Doubts over non-American ethnicity, unrestrained nativist and anti-immigration sentiments, sectional tensions, rivalries between different movements, and even international biases (Edgar’s anti-British rant) all had an impact on both the relief campaign and the way that the commissioners would approach Russia. Edgar’s outlook in particular, including his pronounced public defense of the Russian autocracy, would influence the way he approached the empire in his travel reports.

The Introductory Notes

The commissioners traveled apart from their respective relief steamers. They took a passenger ship to Europe and traveled by train across the continent to the Russian border. All of them briefly visited St. Petersburg and participated in official events organized by the Russian government in honor of their help. Edgar and Reeves traveled to the city of distribution of relief from the arriving steamers (Libau for Edgar, Riga for Reeves). All American commissioners also stopped by in Moscow before proceeding to the areas struck by the famine. Edgar and Reeves, coincidentally but independently of one another, explored the same Tula province to the south of Moscow. These two commissioners investigated the villages near the city of Bogoroditsk, accompanied by members of the Bobrinskiy family, who were prominent industrialists and landowners in this region and the supervisors of the local relief effort. Blankenburg took a train from Moscow to Saratov, crossed the Volga, and inspected villages on the other side of the river with the Miller brothers, who

²⁵³ Editorial, *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, December 25, 1891, 889.

²⁵⁴ See chap. 2, n. 85.

²⁵⁵ Editorial, *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, February 19, 1892, 265.

belonged to an entrepreneur family descending from German colonists on the Volga and who were responsible for local relief operations.²⁵⁶

Before proceeding to the narration of their travels, it is worth examining the introductory notes that the three authors wrote for their book-length texts. Blankenburg stated that he decided to combine his articles in a pamphlet at the request of his friends who were interested in the relief operation. From the start Blankenburg highlighted the increased Russian sympathies to Americans because of the latter's help. He saw the famine and the consequent American aid as an "eventful episode in the progress of civilization" and as evidence that different nations grew friendlier to each other. He believed that Russians would never forget American help and published an extract from the letter of Count Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov, then the Minister of the Imperial Court. In this letter, he thanked Blankenburg for his work and assured him that the American relief effort would always be remembered. Blankenburg complimented his letter with the simple appreciation of a peasant who said, "'all we can say is, God bless you and those who sent you.'" ²⁵⁷

Contrary to Blankenburg, in their introductions Edgar and Reeves shared their general thoughts on Russian relief. Edgar, apart from including several extracts from the *Northwestern Miller* related to the campaign, emphasized from the start that Russia was a vast country with much diversity and incongruities. He believed that, as someone who had a short mission to Russia, he was not adequately prepared to write about such a diverse country and claimed that many lies existed in the Western press and books about Russia. He sympathized with Russians for their brave struggle against the famine and added:

Her people – generous, hospitable and warm-hearted – appeal especially to the American, who contrasts them with the cold, self-satisfied Pharisees of western Europe, and, while his reason applauds the progress, the strength and the superior condition of the latter in all that goes to make a material national success, his heart, nevertheless, goes out to the Russians, and he feels for them more of genuine friendliness than for others more nearly related by ties of consanguinity.²⁵⁸

Thus, from the start he compared Russia to Western Europe, sympathizing with Russians on a personal level but hinting at the importance of material progress in which Europe seemed superior to Russia. Continuing his thoughts, Edgar considered it impossible to understand a country without a strong middle class like in America, and where self-government in village communities and

²⁵⁶ He was traveling with one of the Miller brothers and, according to Blankenburg's biography written by his wife Lucretia after his death, with William Grundy, though Blankenburg did not mention him in his travel account. Lucretia Blankenburg, *The Blankenburgs of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1928), 36.

²⁵⁷ Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 2.

²⁵⁸ Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 3.

unlimited autocracy on top, luxury and poverty, modernity and the Middle Ages mixed with little common ground. In short, he believed it was hard to comprehend Russia by what he called “our western standards,” thus mapping Russia as distant from the U.S. and Europe.²⁵⁹ He emphasized that his main objective was the relief errand. Therefore, he did not learn much about “nihilists, exiles, the condition of the Jews,” but at the same time pointed out that the American public had become so accustomed to reading about Russian horrors that a contemporary book that did not contain them would not sell well. With this remark, he called into question the prevalent negative images about Russia, the ones that he tried to tackle during the relief campaign in his weekly.

Reeves, writing two decades later, began his account by stating that the two countries “have always been on terms of amity” due to such events as the Russian Navy’s visit to the North during the Civil War or the purchase of Alaska, and these tokens of friendship continued all the way to the First World War, overlooking tensions at the beginning of the twentieth century related to Manchuria. In his view, the then current period in history saw advances in material sciences as well as in “knowledge of the will and ways of God and the real meaning of the life of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth.”²⁶⁰ Reeves expressed hope that the war would end as soon as possible, with God revealing a way to end all conflicts, and included a page-long prayer for peace. Similar biblical references are present throughout the whole account and reveal the influence of religion on his thinking. In the introduction, he also declared his belief in the Progressive Era at home as a period of scientific development and the gradual improvement of humankind. To make an argument for printing his travelogue two decades later, he stated that his mission to Russia presented him with “special advantages such as are not experienced by an ordinary traveller.”²⁶¹ Reeves also gave a general account of how the Philadelphia Russian Relief Committee was formed and how Philadelphia’s benevolent citizens organized relief for the famished Russians. Though he was assigned to supervise the *Conemaugh*, he was also present at the departure of the first steamer, the *Indiana*. He gave his impressions on the leaving of this steamer as follows:

Here was Charity in volcanic action, and in its fire I beheld the beautiful foundation-stone of all true religions, sparkling like a "gem of purest ray serene," and, following its light, flashed across the stormy seas, I have seen it again and again, lightening many a dark and dreary dwelling in dreadfully afflicted Russia. Their cry of distress went up to Heaven and was echoed back to our far distant shores.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Edgar, 4.

²⁶⁰ Francis Reeves, *Russia Then and Now, 1892–1917: My Mission to Russia During the Famine of 1891–1892 with Data Bearing Upon Russia of Today* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1917), iv–v.

²⁶¹ Reeves, iv.

²⁶² Reeves, 5.

This comment further confirms the administration of relief as a religious act, yet it also reveals the creation of a dichotomy between “light” in America that strikes straight into “darkness” in Russia. In addition, Reeves stressed the rapidity and the swiftness of American mobilization for a good, almost holy, cause. Yet, writing in retrospect, he chose to disregard the divisions that the relief campaign produced in American society. In sum, while Blankenburg made more general remarks about genuine sympathies of Russians towards Americans, the introductions by the other two commissioners reveal a good deal about their preconceptions and outlook on the world.

Distribution of American Relief and the Russian Response

The relief officials described how the relief cargo arrived in Russia and how it reached the famished population. Blankenburg stayed the whole time in St. Petersburg and gathered information from the local press (in foreign languages), fellow commissioners, as well as the American Consul General in Russia, John Crawford. He noted that the unloading process in Libau went smoothly, that all relief was accounted for properly, and that it would reach ten provinces. He praised the fact that the relief was transported by trains provided by the Russian government and was given the right of way. However, he was concerned that the insufficient density of the railroads in Russia would slow down the delivery. He emphasized that the distribution was “placed in the hands of carefully selected people in the various districts, all of them private individuals.”²⁶³ With this remark, Blankenburg attempted to calm those who criticized the relief effort and equated it with helping the Russian government rather than the people. He also stated that the unloading of cargo in Libau was done only in two days despite “proverbial” Russian slowness. He attributed the speed of the process to the American Consul in Riga, Nils Bornholdt, who had “the Western push and activity that are necessary on such occasions.”²⁶⁴ This comment hinted at Blankenburg’s praise of American/European initiative and can-do spirit compared to the Russian way of doing things.

Unlike Blankenburg, Edgar and Reeves directly participated in the procedure of the cargo’s unloading. Edgar claimed that the cargo from the *Missouri* went to thirteen provinces and provided a map of the famished region and, additionally, the full list of the people who were responsible for receiving it in the book-length account. In his very first article he confirmed that the cargo sent to Libau was of excellent quality and that it went according to plans coordinated by Russian officials

²⁶³ Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 12.

²⁶⁴ Rudolph Blankenburg, “And the Greatest of These Is Charity,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 7, 1892, 5.

and American commissioners to the places that needed it most.²⁶⁵ In his book-length account he also assured his readers and contributors that “their flour went to the exact spot which they intended it should – to the stomachs of the hungry people.”²⁶⁶ However, like Blankenburg, he highlighted the fact that the Russian agents receiving the cargo in famished areas were private individuals.

Reeves assured his readers that the flour delivered to the famished peasants did not lose its good quality and applauded the fact that relief trains were given priority on Russian railways. He included an episode when local officials tried to interfere with the loading process but were quickly stopped. Reeves claimed that the same should be done to what he called “self-serving political gangsters” in his home country, apparently in connection with the power of Philadelphia’s omnipotent Republican machine at the turn of the century.²⁶⁷

All three commissioners took part in events in their honor organized by Russian officials and the population of the cities they visited. Though they mostly spent time attending banquets of the “high society,” they all wrote about Russian gratitude to Americans, whether from officials and nobles or simple people. While Edgar wanted to avoid excessive celebrations to save more money for aid, he still noted that “from noble to peasant the generosity of the people of the United States was a theme of enthusiastic talk.”²⁶⁸ Blankenburg noticed that mentioning the words “Philadelphia” and “Indiana” immediately made locals friendly toward the author, and they refused any tips from him, trying “to do what little they have in their power to emulate the example of a generous people.”²⁶⁹ And Reeves once met a station master, who, upon realizing who the author was, immediately accommodated him in his house, gave him souvenirs, and helped him to get a good train compartment. Reeves penned that “never before was I the recipient of such a profusion of kind attentions even from friends, not to mention strangers.”²⁷⁰ All these remarks reveal the commissioners’ belief in the genuine appreciation of American relief by Russians and the favored status of Americans in Russian eyes, suggesting a parallel to Kennan’s comments in *Tent Life* about Russian sympathies towards Americans in Northeastern Siberia.

Unloading the flour from the steamers was accompanied by Russian Orthodox religious ceremonies. While Edgar gave them scant attention, Reeves praised the “beautiful Christian spirit”

²⁶⁵ William Edgar, “News from Russia,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, May 6, 1892, 680a.

²⁶⁶ Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 32.

²⁶⁷ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 13–14; See: Peter McCaffery, “Style, Structure, and Institutionalization of Machine Politics: Philadelphia, 1867–1933,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 3 (1992): 435, <https://doi.org/10.2307/204988>.

²⁶⁸ William Edgar, “In Russia,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, June 10, 1892, 896a.

²⁶⁹ Rudolph Blankenburg, “Philadelphians in Russia,” *Philadelphia Times*, April 1, 1892, 4.

²⁷⁰ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 75.

of the ceremony, but after describing it quoted Blankenburg's general remark on the ecclesiastical affairs in Russia:

It seems that the Russian Church has for its foundation stone wretchedness, ignorance, and superstition; that to remove them would be to endanger the great influence and absolute control which the priests now wield. ... It seems bent only upon saving souls for the world to come and upon laying up for itself the riches of this world.²⁷¹

Blankenburg argued in favor of such a conclusion because the clergy, in his view, did little for the sake of famine relief among the peasants and their education, although they accumulated much wealth. While the two authors followed an already established trope about the Orthodox Church, their claims show their religious bias rather than their understanding of the role the Church played during the famine. In fact, in late August 1891 the Holy Synod authorized the creation of Diocese Committees (*yeparkhial'nyy komitet*) in all areas affected by the famine and urged both the population and the clergy to contribute to the funds for fighting it. A network of Diocese Committees was established (from provincial to parochial), including in both Tula and Samara provinces that Reeves and Blankenburg examined. In addition, the clergy participated in the work of administration (food and welfare committees in the provinces), while certain institutions, like the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, established their own committees. The clergy not only presided over the committees and coordinated their work with official and other private channels, but also collected information on the famished, secured donations and other funds, and worked “on the spot” with the population, contributing to the formation of soup kitchens and orphanages. Moral support provided by the clergy was no less important than actual relief.²⁷²

As regards the claim that the Church did not contribute to the peasants' education or even intentionally kept them ignorant, it ignores the whole system of parish schools (*tserkovno-prikhodskaya shkola*), the number of which increased exponentially during the reign of Alexander III (from four to approximately thirty thousand) after their reorganization in 1884. Coordinated by the Holy Synod and managed by the diocese councils, they gave free primary education regardless of the estate. Although there is fair criticism that in their early years they focused primarily on

²⁷¹ Rudolph Blankenburg, “Starvation on the Volga,” *Philadelphia Times*, April 18, 1892, 4; Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 32–33.

²⁷² Vadim Yakunin, “Samarskaya yeparkhiya russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvi v 1851–1917 gg.: polozheniye, ustroystvo, deyatel'nost', khramostroitel'stvo i dukhovnoye prosveshcheniye [Samara Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1851–1917: Position, structure, activity, church building and spiritual enlightenment],” *Volga Bulletin of Science* 4 (2021): 41–47; Sergey Ikonnikov, “Vklad prikhodskogo dukhovenstva Voronezhskoy yeparkhii v bor'bu s golodom 1891–1892 godov [Parish clergy of Voronezh Diocese in the fight against famine of 1891–1892],” *Proceedings of Southwest State University. Series: History and Law* 15, no. 3 (2025): 211–22, <https://doi.org/10.21869/2223-1501-2025-15-3-211-222>; Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, 96; Simms, “The Impact of the Russian Famine,” 33–34.

religious subjects, and the quality of education was not high, these schools gradually became closer in organization to *zemstvo* schools supervised by the Ministry of Education and remained one of the pillars of primary education in tsarist Russia.²⁷³

Finally, Blankenburg and Reeves were also wrong in claiming that the Church was exceptionally rich. The majority of the priests lived in the countryside and were themselves poor, relying on peasants' donations or payments for clergy services, and suffering from insufficient funds provided by the state.²⁷⁴

On the whole, all three authors echoed young Kennan's *Tent Life* by describing Russian sympathies for America and assured their readers that the relief was well organized and properly distributed. Yet comments that served to put Russia as alien to the West were also present, although they displayed biases rather than actual facts.

Travel Conditions and the Description of Major Cities

All three Americans traveled across Russia primarily by train. Blankenburg rated the train to St. Petersburg and later to Moscow as overall equivalent to those in Europe, but less luxurious compared to major American trains and lacking water and towels. He criticized the train from Moscow to Samara for its lack of comfort and slow speed. He also saw Russian women who were employed as supervisors of rail crossings and remarked that compared to women both in Russia and Europe, "American women hardly appreciate what a blessing they enjoy, and how thankful they should be to call America their home."²⁷⁵ His general conclusion reads:

Traveling in Russia cannot be called a luxury, although it is equal to that of the rest of the continent. If Mr. Pullman would establish a branch of his great system in Russia he would deserve unstinted thanks from chance American travelers, though his stockholders might grumble, for dividends would be as rare as those of the Keely Motor Company have been and are likely to be.²⁷⁶

Thus, Blankenburg used his travel experience to boost his patriotism, evaluating it through the triangulation with Europe. Yet his comment on American women certainly disregards the appalling

²⁷³ Alexandr Cherkasov and Michal Smigel, "Public Education in the Russian Empire During the Last Third of the Nineteenth Century: Parish Schools," *European Journal of Contemporary Education* 18, no. 4 (2016): 418–29, <https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2016.18.418>; Vladimir Fedorov, *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' i gosudarstvo. Sinodal'nyy period. 1700–1917* [The Russian Orthodox Church and the state. Synodal period. 1700–1917] (Moscow: Russkaya panorama, 2003), 120–24; Eduard Dneprov, *Rossiyskoye obrazovaniye v XIX – nachale XX veka* [Russian education in the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries], vol. 1, *Politicheskaya istoriya rossiyskogo obrazovaniya* [The political history of Russian education] (Moscow: Marios, 2011), 507–23.

²⁷⁴ Sergey Firsov, *Russkaya Tserkov' nakanune peremen (konets 1890-kh–1918 gg.)* [The Russian church on the eve of change (late 1890s – 1918)] (Moscow: Kruglyy stol po religioznomu obrazovaniyu i diakonii, 2002), 23–33.

²⁷⁵ Blankenburg, "Philadelphians in Russia," 4.

²⁷⁶ Rudolph Blankenburg, "Blankenburg in St. Petersburg," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 31, 1892, 9.

working conditions of many working-class women employed in industries during the Gilded Age, the realities of sex segregation, and the particular defenselessness of African American women in the industrialization era.

Reeves made only passing remarks on travel conditions. Edgar, in contrast, mocked western stereotypes about suspicious Russian border guards, rough luggage checks on the Russian border, and the supposedly low quality of train travel. He enjoyed Russian trains and claimed in the book that “the American Pullman sleeping-car is not the ideal traveler’s resting-place” and that European sleepers were more comfortable and offered extra privacy.²⁷⁷ He also made fun of Murray’s *Handbook for Travellers* (the British travel guide discussed in chapter 1) and its remarks about Russia being a country of endless snow with bears and wolves wandering in the vicinity of its major towns.²⁷⁸ Edgar noted ironically that the authors of such guides would also circulate the image of “grizzlies, Indians, and cowboys which the English traveler expects to find in the forests which lie about the confines of New York and Chicago.”²⁷⁹ Thus, Edgar, like Blankenburg, evaluated Russian travel through the lens of Europe and again hinted at his dislike of Britain.

All the travelers commented on the cities they visited. Blankenburg made only brief comments about St. Petersburg and Moscow. When he arrived in Saratov, he described it as an important shipping point, but he wrote the following about the local population:

The substantial middle classes, with their broad and progressive ideas, one finds in all our American cities, are rarely met with here. This probably accounts in a large measure for the ignorance, shiftlessness and inexplicable indifference to their fate that is depicted on the faces of the low and lowest classes. The rich are indifferent to the lot of their poor fellows; the powerful know that such power as they wield can be maintained only by keeping the masses as near down to the brute as they dare.²⁸⁰

With this remark, Blankenburg comes closer to Edgar in his thoughts about the absence of the middle class in Russia and also reflects the lack of urban development in provincial Russian towns. Yet in the age of rapid urbanization and before urban reforms of the Progressive Era many American cities became spaces that also had a considerable gap in wealth and a striking difference between the living conditions of the rich and the poor.

Reeves found both Moscow and St. Petersburg beautiful and evaluated the former capital of Russia as equal in wealth and architecture to any other Western European capital (though

²⁷⁷ Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 18, 21.

²⁷⁸ Edgar was referring to the fourth edition of the guide, which was published in 1888.

²⁷⁹ Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 22.

²⁸⁰ Rudolph Blankenburg, “Down the Volga in a Great Sleigh,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 9, 1892, 2.

sometimes naming it Petrograd, the name adopted after the beginning of the First World War), also looking at Russia through U.S.–Europe–Russia triangulation. At the same time, he was not so impressed by local churches and Sunday schools in Riga and believed that in this type of church-based education Russia did not advance beyond the first Sunday school in America.²⁸¹

In contrast to Reeves, Edgar did not see St. Petersburg as “distinctively Russian” and in the book called it an “artificial” capital compared to Moscow, which he saw in closer proximity to the common people and which was the “heart of Russian civilization and religion.” Moscow impressed him with colorful churches and houses and reminded him of the Arabian Nights, with “its streets and lanes twin with people whose language, dress and habits of life are startling and strange to western minds.”²⁸² With such thoughts, he again revealed seeing Russia as distant both from the U.S. and Europe, repeating a trope about Moscow already established by earlier travelers. He described Libau as a thriving and clean small town, but he attributed its prosperity to German rather than Russian influence. This description further underlined his belief that only Western cities were truly developed, and that ethnic Russians could not match them, rejecting St. Petersburg as a counterargument. In sum, all three relief officials evaluated Russian cities and travel by looking at them through the lens of not only American but also European standards.

Inspection of the Famine Areas

All three commissioners described the villages that they visited. Blankenburg crossed the Volga into Samara province, one of the central areas of the calamity, and visited villages populated mostly by Volga Germans, meeting with local Protestant and Catholic pastors and village elders on the way. Edgar and Reeves inspected the famished areas independently of one another, exploring Tula province in the company of Russian relief agents from the Bobrinskiy family, who were surveying the villages and noting all problems and concerns. It is important to note that both Edgar and Blankenburg, as people who reported to the respective newspapers, affirmed in their very first reports that the famine in Russia was a reality, with Blankenburg urging his readers to send more help. With that, they sought to act as final authorities on the subject and cancel any remaining doubts related to the famine’s existence.²⁸³

Entering the first village of Kasitzkaya, Blankenburg painted a depressing picture:

²⁸¹ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 19–20.

²⁸² Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 35.

²⁸³ Edgar, “News from Russia,” 707; “Reception of the Indiana,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 1892, 2.

The drive through the village we shall never forget. Is it possible that human beings can be housed in such wretched abodes as we see around us? Can nothing be done to ameliorate the fate of those who are flesh as we are? We would not pen cattle in America as human beings are penned here – squalid, low shanties of one story, many with one pane of glass to give light, the roofs covered with straw, when there is any cover at all; a large number have been bared; the straw has been used for fuel or feed for cattle. ... The jingling of our bells does not arouse the populace to come to the doors to see what is transpiring. They have lost all ambition – all life.²⁸⁴

The situation was worse in those settlements that were distant from major infrastructure and lines of communication, and that was correct.²⁸⁵ Only in the Mennonite village of Hahnsan did he see “a cheering oasis” where local Mennonites, reminding him of Quakers, did well and, adhering to a self-sufficient lifestyle, refused help. While he saw no deaths directly from starvation, he noticed that without soup kitchens the death rate would have become much higher, while infections in some of the villages contributed to the suffering. He remarked that the major concern for the population was the future and the need to save cattle and buy seeds to grow the next year’s harvest. Addressing American donors and his readers, he claimed (and Reeves later reprinted this in his account) that “you would have surely felt that you never gave money that was more highly appreciated and did more good to its recipients.”²⁸⁶ On the whole, he described horrific conditions in villages and used it to justify the need for relief and called for sympathy for their inhabitants.

Edgar penned descriptions of a number of villages and local relief institutions such as soup kitchens and shelters for children. In his view, the condition of the villages ranged from satisfactory to destitute, worsened by poverty, the lack of cattle, and the outbreak of diseases. He was surprised by the overall good condition of people in some villages, even if they suffered considerably during the winter. Similarly to Blankenburg, he believed that the major problem at this point was not starvation but other consequences of the famine, such as typhus and the fall of cattle; and that the intensity of the distress depended heavily on the density of railways as well as the competence of local officials.²⁸⁷ He urged all parties involved to keep up the relief at least until late summer, predicting that otherwise hunger would return next year. In some cases, he showed sympathy for the peasants and donated money for their needs. Yet in the village of Sophianka he described the layout and poor insides of the peasant’s house as follows:

²⁸⁴ Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 37–38.

²⁸⁵ In fact, Russia did face a railway crisis, as the lines to the famine-hit provinces became congested by trains moving foodstuffs bought primarily in the Caucasus that saw abundant harvests that year. The fact of absence of any centralized management and frequent incompetence of the local railroad officials forced the Czar to send a special envoy to the Caucasus with extraordinary powers, see: Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, chap. 6.

²⁸⁶ Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 39; Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 134.

²⁸⁷ William Edgar, “Return to Moscow,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, August 12, 1892, 225.

It seems incredible that in this century people can be found who live, contented and happy, in huts compared to which the lowliest cabin in an American poor district is palatial. After entering a peasant's *izba*, one can more readily understand how its occupants can exist on a pound of black bread per day and be comfortable.²⁸⁸

Such a comment looks similar to that of Blankenburg and also hints at the superiority of American living standards. Reeves paid less attention to the villages, briefly noting poverty in all places that he had visited and complaining about the lack of modern roads and infrastructure. He simply reprinted extracts from Blankenburg's description of the village of Kasitzkaya at the end of his book and was similarly concerned about the next year's harvest.²⁸⁹ To sum up, the comments by commissioners show compassion for peasants, their suffering, and their future. However, they simultaneously designated the situation they saw as clearly inferior to American farm life.

The Causes of Famine

Unique to these three accounts is the attempt to identify the reasons behind the famine, similar to many contemporary Russian intellectuals and newspapers. Reeves and Edgar both claimed that the famine had to do with the condition of the average peasant rather than just drought or extreme weather. They identified some secondary causes, including the lack of modern agricultural equipment, ignorance about modern tilling methods, and the excessive export of Russian foodstuffs. Edgar criticized the inefficiency of officials, who, governing from far away St. Petersburg, downplayed the emergence of the crisis and its significance. He saw other causes in the increase of the rural population, which made it harder for village communities to sustain themselves, and the naiveté of peasants in financial affairs that made them victims of moneylenders and richer peasants. But his major conclusion was revealed in the article to *The Forum*:

The present famine, wide-spread and terrible in its effects, is an ominous object-lesson, proving beyond doubt that the theory of communal land-ownership will not bear the test of practical experience.²⁹⁰

Thus, Edgar put the primary fault on the commune system as an obsolete and ineffective type of land ownership. Reeves also hoped that, just like in Western Europe previously, the commune "will vanish like mist before the morning sun."²⁹¹ He pointed out the lack of local manufacturing and shops for basic commodities in most villages and argued that crop failure was worsened by

²⁸⁸ William Edgar, "Among the Peasants," *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, July 15, 1892, 81.

²⁸⁹ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 66.

²⁹⁰ William Edgar, "Russia's Land System: The Cause of the Famine," *Forum* 13 (July 1892): 576.

²⁹¹ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 41.

deforestation, leading to the decline of the land's fertility. In his mind, in terms of forestation and the construction of irrigation for agriculture, the U.S. could be a worthy example for Russia. He thus displayed pride in the agricultural and conservation policies during the Progressive Era in retrospect. His conclusion ended as follows:

Thus it may be seen that the sad condition of these people is not to be reckoned solely as the result of a single year's calamity but rather as the outcome of a combination of evils of which ignorance is the chief, a culmination of long-existing, unfortunate conditions connected with the necessarily defective political economy of their country, with intoxication and with their religion, a curious blending of Paganism and Christianity.²⁹²

With this, he identified peasant lifestyle as the major problem, again hinting at the negative impact of the Orthodox Church on the mind of the peasantry as well as their communal life and alcohol addiction.

Unlike Reeves and Edgar, Blankenburg offered the least detailed analysis of the causes of the crisis. He argued that at least partially the unusually dry weather was to blame. He contrasted the relatively good conditions of the Mennonite village of Hahnsan with others and claimed that the reason for this was that the Mennonites owned the land individually and not communally, while another major problem for Russian agriculture was the absence of fertilizers, which the peasantry was reluctant to use, and forest depletion. He noted that the latter problem existed in the U.S. too, showing his concern about natural resources at home. Blankenburg also put the primary fault on the overall ignorance of the peasantry, citing Leo Tolstoy's thoughts that "as long as the Russian peasants are either unwilling to learn, or are not permitted to adopt a sounder policy of cultivation and agriculture the danger of a recurrence of famine will exist."²⁹³

Thus, the commissioners saw the background of this crisis as a combination of multiple factors. Yet none of the authors, unlike some intellectuals of the age, connected famine with the autocracy, instead putting the fault on the peasants themselves, including their economic conditions and lifestyle. Yet their claims were clearly simplified, as not only did they perceive it through the lens of supposed national character but failed to write about regional and local factors that led to the calamity.

²⁹² Reeves, 42–43.

²⁹³ Rudolph Blankenburg, "A Talk with Tolstoi," *Philadelphia Times*, April 25, 1892, 3.

Russia at the Time of Famine

Along with describing the American relief operation, the commissioners also commented on the Russian relief effort. Edgar saw Moscow as a fortress in the battle against hunger, compared to St. Petersburg, which was far away and could barely help the relief (although in reality that is where most instructions and funds actually came from). He praised the Russians of all non-peasant estates who sacrificed their wealth, health, and even their lives in the struggle to help the peasantry. He was particularly impressed with the efforts of the nobility and the work done by Russian women, including Sophia Bobrinskaya, who supervised a hospital in Bogoroditsk with her brother. For Edgar, Bobrinskaya, a noblewoman who became a professional doctor, “was of the material whereof saints and martyrs are made.”²⁹⁴ He was altogether fairer to the role of the clergy than the other two authors when he described the benevolent work done by a local village priest.²⁹⁵

Reeves, immediately after his thoughts on the origins of the famine, wrote:

Happily, their great ruler is alive to a sense of his serious responsibilities; the higher classes are active in support of his beneficent measures for their relief, and the people of our favoured land have thrown a cheery light upon the dark picture that the world may see it and arise to lift up their fallen brothers and sisters.²⁹⁶

Thus, while praising the state and the nobility, he again applauded the relief/”light” coming from the U.S. to help the “dark” famine-afflicted Russia, with the religious context present. Blankenburg was surprised to find that Russian nobles significantly contributed to the relief and was impressed with their philanthropy. He hoped that the famine provided the nobility a good opportunity and experience to act for the sake of other social groups in the future, “instead of leading lives of uselessness and indolence, bound only to seek the pleasure of this world.”²⁹⁷ With such a remark Blankenburg echoed the American attitude to European aristocracy at the turn of the century but also changed his preconception of the Russian nobility as engaged primarily in hedonism. In the end, all three praised Russian efforts to fight famine, emphasizing the role of the state or the nobility. Nevertheless, except for Edgar the relief commissioners failed to talk about other actors of relief, including the clergy, the *zemstvo*, or city committees, even in the areas they visited. They also abstained from writing about the real problems that the government faced. As pointed out by scholars, apart from railway disorganization, these included confusion and debates between center

²⁹⁴ William Edgar, “In Hunger’s Home,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, July 29, 1892, 157; William Edgar, “The Famine in Russia,” *Review of Reviews* 5, no. 30 (June 1892): 577.

²⁹⁵ William Edgar, “Typhus-Stricken,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, July 22, 1892, 117.

²⁹⁶ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 43.

²⁹⁷ Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 22.

and regions over authority, conflicts between different *zemstvo* agents regarding purchases of foodstuffs, emergency measures that occasionally breached legality, and general dependence of the situation on the personae of local officials, to name a few.²⁹⁸

Other than the nobility, the authors wrote mostly about the peasants, who constituted the majority of the Russian population at the time, and their relations with the former. Blankenburg's thoughts on the peasants he saw were summarized as follows:

To be in close proximity to these people is anything but pleasant and how human beings can live in the atmosphere that a dozen or less of them create, seems a marvel. Their faces are a study, lack of intelligence is depicted in every feature; they stare at the passing train, do not seem to have a word to say to one another and are on the whole perhaps the most indifferent and stupid looking people I have ever seen. ... It is a reflection on morals and religion that the Church has not taken steps to elevate the poor, ignorant and superstitious masses, at least to give them even the semblance of civilization.²⁹⁹

Blankenburg did not go beyond this comment, showing his open belief in the backwardness of the peasantry. He again criticized the Orthodox Church for its failure to "elevate" the peasants, and later concluded that only the government could do something about their education.

Reeves reprinted a paragraph from Blankenburg's account where he made a similar comment on the peasantry. Reeves reiterated already established tropes about the peasants – namely, that they were religious, generous, and loyal to the emperor, even though they often showed contempt toward local officials. While they were devoted to the Orthodox Church, they were, in his view, tolerant toward other religions. This made Reeves conclude that "the Kingdom of God is within them." But he also noted:

If a child falls into a river or brook they make no effort to save its life, believing that God has ordained that it should die in that way. This conviction not only robs them of every incentive to use their own free wills and intellectual faculties to advance themselves and their children in the scale of civilization, but it carries them into the outer darkness of a blind fatalism.³⁰⁰

Thus, Reeves, while praising the piety of the peasants, concurred with Blankenburg on their superstitious character and overall backwardness and the negative influence of the Orthodox Church upon them.

Edgar described local peasants as "contemptuous of luxuries, [...] hardy, strong and honest-looking." For him, the Russian peasant was a hard worker and good-tempered, and although he

²⁹⁸ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, chap. 9; For a detailed examination of relief work on the provincial level see: Bartley Rock, "A Province in Crisis: The Russian Famine of 1891–92 in Tambov Province" (PhD diss., University College London, 2015).

²⁹⁹ Blankenburg, "Starvation on the Volga," 4.

³⁰⁰ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 98–99.

lacked education, he was witty and loyal to the emperor. Even in grave conditions, he remained hospitable to outsiders. In cities peasants might often be seen drunk, wrote Edgar, but they generally drank more moderately than the British. He noted that they were devout and described the genuine religious enthusiasm of the people during Easter in Moscow. He also paid attention to peasant women, underlining that they looked attractive even in such tough times. Wearing long white dresses, they resembled “a lot of Millerites or Adventists, who had come out from their homes and were patiently awaiting, on the summit of the nearest elevation, the sounding of the trump which should signal the crack of doom.”³⁰¹ While he thus also made generalized comments about the peasants, there was an attempt to create a somewhat more positive image of them.

However, he later included an episode on his way back to St. Petersburg, when he allegedly rode in a train car together with John of Kronstadt, a Russian archpriest, evangelist, and philanthropist, who by the 1890s became famous in Russia for his miracles and ascetic lifestyle. Edgar witnessed that at various stops along the way people came to the window of his train compartment, desiring to get a blessing, hoping for a miracle to happen, or at least to touch John’s hand. These strange scenes made the author note that “in Russia the nineteenth century and the year 1500 hobnob with each other everywhere.”³⁰² Thus, Edgar, similarly to the other authors, evaluated the Orthodox Church negatively.

Edgar reflected on the future of the peasants after the emancipation:

If you ask the peasant [about the causes of famine], Ivan Ivanovitch, what he thinks, he simply answers: “It is the will of God.” Perhaps it is as wise an explanation anyone can make. Given 125 years of independence instead of 60, plenty of reading matter, land for themselves, modern agricultural implements, good horses, free soap, free schools, and an abundance of food, and, I doubt not, the Russian peasant would make as creditable a figure in the world as our own farmers.³⁰³

Edgar thus expressed his belief in the potential of the peasant as a productive farmer, provided that he would follow the American way of agricultural development, with emphasis on individual land ownership, education, and modern agricultural machinery. Thus, there is another parallel with Kennan’s *Siberia* regarding the projection of the American experience on Russia. And, like the

³⁰¹ Edgar, “Among the Peasants,” 81.

³⁰² Edgar, “Return to Moscow,” 225.

³⁰³ Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 36. Edgar made a mistake here related to the date of the emancipation. Considering that it took place in 1861, Edgar wrongly stated that it happened sixty (rather than thirty) years ago. In addition, in the articles the original phrase was “as creditable a figure in the world as the disciples of Sockless Simpson,” referring to Jeremiah Simpson, a Kansas farmer-turned-politician and a Populist crusader advocating single tax who served in the House of Representatives in the early 1890s, see: Edgar, “In Russia,” 896b.

other two authors, the journalist did not mention parochial schools established by the clergy (as well as libraries next to them that provided at least some of reading matter he mentioned).

Edgar had nothing but positive remarks about the nobles, claiming that they proved to be the most educated, charitable, and competent social group in fighting famine. He claimed that they were the first to respond to the peasants' suffering and call for aid, which in some cases was correct, as the Marshals of nobility (nobles elected within the local noble community to manage its affairs) organized efficient campaigns before the administration fully joined in.³⁰⁴

In the American *Review of Reviews*, he advised that the local officials should be replaced by the "old and natural lord" who knows the peasants much better than the alien officialdom.³⁰⁵ With that, he showed his lack of knowledge about the local administration since the land captains (*zemskiy nachal'nik*), officials introduced in 1889, just before the famine, and essentially exercising administrative and certain judicial power over local peasant communities, were recruited primarily from the nobility. It was they who carried out day-to-day interactions with the peasants during the famine and were often the connecting link between state and private help.³⁰⁶ Yet Edgar gave another, even more suggestive hint when in *The Forum* article he compared the way many Russian peasants asked their former owners for help when the famine began as similar to the way many African Americans in Southern states looked for their "marster [sic] and missus" in time of need. He concluded on the future of noble-peasant relations in Russia as follows:

The return of the landed proprietor to his estate and, to some extent at least, to his former responsibilities, the faithful, earnest, self-sacrificing work he and his family are now doing, make the only bright spot in an overcast sky. That, having once returned to look after his former dependents, he may never leave them or quite neglect them, is the hope of all who are true well-wishers of Russia and her peasants.³⁰⁷

With such remarks and his overall conclusion that the famine proved to be "a blessing in disguise" since the nobles and peasants got closer to each other, Edgar openly reproduced the ideas of the Lost Cause with its idealization of the relations between former slaves and their owners. The other two commissioners hinted at similar thoughts. Blankenburg and Reeves did not draw parallels between Russian peasants and former slaves in America. But Blankenburg believed that paternal policy on behalf of the nobles towards the peasants would benefit the empire, so that "intelligence might soon take the place of ignorance, comparative wealth that of squalor and want, hope that of

³⁰⁴ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, 103.

³⁰⁵ William Edgar, "Russia's Conflict with Hunger," *Review of Reviews (American Edition)* 5, no. 30 (July 1892): 695.

³⁰⁶ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, 153.

³⁰⁷ Edgar, "Russia's Land System: The Cause of the Famine," 581.

despair, happiness that of misery.”³⁰⁸ Reeves wrote of the nobles as “the peers of their fellow-Christians in any land” and thought that they strove “to maintain a kind, helpful paternal relation toward the peasant class, irrespective of their religious affiliations.”³⁰⁹ On the whole, all three authors displayed a similar approach to the peasants, making general comments on their lifestyle and writing of them as overall backward and in need of paternalism either from the government or the nobility.

Reeves wrote about the Russian exile system and abuse toward the Jewish population, while neither Edgar nor Blankenburg wrote on any of these subjects. Based on the press articles from both the early 1890s and the First World War, Reeves discussed these subjects extensively. His overall thoughts are summed up in this quote:

I wonder no longer that, for seditious utterances or privy conspiracy, thousands have been banished to Siberia in order that peace may be insured to the millions; I only wonder that so much sentiment and sympathy have been lavished in our land upon the said political exiles, with none whatever for the true man at the helm, at that time Alexander III, who, I believe, would have sacrificed his life any day for the safety of the great Ship of State and the happiness of his subjects.³¹⁰

This comment symbolized his clear pro-autocracy attitude two decades after the famine, and his refusal to accept Kennan’s conclusions on political exiles. He even included a small poem made by himself in honor of the Russian monarch and additionally claimed that many faults could be found in penal codes and prisons in the U.S. as well as his country’s state and municipal politics, a fairly balanced comment that once again referenced Progressive reforms at home when writing about Russia. To make his claim regarding the treatment of Jews, Reeves quoted from an 1893 article from the *Century* by Pierre Botkin, who was then a member of the Russian diplomatic staff in Washington, D.C. His article called out Kennan openly and was intended to promote his government’s position on the exile system and the treatment of Jews in Russia in the early 1890s.³¹¹ Reeves also reprinted an article from the *Public Ledger* of 1916 that reported that a bill granting equal rights to Jews might be passed in the Russian State Duma soon. Apparently, that article was also sensationalist, as nothing in the conditions of Russian Jews during the First World War suggested signs of their enfranchisement. The Jews living in the Pale of Settlement suffered from rising suspicions of spy activities on behalf of the state and locals. They often had to leave their

³⁰⁸ Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 61.

³⁰⁹ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 82.

³¹⁰ Reeves, 35.

³¹¹ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 218–19.

residence near the frontline or were simply expelled to the provinces of the interior.³¹² Nevertheless, Reeves personally found no abuse toward Jews during his visit to Russia and believed that Americans had their own issues in the treatment of Chinese and African Americans. However, he also added a condescending comment, stating that “the Jew in Russia is not to be understood as identical with the worthy examples of that race who have become good citizens among us.”³¹³ On the whole, Reeves attempted to improve the image of the Russian autocracy at the time of the war by writing about past events. He combined articles written two decades after the famine and reminders of similar problems at home as well as revealed his own anti-Semitic sentiments (similarly to Edgar in his early *Northwestern Miller* articles).

The American relief officials also had unique interactions with prominent Russians. Before leaving Russia, Edgar was granted an audience in St. Petersburg with heir Nicholas. Edgar described him as a young but modest, simple-looking and attractive man who was not influenced by the strict court manners, so it was hard to believe that soon he would become the absolute ruler of a huge country and millions of subjects. Nicholas left a good impression on the departing Edgar, and his articles written after the end of his mission outlined that even the famine could not increase the chance of revolutionaries to stage a successful uprising among the peasants, since “the government of the Tzar to them seems part of the workings of Nature and the law of God.”³¹⁴ Although his claims proved to be true, and there were no major peasant revolts during the famine, his argumentation once again suggests his belief in the overall backwardness of the peasants and in the deep but also degenerating influence of religion (or, rather the “wrong type” of religion, Orthodoxy) on their character.

Reeves and Blankenburg had a meeting with Leo Tolstoy independently of one another. Blankenburg met with him and his family in Moscow on his way back. Even before the meeting, he showed admiration for his works, philosophy, as well as his personal relief efforts, and denied the rumors in the foreign press that Tolstoy was harassed by the Russian government. Upon meeting him, Blankenburg was surprised to see how much Tolstoy knew about America and its major writers, including contemporary ones. In the conversation the two, as Blankenburg reported, agreed that a major problem in the U.S., Russia, and elsewhere was the land ownership by corporations as opposed to actual settlers who plow it. With such a remark Blankenburg revealed

³¹² Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. 3, 1914 to 2008 (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 6–8.

³¹³ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 78.

³¹⁴ Edgar, “The Famine in Russia,” 577; Edgar, “Russia’s Conflict with Hunger,” 698.

his concerns about the power of the corporations at home, similarly to Reeves reflecting on the contemporary condition of his country. He and Tolstoy also talked about the famine and the formation of the Philadelphia Russian Famine Committee, while Blankenburg assured him that Tolstoy would be welcomed in America at any point in time. As part of the meeting with Tolstoy's family, Blankenburg reported:

No one could speak more highly and with greater admiration of Emperor Alexander III than Mrs. Tolstoi. She sees in him a man of the best impulses, of warm heart and noble character, who is striving to do the best for his people and this opinion is shared by nearly all those I have met in Russia. It is sad to think in this connection that a ruler like the Emperor rarely gets credit for the good he does.³¹⁵

With this, he essentially joined Reeves and Edgar in discarding any criticism of the monarchy, primarily because he believed that this form of government could improve the life and education of the peasantry.

Reeves visited Tolstoy in his estate Begitchevka, Ryazan province, which was the writer's relief headquarters. He described Tolstoy coming to meet him on a pony looking like Yankee Doodle and sitting on it "with all the dignity of a First Regiment trooper."³¹⁶ The two conversed about the condition of peasants, Christianity, and Tolstoy's draft of the philosophical pamphlet *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (mentioned earlier).³¹⁷ Reeves shared the views of the Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf, who visited Tolstoy back in 1894 and published his *My Visit to Tolstoy: Five Discourses* in 1911. Though Krauskopf's account was critical of Russian domestic affairs and the treatment of Jews, Reeves ignored those parts and instead reprinted Krauskopf's positive impressions during his meeting with Tolstoy and his conclusion that "the religion of Russia of the future will be largely that which Tolstoy lived and taught, and it will be the religion of a large part of the rest of the world."³¹⁸ It seems that Reeves was interested primarily in religious subjects and thought of Tolstoy's philosophy as praiseworthy, while his refusal to include Krauskopf's criticism is also revealing. In sum, for the three Americans, their meetings with prominent people in Russia served to contribute to the positive evaluation of the Russian autocracy, in striking contrast to their comments on the peasantry that Tolstoy himself, in his late years, would probably not have approved.

³¹⁵ Blankenburg, "A Talk with Tolstoi," 3.

³¹⁶ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 68.

³¹⁷ Reeves must have been influenced by this pamphlet, when earlier regarding the religious zeal and tolerance of the peasants he claimed that "the Kingdom of God is within them." See chap. 2, n. 192.

³¹⁸ Joseph Krauskopf, *"My Visit to Tolstoy: Five Discourses"* (Philadelphia: Temple Kenseth Israel, 1911), 50; Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 89.

Russian Perceptions of America

All three commissioners recorded minor but noteworthy comments on Russian views of America. Reeves described how one of the peasants found out with surprise that he had had the same hat as the author and noted that he must have expected an American to come with at least a gilded piece of clothing. Edgar, while staying in Moscow before his trip to inspect famished areas, was introduced to many people, some outright cranks and con men, and described their thoughts about the U.S. as follows:

The ignorant in Russia have queer ideas regarding America. The general impression prevails among the common folk, such as *drosky* drivers, waiters and *dvorniks*, that a country rich enough to send ship-loads of flour to the hungry must be rolling in wealth. Russians – orthodox ones, at least – do not emigrate very much. Otherwise, we might expect to receive accessions to our population from them, based on the assumption that America is a country flowing with milk and honey.³¹⁹

Blankenburg was constantly asked about the work of the Philadelphia Committee and how it managed to carry out such a grand relief operation successfully. He noted that his listeners often exclaimed that it “can be only done in America!” and later concluded that the success of the relief operation made him proud to be an American citizen.³²⁰ Together with remarks about the Russian attitude to relief shown earlier, these thoughts reveal that the three authors described genuine Russian interest in America and their sympathies towards Americans, as in *Tent Life*. But whereas Kennan pointed out in *Siberia* that Russian exiles wanted to emulate American democracy, the commissioners presented American wealth and economic power as the things ordinary Russians were most attracted to.

Russia and the United States in the Future

Regardless of their thoughts on Russia’s present, all three officials shared faith in the successful development of the empire in the future and the continuation of what they saw as friendly relations between Russia and America. The cheerful reaction to his companions’ speeches during the Russian-American banquet made Blankenburg write that “the friendly feeling between the two countries, so far apart in many ways and yet so near in others, may endure for all time seemed to be the prevailing sentiment of all those who were present.”³²¹ He believed that Russia could become

³¹⁹ William Edgar, “A Noble Ship,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, June 17, 1892, 931.

³²⁰ Blankenburg, “A Talk with Tolstoi,” 3.

³²¹ Blankenburg, “Starvation on the Volga,” 4.

“one of the wealthiest nations of the world” as soon as it would build an extensive railroad system like in the U.S. and “give their peasants education and light.”³²² Thus, Blankenburg offered a formula for successful Russian development that paralleled the American image of progress, with emphasis on the role of education (in a way to counter what he believed to be the harmful influence of the Orthodox Church) and railways. Edgar finished his book account by urging his readers to visualize the courageous struggle of Russians against the famine, their history, the endurance and tolerance of the Russian people, and finally invited them to speculate what Russia “will give to civilization and progress when the questions which vex her now shall be settled.” His answer was connected to Siberia and the use of its natural resources, and he noted the following:

When her Trans-Siberian railway shall bring her in closer touch with America, what mutual gains to both countries must follow. The Republic and the Empire – a strange friendship, and yet one which will redound to the advantage of both.³²³

He thus invited Americans to imagine Siberia’s potential now that a major railway was under construction and to participate in the region’s development, displaying an open “imperial view.” Considering that the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway began at the time of the famine in 1891, his comment bears a resemblance to Kennan’s emphasis on resources in *Siberia* and foreshadowed the thoughts of Americans who would later travel on this railway.³²⁴

Reeves claimed that the two countries, despite being far away, had always enjoyed good relations and wrote that “Russia loves America and America loves Russia, and we say to her, ‘Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces.’”³²⁵ It is visible that he was influenced by the publications on Russia during the First World War, and in the supplement, he included a number of wartime articles from the American press, excerpts from brochures on Russian resources, economy, and organization during the war, as well as from the book *Russia of To-day* (1915) by Scottish travel writer John Foster Fraser. Most of these remarks combine to produce a positive image of Russia and its considerable prospects for economic development after the war. With that Reeves was similar to Edgar in urging Americans to think of the empire’s economic potential. Reeves was also impressed by the wartime prohibition law in Russia. He quoted several articles on its success and concluded that “no greater blessing has ever been conferred upon Russia than that

³²² Blankenburg, *Philadelphia and the Russian Famine*, 50.

³²³ Edgar, *The Russian Famine*, 64.

³²⁴ See chap. 2, n. 151; chap. 5, n. 539–540.

³²⁵ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 26.

heavenward march of the Czar abolishing vodka from his realm.³²⁶ Again reflecting the Progressive Era at home, this time the prohibition efforts, he emphasized the following:

They [the Russians] are struggling with the great civil and social problems of the day in an earnest spirit of broad Christian charity. If their progress appears to some to be dreadfully slow in comparison with our own, we have but to remember the difference in our forms of government and the dangers involved in sudden, radical political changes, even when those changes are in the line of great reforms.³²⁷

Thus, in his book he approved the Russian pace of development, even though it was slower than in America. Yet in the 1890s, when he was involved in lecturing on the subject at home after the end of his mission, he gave a different take on Russian development. In a lecture for the Presbyterian Alliance in Wilmington, Delaware, apart from repeating, like Edgar and Blankenburg, that the famine was not exaggerated and underlining that he enjoyed his stay in Russia, he went as far as preaching that the mass of Russian peasants would do well to “acknowledge of the Shorter Westminster catechism [sic].”³²⁸ He thus suggested to his American listeners the idea of total conversion of Russians from Orthodoxy to Protestantism for their own good and sounded like many American missionaries working abroad in that era. Additionally, in his final post-printing remarks, he commented on the fall of the Russian monarchy in March 1917. This means that he finished writing his travel account at least by late 1916, when the outcome of the war was still not clear, and before the U.S. entered it. Reeves saw the March Revolution as a “triumph of democracy over aristocracy, of republicanism over a Kingdom with so little sacrifice of human life” and one of the greatest events in contemporary history.³²⁹ With such final remarks he contradicted his arguments about the inadvisability of radical political changes cited earlier and his praising comments about the autocracy throughout the whole account. In general, he updated his book, often writing about Russia in the 1890s through the lens of already passed Progressive reforms and the wartime period.

Visual Materials

While Blankenburg’s account does not contain any photos or images, Edgar and Reeves provided a diverse collection of visual content. In most of his articles Edgar included either photos or drawn sketches of all sizes. While some photos in the articles show the *Missouri* and the unloading of its cargo on the trains as well as the portraits of the Imperial family, including Alexander III, his wife,

³²⁶ Reeves, 110.

³²⁷ Reeves, 82.

³²⁸ “Mr. Reeves on Russia,” *Morning News (Wilmington, DE)*, September 21, 1982, 1.

³²⁹ Reeves, *Russia Then and Now*, 179.

and the young heir Nicholas, in the book Edgar added numerous portraits of Americans who helped with the relief, American diplomatic personnel in Russia, as well as Russian representatives, in addition to a few new sketches. The articles included views of Moscow and the exterior of villages, displaying the impact of famine on their condition (figure 10). His sketches, whether in articles or in the book, focused on peasants, their dress, houses, and pictures of everyday life (figure 11). He was also the only one to include a picture of a food stamp ticket given to the famished and the only one to show the picture of “Hunger Bread” (figure 12).



Figure 10. “Russian Peasant’s Dwelling,” in William Edgar, “News from Russia,” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, May 6, 1892, 680a.



Figure 11. “Interior of a Peasant’s Home,” in William Edgar, *The Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892: Some Particulars of the Relief Sent to the Destitute Peasants by the Millers of America in the Steamship Missouri; a Brief History of the Movement, a Description of the Relief Commission’s Visit to Russia, and a List of Subscribers to the Fund* (Minneapolis: Millers and Manufacturers Insurance, 1893), 50.



Figure 12. “Hunger Bread,” in William Edgar, “Typhus-Stricken.” *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, July 22, 1892, 117. (The caption adds: “From photographs of samples collected by the author.”)

Reeves included only photos and lithographs, around twenty-five in total. Some of them were not his own but taken from Underwood & Underwood, a major producer of photos and stereographs of the time, as well as from Fraser’s *The Russia of To-Day*, dated from the wartime period. Most of the visual material is full-page and printed separately from the text, but in most cases it follows the narrative. Remarkably, the front of his book includes a picture of Russian and American flags united under an emblem similar to the Great Seal and the words “Brotherly Love” written on top, once again demonstrating the influence of religion on the author’s perceptions (figure 13). His photos depict the Imperial family, the arrival of the *Conemaugh*, a group photo of Russian and American relief officials, the views of St. Petersburg, Moscow, as well as a church in Riga. Some focus on the peasants, with primarily group portraits rather than the photos of villages or general pictures of peasant life included by Edgar (figure 14). Extra photos include the portrait of Leo Tolstoy, a letter from him received later, and the award that Reeves got from the Russian government for his help. He also published pictures of Russian handicrafts promoted in the U.S. during the war, and, remarkably, a portrait of the Patriarch Filaret Romanov, who co-ruled with his son, the first Czar of the Romanov dynasty, Mikhail (1613–1645). He included a short biography and a list of Filaret’s actions, casting him in a positive light. However, Reeves made a mistake in dating the Time of Troubles from 1605 to 1682 (in reality – from 1598 to 1613).



Figure 13. The Cover of Reeves' Account.



Figure 14. "A Happy Peasant Family," in Francis Reeves, *Russia Then and Now, 1892-1917: My Mission to Russia During the Famine of 1891-1892 with Data Bearing Upon Russia of Today* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917), 58.

On the whole, it seems that both authors wanted to accentuate friendly Russian-American relations and their personal compassion for the calamity of the peasantry. The visual materials provided depicted a human side of the famine for the readers at home, yet they contrast with the written conclusions about the peasants made by the two authors.

Conclusion

The American relief operation in Russia, just at the time of the publication of *Siberia* and in spite of the debates over the Russian autocracy and its policies, manifested a sincere compassion of individual Americans for the famine-afflicted Russians. As the gospel-like writing style of Reeves demonstrates, for some of them it had a clear religious significance, and the help was interpreted as a missionary undertaking. The three relief officials discussed in this chapter relied on their

experiences of Russia's internal crisis to produce travel accounts that urged the American public to reevaluate the image of Russia shortly after Kennan's exposé. While Blankenburg and Edgar wrote their accounts soon after their trips, Reeves offered his take on Russia at the time of the First World War. The latter often depicted Russia in the early 1890s against the backdrop of the Progressive reforms at home and blended famine and contemporary events together. This type of commentary contrasts with Kennan in his 1910 edition of *Tent Life*, which still described Russia within the framework of the 1860s and did not use the then contemporary articles in the descriptions or arguments. Besides, Reeves copied multiple excerpts from Blankenburg's account and the wartime press, and this reduced the originality of his writings.

Despite the time difference, all three accounts got favorable reviews in the press. Edgar's book and Blankenburg's pamphlet apparently did not rise above local publicity, with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noting that Blankenburg's booklet was "well worthy of preservation," while Edgar got positive acclaim in Minnesota newspapers (the *Star Tribune* and the *Minneapolis Journal*) for graphic descriptions and visual materials.³³⁰ Reeves' account got wider attention due to its relevance amid the revolution in Russia, with the *Bridgeton Evening News* suggesting that his book would give a "more accurate and superior knowledge of the complex and diversified conditions of Russia than heretofore possessed."³³¹ None of the travel accounts were criticized in any of the periodicals, which suggests that Americans acknowledged their content as acceptable. Genuine Russian interest is confirmed by the fact that Edgar's travel account was reviewed in the newspaper *Russkoye obozreniye* (The Russian Review), which combined literary, political, and scientific articles. The review was published in 1893, and the commentator using the initials *E.G.* saw Edgar's book as filled with warm and sympathetic descriptions of Russia, and claimed that it might give a better understanding of Russia to the author's compatriots than "many works of much greater volume."³³² This might indicate that even the Russian reading public, who faced peasant life on a day-to-day basis, found the content acceptable, even its more questionable claims.

³³⁰ "Literary Notes," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 1892, 6; "New Books," *Star Tribune*, April 9, 1893, 21; "The Russian Famine," *Minneapolis Journal*, March 25, 1893, 6.

³³¹ Ernest Isitt, "Russia-Then and Now," review of *Russia Then and Now, 1892-1917*, by Francis Reeves, *Bridgeton Evening News*, July 14, 1917, 3; Another review is: "Russia Before the Revolution," review of *Russia Then and Now, 1892-1917*, by Francis Reeves, and *Russian Memories*, by Olga Novikoff. With an introduction by Stephen Graham. *New York Times*, June 10, 1917, 85.

³³² Ekaterina Gardner, "Mneniye amerikantsa o Rossii [An American's opinion about Russia]," review of *The Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892*, by William Edgar, *Russkoye obozreniye* [The Russian Review] 21, no. 6 (June 1893): 758; While the commentator wrote only the initials, most likely it was Ekaterina Gardner (1849-1936), a Russian novelist, translator, and a prominent feminist activist. In her early years she went to the U.S. to study medicine and married Daniel Gardner. Later the couple relocated back to Russia. She was involved in translating Russian literature to English and writing articles about the states and cities of the U.S. for the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary.

The relief officials' impressions on many occasions differed from *Siberia* and instead corresponded to Kennan's visions of Russians in *Tent Life*, indicating that this account was as important as Kennan's work on the exile system. The three commissioners outlined the poor conditions in the famine-hit villages to elicit sympathy and argue for the necessity of relief (using even visual materials), highlighted genuine appreciation of American help by Russians and the latter's increased sympathy for Americans. All of them were confident that the relief effort served to consolidate Russian-American friendly ties and pointed out sincere Russian interest in the country that aided them. They shifted away from Kennan's political claims and described the Russian autocracy favorably, if not apologetically. Yet on too many occasions their comments hinted at the retrograde or non-Western status of Russia, such as those about the villages, towns, and the peasants, whose lifestyle was deemed the major cause of the famine and who required paternalism from the government or the nobility. And at least Edgar and Reeves entertained the idea of American economic transformation of Russia, showcasing the "imperial view."

The texts, along with the press coverage of the famine, contain a great deal of personal biases that reveal more about the authors themselves and conditions in the U.S. at the time. Most notable among them is the superior religious outlook and the established link between Orthodoxy and the peasantry's backwardness. It made all authors misjudge the impact of the Orthodox Church on the relief in Russia, a fact especially peculiar considering that philanthropy in America itself at the turn of the century was often performed and supervised by the churches and various religious associations rather than millionaires or secular institutions.³³³ Instead, Reeves went as far as longing for spreading the superior Protestant creed in the empire. Although he (albeit with the two-decade hindsight of Progressive reforms) and Blankenburg used their experience in Russia to address domestic issues, the relief commissioners did make exclusive remarks about their compatriots. Edgar's campaign and reports best embodied the tensions in American society and the ethnic, social, and even international prejudices of the white Protestant middle class who faced social and cultural changes at home and wanted to either control or contain them.

The next major event at the turn of the century that opened an opportunity for a number of Americans to come to Russia and reevaluate the image of the country was the 1905 Revolution, to which the next chapter is dedicated.

³³³ David Hammack, "Nonprofit Organizations, Philanthropy, and Civil Society," in *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, ed. Christopher Nichols and Nancy Unger (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 215–28.

Chapter 4. At the Crossroads: American Travels in Russia during the 1905 Revolution

Introduction

Fourteen years after the famine another key event made Russia the center of American, and more broadly, world attention. Despite being overshadowed in research and debates by the 1917 revolutions, the 1905 Revolution (known in Russia as the First Russian Revolution) saw unrest that brought both the territorial integrity and the political future of the Russian Empire into question. The American public showed keen interest in the revolution, and a handful of Americans, primarily journalists, visited the country during this major upheaval. In their reports these visitors attempted to interpret the revolution and shape the image of Russia. This chapter demonstrates how two correspondents presented Russia to their readers and offered markedly different interpretation of the revolution itself.

The Russian Revolution and American Response

While the unrest in Russia, dating back as far as the economic crisis of 1900–1903, was gradually mounting throughout 1904 amid the ongoing Russo-Japanese War, the most commonly mentioned event that triggered the widespread upheaval was Bloody Sunday (22 January 1905), when a march led by clergyman Georgiy Gapon to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to submit a petition to the Czar that included both economic and political demands was fired upon by the armed forces. What followed after Bloody Sunday throughout 1905–1907 was a combination of peasant unrest, strikes and demonstrations by workers and students, instances of mutiny in the army and the navy, and activities of emerging liberal, revolutionary, and reactionary movements, aggravated by ethnic-national conflicts on the peripheries (primarily in the Caucasus, the Baltic provinces, and Poland). The introduction of a consultative (not law-making) State Duma by the laws of 19 August 1905 failed to suppress the unrest and provoked further demands for civil rights and a fully functional parliament. The discontent culminated in the general strike in October and resulted in the October Manifesto (30 October 1905). The Manifesto outlined the granting of major civil rights and the creation of the State Duma as a fully-fledged legislative institution. Sergey Witte, who devised the framework of the Manifesto and convinced Nicholas II to adopt it, became the first head of the unified government (The Council of Ministers). However, the Manifesto did not appeal to everyone, and radical revolutionary demands gained ground by the end of the year. The revolutionaries staged an armed uprising in Moscow in December 1905, but it was eventually

defeated by the military. Meanwhile, the supporters of the old order denounced attempts to curtail the monarch's powers. They initiated activities in the name of defending the autocracy, both peaceful and resulting in violence against those suspected of revolutionary action and against Jews in a series of pogroms throughout late 1905 and 1906. While increasingly using force to quell the turmoil, the tsarist government introduced the two-chamber parliament (the State Duma and the State Council) and revised the Fundamental State Laws in February–April 1906. After the codification of the reforms, various political parties participated in the elections in the first and the second State Dumas based on the curiae system, amidst continuous unrest. Consisting primarily of either liberal Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) or those further to the left, both Dumas proved to be irreconcilable with the government and among themselves and were dissolved by the Czar. In the interim period between the two Dumas the new prime minister, Petr Stolypin, outlined a program of reforms to be passed (including the transformation of the local court, the *zemstvo*, district governments, the promotion of education, etc.). and initiated a major agrarian reform in October–November 1906 that marked the conversion of the peasant communal land tenure into independent landholdings and the turn towards fully-fledged state promotion of peasant migration to peripheral regions, including Siberia and Central Asia. Stolypin also established court-martials, which were given extraordinary powers to swiftly prosecute people caught in the act of grave crimes and punish them severely (up to death). The failure to find common ground between the members of the two Dumas and the government resulted in the unlawful changing of the election law on 16 June 1907 by Nicholas II, which considerably limited the number of voters for the future, third Duma. As a result, it became much more conservative, comprised primarily of the center-right Octobrist Party and those further to the right. This date is usually considered to be the end of the revolution, as the unrest eventually declined.

Nearly all social groups were involved in the unrest and showed flexibility in their support for both the pro- and anti-government camps throughout the revolutionary period.³³⁴ The revolution showed much complexity and ambiguity, with inconsistency and violence by both the government and its supporters and the opposing movements.³³⁵ Some recent research even questions whether

³³⁴ Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, vol. 1, *Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 7.

³³⁵ Howard Mehlinger and John Thompson, *Count Witte and the Tsarist Government in the 1905 Revolution*, Indiana University International Studies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972), 14; Sidney Harcave, *First Blood: The Russian Revolution of 1905* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 29–34, 186.

the participants identified the whole 1905–1907 period as a revolution and presents a fresh take on its commonly accepted start and end dates.³³⁶

Scholars examining the unrest in Russia during this period focus on its causes, the actions of the government and opposition movements, the behavior, demands, and forms of protest of different social groups in different regions, and its major results. They debate whether there was a leading force (such as the peasants or workers) in the opposition movements during these years or whether the unrest was largely uncoordinated and spontaneous.³³⁷ The most disputed question is related to the causes and consequences of the revolution, as it is often connected to the overall development of the Russian Empire before the First World War and ultimately to the revolutions of 1917. Some argue that the monarchy was less and less capable of governing the country successfully and that it downplayed the unrest among the peasants going back to the shortcomings of emancipation, the emergence of the working class and the liberal movement, and mounting problems in the non-Russian provinces. For them, the Russian autocracy was in a state of volatility or outright crisis on the eve of 1905. Even though it survived the revolution, it failed to learn its lessons, making the next revolutionary upheaval inevitable.³³⁸ Others contend that the revolution gave the monarchy a chance to pursue a new way of development, but even the reforms introduced, including those of Stolypin, failed to tackle major economic and social problems.³³⁹ Some add that the opposition itself, especially the liberals, failed to find a compromise with the monarchy and limit their demands, leaving no room for dialogue and cooperation in the future.³⁴⁰

Others deny that the tsarist rule was in crisis before 1905 and point out that the Russian Empire could potentially avoid further disturbances as the country entered a period of rapid

³³⁶ Kirill Solov'yev, "Revolutsiya obuslovlivayetsya 'slabost'yu zashchity, a ne siloy napadeniya' [The 'weakness of defense', not the 'strength of attack' determines a revolution]," *Russian History*, no. 4 (2016): 73–78; Sergey Novosel'skiy, "Obraz revolyutsii v rossiyskoy politicheskoy mysli 1905 g. [The image of the revolution in the Russian political thought in 1905]," *Historia Provinciae – The Journal of Regional History* 4, no. 3 (2020): 799–833, <https://doi.org/10.23859/2587-8344-2020-4-3-4>.

³³⁷ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, vol. 2, *Authority Restored* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 371–72; Teodor Shanin, *The Roots of Otherness: Russia's Turn of Century*, vol. 2, *Russia, 1905–07: Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 170; Avenir Korelin and Stanislav Tyutyukin, eds., *Pervaya revolyutsiya v Rossii: vzglyad cherez stoletie* [The first revolution in Russia: A look a century later] (Moscow: Pamyatniki istoricheskoy mysli, 2005), 544, 553.

³³⁸ Aleksandr Ostrovskiy, *Rossiia. Samoderzhaviye. Revolyutsiya* [Russia. Autocracy. Revolution] (Moscow: KMK Scientific Press, 2020), 2:530; Nefedov, *Istoriya Rossii: faktornyy analiz*, 2:580; Irina Pushkareva, "Byla li al'ternativa u «krovavogo voskresen'ya»? [Was there an alternative to Bloody Sunday?]," *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, no. 5 (2005): 23.

³³⁹ Korelin and Tyutyukin, *Pervaya revolyutsiya v Rossii*, 582–84; Boris Anan'ich, ed., *Vlast' i reformy: ot samoderzhaviya k Sovetskoy Rossii* [The authority and reforms: From autocracy to Soviet Russia] (Moscow: Olma-Press Ekslibris, 2006), 529–31.

³⁴⁰ Harcave, *First Blood*, 262; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 152.

economic and social development after the revolution.³⁴¹ In this narrative, Stolypin's reforms are presented in a positive way as a rational project in a still mostly agricultural country.³⁴² Some scholars even go as far as arguing that the major cause of both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions was the agitation of liberal intellectuals and officials who deliberately wished to destabilize the rule of the monarch and take power on the wave of discontent.³⁴³

While the United States did not participate in the revolution directly, its diplomatic activity and reports on unrest by American diplomats residing in Russia (especially Ambassador George von Lengerke Meyer) affected the call for negotiations between Russia and Japan, resulting in the Portsmouth Treaty that allowed the Czar to focus on the internal unrest. Besides, some American businesses, including the Singer and New York Air Brake factories, faced strikes and the disruption of activities, while William Stuart, the U.S. Consul in Batoum (present-day Batumi in Georgia), was assassinated in May 1906.³⁴⁴

However, it is noteworthy that shortly before the revolution many representatives of both liberal and revolutionary movements in Russia traveled to the U.S. to rally the American public against the Russian government and obtain moral, financial, and diplomatic support, similarly to Russian revolutionaries and escaped political exiles in the early 1890s following Kennan's exposé. The most prominent figures were the leader of the Cadet party, Pavel Milyukov, and Socialist Revolutionary Catherine Breshkovsky (whom Kennan met when she was in exile). Both liberals and revolutionaries, while downplaying their goals, differences, and tactics, presented themselves as champions of American (and overall Western) liberal values and depicted their countrymen as desiring freedom, a peaceful political revolution, and potentially wishing to emulate the American mode of development.³⁴⁵

Their visits to the U.S. influenced the American reception of the revolution at its early phase. Most Americans condemned Bloody Sunday and the monarchy as its perpetrator and for a considerable time imagined the revolution the way the opposition visitors described it – a solely

³⁴¹ Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 2:374-375; Aleksei Miller and Kirill Solov'yev, eds., *Rossiyskaya imperiya mezhdu reformami i revolyutsiyami, 1906–1916. Kollektivnaya monografiya* [The Russian Empire between reforms and revolutions, 1906–1916. A collective monograph] (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2021), 5–19.

³⁴² David Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861–1906: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 247–49.

³⁴³ Mironov, *Blagosostoyaniye naseleniya*, 647.

³⁴⁴ Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 499, 505–6; Stuart was a British subject, and apparently the Russian Empire paid a compensation for his death to his family, see: The United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the Annual Message of the President Transmitted to Congress December 3, 1906. Part 2.* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 1290–95.

³⁴⁵ Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 646; Jane Good, "America and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1888–1905," *Russian Review* 41, no. 3 (1982): 286–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/129602>.

political struggle, where common people, led primarily by liberals, would force the autocracy to grant civil rights and a constitution.³⁴⁶ Kennan shared this belief and, as mentioned in chapter 2, traveled to Japan to organize a propaganda campaign among the Russian POWs to transform their views on the tsarist regime. Widespread criticism of tsarism temporarily revived the “crusade” of the Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom (SAFRF). However, starting from the summer of 1905 many started questioning the increase in revolutionary acts of terror, while the October Manifesto marked a shift in opinion as it was followed by a wave of pogroms, assassinations, and the radicalization of demands symbolizing a social rather than political revolution. By the time of the December uprising in Moscow, many major American magazines sided with the forces of order in the suppression of the insurrection.³⁴⁷ On the whole, Americans became gradually disinterested or disillusioned both with the monarchy and the extreme demands of the opposition, pointing out that the Manifesto gave ground for compromise. Similarly, the reception of opposition leaders in America became less sympathetic.³⁴⁸

With the Russo-Japanese War, Kennan’s writings on Russia, and the visits of Russian liberals and revolutionaries to the U.S., it was hardly surprising that many Americans were aware of the revolutionary events. Naturally, they were interested in the impressions of those who personally traveled to Russia in 1905–1907 and reported on the situation.

Authors and Their Travelogues

This chapter focuses on two reporters. Born in New York, Kellogg Durland (1881–1911) was educated in private schools and later at Harvard College, the University of Edinburgh, and Paris.³⁴⁹ In 1901 he worked as a coal miner in Scotland and showed interest in the working conditions of his colleagues. With this experience, in 1902 he took part in the counsel for miners during the Anthracite coal strike in Pennsylvania. Three years later he made a journey to Naples and returned disguised as an immigrant in order to study immigration issues. He took part in settlement activities in Boston, as well as those of the University Settlement on the Lower East Side. There he met other so-called “gentlemen socialists” born into wealthy families and engaged in social work – William

³⁴⁶ Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 664.

³⁴⁷ Arthur Thompson and Robert Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade: America and the Russian Revolution of 1905* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 69–70.

³⁴⁸ Arthur Thompson, “The Reception of Russian Revolutionary Leaders in America, 1904–1906,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1966): 473–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2710848>; Thompson and Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade*, 141.

³⁴⁹ H.L. Motter, ed., *The International Who’s Who in the World: A Biographical Dictionary of the World’s Notable Living Men and Women* (New York: International Who’s Who, 1912), 410.

Walling, Arthur Bullard, and Ernest Poole. Durland and the other three activists were familiar with Kennan's work on the exile system and either followed the news of or took part in organizing the visits of Russian revolutionaries, including that of Breshkovsky, to the U.S. before 1905.³⁵⁰ All four visited Russia at some point during the revolution as correspondents and were engaged in organizing the trips of Russian revolutionaries, like Maxim Gorky, to America.³⁵¹ Durland traveled extensively throughout Russia in 1906 and wrote numerous articles. Several appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, *Collier's*, *The Independent*, and the *Review of Reviews*. However, most of them were published in two newspapers – the *New York Evening Post* and the *Boston Evening Transcript*. After returning home at the end of 1906, he gave lectures about his visit and made another journey to Russia in 1907. Soon he significantly extended his reporting and published a book under the title *The Red Reign: The True Story of an Adventurous Year in Russia*. However, both the articles and the book focused only on his 1906 trip. As has been explained in the introduction, he remains the only among “gentlemen socialists” still not sufficiently examined by scholars.

The other, similarly not studied, author chosen for discussion here is Stanley Washburn (1878–1950).³⁵² He was born in Minneapolis to the family of Minnesota politician and businessman William Drew Washburn, who served in Congress in the 1880s and the early 1890s.³⁵³ He was educated at Williams College and later entered Harvard Law School on the insistence of his father, but soon quit it and instead turned to journalism, working in 1901–1904 for the Minneapolis *Journal* and *Times*, covering local and international affairs. He wanted to cover the Russo-Japanese War after it began and traveled to the Far East backed by the money of his father. Now a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*, he rented the British vessel the *Fawan* and from March to July 1904 covered the siege of Port Arthur from sea, cooperating with another *Chicago Daily News* reporter, John Bass.³⁵⁴ Then Washburn joined the Third Japanese Army under General Maresuke Nogi, covering the later phase of the siege.³⁵⁵ He visited St. Petersburg shortly after

³⁵⁰ Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire,”* 39; Thompson, “Russian Revolutionary Leaders in America,” 460–61.

³⁵¹ Thompson and Hart, *The Uncertain Crusade*, 47.

³⁵² Motter, *The International Who's Who*, 1072; Stanley Washburn, “The Reminiscences of Stanley Washburn,” interview by Wendell Link, 1950, <https://dx.doi.org/10.7916/d8-qkw2-qb05>.

³⁵³ As mentioned in the previous chapter, he was behind the proposal to cover the transportation of relief to Russia during the 1891–1892 famine.

³⁵⁴ Washburn told his adventures to another American correspondent of the Russo-Japanese War, Richard Barry, who later turned his story into a book, see: Richard Barry, *The Events Man: Being an Account of the Adventures of Stanley Washburn, American War Correspondent* (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1907).

³⁵⁵ Impressed by the general's personality and in response to his ritual suicide in 1912, he wrote his biography *Nogi: A Man Against a Background of a Great War* (1913) where he praised his character and wrote about his personal interactions with Nogi during the war.

Bloody Sunday. From there he wrote for his newspaper about the unrest in Russia and contributed to the creation of the bureau of his newspaper in St. Petersburg. After a short trip home, he again joined Nogi's army for the last four months of the war. Later, in 1907, he, along with other American correspondents (including Kennan) and nurses, was bestowed an order from the Emperor of Japan for his reporting.³⁵⁶ After peace was concluded, he was sent to cover the revolutionary situation in the Black Sea region, again on behalf of the *Chicago Daily News*, according to Washburn. Yet some of his reporting, containing the same text, also appeared in the *Minneapolis Journal*, in a few cases even earlier than in the Chicago newspaper. Seven years later he, like Durland, significantly enlarged his original story and published a book called *The Cable Game: The Adventures of an American Press Boat in Turkish Waters During the Russian Revolution* (1912). Later he would also become an official war correspondent on the Eastern Front of the First World War from late 1914 to late 1916 and write multiple books.³⁵⁷ After the fall of the monarchy, he visited Russia as a delegate of Elihu Root's mission to the Russian Provisional Government.

In the preface to his book Washburn praised his newspaper, lauded the support of its editor, Victor Lawson, and justified his publication by stating that he would provide little-known details on the work and motivation of correspondents who covered important political and military events. He presented himself as the reporter who was fascinated less with money or publicity than with the atmosphere of the "Cable Game," where he strove to get a "World Beat." The unusual title of Washburn's account and his announced motivation suggest delving into the way foreign reporters worked at the time, simultaneously offering a new angle on the newspaper reports of the relief officials in the last chapter. Essentially, at the beginning of the last century reporters could either use the telegraph and undersea cables or turn to regular mail. The telegraph conveyed messages within hours but was extremely expensive, even per word, leading to sending only "hard news" and ingenious ways of making cables (cableses), the least inventive of which prescribed erasing "who," "is," "what," and even periods and commas, often adding to the home editor's stress. Mail was much cheaper and allowed for more elaborate texts, yet it took a long time to reach the newspaper, forcing the authors to write in a less time-sensitive way. In other words, costs, haste, the quality of the text, the importance of the news item, or simply the availability of the telegraph and special circumstances (including foreign states' supervision of postal service and

³⁵⁶ "Mikado Honors 29 Americans," *Chicago Daily News*, July 3, 1907.

³⁵⁷ Igor' Bogomolov, "Amerikanskiy zhurnal'ist Stenli Uoshbern na russkom fronte Pervoy Mirovoy voyny [American journalist Stanley Washburn at the Russian front of the First World War]," *Moscow University Bulletin. Series 8: History*, no. 3 (2020): 78–99.

communications) – all had an impact on the correspondent’s “fieldwork” and its assessment by the editor. In the previous chapter, none of the commissioners sent their materials by cable, and in the following chapters all Americans who wrote for newspapers sent regular letters.

The Spanish-American War was a turning point for foreign correspondence. For American newspapers throughout most of the nineteenth century it equaled either copying foreign news from European newspapers or hiring natives who sent news from their country of residence. According to Hamilton, it was Victor Lawson and his *Chicago Daily News* who “virtually invented the newspaper foreign service,” sending an increasing number of Americans proper to key locations to report on the spot. Experimenting, often lambasting his subordinates for sending cables that could be sent by mail to reduce costs, and offering different types of news from abroad, Lawson succeeded in creating an efficient network of American foreign correspondents, the one that Washburn worked within.³⁵⁸ Naturally, Lawson’s example was followed by his competitors, intensifying the struggle for exclusive pieces (“beats”) of news, and the ever-increasing haste was a matter of both efficiency and personal satisfaction of the correspondent.³⁵⁹

Washburn was commissioned to go to Russia by the *Chicago Daily News* after the end of the war with Japan. He left the Third Japanese Army’s headquarters in Manchuria, reached Shanghai, passed through Ceylon, India, and the Suez Canal, and reached Constantinople (Istanbul) in December 1905. There he acquired a steamer named the *France* for two weeks to cross the Black Sea. He visited Odessa, Sevastopol, and Batoum under the pretext of delivering mail and telegraph dispatches from British and American diplomatic offices to consuls in these cities. But his major goal was to report on the unrest, and the way Washburn did it was important. He sent three cables (using telegraph lines in Romania and the Ottoman Empire) about each city visit, while the rest of his materials were common letters sent by regular mail.

Durland, in contrast, sent all of his materials by mail. In the book-length account he stated that his goal was to present “an accurate picture of Russia in revolution.” He tried to portray his experience as unique by claiming that he traveled extensively throughout European Russia (including Poland), the Caucasus, and Western Siberia. He underscored that he got to know both sides of the conflict since he rode with loyal Cossacks of the Kuban-Terek Regiment in the

³⁵⁸ Jaci Cole and John Hamilton, “A Natural History of Foreign Correspondence: A Study of the Chicago Daily News, 1900–1921,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2007): 151–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900708400111>.

³⁵⁹ John Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 450.

Caucasus, spoke with politicians in the first Duma after witnessing its opening, and got to know revolutionary organizations.

Neither of the authors knew Russian, and to understand the situation and get interviews both used guides and interpreters. Durland, however, knew French, although he still needed help when it was necessary to interview the lower classes. Besides, Washburn had only two weeks to explore the situation, so his stays in Russian cities were short and, as he acknowledged, enough to get only a general glimpse of the local events sufficient for an article in the newspaper.

The Description of European Russia

In his mail letters Washburn depicted how he was ordered in Beijing to rush from the war front to Russia.³⁶⁰ Passing through Shanghai and noting its pivotal role in trade and cultural diversity, he ironically remarked about urban morality, perceiving that “people who conduct shrewd deals which in the United States would land them quickly in the penitentiary are considered clever fellows out there.”³⁶¹ He appreciated the beauty of Ceylon and the kindness of the locals, but he also disliked them for imposing their services upon him, while in India he believed that many people seemed shiftless.³⁶² He wanted to cross the Persian Gulf and Persia to reach the Caspian Sea and Russia, but he missed his steamer, so he had to take one through the Suez Canal while blaming his delay on Cook’s company.

In the book he made extra remarks on his journey from the East. After the end of his Japanese assignment he voiced his satisfaction to finally move into “a white man’s hotel” in Beijing, which he compared to the way he had lived “in a Chinese village, surrounded by the filth and vermin of a Manchu compound” during the previous several months.³⁶³ This city was depicted as “too far from the haunts of civilization for one to follow the news of the world day by day.”³⁶⁴ He also introduced Monroe Morris, an African American who was his subordinate. Washburn presented Morris as witty and capable but also racialized him by calling him “Black Prince” throughout the account and presented him as ready to follow all of the author’s commands. In Constantinople he pointed out corruption, the constant suspicion of Ottoman officials towards

³⁶⁰ This contradicts what Washburn told in his late years to an oral historian, claiming that he left for Russia from Japan, not Beijing: Washburn, *The Reminiscences of Stanley Washburn*, 41.

³⁶¹ Stanley Washburn, “Oddities of Shanghai,” *Chicago Daily News*, December 22, 1905.

³⁶² Stanley Washburn, “Finds Ceylon a Beauty Spot,” *Minneapolis Journal*, January 1, 1906, 12; “India Fails to Please at First,” *Minneapolis Journal*, January 15, 1906, 5.

³⁶³ Stanley Washburn, *The Cable Game: The Adventures of an American Press Boat in Turkish Waters During the Russian Revolution* (Boston: Sherman, French, 1912), 8.

³⁶⁴ Washburn, 12.

foreigners, the mutual distrust between Turks and unruly Armenians and the inhabitants of the Balkans, and censorship of the press and the telegraph. His description of the citizens of Constantinople was as follows, and later other Ottoman cities were described in a similar manner:

The great bulk are ignorant and fanatical, easily aroused by their priests to any form of atrocity, and are generally useless. Most of the population are poor, and all are lazy. The official figures do not include the dogs, which are roughly estimated at about a million. They are a sad lot, and the most dismal creatures in the world.³⁶⁵

In sum, his description of the journey before reaching Russia displays his view of the East (except modern and victorious Japan) as inferior compared to his home country and the West in general. Openly viewing the West as superior, he essentially exemplified the travel writing concept of “the monarch of all he surveys.”

In the book-length account he also added a story of how he acquired the *France* from a Greek owner, and while praising its power and accommodation, he was not satisfied with its crew. The ship’s cook, cabin boy, and engineers earned his praise, but the rest disappointed him, including the Greek marines who were “dirty, shiftless and dismal” and Turkish stokers “distinguished for being several degrees blacker with dirt than the Greeks.”³⁶⁶ Such remarks further underscore the national and racial prejudices of the author.

Throughout his two-week journey, he visited Odessa, Sevastopol, and Batoum, and, as has been pointed out earlier, sent cables about local developments from Romania and the Ottoman Empire. All of the cable messages made it to the first or second page of the newspaper issues of the same or the next day, meaning that his information was considered important. Odessa presents the only case when Washburn sent both a cable and a mail letter. What is notable is that the two were of similar length of about two newspaper columns, suggesting that either Washburn spent a lot of money transferring his cable or that the editor had a considerable influence on transforming basic facts sent by the correspondent into a story.³⁶⁷ In the cable Odessa was described being “as quiet as a graveyard,” yet its calm was “portentous,” with closed-down factories, crowds of unemployed, beggars, cut communications, and talks of an imminent uprising on the day of the Czar’s birthday.³⁶⁸ In the countryside the situation was even worse as thousands of peasants went

³⁶⁵ Washburn, 38.

³⁶⁶ Washburn, 77.

³⁶⁷ As pointed out by Hamilton, at the turn of the century foreign correspondents were not aware for weeks about how exactly their messages would be interpreted and how the information in the newspaper article would differ from the actual message: Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, 451.

³⁶⁸ Washburn was evidently mistaken, since, whereas he was in the city in December, the birthday of Nicholas II was in May.

rogue and were actively seizing lands from their owners or burning their manors. In sum, Washburn reported that “conditions are almost intolerable and it is realized that they cannot last.”³⁶⁹ The letter was similar to the cable in describing unrest, yet two differences are noteworthy. Washburn added his personal experience of going through frustrating bureaucratic procedures imposed by Russian naval customs. More importantly, he inserted a paragraph about local Jews who feared a new wave of unrest after a city pogrom that took place shortly after the publication of the October Manifesto. He implied that they “are said to be constantly helping ferment trouble.”³⁷⁰ In the book he went even further and argued that the Jews were “squeezing” the population.³⁷¹ His cable information, containing only “hard news,” was correct, considering that the Jewish pogrom had occurred two months before Washburn arrived in Odessa and the apprehension caused by the uprising in Moscow in December. Yet both in the mail letter and the book he gave way to his anti-Semitic sentiments and clearly misrepresented the Odessa pogrom.

This was the most violent pogrom of the entire tsarist period (with at least 400 Jewish victims, compared to 49 during the infamous Kishinev pogrom in 1903), and it was much more complicated than Washburn suggested. The pogrom that took place in the city was a combination of both long-term and short-term developments. Odessa, where Jews comprised up to a third of the population, had a long history of religious and ethnic rivalry, competition between unskilled low-paid Jewish and Gentile workers (with many Jews living in the city themselves being poor), and general mistreatment of Jews. The city had already experienced pogroms in the past. These tensions were exacerbated by an extremely divisive political climate following the publication of the October Manifesto, when supporters of the old order genuinely thought that the autocracy could be nearing its end and attacked not only Jews but all whom they perceived to be revolutionaries, even those simply celebrating the freedoms promised by the Manifesto. All this, together with the negligence of local authorities, contributed to the scale of the catastrophe and, along with Odessa, resulted in a wave of pogroms in October-November 1905.³⁷²

In contrast to his reporting from Odessa, Washburn denounced rumors about chaos in Sevastopol, claiming that the marine and garrison uprising (associated today with Lieutenant Petr Schmidt) that had taken place a month before his arrival was crushed and never got popular support.

³⁶⁹ Stanley Washburn, “South Russia Ablaze,” *Chicago Daily News*, December 21, 1905.

³⁷⁰ Stanley Washburn, “Delayed by Red Tape,” *Chicago Daily News*, January 25, 1906, 12.

³⁷¹ Washburn, *The Cable Game*, 105.

³⁷² See: Robert Weinberg, “The Pogrom of 1905 in Odessa: A Case Study,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248–89.

He saw a relatively lively and calm city compared to Odessa and concluded that the stories about Sevastopol were “exaggerated generally in the hope of encouraging trouble in the interior.”³⁷³

Seven years later he explained the way he was forming his opinion on the situation in Russia. Upon disembarking in Odessa, he spent a day and a half exploring it and tried to obtain information about the city and the unrest from different sources, including the government’s statements, foreign consulates, and other correspondents. He also sought to interview people in the streets with an interpreter’s help and pick up major rumors. This was the way he worked in all cities, pressed for time and without knowing Russian. The author described the way he did his job as follows:

Three hours’ driving about town with an interpreter interviewing and talking with everybody available, from the man loafing on the corner to the prefect of police, gives the local color and atmosphere for your cable. Late in the afternoon a man has in his head a mass of material ranging from the most lurid stories of the correspondents to the “official protests” that “all is well and no further trouble anticipated.” The rest is merely a matter of perspective. As he writes, the correspondent must weigh the sources of his information and estimate their probable accuracy. ... The editor is not asking for literature, but for a quick survey of the situation.³⁷⁴

With this comment, it seems that he went for a brief overview of the developments in Russia based on cursory research, which inevitably diminished the quality of his reporting. The problem of balance between speed (obtaining a “World Beat”) and quality was not unique for Washburn; in fact, it was commonplace for correspondents of the time.

Durland’s newspaper reports were more numerous compared to those of Washburn, and a long stay in Russia offered him plenty of time to interact with the population and think about his stories. Yet in the book-length account he distorted the basic facts of his stay. For instance, he claimed that he arrived in Russia on the eve of Bloody Sunday. Yet he was clearly still in the U.S. in January 1906, lecturing in Boston, and his first letter dates back to 24 February, suggesting that he came only a month after.³⁷⁵ He also stated that he did not obtain “special introductions” during his stay, yet in one of the early articles he mentioned getting exactly those from Count Vladimir Andronikov, who served in Her Majesty’s Uhlan Guard Regiment and was transferred to the Caucasus by the time Durland arrived.³⁷⁶

St. Petersburg was his first major destination. The capital was presented to be “as tranquil as Boston Common” and a pleasant city in general, yet for Durland the atmosphere suggested an

³⁷³ Stanley Washburn, “Moscow’s War Continues,” *Chicago Daily News*, December 26, 1905, 1.

³⁷⁴ Washburn, *The Cable Game*, 109.

³⁷⁵ “This Evening’s News,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, January 25, 1906, 1.

³⁷⁶ Kellogg Durland, “By Rail to the Caucasus,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 9, 1906, 18.

incoming “cataclysm” of which the people were not aware.³⁷⁷ Essentially, from the start he pointed to tensions mounting in Russia.

When it comes to European Russia, in the book Durland expanded on how he explored several Russian cities in the Volga region in late 1906. He briefly described Kostroma as an industrial center with workers still mostly recruited from the peasants who longed for their villages and rural life, while Samara was normally a lively center of commerce, but the crop failure in 1906 made it look pitiful. In Nizhniy Novgorod, however, he was impressed with the national fair. Durland praised its scale, the diversity of goods available, as well as the people who came from all parts of Russia and wore flamboyant clothing, yet their dances and other performances reminded him of the Orient. He marked this fair as better than World’s Fairs since the one in Nizhniy Novgorod was “a people’s fair above all else,” and its articles were made by common people and used in everyday life. He added that the goods on display from different Russian regions, the people he saw, and the Russian lifestyle in general seemed “wondrously unlike the needs of Europe and the western world.”³⁷⁸ With this evaluation, he put Russians as different, if not separated, from the West in terms of their life and culture, just like Edgar in the previous chapter.³⁷⁹

The View of the Caucasus

Both authors coincidentally explored the Caucasus at different times, offering remarkable comments on local cities and population. After visiting Sevastopol and Odessa, Washburn headed to Batoum, with a quick stop in Sinope to message his newspaper that he was considering the idea of taking American and other refugees. Upon arrival, he and his crew members advertised the option of leaving Batoum for the Ottoman Empire for those who desired to. In the cable message Washburn described the situation in all major Caucasian cities but did not state the sources of his information. Only in the book did he add that he met the U.S. Consul William Stuart (who, as has been mentioned, was assassinated later), and Washburn admitted he was glad to see a person “from a civilized land.” With information from Stuart in mind, Washburn claimed in his cable that the entire Caucasus “was in a state of convulsion, revolution and anarchy.”³⁸⁰ He reported on strikes in Baku, Tiflis (present-day Tbilisi), Batoum, and Elizavetpol (present-day Ganja in Azerbaijan), the collapse of railway service in the Caucasus, and the ethnic conflict between Armenians and

³⁷⁷ Kellogg Durland, “‘Pacifying’ Russia,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 14, 1906, 16.

³⁷⁸ Kellogg Durland, *The Red Reign: The True Story of an Adventurous Year in Russia* (New York: Century, 1907), 321.

³⁷⁹ See chap. 3, n. 259.

³⁸⁰ Stanley Washburn, “Caucasus Region Is Aflame with Revolt,” *Chicago Daily News*, January 2, 1906, 1–2.

Tartars (present-day Azerbaijanis). These points were correct, but other statements were more dubious. The most obvious mistake was that he stated that the region still remained in the state of “general lawlessness,” whereas just at the time Washburn entered Batoum the revolutionary wave in the region began to subside after the defeat of the Moscow uprising.³⁸¹ Washburn also suggested that Georgian revolutionaries, the major anti-government force in the region, were “divided into many parties,” yet in reality they were predominantly Social Democrats, Mensheviks more precisely. Georgian Mensheviks, adhering to Marxism but simultaneously sympathetic to Populist ideas of land redistribution, staged one of the most unique rebellions of the period, the so-called Gurian Republic, when in 1902–1906 an entire area in Western Georgia was taken over by local peasants who practiced self-government.³⁸² Yet Washburn had nothing to say about it.

Just like in his description of Odessa, he included the more disagreeable statements in the book, not the cable. Talking about local Armenians, he claimed that in both Russia and the Ottoman Empire their own revolutionary provocations made them “the red rag to the government bull,” failing to note that the policies of these two countries on the eve of the revolution contributed to radicalizing Armenians.³⁸³ Those included the massacres of 1894–1896 in the Ottoman Empire and the enforced Russification policy that reached its peak with the confiscation of the property of the Armenian Church by imperial authorities in 1903 (revoked during the revolution).

Before departing, Washburn was surprised to see a huge motley crowd of native refugees who came to seek escape. Since there were no Americans to evacuate, the crew agreed to pick up thirty refugees with passports. During the voyage from Batoum back to Constantinople Washburn grew increasingly annoyed with the uncleanness and inappropriate behavior of the new passengers, claiming in the book that “I wished more than ever that I had let them remain to be eaten alive if need be by the gentle citizens of the Caucasus.”³⁸⁴ With that, he clearly thought of the Caucasian natives living in the empire as inferior to his standards.

Durland visited the region in early 1906, accompanied by Cossack officers, and initially reported only on how he reached the Caucasus by train. While the train cars were full of interesting people and reminded him of a “veritable Wayside Inn,” the train system in Russia was not

³⁸¹ Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 270–71.

³⁸² Stephen Jones, “Marxism and Peasant Revolt in the Russian Empire: The Case of the Gurian Republic,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 67, no. 3 (1989): 403–34.

³⁸³ Washburn, *The Cable Game*, 194.

³⁸⁴ Washburn, 207.

impressive compared to America. He again mapped out Russia as inferior by concluding that “in Russia many things are accounted luxuries that in other countries are the merest necessities.”³⁸⁵

In the book he considerably expanded on his actual stay. Upon arrival in Vladikavkaz, he was provided a Cossack uniform with traditional Caucasian decorations, and also a revolver in case of trouble. In all major cities that the group visited – Baku, Tiflis, Kutais (present-day Kutaisi) – he primarily described the visible destruction, the privations of their inhabitants, and the clashes among themselves or with the Russian military. He noted that there was a contrast between him and his party who stayed in good hotels, enjoyed each other’s company, and “were as happy and care-free as though we were on a holiday” amidst “dire poverty, distress, a veritable carnival of all the elements of wickedness and suffering of which this world knows” in the entire Caucasus.³⁸⁶

Durland also visited the local villages of the Ingush and the Ossetians. Encountering the natives of the region only made him label these ethnicities as being poor and backward, and he did not write anything about their culture or lifestyle. Concluding on his experience, he labeled the Caucasus “the least civilized” region of the country.³⁸⁷

The affirmation of superiority over the local population was combined with blaming the government for all the destruction, suffering, and problems present in the Caucasus. Most notably, he accused it of masterminding clashes between Armenians and Tartars across the region, including in Baku in February 1905, which triggered the wave of ethnic violence. Washburn, though not outright blaming the regime, also cabled local rumors that suggested government involvement.³⁸⁸ Although such a statement was popular in the international press of the time and later in Soviet historiography, modern historians challenged it, suggesting that each case should be considered individually. In February 1905 the authorities in Baku showed a complete lack of preparedness and coordination in tackling the clashes (with the local Orthodox and Muslim clergy playing a more prominent role), and few officials could be accused of promoting them. From late 1905 onward, however, the government became more efficient in preventing outbreaks of violence. Regular clashes revealed the weakness and mistakes of the Russian rule in the Caucasus, but there is no evidence to suggest that the central government was complicit in inciting them.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ Durland, “By Rail to the Caucasus,” 18.

³⁸⁶ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 84.

³⁸⁷ Durland, 87.

³⁸⁸ Durland, 80–83; Washburn, “Caucasus Region Is Aflame with Revolt,” 1.

³⁸⁹ Leslie Sargent, “The ‘Armeno-Tatar War’ In the South Caucasus, 1905–1906: Multiple Causes, Interpreted Meanings,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2010): 143–69, <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2010.0054>; Farhad Rafiq Oglu Jabbarov, “Vlasti Rossiyskoy imperii i armyano-azerbaydzhanskiy konflikt [Authorities of Russian Empire and Armenian-

While in the Caucasus, Durland interviewed General Maksud Alikhanov-Avasky. After serving in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, in Russian campaigns in Central Asia, and participating in defeating the Boxer Rebellion in China, in January 1906 he became temporary Governor-General of the Kutaisi province. He was responsible for suppressing the Gurian Republic, mentioned earlier. Durland called him “the Russian Turk,” although Alikhanov was born in Dagestan. The general, according to the author, said that he was there to punish all revolutionaries and “bad” people and considered the atrocities committed by his army acceptable as long as the ultimate goal of restoring order was achieved. Clearly presenting him in a negative light, Durland even applauded his assassination by Armenian revolutionaries in 1907.³⁹⁰ His interview did point to real crimes perpetrated by the army and Alikhanov’s acceptance of them, yet he failed to take a broader view of the situation. In fact, before Alikhanov’s appointment Vladimir Staroselskii was the Governor of the province, and he sympathized with liberal and possibly even revolutionary views, appeasing the leaders of the Gurian Republic and overlooking their creation of armed squads before 1906.³⁹¹

In short, aside from mistakes in reporting, the authors’ remarks about the region and its natives were stereotypical and penned through the lens of “civilization,” even for Durland, who wrote of the hardships of the cities as well. As shown in the next subchapter, while Washburn eventually deemed the revolutionary situation in Russia exaggerated, Durland’s descriptions of the hardships of locals in cities and native lifestyle served primarily as extra arguments in the narrative that consistently condemned the Russian autocracy, with both similarities and differences to Kennan’s two travel accounts.

The Autocracy and the Revolutionary Movements

To understand Washburn’s take on the unrest it is necessary to consider all his materials together – the reports sent to the *Chicago Daily News* in the winter of 1905 during his stay in St. Petersburg (almost all of them were similarly cables placed on the first pages of the issues), his messages during the voyage on the Black Sea, and the book account. His first cable, sent about a week after Bloody Sunday, depicted rapidly rising public discontent and the division between the government

Azerbaijani conflict],” *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History* 62, no. 3 (2017): 449–62, <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2017.302>.

³⁹⁰ Kellogg Durland, “Gen. Alikhanoff, the Russian Turk,” *New York Evening Post*, October 6, 1906, 21, 23; “Bloody Alikhanoff,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, July 20, 1907, 18.

³⁹¹ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 169.

and the majority of the population. As Durland reported, “all talk of the future and of revolution.”³⁹² Yet his second cable showed moderation, claiming that although the Czar was discredited in the public, “war correspondents who hurried hither in anticipation of bloody doings are preparing to leave.”³⁹³ He clearly changed his initial tone and reported views of primarily supporters of the old order, including then current St. Petersburg Governor-General, Dmitriy Trepov, and conservative journalist Vladimir Meshchersky, head of the government-subsidized newspaper *Grazhdanin* (The Citizen). Some of his reporting was somewhat misleading. At one point he reported that major Russian officials and the “ducal party” wanted to end the war with Japan, and for making a peace project they supposedly offered to convoke an estate-based parliament or “Zemsky sobor” (in reality in February-March 1905 there clearly was no such intention on behalf of the state).³⁹⁴

In his December 1905 cables he showed a similarly ambivalent reaction – he both recognized but at the same time tried to discredit the revolutionary movement. In his cable on Odessa, he affirmed that “notwithstanding the evils which the revolution has brought already, the people generally support the strikers and revolutionaries.” But in the same cablegram (and later in his message on the situation in Sevastopol) he explained that popular support for the revolution was to a degree due to the threats that the armed revolutionaries used to ensure the support of local city dwellers and workers not wishing to go on a strike. Thus, he pointed to the unseemly side of the revolution that existed in some cases of urban revolt.³⁹⁵

The following quote from the book best represents his final thoughts on the upheaval:

My experience in five visits to Russia during the period of convulsion was that the average Muscovite revolutionist has no equal (off the stage) for simplicity and ineffective activity. The moment you set eyes on him you know he is a revolutionist. His hair stands on end, his eyes are wild and his dress is in disorder. ... Every time he has an opportunity he climbs on a barrel or some other conspicuous spot in a public place and proceeds to air his ideas. ... The police (whom you know to be police, just as quickly as you recognize a revolutionist to be a revolutionist) stand around and look wise and make notes.³⁹⁶

With this remark, he ridiculed and downplayed the capabilities of the revolutionary movement, invoking older Western representations of unruly Nihilists. Similarly, in the Caucasus all uprisings resulted in their dispersal, so that “the Russian officers get medals, the dead are buried, and all

³⁹² Stanley Washburn, “Russia Is Split in Two,” *Chicago Daily News*, January 28, 1905, 1.

³⁹³ Stanley Washburn, “Thinks Crisis Is Past,” *Chicago Daily News*, January 30, 1905, 1.

³⁹⁴ Stanley Washburn, “Sees Peace in Russia,” *Chicago Daily News*, February 4, 1905, 1–2; “Russia Is for Peace,” *Chicago Daily News*, February 7, 1905, 1; “Peace at Any Price,” *Chicago Daily News*, February 10, 1905, 1–2; “Peace Plan Is Gaining,” *Chicago Daily News*, February 13, 1905, 1; “Plan to Aid America,” *Chicago Daily News*, February 14, 1905.

³⁹⁵ Washburn, “South Russia Ablaze.”

³⁹⁶ Washburn, *The Cable Game*, 101.

moves on much as before.”³⁹⁷ Thus, Washburn constructed an image of Russia where, although a certain degree of unrest and distrust of autocracy was undeniable, order was gradually being restored, and where the revolutionaries in the end had little chance to overthrow tsarism.

In retrospect, he admitted that on his way to the Black Sea he constantly heard rumors of unrest and near-anarchy in Russia. He used the occasion to lambast “yellow journalists” who promoted them. Following the realization that there were no signs of revolutionary activity in Sevastopol, Washburn complained about how he, as a “special correspondent,” was rushed across half of the world only to find “a few bullet holes in some wall the only visible signs of the ‘horrible riot.’” Disappointed by not seeing the open revolutionary struggle and instead witnessing only “a few poor peasants and a handful of long-haired, wild-eyed Russian students shut up in a dirty room,” Washburn maintained that hearsay, deliberately exaggerated by unprofessional coverage, was “a type of the great majority of Russian riot or revolution ‘stories.’”³⁹⁸

Durland’s political agenda was revealed even before he showed up in Russia. In November 1905 he revealed excerpts of letters sent to him by “underground” informants that served to reinforce the picture of ever-increasing struggle against the autocracy. The following quote best summarizes the major idea that Durland tried to reinforce in all of his later articles and the book that was published two years later:

There has been a revolutionary movement in Russia for many years. But it has been carried on by a small, very small, percentage of the population. ... Today the spirit of revolt is almost universal among the mass of the population. It is no longer an affair of the intellectuals. It is not a class movement. It is a mass struggle. The "People" of Russia, the proletariat of the cities and the impoverished peasants of the country, have come to the realization that there must be a change, and that the chance must come from them. They have lost faith in "reforms" and they demand a revolution.³⁹⁹

The quote neatly recapped the ideological core of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), the major revolutionary actor on the Russian scene in 1905–1907. Considering that at one point in the book Durland openly outlined his sympathy for SRs rather than Social Democrats (SDs) or other revolutionary groups, it is worth giving a concise overview of the party’s goals and ideology to help evaluate Durland’s reporting. The SR party was formed by 1902 from several émigré and Russian-based groups. With the presence of many activists from the older Populist movement, the party claimed to uphold the heritage of their generation. However, SR theorists (with Victor

³⁹⁷ Washburn, 194.

³⁹⁸ Washburn, 154–55.

³⁹⁹ Kellogg Durland, “Everywhere Anarchy,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 4, 1905, 30.

Chernov as their leader) had to account for the failure of Populists in the 1880s to incite a mass uprising after the murder of Alexander II, to remodel their deep-rooted idea of Russia bypassing capitalism straight to socialism in view of the industrialization and generally capitalist development of Russia at the turn of the century, as well as to offer an appealing alternative to Marxism. Essentially, SRs attempted to combine the older Populist concepts for the peasantry with the newer Marxist ones for the workers. They still imagined the general uprising of “the working people” (landless peasants or those who cultivated the land with their own labor, as well as industrial workers) led by the party, followed by the redistribution (“socialization”) of the land among all wishing to cultivate it after the fall of the old regime. They maintained that the peasantry was just as capable as workers in supporting the revolution and deserved to enter the socialist way of development based on the peasant commune or cooperatives. The program was ambiguous, caused criticism of different groups within the party, and almost immediately led to a bitter feud between SRs and their Social Democrat challengers – over the questions of the role of the peasantry, workers, and intellectuals, the organization of the party, and, as will be pointed out later on, terrorist actions.⁴⁰⁰

Just like Kennan in *Siberia*, Durland openly politicized Russian conditions, and the structure of their respective book accounts is similar, with a concluding chapter on the political future of Russia and extra materials in the appendix. Like Kennan, the reporter also attempted to construct an engaging narrative full of conspirative activity, when he and his friends were often under the government’s suspicion or surveillance. But the essence of Durland’s discourse consisted of condemning the tsarist regime and inviting his readers to sympathize with the revolutionary cause. Some of his accusations are similar to Kennan’s, as Durland blamed the autocracy for corruption, censorship, police abuse, and the curtailment of the population’s rights. Yet he was far more critical of the tsarist system than Kennan himself. He denounced it for the brutal suppression of unrest and the atrocities of its “pacification” armies, and general misrule, especially in the Caucasus and Poland, which resulted in the hostility of Poles and Caucasian peoples toward Russian rule. While his generalizations in the Caucasus have been covered earlier, in Poland he reported from Warsaw, suggesting its similarity to Paris but also emphasizing poverty and the presence of beggars, the disabled, prostitutes, and the starving, as well as unrelenting unrest. For Durland, “sunshine and shadow chase each other through Warsaw streets; and sunshine and shadow

⁴⁰⁰ Mikhail Leonov, *Partiya sotsialistov-revolutsionerov v 1905–1907 gg.* [The Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1905–1907] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997), chap. 2; Manfred Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party Before the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 96–98.

have entered into the temperament of the people.”⁴⁰¹ Yet in his reporting he did not go beyond personal impressions of the city and presenting testimonies of the locals, and only in his book did he admit that the political movements in Poland were clearly divided between those pursuing socialist and nationalist goals. He also chose to ignore the National Democratic Party that argued for cooperation with Russian authorities in gaining autonomy for Poland, dismissing them as “opportunists.”

Durland’s observations, albeit pointing to real problems and abuses of autocratic rule, often turned into simplifications. As an example, he did point to existing restrictions for the Jews living in the Pale of Settlement and fairly noted that while many Jews enlisted as volunteers to fight in the Russo-Japanese War, what they got in return was a wave of pogroms. However, his view on anti-Jewish violence in Russia was that “the present Russian Government relies upon terrorism as one of its most important weapons,” and that it deliberately arranged pogroms through supporting the Black Hundred mobs (*chernosotentsy*) “to keep the whole Jewish population in a state of perpetual panic.”⁴⁰² Durland gave a one-sided view of the much more complex problem of Jewish pogroms in the first decade of the twentieth century that took place primarily within the cities in the Pale of Settlement and Poland. Modern historians generally concluded on the absence of the central government’s complicity and attributed the breakout and the unfolding of pogroms to a whole spectrum of causes, resulting in a variety of outcomes – from uncontrolled violence to the timely prevention of it. The causes include long-standing religious and ethnic tensions in the area, economic and social changes in the period of industrialization and growing urbanization that transformed the everyday lives and traditions of both Jews and Gentiles living side-by-side and naturally caused concerns and insecurities, as well as local factors, such as the attitude of local officials. Existing tensions were especially aggravated at the time of general political instability and uncertainty after the publication of the October Manifesto. However, whereas the Czar or his ministers did not instigate pogroms, this does not excuse their failure to prevent the spread of anti-Semitic sentiments (including in rightist press). Local governors and officials in many cases failed to stop the spread of mob violence. On occasion, they themselves were anti-Semites and promoted it. This weak reaction further reinforced the rumors of government implication in pogroms.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Kellogg Durland, “Terror in Warsaw,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 8, 1906, 27.

⁴⁰² Kellogg Durland, “Terrorism in Russia,” *New York Evening Post*, November 10, 1906, 22.

⁴⁰³ Shlomo Lambroza, “The Pogroms of 1903–1906,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 238–42; Hans Rogger, “Conclusion and Overview,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John Klier and Shlomo

Similarly, the view that the Black Hundreds and Russian rightists in general were little above the Czar's minions and riffraff who committed pogroms and intimidation campaigns in his favor has been reexamined. In fact, the government did not create or completely control any of the rightist organizations. The movement on the right, although sharing the basic formula of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality," almost from the very beginning was divided over political changes initiated by the autocracy itself, such as Stolypin reforms or the creation of the Duma. Even the largest and most infamous of these organizations, the Union of the Russian People (URP), did not escape factionalism and conflicts in organization, leadership, and ideas.⁴⁰⁴ The rightist organizations, far from being composed solely of lowlifes, included almost all social groups, with the URP, the party with the higher number of members than any of the liberal and revolutionary parties at the time, focusing on urban dwellers, workers, and peasants. While the URP was most commonly associated with pogroms and violence, not all rightists were in favor of it. Some preferred widespread agitation and later participation in the Duma.⁴⁰⁵

The relations between the government and the rightist movements were not static or entirely cordial. The higher-ups perceived them as a useful instrument of rallying public support and preserving order, especially in times of deepest crises. But after the peak of the upheaval passed they saw the extreme wing of the movement, including the URP, as "revolutionaries from the right" for their incessant criticism of bureaucracy and the reformist course pursued by Witte and Stolypin in favor of unrestrained autocracy. Sometimes rightist deputies went as far as obstructing Duma projects. The attitude of local officials to the movement was never unanimous and ranged from supporting to prohibiting their demonstrations and other actions.⁴⁰⁶

Another of Durland's major blunders was his statement about the exile system. The reporter briefly visited Western Siberia and got acquainted with political exiles in Tobolsk. He directly referred to Kennan by claiming that a couple of exiles remembered meeting him in 1885 and asked the correspondent to deliver their greetings. He shared Kennan's conclusions on their noble character and the horrors of exile, claiming that political exiles were "men and women that any

Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 314–72; For a detailed pogrom case study see: Steven Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (New York: Liveright, 2019).

⁴⁰⁴ Igor Omelyanchuk, "'Dom, razdelivshiysya v sebe': raskol Soyuza russkogo naroda ['The house divided against itself: Split of the Union of the Russian People]," *Russian History*, no. 1 (2021): 124–39, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086956870013449-4>.

⁴⁰⁵ Donald Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 9.

⁴⁰⁶ Rawson, chap. 10; George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 127.

nation in the world should be proud of – verily the flower of the land.”⁴⁰⁷ Yet not only did he provide a less personal narrative than Kennan, but he was clearly less knowledgeable about the exile system. He reported that “nearly one million *politicals*” were banished to Siberia between the time of Nicholas I and Nicholas II, or between 1825 and 1894. He was wrong in both defining all exiles as politicals (as discussed in the Kennan chapter above) and in their actual numbers.⁴⁰⁸

Durland’s discourse reveals much about SR ideology and simultaneously its major ideological and organizational drawbacks. The question of terror is the most obvious case in point. It was one of the major reasons why he proclaimed to prefer SRs over Social Democrats, who were too absorbed in theoretical debates rather than the day-to-day struggle. The SRs indeed proved to be the most militant force during the revolution. Yet Durland ignored that Social Democrats, especially the Bolsheviks, denouncing terror in theory before 1905, joined in applauding and encouraging terror as tensions rose. They cooperated with SRs in many instances in preparing and assisting with assassinations and “expropriations” of government funds.⁴⁰⁹

He proclaimed that terrorism by revolutionaries was committed to liquidate oppressors in the government, destabilize it, and foster fear and compliance among the successors of the assassinated officials. Developing this idea in the book, he suggested, in a most un-American manner, that his compatriots should reevaluate the morals of terror:

Terrorism proper is not a blind, fanatical policy of bloodshed. It is a phase of warfare which can be logically justified even when it can not be sentimentally accepted. Assassination in a country where normal, peaceful conditions prevail can never be justified. But terrorism, as it exists in Russia, rests on the basis that Russia is not only in an abnormal condition, but it is a country seething with internal war. ... The Russian government maintains a state of perpetual warfare against its own people, therefore the ethics of a peaceful land do not at all apply to Russia.⁴¹⁰

Essentially, he combined the arguments developed by the SR ideologues when analyzing the terrorist experience of Populists in the 1870s and early 1880s, including implying the general backwardness of autocratic Russia that, for them, justified resorting to terror. Yet Durland failed to understand the changing perception of terror in the empire. Theoretically, the SRs perceived it as only political (aimed at individual higher officials or the Czar) and only as one of the instruments in bringing down the autocracy, along with agitation among the masses. The first major political

⁴⁰⁷ Kellogg Durland, “Wretched Siberian Exiles,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 17, 1906, 30.

⁴⁰⁸ Salomon’s statistics of the exile system suggests a total of 740,000 for this period (including all types of exiles; a considerable portion were also relatives who followed them), also see: Gentes, “Roads to Oblivion,” 212, 330.

⁴⁰⁹ Budnitskiy, *Terrorizm v rossiyskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii*, 311–35; Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 84.

⁴¹⁰ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 391.

assassinations of figures perceived as staunch reactionaries (including that of the Minister of Interior Vyacheslav von Plehve in 1904) were met with widespread tolerance, sometimes even approval, in the public, even among liberals, encouraging terror that in the end went out of control. The initially “noble” and individually-targeted political terror organized by the autonomous SR Fighting Organization (*Boevaya Organizatsia* – BO) in the end turned into indiscriminate destruction. The party’s leadership found it impossible to contain growing attacks on police, local officials, and other visible representatives of the old order, including rightist activists, as well as widespread “expropriations.” The center failed to control the actions of the local cells of the party, which often attracted simple criminals to their ranks. In the end, terror contributed to the discreditation of the SRs as a political force (especially after the exposure of Evno Azef, the leader of the BO in 1903–1906 who turned out to be a police agent) and a turn towards a widespread public rejection of violence.⁴¹¹

While Durland tried to present terror as unrelenting and systemic, in reality it contributed to the split within the SR party, with factionalism both from the right and the left. The latter was embodied by the so-called Maximalist group, led by Mikhail Sokolov. He and his subordinates pushed in favor of further intensification of terror and hits on government funds, but the group was quickly dispersed by authorities. Durland claimed that “the story of the Maximalists is the most dramatic and most thrilling of all the Revolution has furnished,” and although he deemed their actions reckless, even they were presented as “glad, living sacrifices to the greatest cause they know – the freedom of their enslaved fatherland from the powers of darkness and wrong.”⁴¹² Here he went against the perception of Maximalists by SR leaders like Chernov, who criticized their turn to “economic terror” (assassinating land- and factory owners). Chernov and the party leadership publicly denounced SR involvement in the bloody Maximalist assassination attempt on Stolypin in his cottage house in August 1906. Despite Durland’s attempt to attribute some sort of moral superiority to them, historians concluded that Maximalists stood for outright anarchy and banditry.⁴¹³

During his journey in the Volga region, he wrote about the famine of 1906–1907 that, although less severe than in 1891–1892, again gripped a considerable part of the area. He visited several villages near Samara and painted a depressing picture, noting the lack of food, the

⁴¹¹ Budnitskiy, *Terrorizm v rossiyskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii*, 176–78; Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 52–58; Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, chap. 2.

⁴¹² Kellogg Durland, “A Fighting Circle of Revolutionists,” *New York Evening Post*, December 1, 1906, 21–22.

⁴¹³ Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 123; Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 78–81; Budnitskiy, *Terrorizm v rossiyskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii*, 178–81.

establishment of emergency soup kitchens, and the misery of the local peasants. Unlike the American relief officials in 1891–1892, Durland did not blame the peasants for the crisis and marked it as another failure of the government instead. His solution for the peasantry's calamities was simple:

There is land enough in Russia to properly nourish and support all of the people — if it were differently distributed. There is water enough in Russia to enrich and make fertile those areas which now depend upon spring rains to open the seeds of harvest — if it were guided and directed intelligently according to the character of the land. When the Duma undertook to solve the land question in a larger, practical way — it was dissolved.⁴¹⁴

Upon the publication of his book, he professed that “the attitude of the government toward this great question is, perhaps, more directly responsible for forcing the country toward civil war than any other one thing.”⁴¹⁵ Offering the redistribution of the land as a major solution to all the hardships of the peasantry, Durland was as superficial as major SR theorists on what exactly this meant. For Chernov and other SRs, the “socialization” of the land implied its belonging to all the “working people” on an equalized basis. Yet they were in disagreement over how exactly land redistribution was to be carried out, whether non-peasant landholders were to be compensated, and what the balance between the central and local authorities was in supervising the peasant communities.⁴¹⁶ Durland did not answer any of these questions.

In connection with the land question, the SRs misunderstood the sentiments of the peasantry and were upset when many of them went to the ballot box to vote for the Duma despite active SR propaganda. The attitude of SRs, the party that preached a general revolt of the people, towards the Duma was a matter of debate. After boycotting the first Duma, the SRs chose to participate in the Second Duma, hoping to use it as a platform for spreading revolutionary ideas and promoting their agrarian project. The issue of employing terror amidst parliamentary work also divided the party.⁴¹⁷ Durland reported on the opening of the first Duma in the Winter Palace, asserting that “in the midst of a Court supporting the most rigid formalities of medievalism, was inaugurated the most perfectly democratic congress the world has seen.”⁴¹⁸ Yet he did not mention the actual limitations put on the voting process (the exclusion of women, the indirect voting based on the curiae system, etc.). Instead, he emphasized the lack of goodwill on behalf of the Czar and his government that rejected Duma demands for amnesty, workers' rights, and land redistribution. Without sensing any

⁴¹⁴ Kellogg Durland, “Famine-Stricken Russian Peasants,” *New York Evening Post*, November 3, 1906, 27.

⁴¹⁵ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 356–57.

⁴¹⁶ Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 79–84.

⁴¹⁷ Hildermeier, 160–68.

⁴¹⁸ Kellogg Durland, “Russia's Fireband: The Opening of the Duma,” *Harper's Weekly*, June 16, 1906, 840.

contradiction and employing a triangular view, in another article he preached that the nature of the Duma's goals would "effect a complete economic and industrial revolution," while simultaneously claiming that "most of the demands of the Duma are not extravagant, viewed in the light of Western civilization, but to Russia they mean enormous advances."⁴¹⁹

Without the SR presence in the first Duma, Durland switched to praising the Labor Group (*Trudoviki*), a numerous but loose faction that included many deputies of peasant origin and who advocated for land expropriation. He dedicated a favorable article to one of its leaders and key orators, Alexey Aladin. Aladin, born to a peasant family in Samara province, became a political activist at a young age and eventually had to escape to England, where he lived before 1905. He was the one who helped Durland with the translation of some of the documents that he, like Kennan, included in the appendix of his book account, demonstrating that he did research on Russia and should therefore be seen as an expert on the empire. Except for a short overview of the wages and the standards of living of Russian workers in Yuzovka (more on that later), all of them pointed to government abuse. Lauding Aladin and the goals of his faction, Durland failed to notice that the demands of the Labor Group made it hard to cooperate with any other major force in the Duma, primarily the Cadets, who had the majority.⁴²⁰

In the end, Durland's attitude to the new Russian parliament remained ambivalent, similarly to the SRs. Lauding it as a great training ground for the country's new representatives and asserting that it showed that Russians were capable of proper self-government, the journalist claimed that the Cadet-led Dumas, where the liberals amateurishly hoped to persuade the government to grant reforms rather than demand them, exposed that "in Russia, as in more civilized lands, honesty in political life does not necessarily spell success." In the end, unlike Kennan, he proclaimed the need for armed struggle, claiming that "the promise of the future is that permanent democratic government in Russia will first have to be fought for, precisely as all liberty is battled for."⁴²¹ He again hinted that he perceived Russia as less "civilized" and, overall, lagging behind the West.

He additionally tried to persuade his readers to sympathize with the more radical revolutionaries by invoking the struggle for American independence and the idea of American commitment to those who fight for liberty. Writing in retrospect about his experience in the Caucasus, in the book he avowed that "I am a thoroughgoing American in spirit" and that

⁴¹⁹ Kellogg Durland, "Birth of a Parliament," *Collier's*, June 16, 1906, 13–15.

⁴²⁰ Kellogg Durland, "Aladyin, Russia's First 'Walking Delegate,'" *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 34, no. 2 (August 1906): 168–71; Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 2:88, 91–93.

⁴²¹ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 205–6.

“revolution is my most sacred heritage,” finishing his thoughts by stating that “If I lived in the Caucasus, suffering and bleeding under Russian misrule, I would be a revolutionist.”⁴²² Yet despite such bravado, his reaction to real dangers was different. After finishing his residence in 1906 and lecturing on his experience at home in the winter of 1907, at some point in that year he returned to Russia. There he, William Walling, another “gentleman socialist” mentioned in Durland’s biographic section, Walling’s wife, and his sister-in-law got arrested in October. Durland resorted to calling for the help of the State Department to resolve the situation, and all of them managed to return home safely.⁴²³

Durland reiterated his agenda throughout the whole revolutionary period. In the lectures given at home he tried to reinforce the hopes for a successful revolution even when its tide was clearly receding. In December 1907 in a lecture with a peculiar title, “Civilized Barbarism of Russia,” given in the Tremont Temple in Boston, Durland still asserted that the revolution was supported by ninety percent of the Russian people, but the Czar held the loyalties of the army.⁴²⁴

Overall, there is an obvious contrast between the way the two journalists reported on the situation. Presenting unrest in Odessa and in the Caucasus in his cables, Washburn deemed the revolution exaggerated and reinforced this conclusion in his book. Durland, having adopted some of Kennan’s ideas and arguments outlined in *Siberia*, argued in favor of a more radical revolution along the lines supported by the Socialist Revolutionaries, whom he consistently presented as the true champions of Russian freedom. However, like the SRs, he proved to be unresponsive to the changing political situation. In reality, revolutionary ideology and its practical incarnation often remained far away from each other.

Durland’s Depiction of Russian Estates

Unlike Durland, Washburn did not describe his interactions with the people in the cities he visited. Instead, he wrote a lot about the way a correspondent worked back then and the press in general. He claimed that, compared to regular press staff, he, as “the cable man,” was often “a part of the great event” as he traveled around the world and reported on the situation on the spot, even when it was dangerous to do so. Such a remark corresponded to the existing sense of elitism among foreign correspondents at the turn of the century as they enjoyed autonomy, the trust of their

⁴²² Durland, 120.

⁴²³ “Work to Release Walling,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, October 21, 1907.

⁴²⁴ “Why Russians Will Repudiate,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 26, 1907; “School and College,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 7, 1907; “Czar Is Stubborn,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 10, 1907.

newspapers, and were often provided considerable financial resources for their work. Some of them also became “influencers” in the sense of being able to obtain information from policy makers and members of the elites in foreign countries that was reported to political and business interests at home.⁴²⁵

When he sailed from Odessa to Romania to find a telegraph to report on that city, Washburn urged the steamer’s engineer to increase its speed. In the book he described the value of time for American newspapers that few, including the engineer, could understand, and added:

Hunger and hardships of all kinds are a part of the day’s work to him [the correspondent] if he can but land that priceless “story,” which is the only object of his life from day to day. ... From the world he looks for no recognition, and if his chief at home is satisfied, the cable-man rejoices and his heart is glad.⁴²⁶

His claim that he did not look for fame or credit was an attempt to sound modest, just when he willingly accepted a medal of honor from the Japanese government. In that period foreign correspondents often received state rewards and international acclaim, and rarely did they try to hide from it (perhaps, with Richard Harding Davis as the finest American example). Washburn himself, in his late years, confessed that “all I ever cared for in journalism was spot news and influence.”⁴²⁷

Durland similarly sought to establish himself as a prominent authority on Russia. As has been explained, in early 1906 he rode with loyal Cossacks across the Caucasus. On one occasion, they visited a Cossack *stanitsa* (village), and in the book Durland depicted Cossack life.⁴²⁸ Their physical strength, talent for horse riding, clean houses, and hospitality impressed him and “little suggested the proverbial brutality of the Cossacks.”⁴²⁹ Durland interviewed the *ataman* (the Cossack chief) of Terek province about their history and traditions. The correspondent pointed out that they plowed their land on their own and had a bigger share of it than the peasantry, and that while they lived in a community and decided local matters collectively, their individual freedom was also considerable. They hunted down criminals in the Caucasus without mercy, but when asked

⁴²⁵ Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, chap. 14.

⁴²⁶ Washburn, *The Cable Game*, 120.

⁴²⁷ Washburn, *The Reminiscences of Stanley Washburn*, 30.

⁴²⁸ By the early twentieth century Cossacks remained the sole military estate, serving both as an irregular army and as a peacekeeping force, including during the 1905 Revolution. They lived in decentralized communities across the empire and received land and exemption from taxation in exchange for military service. For their position at the turn of the century, see: Ivanova and Zheltova, *Sosloynoye obshchestvo Rossiyskoy imperii*, 533–42.

⁴²⁹ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 64.

about violence against common people, they mostly responded that they did it since it was the order of their officers and the will of the Czar. His conclusion about them reads:

My observations would indicate that the Cossacks have all the elements of a strong and wholesome people. Their cruelty is the result of generations of encouragement, on the part of the Russian government. ... Their land cannot be taken from them without a struggle. ... So long as the House of Romanoff holds supremacy – and autocracy – the Cossacks will continue to flourish. If this regime is overthrown the next will have the Cossacks to cope with. The Cossacks will die hard. But die they must – or at least the institution of Cossackdom. ...⁴³⁰

Despite his personal sympathy for the Cossacks, Durland identified them as a major pillar of tsarism that had to become a “necessary sacrifice” so that the social revolution and the appropriation of their lands by the peasantry would succeed.

His travelogue also depicted workers and, in accordance with SR ideology, peasants, and paid the latter more attention. Durland talked with the peasant deputies in the first Duma and praised their conduct and determination, claiming that the major demand of the peasants was land, and they were determined to push for it. In the book Durland expanded on his trip to the villages in the Volga region to ask local peasants about the abrupt dissolution of the first Duma. He stated that the peasants he interacted with lost their loyalty to the Czar because of the dissolution and now hoped that the projected Constituent Assembly, a popular institution with all powers, would solve all the urgent problems. He reported that some peasants even asked why foreign governments lent Russia money that ended up being spent on oppressing them. In short, he presented his interactions with the peasantry as “evidence of a peasant awakening” in political terms.⁴³¹ He echoed the SR theorists in their rebuttal of Social Democrat arguments about the political passivity of peasants and their unwillingness to join the ranks of the revolution.

With that in mind, in a separate article he challenged the widely held negative stereotypes about the Russian peasantry. He denounced claims about peasants being lazy, ignorant, or childlike. Instead, he presented them as generous, patient, honest, and shrewd. They had a huge potential for development in the future, while their local self-governing traditions gave them a deep sense of republicanism and equality. Their weak agricultural productivity was related, in Durland’s view, to insufficient land ownership and the slowness of the government in promoting agricultural innovation. While they were pious, the author believed that “the *muzhik* is not a religious being” and that he followed religious norms out of custom or while expecting something material in return.

⁴³⁰ Durland, 69–70.

⁴³¹ Durland, 319.

His comment went against common tropes about peasant piety. Evidently, Durland marked religion as one of the major pillars of peasant traditionalism and loyalty to the autocracy, the one that had to be presented as weakened or eliminated in order to show that the peasants could be mobilized for the revolution. Durland was partly correct, as the years of the upheaval saw the disruption of religious life in the empire and the growing anti-religious propaganda conducted by revolutionaries among peasants and workers. On its part, the Orthodox Church tried to contain these influences and criticized socialist ideology.⁴³²

Durland offered the following response to those who criticized the peasantry:

Again, in judging the industrial fibre of the Russian peasant, it must be remembered primarily that it is less than half a century since the shackles of bondage fell from his hands. Surely not one generation or two can make these recent slaves ready to be judged by the side of men who have been free for centuries. The problem of adjustment to new conditions of life is only slightly less formidable among these peoples than it is among the American Negroes, and the differences of opinion in regard to the relative advantages and disadvantages of the present condition as compared to serfdom are quite as numerous in Russia today as the differences of opinion in America regarding the welfare of the Negro now and before the war. One thing I have noticed which seems to me decisive – no *muzhik* ever wants to return to serfdom.⁴³³

This comment recalls Edgar's observations on the peasantry quoted in chapter 3 above.⁴³⁴ While Durland rejected paternal policy or serfdom, unlike the relief officials, he still compared Russian peasants, without distinction and four decades after emancipation, to African Americans at home, and promptly drew a parallel between Russian serfdom and American slavery. It transpires that while Durland tried to refashion the peasant image and envisioned their great future, he simultaneously viewed them being at a level still inferior to "free" people; another sign that he saw Russia as not completely Western.

A case in point which reinforces the notion of "East meets West" was his visit to Arthur David Hughes, the head of the New Russian Company that was operating in Yuzovka (present-day Donetsk). Arthur was the son of John Hughes, a Welsh engineer who founded both the settlement and its coal works, employing British and Russian workers. Durland paid a visit to him and inspected the working conditions – with his coal mining experience in mind. The Russians mostly occupied low-ranking positions, and the managers were British. Although he admitted that Russian labor laws were progressive, he pointed to unfavorable living conditions of local workers and the lack of modern machinery, recapping that "here in South Russia the extremes meet – the

⁴³² Sergey Firsov, *Tserkov' v Imperii: Ocherki iz tserkovnoy istorii epokhi Imperatora Nikolaya II* [The church in the empire: Essays on church history of the reign of Nicholas II] (St. Petersburg: Satis, 2007), 135–36.

⁴³³ Kellogg Durland, "The Puzzling Muzhik," *Boston Evening Transcript*, October 17, 1906, 24.

⁴³⁴ See chap. 3, n. 307.

progressive methods of the European, and the crude, primitive ways of the Russian.”⁴³⁵ With another triangulation not in favor of Russians, he pointed out some of the major problems of Russian labor organization, including low productivity, the lack of experience of Russian engineers, and the fact that many workers were migratory peasants, with peasant traditionalism and spirituality. They perceived working in industries as seasonal employment and still had a rural mindset. In the book account Durland expanded on the character and the future of Russian labor:

Looked at critically he is good raw material – but very raw and very crude. Like the country at large, the Russian workman promises well under proper conditions, and if sufficient time and capital are invested in him, he will develop an adequate earning capacity. But his religion must first be tempered with intelligence. He must learn to make the best use and the most use of his naturally strong physique, and his economic condition must so alter that it will appear to him worth his while to devote himself with more heart to his work.⁴³⁶

With this argument, Durland emphasized the potential of the workers alongside the peasants and offered advice on how it could be unleashed at the time of the increasing industrialization of the country, again suggesting that religious influence be weakened and replaced by education and revolutionary zeal. He suggested that workers should be clearly separated from the peasantry. He also predicted that the “economic condition” of the workers, like that of the peasants, would be improved primarily by a future revolution.⁴³⁷ This vague position echoed the SR labor program, which was less detailed and appealing than Social Democrat emphasis on workers’ own organization and political interests.⁴³⁸

Russian-American Interactions in Durland’s Narrative

Durland included a handful of episodes that served to demonstrate the attitudes of Russians toward him as an American. At the very beginning of his book, he emphasized that in Russia “it was rarely indeed that I did not find a cordial response where I spoke a friendly word, or extended a friendly hand.”⁴³⁹ Soon after arrival in St. Petersburg, he and his American acquaintance entered a restaurant. Durland reported how the local orchestra paid respect to the visitors by allegedly playing the U.S. national anthem, followed by Dixie. For him, this meant that an American correspondent who shapes domestic public opinion “finds most unexpected doors open to him,” hinting, like earlier Washburn in his comments, at the elitism and sense of self-importance of foreign

⁴³⁵ Kellogg Durland, “The Russian Coal Mines,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, July 11, 1906, 14.

⁴³⁶ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 448.

⁴³⁷ Durland, 454–55.

⁴³⁸ Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 176.

⁴³⁹ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 5.

reporters.⁴⁴⁰ In Kutaisi, Durland inspected local Cossack barracks. While its residents were initially suspicious of him, the author recounted how they immediately became friendlier after they realized that he was a correspondent from the U.S. and appreciated his willingness to wear a Cossack uniform. He was also surprised that some of them had Singer sewing machines in their possession, which, as it turned out, they stole from a local shop.⁴⁴¹ These small episodes reveal that he echoed Kennan's *Tent Life* and the relief officials by emphasizing the open displays of sympathy by common Russians towards Americans.

Other encounters reveal how Durland depicted the Russian perceptions of America in general. In the Cossack *stanitsa* in the Caucasus, he asked locals what they knew about America, and though he did not describe what their responses exactly were, he noted that "the stories of darkest Africa which were told me as a child never fascinated me more nor seemed more wonderful than did the things they heard about America seem to them."⁴⁴² In the Volga region, he visited the village of Peski, where he interacted with the local peasants in the village hall and was asked questions about land policies in America, including "what did we do with landlords in America who could not possibly work or use the land and yet would not allow the people to use it?"⁴⁴³ With that he implied that the redistribution of land and the social revolution was what the peasants themselves wanted and were ready to mobilize for.

Durland also received permission from local officials to interview the revolutionary Maria Spiridonova in Tambov, and his claims followed the narrative on Russian political terrorism discussed earlier, but with an additional and powerful twist. In the book he recounted how some Russian women took up the work of agitation and even assassination "in precisely the same spirit that a woman enters a religious order."⁴⁴⁴ He thus established a vivid link between terror, female self-sacrifice, and religion, and used it when discussing Spiridonova and her case.

Spiridonova was born in Tambov into the family of a banker belonging to non-hereditary nobility. She did not finish her education because of the early death of her father and because she fell ill with tuberculosis. Instead, she was employed as a secretary in the local Assembly of the Nobility. She joined the Tambov SR cell and on its verdict in January 1906 (she was twenty-one at the time) shot Tambov provincial counselor Gavriil Luzhenovsky for abusing local peasants. She received capital punishment, but her case drew widespread attention due to her brutal treatment

⁴⁴⁰ Durland, "'Pacifying' Russia," 16.

⁴⁴¹ Durland, *The Red Reign*, 99–100.

⁴⁴² Durland, 64.

⁴⁴³ Durland, 135.

⁴⁴⁴ Durland, 208.

in prison and debates about female involvement in terror. In the end, the public scandal, along with Spiridonova's tuberculosis, resulted in the revocation of the death sentence in favor of penal labor in Siberia. She acquired nationwide fame that lingered on when she returned from exile and resumed political activism after the fall of the monarchy.⁴⁴⁵

Durland interviewed her in Tambov prison shortly after the death sentence was announced. He presented her as a dignified and stoic woman who was fully justified in her action and compared her to Charlotte Corday and Jeanne d'Arc. Later he received a smuggled letter from her:

If the people of America are interested in the fate of this Russian girl, tell them that they must rather interest themselves in the fatherland of this girl. The revolutionary movement here is now making for liberty. ... My heart and my soul are given to this movement – the movement which is in the service of the people. ... I was glad to see free people, from a quiet, liberty-loving land, to receive their salutations.⁴⁴⁶

Durland's narration of his encounter with Spiridonova combined several important elements. Namely, a link between radicalism and female virtue, the presentation of Spiridonova similarly to Kennan's discourse of political exiles in *Siberia*, and the claim that Russians were looking at America as an example of liberty, also present in Kennan's narrative.⁴⁴⁷ An imposing combination, this narrative, however, disregards other factors that, possibly, were more influential in driving young women and men toward revolution and violence in turn-of-the-century Russia. Boniece argued that what turned Spiridonova to such an act were economic and social constraints, grief over the loss of her father, and the influence of chronic disease. The general instability of Russia at the turn of the century, and, according to some historians, the youth psychology (maximalism, defiance, and the idea of revenge against perceived evil) were other influential factors.⁴⁴⁸

Durland also met with Leo Tolstoy at his estate in Yasnaya Polyana. The author was impressed by Tolstoy's energy despite his age and pointed out his friendly attitude. He praised Tolstoy's knowledge of American literature and America in general. The two talked about the revolution in Russia, and Durland noted that Tolstoy attached a religious meaning to it, thinking of the turmoil as part of God's plan that would ultimately show the road for Russia to its glorious future. Durland agreed that the future of Russia would indeed be grand, but he reported that Tolstoy disliked socialist ideas even though his pamphlets often criticized the government. As if in

⁴⁴⁵ For a detailed overview of the affair see: Sally Boniece, "The Spiridonova Case, 1906: Terror, Myth, and Martyrdom," in *Just Assassins: The Culture of Terrorism in Russia*, ed. Anthony Anemone (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 127–62.

⁴⁴⁶ Kellogg Durland, "Marie Spiridonova," *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 29, 1906, 38.

⁴⁴⁷ See chap. 2, n. 161–163.

⁴⁴⁸ Budnitskiy, *Terrorizm v rossiyskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii*, 164–65; Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, chap. 4.

response, he argued against Tolstoy's "passive resistance" philosophy, claiming that in Russia, "all resistance of necessity becomes active resistance."⁴⁴⁹ His thoughts bear a resemblance to those of Kennan, who also called Tolstoy's non-resistance convictions impractical.⁴⁵⁰

Visual Materials

The two travel accounts are different in terms of visuals included. Washburn's newspaper reporting did not include any, while his book account has only nine photos, none of which were taken in any Russian city. They all show either the Third Japanese Army in action (which is not the subject of his book) or the *France* and a couple of photos on board. Apparently, Washburn was not interested in or was advised against taking pictures in Russia.

Durland, except in articles on the opening of the Duma and Aladin, similarly did not provide any visuals. However, in his book he included a collection of over seventy photos along with a map of the areas he visited, and they add to his personal interactions with the two sides of the revolution. They are placed throughout the whole text and logically follow the narration, and the majority of them are either full-page or half-page in size. Some of the photos were not his own, such as the picture of the barricades in Moscow during the December uprising that occurred before his arrival. He took photos that showed the consequences of uprisings and their suppression, including destruction in Baku, Tiflis, and other cities, and the aftermath of the attacks by the revolutionaries (figure 15). They serve to reinforce the image of the unrelenting revolutionary struggle in the empire. The author added his own comments in the captions of some of the pictures, and these remarks were included to further underline the brutality of tsarism (figure 16).

He added a couple of photos of the official opening of the first Duma as well as those of exiles. He also included portraits of the people he interviewed and the Cossacks he traveled with in the Caucasus. Among the people he did not meet, there are portraits of Cadet leaders, but also those of Catherine Breshkovsky and another famous Populist who joined the SRs, Nikolay Tchaikovsky. These pictures altogether serve to reinforce Durland's claim that he interacted with all sides of the revolutionary events and thus could justify the objectivity of his impressions.

While a group of pictures showed Russian labor conditions, numerous photos were dedicated to the peasantry: their houses, families, and their life in the famine areas (figure 17). They serve to complement his written descriptions with the demonstration of the authentic lifestyle

⁴⁴⁹ Kellogg Durland, "In the Home of Tolstoi," *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 29, 1906, 28.

⁴⁵⁰ See chap. 2, n. 193.

of the peasantry and to strengthen his comments about their poor living conditions under tsarist rule. The illustrations of natives show Caucasian and Tartar “types” as well as a picture of Ostyaks (a discontinued word for several Siberian indigenous ethnicities) with a comment on their impact on the well-being of exiles in Siberia (figure 18). The pictures related to them add to his written depictions of the natives in the Caucasus and reinforce the notion that Durland saw native peoples as inferior. Despite the considerable number of photos, all were taken at a distance, while the author himself was only shown in the frontispiece.



Figure 15. “Horse Killed by Small Bomb Thrown to Stop the Carriage in Which State Money Was Being Conveyed,” in Kellogg Durland, *The Red Reign: The True Story of an Adventurous Year in Russia* (New York: Century, 1907), 395.



Figure 16. “Pacification,” in Kellogg Durland, *The Red Reign*, 117. (The caption under the photo reads: “‘Of course I order my soldiers to burn down the homes of these people.’ General Alikhanoff.”)



Figure 17. “A Typical Cottage in the Famine District of Saratoff,” in Kellogg Durland, *The Red Reign*, 134.



Figure 18. “Ostiaks,” in Kellogg Durland, *The Red Reign*, 362. (The caption under the photo reads: “Among these semi-barbarous people cultivated men and women are forced to spend long years of exile.”)

Conclusion

Washburn ended his account after arriving in Constantinople. His vessel docking in the Ottoman waters symbolized the imagined geographical and civilizational division between the West and the East, more exactly, “Asia and her mediaeval civilization from Europe and all her enlightened progress.”⁴⁵¹ Durland also left Russia at the end of 1906 on a steamer to Constantinople, concluding that leaving the country signified for him the “sheer joy of being alive – and thankfulness that Russia and all her darkness lay behind.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Washburn, *The Cable Game*, 217.

⁴⁵² Durland, *The Red Reign*, 479.

Washburn's narrative got an unanimously positive reception. Some newspapers suggested it was a good read for future foreign correspondents. The *Minneapolis Journal*, the newspaper Washburn sent some of his articles to, summarized that his account "is a decidedly good piece of work, full of adventure and information, and seasoned with fun and clever criticism."⁴⁵³ Durland's oeuvre received even more praise. Parallels with Kennan ran rampant. Shortly before the announcement of the book the *New York Times* vouched that "since George Kennan journeyed through Russia and Siberia eighteen years ago, no American has traveled so widely nor witnessed so many different kinds of events in those countries as Mr. Durland."⁴⁵⁴ The *Baltimore Sun* suggested that Durland's narrative surpassed Kennan's, and that the former "has not written a line but what is based upon the truth as expressed by living persons or by unquestioned primary sources."⁴⁵⁵ Compared to the uproar and debates about *Siberia*, none of the reviews that we know of criticized any of Durland's conclusions. The press lauded his account for the fact that Durland visited many areas in Russia and interacted with all sides of the revolution, the engaging storytelling, the author's shrewd perception of Russian affairs, and visual materials. A couple of reviews made straightforward comments. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, claiming that his narrative "stirs the imagination to the boiling point," concluded that "it seems impossible that such things exist in the twentieth century in a nation which pretends to be civilized."⁴⁵⁶ The absence of criticism of Durland suggests that Americans took his descriptions about the empire at face value, likely due to the negative image of the autocracy at the turn of the century and the oversaturation by materials about Russian unrest and violence. More generally, while many scholars argued that American moral support or interest in the revolution weakened by 1907, the fact that no one criticized Durland's book, published at the end of that year, seems to contradict these claims.

Washburn, an experienced foreign correspondent, provided a professional, or at least a balanced summary of the situation in the Black Sea region in December 1905 in his cables, albeit he was limited in time to conduct a more thorough survey. Yet in his written mail letters and the subsequent book his approach changed. He did not include or take any photos, which seems strange for a foreign correspondent who must have had a camera. He published his account five years after

⁴⁵³ "Adventure Told by Minneapolis Man," *Minneapolis Journal*, January 12, 1912, 17; Other reviews include: "Black Sea Adventures," *Springfield Daily Republican*, January 12, 1912, 17; "Today's Book," *Evening Sun (Baltimore)*, July 12, 1912, 4.

⁴⁵⁴ "Russia's 'Red Reign' as Seen by an American," *New York Times*, October 13, 1907, 44.

⁴⁵⁵ "A Brilliant Description of Startling Events," *Baltimore Sun*, January 8, 1908, 9.

⁴⁵⁶ "The Red Reign," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 20, 1908, 6; Other reviews include: "Durland and His Book," *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 9, 1907, 34; "A Guide to the New Books," *Literary Digest* 36, no. 1 (January 4, 1908): 25–26.

the revolution was over in 1907, and he did not make any comments about Russians as people. This suggests that he compiled his book for his personal goals rather than because of genuine interest in Russia. It revealed much about his personality, and by extension about the cultural outlook of at least a portion of Americans – with unabashed belief in Western preeminence, anti-Semitism, and nativism influenced by the influx of Jews and other immigrants. His experience in the Czar’s country, with unrest in cities, the exotic Caucasus, and amateur revolutionaries, apparently reinforced his belief in Western superiority and prompted him to present Russia as alien.

Durland, with a long residence in the empire, had a clear goal to revive American sympathies towards the revolution in Russia and to reinforce the support for Socialists at home. His account has much in common with Kennan’s study of the exile system, and Durland attempted to follow in Kennan’s footsteps and become a popular commentator on Russia. In describing his interactions with common Russians and their sympathies towards Americans, Durland came close to *Tent Life*. Yet when it came to Russian politics, he echoed *Siberia*, including the image of Russians who wished to emulate American liberty at home and the overall potential of the country, including its workers and peasants.

Durland was writing in support of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries. Yet his ideologically biased narration was flawed and, by extension, displayed the problems and outright wishful thinking of the SRs. Throughout 1905–1907 the party misunderstood popular sentiments, including those of the peasants, and the fluctuating tide of the revolution in Russia. It was divided over the course of action to be taken, lacked unity, and in the long run suffered from indulgence in terror. When criticizing the government, Durland tended to present things not only one-sidedly, but on many occasions falsely. He was certainly more interested in common people than Washburn, particularly the peasantry. Yet a handful of his remarks, especially those employing triangulation, reveal that he did not view Russians as fully-fledged members of Western civilization.

The second part of this thesis covered two formative events in the history of the late Russian Empire that incited Americans to go to Russia and write about the country and its people. The final section covers American travels to non-European Russian regions. Considering the impact of Kennan’s work on the exile system and the transcontinental railways at home, the Trans-Siberian Railway naturally became a subject of constant American interest and travel reporting. The next chapter thus turns to the journeys on an “iron horse” across entire Siberia.

Part III

Chapter 5. “The Old Dark Siberia Dies, but Our New Siberia of the Railroad Lives:” The Trans-Siberian Railway in American Travelogues

Introduction

The Trans-Siberian Railway, the construction of which began on 31 May 1891 in Vladivostok and was completed in October 1916, became the object of continuous and unceasing American interest. This railway was one of the most colossal infrastructure projects of the age, and dozens of American travelers tried it out at different stages of its construction. Many of them wrote travel accounts that added to the discourse about Siberia and Russia in general. The narratives of three authors discussed in this chapter, written over a decade, demonstrate that Americans reexamined the image of Siberia set by Kennan in the 1880s. While the new cohort of travelers wrote mostly about the same subjects, for them the Russian Empire became a creative force rather than a retrograde country. Based on drawing imaginative parallels between Siberia and the settlement of the American West, their conclusions shifted closer to *Tent Life*, even though the “imperial view,” which can be traced back to *Siberia*, was also present. And yet, their Siberian impressions revealed a great deal about their own, and, by extension, their countrymen’s, concerns and longings at the turn of the century.

The Trans-Siberian Railway and Its Significance

The first railway projects related to Siberia emerged in the late 1850s. They were at first limited to regional railroads between major Siberian cities or those linking European Russia with the industrial centers of Ural as well as Western Siberia. From the 1860s to the 1880s many railway specialists and officials argued for a mixed railway-waterway system across Siberia. It was only in February 1891 when the state elite resolved to build a single continuous railway to connect European Russia and Vladivostok. Debates over the route resulted in the three proposals for the initial point of construction – Tumen to the north, Orenburg to the south, and Miass station next to Chelyabinsk in between these two cities. The latter project, detailed by Konstantin Posyet, who served as the Minister of Transportation from 1874 to 1888, was in the end approved in February–March 1891. Even though today the starting point of the Trans-Siberian Railway is widely considered to be Moscow, back then it was the line only from Miass to Vladivostok (see figure 26).

The construction began from Vladivostok to Khabarovsk and simultaneously from Chelyabinsk eastward and was to be funded fully by the state.

The “Great Siberian Route” (as it was known in Russia) marked an increase in the role of the state in building and operating Russian railroads, which began in the late 1870s after a two-decade period of dynamic private railway construction.⁴⁵⁷ State-funded railway building contributed to the skyrocketing mileage of the empire during the 1890s.⁴⁵⁸

The reasons for building the Trans-Siberian line were complex. The strategic significance was emphasized from the earliest projects, and the necessity of a direct connection between European Russia and the Far East was becoming more apparent in the 1880s. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, the British occupation of Port Hamilton on the Korean Peninsula in the same year, the growing influence of other European powers in China, and the rapid modernization of Japan made Russia increasingly concerned about the security of its remote eastern territories. The railway served as an extension of Russia’s own East Asian empire. In 1896 the Russian government obtained a concession from China to connect the Siberian line under construction with Vladivostok through Chinese Manchuria (rather than its own territory) as part of a defensive alliance. Two years later Russia acquired the right to use two strategic ports, Port Arthur and Dalian, and to construct a southward railway to connect them with the Trans-Siberian one via Harbin. The lines constructed on Chinese territory were collectively known as the Chinese Eastern Railway (1896–1903), but its crucial southern part from Dalian to Changchun (later called the South Manchurian Railway) was lost to the Japanese after the war, making the northern line strategically redundant (see figure 27).⁴⁵⁹ Apart from political influence, it could potentially become a major transit and freight route between Europe and Asia. The railway also allowed Russia

⁴⁵⁷ Aida Solov'yeva, *Zheleznodorozhnyy transport Rossii vo vtoroy polovine XIX v.* [Russian railways in the second half of the nineteenth century] (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 159–63; Evgeniy Kraskovskiy and Mikhail Uzdin, eds., *Istoriya zheleznodorozhnogo transporta Rossii* [History of the railroad transport of Russia], vol. 1, 1836–1917 gg. [1836–1917] (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet putey soobshcheniya, 1994), 98.

⁴⁵⁸ While in 1890 the total mileage of Russian railroads was around 30,000 kilometers, it soared to over 50,000 by 1900 and around 70,000 by the First World War, including the Trans-Siberian Railway. It became the second longest after the United States by the time of the war, although the density remained insufficient.

⁴⁵⁹ John Westwood, *A History of Russian Railways* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 114–15; Igor' Lukoyanov, “*Ne otstat' ot derzhav...*”: *Rossiya na Dal'nem Vostoke v kontse XIX – nachale XX vv.* [‘Not to fall behind the powers...’: Russia on the Far East in the end of nineteenth – early twentieth centuries] (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriya, 2008), 100–113; Ralph Glatfelter, “Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Chinese Eastern Railway,” in *Railway Imperialism*, ed. Clarence Davis, Kenneth Wilburn, and Ronald Robinson, Contributions in Comparative Colonial Studies 26 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 137–54.

to promote itself as a modern great power, as evidenced by its presentations at the World's Fairs in Chicago in 1893 and in Paris in 1900.⁴⁶⁰

The Trans-Siberian Railway was recognized as a major instrument in bringing Siberia closer to the imperial center.⁴⁶¹ The Committee of the Trans-Siberian Railway (1892–1905), headed by heir Nicholas (the future Nicholas II), was responsible for the construction of the railway and the general development of Siberia, including its settlement by peasants of Slavic origin, which was perceived as especially important.⁴⁶² The railway and the immigration that it spurred were supposed to boost the Siberian economy and scientific research of the region, ease overpopulation in certain areas of European Russia, and, according to some Russian contemporaries, contribute to the acculturation or “civilizing” of the natives.⁴⁶³

Historians agree that the Trans-Siberian line was a key railway for the Russian Empire. Most of them, however, also mention the flaws of the project. The standards of construction were lowered to allow for building as quickly and as cheaply as possible, which necessitated changing or improving tracks in the future. To ease the shortage of labor in remote areas and to cut costs, the state engaged exiles, soldiers, and migrants from China and Korea, yet the construction, with its inefficient management, proved to be extremely expensive.⁴⁶⁴

This railway is linked to ongoing scholarly disputes regarding Russian domestic policy in Siberia, especially its economic and social influence and its effect on the native population. Some scholars emphasize that this major line boosted Siberian economy, urbanization, the growth of the region's population, and contributed to the integration of Siberia into the imperial center.⁴⁶⁵ Others

⁴⁶⁰ Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Poyezd v sovremennost'. Mobil'nost' i sotsial'noye prostranstvo Rossii v vek zheleznikh dorog* [A train to modernity. Mobility and social space of Russia in the age of railways], *Historia Rossica* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2016), 95–103; Claudia Weiss, “Representing the Empire: The Meaning of Siberia for Russian Imperial Identity,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 3 (2007): 444–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990701368696>.

⁴⁶¹ Dameshek and Remnev, *Sibir' v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii*, 41; Shannon Smith, “The Politics of Progress and the American-Russian Relationship, 1867–1917” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1994), 189.

⁴⁶² The task of promoting and handling immigration to Siberia and other Asian parts of Russia was eventually transferred to the Resettlement Administration, which was formed in 1896.

⁴⁶³ Willard Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question’: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, no. 2 (2000): 225; Anatoliy Remnev and Natal'ya Suvorova, *Kolonizatsiya Aziatskoy Rossii: imperskiye i natsional'nyye stsennariy vtoroy poloviny XIX – nachala XX veka* [The colonization of Asiatic Russia: Imperial and national scenarios of the second half of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries] (Omsk: Nauka, 2013), 25–26.

⁴⁶⁴ The total costs reached 1.5 billion rubles compared to initially planned 350 million rubles. Kraskovskiy and Uzdin, *Istoriya zheleznodorozhnogo transporta Rossii*, 1:153; Lukoyanov, “*Ne otstat' ot derzhav...*”, 78–79; Steven Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850–1917* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 188–91, 217.

⁴⁶⁵ Kraskovskiy and Uzdin, *Istoriya zheleznodorozhnogo transporta Rossii*, 1:178–80; Harmon Tupper, *To the Great Ocean: Siberia and the Trans-Siberian Railway* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), 468–69.

contend that the economic impact was limited to agriculture rather than industries or trade and to areas close to the railway and Western Siberia, not the whole of it. The colonization of Siberia, in their view, brought ambiguous results regarding the settling and “civilizing” abilities of the peasants.⁴⁶⁶ Researchers demonstrate that the interactions of the settlers with natives proved to be more complex than expected by Russian administrators, with peasants influencing natives both positively and negatively, while at times they themselves were “nativized.”⁴⁶⁷

The Trans-Siberian Railway was built with American know-how in mind as Russian engineers studied Canadian and American rail networks and American practices of settling vacant land before and shortly after its commencement.⁴⁶⁸ In general debates about Siberia and its future Russians occasionally evoked the image and the historical experience of America. Officials and intellectuals who called for the rapid construction of the railroad and the subsequent integration of Siberia associated its development with progress in the American West and “Manifest Destiny.” Yet they were also concerned by the prospect of its potential future separation from European Russia, similarly to the U.S. gaining its independence from Britain.⁴⁶⁹ Their political opponents, who were exiled to Siberia, celebrated their place of banishment as the land of the future, martyrdom, and true freedom akin to America. At the turn of the century the Regionalist intellectual movement (mentioned in chapter 2 above) categorized state policy as colonial and argued for the necessity of greater autonomy for the region.⁴⁷⁰

Americans were genuinely interested in the Trans-Siberian Railway. This interest, however, was not a matter of coincidence. Instead, it was another indicator of decades-long attention and

⁴⁶⁶ Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question,’” 226–31; Remnev and Suvorova, *Kolonizatsiya Aziatskoy Rossii*, 180–85.

⁴⁶⁷ Dameshek and Remnev, *Sibir’ v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii*, 214–15; Willard Sunderland, “Russians into Yakuts? ‘Going Native’ and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s–1914,” *Slavic Review* 55, no. 4 (1996): 806–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501239>.

⁴⁶⁸ Sergey Kann, “Opyt zheleznodorozhnogo stroitel’sstva v Amerike i proyektirovaniye Transsiba [The experience of railroad building in America and the planning of the Trans-Siberian Railway],” in *Zarubezhnyye ekonomicheskiye i kul’turnyye svyazi Sibiri (XVIII–XX vv.): sbornik nauchnykh trudov* [Foreign economic and cultural connections of Siberia (eighteenth–twentieth centuries): Compilation of scientific works], ed. Leonid Goryushkin (Novosibirsk: Rossiyskaya Akademiya Nauk. Sibirskoye otdeleniye. Institut istorii, 1995), 114–36; One example is: Ivan Kologrivov and Mechislav Rutkovskiy, *Otchet po izsledovaniyu zheleznodorozhnago dela v Soyedinennykh shtatakh Severnoy Ameriki predstavlenyy inzhenerami I. S. Kologrivovym i M. V. Rutkovskim* [Report on the study of railways in North American United States made by engineers I. S. Kologrivov and M. V. Rutkovskiy] (St. Petersburg: Tipo-litografiya S. Muller i I. Bogel’man, 1887).

⁴⁶⁹ Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question,’” 219.

⁴⁷⁰ Stephen Watrous, “The Regionalist Conception of Siberia, 1860 to 1920,” in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 113–32, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-08914-4_7; Mark Bassin, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (1991): 776–78, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/96.3.763>; Dameshek and Remnev, *Sibir’ v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii*, chap. 10.

involvement in the development of the Russian railway system. George Washington Whistler (until his death in 1849) and his successor, Thompson Brown, supervised the major railroad between Moscow and St. Petersburg (1842–1851) and contributed to the decision to set the Russian gauge width (5 ft or 1,524 mm) that would be used on all Russian railways later. American businessman Perry McDonough Collins (introduced in chapter 2 above) presented his plan of the railway across Siberia to the Russian government as early as the late 1850s. In the 1880s Wharton Baker and Daniel Butterfield also made proposals related to railroads in Siberia.⁴⁷¹ Even though the Trans-Siberian Railway was built by the state, the American readership was aware that American-made railway equipment, including Baldwin locomotives and air brakes made by Westinghouse and New York Air Brake, was employed on Russian railways and made it to Siberia as well.⁴⁷² In the interwar period American railway technologies (including the electrification of railways and electric locomotives) and specialists were part of a large-scale technology transfer to the Soviet Union.⁴⁷³

With the influence of Kennan's writings, an extensive railroad system at home at the turn of the century, including transcontinental lines, and the continuous American assistance in the foundation and operation of Russian railways, it was natural that many Americans eagerly followed the news about the Trans-Siberian Railway and rushed to Russia to try it out even at the earliest stage of its construction.

Authors and Their Travelogues

At least a dozen book-length travelogues penned before 1914 testify to this widespread interest. It is the largest group of American books on a single topic about travel in Russia at the turn of the century, while other authors published solely newspaper articles.

Three authors were selected for discussion. The first is John Bookwalter (1839–1915), an Ohio businessman and philanthropist. Born in Rob Roy, Indiana, he showed interest in mechanics from his childhood and made an acquaintance with James Effel, an inventor of hydraulic turbines in Springfield, Ohio. Bookwalter joined his James Leffel & Co. and married Effel's daughter Eliza.

⁴⁷¹ Donald Wenger, "Russian-American Relations in Northeast Asia During the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1984), 181–83.

⁴⁷² Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 409–10.

⁴⁷³ Norman Saul, *Friends or Foes? The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921–1941* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 223–24, 241–42; Evgeniy Kraskovskiy and Mikhail Uzdin, eds., *Istoriya zheleznodorozhnogo transporta Rossii* [History of the railroad transport of Russia], vol. 2, 1917–1945 gg. [1917–1945] (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet putey soobshcheniya, 1997), 148.

He was later involved in banking, the steel industry, and publishing. He managed to accumulate considerable wealth, which made it possible for him to engage in philanthropic work in Springfield and Clark County, Ohio (including donating money to the present-day Wittenberg University). He briefly participated in political life – he was the Democratic nominee in the 1881 Ohio gubernatorial election but lost to the Republican candidate, Charles Foster. Bookwalter was interested in agricultural development: he bought up to 65,000 acres of land in Ohio, Nebraska, Kansas, and Illinois and launched agricultural experiments in an attempt to attract people to farm life.⁴⁷⁴ In one of the organized settlements in Nebraska he donated money to a Methodist Church. He traveled extensively around the world, and before his trip to Russia he had visited Greece, Italy, Iran, Japan, China, Egypt, and the Middle East, collecting art and donating it to the Cincinnati Art Museum.⁴⁷⁵ He undertook a trip along the emerging Trans-Siberian Railway, the Caucasus, and into Turkestan (the subject of the next chapter) in the summer and autumn of 1898, sending several letters primarily to Midwestern newspapers while on the road. The majority of them ended up printed in the *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*. These letters formed the basis of the considerably expanded book, *Siberia and Central Asia*. Published initially for private circulation by the author himself, in the next two years it became available for a wider readership both in the U.S. and Britain. He additionally gave a couple of post-travel interviews, which are discussed in both this and the next chapter.

Three years later military surgeon Nicholas Senn (1844–1908) undertook a trip across Siberia while simultaneously writing a series of articles for the *Chicago Tribune*.⁴⁷⁶ He was born in Buchs, Canton of St. Gallen, Switzerland, but his family emigrated to the United States in 1852 and settled in Ashford, Wisconsin. A lifelong adherent to the Reformed Presbyterian Church due to his mother's influence, he graduated from Chicago Medical College in 1868. Following an internship at Cook County Hospital, he began medical practice in Wisconsin. In 1877–1878 he studied at Munich University, where he got his M.D., and, eventually, he got a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. After his studies in Germany, he returned to practice in Milwaukee and

⁴⁷⁴ Musetta Gilman, "Bookwalter, Agricultural Commune in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 54 (1973): 91–105. He wrote a couple of books related to the subject, including *If Not Silver, What?* in 1896, arguing for silver coinage, and *Rural versus Urban* in 1910, where he warned against excessive city building and discussed agriculture in different countries and the principle of "organic" human living.

⁴⁷⁵ See John Bookwalter, *Catalogue of Objects Loaned by Mr. John W. Bookwalter, to the Cincinnati Museum Association* (Cincinnati: C. F. Bradley, 1890).

⁴⁷⁶ James Phalen, "Senn, Nicholas," in *Dictionary of American Biography*. Robert-Seward, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935); Albert King, "Nicholas Senn. 1844–1908," *Proceedings of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 10 (1908): 232–34.

later Chicago, until in 1890 he became a professor of surgery and surgical pathology at Rush Medical College. In 1891 he founded the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States. In 1892–1893 he was the head of the American Surgical Association, and in 1897–1898 he led the American Medical Association. When the Spanish-American War broke out, he was appointed chief surgeon of the Sixth Army Corps and took part in military action in Cuba. He served as the Surgeon-General of the National Guard of Wisconsin from 1888 until leaving the state and as the Surgeon-General of the National Guard of Illinois. He made a considerable scholarly contribution to American medicine and participated in a number of International Medical Congresses, including in Moscow in 1897. In his late years, he traveled extensively, visiting South America, Africa, India, and Greenland. In 1901 he embarked on a round-the-world trip, visiting Europe and traveling along the Trans-Siberian Railway in July–August of that year, followed by trips to Japan and China before returning home.⁴⁷⁷ Senn republished his articles, printed every week in the Sunday edition, almost word by word in a book titled *Around the World via Siberia* (1902).

Lastly, after a journey on the Trans-Siberian line with a side trip to Chinese Mongolia in the winter of 1908, Lindon Bates, Jr. (1883–1915) published *The Russian Road to China* (1910).⁴⁷⁸ He was the son of civil engineer Lindon Wallace Bates, who worked on the Northern Pacific and the Oregon Pacific Railroads and the Suez Canal and created his own plan for the construction of the Panama Canal. Bates, Sr. worked in Europe and was temporarily hired for the improvement of waterways in Russia. His son visited the empire first as a kid.⁴⁷⁹ Bates, Jr. graduated from Sheffield Scientific School at Yale University in 1902. He began working on the New York Barge Canal and later supervised grade raising against flood in Galveston, Texas, as the secretary of the United States Engineering Company. He traveled to Hudson Bay in 1900 and Panama in 1904 to examine canal construction. He was elected as a Republican to the New York State Assembly in 1908. He was reelected a year later, but he failed two bids for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1912 and 1914. While he was a member of the State Assembly, he was involved in the General Commission of Water Supply and served in the National Conservation Congress. He became the vice-president

⁴⁷⁷ His round-the-world trip and his previous visit to Russia in 1897 to attend an international medical event represent the growing connection between the mobility of surgeons for the sake of travel, science, and education at a time of the proliferation of medical knowledge and growing connections between surgical schools and individual doctors worldwide, see: Thomas Schlich, “‘One and the Same the World Over:’ The International Culture of Surgical Exchange in an Age of Globalization, 1870–1914,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 71, no. 3 (2016): 247–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/jrw003>.

⁴⁷⁸ Yale University, “Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University Deceased During the Year Ending July 1, 1915, Including the Record of a Few Who Died Previously, Hitherto Unreported,” *Bulletin of Yale University* 74, no. 9 (1915), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100607751>; Motter, *The International Who's Who*, 94.

⁴⁷⁹ Zhuravleva, *Ponimaniye Rossii v SShA*, 347–48.

of Bates Engineering Company of New York City, a consulting engineer of several companies, and a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers. At one point, he also became the trustee of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. When the war broke out, both father and son joined the American Commission for Relief in Belgium, and Bates, Jr. was one of the victims of the German submarine attack on the *Lusitania* in May 1915.

The Travel Accounts

The three American travelers took a trip at different phases of the building of the railroad and with different goals in mind. By the time Bookwalter began his journey, only two sections were completed: the Ussuri Railway from Vladivostok to Khabarovsk (1891–1897) and the Western Siberian Railway from Miass/Chelyabinsk to Ob (present-day Novosibirsk, 1892–1896), while the section further eastward to Irkutsk was open only for temporary traffic. Bookwalter traveled from Moscow to Taiga station next to Tomsk and visited the city. He explored villages around Tomsk and further southwest in the Kazakh Steppe. His goal was to study Siberia, especially in terms of economy, “as the Eastern Question hinges largely upon the position of Russia.”⁴⁸⁰

Senn undertook his journey three years later, by the time the Mid-Siberian Railway from Ob to Irkutsk (1893–1899) and the Transbaikal Railway from the eastern shore of Lake Baikal (Mysovaya station) to Stretensk (1895–1900) had become operational. Senn traveled in the company of three fellow American doctors: his colleague at the Rush Medical College, Daniel R. Brower, Dr. Jacob Frank from Chicago, and William M. Mastin, a practitioner in Mobile, Alabama. The four doctors arrived in St. Petersburg from Germany, took a train to Moscow, and made an all-steam journey to Vladivostok, sojourning for a couple of days in Samara and Irkutsk on the way. They crossed Lake Baikal on a substitute ice-breaker (it served the passengers until the completion of the Circum-Baikal Railway in 1905) and sailed on a regular steamer from Stretensk to Khabarovsk on the Amur River. The group reached Vladivostok via the Ussuri Railway. Senn was inspired by the travel account of Carter Henry Harrison titled *The Race with the Sun* (1889), to the point that he initially labeled his own journey “The Race Against the Sun.” Harrison, a member of the House of Representatives from 1875 to 1879 and the mayor of Chicago from 1879 to 1887, embarked on a year-long journey around the world in 1887–1888 with John W. Amberg and his son William. Arriving in Russia with a prejudice against the monarchy, he changed his preconceptions for the better and claimed that the government treated non-Russian nations fairly

⁴⁸⁰ John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia* (Springfield, OH: printed by the author, 1899), v.

and developed the country successfully. Harrison compared Russia with British India and concluded that it would be “an advancement in civilization” if Russia expanded to the south from the Caspian Sea.⁴⁸¹ Senn justified his journey in a peculiar way. He declared travel to be an essential type of rest for physicians as well as for all involved in intellectual rather than physical work. But he hoped to combine rest with education, aiming to learn about medical and military affairs in Russia. With that he joined those Americans who, with wider travel opportunities at the turn of the century, often employed the Protestant-rooted rhetoric of self-improvement and education to avoid accusations of idleness.⁴⁸²

Bates took a trip on the Trans-Siberian Railway after the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, when Russian access to China and Korea was cut off. This made the Chinese Eastern Railway irrelevant from the strategic point of view and forced the government to build a connection to Vladivostok on its own territory, the Amur Railway (1908–1916). He traveled from Moscow to Irkutsk, where he temporarily stayed, and with a change of trains reached Verkhneudinsk (present-day Ulan-Ude). Then he rode on a sled and a Russian *tarantass* (a four-wheeled vehicle) through Kyakhta to Urga (present-day Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia). Kyakhta, a small settlement on the contemporary Russian-Mongolian border, became a major trading center between the Russian Empire and China after the Treaty of Kyakhta of 1727, which gave Russians the right to send their caravans to Beijing. Tea exports from China through Kyakhta represented a major article of Russian imports for more than a century, and Kyakhta remained a major transportation hub of tea until the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, when it switched to Vladivostok.⁴⁸³ Bates believed that although Japan cut off Russia in Manchuria, a new railway that Russians might construct to reach China could run through Mongolia along this ancient tea trade route, which he wanted to explore.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Carter Harrison, *A Race with the Sun; or, a Sixteen Month's Tour from Chicago Around the World Through Manitoba and British Columbia by the Canadian Pacific, Oregon and Washington, Japan, China, Siam, Straits Settlements, Burmah, India, Ceylon, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Roumania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Transcaucasia, the Caspian Sea and the Volga River, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Prussia, Paris, London and Home* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 485–89.

⁴⁸² Aron, *Working at Play*, 101–2, 155.

⁴⁸³ Chinyun Lee, “From Kiachta to Vladivostok: Russian Merchants and the Tea Trade,” *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 3, no. 2 (2014): 195–96; 209, <https://doi.org/10.1353/reg.2014.0017>.

⁴⁸⁴ Lindon Bates, *The Russian Road to China* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 24. He was not far from the truth in his claims since the state interest in this projected railway intensified after the Russo-Japanese War and the completion of the railway between Beijing and Kalgan (present-day Zhangjiakou) in 1909. Considering the political and economic benefits, in June 1913 the Russian State Duma approved the construction of the railroad from Verkhneudinsk to Kyakhta, but it was abandoned when the First World War broke out, see: Il'dar Khamzin, Rustam Ganiyev, and Anton Kochnev, “Kyakhtinskaya zheleznaya doroga: geoeconomicheskii proyekt Rossiyskoy imperii s tsel'yu razvitiya torgovykh svyazey s Kitayem i Mongoliyey [The Kyakhta Railway: A geoeconomic project of the Russian Empire

None of the three authors knew Russian, although Bates spoke French and used it to speak with Russians of the upper class. Nevertheless, during his trip to Mongolia he (and also Bookwalter) employed guides and translators. Unlike the other two travelers, Bookwalter was welcomed by Russian officials on his way.⁴⁸⁵ Senn, for his part, with his earlier visit to Moscow and the influence of Harrison's earlier trip, carried a relatively positive bias to what he was going to experience in the empire. Finally, Senn and, to a smaller degree, Bookwalter were reporting while being on the road, therefore showing their own fresh impressions, whereas Bates wrote his book some time after his journey.

Trains and Travel Conditions

The three travelers took different types of trains. Bookwalter took a quicker express train from Moscow to Tomsk. In his view, the railway was decently built, with properly constructed and ballasted road track and well-made bridges across rivers. He also gave positive remarks regarding the stations as some of them even had restaurants with delicious food. The stations also offered free hot water to passengers and immigrants, and its quality was strictly regulated. Bookwalter lauded this arrangement and commented with irony on Britain and its recent Maidstone typhoid epidemic, caused by contaminated water.⁴⁸⁶

He praised the comfort of his train compartment. It was several months before Bookwalter's journey when express trains were introduced, consisting of one car of first class and two of second, with additional luggage and salon/restaurant cars. Since he had the support of Russian officials, he likely traveled first class. The train was electrified inside and offered four- and later two-bed compartments.⁴⁸⁷ Compared to his own car, Bookwalter wrote in detail about the cars of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits, which were about to be introduced in Siberia. This company developed a number of luxurious travel routes, including the prominent *Orient Express*.⁴⁸⁸ Bookwalter was shown one of the company's cars, which included a shower, a library, a gym, and first-rate electrified compartments. He imagined that a journey on such an elaborate train could be soon made from Moscow or even Paris to Beijing and concluded that its

aimed at developing trade relations with China and Mongolia],” *Oriental Studies* 16, no. 2 (2023): 268–80, <https://doi.org/10.22162/2619-0990-2023-66-2-268-280>.

⁴⁸⁵ Unfortunately, I could not find the exact reason behind such a favorable reception; yet, most likely, it had to do with his considerable personal wealth.

⁴⁸⁶ John Bookwalter, “An American in Siberia,” *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, November 13, 1898, 33.

⁴⁸⁷ Platon Krasnov, ed., *Sibir' pod vliyaniyem rel'sovogo puti* [Siberia under the influence of the railway] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya V. Kirshbauma, 1902), 94–95; Tupper, *To the Great Ocean*, 267–73, 276.

⁴⁸⁸ Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, 178–83; Tupper, *To the Great Ocean*, 274–75, 281–82.

magnificence “is a surprise even to one familiar with the splendor of our own metropolitan trains.”⁴⁸⁹

While Bookwalter pointed out that the increasing traffic of the Trans-Siberian Railway would necessitate further expansion in the future, his conclusion in the book reads:

A sufficiently accurate general description of the Siberian railroad and its various appointments would, I think, be covered by the statement that it is fully equal to either the Union or Northern Pacific Railway, although the oldest portion east of Tscheljabinsk has been in operation scarcely two years, and the newer portions a few months only.⁴⁹⁰

Thus, for Bookwalter the railway and the travel experience were on par with the transcontinental lines at home, and for him the Trans-Siberian line fit into the developing railway system in Europe on the whole. Still, he was somewhat erroneous in fully equating the state-built and state-controlled railway in Siberia to the lines that were based on private activity.

He also rode on a Russian *tarantass* to villages next to Tomsk and criticized the quality of Russian roads. However, he noted with humor that compared to similar means of transportation that he experienced in other countries, “a Siberian *tarantass*, engineered by a Kalmuck *Yamstchik* (carriage driver) with a little vodka for fuel, easily beats the record.”⁴⁹¹

Senn from the beginning confidently asserted that there was “no other country in the world in which traveling is done with more comfort and ease than in the United States” and feared that foreign train travel would cause much discomfort.⁴⁹² His pride was further reinforced when he saw many middle-class American passengers on the steamer that he took across the Atlantic. Pleased that a growing part of the population was now able to travel abroad, Senn reasoned that “money is plenty” and that “the country is in a more prosperous condition than at any time before,” equating travel with asserting American presence in the world. Yet, he simultaneously claimed that in many things, from nature to history, America was on par, if not superior to Europe. While he himself was off to Europe, he did not notice any incongruity when he moralized that he had “no patience with Americans who rush off to Europe before they have seen their own country” and that their home country had so much more to offer to an average vacationer. He thus clearly displayed a nationalist sentiment regarding vacation across the Atlantic that was well-studied by Shaffer.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ John Bookwalter, “In Siberia,” *Buckeye (Troy, OH)*, September 8, 1898, 1.

⁴⁹⁰ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 91.

⁴⁹¹ Bookwalter, 176.

⁴⁹² Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Trip Around the World,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1901, 41.

⁴⁹³ “Senn’s Vacation Tour of Globe,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 22, 1901, 4; Nicholas Senn, “Life on Board Ship,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1901, 34.

The surgeon dedicated a separate article to the description of the railway and the cars. The roadbed was well-laid, and most of the railway's support infrastructure was satisfactory, but the weight of the rails was a major concern. He found them too light: he believed increased jostling might lead to accidents and would require replacement in the future. Senn pointed out that he was happy to recognize Baldwin locomotives a couple of times during the trip, displaying satisfaction with American economic presence in distant regions.

Senn mentioned three major types of trains. The "grand train *de luxe*" (the Wagons-Lits), the cars of which the author had an opportunity to see, were "by far the handsomest train of railway coaches to be found in any land." Russian express trains seemed equal to their American counterparts. Then Senn switched to the description of his regular train, comprised of the cars of first, second, and third classes, with an additional luggage car, but without a separate restaurant. The four Americans also had to buy their own linen, soap, and towels in advance. Their first-class car consisted of eight compartments for two travelers each, and every two compartments were connected to each other. While he criticized the train's lavatory, he admitted that "these quarters were of a most comfortable and even luxurious character, and will long be remembered in connection with one of the most pleasant and agreeable railway journeys, notwithstanding its length, we have ever taken."⁴⁹⁴ While he wanted to point to an agreeable travel experience despite initial negative preconceptions and pose himself as an expert on the operation of the railway, out of the three authors he was the only one to make the biggest blunders about it. His most significant mistake was that he claimed the Trans-Siberian line began in Samara, rather than Miass, or at least Moscow. He also confused Ob/Novosibirsk with Barnaul, which was not even on the railway.

The major target of his criticism was the steamer *Ural* that sailed on the Amur River from Stretensk to Khabarovsk. It was overcrowded, the food was bad, the restroom dirty, and the steamer got stuck a couple of times in shallow waters. Additionally, when the steamer and its passengers had to stay for a whole day in Blagoveshchensk because a government official had to be taken on board, he complained:

What railroad or steamship line in the United States would hold a train or a ship carrying so many passengers, anxious to reach their destination, for such a length of time for any government official or even the president himself? After all, there is some satisfaction in living in a country where no such distinction is made.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Nicholas Senn, "Dr. Senn Tells of the Siberian Railway," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 20, 1901, 50.

⁴⁹⁵ Nicholas Senn, "Dr. Senn on the Schilka and Amur," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1901, 50.

This passage not only reveals Senn's irritation but also serves to point out the unduly privileged position of Russian bureaucrats vis-à-vis the rest of the population compared to what he believed to be the more democratic society and travel practices in America.

Bates did not describe the railway or his compartment extensively, but he likely took first class in a Russian express train to Irkutsk. Compared to Bookwalter's time, it similarly had one first- and two second-class cars, a restaurant, and a luggage car, but it also came with a library, a bathroom, and a gymnasium. He criticized its slow speed but found his compartment comfortable, "like a real room" with electric light and a comfortable sofa that could be turned into two berths for the night, and the bed was made by the porter. However, he felt uncomfortable seeing armed guards at almost every train station.⁴⁹⁶

He was the only traveler to describe city accommodation, namely the Metropole Hotel in Irkutsk, one of the grandest in the city at that time. He was given a huge and well-equipped room, in which the "average New York flat would rattle around in." Ordering tea and dinner from a waiter took so long that made him wonder if the "secret gendarmerie" had arrested the staff. While the cuisine was good, Bates was annoyed by the passport system, having to give his own to the receptionist for the registration of his residence. Despite the size and amenities of the room, some of the furniture was tattered, and he found bugs in the room:

It is one thing to go to bed, another to sleep. Tales are told of powder-circled couches which the invaders, surmounting these ramparts by climbing walls, dropped upon from above. There is a legend that there are some people whom they do not bite. "*Nietchevo!*" Is it not Irkutsk, the Paris of Siberia? Why then complain of parasites?⁴⁹⁷

Hotel accommodation thus got a mixed and ironic reaction compared to the train compartment. He used a comparison with France that indeed did exist, since Irkutsk was sometimes called "the Paris of Siberia" for its regional importance, considerable increase in population at the turn of the century, and for its curiosities, including the Amur Gates (built in 1858 and collapsed in 1920), an arc that would remind an outsider of the Arc de Triomphe. From Irkutsk to Verkhneudinsk he took a regular train, and while he found it comfortable, he again lamented its slow speed. Upon arrival, he prepared for a sled journey from Verkhneudinsk to Urga with Russian drivers and guides. The major feature of his travel account is that he often narrated in the second person:

Thus outfitted and manned, take your place, muffled in furs, and seated on the felt sleeping-blankets. Guns are at your side, the bag of provisions is in front, your own little ponies paw the snow. ... The air is frosty, clear, and thrilling as wine; the snow is feathery and uncrusted, as when

⁴⁹⁶ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 31, 38.

⁴⁹⁷ Bates, 84.

it fell months back; bells are jingling, and the driver is crying his alternate endearments and curses upon the shaggy ponies. Down the long rock-flanked river valleys, amid birch and pine forests, you will skim, by unwonted paths, through out-of-the-world villages, to see in their own homes the red-bloused peasants, the women spinning at the wheel, the peddlers and priests, the traveling Mohammedan doctors, the rough Buriats, miners and merchants, along the white way.⁴⁹⁸

This type of narration invited American readers to explore what Bates would later call “the real Siberia,” echoing Kennan’s *Tent Life*, which also strove to entertain the readership with adventures in a wild and scarcely inhabited region on local means of transport. As will be emphasized later, this kind of experience of living in harsh but “natural” conditions unrestrained by modern “civilization” was alluring to a growing number of Americans before the First World War.

The Landscape of Siberia

American travelers tried to visualize the landscapes they saw for their readers. Bookwalter simplified Russian geography by dividing it into forests to the north and *chernozem* (black soil) to the south and continuously compared what he saw to the Midwestern states. While the Volga resembled the Mississippi, the scenery in the southeast of European Russia made him think of Illinois and Nebraska, “were it not for the quaint appearance of the people, with their queer, particolored costumes, the Saracenic aspect imparted by the mosque-like churches [...] and gilded domes, that dot the landscape everywhere.”⁴⁹⁹ Upon entering Siberia, he noted that it was an “exceptionally level” region and confessed that he expected to Siberia to be “a mountainous, broken, barren, and even sterile country, covered with forests.”⁵⁰⁰ He was pleasantly surprised with the summer Siberian landscape, changing his preconceptions to a more positive conclusion and drawing parallels between Siberia and the Midwest, where his business and farming operations were located.

Bates’ impression of wintertime nature was the opposite. Outside of the train window he witnessed primarily “snow-covered wastes, treeless, houseless, lifeless,” which made him think of all the horrors in Siberia in the past. During his trip to Mongolia, he again depicted desolation and repeatedly complained about various hardships. His comments repeat the image that Kennan created in *Tent Life* – Siberia as a vast but barely inhabited and developed region, where the winter landscape is hostile, barren, and alien. Yet he also offered a philosophical thought on the relations between humanity and nature. The endless winter steppe along the railway, which indicated neither

⁴⁹⁸ Bates, 128.

⁴⁹⁹ John Bookwalter, “Wheat Fields of Siberia,” *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, September 18, 1898, 47.

⁵⁰⁰ John Bookwalter, “A Journey in Siberia,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, October 16, 1898, 14.

“sign of man’s handiwork” nor “Nature’s kindliness,” revealed to him “how infinitesimal is all that man has done in this ocean of untrodden snow!”⁵⁰¹

Out of all three travelers Senn was the only one to write about the landscape, fauna, and flora of the country in detail. In European Russia, he was pleased to see a primeval forest. He called the birch “the very emblem of purity, modesty, unselfishness, frugality, and endurance,” while comparing the fir to a mother that took care of nearby trees as its children and condemning the oak that “asserts no friendship” to the trees next to it and “sends out its roots far and wide in its greed to satisfy its hunger and thirst.”⁵⁰² Attributing human traits to nature, before entering Siberia he used the occasion to discuss environmentalism:

The northern part of Europe, especially Germany and Russia, furnishes an instructive object-lesson to the American tourist in the way of forest preservation. Our country has been stripped of its majestic forests until many parts have become mere deserts. ... With the disappearance of our forests the game was extinguished in the same unmerciful manner. ... Why our government does not take vigorous measures in replanting trees and in protecting the forests that still remain has always been an enigma to me.⁵⁰³

Using a triangulation, he thus addressed the depletion of timber resources and fauna in his home country. While the problem of preservation of nature proliferated after 1900 and the conservation movement in the U.S. expanded during Theodore Roosevelt’s second term, it had its origins in the early 1870s, and Senn’s claims should be perceived in a more nuanced way in view of the formation of the Sierra Club in 1892, the 1891 Forest Reserve Act, and the creation of the first national parks.

He recounted that the land in between the Ural Mountains and the Ob River was “as level as a billiard table,” with few visible trees or animals. In Western Siberia he dedicated a monologue to the birch compared to its counterpart in European Russia:

Poor little, stunted, dwarfed, crippled, sickly birch! I hardly recognize you. I was charmed by the grace and elegance of your sisters west of the Ural and on the mountain sides, but what ails you? You are evidently very ill. ... If I could, I would like to take you with me to America, plant you in the rich soil on a mountain side, where you would be sure to receive the food you need and where you could enjoy the genial smile of the sun eight months out of twelve and drink in the air perfumed with liberty and equality.⁵⁰⁴

While Senn again presents nature in terms of human qualities, this monologue also contains a self-congratulating remark for his own country, evidently using Russia in this case to downplay the actual political and social problems in the U.S. of the time.

⁵⁰¹ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 44–45.

⁵⁰² Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey from Moscow to Samara,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 1, 1901, 50.

⁵⁰³ Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Travels in Russia,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 25, 1901, 50.

⁵⁰⁴ Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey in Siberia,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 15, 1901, 56.

Senn's praise for the summer Siberian landscape was continuous. At one point, he exalted nature with the use of religion, preaching that "for quiet, beautiful, God-inspired scenery, the forests, mountains, plains, and steppes of Siberia cannot be excelled."⁵⁰⁵ In the Transbaikal area, he paid particular attention to local flowers and was especially happy to find a Transbaikal edelweiss, a unique plant that he once saw in Switzerland. While he dedicated another monologue to humanize this flower, he also questioned whether she would be able to go further north to avoid the "iron horse," which "will bring here thousands annually intent on your destruction."⁵⁰⁶ Thus, riding on what was considered the epitome of modernity and "civilization" and looking out from its window, Senn displayed a longing for natural purity and invited his compatriots to come and see the pristine Siberian nature before it would be too late. This duality in presenting the natural landscape is notable and would be emphasized later, when talking about how Senn viewed Russians themselves and their country.

The Cities of Siberia

The authors talked about different towns since their itineraries were different. Bookwalter began his narration in Moscow. He did not comment on the city except noting its picturesque railway station that blended "the plain, practical materiality of the West with the florid idealism of the East."⁵⁰⁷ Then, all the way to Omsk, he saw rapidly developing towns (Kurgan, Petropavlovsk), the growth of which he attributed to the influence of the railway. Only in Samara did he perceive distress, on account of a crop failure in the province.⁵⁰⁸ In the book he expanded on the easternmost Siberian cities he saw, including Omsk:

Like all Siberian towns of this class, it has some elegant and even massive government buildings, along with many fine brick and stone business structures, all embedded in a mass of curiously built wooden houses. The streets, except the long one on which the business houses are located, and forming the artery of the town, are unpaved; much of the year they are almost impassable. Like all Russian towns, there are many fine churches in Omsk, some of them of great size, and, being always of the Oriental type of architecture, sometimes present an indescribably charming appearance.⁵⁰⁹

Thus, overall, he found the cities located along the railway agreeable, even though Russian architecture, along with local peoples, as cited in the previous section, seemed exotic to him. In

⁵⁰⁵ Senn, 56.

⁵⁰⁶ Nicholas Senn, "Dr. Senn's Journey from Irkutsk to Serjetensk," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 29, 1901, 52.

⁵⁰⁷ Bookwalter, "In Siberia," 1.

⁵⁰⁸ Bookwalter, "Wheat Fields of Siberia," 47.

⁵⁰⁹ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 140.

Tomsk he noted imposing government buildings, the sole university in Siberia, electric lights, and telephones. And while he disapproved of the local prison, seeing a modern horse racetrack made him conclude that the people of the empire “follow the customs and progress, and adopt the conveniences and improvements, of other countries.”⁵¹⁰ From these comments, it is clear that he saw modern urban features as signs of advance and approached Russian cities in Siberia with a positive bias. Surely, it was true that Siberian cities experienced a massive influx of population after the railroad became operational, but he still failed to talk about the social changes or larger infrastructure problems of the burgeoning settlements.

Senn made lengthy stops in Samara and Irkutsk, and, like Bookwalter, also made general remarks based on his personal impressions. He first went through St. Petersburg and Moscow, describing the former as a “typical and flourishing capital city” and noting the improvements in Moscow since his first visit there in 1897. However, he was concerned that neither of these cities had electric railways, unlike Chicago.⁵¹¹ He drew a parallel between Samara and the cities in the American West, noting the absence of big buildings, cobblestone-paved roads, and primitive horse carriages. He explored what he named the city’s general hospital (in fact, a *zemstvo* hospital), and while it lacked modern equipment, he applauded the hospital’s professional staff. Before arriving in Irkutsk, he made passing remarks, noting the general similarity between Siberian settlements and those in the American West. Again, however, he did not escape making mistakes, including claiming that the only university in Siberia was in Omsk, while in reality it was in Tomsk.

He gave a more detailed description of Irkutsk which he called “the most characteristic of all Siberian cities.” With that in mind, it should be mentioned that the history of turn-of-the-century Irkutsk, while sharing some features of other growing Siberian cities, had distinctions that did not make it typical. It remained the capital of the large Irkutsk General-Governorship and the chief city in Eastern Siberia and experienced considerable growth from 1898. Its population rose from around 50,000 in 1897 to over 110,000 by 1910. However, it suffered from the 1879 fire that destroyed a considerable portion of the city, then almost wholly wooden. The fire led to renewed city planning and the construction of new buildings. The status of the city, growing urbanization, and waves of immigrants from European Russia brought population and investments, rapidly changing the outward look of the town and gradually bringing about urban infrastructure.⁵¹² Senn was correct in

⁵¹⁰ Bookwalter, 180.

⁵¹¹ Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Travels in Russia,” 50.

⁵¹² Lev Dameshek, ed., *Irkutsk v panorame vekov: ocherki istorii goroda* [Irkutsk through the ages: Essays on its history] (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskaya izdatel’skaya kompaniya, 2002), 139, 146–47.

pointing to pretty government and social buildings, eye-catching churches, the presence of electricity, and the appearance of several department stores “on the American plan,” but, like Bookwalter in Tomsk, he pointed to the absence of paved roads, which for him was the indication of “a country village.”⁵¹³ He visited the hospitals in Irkutsk and evaluated them much like those in Samara. Yet, apart from unpaved roads and problems with medicine, Irkutsk, with the rapid influx of people, showed a radical contrast between the rich living in the center of the city and the poor on the outskirts. Despite progress in infrastructure and the appearance of cultural, scientific, and educational institutions, Russian observers pointed to its lack of sewers, the absence of plumbing until the mid-1900s, and the old-fashioned prevalence of horse riding. In sum, Senn presented the city positively, but did not offer a deeper insight into urban problems in Siberia.⁵¹⁴

The rest of his remarks were also general. He called Stretensk “by far the dirtiest town in Siberia” with almost no business and high crime rates. In contrast, Blagoveshchensk seemed to him like the “Chicago of Siberia” for its wide, laid-out streets and active commerce, and he later praised Khabarovsk for the same reasons. Finally, Vladivostok was perceived as “the Gibraltar of Siberia” because of its strategic significance and beautiful location. He again pointed out modern buildings and urban features as well as paved roads. However, at night, many wild dogs could be heard, and the lighting of the streets was poor. He visited major hospitals and found that they left much to be desired, except the marine hospital. On the whole, like Bookwalter, Senn formed mostly positive impressions about the cities, highlighting their resemblance to either frontier towns or his Chicago and judging them based on urban features and business activity.

Before beginning his narration, Bates invited his readers to imagine the area he traveled within. He drew a parallel between the major cities in Siberia following the 1905 Revolution with those in Germany after its failed 1848 insurrection, where one saw consequences of government repression, yet potential for improvement also existed. The smaller Siberian settlements resembled those in America “of the days of the Stamp Act,” and their inhabitants shared much with American colonists. In Mongolia, one could see “Middle Ages flung down into the twentieth century,” with feudalism, superstitious Mongols who traveled to Urga for pilgrimage, and the contrast between magnificence and brutality.⁵¹⁵ In other words, he showcased his “imaginative geography,” using different historical periods to evaluate regions, and the farther East he went, the less developed areas he perceived, preparing readers for the “East meets West” encounters.

⁵¹³ Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn in the Interior of Siberia,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 22, 1901, 58.

⁵¹⁴ Dameshek, *Irkutsk v panorame vekov*, 148–49.

⁵¹⁵ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 20–23.

However, during the journey itself he mostly noticed rapidly growing cities next to the railway. Upon arrival in Irkutsk, he saw wooden houses on its outskirts and whitewashed ones on the main streets, while the town's major buildings, including cultural and scientific ones, "in no city would be other than sources of satisfaction." Unlike the other two travelers, Bates focused on describing the city dwellers and showed interest in everyday urban life, including visiting a public bathhouse and the local market, which he compared to the Forum in Ancient Rome. At the same time, Irkutsk (like Moscow) had no street numbers which Bates called "a refinement of civilization."⁵¹⁶ He also pointed to high crime rates and a chaotic nightlife. He concluded:

Many-faceted is the life in a Siberian city. In numerous ways it seems feverish and abnormal, for it represents the young blood of a capable race struggling upward, and knowing that in much its battle is desperate. The towns have hardly yet got settled methods; they are outgrown villages where men of all stamps, who have become enriched in the new land, come for the pleasures or the benefit of a less monotonous existence. The traditions of peasant origins survive in the conditions and general civic neglect. Irkutsk, once its novelties have become familiar, has lost its charm.⁵¹⁷

This evaluation of Irkutsk is fair, pointing to both positive and negative sides of the city and urbanization of Russia in general. Indeed, the city by 1910 was a cosmopolitan one, with many nationalities present, from Russians and Poles to Jews. Migrating peasants made up a considerable portion of the city's population, but the presence of other groups, including exiles, was also notable. The city certainly had artistic and cultural achievements, but the gap between the city's wealthy and poor remained by the time of Bates' visit, and crime remained a major problem.⁵¹⁸ American cities were not free from these issues either, as one of the major features of the Progressive Era was the crusade against urban vice and calls for city improvements.

The engineer's later remarks created a contrast between Russian and Chinese cities. Upon arrival in Kyakhta on the Russo-Chinese border, he described it as a typical crude frontier town where the West and the East met.⁵¹⁹ But his entry to Chinese Maimacheng (present-day Altanbulag in Mongolia) represented for Bates leaving behind "the whole fabric of European civilization" and entering "the antithesis of all Western experience, into an utterly strange environment, where the most remarkable of the world's Asian races lives and trades, works and rules."⁵²⁰ He thus

⁵¹⁶ This is a wrong assumption, as in both cities (in Irkutsk since 1872) street numbers did exist, though Irkutsk did not have them everywhere, and some houses were identified based on the surname of their proprietors.

⁵¹⁷ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 110.

⁵¹⁸ Dameshek, *Irkutsk v panorame vekov*, 142–45.

⁵¹⁹ Bates, 165. He wrote about Troitskosavsk, a settlement next to Kyakhta that eventually united with it.

⁵²⁰ Bates, 176.

emphasized that he left the radius of “civilization” and repeated Kennan’s assessment of the same towns in *Siberia*, where Russia seemed more familiar, and, for Bates, even more Western.⁵²¹

In Urga he stayed in the house of a Russian merchant, Michael Varlakoff. He arrived there at the time of the Mongol New Year, and the decorated town also resembled a mix between the West and the East. Urga had major Buddhist temples, a Russian quarter, and was the residence of the eighth Bogd Gegeen, who was the theocratic leader of Mongolia, and who, in the author’s words, was called “the Living God” by the locals.⁵²² Bates ironically noted that the Bogd Gegeen used his status and donations from pilgrims mostly to enjoy a luxurious life. In spite of the joyous atmosphere, the author again pointed to the high level of crime and dogs roaming the city at night. His conclusion about Urga reads as follows:

If the thought of the rights of man has drowned sympathy with all that concerns the government of Russia, visit Urga at night, and the Cossack of the Russian Guard, swaggering along among the Chinamen, – this Cossack whom you have heard execrated as the “knout of the Czar,” – will look to you like a Highlander at Lucknow. The chance to absorb an unwholesome amount of tannin by way of a samovar, and to sleep on the floor beside the oven in the whitewashed house of Michael Varlakoff, will become a privilege more prized than any possessed by His Holiness, the Living God.⁵²³

Therefore, despite the “imaginative geography” presented in the beginning and the criticism of Irkutsk, his experience in then Chinese cities reinforced his preference for the Russian ones as the places of “civilization” since they offered better comfort, safety, and urban features.

On the whole, American travelers often associated Russian towns in Siberia with those on the frontier in the American West. All three authors, whether by outlining the remarkable urban development of Siberian cities thanks to the railway (Bookwalter and Senn) or judging them as superior to Chinese ones (Bates), gave Siberian settlements a positive evaluation. They challenged Kennan’s negative comparison of Siberian towns with settlements in America or Europe in his study of the exile system. Instead, the views of the authors were much closer to *Tent Life*.

The Potential of Development in Siberia

Turning to the analysis of what the authors said aside from conventional descriptions, it is essential to highlight how American developments of the time influenced their sympathies and preconceptions. Bates’ “imaginative geography” and search for the “real Siberia” was one example.

⁵²¹ See chap. 2, n. 164.

⁵²² The Bogd Gegeen was one of the leaders of the Mongolian Revolution in 1911 against Chinese rule and emerged as the ruler of the new Mongolian entity from then until 1924, carrying the title of Bogd Khan.

⁵²³ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 249.

It has been emphasized in Bookwalter's biographical sketch that he did try to bolster the appeal of life in the countryside in view of rapid urbanization in America. The Midwestern press reported his criticism of how the homestead policy in the West was carried out, his worries that the U.S. was running out of land for cultivation, and predictions of potential food shortages in the world due to the demise of agriculture. He asserted that "everyone knows that the rural population is the best population of our country, and that the rural life is healthier, better life physically and morally than life in the cities."⁵²⁴ His discourse thus was an open praise for agrarian virtue over urban demoralization, a key topic at the turn of the century that went back to Jefferson's time.⁵²⁵ Senn, with his praise of nature, similarly admired a simple and healthy life close to it as opposed to artificial residence in expanding cities. In his articles he often employed quotes from the philosophical and literary writings of Roman scholars, novelists, and poets, as well as later authors, such as Shakespeare and Byron, to add a moral tone to his narration. A clear example is when he quoted the following from *Epigrams* by the Roman poet Martial that expressed a growing notion for many Americans that "civilization" and modernity at home were becoming too overwhelming:

My humble desires are satisfied with a quiet fireside, a house that is not spoiled by smoke, a living spring, and the natural green sod. May these be mine – a well-fed slave, a wife not overlearned, nights with sleep, days without strife.⁵²⁶

Another of Senn's concerns, also widely shared by many, lay in the accumulation of great wealth. In the book he excluded two articles that focused on the question of riches. While America was becoming richer by the year, the surgeon warned that the power of money led to a growing social gap, devalued the ethic of hard work, and forced many to follow the self-indulging lifestyle of the richest, with little personal fulfillment but with growing health and psychological problems as a result. Calling in a moral quote from Tacitus, he professed that "the history of the world goes to show that the accumulation of wealth is gradually but surely followed by a slow but progressive individual and national decay."⁵²⁷ This was another common apprehension of Americans that was significantly reinforced during the Gilded Age – the transformative power of money, alongside materialism and consumption. Although fascinating and promising prosperity, these forces threatened the old traditions, morality, psychology, and the Protestant work ethic.⁵²⁸ Senn addressed the latter topic by praising those who earned their wealth through hard work as opposed

⁵²⁴ "Hope," *Cincinnati Inquirer*, February 12, 1899, 9.

⁵²⁵ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 133–36.

⁵²⁶ Senn, "Dr. Senn's Journey from Moscow to Samara," 50.

⁵²⁷ Senn, "Life on Board Ship," 34.

⁵²⁸ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 52–57.

to speculation and who behaved modestly and put their money to public use rather than squandering it for self-satisfaction. For him, great examples included Philip Armour, Sr., the major Chicago meatpacking businessman of the time, and John D. Rockefeller, Sr., both of whom donated in favor of Chicago. In contrast, Senn criticized Andrew Carnegie for his contributions to Scotland, his native land, rather than solely to the country where he made his money. With this patriotic claim that was borderline nationalist, Senn declared that the rich had an important duty – to “place the surplus where it will be of greatest benefit to their fellow-men.”⁵²⁹ Presenting a common trope for many in the emerging Progressive Era (the need to contain and control the power offered by great wealth), Senn went along with the self-image that the great entrepreneurs tried to promote – that they were decent, hard-working, and God-fearing businessmen who welcomed philanthropy with open arms. Although it was true that many of them, including Carnegie and Rockefeller, Sr., were influenced by Protestantism and lauded the ideals of the self-made man, as Lears showed, behind this moral façade still lay ruthless corporate competition and an ambiguous, if not double-faced, morality.⁵³⁰

With all three authors displaying unease about the rapid growth of “civilization” at home and preaching in favor of a more “natural” or “real” lifestyle, their perception of Russia showed a vivid duality. Despite concerns about modernity, all of them echoed Kennan’s *Siberia* in outlining the enormous potential of the region, regularly pointing to its fertile land, natural resources, and available space for mass immigration. Bookwalter suggested that his readers imagine that the Trans-Siberian Railway would connect “500 millions of people in the east and 300 millions in the west.”⁵³¹ Senn visualized a “vast and mysterious country [...] which for centuries has awaited immigration to develop its enormous resources.”⁵³² And Bates imagined Siberia as “the Colossus sleeping beneath these snows” that growing immigration to the region would finally awake.⁵³³

Whereas Kennan criticized Russian inefficiency in developing Siberian industries and mines in the 1880s, the three travelers offered a new take on the role of Russia in Siberia. Bookwalter highlighted the growth of Siberian cities and new villages next to the railway and in the book added statistics on Russian demography and economy, although it did contain inconsistencies (at one point, Bookwalter wrote that the population of Russia in 1893 was 130 million, but later claimed it was 110 million). He applauded the colonization policy of the

⁵²⁹ Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey Around the World,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1901, 44.

⁵³⁰ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 57–63.

⁵³¹ Bookwalter, “In Siberia,” 1.

⁵³² Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn Tells of the Resources of Siberia,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 8, 1901, 52.

⁵³³ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 69–70.

government and the more balanced way of developing both waterways and railways in Siberia compared to the disproportionate focus on railways at the expense of abandoning waterways in the U.S.⁵³⁴ Bookwalter compared these developments to the Midwestern states and additionally underlined that “there are some instances of rapid growth not surpassed in our own great West.”⁵³⁵

Senn pointed out that Siberia used to be a land of poverty and cruelty in the past. In spite of his concerns related to the impact of colonization on the Siberian environment, he professed:

From what I have seen and heard since I have penetrated the very heart of what has become to me the strangest and most interesting of all countries, I have no reason to doubt that poverty will soon give way to prosperity. The very vastness of the country and its enormous resources would warrant such a prophecy. ... It is a repetition of what took place in our country, where the first settlers did the hard work of clearing the fertile lands and the children reaped the fruits of their labor and hardships.⁵³⁶

Bates emphasized that the then current period saw a “mighty expanse of Siberia redeemed from a desolate waste to a land of farms and villages, of mines and industries” as well as new cities and infrastructure.⁵³⁷ He compared the Trans-Siberian Railway to the Mississippi canal system, arguing that while the latter was not profitable, it brought immense indirect value to Americans. On the whole, he concluded, thanks to its influence Siberia experienced “the kind of education that made the American West – the education of expansion.”⁵³⁸

These passages reveal a substantial departure from Kennan’s views offered in *Siberia*. While emphasizing Siberia’s potential, now all three travelers saw the railway and its influence as a sign that Russia was a creative force and was capable of developing Siberia efficiently, with parallels to the American West or the development of the North American continent in general. Both modernist and anti-modernist sentiments can thus be clearly seen.

At one point, Senn noted that the U.S., with its machinery, friendly relations with Russia, and as its “nearest civilized neighbor,” must secure a role in the “commercial awakening of Siberia.”⁵³⁹ The other two authors made similar remarks, with Bates promoting his projected railway between Russia and China by inviting his readers to visualize American cars moving on American rails and carrying American goods “into the very heart of a new and expanding empire.”⁵⁴⁰ The three travelers thus envisioned the participation of their country in the development

⁵³⁴ Bookwalter, “An American in Siberia,” 33.

⁵³⁵ Bookwalter, “A Journey in Siberia,” 14.

⁵³⁶ Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey from Irkutsk to Serjetensk,” 52.

⁵³⁷ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 18.

⁵³⁸ Bates, 296.

⁵³⁹ Senn, “Dr. Senn Tells of the Resources of Siberia,” 52.

⁵⁴⁰ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 390–91.

of Siberia, just like Kennan and Edgar in chapter 3.⁵⁴¹ But compared to *Siberia*, which imagined the better prospects of Siberia under American private initiative and know-how, the three authors recognized Russia and America as equal creative powers.

The authors connected the future of Siberia primarily with the peasantry. Bookwalter, with his agricultural experiments, and Senn, with his poetic descriptions of life close to nature and praise of hard work, naturally lauded the life of peasants in Siberia and Russia in general. Senn declared that “the manner of living of the peasantry might be well recommended to our rich men and women who in vain consult physicians and swallow drugs to relieve them of some real or imaginary affliction.”⁵⁴² Yet, their descriptions of the peasantry differed. Bookwalter made only lauding remarks and found their lifestyle wholesome, up to claiming that, although peasants drank vodka, their level of intoxication did not exceed that of their counterparts in Anglo-Saxon countries. Senn, although expressing belief in the peasant’s potential, was more critical. In European Russia he saw “little abject poverty” among the peasants and underscored that some of them became prosperous, but others still wore primitive clothes and owned obsolete agricultural equipment. In Eastern Siberia, he met groups of disgruntled peasants who failed to settle and noted that many villages in this region were new, and the value of their assets “would not net \$100 on forced sale.”⁵⁴³

These remarks were more true-to-life compared to Bookwalter, as the issue of returning peasants and the “quality” and means of new settlers remained a continuous problem. Siberian officials and observers frequently pointed to peasant poverty in the new place and their failure to establish successful farming. As pointed out in the introduction, some were even disappointed in the peasants’ supposed lack of “civilizing” skills.⁵⁴⁴ Yet Senn’s comment on religion showed his bias. While he outlined the piety of the peasantry in general, he regarded Orthodox priests as ignorant, denounced them for living wealthily at the expense of the population, and asserted that “the Greek religion is more on the surface than a concern of the heart; in other words, it consists largely of ceremonies which are mechanically performed.”⁵⁴⁵ With that he joined the relief officials in criticizing Russian faith and was similarly wrong in his claims on the rich lifestyle of local priests.

⁵⁴¹ See chap. 2, n. 151; chap. 3, n. 323.

⁵⁴² Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey in Siberia,” 56.

⁵⁴³ Senn, “Dr. Senn on the Schilka and Amur,” 50.

⁵⁴⁴ Remnev and Suvorova, *Kolonizatsiya Aziatskoy Rossii*, 171–73; Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question,’” 226–28; Shilovskiy and Elert, *Istoriya Sibiri*, 3:526.

⁵⁴⁵ Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey from Irkutsk to Serjetensk,” 52.

Bates visited one of the peasant houses in a village on the way to Kyakhta, evaluating his accommodation as primitive. He saw patriarchy dominating the peasant family, while the head of the village controlled all the affairs in the *mir*, or village community. In general, his description of the Siberian peasantry was stereotypical. He believed that the peasants lived based on equality as the main principle and wrote the following about its impact:

The apathy of the rural element is to be laid at the door of the system which hinders those within the confines of the communes from reaping the fruits of special sacrifice and effort. No one attempts to raise himself in the Mir, where the dead weight of those bound to him is so hopeless. ... The aspirant must bury ambition, or leave the drudging Mir with its toll of taxes and recruits. He will not study law before the wood-fire as did Lincoln in his log cabin.⁵⁴⁶

Failing to write about widening economic differentiation in the commune at the turn of the century, with the growing differences between “kulaks” and poor peasants, he still added that communal living did not tackle their ignorance, noting that his hunting peasant guide did not know what a watch was. He also underlined that the peasants were prone to drinking on almost every holiday or other festive occasion and reacted indifferently to all calamities in their lives with “it is the will of God” or “*nietchevo*.” In sum, he claimed that “the commune, vodka, and resignation are the incubi of Siberia.”⁵⁴⁷ Still, he praised the trend of peasant migration to cities to receive proper education and Stolypin’s agrarian reforms in Siberia, but, as will be explained shortly, he missed the point regarding their application there. An additional positive factor was the absence of serfdom in Siberia. In his view, despite all its flaws, the village community could become a foundation for the future system of peasant self-government.

The authors also speculated about how Siberia would develop, and all focused primarily on agriculture or animal husbandry, not industry. Senn, in addition to voicing concerns about the impact of the railway and colonization on the flora and fauna of Siberia, as shown earlier, claimed that the lifestyle of the old generation of Siberian settlers was in danger. He stated that their self-sufficient and honest living based on small-scale farming would come to an end due to the influx of “greedy landowners, forest destroyers, department stores, steam plows, reapers, and harvesting machines.”⁵⁴⁸ Thus, once again he displayed ambivalent sentiments about the advance of capitalism and modernity, linking the future of Siberia to the past of the American West.

Yet, in connecting Siberia and the American West, all three authors downplayed significant differences. The colonization of Siberia at the turn of the century was clearly a state-designed and

⁵⁴⁶ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 143–44.

⁵⁴⁷ Bates, 145.

⁵⁴⁸ Senn, “Dr. Senn in the Interior of Siberia,” 58.

state-controlled project. There was to be no incoming of “greedy landowners” since almost all the lands east of Urals belonged either to the state or personally to the Czar and his family through the Imperial Cabinet (primarily mining regions in the Altai and Transbaikalian areas). Peasants from European Russia were supported by the state at the initial stage of settling and gained the right of perpetual use of their allotment for free, but it did not and was not to become their private property. If anything, the creation of allotments and land management was done by state officials. Stolypin’s reforms, initiated in 1906, established a trend toward private land ownership in European Russia and encouraged resettlement east of the Urals. But in Siberia the land still remained under state or the Imperial Cabinet’s control, although Stolypin did advocate for private land ownership there as well. In other words, Bates was wrong in applying Stolypin’s reforms to the future of Siberia; simply put, they were not enacted there. Considering that most incoming peasants chose to settle in a community like in European Russia, scholars do have a point in claiming that, contrary to European Russia after 1906, in Siberia communal living was strengthened rather than weakened.⁵⁴⁹

The Natives of Siberia and Mongolia

Another set of projections can be seen regarding the descriptions of natives. Senn and Bookwalter made general remarks. After arriving in Tomsk, Bookwalter made a separate trip to a village in the Kazakh Steppe and called the Kazakhs “a splendid race” for their dignified look and many personal virtues, writing of them as predominantly pastoral people who disliked working the land. However, when he evaluated the potential development of agriculture in Siberia in the book, he highlighted several factors that would likely limit its pace. For Bookwalter, one of them were the Siberian sedentary natives. He pointed out that “settled” natives in Western Siberia (whom he all called Tartars) took a lot of arable land in the region, and that, compared to Native Americans, it would not be easy to “dispossess them.”⁵⁵⁰ It was clearly a wrong statement, considering that at the turn of the century the Russian government put increasing pressure on not-yet-settled “aliens” (or *inorodtsy*, a legal term for natives in Russia’s borderlands) to actually make them settle, providing them as much land per household head and his family as for Russian peasants. However, it simultaneously moved in to cut off “leftover” lands from them, considering the state and the crown their supreme owner. It also sought to change native traditional tribal government institutions in favor of standard peasant administration, and altogether these assimilatory measures, often without

⁵⁴⁹ Shilovskiy and Elert, *Istoriya Sibiri*, 3:570–75.

⁵⁵⁰ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 237.

native consent, led to widespread grudges.⁵⁵¹ Bookwalter also revealed a similarly one-sided perception of native land ownership at home. Not only did Native Americans fight for it, but in the decades after the Dawes Act, when the federal government increasingly yielded to pressure from Western politicians and settlers on native lands still unaffected by mounting allotments or land cessions, they did try to raise support and legal resistance. *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* was one such case that became famous nationwide.⁵⁵²

Senn noticed that after passing the Ural Mountains the “Mongolian type” could be seen more often. The only indigenous people that he described were the Buryats. He believed that they were good horsemen and hunters and preferred cattle breeding to agriculture. However, his general view was that “in consequence of advancing civilization, a number of the nomadic tribes are rapidly disappearing and will soon be extinct, sharing the fate of the American Indians.”⁵⁵³ Senn thus subscribed to the decades-old belief that Native Americans were to “vanish” either as an ethnicity or at least as a unique culture under the advance of “civilization.” This concept was reinforced at the turn of the century due to the closure of the frontier in 1890, developing ethnography, arts, government assimilation efforts, and nostalgic cultural representations by whites.⁵⁵⁴ Yet such a projection to Siberia was wrong, as the number of Siberian natives throughout the nineteenth century increased, at least to a degree influenced by Russian policy, although in the Far East several smaller ethnicities indeed suffered losses, and the percentage of child mortality remained high.⁵⁵⁵

While the other two travelers made general remarks, Bates, while in Russia, wrote only about the Buryats but did so in great detail. He depicted them as fearless hunters and riders. He claimed that while until recently they were “on the threshold of civilization,” many of them improved their lifestyle, so that “all phases of the advance from the nomad to the agricultural stage may be studied among them.”⁵⁵⁶ The engineer noted that pastoral Buryats looked like the Chinese, and their primitive accommodation did not induce one to stay as their guest. Sedentary ones, in contrast, wore better clothes, had more comfortable houses, and were hospitable to any stranger. The Buryats also displayed an increasing interest in education and enjoyed good relations with Russians, and the latter often hired them as Cossacks. He claimed that while other nations,

⁵⁵¹ Shilovskiy and Elert, *Istoriya Sibiri*, 3:540–44.

⁵⁵² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, chap. 5.

⁵⁵³ Senn, “Dr. Senn Tells of the Resources of Siberia,” 52.

⁵⁵⁴ Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, chaps. 13, 14.

⁵⁵⁵ Dameshek and Remnev, *Sibir’ v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii*, 206–8; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 161–62.

⁵⁵⁶ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 151.

including Americans, would ostracize or even “eliminate” natives, in Russia the Buryats “live side by side with the good-natured Slav in perfect accord, progressing in civilization and material well-being as high as the individual can aspire to and attain.”⁵⁵⁷ While his remarks overlap with *Tent Life* regarding the “civilizing” influence of Russia upon natives, he exaggerated the actual benevolence of Russian policy. In fact, like other natives, the Buryats faced increasing land cessions by the First World War, with the loss of up to no less than forty percent of their tribal lands, and administrative changes aimed at assimilating them. This sparked both passive and active resistance, especially during the 1905 Revolution, when they organized political meetings, demanding the return of their earlier self-government status, their lands, and even insisted on an autonomous *zemstvo* for themselves.⁵⁵⁸

Later Bates interacted with the Mongols during his trip to Urga and extensively described his stay in the tent of a Mongol family. Simple lodgings and the nomad appearance of their owners were compensated by their hospitality. He depicted an episode when this family did their household chores outside in the cold winter morning, while he struggled even to get up:

If you have the moral courage to take off these friends in need, and the inner coat and sweater, to get a bowlful of snow-water, and hunt among the baggage for soap and a towel, all at five o'clock in the morning of this freezing weather, then you have full license to call the Mongols dirty degraded heathen. If, however, you sit and shiver, and promise yourself that you will bathe at Urga, it is elementary fair play to be discreetly silent about the little failing of your hosts. You will rejoice, too, in open admiration of courage, when you find, as you sometimes will, a clean-shaven well-groomed lama, or a washed and combed village belle, on the road to the sacred city.⁵⁵⁹

With a clearly sympathetic passage that broke away from commonplace stereotypes, he reinforced this image when he later met a Mongol lama, who was friendly and dignified, and introduced him to Mongolian gods and prayers. Bates also took part in local Mongol games and got to see the traditions of common people. The Mongols saw him as one of their own, and Bates deduced that he was “taken into the social life of a simple affectionate people.”⁵⁶⁰

Yet these remarks contrast with his perception of the Chinese in Mongolia. In Maimacheng, located across the border from the Russian town of Kyakhta, Bates felt uncomfortable due to not seeing Chinese women or children on the streets.⁵⁶¹ On his way to Urga, he visited the local *kang* (a type of inn widely used in Northern China at the time) and depicted its guests:

⁵⁵⁷ Bates, 153.

⁵⁵⁸ Shilovskiy and Elert, *Istoriya Sibiri*, 3:547–49, 658; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 172–73.

⁵⁵⁹ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 195.

⁵⁶⁰ Bates, 206.

⁵⁶¹ Before 1910 the Qing Empire retained restrictions on settlement in Outer Mongolia for Han Chinese, except merchants, officials, and soldiers. There was an official prohibition on marriage between Chinese and Mongols. As a

No generous bringing out of fat sheep's tails and snuff-bottles for the guests' delectation. You cannot but have the feeling that these people are as indifferent to your existence as they are to the pariah dog that howls outside the walls. They are exclusive, non-welcoming, – these Chinese. They are strangers to the land, self-sufficing in their toilsomely cultivated rye- and wheat-fields, an isolated, womanless, working settlement. Despite the better quarters and comfort which these inns afford, one prefers to go to a Mongol tent and be among men more human, if less civilized.⁵⁶²

His comment challenged the widespread belief in the evolutionary hierarchy of peoples. His pronounced preference for the supposedly less “civilized” but more authentic lifestyle of Mongols suggests that, like the other two authors, he too represented the growing antimodernist sentiments among Americans who searched for genuine, “real” personal experience, even abroad. As shown later, his impressions of the Chinese would be used to reinforce his political conclusions.

Russian Domestic Policies

All travelers commented on the Russian politics of the time. Bookwalter noted that much had been written about horrors in Siberia and the despotism of Russian tsarism. He admitted that while Russian exile laws were harsh, they protected the population from criminals, including fraudsters who became omnipresent in his home country, although he did not offer any detail on how the exile laws or the system itself actually worked.⁵⁶³ He remarked that Russia, with its diverse regions and ethnicities, experienced great changes during the past decades. He paid special attention to the emancipation of serfs, which was accomplished in a more preferable way than the abolition of slavery and Reconstruction in America. While it was intended as a positive comment, by saying so he joined other American travelers who compared Russian serfdom with American slavery (including Edgar and Durland). His general conclusion in the book reads as follows:

In no nation, perhaps, has the problem of uniting a just government and liberal institutions with the impulse of modern change and progress been so difficult of solution as in this great empire. That under these adverse conditions she has been enabled to make that remarkable advance witnessed in the last two generations, stands as a marvel in the history of national development.⁵⁶⁴

Bookwalter thus tried to defuse the prevalent critical remarks about the autocracy by pointing out that it was capable of developing the empire.

result, most Chinese residing in the region were men, see: Thomas Ewing, “Ch’ing Policies in Outer Mongolia 1900–1911,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1980): 145–57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X0001221X>.

⁵⁶² Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 213–14.

⁵⁶³ Bookwalter, “An American in Siberia,” 33; Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 258.

⁵⁶⁴ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 255.

Senn called out Kennan even before he turned to the description of his Siberian journey. He stated that his *Siberia* “has done much toward rendering travel in Russia more difficult and accomplished nothing in alleviating real or imaginary wrongs.”⁵⁶⁵ Though Senn described a sad procession of prisoners that he witnessed in Stretensk, later he pointed out that the convicts escorted on the Amur River eastward had better travel conditions than the passengers of the steamer that he himself took. He pointed out that “we have much to learn from Russia regarding the proper punishment of criminals and in restraining vice,” since criminals in American prisons enjoyed comfort that did not correspond to the severity of their crimes, another comment pointing to the concerns about instability and growing urban demoralization in America.⁵⁶⁶

Before entering Russia, the doctor paid tribute to the German emperor William II, calling him “a genius” and one of the most competent and respected rulers of Europe. Before even proceeding to Siberia, he similarly praised Nicholas II and his government for doing everything in their capacity to improve the lives of ordinary people. He lauded Russian universities, hospitals in major cities, as well as the Russian navy and army. In the same article where he lambasted Kennan, he offered his general thoughts about Russian politics, showing his preconceptions rather than a modified opinion as a result of his Siberian trip:

In many things the Russian government is an ideal one. It is always easy to criticize; it is more difficult to adjust. Slavery was abolished more than fifty years ago. Religious freedom is assured everywhere. The law-abiding Russian citizen has nothing to fear. It must be remembered that a large part of the inhabitants of Russia, particularly of Asiatic Russia, is still in semi-barbaric state. It is a source of surprise that in the management of state affairs in the government of such diverse elements there has been no more disturbance than has actually taken place.⁵⁶⁷

Thus, Senn denounced Kennan’s political claims and praised the monarchy, since for him it represented stable development as well as “law and order.” Yet his justification showed his obliviousness to the actual conditions in Russia and its history. Like Bookwalter, he equated serfdom with slavery, and was wrong in saying the former was abolished fifty (instead of forty) years before. There certainly was no complete religious freedom, with the Orthodox Church being dominant in its right to proselytize, and the existence of punishments for personal conversion or proselytizing away from the Orthodox faith. While the 1905 act on religious tolerance lifted some restrictions, even this document did not lead to the complete freedom of choosing religion. The

⁵⁶⁵ Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Travels in Russia,” 50.

⁵⁶⁶ Senn, “Dr. Senn on the Schilka and Amur,” 50.

⁵⁶⁷ Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Travels in Russia,” 50.

“religious exile” as part of the Siberian exile system remained even after 1905.⁵⁶⁸ His claim on the absence of disturbances did not take into consideration the beginning of the wave of assassinations of senior officials, including Minister of Education Bogolepov who was murdered by an SR member in 1901. If anything, Senn’s final justification was dubious, revealing his dichotomous West/East vision of the empire.

On many occasions he compared Russia and America directly. In Russia Senn saw many people wearing uniforms. He believed that in this matter Russians exceeded even Germans, and that their uniforms reflected the “monarchic character” of the country. This presented an occasion to praise his democratic homeland, where uniforms were not needed. In Vladivostok, he received outdated but authentic issues of the *Chicago Tribune* from the American Consul, Richard Greener, who used the occasion to note that Russian newspapers were often inked by censorship. This made Senn think that the Russian press had “but little real news” and that “any American who makes a trip around the world will return to his home fully impressed with the greatness, energy, and power of the American press.”⁵⁶⁹ In sum, Senn did point out both positive and negative aspects in Russia and acknowledged, albeit with ambiguous reasoning, that the monarchy was a creative force. However, he was proud of the republican form of government and democracy at home, which he recognized as superior. He made another noteworthy comment in Irkutsk when he praised the city’s philanthropic institutions. In his view, their founders owed their fortunes to this city, and he scolded the wealthy at home with this example, claiming that in America “the thirst for more riches is only too often in the way of benefiting more frequently and substantially the poor, the sick, the orphans, and widows.”⁵⁷⁰ Thus, it is visible how his opposition to great wealth, concerns about riches corroding American society and values, and insistence that the wealthy in America should spend their money for the public good found its manifestation in Irkutsk.

Senn also compared Russian and American education. He praised the fact that Russian universities and high schools had tuition fees and that the empire had fewer primary schools than America. In his opinion, after emancipation the Russian government did not “educate at its expense the liberated slaves” and thus did not obstruct the formation of a sizeable labor force, while America faced labor shortage. He went as far as calling for the curtailment of free public instruction in the U.S., especially that of African Americans in Southern states, since “those who live among them

⁵⁶⁸ Gentes, “Roads to Oblivion,” 331–39.

⁵⁶⁹ Nicholas Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Journey from Chabarowsk to Vladivostock,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 13, 1901, 52.

⁵⁷⁰ Senn, “Dr. Senn in the Interior of Siberia,” 58.

have become satisfied by experience that education among them has proved a failure.”⁵⁷¹ With this, Senn, highly educated himself, revealed his unabashed racial attitudes as well as scorn for the lower classes. He was clearly wrong in his assumption of labeling education as a barrier toward the formation of workforce and did not bother to expand on the topic of neither labor nor education in Russia. He did not mention, unlike Durland, for all his socialist ideology, that many peasants considered industrial work temporary and did not join labor permanently since they retained their ties with agriculture and the village community.

Bates offered a lengthy overview of Russian development at the beginning of the twentieth century, with references to Russian history and its relations with Asia (while making a few mistakes, including writing that the Treaty of Kyakhta took place in 1725 instead of 1727). Now that Russia had established hard borders, he reasoned, the attention of the people switched to internal development. What he called “the upward struggle of a people striving to find itself” was made both by evolutionary reforms and revolutionary struggle.⁵⁷² The engineer pointed out both successes and failures of the state. On the one hand, it liberated the serfs, managed to keep such a diverse country together, built the grand Trans-Siberian Railway, and turned its attention to internal material, cultural, and industrial development. The limitations put on the exile system after 1900 and fair labor laws were other notable achievements. At the same time Bates highlighted the overall poverty of the people, the decrease of arable land available to peasants in European Russia due to population growth, unprofitable manufacturing, overtaxation, the inefficiency of public expenditures, and limited funding for education and intensive farming. He believed that the bureaucratic system had room for improvement, while there were many cases of repression and the restriction of civil rights.

He then traced the emergence of the State Duma, which from a third attempt managed to integrate successfully into the Russian political system in spite of the struggle during the 1905 Revolution. Bates supported the right-wing Octobrist Party in the Third Duma as the most constructive force. He urged the Duma to cooperate rather than oppose the Czar since he believed that “the history of parliamentary government demonstrates again and again that in an ordered community authority gradually reverts to the national representative assembly.”⁵⁷³ He drew parallels between Russian flaws and those in Western Europe and assured his readers that they would be solved in Russia with time, like in other European countries. He also invited his

⁵⁷¹ Senn, “Dr. Senn on the Schilka and Amur,” 50.

⁵⁷² Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 274.

⁵⁷³ Bates, 315.

compatriots to focus on their own domestic issues (including manipulated press to the point of censorship, plutocracy, etc.) rather than Russian problems and claimed that “it is not an error to say that in many matters of individual liberty the Slav enjoys more than the American.”⁵⁷⁴ On the whole, he gave a fairly balanced overview of the policy of the state and mitigated the criticism of the autocracy, supporting evolutionary instead of revolutionary transformation of Russia, which eventually would turn it from a monarchy to a republic. Looking at Russia with triangulation in mind, Bates put the empire at a favorable place together with the West.

In sum, all three travelers were clearly influenced by the railway as an example of successful Russian development, as they departed from Kennan’s political criticism voiced in *Siberia*. They presented Russia as a creative force that, despite all of its flaws, was capable of developing the country, and their conclusions sounded like those of Kennan in *Tent Life*.

Russian-American Interactions

In travel accounts about the Trans-Siberian Railway, one would naturally expect descriptions of the interactions with passengers on the train. However, Bookwalter and Senn gave scant remarks, apparently due to their lack of Russian, while Bates knew French and wrote in detail about his encounters. Senn, however, did comment on Russian women (he did not find any of them beautiful) and distinct Russian physical features, including the “characteristic” Russian nose. He also evaluated the behavior of Russians at the railway stations, claiming that “the Russians are proverbially a stolid and phlegmatic race at all times, little given to hilarity or loudness – even the usual city noises and hums being much less pronounced than in the New World.”⁵⁷⁵

Bates conversed with officials and engineers about the history of the railway’s construction and heard debates about the pros and cons of private and state railroad building. He was told stories about unrest in Siberia during the 1905 Revolution. On one occasion, he talked with a former political exile who recounted his hardships more than three decades ago. He became a successful miner after the end of his sentence and remarked that “the old dark Siberia dies, but our new Siberia of the railroad lives, and grows great.”⁵⁷⁶ The inclusion of this dialogue served to challenge the image of “dark” Siberia, which was promoted by Kennan in the late 1880s.

Bates recalled personal encounters in Irkutsk. During his stay there, he attended a concert in the Grand Hotel. He observed that Russians were excited by a performance of an African

⁵⁷⁴ Bates, 318–19.

⁵⁷⁵ Senn, “Dr. Senn Tells of the Siberian Railway,” 50.

⁵⁷⁶ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 30.

American from Charleston, who performed a clogging dance and sang in Russian a “Slavonic version of the ‘Suwanee River.’”⁵⁷⁷ The show made Bates think that this actor was “thinking, in frozen Irkutsk, of the old Carolina homestead.”⁵⁷⁸ His comment reveals his apparent reflection on African Americans within the paradigm of their nostalgia for life on the plantation.

Later he got acquainted with the Karetnikov family, whose head was an important banker. Bates was invited to their family dinner, enjoyed their hospitality, and noted that while the banker and his father were loyal to the monarchy, the banker’s brother was on the run due to his anti-government actions. He also met a family relative, Valerian, who was a student “saturated with the French Revolution” and participated in the revolutionary clashes in 1905. The engineer recorded his perceptions of America:

America he considers one of the free nations, but he has reserves. Though he is not at one with our political system, yet he thinks that all learned about it is a great gain. "Your land is free politically," he specifies, "but it is not yet emancipated from capital, – it is not free socially. You have an industrial feudalism and a proletariat. So will it not be when we have won our revolution."⁵⁷⁹

Thus, Bates hinted that while Valerian looked at the U.S. as a point of reference, he did it only to a degree necessary to imagine the social revolution at home, recalling Socialist Revolutionary ideology discussed in the previous chapter. Before leaving for Mongolia, Bates was also granted an audience with Mikhail Khilkov, the Minister of Transportation in 1895–1905, who arrived in Irkutsk on an inspection. The two talked about American politics, the Russo-Japanese War, the Chinese Eastern, and the possible Kyakhta Railways, and Khilkov emphasized the need for unity in Russia. Bates called him “a patient builder of the new order” and contrasted him with a student walking down the street and quietly murmuring the *Marseillaise*. Overall, his interactions with Russians highlighted the positive developments in Siberia and simultaneously the divisions in Russian society over the outcome of the 1905 Revolution and the political future of the empire.

⁵⁷⁷ This song is also known as “Old Folks at Home” and is today the state song of Florida, although its lyrics are revised compared to the 1851 original, which was criticized for romanticizing slavery.

⁵⁷⁸ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 85. Bates mentioned that the performer’s surname was Johnson, but it was likely Edgar Jones, an African-American comedian, stage actor, and musician, who had been performing in Europe since the early 1890s, see: Rainer Lotz, “A Musical Clown in Europe,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 18, no. 1/2 (1990): 116–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1214861>.

⁵⁷⁹ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 108.

The Russian Empire in East Asian Politics

All three American travelers discussed the influence of the new railway on international affairs. Writing in the late 1890s, Bookwalter from the start argued that even in its incomplete condition the Trans-Siberian Railway “has thrown England into ‘jim jams’ and has caused that descent of other European nations upon the China littoral.” He believed that the growing network of Russian strategic railways in Asia, including the Chinese Eastern Railway and those in the Caucasus and Turkestan, might give it paramount influence on the continent. In his post-travel interviews he articulated against the takeover of the Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War and involvement in great power politics in Asia. He warned especially against any interactions, let alone an alliance, with Britain, which would likely mean cutting friendly ties with Russia.⁵⁸⁰ Throughout the book he ridiculed British foreign policy, which was based on the protection of India at all costs. And yet what could be perhaps understood as an anti-imperialist stance was clearly contradicted by what he thought about the U.S. role in Latin America:

No nation has ever equalled the Americans in those admirable qualities so necessary for the settlement and development of new countries. This is our special province and our appointed destiny, and in the Western Hemisphere alone there will be for all time an ample field wherein to exercise our choicest energies and abilities.⁵⁸¹

Essentially, he accepted the rising imperialism of Russia in Asia and, ironically, simply offered another major destination for the same in the U.S. after its defeat of Spain. Bookwalter thus revealed the sentiments that would shortly encourage American involvement in Latin American crises and Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.

Senn, who participated in the Spanish-American War, showed an evolving but similarly contradictory position. In an early article he claimed that the Czar did not want to expand further into Europe, and that the Hague conference (1899) initiated by Russia was a case in point. Instead, Russia set a firm goal to get a port in East Asia, which would be secured peacefully.⁵⁸² In the later part of his reporting and post-travel impressions, however, he continuously maintained that now Korea and Manchuria were about to become the prize for the winner of the inevitable military clash between Russia and Japan (the surgeon had nothing but positive remarks about his trip through the latter country).⁵⁸³ While he hoped that China would retain its territorial integrity after the recent

⁵⁸⁰ “John Bull’s Deep Game,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 15, 1899, 21; “Opposes All Alliances,” *New York Times*, September 3, 1899, 10.

⁵⁸¹ Bookwalter, “In Siberia,” 1.

⁵⁸² Senn, “Dr. Senn’s Travels in Russia,” 50.

⁵⁸³ “Japan Praised by Senn,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 21, 1901, 3.

Boxer Rebellion, he created a sharp contrast between Russia and China when he voyaged down the Amur River, the natural border between the two countries:

The stranger who visits this spot for the first time can hardly imagine that he stands on one of the most important political landmarks – Russia on one side, China on the other. This part of Russia new, China older than Rome; Russia strong, China yielding; Russia aggressive, China made passive by recent disasters; Russia progressive, China still wrapped in the mantle of obstinate conservatism. ... When Manchuria becomes a part of the great Russian empire its inhabitants may find some comfort in chanting with Phaedrus: "In a change of government, the poor seldom change anything except the name of their master."⁵⁸⁴

His observations about Asia can be considered realistic, especially since after the defeat of the Boxer Rebellion Russia retained its troops in Manchuria and refused to move them out in 1903. That decision was one of the causes of the clash with Japan. Yet Senn's view of the role of America in Asia was far-fetched. He reasoned that the Koreans, freed from Chinese rule after the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894–1895, "are friendly to the United States and would like nothing better than for America to declare a protectorate over their country and develop its really great resources."⁵⁸⁵ In reality after the war and the proclamation of the Korean Empire in 1897, this country, despite its name, was torn apart between Russian and Japanese influence, and the victory of Japan against Russia led to logical results – the Taft-Katsura Memorandum that essentially recognized Korea as a Japanese sphere of influence and its annexation by Japan in 1910.

Writing after the Russo-Japanese War, Bates reported that some Russians argued that their defeat was but a temporary setback. He claimed that the soldiers he saw at the train stations "would undoubtedly vote the Democratic ticket to repay Mr. Roosevelt for putting Russia under the alternative of stopping the war perforce, or forfeiting sympathy, when Japan was said to be breaking under the strain," thus pointing to the revanchist mood in the empire.⁵⁸⁶

However, his account was mostly preoccupied with the life of the Mongols under Chinese rule and Russian influence in Mongolia. He included a separate chapter about Mongolian history. There he recounted how these people used to rule half of the world following Genghis Khan's conquests, but eventually became "prostrate beneath the Yellow Empire" and dependent on the alien Chinese. His thoughts on Chinese Mongolia read as follows:

The homeless, wifeless, Chinese city, with the quarter of Mongol women without the walls, – it is in many ways typical of all Chinese rule in Mongolia. For, as the Celestial trader defaults in the duty of marrying the Mongol mother of his children, so China defaults in many of the duties that

⁵⁸⁴ Senn, "Dr. Senn on the Schilka and Amur," 50.

⁵⁸⁵ "Senn Returns from Tour," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 15, 1901, 2; Senn, "Dr. Senn's Journey Around the World," 44.

⁵⁸⁶ Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 47.

are inherent in suzerainty. One resents the heavy Chinese yoke on the necks of these simple frankhearted Mongolians. They are a race of great goodhumored children, and they are exploited while disdained.⁵⁸⁷

He then claimed that the Mongols increasingly interacted with Russian travelers, traders, and Cossacks of Russian or Buryat origin, and were especially interested in the life of the Buryats. He reported the thoughts of his Russian guides, one of whom said that the projected railway to Kyakhta would be very important, while the other claimed that “they [the Mongols] will all be glad when the Cossacks come to Kalgan.”⁵⁸⁸ Bates essentially acted as an agent of Russian imperialism, and he was not far from the truth in light of the Russo-Japanese secret conventions in 1907–1912 that designated Outer Mongolia to be a sphere of Russian influence. Besides, apart from the general issue of poverty in the region that many Mongols connected to the rapacity of Chinese merchants, after 1910 the Qing government lifted earlier restrictions on Chinese settlement and sought to decisively bring the region closer to the center. Yet Cossacks were not to appear in Kalgan or Inner Mongolia even after the Xinhai Revolution in China in 1911 and the subsequent proclamation of the independence of Mongolia.⁵⁸⁹ In the end, for all authors the Trans-Siberian Railway signified the increasing power of Russia in Asia, but they also added comments, naïve or realistic, that showed that international affairs in East Asia were becoming more relevant and captivating than ever for the American eye.

Visual Materials

All three authors included visuals in their books to add authenticity to their impressions and claims about Russia. Each of Senn’s articles offered a panorama made from a few photos he either made or bought along the way, with an artistically drawn background. Apart from conventional views of Moscow, Samara, and Vladivostok, pictures of the train, and portraits of Cossacks and Buryats, Senn included numerous pictures taken in Irkutsk, including all the charitable institutions that he praised (figure 19). In the book Senn added the portraits of Nicholas II and his wife, Leo Tolstoy, major Russian officers, as well as Orthodox clergymen. In the Amur section of the journey, he presented extra pictures related to the recent Boxer Rebellion, indicating his interest in Asian

⁵⁸⁷ Bates, 269–70.

⁵⁸⁸ Bates, 272. As pointed out earlier, Kalgan is present-day Zhangjiakou in China.

⁵⁸⁹ The Mongolian Revolution of 1911 was not accepted by China and not enforced by Russia, resulting in the 1912 Russo-Mongolian convention in Urga, superseded by 1915 Kyakhta Treaty between Russia, China, and Mongolia. The latter outlined only the autonomy of Mongolia. Yet this region, though under Chinese suzerainty, was still significantly influenced by Russia.

geopolitics and the significance of the recent upheaval in China for the American public. He added additional pictures of the Buryats, including a photo of a Buryat sacrifice ritual and a women's group portrait as "types," clearly thinking of them, and natives in general, as exotic (figure 20). Despite his eloquent praise of nature, he did not publish a single picture of the landscapes.

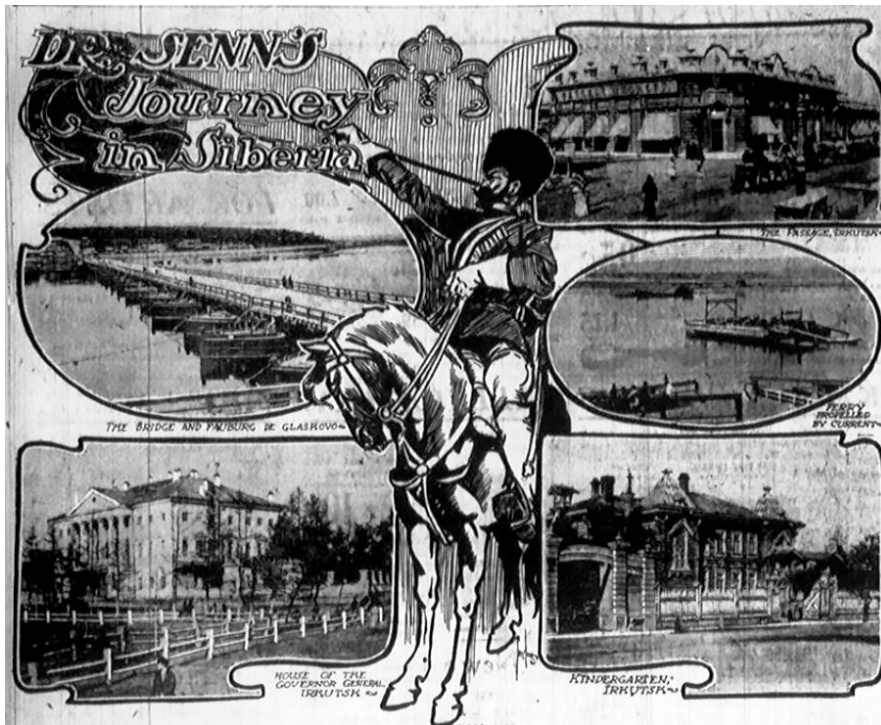


Figure 19. Nicholas Senn, "Dr. Senn's Journey in Siberia," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 15, 1901, 56.



Figure 20. "Types of Buriat Women," in Nicholas Senn, *Around the World via Siberia* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey, 1902), 124.

Bates included over forty photos in addition to three paintings – *The Conquest of Siberia* by *Ermak Timofeevich* by Vasiliy Surikov put in the chapter related to the Cossack conquest of

Siberia, and the other two – *The Knight at the Crossroads* by Viktor Vasnetsov and *The Meeting of Leo the Great and Attila* by Raphael – when describing the history of the Mongols (although Vasnetsov’s painting had nothing to do with Mongolia). The photos are full- or half-page in size, but they do not always complement the text logically. Just like Senn, Bates did not take all of them himself. He showed the places of interest in Moscow, views of Lake Baikal, Irkutsk, and what Bates called “Cities of New Russia”, connecting the rise of the region’s settlements with the impact of the railway (figure 21). He included pictures of the rails, a locomotive, and a train compartment, along with photos taken during the trip to Urga. To underline the recent instability in Siberia, he printed a photo of the organizers of a short-lived Chita Republic during the 1905 Revolution. Similarly to Senn, he pictured Russian and Siberian “types” – the portraits of peasants, students, policemen, Cossacks, and Buryats. In the Mongolia-related chapters, he incorporated the pictures of major temples as well as the portraits of a lama, Bogd Gegeen, and a Chinese Mandarin. His picture of a prostrating pilgrim is clearly the case of “othering” (figure 22).



Figure 21. “Cities of New Russia,” in Lindon Bates, *The Russian Road to China* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 50.



Figure 22. “A Prostrating Pilgrimage,” in Lindon Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, 234.

Bookwalter, while not providing any visuals for Midwestern newspapers, included the largest number of photos by far in his book, over one hundred and twenty on the Siberian portion of the journey, all of them taken personally. They are incorporated throughout the text and are of all sizes. He was apparently permitted by the government to take different kinds of photos, including the rails at different sections, and had the means to publish such a richly illustrated account. He included pictures of his train, a lot of general views of the steppes and rivers, as well as newly-built villages next to the railway (figure 23), offering a glimpse of the rapid settlement of Siberia. He included many photos of people at the stations, including emigrants (figure 24) – to show that the population of Siberia was rapidly increasing. Compared to numerous photos of new villages, landscapes, cities (figure 25), and immigrants, there are few pictures of natives. This implies that the latter were of limited interest to the author.



Figure 23. "Recent Settlement on Siberian Railway, Between the Obi and Tom Rivers [sic], about Two Thousand Four Hundred Miles East of Moscow," in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia* (Springfield, OH: printed by the author, 1899), 117.



Figure 24. "Emigrants at Station, Between Petropavlovsk and Omsk, on Siberian Railway," in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 141.



Figure 25. "Street Scene in Tomsk," in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 143.

Conclusion

The three American travelers of different social backgrounds account for two decades of continuous American travel on the Trans-Siberian Railway. The narratives of Senn and Bates got overwhelmingly positive reviews, while the responses to Bookwalter's account will be discussed in the next chapter. The interest in reviewing Senn's book seemed to be limited to medical journals. Despite the mistakes he made, the *Pacific Medical Journal* asserted that his book has a "clear, comprehensive, interesting style, and reads like a novel."⁵⁹⁰ The engineer's account got a much wider acclaim, including positive remarks from scientific journals like the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*. He was praised for his captivating narration, insightful interactions with Russians and natives, and authoritative takes on the subject of the railway and the future of East Asia. The *Literary Digest* summed it up well, assuring that "it is capital reading" and that Bates had been "looking at the show with the whimsical good humor of a Yankee and the joyous tolerance of a man who is constantly struck by the parallel between the frontier boom of Siberia and that of our own West."⁵⁹¹ One review in a scholarly journal combined Bates and 1910 *Tent Life*. While Kennan's romantic descriptions still held value for Northeastern Siberia, claimed the reviewer, the book by the engineer, printed a generation later, revealed ongoing colonization and imperial advances. For the reviewer, "the books can very profitably be read together, for Mr. Kennan sketches the ground work, the conditions before the opening of the country, and Mr. Bates emphasizes the present day developments."⁵⁹² On the whole, no one questioned the parallels between Siberia and the American West or other, more generalizing comments of the travelers.

While repeating some of Kennan's views expressed in *Siberia* (including highlighting the potential of Siberia and looking forward to American participation in its economic development), all three travelers reversed many of his conclusions. The railway represented "light" and "civilization" that Russia was bringing to its Asian regions, akin to the American railway advance in the West. Its influence, whether imagined or real, prompted all authors to either praise or smooth the criticism of the Russian autocracy and argue that it was capable of developing its distant regions and commanded the reader's respect. In short, they saw Russia in Siberia as an equal Western

⁵⁹⁰ Winslow Anderson, review of *Around the World Via Siberia*, by Nicholas Senn, *Pacific Medical Journal* 46, no. 3 (March 1903): 177.

⁵⁹¹ "A Guide to the New Books," *Literary Digest* 41, no. 6 (August 6, 1910): 211; Also see: Caroline Maddocks, review of *The Russian Road to China*, by Lindon Bates, *Chicago Tribune*, September 15, 1910, 10.

⁵⁹² Chester Jones, review of *The Russian Road to China*, by Lindon Bates, and *Tent Life in Siberia*, by George Kennan, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 37, no. 1 (January 1911): 239.

power and a creative force that followed its own “Manifest Destiny” in Siberia, and the resurgence of this role indicates a turn to the image of Russia entertained in *Tent Life*.

And yet, it is startling, perhaps even ironic, how these Americans, while riding a puffing train that was universally considered a symbol of the new, modern, better age, and praising Russian efforts in bringing modernity to the shores of the Pacific, simultaneously longed for the old, more traditional, even less “civilized” lifestyle. Bookwalter’s praise of agrarian virtue in Russia and the U.S. in response to rapid urbanization at home, Senn’s moralizing about great wealth, honest labor, public good, and simple living away from urban pressure, coupled with poetic descriptions of nature (which resemble Thoreau’s *Walden*), and Bates’ search for the “real Siberia” and praise for the harsh, but more genuine life of Mongols over the Chinese – all these illustrate the antimodernist sentiments of the authors. Their accounts contain the biggest portion of reflections on domestic problems by comparison with Russia shown in this dissertation, ranging from the issue of wealth and philanthropy to forestation policies to the treatment of natives. It seems as if, running away from “overcivilization” at home in search of “real” experiences, old morality, and general revitalization, in Russia they sought to recreate and re-experience, at least in their imagination, the pre-modern American frontier. But by focusing on similarities between the American West and Siberia, the three authors failed to pinpoint the differences. Instead, they repeatedly displayed their ethnic or racial biases, even Bates, who clearly was the most prepared for writing a travel book about Siberia. The other two authors were less knowledgeable about Siberia and based their conclusions primarily on impressions and preconceived ideas, with the help of officials likely influencing Bookwalter’s view. Out of the three Senn best personified an overconfident type of tourist. He asserted his social and cultural authority as a famous and educated surgeon at home by excluding African Americans and the lower classes from his picture of America, often lauded his country of residence as the paragon of liberty, demanded that other American tourists not go to Europe, and, ironically, committed the largest number of simplifications and blunders.

The next chapter is related to journeys in the then recently acquired Russian Turkestan. This region was different from Siberia in terms of climate, geography, history, and the native population. In spite of official restrictions on foreign travel, its prospects and the development of railways prompted a handful of Americans to visit it and write travel accounts.

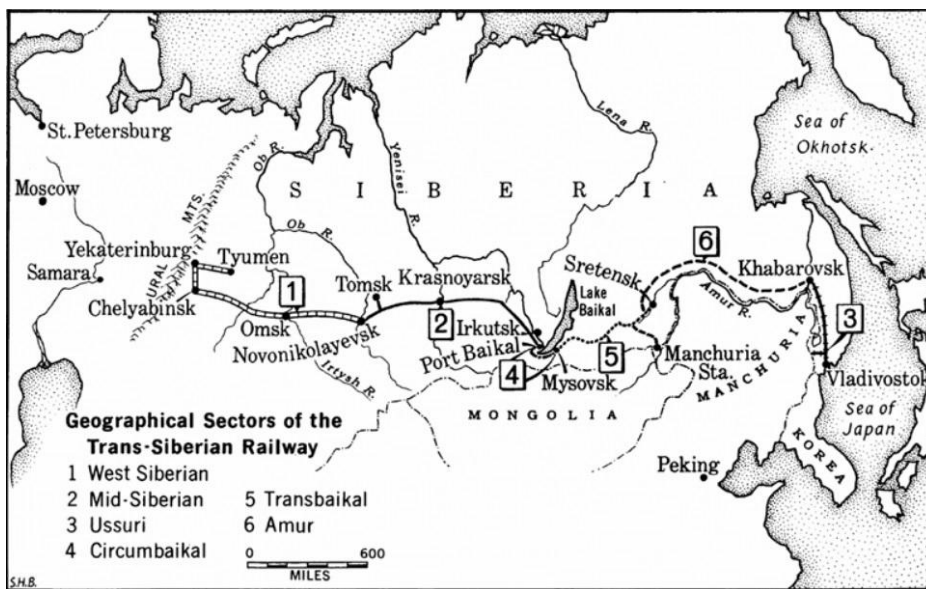


Figure 26. Tupper, Harmon. *Geographical Sectors of the Trans-Siberian Railway* [map]. In: Harmon Tupper, *To the Great Ocean: Siberia and the Trans-Siberian Railway* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), 87. (Note: Novonikolayevsk is now Novosibirsk, initially Ob station on the railway)

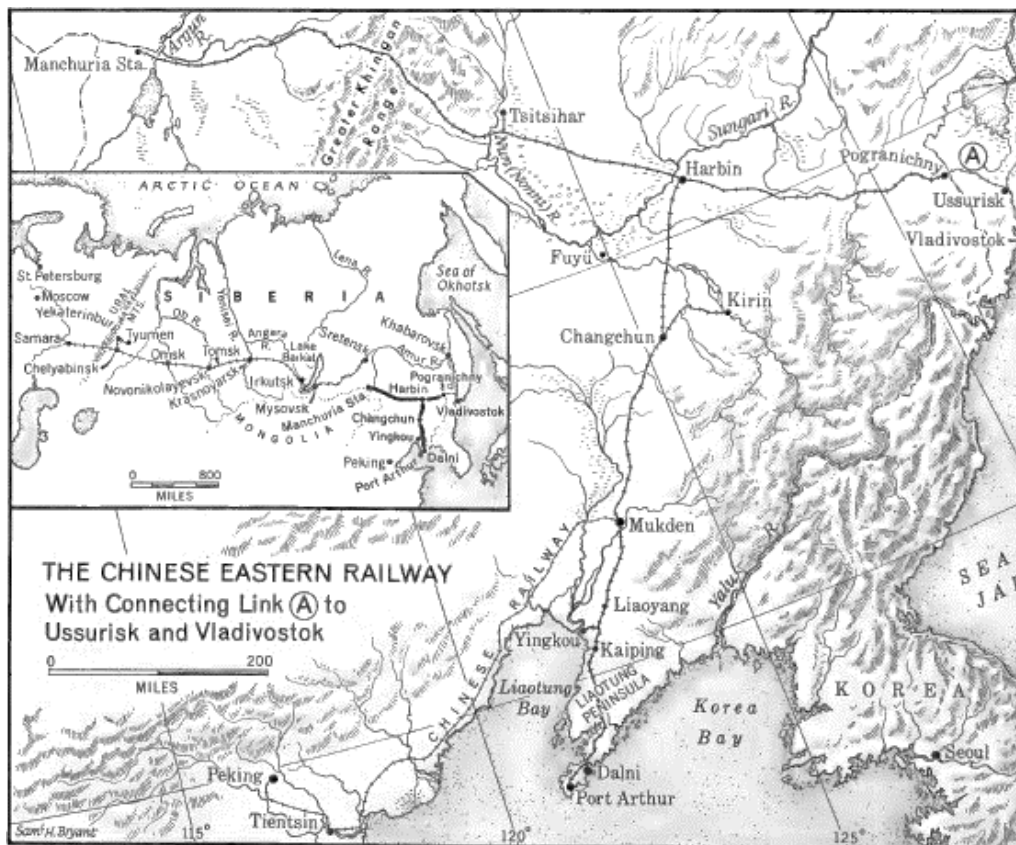


Figure 27. Tupper, Harmon. *The Chinese Eastern Railway* [map]. In: Harmon Tupper, *To the Great Ocean*, 320.

Chapter 6. Deserts, Natives, and Sylvan Cities: Russian Turkestan in American Travel Writing

Introduction

The Russian conquest of Turkestan (the territories of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, most of Kirghizstan, as well as the southern and southeastern areas of Kazakhstan), completed within three decades from the mid-1860s, brought controversial changes in the region's economy, administration, and native lifestyle. Unlike Siberia or European Russia, the Turkestan General-Governorship, governed by the military, enforced restrictions on foreign travel. Nevertheless, some Americans visited Turkestan at the turn of the century and wrote travelogues for the home audience. This chapter demonstrates how two American travelers, despite their different social backgrounds and almost a decade between their trips, presented Russia as a creative force and a Western power that was bringing "civilization" to this distant non-European region. Their conclusions on Russian presence and policy in Turkestan bear a close resemblance to the impressions of Americans who traveled along the Trans-Siberian Railway, but with an extra Orientalist component.

Turkestan as Part of the Russian Empire

While Russia experienced its first direct contact with the population of Central Asia in the late sixteenth – early seventeenth centuries during its conquest of Siberia and expansion toward the Pacific, from the early nineteenth century it began increasing its presence and by the late 1850s gradually acquired most of modern Kazakhstan, encountering three independent entities farther to the south: the Khiva and the Kokand Khanates and the Bukhara Emirate. In the three decades from 1864 onwards Russia dissolved the Kokand Khanate, while the other two states were turned into protectorates. The territories conquered were initially incorporated as the Turkestan province of the Orenburg General-Governorship, but in July 1867 they were organized into the Turkestan General-Governorship with two provinces: Syr-Darya and Semirechie. Following a series of administrative reorganizations after the conquest, by the early twentieth century the Turkestan General-Governorship consisted of five provinces (see figure 32).⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ Edward Allworth, ed., *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 151–59.

The Russians entered a region that differed decisively from European Russia, above all in terms of climate and geography, with semi-desert and desert areas to the south and southwest, and the mountains to the southeast where the major rivers (the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya) flow from, creating oases and making nearby areas available for cultivation.⁵⁹⁴ Most of the sedentary population was concentrated near sources of water or constructed irrigation areas, but others retained a nomadic or semi-sedentary lifestyle. The inhabitants of Turkestan were ethnically and linguistically diverse, with a rich cultural and historical heritage that went back thousands of years. Most of the population shared Islam as a prevalent religion, different from mostly Orthodox Russians. These differences altogether contributed to the fact that Russians saw Turkestan as a culturally distinct region, and the local population shared little common cultural ground with the new administration.⁵⁹⁵

The ultimate goal of the Russian approach to Turkestan was to gradually integrate it with the rest of the empire in terms of economy, education, administration, and cultural development. But as the Russian administration introduced economic, administrative, and social changes, from the start both local and central officials debated about the degree of integration and weighed the risks of potential instability.⁵⁹⁶ The administration of Turkestan was subordinated to the Ministry of War and was called “the military-civilian administration.” Whereas both military and civil powers were held by military officials on upper government levels, there was the presence of officials from several civil departments and traditional native and Russian self-government structures on the local level. The imperial government focused on developing a market economy and encouraging irrigation, agriculture, cotton growing for the domestic textile industry, and railroad building. It also attempted to establish Russian and mixed Russian-native schools parallel to the traditional Muslim education system, and, following Stolypin’s reforms – to encourage Russian settlement in the region.

⁵⁹⁴ Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2.

⁵⁹⁵ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), xi; Richard Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867–1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 203–4.

⁵⁹⁶ Tat’yana Kotyukova, “Turkestan v diskurse frontirnoy modernizatsii Rossiyskoy imperii v kontse XIX – nachale XX v. [Turkestan in the discourse of frontier modernization of the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries],” *Islam in the Modern World* 11, no. 1 (2015): 45–46, <https://doi.org/10.20536/2074-1529-2015-11-1-43-54>; Sergey Abashin, Dmitriy Arapov, and Nailya Bekmakhanova, eds., *Tsentrāl’naya Aziya v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii* [Central Asia as part of the Russian Empire], *Historia Rossica* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2008), 87; Ulrich Hofmeister, “Civilization and Russification in Tsarist Central Asia, 1860–1917,” *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 413–15, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2016.0115>; Paul Georg Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal Commitment and Political Order in Change* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 156, 181.

Historians offer different opinions on the successes and failures of the Russian Empire in Turkestan, and more broadly, Central Asia. Many Russian and some English-speaking academics focused on state policy and emphasized positive changes in the region, whether demographic, material, social, or cultural.⁵⁹⁷ Others present a much more critical evaluation of imperial rule and argue that Russian administrators, like other European empire-builders of the time, sought to bring “civilization” to natives who were perceived as inferior. Earlier widely accepted achievements of Russian rule, such as the universal and immediate abolition of slavery, were reexamined.⁵⁹⁸ Critics see the imperial efforts in developing agriculture, education, railways, encouraging settlement, and, no less importantly, transforming the nature of the region, perceived as “lifeless” and alien by Russian senior officials, with the help of irrigation, changes in water use, and forestation as essentially colonial policy.⁵⁹⁹ They argued that the regional policy was often inefficient and inconsistent and reversed the role of the local population, which was an active force rather than a passive actor, and showed both accommodation and resistance to state policy.⁶⁰⁰

Scholars agree, however, that Russia eventually began to pay more attention to the economic potential of Turkestan, specifically cotton growing for the domestic textile industry. The United States was the major cotton producer in the world at the turn of the century, and Russia looked at it as a point of reference for establishing cotton cultivation in Turkestan. The region’s administrators, agencies, and locals experimented with cotton seeds from America, and in the 1880s the use of the Upland seed became widespread in Ferghana province, which quickly turned into the major cotton-growing area in the region. Russians also purchased agricultural machinery and cotton gins from the U.S. This eventually led to a cotton “boom” in Turkestan, which before

⁵⁹⁷ Yuliya Lysenko, ed., *Tsentrāl’noaziatskiy region Rossiyskoy imperii v usloviyakh frontirnoy modernizatsii (vtoraya polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)* [Central Asian region of the Russian Empire under conditions of frontier modernization (the second half of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries)] (Barnaul: Izdatel’stvo Altayskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2021), 375; Abashin, Arapov, and Bekmakhanova, *Tsentrāl’naya Aziya*, 27; Pierce, *Russian Central Asia*, chap. 20.

⁵⁹⁸ Jeff Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁹⁹ General contemporary critical works on the period include: Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021); Shoshana Keller, *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020). Other scholars look at the region and imperial policy through the lens of environmental history: Julia Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams: Cotton Growing and Irrigation in Central Asia, 1860–1991*, Cultural and Social History of Eastern Europe 8 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017), chap. 1; Maya Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia’s Aral Sea Basin*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jennifer Keating, *On Arid Ground: Political Ecologies of Empire in Russian Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁶⁰⁰ Keller, *Russia and Central Asia*, 130–31; Albert Kaganovich, “Nekotoryye problemy tsarskoy kolonizatsii Turkestana [Some problems of the tsarist colonization of Turkestan],” *Tsentrāl’naya Aziya*, no. 5 (1997): 117–20.

the First World War was able to cover almost half of Russian cotton demand.⁶⁰¹ Like the role of Americans in the development of Russian railways discussed in the previous chapter, the application of American knowledge and technologies in Turkestan cotton growing, irrigation, and agriculture in general was another case in point of cooperation between the two countries.⁶⁰² In spite of this progress, Russia still depended on American cotton exports, which remained the major article of Russian-American trade. In turn, American entrepreneurs displayed interest in local agriculture, irrigation, and mining.⁶⁰³

The development of railroads and infrastructure, economic interest, and the awareness about growing cotton cultivation in the region based on American know-how naturally prompted a number of American visitors to come specifically to Turkestan. Some of them wrote travel accounts about this relatively remote and unknown region of the empire for the readers at home.

Authors and Their Travelogues

This chapter focuses on two authors. The first is John Bookwalter (1839–1915), whose biography was presented in the previous chapter. As has been explained, he was a businessman and philanthropist residing in Ohio who traveled in Russia throughout the summer and autumn of 1898. After he tried out the recently built Trans-Siberian Railway, he turned his attention to the Caucasus, and after exploring it decided to head for Turkestan. He continued to write articles for the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* and expanded his narration in *Siberia and Central Asia*.

The second author is journalist, writer, and diplomat William Curtis (1850–1911). Born in Akron, Ohio, into the family of a Presbyterian pastor, he attended Western Reserve College (currently Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio) and received a D.Litt., as well as an LHD from Amherst College. He began his career with the *Cleveland Leader*, and later worked as editor and travel correspondent for major Chicago newspapers.⁶⁰⁴ In the mid-1880s and the early

⁶⁰¹ Some scholars questioned earlier accepted claims about the significant role of the state in promoting cotton growing, attributing it to the initiatives of local administrators and cotton growers, see: Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams*, 100, 113; Beatrice Penati, “The Cotton Boom and the Land Tax in Russian Turkestan (1880s–1915),” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 4 (2013): 741–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2013.0060>.

⁶⁰² For example, one of the publications made by agronomist Nikolay Tulaykov was published in Tashkent based on his study trip to America, see: Nikolay Tulaykov, *Ocherki po irrigatsii v Soyedinennykh Shtatakh. Solontsy, ikh utilizatsiya i uluchsheniye* [Sketches on irrigation in the United States. Solonetz, their utilization and improvement] (Tashkent: Tipolitografiya V.M. Il’ina, 1910).

⁶⁰³ Saul, *Concord and Conflict*, 573–75; Savoytskiy, *200 let ekonomicheskoy diplomatii*, 155.

⁶⁰⁴ “Curtis, William Elleroy,” in *Men and Women of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporaries* (New York: L.R. Hamersly, 1910), 437–38.

1890s he was involved in U.S.-Latin American affairs.⁶⁰⁵ As a correspondent, he traveled regularly around the world and published a dozen book-length travelogues, covering Western Europe, the Balkans, Scandinavia, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, India, Egypt, and Japan. His travelogues covered the cities he visited, social and political life, religion, and the traditions of local peoples. He often presented information about local trade and economy and outlined the possibility of investments for the home audience. In some travelogues he praised the missionary presence of the U.S. in the countries he visited. Briefly, Western countries, Scandinavia, and Japan as the “Yankee of the East” were mostly praised for their development and prosperity. Curtis often lauded the British colonial administration, including its policy in Ireland. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire was frequently vilified, and its population was presented through the lens of stereotypes about the Orient.

Curtis also wrote a travel account titled *The Land of the Nihilist. Russia: Its People, Its Palaces, Its Politics* (1888). He explored Moscow and St. Petersburg with his wife in 1887 and wrote for the *Chicago Daily News* about the Russian army, religion, education, censorship, police, exiles, and private life of the imperial family, concluding that compared to Western Europe the overall condition in Russia was “that of oppression, solemnity, and distrust.”⁶⁰⁶ More than two decades later, from spring to autumn of 1910, he visited Turkestan on assignment for the *Chicago Record-Herald* as part of a bigger trip across the Caucasus and southern areas of European Russia. Throughout this period his articles appeared daily, on the first pages of this newspaper. He collected his articles together in a separate book titled *Turkestan: “The Heart of Asia”* (1911).⁶⁰⁷

Both Americans traveled by train on the Central Asian Railway (see figure 32). It was initially designed for military purposes and called the Transcaspian Railway. Its construction began in 1880 and started from the city of Krasnovodsk (present-day Türkmenbaşy in Turkmenistan) on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. The railway ran eastward and by 1888 reached Samarkand via Ashkhabad, the ruins of ancient Merv and the new Russian settlement next to it, Chardjuy

⁶⁰⁵ Following his public support for the renomination of Chester Arthur at the 1884 Republican convention, Curtis was appointed a member of the Latin American Trade Commission in 1884–1885. This allowed him to visit numerous Latin American countries, and he published his *The Capitals of Spanish America* in 1888, which made him prominent as a specialist in Latin American affairs. He was the executive officer of the first International Conference of American States, the first director of the Bureau of the American Republics, and the manager of the Latin American exhibition at the Chicago World’s Fair. As argued by Coates, his activities and writings implied shared Pan-American identity, but at the same time hinted at the U.S. superiority and the possibility to “uplift” Latin America, forming an imperial ideological dimension: Benjamin Coates, “The Pan-American Lobbyist: William Eleroy Curtis and U.S. Empire, 1884–1899,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 1 (2014): 22–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht067>.

⁶⁰⁶ William Curtis, *The Land of the Nihilist. Russia: Its People, Its Palaces, Its Politics. A Narrative of Travel in the Czar’s Dominions* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, 1888), 323.

⁶⁰⁷ As a result of his travels, he published this book as well as another account titled *Around the Black Sea*, which included his impressions during the rest of the trip.

(present-day Türkmenabat in Turkmenistan), and Bukhara. Bookwalter crossed the Caspian Sea from Baku to Krasnovodsk and finished his narration in Samarkand, yet his post-travel interviews suggest that he visited Tashkent (the capital of the General-Governorship) as well, but he published nothing about it.⁶⁰⁸ Later the railway was extended to Andijan, with additional lines to the north to Tashkent and from Merv to Kushka on the Afghan border. In 1899 it was renamed the Central Asian Railway, and that same year its control was transferred from the military to civilian authorities.⁶⁰⁹ Curtis also crossed the Caspian Sea from Baku and traveled across the extended railway from Krasnovodsk to the east. Since Turkestan was bound by restrictions on foreign travel, both Americans needed permission from the Ministry of War.

Unlike Curtis, Bookwalter (just like during his earlier journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway) was welcomed in all major cities by Russian officials who tried to secure comfortable travel conditions for him, which likely influenced his impressions.⁶¹⁰ Neither author knew Russian or any of the native languages, and both hired interpreters or guides (who are barely mentioned in the text) to collect information. This, in turn, shaped and limited their understanding of the region.

Finally, a few extra remarks should be made about Curtis. Having already established himself as a professional travel writer, he carried a typewriter with him at all times. Although he did not use cables like Washburn and sent all his articles by mail, he or his companions put the typewriter to use almost every day. He confessed that he always tried to maintain a three-week interval between a certain section of travel and writing down impressions about them, using the help of notes and companions. The typewriter was a symbolic tool for the journalist. For him, “whether afloat or ashore, afoot or a-horseback, whether in a luxurious hotel or in a mountain cabin, rain or shine, cold or hot, sick or well, that death-do-us-part ‘scribe machine’ is unlimbered and called into action for an hour and a quarter or an hour and a half daily.” This style of reporting was

⁶⁰⁸ “Russia in the Far East,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1898, 7. The same interview appeared in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* for the same date.

⁶⁰⁹ Irina Bochkareva, “Zheleznodorozhnoye stroitel’stvo v strategii Rossiyskoy imperii po osvoyeniyu Turkestana [Railway construction in the Russian Empire’s strategy for Turkestan development],” *Izvestiya of Altai State University*, no. 5 (109) (2019): 35–37, [https://doi.org/10.14258/izvasu\(2019\)5-04](https://doi.org/10.14258/izvasu(2019)5-04). Along with the construction of the railroad from Orenburg to Tashkent in 1901–1906, the significance of the railways in the region gradually changed from military to economic.

⁶¹⁰ Curtis got his permit from the Ministry of War with the help and introduction letters by Roman Rosen (Russian Ambassador in the U.S.), Nikolay Charykov (Russian Ambassador in the Ottoman Empire), and William Rockhill (American Ambassador in Russia). At first abandoning the idea of traveling to Turkestan, Bookwalter received his permission “in a wonderfully short space of time” allegedly from the Ministry of the Interior with the help of American Ambassador in Russia Ethan Hitchcock after finishing his journey across the Caucasus. He also met with the Governor-General of the Caucasus Grigory Golitsyn to discuss the subject.

considered professional, and yet, like Washburn, Curtis was too pressed by time, and as pointed out later, he was not free from committing mistakes.

Travel Conditions and the Landscape of Turkestan

Bookwalter was assigned a train compartment all for himself and his guide by the officials who expected him to enter Turkestan. He pointed out that the train was painted completely white and consisted of cars of second, third, and fourth class, the latter two for the increasing number of immigrants and native passengers. While its outside appearance was attractive, the interior offered little comfort overall.⁶¹¹ Both Bookwalter and Curtis had to bring their bedding with them. The latter briefly described his voyage across the Caspian Sea on a steamer and found it agreeable. Curtis took a new first-class car, which consisted of compartments for two or four people, and found it just as comfortable as Pullman sleepers. He lauded the railroad's quality, comparing the Central Asian Railway to the Union and Central Pacific lines. More generally, he approved of the management of Russian railways, including the Trans-Siberian. While he criticized the train operating according to St. Petersburg rather than local time and its slow speed, he made a mistake regarding the dates of the railway's construction. Early in the trip he pointed to the arbitrary treatment of his persona by local officials. He reported that his group was "under suspicion from the start" as Russian officials and police could barely distinguish between British and Americans, commonly viewing any English-speaking individuals as potential spies.⁶¹² He told a story when his behavior and typewriter made a local official in Krasnovodsk suspicious, and he cabled his concerns to Ashkhabad, leading to the police interrogation of the author and his team on board a train.⁶¹³

As for the region's landscape, both Americans focused on deserts and steppe areas traversed by nomads and irrigated areas and oases with water that supported the settled population. For Bookwalter, the oases of Turkestan reminded him of those of the Nile area that he had visited before, and he believed that in the past there were more water sources and cultivated areas in the region. Curtis shared this reflection by describing the ancient and medieval history of Turkestan and argued that huge armies of the past, like that of Alexander of Macedon, would not have been able to go so far to the north without a constant source of water among the many rivers that existed

⁶¹¹ John Bookwalter, "Across Central Asia," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, December 18, 1898, 53.

⁶¹² William Curtis, "Russian Officials See All Turkestan Tourists as Spies," *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 19, 1910, 1, 10.

⁶¹³ William Curtis, "Typewriter Cause of Suspicion by Russian Officers," *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 24, 1910, 1, 8.

there centuries before.⁶¹⁴ To strengthen his argument, in one of the articles he cited the results of the Carnegie Institution expedition in Turkestan in 1903–1904 led by geologist Raphael Pumpelly, whose aim was to study the region’s archaeology and find traces of ancient civilizations in Turkestan and the reasons behind their decline.⁶¹⁵ For him, the entire region bore a resemblance to the southwestern U.S. states as well as certain areas of Latin America that he had visited.

Both authors wrote about their impressions upon arrival in an oasis area after a long journey through the desert. Curtis compared approaching an oasis to the way Americans traveling to California on the Southern Pacific Railway would feel if they crossed from the “dusty desert” to an irrigated “paradise of orange groves.”⁶¹⁶ He also imagined how travelers of the past, compared to contemporary travel by train, used to cross the Hungry Steppe to reach Samarkand, and how they celebrated the sight of an oasis.⁶¹⁷

In the book Bookwalter expanded on his impressions about the desert landscape, noting on the way from Merv to Chardjuy that “scarcely a vestige of vegetation exists through this long and dreary waste; the flight of a solitary bird or the sight of a lone shrub in the distance only emphasized the horrible desolation.”⁶¹⁸ Upon reaching Chardjuy, which is located next to the Amu Darya, his impressions changed:

The magician's art can scarcely produce an effect more startling than that which followed our sudden transition from the desert, with its torrid heat and blinding sands, to the cool shady groves, the lovely gardens and smiling landscapes in the charming valley of the Amu-Daria. So abrupt was the change that it seemed the work of enchantment.⁶¹⁹

This passage and other comments reveal that both American authors, traveling by modern means of transport and looking at surroundings from a secluded train car, emphasized the contrast between the dreary desert and the much more pleasant oasis areas.

⁶¹⁴ William Curtis, “Askhabad, Capital of Trans-Caspia, Is a Prosperous City,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 23, 1910, 8.

⁶¹⁵ Raphael Pumpelly, William Davis, and Ellsworth Huntington, *Explorations in Turkestan: With an Account of the Basin of Eastern Persia and Sistan. Expedition of 1903, Under the Direction of Raphael Pumpelly*, Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 26 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1905). Curtis also claimed that long ago the Caspian Sea was probably directly connected with the Arctic Ocean.

⁶¹⁶ William Curtis, “Oasis Yields Crops Amid Desert Sands on Bare Turkestan,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 20, 1910, 1; For connections between travel writing and the desert see: Roslynn Haynes, “Travel Writing and the Desert,” in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 315–29.

⁶¹⁷ The Hungry Steppe or Mirzacho‘l was a large area mostly in eastern Uzbekistan where agriculture and settlement were at that time almost impossible without irrigation that would be developed there much later.

⁶¹⁸ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 452–53.

⁶¹⁹ Bookwalter, 454.

The two Americans expressed their belief in the potential of the region due to the high fertility of the soil, even in the desert, and claimed that Turkestan would benefit greatly as soon as water was made more accessible with irrigation expanded. Both discussed the possible redirection of the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya and the construction of a canal between the Aral and the Caspian Seas. Bookwalter believed that Turkestan would turn into a major agricultural center of the world as soon as the two rivers were to be redirected to irrigate the deserts further to the west. He was informed of an engineering project to divert the Amu Darya with the help of a canal, so that as a result this river could one day reach the Caspian Sea. He invited his readers to imagine the results of such an undertaking:

The eye of imagination may even discern that in future eons the Caspian itself, and even the great basin of which it is the centre, may yet be filled by the washings of the mountains a thousand miles away. The contemplation of cosmic changes so vast, wrought by the erosions of time, suggesting the ultimate removal of the earth's inequalities, teaches anew the lesson that all things seem to be travelling toward a final, and perhaps an eternal, equilibrium.⁶²⁰

Curtis similarly lauded the potential of the soil, calling it “one of those inexplicable mysteries of nature” when the repulsive desert turns into a beautiful area thanks to water.⁶²¹ Early in the journey, he summed up his impressions:

Excepting the enormous adobe fortifications which the Turkomans thought would enable them to resist the Russian invasion, the camels, and the fantastic costumes which the people wear, Central Asia looks exactly like Arizona; and the similarity is emphasized now and then when the train passes through an oasis with orchards like the orange groves around Riverside, and fields of grain and alfalfa, and vegetable gardens wherever water has been brought.⁶²²

Thus, both authors were clearly in favor of the potential transformation of alien desert areas in favor of irrigated and cultivated land. Yet there is no indication, unlike in Siberia, of mourning the loss of primeval nature (as was the case for Senn in the previous chapter). Instead, the thinking of the two authors essentially went along with that of many Russian commentators and imperial officials who considered the desert alien and sought to appropriate it for good use.⁶²³ As argued by modern historians, such a perception of Turkestan lands as supposedly alien or “empty” and the need for their transformation was one of the major arguments in justifying Russian benevolent rule

⁶²⁰ Bookwalter, 461.

⁶²¹ Curtis, “Oasis Yields Crops Amid Desert Sands on Bare Turkestan,” 10.

⁶²² William Curtis, “View in Turkestan Resembles Arizona Except for Camels,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 21, 1910, 1, 10.

⁶²³ Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 31, 160–61.

and “civilization” in the region.⁶²⁴ The impressions about local geography certainly influenced the authors’ perception of Russian presence in Turkestan.

The Cities of Turkestan

The Central Asian Railway eventually connected all the major cities of the region. Some of them were built from scratch by Russians (such as Krasnovodsk, Ashkhabad, and the new city near the old ruins of Merv), while in ancient cities like Tashkent and Samarkand they created a separate district with general planning and European urban design next to the native settlement.

Both authors got their first impression from Krasnovodsk on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. In the book Bookwalter described his enchantment with the local railway station which combined Western and Eastern design. This combination made him think of the ultimate synthesis of the West and the East and a “neutral state of races,” where “the softening idealism of the East will give a soul to the inflexible materiality of the West, which in return will impart a substance to Oriental dreams and abstractions.”⁶²⁵ He again perceived Russian architecture as exotic, echoing a similar comment about the railway station in Moscow, cited in the previous chapter.⁶²⁶ Curtis, in contrast, compared Krasnovodsk with mining towns in the southwestern states and those in Chile. He described it as a collection of one-story whitewashed houses and depots. He praised the local railway station as well as the fact that there were no saloons, gambling houses, and other “disreputable resorts” compared to frontier towns in America, referencing the already discussed concerns about urban development during the Progressive Era. However, he pointed to the lack of greenery and noted that it was important only as a transportation hub and military station, concluding that “it was created for a single purpose, and no one would live there unless he were compelled to do so.”⁶²⁷

The later comments of the authors about the cities on the railway reveal a clear division between the native and Russian quarters and the importance of landscaping as well as economic activity in the authors’ perceptions. In their descriptions of Ashkhabad, both authors made comments that they would repeat for all other Russian cities, whether new or next to native settlements. Bookwalter’s thoughts about this city, present only in the book, read:

⁶²⁴ Keating, *On Arid Ground*, 20; Peterson, *Pipe Dreams*, 14.

⁶²⁵ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 383–84.

⁶²⁶ See chap. 5, n. 507.

⁶²⁷ William Curtis, “Krasnovodsk Only Port of Entry for All Central Asia,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 17, 1910, 1, 3.

Like all new Russian towns in these regions, it has wide, well-paved streets, and beautiful avenues of trees, with a stream of running water on either side of the streets. Having an abundance of water, supplied by a stream descending from the adjacent mountains, most of which is used for irrigation, Askabad has become the centre of a large and highly productive agricultural region.⁶²⁸

Curtis too noted that Ashkhabad was “a splotch of green upon the desert” and concluded that the population here looked prosperous. He, too, highlighted gardens, groves, and rows of trees. However, whereas Bookwalter emphasized agriculture, Curtis additionally focused on urban infrastructure: schools, museums, theaters, newspapers, retail shops, and other features of modern civilization.⁶²⁹

Both authors contrasted the new city of Merv against the abandoned ancient city nearby. The two Americans lauded the design and the greenery of the recently established town, although Curtis did notice the presence of malaria in it. While Curtis claimed that the area did not contain any notion of Eastern romance immortalized in Thomas Moore’s poem *Lalla Rookh*, Bookwalter, in contrast, postulated about the ancient Merv:

It baffles the imagination to conceive, or the tongue to describe, the wide prospect of ruin and desolation that spreads before the view. Extending in all directions as far as the eye can reach, there is nothing but great heaps of rubbish, crumbling walls and buildings, broken arches, with here and there the half-preserved ruins of some majestic edifice towering over all, and standing like a solemn, solitary sentinel to guard the sad remains of former splendor and greatness.⁶³⁰

With that Bookwalter visualized the former significance of the ancient city compared to the recently established Russian city, and both authors gave preference to the new one.

Bukhara was the only major city on the railway where there was no distinctive Russian quarter. This had to do with the fact that the Bukhara Emirate was a protectorate state and that the railway passed at a distance from Bukhara.⁶³¹ Bookwalter found little of interest in the town except massive walls that surrounded it and strange local customs like prohibiting the population from entering or exiting the city during the night. However, he admitted that Bukhara had its merits, including a low crime rate. In this case he echoed Curtis’ criticism of urban vice at home, additionally lauding the temperance of the population that was an example for his home country and other “nations laying claim for a higher civilization.”⁶³² Curtis also praised some of the habits

⁶²⁸ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 417.

⁶²⁹ Curtis, “Askhabad, Capital of Trans-Caspia, Is a Prosperous City,” 1, 8.

⁶³⁰ John Bookwalter, “From Merv to Bokhara,” *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, January 8, 1899, 37.

⁶³¹ Instead, it ran through the settlement New Bukhara (present-day Kogon), located twelve kilometers away from the town and established by Russians.

⁶³² Bookwalter, “From Merv to Bokhara,” 37.

of the population, their tidiness and colorful clothes, and showed a notable interest in the city's bazaars, which had an infinite variety of goods and a unique atmosphere. However, he was sarcastic about Bukhara's identification as "the Noble, the Sublime" by the locals in the past. He perceived the degradation of its mosques, neglected buildings, and the lack of foliage, and added:

But if anybody should start out to search for the sublime in Bokhara to-day he would become more and more disheartened as he proceeded. It is in all respects the most antiquated, the most depraved, the ugliest, and the least progressive city in Turkestan, although there are fascinations in such places that more enterprising and attractive cities do not possess.⁶³³

Thus, it is clear that the lack of modern urban features and green spaces and the overall rundown look of this ancient town compared to Russian cities made it look unappealing to the author.

Both Americans described major mosques, squares, bazaars, and houses of the population in Samarkand and Tashkent, again noticeably contrasting the new and the old. In Samarkand, where Bookwalter ended his narration, he, as usual, praised the greenery and general planning of the Russian part of the city, stating that "in fact, a more perfect sylvan city would be hard to imagine." Concerning the ancient city, he witnessed some ruins that evoked only its glorious past. Yet its major places of interest, including major mosques, the local madrasa, the buildings of the city's Registan (public square), the famous mausoleum of Tamerlane (Gur-e-Amir), and other architectural masterpieces still managed "to produce an indescribably charming effect."⁶³⁴

Curtis lauded the richness of the Russian part of Samarkand in trees, groves, and all kinds of modern establishments that made it look, in his opinion, like one of the "finest of all the Russian settlements in Asia," surpassed only by Tashkent. The ancient city, however, reminded him of "a crippled giant fallen helpless by the wayside," where many buildings and almost all places of interest except the Gur-e-Amir were in decay, the bazaars were not so interesting, and the locals were indifferent to their city's development. His general thoughts were:

There is not a trace of ancient splendour in the old city. I did not see one decent looking building, nor one which seemed to have been erected or repaired by the present generation. ... Everything is dilapidated and filthy, but, oh, how picturesque! The riot of colour in costumes, the Oriental types of faces, the camels, the donkeys, the *droshkys*, the highwheeled carts, and the peasants loaded with the produce of their farms and gardens, which they bring to market on their backs. ... No matter how humble or hungry a man may be, and even if he have but a single garment, that is made of the most brilliantly coloured material he can find.⁶³⁵

⁶³³ William Curtis, "Bokhara, Rug City, Still Independent of Foreign Rule," *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 18, 1910, 1.

⁶³⁴ John Bookwalter, "In Tamerlane's Capitol," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, January 15, 1899, 38.

⁶³⁵ William Curtis, "All Glories Faded in Samarkand, Once Mighty City," *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 10, 1910, 8.

Thus, Curtis distinguished between the city and its population. Similar to Bukhara, the native section of Samarkand was perceived negatively, while looking at its inhabitants confirmed the author's perceptions of the exotic Orient. Indicative of the difficulty of acquiring credible information on account of not speaking any of the languages in use in the area, both Curtis and Bookwalter made mistakes regarding the places of interest in the city – including the dates of the construction of Tilya Kori Madrasa. Curtis mistakenly claimed that it was the creation of Tamerlan (in reality, it was built in the seventeenth century). While Bookwalter correctly assumed that the Bibi Khanym Mosque in Samarkand was built during Tamerlane's reign and named after his wife, Saray Mulk Khanum, he called her a "Chinese Princess," which she was not.

Later, while visiting Kokand in Ferghana province, Curtis declared that the new part was more interesting than the old "because it represents life and progress" and since "there is something doing every day in the development of natural resources and in extending the wealth-producing capacity of the country."⁶³⁶ Only in Tashkent was he attracted to the native district due to its foliage, streams, and accessibility of water, calling it "the cleanest Oriental city I have ever seen."⁶³⁷

In conclusion, both authors saw the cities of Turkestan with a clear distinction between ancient and modern. The development and "progress" were equated primarily with new Russian cities or districts that had visible economic growth, Western urban facilities, modern infrastructure, and, no less importantly, foliage and water supply. Essentially, just like regarding nature, the two Americans subscribed to the narratives promoted by imperial administrators who sought to present Russian cities as the epitome of development and "civilization" compared to dilapidation in ancient native towns. Yet in following these discourses the authors gave a simplified vision of urban development in Turkestan based on a fixed division between the Russian and native city quarters. The case of Tashkent, the biggest city in the region at the turn of the century and the capital of the General-Governorship, provides a more nuanced picture. Native quarters, too, had professionals (such as doctors or engineers) without whom it would have been much more difficult for Russians and other foreigners to sustain themselves. Native merchants (including those who settled in the Russian quarters) played a considerable role in supplying Russians with consumer goods, while native workers maintained the water system that the authors lauded in all Russian cities. While the Americans presented the Russian and native quarters in all cities as if totally separated, Tashkent displayed the contrary, with growing interconnections in trade, religion, city ceremonies, and

⁶³⁶ William Curtis, "Deserts of Asia Like Arid Regions in United States," *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 8, 1910, 1.

⁶³⁷ William Curtis, "Old Tashkent City Cleanest of Any in the Turkestan," *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 4, 1910, 1.

everyday life.⁶³⁸ Finally, while both authors pointed to native virtues, neither of them paid attention to the urban vice that Russians coming from other regions of the empire brought. Drunkenness, poverty, laziness, etc., were occasionally pointed out by some local officials whose belief in Russia's automatic "civilizational" superiority was thus disturbed. At times, they went as far as defining poor Russian city dwellers as backward themselves.⁶³⁹ On the whole, rather than true-to-life city depictions, the authors followed the Russian imperial discourse and displayed widespread concern about urban demoralization in the U.S. itself.

Turkestan's Native Population

Both authors described the same major ethnic groups in their travelogues, namely the Kirghiz (or more precisely Kirghiz-Kaisak, an earlier name adopted by Russians for contemporary Kazakhs), Uzbeks, Turkmens, and Sarts.⁶⁴⁰ The two American authors focused on the status of the native peoples as settled or nomad, their activities, appearance, accommodation, character, religion, and occasionally on the position of women.

Both authors were impressed by the appearance and physical strength of the Turkmens, whom they saw as Muslim nomads and cattle breeders. Bookwalter admired their physical power, beautiful tents, and their strong character, and linked them with the impact of the desert.⁶⁴¹ In his observation, Turkmen women liked colorful rich clothes, but Bookwalter also outlined their acceptance of polygamy and wife purchasing. For him these two customs signified "the ancient patriarchal traces of the Eastern races."⁶⁴² To Curtis, Turkmen men looked fierce, while their faces resembled those of the Chinese and the Koreans. Though they were illiterate, some of them were wealthy; and though loyal to their wives, the Turkmens often saw them as "slaves." He compared them to Bedouins in Arab countries in their lifestyle. He admired their bravery, with Russians employing them as an effective cavalry militia after the conquest of the region. He noted:

⁶³⁸ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865–1923* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 81–91.

⁶³⁹ Keller, *Russia and Central Asia*, 124–25; Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent*, chap. 4.

⁶⁴⁰ The term "Sarts" was often used since the Russian conquest of Turkestan, but presented considerable definition difficulties for contemporaries and still causes debates whether these were a separate ethnicity, a synonym to Tajiks or Uzbeks, or a term used to identify the majority of the settled population of the region, see: Sergey Abashin, "Problema sartov v russkoy istoriografii XIX – pervoy chetverti XX v. [The problem of Sarts in Russian historiography of the nineteenth – first quarter of the twentieth centuries]," in *Natsionalizmy v Sredney Azii: v poiskakh identichnosti* [Nationalisms in Central Asia: Searching for identity] (St. Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2007), 95–176.

⁶⁴¹ Bookwalter's perceptions corresponded to many Western notions about the inhabitants of the desert, see: Rune Graulund, "Deserts," in *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Carl Thompson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 435–36.

⁶⁴² Bookwalter, "Across Central Asia," 53.

In their fights with the Russians the Turkomans have shown marvellous bravery but no military skill, and it is acknowledged that on equal terms, among semi-savages of their own class, they are masters of the art of war, resembling the North American Indian more than the Eastern races to which they are related. And, while they have no codes of morals or standards of honour to advertise, travellers who have passed much time among them and people who have employed their services testify to their loyalty, hospitality, and truth.⁶⁴³

Thus, he admired the personal traits of the Turkmens but did not go beyond the “noble savage” stereotype, comparing them to the inhabitants of the Middle East and Native Americans, and Bookwalter’s descriptions were also superficial.

The two Americans wrote similarly of the Kirghiz (Kazakhs): they were mostly pastoral people who lived in yurts, and were hospitable, courageous, and respectful to women and their families. Bookwalter’s interaction with the Kirghiz (whom he called Tartars a couple of times) on his way back from Siberia was discussed in the previous chapter. Curtis recognized the Kirghiz-Kaisak and the Kara-Kirghiz but wrote mostly about the former.⁶⁴⁴ I found no evidence to prove that Curtis saw them in person like Bookwalter did since they mostly lived to the north of the Central Asian Railway. Whereas Bookwalter considered them to be dignified and called them “a splendid race,” Curtis described them as children, affectionate and easy-going, but untruthful and unreliable in their words, copying the thoughts on their character from *Turkistan* (1877) written by Eugene Schuyler.⁶⁴⁵ Curtis stated that they also lived the lifestyle of Arab Bedouins but rarely engaged in religious activity. He claimed that these nomads had “no history, no literature; scarcely a written language,” concluding that they were “a dying race.”⁶⁴⁶ This was but a projection of the belief of the inevitable “vanishing” of native peoples under the advance of “civilization” and did not apply here. In fact, Kazakhs increased in numbers throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁴⁷ The supposed lack of history is contradicted by the existence of the united Kazakh Khanate from the

⁶⁴³ Curtis, “Oasis Yields Crops Amid Desert Sands on Bare Turkestan,” 10.

⁶⁴⁴ The term “Kirghiz-Kaisak” was devised by Russians to refer to contemporary Kazakhs, while the term “Kara-Kirghiz” was eventually turned to modern Kirghiz. Nevertheless, at the time Russian administrators confused between these terms and at times referred to both as united Kirghiz, see: Abashin, Arapov, and Bekmakhanova, *Tsentrāl’naya Aziya*, 262–64.

⁶⁴⁵ Schuyler, the secretary of the American legation in St. Petersburg in the early 1870s, learned Russian and translated the works of prominent Russian writers. From April to November 1873, during the Russian campaign against the Khiva Khanate, he explored major cities of the region as well as visited Kuldja in China (then temporarily under Russian control). He initially wrote a report for the State Department that was eventually extended into the two-volume travel account, see: Patricia Herlihy, “Ab Oriente Ad Ulteriore Orientem – Eugene Schuyler, Russia, and Central Asia,” in *Space, Place, and Power in Modern Russia: Essays in the New Spatial History*, ed. Mark Bassin, Christopher Ely, and Melissa Stockdale (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 119–41.

⁶⁴⁶ William Curtis, “Kirghiz Dying Out; Only Half of One of Once Famous Race Left,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 30, 1910, 1, 3.

⁶⁴⁷ Abashin, Arapov, and Bekmakhanova, *Tsentrāl’naya Aziya*, 157.

late fifteenth to the early eighteenth century that saw the development of Kazakh literature. The time of Curtis' writing actually saw the emergence of modern Kazakh prose, with Abai Qunanbaiuly as its most celebrated writer of the time. Finally, the projects of reforms of Kazakh writing (traditionally using the Arabo-Persian script) emerged, such as those by Ibray Altynsarin and Ahmet Baitursynuly. Instead, his claim that Kazakh nomads did not practice religion recalled some Russian commentators. Disregarding the influence of Islam upon them, they entertained the idea of their Christianization due to their nomadic lifestyle.⁶⁴⁸

The two authors barely mentioned Uzbeks but focused instead on Sarts. Bookwalter believed that Sarts were the population of Samarkand and nearby areas. For him, they seemed to be a mix between the Tartars and the Chinese and excellent sedentary farmers. He described an episode when he was invited to a dinner in the company of Sart and Russian officials in Samarkand and experienced local music and dances. He described his impressions:

I wish I were sufficiently versed in music to make an effort to determine wherein lies the charm of the music of the East, since it certainly has a decided charm for the Oriental ear, as they always listen to it in a dreamy silence. I am inclined to think that it is due to its rhythm, producing a sort of hypnotic spell upon the hearer. To the influence of rhythm is evidently due that strange entrancement displayed by the dancing and howling dervishes of the East, and the somewhat similar mental and emotional state shown by the negro in America on certain occasions of high religious excitement.⁶⁴⁹

Bookwalter thus invoked the image of African Americans to evaluate native arts and customs. By drawing a parallel between the natives of the East and African Americans at home he visibly separated himself from native culture during this "East meets West" type of interaction.

Contrary to Bookwalter, Curtis was impressed by Sarts, whom he described differently.⁶⁵⁰ He applauded their cleanliness and desire for education, in which they reminded him of the Japanese. Curtis summed up his impressions of young Sarts in Tashkent as follows:

They [children] are clothed like grown people, wearing the same pattern of garments, and imitate them [their parents] in their manners. Their gravity is amusing. You never saw anything more solemn than a Sart baby, unless it is a Japanese infant, and instead of running after strangers and clamouring for "backsheesh," as the children of other Eastern cities do, the boys and girls of Tashkend return your greetings with the grace of a Chesterfield and are as serious as undertakers.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁸ Hofmeister, "Civilization and Russification in Tsarist Central Asia," 428.

⁶⁴⁹ John Bookwalter, "A Dinner in Samarkand," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, January 22, 1899, 36.

⁶⁵⁰ At one point, he claimed that they were the inhabitants of Samarkand. Later he stated that this term described the population of all cities but was more precisely applied to "inhabitants of the former khanate at Samarkand to distinguish them from the people of Khiva, Bokhara, and other neighbours" (even though the Samarkand Khanate never existed, and Samarkand was part of the Bukhara Emirate before the Russian conquest).

⁶⁵¹ Curtis, "Old Tashkent City Cleanest of Any in the Turkestan," 8.

His view complements his positive evaluation of the native Tashkent shown previously, and the praising remarks were given to Sarts both because of the greenery and water access in the native part of Tashkent and because the natives seemed to have adopted Western values.

The encounters with natives and their lives made both authors reflect on the local population in general. Upon concluding his book account, Bookwalter attempted to describe what he saw as “inscrutable causes that operate to create nations, and to control their destinies.” He tried to explain how different ethnic groups could be so different from one another in traditions and culture despite living in similar “external” geographic conditions. He concluded that there were other factors not visible to the average eye and that they together combined into what he identified as the “general law of life – ‘the adjustment of internal to external relations.’”⁶⁵² Thus, with environmentalism in mind, Bookwalter attempted to explain the diversity of the peoples of the world and reconcile native life with that of the more “civilized” nations.

Despite his praise for the Sarts in Tashkent, in other native cities Curtis pointed out the degradation of buildings and mosques, passive and ignorant inhabitants, and their lack of modern education. His attempt to find the reason behind such a state of affairs resulted in the following comment:

You would think there would be sufficient pride, piety, and patriotism in the Mohammedan world to perpetuate monuments and institutions chiefly ecclesiastic in their origin and purpose, but the same conditions appear in every country where Islam prevails, except in Constantinople, Cairo, and one or two other cities. Islam is a dying religion. It has reached a hopeless stage of decay, if the appearance of its mosques and meddresses, its shrines, the mausoleums of its saints, its cemeteries, and other public institutions may be accepted as evidence.⁶⁵³

His conclusion demonstrates his Islamophobia and a lack of awareness of intellectual developments in Turkestan. Suffice it to say that at the turn of the century intellectuals in many areas of the Muslim world addressed the issue of perceived educational stagnation, the power of European colonialism, the incoming of modernity, and the future of Islam. In Turkestan the Jadid movement emerged, influenced by Russian presence, European intellectual developments brought by the new rulers, and simultaneously tied to cultural Muslim centers in other countries. It offered new discourses regarding the cultural future of Central Asia. With the use of print and the development of Turkestan’s “new method” schools that sought to combine traditional Muslim education with modern knowledge, Jadid activists attempted to reimagine the role of Islam, the balance between

⁶⁵² Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 547–48.

⁶⁵³ Curtis, “All Glories Faded in Samarkand, Once Mighty City,” 8.

ethnicity and religion, and the political prospects of Central Asia. Briefly, Jadid discourses led to the redefinition of culture, religion, and society in the region.⁶⁵⁴

In sum, both authors entertained the stereotypical image of the Oriental native based on the discourse of race, character, and the “civilization”/savagery dichotomy. Though at times they did write about some of the natives sympathetically, they made no genuine attempt to understand the culture of the native “Other.” Multiple mistakes committed by the authors reinforce that notion. Curtis made errors in his narration of the history of the region, such as confusing the Khiva Khanate with the Kokand Khanate when writing about the Russian conquest of the region, or calling Genghis Khan a Mongol early in the account, while later noting that he was Chinese. The two travelers compared the local population to Arabs, Asians, and African or Native Americans, depending on their lifestyle and the degree of adopting Western lifestyle and culture, implying their exoticism or inferiority otherwise. In contrast, as explained in the next subchapter, Russia was presented by both authors as a “civilizing” and creative force.

Colonial and Economic Policy of Russia

Both American authors described and evaluated the local economy and the regional policy of the empire. Before entering Turkestan Bookwalter praised the empire’s capability for development. In his view, the economic development in Central Asia, similarly to Siberia, demonstrated a considerable advance. Writing in the late 1890s, Bookwalter saw the emergence of cotton growing in the Merv oasis and Bukhara. He also noticed that much of the agricultural machinery used by the locals was imported from the U.S. In the book the businessman added the following paragraph:

Considering the immense population of this country, its long and steadfast friendship for America, and the still further fact that in order to develop her own incalculable resources and those of the other Asiatic nations into which she is carrying her influence, there must be created wants far in excess of her own ability to supply, thus necessitating extensive purchases from other nations, it seems evident that, by a proper effort on our part, this, of all countries in the world, could become the most important and profitable field for American enterprise.⁶⁵⁵

Thus, he expressed hope for friendly Russian-American relations for the economic benefit of both and urged more active participation of his home country in Turkestan’s development. His comments echo those of Americans who took a train along the Trans-Siberian Railway.⁶⁵⁶ Yet, as

⁶⁵⁴ See Adeeb Khalid, *Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶⁵⁵ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 385.

⁶⁵⁶ See chap. 5, n. 539–540.

will be pointed out shortly, the author did not acknowledge the differences in the approach of the imperial government to Siberia and Turkestan, including regarding foreign investments.

Curtis gave a more detailed evaluation of the subject matter two decades later. He was similarly pleased and proud to see American machinery in use in Turkestan and more broadly American influence in the region. In Tashkent, he had a conversation with Vladimir Gnesin, a foreign agent of the Yaroslavl Great Manufacture, one of the major textile factories in European Russia. Gnesin informed him that the major goal of cotton growing in Turkestan was to lower the dependence of Russia on foreign cotton. He additionally claimed that the Russian State Duma would soon adopt a bill authorizing the creation of an investment fund for the promotion of innovations in cotton cultivation and irrigation in the region based on extra payments from cotton producers.⁶⁵⁷ The journalist added that Gnesin and his family for some time resided in New York and became thoroughly “Americanized.” To reinforce this statement, Curtis pointed to the presence of the portrait of Theodore Roosevelt in his house.⁶⁵⁸

He observed that the government and individuals alike did much to promote cotton growing in Turkestan so that soon it might rival American production. Curtis described the trade balance of the region, based on supplying European Russia with cotton and wool and getting manufactured products and water tanks in exchange. While Curtis applauded the progress of cotton cultivation and agriculture in general, he criticized restrictions set by the government on foreign capital that resulted in the slower development of heavy industries. He argued that large-scale irrigation would also eventually require the involvement of large capital and syndicates. Similarly, because of the state restrictions any foreign prospector of natural resources “is apt to perish before he gets very far.”⁶⁵⁹ This was a true-to-life observation, since the Russian government specified in its 1886 Turkestan Statute that land and property possession was to be limited only to Christian Russian subjects, in addition to the state and the natives who already resided in Turkestan or the Bukhara and Khiva entities. This rule was applied to both individuals and corporations. It naturally led to the limited participation of foreign investors compared to Russians, especially in irrigation and mining, both of which required solving the question of corporate land ownership. Even major

⁶⁵⁷ There indeed were debates about “cotton tax” in 1909–1910, but such law was only implemented during the First World War, see: Ekaterina Pravilova, *Finansy imperii: Den’gi i vlast’ v politike Rossii na natsional’nykh okrainakh. 1801–1917* [Finance of empire: Money and power in Russia’s imperial borderlands. 1801–1917] (Moscow: Novoye izdatel’stvo, 2006), 290–92.

⁶⁵⁸ William Curtis, “Roosevelt Picture Found in Residence on China’s Border,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 6, 1910, 1.

⁶⁵⁹ William Curtis, “Cotton Industry in the Turkestan Most Profitable,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 26, 1910, 1; “Kalmucks’ Flight Most Tragic Event in World History,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 7, 1910, 1.

Russian business groups desiring to invest in the Turkestan economy found themselves in conflict with the state regarding the establishment of property rights on land for their projects.⁶⁶⁰

In connection with the Turkestan economy, Curtis noted the considerable trade influence of Jews residing in Bukhara. He explained that while before the Russian conquest Turkestan Jews faced severe restrictions, under the new rule they gained many liberties, including the right to settle anywhere and carry out all kinds of business. However, the author explained the Russian benevolence to Turkestan Jews with a clearly ironic attitude:

The Russians are fair to the Jews in all these Asiatic settlements because they need their money and their enterprise, but there is no telling what will happen when they begin to crowd their Russian competitors off the road. The persecution of the Jews in Russia has never been due to religious prejudice, but to professional and commercial jealousy. The Jews are so much superior to the Russians in ability, industry, enterprise, and in the other qualities which are necessary for success in everyday business and in every community, that they are absorbing about all that is worth having, and the only way the Russians can hold their own is by depriving their Jewish competitors of the means and opportunities of making money.⁶⁶¹

Curtis touched upon a topic that adds a considerable nuance to the general question of Russia's Jewish policy. He was partly justified in connecting the role of Jews in the local economy and their preferential treatment. Indeed, Turkestan Jews living in the region before the Russian conquest were given rights not exercised by the majority of Jews living in the Pale of Settlement. First Russian administrators recognized the considerable role the Jews played in local trade and crafts and divided them into "native" Jews (residing in the territory of the General-Governorship) and "Bukhara" Jews (residing in the Bukhara Emirate). Both categories were essentially equated to the native Turkestan population, including in the freedom of movement and residence anywhere in the empire, whereas in the Pale this right was limited only to important merchants and highly educated Jews. Turkestan Jews also got the right to own property and land in Turkestan along with other natives. Yet Curtis did not acknowledge the mounting distrust of the Russian administration of Jews and their influence at the turn of the century. In 1889 "Bukhara" Jews, as "foreign subjects," were restricted in owning property outside of the Bukhara Emirate, while by 1910 they lost the right to reside outside of the Emirate (even in Turkestan proper) and were banished either to

⁶⁶⁰ Muriel Joffe, "Autocracy, Capitalism and Empire: The Politics of Irrigation," *The Russian Review* 54, no. 3 (1995): 365–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/131437>; Muriel Joffe, "Diamond in the Rough: The State, Entrepreneurs and Turkestan's Hidden Resources in Late Imperial Russia," in *Extending the Borders of Russian History: Essays in Honor of Alfred J. Rieber*, ed. Marsha Siefert (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 183–204.

⁶⁶¹ William Curtis, "Jews of Bokhara, Given Protection, Lead All in Trade," *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 24, 1910, 1.

Bukhara or borderline Turkestan settlements.⁶⁶² And in Siberia Jews indeed, as Curtis wrote, enjoyed more tolerable treatment due to their limited numbers and their importance as merchants or the highly educated class. However, at times of tension, including the 1905 Revolution and the First World War, even they could not avoid pogroms (although on a drastically milder scale than in the Pale).⁶⁶³

The two American authors differed in their claims on the Russian policy toward natives. Bookwalter argued that the Russian administration in Turkestan showed flexibility in meeting the traditions and demands of the local population. He applauded the fact that the railway stations and Russian quarters were at a distance from the native ones. In his view, this would make the local population adapt to “civilization” more gradually and voluntarily, relying on what he called the “Oriental process of slow absorption, rather than the more modern one of pressure and compulsion.” In the book he concluded:

It seems to be her policy to allow the older communities and cities the fullest possible freedom to enjoy and exercise their ancient rights, customs, and habits; and to this end she seeks to avoid those violent shocks, changes, and disturbances that must inevitably result from bringing into an unduly near position the influences of a new and too often incongruous civilization. By this precaution the two will ultimately, insensibly, and peacefully merge, the one by gradual decline, and the other through a steady advance.⁶⁶⁴

Thus, he concluded that Russian policy was beneficial, assuming that its ultimate result would be the assimilation of the indigenous population and its integration into “civilization.” While historians indeed point to a degree of Russian non-interference in native affairs, the changes introduced by Russian rule, which were pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, did not suggest complete stability. In the same year the American businessman traveled to the empire, Andijan became the scene for a rebellion led by a Sufi elder, Muhammad Ali Madali. He and his supporters, frustrated by the changes brought by Russian presence, attacked the local garrison and proclaimed a “Holy War” but were eventually defeated.⁶⁶⁵

Bookwalter’s general view of the region and its possible future was clarified in his post-travel interviews, when he declared that “Central Asia is almost an exact reproduction of what I

⁶⁶² Albert Kaganovich, “Rossiya ‘absorbiruyet’ svoikh yevreyev: Imperskaya kolonizatsiya, yevreyskaya politika i bukharskiye yevrei [Russia ‘absorbs’ its Jews: Imperial colonization, Jewish politics, and the Bukhara Jews],” *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2003): 301–28, <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2003.0042>.

⁶⁶³ Lilia Kalmina, “The Possibility of the Impossible: Pogroms in Eastern Siberia,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, ed. Jonathan Dekel-Chen et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 131–43.

⁶⁶⁴ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 425.

⁶⁶⁵ Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*, 95–100.

witnessed years ago in Western territories,” especially regarding its settlement.⁶⁶⁶ He thus essentially had the same outlook on Turkestan as on Siberia, connecting both to the American West without much distinction. Curtis echoed his vision despite the time difference both by comparing Turkestan to southwestern states, as shown earlier, and by claiming that “there is room for many millions of people upon land within twenty miles on either side of the railway track, and the bright green spots on the landscape show what they might do.” He added that millions of acres waited to be purchased by the peasants.⁶⁶⁷ Yet Americans clearly misunderstood the nature of the colonization of Turkestan. Here, like in Siberia, it was a state-driven project. The Russian peasants settling there likewise received land not as private property but on terms of perpetual use for free. But the single major difference is that until 1910, with the development of Stolypin’s reforms, the settlement of Turkestan was discouraged or outright prohibited. In the 1900s this subject was a recurring source of conflict between the Chief Administration of Land Settlement and Agriculture (*GUZiZ* or, simply put, the Ministry of Agriculture), the War Ministry, and Turkestan senior officials. Those who advocated restraint were concerned about the potential unrest of the native population in case of the influx of Russians. They also emphasized the lack of available arable land for settlement that did not require costly irrigation. These arguments were intended to cool down the claims of those (especially in *GUZiZ*) who underlined the need to Russify Turkestan through colonization and improve native agriculture with the Russian peasant experience. The year 1910 was the milestone after which the Turkestan nomads, like the natives of Siberia, faced increasing cessions of their lands that were considered state property.⁶⁶⁸ Besides, the colonization approved was not entirely a “success story.” Just like in Siberia, some officials complained about settlers causing conflicts with natives over land as well as their own lack of agricultural skills and supposed capacity to “civilize” the new region and its inhabitants.⁶⁶⁹

The views of Curtis on the future of Turkestan are more ambivalent than those of Bookwalter. He stated that Russia brought peace to the region and acknowledged the traditions and customs of the natives. He applauded the Russian goal to settle down nomads, which would make

⁶⁶⁶ “Russia in the Far East,” 7.

⁶⁶⁷ Curtis, “Oasis Yields Crops Amid Desert Sands on Bare Turkestan,” 10.

⁶⁶⁸ Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*, chap. 5; Keating, *On Arid Ground*, chap. 3.

⁶⁶⁹ Alexander Morrison, “Peasant Settlers and the ‘Civilising Mission’ in Russian Turkestan, 1865–1917,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 3 (2015): 387–417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2014.941166>; Svetlana Brezhneva, “Otrazheniye idei akkul’turatsii v pereselencheskoy politike Rossiyskoy imperii v Turkestane na rubezhe XIX–XX vv. [Reflection of acculturation idea in the resettlement policy of the Russian Empire in Turkestan at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries],” *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 17, no. 3 (2018): 608–38, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2018-17-3-608-638>.

them farmers like in other “civilized countries.” The railway that Curtis took represented for him a major “civilizing” tool, with apparent parallels to the influence of railways in the American West. He believed that in material terms Russians also brought benefits to the native population, ensuring fair taxation, administration, justice, and self-rule on the local level.

He was particularly impressed with the rules banning the sale of alcohol to natives, which he compared favorably to the degradation of Native Americans brought about by liquor and the policies of the British in South Africa and India. Although he tended to slander Islam in his articles, he openly admitted that in East Asian settlements urban vice and demoralization could be found primarily in the “Christian Quarter.” In Turkestan, he claimed, “the Christian religion, represented by the Russian Greek Church, cannot be held responsible, as it is elsewhere, for debasing the native races with modern vices, like intemperance.”⁶⁷⁰ Although the journalist certainly saw himself as superior to the native “Other,” these comments revealed significant concerns about reconciling his faith to the mounting feeling of moral uncertainty at home and the unsightly consequences of Christian missionary work abroad. He added that while Orthodox missionary work in Turkestan was prohibited, some bishops and activists spread Christianity indirectly, while working in schools or for other institutions, which reminded him of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He reported on his encounter with Jenny (Evgeniya) de Mayer, a Russian female missionary, who was spreading the Bible among locals on a voluntary basis while being employed by the Russian Red Cross.⁶⁷¹

Regardless of the obvious achievements, Curtis argued that Russian rule rested on the display of force, large garrisons in major cities, and the memory of brutal Russian military campaigns against natives. Further comparing Turkestan to nearby British India, Curtis believed that the Governor-General of Turkestan had autocratic powers, even if he used them as an effective imperial administrator. He contrasted his authority with that of the Viceroy in India, who was a constant victim of British public opinion and was restricted by actions of both local and British

⁶⁷⁰ Curtis, “Krasnovodsk Only Port of Entry for All Central Asia,” 1.

⁶⁷¹ William Curtis, “Red Cross Agent in Bokhara Acts as a Missionary,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 22, 1910, 1, 11; Born in 1865 to a family of Carl Anton Julius Paul von Mayer, a prominent doctor and the founder of St. Petersburg Evangelical Women’s Hospital, Jenny studied medicine, including anatomy, in Europe, but did not complete her education. In her early years both she and her father were influenced by Evangelist preaching of Vasiliy Pashkov, an important figure in the history of evangelical Christianity in the empire. In the mid-1890s, after reading Chekhov’s travel account *Sakhalin Island*, which told horrific stories about the local exiles and other inhabitants, and barely escaping death from a disease, she experienced a spiritual renewal. She turned to the Russian Red Cross in 1899 and from then until 1903 worked on Sakhalin, helping the exiles and supervising a local orphanage and workhouse. After a period of social work in Moscow, she then entered Turkestan to spread the Bible and other Christian pamphlets both in Russian and native languages. For de Mayer’s short biography see: Sharyl Corrado, “Sakhalinskie Pis’mu E. K. Maier [The Sakhalin letters of Jenny de Mayer],” *Vestnik Sakhalinskogo Muzeia*, no. 2 (2020): 101–24.

governments. And while the British appealed to “moral suasion” in India, the Russians, after ruthlessly defeating the natives and ensuring their obedience, offered the best of them to integrate into the ranks of the military and state elite. In the view of the American correspondent, “there can be no doubt that the Russian tactics are exceedingly effective from a practical point of view, because the Oriental mind recognizes in every terrible disaster the all-powerful will of Allah, and the Oriental being a fatalist, that means submission.”⁶⁷² Thus, the major point of criticism for Curtis was the authoritarian character of Russian policy in Turkestan that he connected (in a derogatory way) to the character and religion of the native population.

While Curtis recognized and approved Russian administrative reforms, general material development in the region, and irrigation and forestation efforts, he did criticize the Russian government for the absence of improvements in education and overall cultural “enlightenment” of the population, leaving their (native) lifestyle at their discretion.⁶⁷³ In the concluding remarks of his book Curtis penned:

I suppose the people of Turkestan in their habits of life and costumes are not much different to-day from what they were at the time of Tamerlane. There has been little change since the Russian conquest, and it seems to be the intention of that government to keep them as they are. This will afford an interesting and unique experiment in civilization. The question is, what will happen to those ten millions of people, who are permitted or required to remain in their ancient condition, while the rest of the world is developing so rapidly?⁶⁷⁴

In the end, Curtis, ignoring the Jadid discourse, the building of Russian and Russo-native schools for the local population, and the economic changes that he himself pointed out, suggested that his audience consider Turkestan natives generally inert in their traditions and culture.

Both travelers also discussed the developments in the dependent Bukhara Emirate. Bookwalter believed that in the case of Bukhara the Russians also relied on the slow yet steady assimilation of the natives, including their elites. This brought results, and he pointed out that the emir of Bukhara, Said Abd al-Ahad Khan, was now a loyal subordinate of the Czar, and he was pleased whenever he had to put on a Russian uniform.⁶⁷⁵ In contrast, Curtis presented the emir as a lazy and greedy ruler whose inefficient and authoritarian policy made the population of the Emirate think of a potential revolution. While he noted that in recent years the people in Bukhara were affected by the Young Turk Revolution (1908) and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran

⁶⁷² William Curtis, “Ruin of Fortress Marks Deathtrap to 20,000 Victims,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, July 22, 1910, 1.

⁶⁷³ William Curtis, “Czar Fosters Ignorance Among Central Asiatics,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 29, 1910, 1, 11.

⁶⁷⁴ William Curtis, *Turkestan: “The Heart of Asia”* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), 337.

⁶⁷⁵ Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 471.

(1905–1911) and showed signs of desiring freedom from the emir, he concluded that “the great white czar holds the only key that can unlock the future of Bukhara politics.”⁶⁷⁶ In sum, both authors pointed to the paramount Russian influence in the Bukhara Emirate that could not be contested by any other major power.

In conclusion, it transpires that both authors saw Russian conduct in the region as a “civilizing mission” that improved the living conditions of natives, with varying degrees of success. The natives themselves were denied the opportunity to develop their economy and culture on their own. Satisfied with the American presence in the region, both authors seriously misconstrued the actual policy of Russia in Turkestan.

Russia in Asian Geopolitics

The two American writers offered their take on the role of Turkestan in foreign affairs and the prospects of Russia in Asia. They shared the opinion that the conquest of Turkestan created tension in the region between Russia and the British Empire and pointed out Russian plans to build additional railroads in Turkestan with potential access to British India, Persia, and Afghanistan, which could ensure Russian supremacy in Asia.

It was noted in the previous chapter that Bookwalter accepted growing Russian influence in Asia and advocated that the “appointed destiny” of his country was to dominate in the Western Hemisphere and stay away from Asia or great power politics. In the Turkestan-related chapters, he explained that the Central Asian Railway could be even more important for the rise of Russian influence in Asia than the Trans-Siberian Railway. Based on what he heard from Russian officials, in the book he recounted British proposals to prohibit Russia from constructing railways in its own region and to introduce opium to the locals. He deemed these ideas ridiculous and did not show any change in his ironic attitude to British imperial policy, claiming that “no matter what Russia may do, she [Britain] seems to regard every incident and event, however remote, to which that country is related, as a direct menace to India.”⁶⁷⁷

Yet in his post-travel interviews he made sensational predictions that contradicted what he initially wrote and had little to do with geopolitical reality. He suggested that if America still wanted to establish a presence in China, Russia, with its railways, would provide the best route to gain a foothold there. More importantly, he believed that Russia and Britain would never yield

⁶⁷⁶ William Curtis, “Revolt Is Planned to End Despotism of Bokhara Ruler,” *Chicago Record-Herald*, August 28, 1910, 1.

⁶⁷⁷ John Bookwalter, “The Oil Boom in Asia,” *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, December 11, 1898, 36.

China to other powers, and in the long run they would unite and divide the rest of Asia between themselves. Bookwalter foresaw that “the alliance of England, Russia and China – of two-thirds of the human race – will be such an alliance as history has never yet seen, and it will be one which will give peace to the world for centuries.”⁶⁷⁸ Although in the end Russia and Britain did conclude an alliance, it is also noteworthy that in none of his articles or the book did he mention Japan, the rising contender for East Asian dominance, which allied with Britain in 1902 to counter Russian plans in Manchuria.

While he compared Turkestan and British India in terms of colonial policy, Curtis indicated the mutual distrust between Russia and Britain despite the formation of the Triple Entente by 1907. He stated that while Britain was frustrated by Russian railroad building plans in Asia and “almost frightened out of her wits whenever she sees the cap of a Russian soldier approaching boundary lines,” Russians were suspicious of any traveler who spoke English.⁶⁷⁹ However, his general conclusion was completely different from Bookwalter’s:

The railway over which we traveled, the highways which have excited our admiration, the vast accumulations of military stores we have seen in Turkestan and the Caucasus are a part of the inflexible determination of the Russian autocracy to extend the empire as rapidly as the opposition will permit. The failure of the Russian arms in the struggle with Japan and the recent treaty of peace and concord between those nations does not mean that Russia has given up its purpose to obtain a port upon the Pacific, and the friendly protocol between the Czar and the King of England has not caused any change in the Czar’s determination to annex Persia, Manchuria and ultimately India, to his empire.⁶⁸⁰

Thus, Curtis assumed that the foreign policy of the Russian Empire was aggressive and expansionist. He evidently wished for the British Empire to strengthen its influence in Asia to contain Russian advances. Yet both he and Bookwalter exaggerated the rivalry between Britain and Russia. While it was a common trope in the then contemporary press, modern historians largely demystified the concept of the “Great Game” between the two empires, including the claim that Russia resolved to conquer Central Asia out of fear of the British potential expansion there. While Russia did (along with Britain, however) interfere in Persia during its Constitutional Revolution, proving Curtis’ perception to be partially correct, the claims that Russia had actual plans to attack India rarely went beyond journalistic sensations or lip service of some officials.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ “Russia in the Far East,” 7.

⁶⁷⁹ Curtis, “Krasnovodsk Only Port of Entry for All Central Asia,” 3.

⁶⁸⁰ Curtis, “Czar Fosters Ignorance Among Central Asiatics,” 11.

⁶⁸¹ Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 10–13; Keller, *Russia and Central Asia*, 98–100.

Visual Materials

In the newspaper articles Curtis added approximately a dozen pictures, not all of them taken by himself. In the book he used a couple of photos from his articles, but the rest belonged to another American correspondent, John McCutcheon, who visited the region in 1906. While in Curtis' book most photos follow the narration logically, in some instances this was not the case in his articles. Bookwalter's book includes around a hundred pictures taken personally during the Turkestan section of the trip (adding up to a stunning number of around two hundred and twenty photos taken in Siberia and Turkestan, with additional visuals about the Caucasus). This is the single most illustrated American book-length travel account about Russia published at the turn of the century.

In Russian districts both authors showed general views, and the angle of the pictures suggests they wished to present them as spaces of modernity (figure 28). In addition, Curtis included portraits of the then current Turkestan Governor-General and the Bukhara emir.



Figure 28. "Street in the Russian City of Ashkhabad," in William Curtis, *Turkestan: "The Heart of Asia"* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), 49.

In native towns both travelers included photos of the daily life of their inhabitants, like trade or prayer, as well as major places of interest, including famous mosques and bazaars. Some, however, illustrate their more neglected parts or ruins, including those in ancient Merv. The authors incorporated pictures of natives in their traditional costumes, and while Bookwalter took pictures in the streets, Curtis published group and full-size portraits where the entire dress and facial features can be seen (figures 29 and 30). All of the images related to natives were taken at a distance, and not a single one shows the authors themselves together with the locals, allowing the readers to "gaze" at them and their lifestyle from a comfortable distance.



Figure 29. “Market Scene in Samarkand,” in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia* (Springfield, OH: printed by the author, 1899), 529.



Figure 30. “Turcoman Family in Turkestan, of Type Described in Letter of W.E. Curtis,” in *The Chicago Record-Herald*, July 19, 1910, 10.

Bookwalter presented numerous images of landscapes, with a contrast between deserts and irrigated areas with agricultural activity. Curtis did not include photos of the natural landscape of the region but showed interest in cotton growing. In the book he added several pictures of cotton warehouses and the transportation of cotton. With this, both Americans showed a clear interest in the economic development of the region. Both authors also incorporated one or two pictures of Muslim women in public. In the book Curtis presented a picture of a woman riding independently with a veil covering everything but her eyes, while Bookwalter showed a photo of several women sitting on a cart driven by their husband, which the author saw as a custom of wealthy natives taking their wives outside “on an airing” (figure 31). Overall, the photos included by both authors

mostly seem to complement the contrast between the exoticism of the Orient and the “civilization” that Russia was bringing.



Figure 31. “A Queer Equipage. A Mohammedan and His Wives Out for a Drive,” in John Bookwalter, *Siberia and Central Asia*, 527.

Conclusion

While Bookwalter concluded his travelogue with thoughts on the “inscrutable causes that operate to create nations” shown earlier, Curtis recommended that his readers and potential tourists should stay away from Turkestan because of the exhausting climate, bad food, high costs of local tourist infrastructure, as well as Russian suspicion of English-speaking foreigners.

Both authors received generally, but not entirely, positive reviews in the press. Bookwalter’s account received praise not only from multiple eastern newspapers but also from Midwestern periodicals. The *Indianapolis Journal* summed up all the positive remarks neatly, stating that “Mr. Bookwalter visited many new places and peoples, had many novel and interesting experiences, and his descriptions of them, aided by numerous realistic photographs taken by himself, make an unusually interesting book and one that fills a distinct place in the descriptive literature of Russia.”⁶⁸² A few newspapers justified his authority on the subject by claiming that, unlike sympathizers of Russian revolutionaries and exiles or military agents with preconceived notions, Bookwalter went to Siberia and Central Asia as a neutral observer, providing rational

⁶⁸² “Siberia and Central Asia,” *Indianapolis Journal*, May 29, 1899, 4.

thoughts.⁶⁸³ However, critics asserted the contrary and pointed out that his narration was biased due to the influence of Russian officials. The *Chicago Tribune* ironically asserted that, apparently, for Bookwalter even the exile system became “a wise and semi-benevolent institution.” Others disagreed with his foreign policy predictions.⁶⁸⁴ British newspapers too reviewed the book version, with extra criticism. *The Spectator* charged that although much of what Bookwalter said was true, many of his optimistic conclusions were only theoretical; meanwhile, Central Asia had to be populated, its railways and economy expanded, and the weak local army reorganized before it could in any way rival British India.⁶⁸⁵ Compared to Bookwalter, twenty years later Curtis received no criticism in the domestic press, meaning that his remarks, however prejudiced, seemed to be generally accepted by the public. The *Boston Evening Transcript* summarized that Curtis “appeals at once to the imagination and at the same time through his shrewd observation and trained diplomatic mind, he throws new light on the czar and his aggressive policy in the Far East.”⁶⁸⁶ Only the British *Spectator* again offered some critique. It doubted the actual efficiency of the Central Asian Railway and maintained that Curtis tried to restore an “admiration” for Russia that had been significantly weakened in the U.S. since the 1880s. It went as far as hinting that, despite denouncing Russian expansionism in Asia, Curtis in fact tacitly accepted it.⁶⁸⁷ No criticism was offered on his descriptions of natives. The British critique of the two travelers suggests their continuous attention to the subject of Turkestan in the context of general relations between the two empires in Asia.

A businessman and an established travel writer and diplomat, regardless of social background and more than a decade between their journeys, wrote about Turkestan under Russian control in a strikingly similar manner. Like in *Tent Life* and travel accounts of Americans who took a train on the Trans-Siberian Railway, Russia was presented as a creative power capable of developing its remote regions and as part of the Western world that spreads “civilization.” Like those who tried the railway across Siberia, both authors viewed Turkestan through the lens of the westward expansion of the U.S. and the settlement of the North American continent. Yet this parallel was even less justified, and neither American expanded on the features that made Turkestan

⁶⁸³ “Hon. J. W. Bookwalter in Siberia,” *Plain Dealer*, June 4, 1899, 22; “Russia’s Advance in the East,” *Philadelphia Times*, May 7, 1899, 30.

⁶⁸⁴ “Mr. Bookwalter on Siberia,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1899, 10; “America, England, and Russia,” *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, January 18, 1899, 6.

⁶⁸⁵ “Russia and Her Asian Empire,” *Spectator*, February 24, 1900, 279–80.

⁶⁸⁶ “Turkestan, the Heart of Asia,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, August 9, 1911, 18; Also see: “All About Turkestan,” *Sun (New York)*, June 30, 1911, 10.

⁶⁸⁷ “Some Books of the Week,” *Spectator*, January 20, 1912, 105.

different not only from the American West but even from Siberia, especially in terms of colonization.

Like in the case of Siberia, the two travelers revealed not so much their deep knowledge of the region or its people as Protestant middle-class concerns in the age of modernity and Progressive reforms. Their admiration of certain native character traits and concerns about urban vice and intemperance, along with the anxiety about the moral power of Christianity for Curtis (combined with a clearly Islamophobic attitude), illustrate this point well.⁶⁸⁸ However, compared to journeys on the Trans-Siberian Railway, the anti-modernist sentiments of the American travelers were weaker. Bookwalter, for all his praise of Russian peasant lifestyle and the American countryside pitted against urban evil, effectively became a follower of the Russian “civilizing mission” in Turkestan, even when it came to urbanization. Compared to Bookwalter’s descriptions, which were devoid of criticism, Curtis was more realistic and pointed to real problems and failures of the imperial government. With his diplomatic experience, he was keenly aware of Anglo-Japanese and Anglo-American rapprochement in the 1900s, and the cooling of Russian-American relations after the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, taking a more pro-British stance in foreign policy. Yet, evaluated in contrast to what he wrote about Russia in his 1880s travelogue, he certainly changed his opinion for the better and presented the empire as a capable creative power. Curtis read at least some materials on Turkestan (Schuyler’s *Turkistan*, the materials of the Carnegie Institution expedition). However, this did not prevent him from making a considerable number of mistakes, and he failed to correct the contradictory information in the published book. Limited communication with natives due to not knowing local languages and extensive citations from secondary works clearly diminished the quality of his reporting. This once again testifies to the problems of time-bound coverage and the partial sacrifice of quality in favor of speed (one hour of typewriter work every day for Curtis) for foreign correspondents working before the First World War.

A more pronounced American support for Russian “civilizing” efforts in Turkestan was largely due to its particularity as an imperial colony and borderland. Nature was certainly one of its distinctions. Americans did not seem to put any aesthetic value in the desert in contrast to the untouched Siberian steppes, rivers, and forests (like Senn did). Consequently, it became logical for

⁶⁸⁸ In February 1911 Curtis lectured on his trip in the Masonic Temple in Washington, D.C. before the National Geographic Society. He repeated his general thoughts on the Russian policy and the treatment of natives in Turkestan. The reporter underlined the moment when “Mr. Curtis provoked hearty applause” after lauding Russians for enforcing a ban on alcohol sales to natives. See: “Mr. Curtis Lectures on ‘Heart of Asia,’” *Evening Star (Washington, D.C.)*, February 18, 1911, 3.

them to praise the Russian efforts to transform the “empty” natural landscape of Turkestan, with parallels that could invoke the creation of major waterways like the Erie Canal, the irrigation of southwestern states, or forestation efforts in the Progressive Era. The local native population was also perceived differently. The inhabitants of Turkestan enjoyed hundreds of years of statehood, settlement in large and important cities, and had monumental cultural achievements. Yet by the beginning of the twentieth century they, along with the Orient in general, were largely perceived as exotic in Western eyes, with a static, if not degrading lifestyle, and generally incapable of entry into modernity. Finally, the Russian presence in Turkestan, compared to Siberia with its apex of peasant colonization in the 1900s, remained relatively small, and the authors likely saw way more natives than new colonizers. In short, any kind of anti-modernism was superseded by an almost canon Orientalist discourse at the time of the high tide of imperialism. Static natives, unappealing deserts, the exoticism of Eastern spirituality, the backwardness of Islam, and Western male gazes at the mysterious and secluded women – all these patterns were well explained by Said in his monumental study and found their visible reflection here.⁶⁸⁹ The two travelers certainly desired to exercise authority over the Orient and imagined its political and social transformation, though not by Americans but by the Russian imperial officials. The “imperial view,” which outlined Turkestan’s enormous potential and prompted the authors to act as heralds of increasing American economic influence in the region, became almost a natural addition.

While railways in Siberia and Turkestan gave new options for Americans interested in exploring Russia, there was mutual travel interest regarding the two countries’ most distant territories, the Russian Far East and Alaska. To a large degree due to gold mining, settlement, and science the area where Kennan worked back in the 1860s saw actual interactions between Russian and American visitors and became the only region of reciprocal and interconnected travel writing. Taking this into consideration and given that I plan to examine Russian travel writing about the U.S. in a subsequent project, the final chapter of the thesis addresses examples of both Russian and American travel accounts in these most remote northern corners of the world.

⁶⁸⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 206–9.

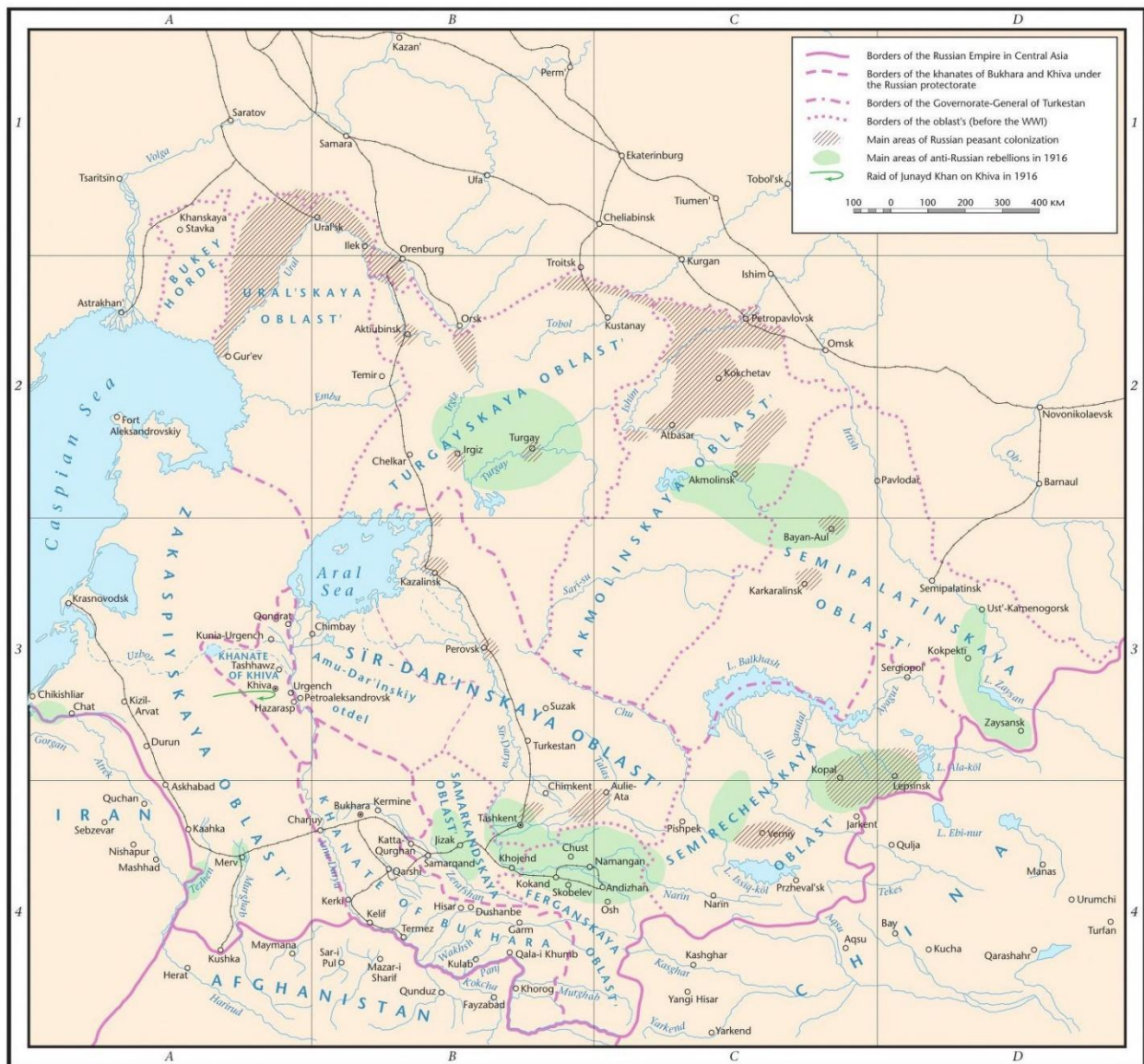


Figure 32. Bregel, Yuri. *The End of the 19th and the Early 20th Centuries: Western Turkestan Under Russian Rule* [map]. In: Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 91. (Note: to get to Krasnovodsk, the starting point of the Central Asian Railway, a traveler had to cross the Caspian Sea from Baku.)

Chapter 7. Gold Rush in the Cold: Travels to the Russian Far East and Alaska

Introduction

Three decades after the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition and the publication of the original *Tent Life*, a new wave of travelers from Russia and the U.S. again went to the most distant territories of both countries. A series of Gold Rushes in Alaska and northern Canada and bilateral interest in the economic prospects of remote regions and the life of its native inhabitants made the Northern Pacific an area of Russian-American encounter and the subject of travel writing from both sides. The last chapter of this thesis examines both Russian and American travel accounts. It demonstrates that the “imperial view” was also present in Russian travel writing when it came to Alaska and the Russian coastline next to it. The Russian author examined here viewed the American “Other” in this area through the lens of competing Russian and American economic and cultural influence and offered peculiar takes on America itself. In contrast to his perceptions, an American miner spent two years in the general area where Kennan had worked on the telegraph line in the 1860s, and his travel account bears a close resemblance to *Tent Life*.

Russian-American Interactions in the Northern Pacific

The prospect of excavating valuable mineral resources, especially gold, was one of the key factors in drawing the attention of both Russia and the U.S. to their most remote areas at the turn of the century. The first prospecting expeditions and individual enterprises were established and deployed to the Russian Far East in the late 1860s, and the gold mining industry rapidly became a significant part of the regional economy, attracting population and investments. It accounted for up to a third of the gold mined in pre-revolutionary Russia.⁶⁹⁰ The developments in Russia correlated with those in the District of Alaska (established in 1884) following the Klondike, Nome, and Fairbanks Gold Rushes. Before the 1880s the federal government was primarily collecting data about the geography and the population of the region and was governing Alaska with military rule, while the non-native population was minuscule. The emergence of gold mining attracted thousands of settlers, temporary workers, adventurers, and businessmen, forming the economic base of the region. In turn, it generated action by the federal government, including dispatching additional troops and expeditions, establishing telegraph service and agricultural experimental stations, and

⁶⁹⁰ Alexandr Alekseyev, *Osvoyeniye russkimi lyud'mi Dal'nego Vostoka i Russkoy Ameriki. Do kontsa XIX veka* [The exploration of the Far East and Russian America by the Russian people. Until the end of the nineteenth century] (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 253.

revising legislation, most notably the Nelson Act of 1905. Further economic development resulted in the Second Organic Act of 1912 and influenced the first Alaska legislative measures in line with Progressive reforms.⁶⁹¹ Thus, gold mining and searching for natural resources contributed to travel, settlement, and economic progress in distant regions both in Russia and the U.S.⁶⁹²

Economic interest was interconnected with science, with multiple individual and government-supported expeditions studying flora, fauna, indigenous peoples, and the availability of natural resources. A major example is the 1895–1898 expedition to the coast of the Okhotsk Sea and the Kamchatka Peninsula led by Russian-Polish geologist Karol Bohdanowicz, Sergei Kichenski, and Nikolay Slyunin. Another prominent undertaking was the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902), financed by the director of the American Museum of Natural History, Morris Ketchum Jesup. It was carried out in collaboration between Russian (Waldemar Bogoras and Waldemar Jochelson) and American (Franz Boas) anthropologists and investigated the culture, folklore, and relationships among indigenous peoples on both sides of the Bering Strait.⁶⁹³

Despite the rising interest of both countries in their far-off northern territories, the thinking about them and their development differed. Unlike Alaska, where the dominant interest was primarily economic or scientific, for the Russian Empire both Siberia and the Far East had additional strategic and geopolitical value. As discussed in chapter 5, the Russian government's intentions to develop these regions were marked by the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the development of communications and cities, as well as the support for peasant migration. Similarly to Siberia, the ultimate objective of the imperial policy in the Far East was to ensure security as well as political, cultural, and economic integration of the region and its inhabitants into the imperial center.⁶⁹⁴ However, after the sale of Alaska in 1867, the imperial efforts in the Far East were focused primarily on southern and southeastern areas, including the Amur and Transbaikalian provinces and the vicinity of present-day Vladivostok. In contrast, territories to the north and northeast (the Kamchatka and the Chukchi Peninsulas) were neglected, with local

⁶⁹¹ Stephen Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2nd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 224, 247–48.

⁶⁹² Ivan Sablin, "Transcultural Interactions and Elites in Late Pre-Soviet and Early Soviet Chukotka, 1900–1931," *Social Evolution & History* 12, no. 1 (2013): 119–20; Valeriy Nikitin, "Gold Mining," in *Encyclopedia of the Arctic*, ed. Mark Nuttall (New York: Routledge, 2005), 759–61.

⁶⁹³ William Fitzhugh and Aron Crowell, eds., *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 97–103. It was from the results of this expedition that Kennan took the photos for his new edition of *Tent Life*, as shown in chapter 2.

⁶⁹⁴ Anatoliy Remnev, *Rossiia Dal'nego Vostoka. Imperskaya geografiia vlasti XIX – nachala XX vekov* [Russia of the Far East. The imperial geography of power in the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries] (Omsk: Izdatel'stvo Omskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2004), 15–17.

officials, inspectors from European Russia, and travelers (as demonstrated later in this chapter) often complaining that these areas were “abandoned.” When the Gold Rushes attracted thousands of settlers and brought federal legislation, the northeastern Russian territories formed an unfavorable contrast with expanding development and settlement in the southern areas of the Far East and Alaska.⁶⁹⁵ Still, the Gold Rushes and scientific activities sparked the belief among Russians and Americans that there could be gold on the Russian side of the Bering Strait as well and naturally led to Russian-American travel encounters.⁶⁹⁶

On the whole, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked an eventful period in Russian-American interaction in the region. Expeditions, whether scientific or gold-seeking, and their results, including travelogues, were among the major sources of information about distant northern areas, their indigenous peoples, and the Russian or American “Other” for readers in both countries. Considering the continuous demand for *Tent Life* and the Gold Rushes, it is safe to say that Americans were interested in the accounts of a new generation of polar travelers. The latter could become recognized at home just like Kennan by publishing on their travel experience, especially in the decade of public excitement over the races to the North and the South Poles.⁶⁹⁷ With this in mind, in the case of Alaska and the Russian Far East travelogues from both sides are examined here.

Authors and Their Travelogues

This chapter focuses on two of them, one written by a Russian and one by an American. The first account was written in Russian under the title *To the Far North: From the Diary of a Trip Around the World* (1904) by Ivan Akifiev (1872–1905), a member of the joint Russian-American gold-seeking expedition to the shores of the Chukchi Peninsula in the summer of 1900. He published his travelogue in 1902 under a slightly different title, and I am examining the 1904 version, which is a reprint of the original.⁶⁹⁸ Born in Nizhniy Novgorod, Akifiev graduated from the medical faculty of Moscow University and acquired doctoral practice while supervising the builders of the

⁶⁹⁵ Remnev, 399.

⁶⁹⁶ Remnev, 409; Larisa Garusova, *Rossiysko-amerikanskiye otnosheniya na Dal'nem Vostoke (konets XVIII–XX vv.). Istoricheskiy opyt* [Russian-American relations on the Far East (the end of eighteenth – twentieth centuries). Historical experience] (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 2001), 67.

⁶⁹⁷ Leane, “Polar Travel,” 364–65.

⁶⁹⁸ Ivan Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever za zolotom: Iz dnevnika krugosvetnogo putestvestviya 1900 g.* [To the far north for gold: From the diary of a round-the-world trip in 1900] (St. Petersburg: Kommerch. skoropech. E. Tile preyemn., 1902).

Samara-Zlatoust Railway.⁶⁹⁹ He traveled extensively and visited Switzerland, Italy, and in 1898 Korea as a medic, aiding a secret Russian expedition. Its primary supporters were the statesman Alexander Bezobrazov and retired colonel, Novgorod official, and entrepreneur Vladimir Vonlyarlyarskiy. The expedition's goal was to survey the area of the timber concession that was gained in 1896 by prominent Vladivostok entrepreneur Julius Briner as well as to identify sea and land routes to and of Korea for military purposes.⁷⁰⁰ Later Akifiev was a frontline doctor during the Russo-Japanese War. Overall, his activities made him involved with imperial economic and political prospects in the Far East and broadly East Asia, and the expedition to the Chukchi Peninsula, where he again served as a doctor, seems to confirm this fact.

The other travelogue is titled *In Search of a Siberian Klondike* (1903), and it depicts the explorations of Washington Vanderlip, Jr. (1867–1943), an American engineer from Elkhart, Indiana, who had previously worked in Australia, Burma, and Korea. By 1898 he was working for the Oriental Consolidated Mining Company, financed by the British and Americans to do gold mining in Korea. Later he was involved in engineering and mining work in Alaska, the Philippines, and Nigeria. He became a fellow of the Institute of Mining Engineers and the Royal Geographical Society before the First World War. In 1920–1921 he negotiated the possibility of concessions to an American syndicate on the Kamchatka Peninsula with Lenin and the Bolshevik government, but to little avail.⁷⁰¹ His initial knowledge of the Far East was acquired between 1898 and 1900 when he conducted several expeditions into the Kamchatka area and on the Chukchi Peninsula to find gold.

Neither author knew the other language: Vanderlip did not speak Russian, while Akifiev had no English. Nor did they speak any of the native languages, which, in turn, meant that they had to rely on interpreters or local guides. Akifiev's account was checked by censorship before circulation.⁷⁰² Vanderlip recounted his travel experiences to Homer B. Hulbert, who later put them

⁶⁹⁹ Zlatoust is located close to Miass station, the beginning of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

⁷⁰⁰ Lukoyanov, "*Ne otstat' ot derzhav...*", 414–31.

⁷⁰¹ Albert Parry, "Washington B. Vanderlip, the 'Khan of Kamchatka,'" *Pacific Historical Review* 17, no. 3 (1948): 311–30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3634259>.

⁷⁰² The 1865 Temporary Statute on Publishing marked a considerable change in the existing regulations for all printed materials. Instead of the fully preliminary censorship, now in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the two cities where a considerable part of publishers was concentrated, periodicals that got the approval of the Ministry of the Interior and paid a deposit, books with more than ten printed (160) pages, and translations over twenty printed (320) pages were not subject to preliminary censorship anymore. Their publishers had to send copies of their already printed materials to individual censors or censorship committees either two (monthly journals), three (books) days before or concurrently (periodicals) with the beginning of their sales/circulation. Publishers were now subject only to judicial prosecution in case of publishing something objectionable, but from the late 1870s to the 1905 Revolution an increasing number of administrative measures developed. The offensive content included, among other things, derogatory comments about Christianity and the Orthodox Church, any estate of the country, or the government on the whole; calls for sedition

into a book. Hulbert was an American journalist in Korea who made friends with Vanderlip there. The fact that the two published the account together implies that the real impressions of the author were to a degree altered by the tips and writing style of his colleague.

The two travelogues follow a chronological order, but they differ in narration and structure. Akifiev's notes are written in the form of a diary and are presented in retrospect. He began the narration after leaving St. Petersburg westward to New York, and through Washington, D.C. and Chicago to San Francisco, from where the expedition, led again by Karol Bohdanowicz and including Russian, American, English, and Chinese prospectors, left the city in June 1900. In his report of the expedition Bohdanowicz claimed that Akifiev, in addition to the role of doctor, was assigned a mission to collect ethnographic and material items from the natives they met.⁷⁰³ The group sailed toward the Chukchi Peninsula on the *Samoa*, a steamer operated by an American crew. The expedition was organized by the already mentioned Vladimir Vonlyarlyarskiy, who in January 1900 petitioned the Russian Ministry of Agriculture and State Domains for the authorization to concentrate all mining on the peninsula in his hands, and promptly received a five-year concession in April. His plan was apparently backed by Bohdanowicz, who, as a geologist, worked in the Mining Department of this ministry. Considering that Akifiev participated in the 1898 Korean expedition supported by Vonlyarlyarskiy, the latter likely approved of his medical work and selected him once again. The expedition was financed from London by British investor Frederick Baker, who shortly before the expedition created the East Siberian Syndicate. The expedition sailed to the northeast of the peninsula, visiting Unalaska (Aleutian Islands), Providence Bay, Cape Chaplin, the Senyavin Strait, Saint Lawrence Bay, circled the peninsula through the Bering Strait up to Kolyuchin Bay, and visited Nome, Alaska, twice. The crew of the *Samoa* was complemented by twelve Russian workers and eight Cossacks and marines from the Russian warship *Yakut*. On the way back, Akifiev briefly visited Petropavlovsk (present-day Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky), Sakhalin, and Vladivostok before heading for Japan.

Vanderlip's travelogue is divided into chapters, the content of which ranges from describing people and events along the way to specifically examining nature and local native customs. He started from the Chittabaltie mine in Korea to Vladivostok, and through Sakhalin to Gizhiga (the very same settlement that young Kennan had worked from). It was from here that he organized

against the monarchy, rude remarks about foreign monarchs or governments, and propaganda of socialism. See: Ruud, *Fighting Words*, chaps. 9, 12; Patrusheva, *Tsenzurnoye vedomstvo*, 129–43.

⁷⁰³ Karol Bohdanowicz, *Ocherki Chukotskogo poluoostrova* [Essays on the Chukchi Peninsula] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya A.S. Suvorina, 1901), 22.

most of his expeditions in 1898–1899, reaching inland into the northern part of the Kamchatka Peninsula and the areas around the Stanovoi mountain range (an outdated term for the present-day Kolyma Mountains). After a short rest in the U.S., in the summer of 1900 he made a prospective voyage along the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula on the steamer *Progress* from Vladivostok, incidentally crossing paths with the *Samoa* and Akifiev’s crew along the way. While he briefly mentioned being hired by “a Russian firm” in Vladivostok to do the explorations, he was apparently employed by the company related to the already mentioned Julius Briner – the entrepreneur who got the timber concession from Korea in 1896 that involved Akifiev in 1898. Briner was stationed in Vladivostok, and his business involved German and British investors also looking for resources on Sakhalin and in Northeastern Siberia.

The two travelers failed to realize their respective goals in full: Vanderlip did not find anything of value, while Bohdanowicz’s expedition was canceled after conflicts erupted between Russian and American crew members. The breaking point came when Americans persuaded the captain of the *Samoa* to go back to Nome in the middle of August. In the city the Russians were held on board, by force, for several days, followed by legal proceedings, before they were allowed to leave for home after being acquitted by a local court at the end of August.

Travel Conditions and the Landscape of the Far North

With different itineraries, it is no wonder that the descriptions of means of transportation and nature were different. Akifiev stated that the decision on his and his Russian companions’ part to travel westward was based on the lack of infrastructure in the Russian Far East: they saved almost a month of travel by going from St. Petersburg to San Francisco westward rather than eastward through Vladivostok.⁷⁰⁴ The company took a series of trains to London, then the steamer *Campania* of the Cunard Line to New York, and continued to San Francisco by train. On the way to London, while conceding that German-made train cars were superior to Russian ones, he called the food mediocre and expensive; for him, the *Campania* looked like a “giant house” afloat, and the interior was wonderful, but the cabins were small, and the price of first-class accommodation was too expensive. And while Akifiev enjoyed the comfort of the Pullman cars on his way to San Francisco,

⁷⁰⁴ Ivan Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever: iz dnevnika krugosvetnogo putesthestviya* [To the far north: From the diary of a trip around the world] (St. Petersburg: Tipo-litografiya “Yevgeniya Tile Premn.,” 1904), 1. By 1900 the direct rail connection between Moscow and Vladivostok was still not established.

he criticized the quality of American rails.⁷⁰⁵ His reaction to seeing the *Samoa* for the first time in the docks of San Francisco was:

The disenchantment was complete. I did not believe it when Stern said to us: “And here is our steamer!” It seemed so small and unimpressive to us. Its length is only 150 feet, and the passenger cabins are only on the aft and deck, making a rather strange appearance. ... It looks as if the middle of the steamer is broken down. The dirt everywhere is terrible.⁷⁰⁶

In sum, while he did not describe travel conditions on the way to California extensively, he made judgmental remarks on almost all occasions. This way of estimating non-Russian things would be, as shown later, characteristic when evaluating foreigners themselves.

Vanderlip barely described how he got to Gizhiga on a steamer, but he paid attention to listing all the necessary items and commodities he took with him, ranging from guns and tobacco for trade to needles and pipe bowls, though he lost a considerable part of his belongings during a naval accident on the way from Korsakovsk Post (present-day Korsakov) on Sakhalin.⁷⁰⁷ Additionally, he claimed that he got permission from the Russian government for all of his expeditions, though this might be more dubious regarding his last expedition to the Chukchi Peninsula on the *Progress*, considering that Vonlyarlyarskiy received a monopoly right for mining activities there in April 1900, before Vanderlip’s arrival in the summer of that year. Unlike Kennan in *Tent Life*, the miner paid a lot of attention to the local ways of travel in the area of his exploration, including horses, deer, and sled dogs. He wrote in detail about the process of riding a deer and operating a *narta* (sled) with sled dogs, praising deer and particularly dogs for their suitability for traveling in a harsh climate as well as for their natural instincts, including their ability to “foresee” the upcoming blizzard. Once the dogs saved Vanderlip and his companions from starvation by bringing eggs of seagulls. On another occasion, his sled dogs started instinctively chasing grazing deer near a Koryak camp, leading to his sled abruptly capsizing. The description of this episode was concluded with the following comment:

I have coursed antelope in Texas, and in Arizona have picked wild turkeys from the ground while on horseback, but for good exhilarating sport give me fourteen wild sledge-dogs, the open tundra, and a bunch of deer ahead.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁵ Akifiev, 4, 8, 18.

⁷⁰⁶ Akifiev, 19.

⁷⁰⁷ Washington Vanderlip and Homer Hulbert, *In Search of a Siberian Klondike* (New York: Century, 1903), 14–18, 30.

⁷⁰⁸ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 187–88.

In short, Vanderlip was impressed with dogs and added many stories related to them to show the excitement of adventure in the faraway northern region.

As for nature, Akifiev omitted his impressions about American landscapes, writing only about what he saw after the *Samoa* had left San Francisco. Traveling in summer, he bid goodbye to California, “the land of gold, light, and warmth,” and addressed “the severe North” as if he was a guest coming to an undiscovered place.⁷⁰⁹ He enjoyed collecting local flowers and breathing fresh mountain air during a brief stop in Unalaska. When the *Samoa* reached Providence Bay, the crew caught their first sight of the Chukchi Peninsula. In his words:

The closer we were approaching the coast, the clearer were the black arrays of colossal bare mountains, covered with white patches of snow. These somber, stern mountains, fog, gray sea covered with floating ice, penetrating dampness, and cold give a unique, overwhelming impression. It seems like we entered a new, dreamlike world.⁷¹⁰

But this “overwhelming impression” quickly gave way to the notion of “harsh and unwelcoming” nature when the expedition landed on the coast of the peninsula for the first time – when the birdcalls and sounds of cracking ice were the only things that “made this dead nature alive.”⁷¹¹ The image of “dead nature” dominates throughout Akifiev’s travelogue, except for the odd clear days in late summer, when bright weather finally gave the feeling of nature “awakened after its ten-month sleep and cheerfully smiling” at the sun, which “had woken her up with hot kisses.”⁷¹² His preference clearly lay with the landscape of Petropavlovsk when returning to Russia after the end of the expedition: its greenery and spectacular volcanoes that rose above the sea were shown to be preferable to the lifeless and cold Chukchi Peninsula.

Vanderlip wrote little about his impressions when seeing landscapes. Instead, he extensively described local fauna, most frequently in connection with hunting prospects, and he recorded many episodes of hunting for profit or fun. Going up the Gizhiga River to reach Gizhiga for the first time, he saw the coast filled with dead salmon swept ashore as well as seagulls hunting them. He also noted the variety of berries and birds and concluded:

An hour’s stroll is enough to use up all the gun-shells one can conveniently carry, and to bag more game than one can bring home. The hunter has only to sit down in a “goose lane” or behind a blind of some sort and shoot birds right and left. ... The natives, as a rule, are too poor to own shot-guns, and so do not profit largely by this generous supply of feathered game.⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁹ Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 28.

⁷¹⁰ Akifiev, 44.

⁷¹¹ Akifiev, 49.

⁷¹² Akifiev, 100.

⁷¹³ Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 63.

Thus, he invited his readers to look at pristine nature as a source of prosperity for potential hunters or fishermen, although his claim that natives did not own guns was contradicted by his own narration later. But he pointed out on multiple occasions that without hunting deer, catching fish, getting seal fat, or collecting berries on the spot his lengthy expeditions would not have been possible. After finishing one of them, he admitted that “to say that we fed off the fat of the land is true.”⁷¹⁴ With that, he echoed Kennan in giving the notion of nature as a source of survival.⁷¹⁵

Vanderlip recounted several incidents when his life was in danger, such as an encounter with a bear or being caught in a winter blizzard in an open tundra for several days.⁷¹⁶ On one of his expeditions, Vanderlip and his Tungus companion Fronyo had to go down a river. Instead of going along the riverside, the author decided to make a raft and go down the stream, stating his reasoning:

The rush and swirl of the angry waters, the narrow escape from the ragged crest of a reef that came almost, but not quite, to the surface, and was invisible thirty feet away, the rush past steep cliffs and flowery banks, all formed such a delightful contrast to the weary plodding through the forest that we were willing to welcome almost any dangers for the sake of the exhilaration of this mad dash down the stream.⁷¹⁷

In sum, while Akifiev was close to Kennan in their depictions of a largely “empty” northern natural landscape and its occasional beauty during summer, Vanderlip included many engaging stories of prospecting in the wild, as if inviting Americans to experience the same kind of living that tested one’s character but allowed one to gain life-changing experience. This quote shown above demonstrates that at times the author wanted to present himself as a brave and skilled polar explorer and impress his readers by depicting situations when he put himself in danger deliberately. Yet he simultaneously suggested to Americans who were interested in the Russian Far East to think of its natural riches, sounding like his compatriots who traveled on the Trans-Siberian Railway and highlighted Siberia’s immense resources.

The Description of the Native Population

Another major topic of the two travelogues is the life of the indigenous peoples, primarily the Chukchi, the Koryaks, Even, and Evenki (the latter two were known together as Tungus before the 1930s) on the Russian side. By the turn of the century natives still made up the majority of the northeastern areas of the Russian Far East, including 11,750 Chukchi, around 7,300 Koryaks, and

⁷¹⁴ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 176.

⁷¹⁵ See chap. 2, n. 94.

⁷¹⁶ Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 97–98, 169–70.

⁷¹⁷ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 271–72.

around 8,850 Tungus (approximately 740 Evens, also known as Lamuts, and 8,110 Evenks) – out of an overall number of around 65,000 Tungus living in Siberia and the Far East combined.⁷¹⁸

Since Kennan's expedition in the 1860s native contacts with the newcomers on both sides of the Bering Strait drastically intensified. Rigorous gold mining, fishing, seal and walrus hunting, and the influx of settlers at the turn of the century had mixed consequences and disturbed the life of the native population, which encountered the incoming Russians and Americans. The positive impact of new commodities, technologies, modern methods in agriculture, and the introduction of market relations and education (including the creation of written native languages) was partly undone by imported diseases, armed conflicts, and the disruption of the local environment leading to famines among a population dependent on fishing and hunting. The exploitation of natives' skills by merchants and businesses, skirmishes over land, and involuntary migrations of natives also occurred in both Alaska and the Far East.⁷¹⁹

Compared to Siberia, the natives on the Russian side were less affected by the avalanche of colonization and government pressure to seize native "leftover" lands in favor of the settling peasantry, to settle natives themselves, and to abolish traditional native self-government. Yet projects regarding their similar future were already taking shape.⁷²⁰ The weakness of the Russian administration in the districts next to the Bering Strait, in contrast to the developments in Alaska, stalled such plans and instead led to increased American trade presence there.⁷²¹ From the 1880s Americans were increasingly engaging in both legal and illegal hunting, fishing, and whaling in Russian waters. They actively traded with the native population on the Russian side, giving their manufactured goods, guns, clothes, and other commodities in exchange for deer, meat, and pelts. This barter trade was also ambiguous, often helping the locals to survive and obtain necessary items, but at the same time, traders were gaining significant profits and securing an overwhelming presence that concerned the Russian government and business elite, both fearing the

⁷¹⁸ Serafim Patkanov, *Statisticheskiye dannyye, pokazivayushchiye plemennoy sostav naseleniya Sibiri, yazyk i rody inorodtsev (na osnovanii dannyykh spetsial'noy razrabotki materiala perepisi 1897 g.)* [The statistical data showing the tribal composition of Siberia, language, and the types of aliens (based on the data of the special draft of the 1897 census)], vol. 3, *Irkutskaya gub., Zabaykal'skaya, Amurskaya, Yakutskaya, Primorskaya obl. i o. Sakhalin* [Irkutsk, Transbaikalia, Amur, Yakutsk, Primorie provinces, and Sakhalin] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya "Sh. Bussel," 1912), 864–68.

⁷¹⁹ Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 217–18; Haycox, *Alaska*, 205–6, 221–23; Vadim Turaev, ed., *Rossiia i narody Dal'nego Vostoka: istoricheskiy opyt mezhetnicheskogo vzaimodeystviya (XVII–XIX vv.)* [Russia and the peoples of the Far East: Historical experience of interethnic interactions (seventeenth – nineteenth centuries)] (Vladivostok: Nauka, 2016), 187, 225.

⁷²⁰ Sardana Boyakova, *Osvoyeniye Arktiki i narody Severo-Vostoka Azii (XIX v. – 1917 g.)* [The exploration of the Arctic and the peoples of Northeastern Asia (nineteenth century – 1917)] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 2001), 34–38.

⁷²¹ Garusova, *Rossiysko-amerikanskiye otnosheniya na Dal'nem Vostoke*, 56.

“Americanization” of the natives.⁷²² Another major problem was illegal alcohol sales (from both sides) that had an ill influence on their physical and mental health.

As a result, many of the natives mentioned above came under simultaneous Russian and American economic and cultural influence. This was true especially for the Chukchi, who, remaining the only indigenous people exercising independence and not bound by *yasak* (fur tribute) to the Russian authorities, traded with both Russians and Americans, acting as the middleman between the two, while not being completely dependent on either.⁷²³ At the same time, the influence of natives upon settlers, while often overlooked, was remarkable. It ranged from helping foreigners sustain themselves by bringing them proper clothes, goods, and food to teaching some of the skills necessary for survival in the harsh climate. Also, at least for the Russian side, the natives enriched the Russian language with a new lexicon, and at times they themselves “nativized” the incoming Russians.⁷²⁴ The natives in the empire did not remain passive actors only, as they sought to adopt the newcomers’ tools for their own benefit, became intermediaries, migrated, changed occupations, and adopted their lifeways and tribal living to the new conditions in other ways.⁷²⁵ Briefly, the interactions of both Russians and Americans with natives were complex, while the reverse influence on settlers existed as well.

The Bohdanowicz expedition visited native villages along the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula. Therefore, Akifiev wrote only about the Chukchi, although he possibly saw Aleuts in Unalaska and the Eskimo on the coastline of the peninsula. His first encounter with the Chukchi was on the coast of Providence Bay, with some natives boarding the *Samoa*. He depicted a Chukchi burial ground where dead bodies were kept in the open and wrote about the clothes and dwellings of these people. Their clothes were described as sturdy but not hygienic, their faces revealed major diseases, and their *yarangas* (Chukchi tents) were anything but clean. Despite occasionally taking care of the health of the Chukchi he encountered during the expedition, he claimed, “to eat seal meat, fat, dead whales thrown out of the sea, to sleep in stinking hides in the dirt of the smoky tent. What kind of life is this? But they still live, joke, and laugh. What can austerity lead to!”⁷²⁶ This notion was reinforced later, when near Cape Kriguygun he met his compatriots, who were hired

⁷²² Garusova, 44–48.

⁷²³ Andrey Znamenski, “‘Vague Sense of Belonging to the Russian Empire’: The Reindeer Chukchi’s Status in Nineteenth Century Northeastern Siberia,” *Arctic Anthropology* 36, no. 1–2 (1999): 24–26.

⁷²⁴ Turaev, *Rossiia i narody Dal’nego Vostoka*, 209; Znamenski, “Vague Sense of Belonging to the Russian Empire,” 23.

⁷²⁵ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 101–2.

⁷²⁶ Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 58.

for the Vanderlip expedition on the *Progress* and disembarked to scout potential sources of gold. It turned out that these Russians had been with Akifiev during the expedition to Korea in 1898. Together they organized a small dinner on the shore, and Akifiev contrasted his impressions here with his experience in Korea:

The four of us, who had been in the Korean expedition, unexpectedly met, and, somehow, we all immediately remembered our gatherings and curiosities, and we again carried ourselves away from this ice, tundra, stinky yurts, and the beastlike Chukchi to the green fields of rice and millet, where emerald mountain rivers gurgles among prideful rocks. ... We remembered dense forests, light and clean *fanza* [traditional East Asian dwelling], and good-natured Koreans in their wide white garments, and we were drawn there again.⁷²⁷

From Akifiev's comments it is clear that he viewed the Chukchi as inferior, and the fact that he did not write about Chukchi culture or beliefs at all manifests that he had little actual interest in them, although he helped the natives with their health issues.

In the village of Ungazik (Indian Point), Akifiev admitted that those Chukchi who were visited by Americans looked better, and that some of them even lived in log cabins made by American merchants. While acknowledging beneficial American influence, he lamented multiple times that the Russian government and businessmen, unlike Americans, completely forgot about the northeastern-most areas of the empire. He argued that in case of finding gold his expedition could incite Russian migration to the region, which would bring the Chukchi an example of "a more cultured way of life." He then compared the Russian and American presence:

It is strange that Russians don't visit the Chukchi Peninsula, even for commerce, even though Americans consider coming here for barter trade and profit from it. Our government would do well to think about sending navy ships here at least to oppose the exploitative trade of foreigners. It is as if everyone has forgotten about this distant corner of our Russia. On the opposite American shore we see an absolutely different approach.⁷²⁸

Thus, he tended to view the Far East and its indigenous peoples in a politicized context and was suspicious of American traders and foreigners in general, urging his government to step in. But he chose to overlook the fact that natives were victims of Russian merchants' rapacity as well ("exploitative trade," as he claimed), both then and before the late nineteenth century, when they often ended up in debt and dependence on entrepreneurs who bought their furs with a huge revenue. His medical observations did indeed showcase that the generally weak imperial administration did not provide natives with adequate health treatment. What exacerbated the situation was that for

⁷²⁷ Akifiev, 73.

⁷²⁸ Akifiev, 102–3.

decades, if not centuries, Russians brought diseases to the natives they settled next to. On the whole, Akifiev did have to grudgingly acknowledge the failures of local authorities, while being clearly skeptical about any foreign presence nonetheless.⁷²⁹

His depiction of the meeting with Vanderlip's *Progress* illustrates his skepticism well. Vanderlip wrote that the two expeditions met only once in Plover Bay. The American miner noted in his travelogue that he met Bohdanowicz on board the *Samoa*. The latter was furious over the fact that there were other expeditions in progress on the Chukchi Peninsula, even though the rights on mining activities officially belonged to Vonlyarlyarskiy. Vanderlip justified the legitimacy of his expedition, arguing that the papers of Vonlyarlyarskiy were not yet officially ratified (which was not true since they were signed in April 1900). Before the meeting, he had already scouted the eastern and northeastern shores but found nothing and shared this information with the *Samoa*'s crew. After that, Vanderlip wrote that he quit his venture and returned to Vladivostok. However, Akifiev's conclusion on the encounter was that the *Progress* expedition and its sponsors were not to be trusted. It was after this meeting that he met the Russian crew members of Vanderlip's expedition stationed on Cape Kriguygun, as described previously. This meant that the *Progress* was still in the vicinity rather than in Vladivostok. Akifiev's account proves the claims of Vanderlip to be false, and this turn of events further reinforced the Russian doctor's suspicion.

At the same time, he was satisfied with the remaining Russian and Orthodox influence among the natives on the Aleutian Islands. He regretted selling Alaska to the United States (mistakenly dating it to 1866 instead of 1867), and grieved that Alaska's newly found resources, including gold, proved that it was worth way more than its original price.⁷³⁰ Overall, Akifiev longed to contain any foreign influence in this faraway Russian area but simultaneously did not seem interested in the indigenous inhabitants who lived there. Instead, he revealed the growing turn-of-the-century Russian perception of their own northeastern natives, especially the Chukchi, as generally backward and alien to Russian culture.⁷³¹ For Akifiev, they seemed to be no more than a background in the perceived regional contest of influence between the two countries. He entertained the "imperial view" regarding both Russian territories and Alaska.

Vanderlip experienced living side by side with multiple peoples – the Chukchi, the Koryaks, and the Tungus – as well as in the villages of mixed Russian and native population.

⁷²⁹ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 100, 109–10; Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 159; Turaev, *Rossiya i narody Dal'nego Vostoka*, 187–90.

⁷³⁰ Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 90.

⁷³¹ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 107–8.

During his journey on the *Progress*, he also encountered the Eskimo but made only passing remarks about them. Like Kennan, he had various kinds of interactions with the natives, from trading to eating and even sleeping in their tents. He focused on describing native accommodation, beliefs, food, clothes, and lifestyle in general, and, compared to Akifiev, his narration was more intimate, including spelling the names of the natives he met. Vanderlip mistakenly claimed that the natives of the Far East belonged to “the great Turanian family” that incorporated Mongols and all major tribes of northern Asia.⁷³² But he described them in a way familiar to Americans. For example, he narrated his encounter with Koryaks for the first time as follows:

These people were pure Koraks, a little under the medium size, in which they resemble the Japanese. I was led into the largest of the tents, and a wooden bowl containing boiled reindeer meat was placed before me. To the delight of my host, I went to my pack and produced some tea. I also displayed some sugar and black bread, which firmly established me in their good graces.⁷³³

This and other descriptions of the appearance and life of the indigenous peoples referred the readers to the perceptions of Native Americans or the East and drew parallels to the American frontier. In this Vanderlip did not differ from his compatriots’ perception of Siberian natives. However, unlike Kennan in *Tent Life* he did not make simplified claims on their supposed character. He also did not praise wandering natives for their independent lifestyle and did not proclaim the need for “enlightenment” for natives, focusing primarily on stories of adventure. Unlike other authors, such as Senn or Curtis, he did not believe in the supposed “vanishing” of the natives.

The Tungus received the least attention in his travel account. He noted that they wore clothes made of deer skin and lived in tents similar to the wigwams of Native Americans. While he observed that they looked dirty, at one point he described the event when all the members of a converted Tungus family crossed themselves before an Orthodox icon in a tent. For Vanderlip, this was “a scene that would have put to shame not a few of the homes in America.”⁷³⁴ With that he, like young Kennan, presented the Orthodox faith in this distant region in a positive light, and simultaneously revealed more general American concern about the appeal and power of religion in the age of modernity at home. Another favorable evaluation of the Tungus was related to his companion, Fronyo, who showed bravery and resilience and whom the author often took with him on his expeditions. It was with Fronyo when he decided to make a raft and deliberately try to flow down the river on it, an episode referred to earlier. He described his character:

⁷³² Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 211.

⁷³³ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 95.

⁷³⁴ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 108.

This Tunguse, Fronyo, was game to the backbone. When it came time to start out once more on our crazy craft, he crossed himself devoutly, and followed me without a murmur. He said that if God willed that he should die on that raft he would die, that was all. If he did not follow me wherever I went he felt that he would lose caste with his people and be shamed forever.⁷³⁵

With this, despite the praise of his Tungus companion's personality, he presented him as if he was destined to be loyal to him throughout his adventures, thus depicting the "noble savage" archetype.

Vanderlip called the Chukchi the "Apaches of Siberia" for resisting the Russian expansion for decades. The American miner contrasted his experience with the Chukchi to the hardships of Harry de Windt, a prominent British traveler, who had previously traveled in the region and published his impressions in *Through the Gold-Fields of Alaska to Bering Straits* (1898). De Windt wanted to reach Paris from New York by land in 1896, but he and his companion had to stay at the Chukchi village of Oumwaidjik (Cape Chaplin) for a month and a half until an American steamer spotted and rescued them. De Windt described his life among what he called "the filthiest people in creation" while suffering from their drunkenness and deception, cold, vermin, and later skin eruption and mental stress.⁷³⁶ But Vanderlip was impressed with their hospitality and thankful for their help during his expeditions. He characterized these natives as "the finest race of savages that it has ever been my lot to meet."⁷³⁷ In sum, he challenged De Windt's claims, differed from Akifiev's thoughts, and instead was closer to Kennan's positive evaluation of them.

Vanderlip described the Koryaks in detail and included a separate chapter where he wrote about their hunting skills, traditions, marriage, family life, as well as their shamanistic beliefs. He, like Kennan, divided them into nomad and settled ("Deer" and "Dog" Koryaks). He clearly read *Tent Life* since some of his descriptions (for example, related to Koryak marriage) are almost identical to Kennan's account. On the one hand, he seemed to have a marked interest in their life and praised Koryak talent in building and making unique tents, clothes, or pole weapons as well as positive character traits. He also refuted Kennan's unsavory contrast between wandering and settled Koryaks described in chapter 2 and claimed that settled ones had well-designed tents with better ventilation than nomads. Like Kennan, he too noted that many of them still had Shamanist rather than Christian beliefs. A change from *Tent Life* observed by Vanderlip was that now many Koryaks mastered modern arms, and one of them even managed to outshoot the American miner

⁷³⁵ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 278.

⁷³⁶ Harry De Windt, *Through the Gold-Fields of Alaska to Bering Straits* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1898), 201, 268–70.

⁷³⁷ Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 229.

in a contest. In another interaction, when a Koryak cleaned a cup from his own stock with moss and gave it to Vanderlip, inviting him to drink tea in his tent, he was stunned:

Strange is the effect of environment; a year previous, no inducement could have made me use those cups after seeing them cleansed in that fashion. Was I, after all, a savage, and civilization but a thin veneer? I found myself at times looking at life from the standpoint of these people. I was thinking, dreaming, and talking in my sleep in my polyglot language. At times I would talk to myself in English, just to enjoy the sound of it. ... Action was my only salvation. Had I been compelled to stay in one place I should have feared for my reason.⁷³⁸

Vanderlip thus attempted to look at native life from the position of the natives themselves and showed a degree of self-reflection. It seems that he subtly challenged the standard differentiation between “civilization” and “savagery” by pointing out that these categories were not so far away from each other as commonly perceived. Still, this passage resembles a similar one penned by Kennan while sitting in a tent among wandering Koryaks, when he felt carried away from “civilization.”⁷³⁹

Like Akifiev, Vanderlip was nevertheless prone to generalizations in his description of native life. On one occasion, while he was caught in a blizzard, Vanderlip recounted how he tried to tell his native companions about elections, railways, and electricity and teach them astronomy, but was deemed crazy, repeating Kennan’s depictions of native ignorance. However, he also highlighted actual issues in the native lifestyle. Mentioning the Russian ban on selling alcohol to natives, he noted how some of them were keen on spirits to the extent that they could sell even their wives and daughters for another drink, pointing to a grave problem existing among natives under the influence of settlers and travelers, whether American or Russian.⁷⁴⁰

The major point where Vanderlip differed from Kennan was his lengthy account of trading with natives. He and Akifiev claimed that they did not recognize money and mostly did a barter exchange of pelts or animals for the articles they needed, and that traders could make a huge profit over it. Vanderlip dedicated several pages describing the price of fur in dollars, Russian government policies regarding fur tribute and deer sales to America, and how sables, being the most expensive type of pelt, were hunted by the locals. These extensive remarks add to Vanderlip’s thoughts about the rich flora and fauna of the region that could be alluring to American hunters and traders who wished to do business with the native population. However, writing in the 1900s, both authors somewhat underestimated the development of market relations and the natives’ gradual

⁷³⁸ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 197.

⁷³⁹ See chap. 2, n. 113.

⁷⁴⁰ Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 10, 170–73.

adaptation to the concept of money, as even the *yasak* was eventually turned into cash form by 1910.⁷⁴¹ Unlike Akifiev, however, Vanderlip avoided politics or the discussion of Russian policy towards natives, except for mentioning a couple of times that the Chukchi preferred Americans to Russians due to the latter's past attempts to make the Chukchi submit to their rule (which was true).

In the end, while Akifiev looked at the Russian Far East and Alaska through the lens of the empire and the projected influence of both countries, giving natives themselves a background role, Vanderlip's description of natives both supported and challenged claims in *Tent Life*. He gave them a chief place in his account and, although not going beyond "savage" rhetoric or commonplace parallels to the frontier, offered a more respectful narrative that breached the perception of the native "Other" as completely alien. By focusing only on adventures, Vanderlip appealed to a growing number of Americans who wanted a change in their lifestyle and were concerned about the advent of modernity at home.

Russian-American "Othering"

The final major topic in the discussed travelogues is the representation of Russians and Americans as the "Other." Akifiev's thoughts were influenced by the arrest that the Russian party of the expedition experienced in Nome. The arrest was based, according to his account, on the alleged fear of Americans that the Russians, being the majority among the prospectors and later having armed Cossacks on deck, might leave them on the Chukchi Peninsula or even capture the *Samoa* by force, throwing anyone resisting overboard. The organizers of the expedition named other reasons. Bohdanowicz in his report emphasized the haste in the organization of the venture and the incompetence of the captain of the *Samoa*. But the major reason was that some of the English members of the crew were agents of Frederick Baker (the financial supporter of the enterprise) and were interested in raising quick speculative money on the stock exchange rather than the expedition. In addition, American members thought that they would arrive in an already mined area instead of scouting for gold around the whole peninsula. Influenced by the intrigues of the English, they became increasingly frustrated.⁷⁴² Vonlyarlyarskiy, writing with ten years of hindsight, refuted the fact of speculations and found fault with the failure of Bohdanowicz to follow his instructions and his lack of English.⁷⁴³ Unfortunately, I did not find any memoirs or reports

⁷⁴¹ Dameshek and Remnev, *Sibir' v sostave Rossiyskoy imperii*, 217–18.

⁷⁴² Bohdanowicz, *Ocherki Chukotskogo poluostrova*, xi–xii, 36, 78–79.

⁷⁴³ Vladimir Vonlyarlyarskiy, *Chukotskiy poluostrov: Ekspeditsii V.M. Vonlyarlyarskogo i otkrytiye novogo zolotonosnogo rayona, bliz ust'ya r. Anadyrya, 1900–1912 gg.* [The Chukchi Peninsula: The expeditions of V.M. Vonlyarlyarskiy and the discovery of new gold-bearing area near the mouth of Anadyr, 1900–1912] (St. Petersburg:

produced by non-Russian crew members, but a couple of American journal articles written in 1903–1904 blamed the Russian side.⁷⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Akifiev condemned American actions, mocking how the Russians in Nome were limited in their movement and were subject to surveillance and armed escort on a steamer during the arrest, all that in the “land of freedom.” The Russians were allowed to leave for Russian waters on the *Samoa* only nine days after arrival in Nome, escorted by an American warship to wait there for the arrival of the *Yakut* to pick them up.

Before getting to San Francisco, he briefly covered his trip across the United States, describing New York as a very noisy city with dirty streets and unwelcoming skyscrapers. In contrast, he marked Washington, D.C. as one of the best cities that he had ever seen due to its vegetation, wide streets, and lack of overcrowding. In the capital, Akifiev visited the National Mall and nearby museums, including the Smithsonian Institute, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the National Museum of Natural History, concluding that while their buildings were exquisite, they lacked exhibits of real cultural or scientific value compared to European museums. He also attended vaudeville in New York and Washington, D.C., describing their repertoire:

In almost all vaudeville someone is thrown out of the window. ... Both big and small [people] are thrown, and this causes a frightening laughter on the part of spectators who applaud and scream like crazy. But they like it even more when a girl or a boy around seven years old enters the scene and starts to dance the can-can while singing something of definite improper content. The audience became completely delighted when it saw a dancing mulatto family. The husband does the can-can immodestly with his wife, and their kids imitate them. “Wonderful” parenting!⁷⁴⁵

These episodes indicate that, while looking at America through the lens of Europe (what many American travelers did when evaluating Russia itself, as shown throughout this thesis), he clearly denied the existence of “high” culture in America.

His American prospecting counterparts, while some of them looked amiable at first, throughout the expedition turned out to be lazier than Russian workers, bringing drinks and guns with them to the shore, hunting and feasting before doing actual prospecting. Another way that they were vilified was by showing their eagerness for a quick profit when doing unequal trade with the natives or selling them alcohol, disregarding the fact that for decades, despite the attempts of

Tipolitografiya K.I. Lingard, 1913), 24. After the failure of the expedition Vonlyarlyarskiy formed the Northeastern Siberian Company, which in 1902–1910 was responsible for mining in the area. However, it failed to achieve any considerable success, and instead was overwhelmed by American influence and gained an infamous reputation, see: Thomas Owen, “Chukchi Gold: American Enterprise and Russian Xenophobia in the Northeastern Siberia Company,” *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (2008): 49–51, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2008.77.1.49>.

⁷⁴⁴ Owen, “Chukchi Gold,” 58.

⁷⁴⁵ Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 16–17.

the state to ban the sales of spirits, the same was done by Russian merchants.⁷⁴⁶ Only the maintenance crew of the *Samoa*, consisting of Americans, earned Akifiev's praise for their honest and responsible work throughout the expedition. He mentioned how during the last day in Plover Bay before final good-byes these Americans and Russians in an amicable spirit got drunk together, with Russians getting in a fight with one another.⁷⁴⁷

He gave a less one-sided image of the country by describing his conversations with Fedorov, an immigrant living in San Francisco with his family, and with Vasiliy Belyaev, one of the Russian workers on the *Samoa* who had worked in the Bay area before getting hired for the expedition. Fedorov, enjoying a successful life, concluded that, in case of knowing the language, the desire to work hard, and proper connections, one could settle down. But Belyaev did not like his working experience and stated that in America "people don't believe in anything and pray to the devil."⁷⁴⁸ The lack of true religion among Americans and in their missionary activity abroad, substituted by charity or agitation, was another point of the author's criticism.

Akifiev got to visit Nome, and while praising the way Americans could quickly build a town and all the necessary infrastructure (the "American way"), the city itself was depicted as being crowded with money-makers and criminals. When leaving Nome for the Russian waters after the arrest, he gave his final sentence on his experience in America:

Here we are back in Russia, even though there is nothing similar here to the European part of Russia. It is desolate around, but this dead silence, these bare mountains are still somehow dearer than the commotion of Nome and the noise of the mobs of vagabonds, crooks, con men, and quick profit seekers.⁷⁴⁹

Overall, his initial, possibly more positive, perceptions of America were completely changed by the encounters with the foreign members of the expedition and the arrest in Nome. Despite occasional signs of a more balanced view, Akifiev presented a clearly negative image of the country based on his dual identity as both Russian and European and his feeling of superiority over things American.

Vanderlip dedicated less written space to Russians and their life than to his adventures and the descriptions of natives. In the towns of the Far East (Petropavlovsk, Korsakovsk Post, Gizhiga) he noted churches surrounded by wooden houses, the quality and comfort of which he praised. He emphasized repeatedly that officials and locals alike were always hospitable to him, especially in

⁷⁴⁶ Akifiev, 113; Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 99; Turaev, *Rossiia i narody Dal'nego Vostoka*, 111–12.

⁷⁴⁷ Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 142. Bohdanowicz in his report also praised the marines of the *Samoa*.

⁷⁴⁸ Akifiev, 41.

⁷⁴⁹ Akifiev, 134–35.

Gizhiga. Upon arrival there for the first time, the locals welcomed Vanderlip and offered him to join a marriage ceremony. The author played “The Washington Post March” on a piano and concluded that “many of those rough but kindly people had never heard anything like it in their lives, and, as the Russian is musical to his heart’s core, I felt pleased to have added my mite to the evening’s entertainment.”⁷⁵⁰ Later Vanderlip recounted that the dwellers of Gizhiga gave him a saddle that allegedly used to belong to Kennan in the past, an extra reference to *Tent Life*. On another occasion, he described how the locals, after having realized that Vanderlip was celebrating Christmas (earlier than Orthodox Christians would), decided to join and organize special festivities for him with singing, dancing, and binge drinking. This made the author admit his feeling of being “embarrassed by their excessive generosity.”⁷⁵¹ These episodes repeat *Tent Life* in outlining the sympathy of common Russians toward American travelers. Also, he occasionally noted that he saw American-made items in Russian and native possession, ranging from Singer machines to cups, another similarity to Kennan’s account.

From time to time, he distinguished between himself and Russians, writing about their bathing habits and excessive drinking. On one occasion he had a rich dinner in the company of a magistrate in Korsakovsk Post. He noticed that all the food was served at once and nothing got passed around the table except vodka, labeling such an arrangement as “not fashioned on ordinary European models.” He also saw that one of his Russian companions did not use a fork to eat and added, “my use of the fork was not the only thing that distinguished me while in the country of the White Czar. Wherever I went, the Russians were highly amused at my use of the tooth-brush, which they consider a peculiarly feminine utensil.”⁷⁵² Therefore, at times Vanderlip presented Russians as somewhat bizarre and perceived them through triangulation with Europe, like Akifiev. This triangulation is especially noteworthy since Vanderlip, as an American, compared Russian table manners not with his home country but with Europe, and in Sakhalin of all places.

He created a contrast between the uninhabited wilderness and the radius of “civilization,” especially after hard expeditions. After finishing one of them, he was happy to return to a village of mixed Russian-native population next to Gizhiga, where he expected to rest in a wooden house and have a proper bath.⁷⁵³ In another episode, after an extensive expedition, he and his companions were on the verge of complete exhaustion and, being far from Gizhiga, sent for help. The

⁷⁵⁰ Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 73. The “Washington Post March,” composed in 1889 by John Philip Sousa, remains one of the most popular American marches.

⁷⁵¹ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 179.

⁷⁵² Vanderlip and Hulbert, 33–34.

⁷⁵³ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 176.

prospectors managed to persevere until a group of Russians finally reached them and brought aid. The head of this group was a Russian who knew English, and Vanderlip confessed that upon meeting him he spoke a mixed gibberish of Russian, English, and Koryak. His saviors brought food, supplies, and everything that Vanderlip wanted:

I ordered several kettles of water heated, and stripping behind the tent, I threw the noisome rags, with all their denizens, as far into the bush as I could, and then went in and had a glorious tubbing. I got into a suit of soft flannels, Scotch tweed knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket, and after shaving and grooming myself for an hour, the loathsome larva that had crawled into camp emerged from that tent a bejeweled butterfly. That delicious moment was worth almost as much as it cost.⁷⁵⁴

It seems that while Vanderlip did not openly designate Russia as a creative force, he still reiterated *Tent Life* in hinting at the Russian presence in the Far East, even in terms of comfort, as that of a “civilization.”⁷⁵⁵

There is a subject that both Vanderlip and Akifiev wrote about – the Russian exile camps on Sakhalin, which they both visited. They described the types of prisons, the condition of prison barracks, and interacted with prisoners or city dwellers who used to be criminals. Both authors condemned what they saw, and while Vanderlip wrote of the exile system as “terrestrial Valhalla [...] a sort of ante-mortem purgatory,” Akifiev, visiting the island shortly after the expedition, stated in disgust, “away, away as quickly as possible from this horrible island, where thousands of people are physically and morally decaying alive.”⁷⁵⁶ The penal labor colonies on Sakhalin, operating between the late 1860s and the Russo-Japanese War, indeed were one of the most infamous and brutal places of exile, immortalized in Chekhov’s *Sakhalin Island*.⁷⁵⁷ Their views reveal that Akifiev criticized his country too, even if he presented it as more preferable to the U.S., while Vanderlip did perceive more negative aspects of Russian conditions despite positive remarks elsewhere.

Visual Materials

The Bohdanowicz expedition took photos along the way and published a photo journal, from which Akifiev took most of the pictures.⁷⁵⁸ His account has slightly less than forty photographs. They are mostly full- or half-page in size and are scattered throughout the text. Most photos, except for a

⁷⁵⁴ Vanderlip and Hulbert, 290.

⁷⁵⁵ See chap. 2, n. 120, 216.

⁷⁵⁶ Vanderlip and Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 22; Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 181.

⁷⁵⁷ See Gentes, “Roads to Oblivion,” chap. 13.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ekspeditsiya polkovnika V.M. Vonlyarlyarskogo na Chukotskiy poluostrov v 1900 godu* [The expedition of colonel V. M. Vonlyarlyarskiy to the Chukchi Peninsula in 1900] (n.p.: n.p., 1900).

couple shown in the chapter related to their arrest in Nome, logically complement the text. It is noteworthy that Akifiev did not include any photos of the trip to San Francisco across the entire continent. Perhaps the company did not take any pictures, or Akifiev simply excluded content related to the U.S. due to his negative perception of the country. The landscapes snapped during the expedition are mostly general views, and they look vast but unwelcoming and uninhabited. He also included group portraits of the Russian members of the crew (without Americans) and general pictures showing mining groups at work on the Chukchi Peninsula. Nome was shown to be a bustling city, contributing to the image of the U.S. as an economic powerhouse (figure 33). The images of the natives included full-figure portraits of the Chukchi, their tents, and their interactions with the expedition members on board. All pictures related to them were taken at a distance, and, in addition, there is a disturbing photo of Chukchi burial grounds (figures 34 and 35). On the whole, they serve to complement Akifiev's view of these natives as exotic and inferior.

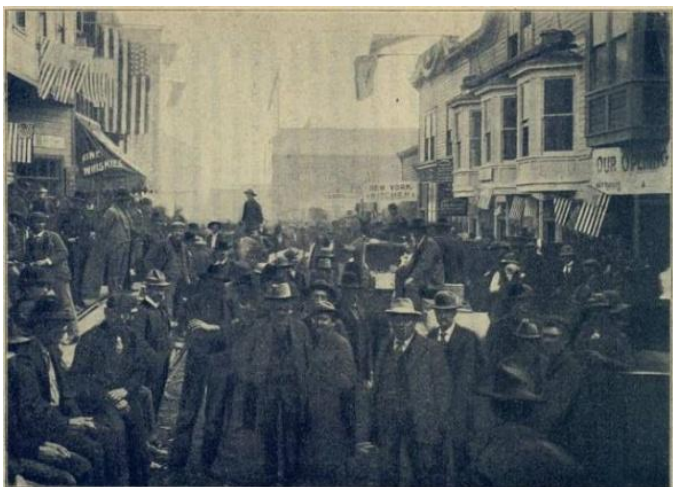


Figure 33. “Ulitsa v Nome” [A Street in Nome], in Ivan Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever: iz dnevnika krugosvetnogo putestviiya* [To the far north: From the diary of a trip around the world] (St. Petersburg: Tipo-litografiya “Yevgeniya Tile Premn.,” 1904), 82.



Figure 34. “Chukchi u yurty” [The Chukchi Near a Yurt], in Ivan Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 53.



Figure 35. “Sposob pogrebeniya u chukchey” [The Chukchi’s Burial Method], in Ivan Akifiev, *Na dalekiy sever*, 50.

Vanderlip included a set of over forty photos taken personally as well as a map of his journeys. All of them are full-page in size and are placed logically throughout the text. They show local landscapes and animals such as dogs and fish, while others depict the members of the expeditions, including Vanderlip himself, on the road or camping. There are many photos of deer in the wild that suggest the pristine fauna of the region that could prompt potential hunters to come there. The natives, however, were given the most attention, with many full-figure portraits of them or Russian-native families in their rich dress. A case in point is a photo of a Chukchi hunter (figure 36). Vanderlip also posed together with the natives (figure 37). The depictions of natives reinforce the notion that Vanderlip was interested in native life, and he clearly gave them a better photo representation than Akifiev. Besides, he included a handful of general images of the Russian

settlements in the Far East. Vanderlip pictured convict life, while Akifiev, who also visited Sakhalin, did not include any pictures of exiles (figure 38).



Figure 36. “One of the Tchuktches—An Unconquered Race,” in Washington Vanderlip and Homer Hulbert, *In Search of a Siberian Klondike* (New York: Century, 1903), 227.



Figure 37. “The Pride of the Family,” in Washington Vanderlip and Homer Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 105.



Figure 38. “Russian Murderers in Angle of Prison-House, Korsakovsk, Saghalien Island,” in Washington Vanderlip and Homer Hulbert, *Siberian Klondike*, 37.

Conclusion

The two accounts in this chapter demonstrate that readers in both countries were interested in the Far East and Alaska at the turn of the twentieth century and were aware of the presence of the Russian or American “Other” nearby. By publishing their experiences in book format, Vanderlip and Akifiev must have established themselves as authorities on polar regions. This claim can be supported by the fact that Akifiev’s account was initially published in 1902, but it was reprinted just two years later. Vanderlip’s travelogue got overwhelmingly positive reviews. *The Nation* summarized that, “while the narrative makes no pretensions to literary merit, it is a straightforward and interesting account of experience, enlivened with a vein of genial humor.”⁷⁵⁹ Periodicals, including specialized ones like the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, praised him for engaging storytelling, photos, and his own endurance shown during continuous life in native tents amid harsh climate.⁷⁶⁰ One review was published by none other than Kennan in *The Outlook* in 1904, more than thirty years after his own adventures. This means that Kennan had fond memories of his travels in the 1860s and kept his finger on the pulse regarding new books about Russia. In the review, he praised Vanderlip for his courage and true-to-life descriptions and stated that “northeastern Siberia, evidently, has not changed one iota in thirty-five years, and Mr. Vanderlip’s book is a faithful and trustworthy description of the country and its people,” with the first part of

⁷⁵⁹ “Book Reviews,” *Nation* 77, no. 2008 (December 24, 1903): 512.

⁷⁶⁰ “Book Notices,” *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 36, no. 4 (1904): 249–50; “Two Men and a Book,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 1903, 6.

citation being evidently wrong due to the real changes in native life described in this chapter.⁷⁶¹ As for censorship, considering Akifiev's remarks on the exile system, and the fact that he voiced discontent with the state policy in the Far East, its impact seems to be minor.

Akifiev's narrative demonstrates that the legacy of Russian presence in Alaska and the concerns over growing, if not overwhelming, American presence in Russian waters reinforced his clearly protective, even xenophobic attitude regarding the empire's own distant regions, revealing the "imperial view" of both Russian and American possessions. Judging by the account's popularity, this vision was entertained by at least a portion of the Russian reading public. His view apparently aligned with the outlook of not just the readership but also the state elite. Intent on containing foreign influence in the empire's faraway borderlands, especially where Russian presence was feeble, the government wished to expand its own beyond the empire's borders. The natives were not to play a decisive role in defining or altering the plans of the state in strengthening its positions in the northeastern regions. Another notion that his account reveals is the duality of the self-perceptions of Russian travelers and the growing discourse of nationalism. He was clearly self-confident as a carrier of supposedly superior European and Russian culture simultaneously when visiting distant imperial borderlands populated primarily by non-Russians. He demonstrated a superiority complex over both the U.S and the West under the impact of growing discourses on Russian uniqueness and its exceptional course of historical development.

The structure and writing of Vanderlip's account often recall *Tent Life*, with an emphasis on adventures in the polar wilderness and engaging stories of life with natives rather than politics. Based on his references to Kennan and De Windt and his discussions of fur trade, it is reasonable to assert that Vanderlip read the travelogues of other adventurers as well as general accounts about Siberia before coming to the region. His comments on natives were more balanced than those of Akifiev or many Americans of the time, although with standard parallels to the American frontier. Together with Bates with his winter quest for the "real Siberia" and living in Mongol tents as well as the revised *Tent Life*, both published shortly afterwards, Vanderlip's book contributed to the anti-modernist sentiments of Americans who read of his adventures in the pre-modern frontier (although a colder one) and longed for a genuine lifestyle.

⁷⁶¹ George Kennan, "Two Views of Siberia," review of *In Search of a Siberian Klondike*, by Washington Vanderlip and Homer Hulbert, and *Sixteen Years in Siberia: Some Experiences of a Russian Revolutionist*, by Leo Deutsch. Translated by Helen Chisholm. *Outlook* 76, no. 3 (January 16, 1904): 182.

Conclusion and Outlook

The goal of this thesis was to examine American travel narratives on the Russian Empire from the time of the publication of George Kennan's *Siberia* in 1891 to the First World War, a period of intense imperial rivalry and emerging mass tourism. The dissertation examined Kennan's three travel accounts because of their significant influence on the published impressions of subsequent travelers, American visits in response to two major events in late Russian imperial history, the 1891–1892 famine and the 1905 Revolution, and journeys to three non-European areas of the empire – Siberia via the Trans-Siberian Railway, Russian Turkestan, and the Northern Pacific. In the case of the latter, both Russian and American travel accounts were analyzed since this area represented a space of actual Russian-American encounters. It introduced a range of accounts whose authors represented mostly the middle class and its growing opportunities for travel and which were given limited or no scholarly attention thus far. It also sought to offer a fresh take on already discussed topics, especially the famine and the 1905 Revolution. The selected travel accounts were examined based on an interdisciplinary approach, with an extra emphasis on historical context that is rarely considered by travel writing scholars. Taking into consideration the social backgrounds and personal outlook of the authors, their goals and motivations, knowledge of the language of the destination country, and special circumstances, this thesis identified and analyzed the major topics of the travelogues. Given the lack of scholarly research on American travel writing about Russia, this dissertation sought to give this overlooked body of source material the attention it warrants.

American travelers produced a considerable number of accounts on Russia at the turn of the century and offered a variety of comments on what they saw during the journey and what they thought about the country. The sheer volume of travel publications suggests that Americans had a continuous interest in visiting, as well as writing and reading about Russia. However, their impressions were often perplexing. In some cases, even within one travel account sympathetic remarks and genuine efforts to comprehend the enormous continental multinational empire coexisted with sweeping negative statements that would undoubtedly be perceived as offensive in our twenty-first century culture. To compare such travel remarks written by Americans of different social backgrounds, each of whom had their own travel goals, agenda, and preconceptions, and to make sense of them was especially challenging.

As this dissertation demonstrated, the image of Russia that was entertained by travelers at the turn of the century was complicated and ambivalent, just like in post-Civil War travel writing, rather than wholly or increasingly negative. It discussed the emergence of the “dual vision” of the empire, shaped by Kennan’s three travel accounts, and showed the appearance of new important topics, such as natives, Russian regional policy, or international affairs. A remarkable variety of discourses were present in the American perception of Russia – “civilization”/savagery dichotomy, triangulation with Europe, the “imperial view,” Orientalism that was particularly applicable to Russian Turkestan, all additionally complicated by Protestant traditions as well as rising anti-modernist sentiments and yearning for a genuine lifestyle or rejuvenation for a number of authors. Some travelers proposed the American-led economic or political modernization or even the spiritual transformation of Russia (the example of Reeves), fed by both secular and religious drive. While for this group the empire played the role of the object of the American mission, for other visitors Russia was the source of values that the U.S. itself, with its rapid change at the turn of the century, was missing or rapidly losing. For half a century, from young Kennan in the 1860s to Bates in the early 1910s, Americans perceived the Asian parts of Russia through the prism of the American frontier, even after it was officially closed in 1890. The romanticized history and values associated with the “taming” of the American West remained deeply ingrained in the American mind and found its vivid expression in travel impressions.

Drawing parallels between Siberia or Turkestan and the American West was just one example of the projection of American historical experience onto the Russian Empire. My analysis of various American travel accounts revealed plenty of such simplified claims that were detached from Russian historical developments. This is not to say that every traveler was superficial. The example of Bates shows that some Americans did try to present a complex picture of Russia, while other travel accounts displayed genuine efforts put into them, such as Bookwalter with his enormous volume of visuals, or Vanderlip who tried to challenge commonplace beliefs in native inferiority. And yet, since the majority of American travelers did not know Russian or any other native language of the empire and spent limited time there, it was natural to expect that their published impressions would be largely shaped by preconceived notions (discussed in chapter 1), personal biases (for instance, Islamophobia on Curtis’ part), political agenda (the “gentleman socialist” Durland), or already established tropes about Russians. Of course, one does not expect travel writing to be scientifically accurate, but on too many occasions the statements about Russia seemed to come down to a resolute black-or-white frame of mind. A skeptical eye would question

whether American travelers, who surely used their experience to establish their authority on the subject of Russia and desired to shape its perception among their countrymen, contributed more to misunderstanding than understanding of their geographically distant but also close neighbor after all. A more ironic one would point out that a large portion of travelers tried to turn travel experience into domestic authority as well. They attempted to reinforce the position of the white, Protestant middle class as the creative force in American society itself at the time of great change and reforms – at the expense of denigrating and excluding large groups of their compatriots on racial, ethnic, or immigrant grounds.

Considering the abundance of available primary sources, the allowed length of the dissertation, and the overall lack of research on the subject, this thesis set out to provide a framework and a foundation for the study of American travel writing on late imperial Russia as opposed to an analysis of all available American travelogues. In other words, I sought to map out the general picture, and I readily admit that numerous additions could be made to it. Among book-length accounts (no less than fifty, as explained in the introduction), let alone articles, there is room for further research. At least three more topics could further complement the subject of American visits to the empire before the First World War. Regarding events, one might think of the coronation of Nicholas II in Moscow in 1896, which was attended by foreign diplomats, distinguished guests, journalists, and ordinary tourists, with Americans present as well. Naturally, common tourist impressions of European Russia could and would be a valuable addition. As for the non-European regions of the empire, travelogues covering the Caucasus might be taken into consideration.

The limits to introducing and examining the photos and other visuals in these travel accounts were also presented in the introduction, and, considering their quantity, they could, and perhaps should, be given a separate, more comprehensive analysis. Besides, female American travelers did venture into Russia in the examined period, but as has been pointed out, I intend to write a comparative analysis of Russian and American women's travel writing, with the usage of relevant research related to gender and its role in the perception and writing about foreign countries. More generally, archival work and the comparison between the available travel notes and the actual publication that circulated among the readers (a key question of authorship) would undoubtedly contribute to the subject matter.

Thus, even the topic of American travel writing on the Russian Empire at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be easily expanded in many ways. It can also be extended both geographically and chronologically, while individual subjects could be examined separately.

To give an example, American trips on the Trans-Siberian Railway could alone become the subject of an extra article, if not another dissertation, especially with an extended timeframe. Alternatively, one could compare American travel impressions of the late Russian Empire with those of travelers from Western Europe or other parts of the world. Still another direction could be a comparison between American accounts written soon after the Civil War and those penned at the turn of the century. Apart from *Tent Life*, dozens of so-far neglected American travelogues published from the Civil War to the 1890s could be analyzed. One could thus establish whether travelers other than Kennan also fostered the “dual vision” of the empire or entertained the “imperial view.” Another intriguing question that begs to be answered is how this ambivalent perception changed after the Bolshevik Revolution. Numerous studies already covered important topics regarding American journeys in Soviet Russia and the interwar USSR – from the perception of the famine of 1921–1923 by the officials of the American Relief Administration and women’s travel writing to the writings by invited American intellectuals, novelists, or specialists and general impressions of the structured and ideologically-charged tourism regulated by Intourist, all primarily within European part of the country.⁷⁶² And yet some less-examined topics could build upon the chapters of this dissertation. For instance, did American travelers on the Trans-Siberian Railway in the 1920s or the 1930s still draw parallels with the American West, even though the country across which they traveled adhered to communism? While Americans tried the Central Asian Railway earlier, were there visitors who traveled on the Turkestan–Siberian Railway (Turk-Sib, built in 1927–1930)? Were there new joint expeditions in the Northern Pacific?

All these topics and questions await researchers interested in contributing to the subject of Russian-American cultural interactions and travel studies in general. And, as a small final reminder, the subject of Russian tourist trips to the U.S., including in the decades before the First World War, also seems to be a very promising field. Taken together, the study of mutual Russian-American travel writing would offer another, so far neglected, perspective on how the people of the two countries perceived and reflected the similarities and differences between them.

⁷⁶² For example, see: Jennifer Hudson, “Socialist Utopia or Dystopian Nightmare? American Interwar Travelogues About Russia,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 244–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2015.1078165>; Bertrand Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Julia Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Samantha Kravitz, “The Business of Selling the Soviet Union: Intourist and the Wooing of American Travelers, 1929–1939” (Master thesis, Concordia University, 2006).

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