РОССИЯ и США: познавая друг друга

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RUSSIA and THE UNITED STATES: perceiving each other

In Memory of the Academician Alexander A. Fursenko

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The Perils of Prophecy: American Predictions About Russia’s Future Since 1881

Since the late nineteenth century the most prominent and influential American experts on Russia have often claimed to know its future. Russia, American journalists, diplomats, and scholars have predicted, was headed for a revolution that almost all of them believed would lead to the creation of a liberal democracy. These prophecies have often proved false in substance and inaccurate on timing. More important, the influential predictions have blinded many Americans to Russian realities that did not conform to the wishful forecasts and they have helped to incline many Americans toward hostile, confrontational postures toward Russian governments. As a result, the prophets have helped to distort U.S. perceptions and policies, to inflame tensions with Russian governments, and to provoke counterproductive reactions. Yet Americans have continued to believe they know the destiny of Russia and can help to bring it into being.

This essay attempts to illuminate the origins and effects of American inclinations to prophecy about Russia by focusing on three experts: (1) journalist and activist George Kennan, who encouraged Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to have faith that the tsarist autocracy would be replaced by a government modeled on the United States of America; (2) diplomat George F. Kennan, who most famously predicted in the late 1940s that a policy of containment would lead to the break-up or mollifying of the Soviet system in the near future but later cautioned against foreign promotion of regime change in Russia; and (3) scholar and diplomat Michael McFaul, who persistently assumed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that the end point of Russia’s political evolution must be liberal democracy, championed U.S. support for democratic forces in Russia, and ultimately urged the United States to confront the Russian government, which he predicted would not endure.

In addition to describing the three experts’ major prophecies and analyzing the impact of their predictions, this essay suggests that Americans’ tenacious attachment to beliefs about Russia’s future should be understood in the context of a prophetic political culture closely intertwined with American national identity. Prophecy beliefs have been central to many Americans’ thinking about their place in the world since Puritans founded colonies in New England in 1691 that they believed would be the seat of a future divine metropolis. In the late nineteenth century, when the United States emerged as a world power and Americans first embraced the cause of redeeming Russia, religious beliefs still figured importantly in many Americans’ visions of the future, underpinning a strong sense of America’s special identity and its mission to extend “civilization” around the earth. Although apocalyptic Biblical prophecies continued to fascinate many Americans, especially increasingly influential evangelical Christians, public discussion of the U.S. role in the world grew more secular in the twentieth century. During the Cold War and on into the post-Cold War era, U.S. foreign policy experts tended to speak of “modernization” rather than “civilization”, yet their teleological views continued to place the United States at the “end of history”. In this long-term context, many American predictions about Russia’s future can be seen as part of a broader “political theology” that affirms America’s mission in the world.¹

I. George Kennan and Tsarist Russia

In the first century after the American declaration of independence from England, when American-Russian relations were generally friendly and the two countries were tacit allies against the British Empire, few Americans championed the transformation of the Russian autocracy into a democracy. Although Bible-citing prophets in the 1850s launched a long apocalyptic tradition of identifying Russia with the evil forces the United States would defeat in order to usher in a millennium of Christian republicanism, most Americans who thought about Russia viewed it as a benevolent Christian empire developing along a path parallel, rather than identical, to America’s path.² That changed after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, which prompted a number of journalists and political activists to proclaim that the “nihilists” who killed the Tsar admired the United States and to predict that the influence of American political principles would help to emancipate Russia from tsarist despotism.³

The journalist and explorer George Kennan, who had been friendly with Russian government officials since his first trip to Siberia in 1865–1867, at first rejected the new indictments of Russia. However, after investigating the Siberian exile system in 1885–1886 Kennan converted to the cause of the Russian revolutionaries he encountered. Having lost his faith in Calvinist theology in the 1870s, Kennan had longed for a new faith and now he had found it. In hundreds of lectures and scores of magazine articles over the next three decades, Kennan repeatedly urged Americans to believe that Russian revolutionaries worshipped the United States and would remake Russia in the image of America when they were freed from the prison of the tsarist regime. In 1893, for example, Kennan declared in a widely read magazine article that "Russia will not always be a despotism. Sooner or later the authority of the autocrat will give way to the authority of the people", who "share our love of freedom" and "look to us for sympathy while they wait for the dawn of a brighter day".

Kennan’s predictions, often conveyed through colorful, dramatic, memorable stories, exerted a wide and deep influence on American popular thinking about Russia. Already by 1912, the editor of one American newspaper concluded that "for most people in the United States the gospel according to Kennan has become the truth about Russia". In the following years, Kennan continued to influence American expectations about the form Russian institutions would take when Russians gained their freedom. When Nicholas II, facing a powerful revolutionary movement in the fall of 1905, reluctantly signed the October Manifesto granting his subjects civil liberties, American editors and cartoonists immediately concluded that Russia was being transformed overnight from an oppressive autocracy into an enlightened nation modeled on the United States. The idea that the darkest autocracy in the Old World was destined to be regenerated by the bright light of America had a powerful appeal to many Americans and helped to eclipse anxieties about defects in American democracy.

Kennan’s harsh criticisms of the Russian government made him an enemy of tsarist officials, who forced him to leave St. Petersburg when he tried to visit in 1901, and a hero to many in the revolutionary movement. But his predictions that a revolution would usher in a democracy modeled on the United States were deeply misleading. When the revolution of 1905 culminated in a socialist-inspired general strike and an armed uprising in Moscow many Americans were bitterly disillusioned. Kennan seems to have shared some of the disappointment: at one point in 1914 he thought that fifty years might pass before Russia would enjoy liberty. Yet after the outbreak of war in Europe Kennan joined in a new upsurge of enthusiasm about the anticipated emancipation of Russia. In 1915, for example, he reiterated his


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teleological vision that the Russian common people were “advancing along the same path that we ourselves have followed.” This vision was not founded on recent close study: Kennan had been unable to visit Russia since 1901. Instead, it was founded, as he explained in July 1914, on an unreasoning belief in the Russian people.

When the war-strained autocracy collapsed in February 1917, Kennan hailed the “complete triumph of democracy”, dismissed the possibility of “any serious internal dissension”, and predicted that the change of government would soon bring “a complete regeneration of the people”. Influenced by Kennan’s long publicity campaign, many Americans embraced the notion that Russia was being uplifted by rays of light from the shining city upon a hill. The ideas that ordinary Russians had always been “democratic at heart” (as President Wilson asserted in April 1917), that the February revolution had created an American-inspired democratic government, and that Russians would now fight Germany with a new democratic zeal had significant impacts on U.S. foreign policy: they facilitated the U.S. entry into the Great War and influenced the massive U.S. financial support for the Provisional Government’s war effort. If Wilson and his closest advisers on Russia had not been so convinced that Russia’s democratic future had arrived they might have been more reluctant, less insistent on Russia’s continuation in the war, and more sympathetic to Russian popular desires for peace.

Americans’ high hopes soon gave way to mounting anxiety over antiwar demonstrations and the rising popularity of socialist radicals in Russia. Yet even the Bolshevist seizure of power in the fall of 1917 did not cause Kennan to lose his faith in a Russian democracy. Characterizing the Bolsheviks as German agents enabled Kennan to hold on to his belief that genuine Russians admired America and would welcome U.S. aid to help them regain their liberty. When Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who regarded Kennan as America’s foremost expert on Russia, asked in May 1918 for his advice about a possible intervention in Russia, Kennan predicted that even a small military expedition to eastern Siberia would inspire popular anti-Bolshevik uprisings that “might bring about the overthrow of the Bolshevik regime even before” the eastern intransigent Chuvash and Udmurt soldiers secured control of the Trans-Siberian Railway that summer, Kennan further predicted to Lansing that with “the overthrow of class tyranny” in eastern Siberia “the regeneration of Russia as a true democracy will begin”.

Once again Kennan’s forecast did not come true. Foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War did not bring about liberation from Bolshevism. To some extent it contributed to the Red victory by provoking a nationalist reaction and providing ammunition for Bolshevist propaganda depicting Whites as tools of their imperialist masters, including Uncle Sam. In January 1920, after the Red Army had largely defeated Admiral Kolchak’s White forces in Siberia, Kennan complained to Lansing

that the U.S. force sent to eastern Siberia had been "passive" instead of actively assisting "the loyal Russians" who fought to free Russia from Bolshevism. Yet Kennan still did not abandon his hopes. In September 1920, he called attention to an offensive by the last remaining White armies in Crimea and declared that General Wrangel's campaign "may be the beginning of a really national uprising against the despotic oligarchy which has ruled Russia for nearly three years. Even more improbably, Kennan wrote, "In Siberia such an uprising seems to be already in progress".

Kennan was not alone in predicting the demise of the Bolshevik regime. The New York Times, for example, reported on 91 occasions between November 1917 and November 1919 that the Soviet government had fallen or was about to fall. After, in August 1920 Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby issued a statement, drafted by anti-Bolshevik socialist John Spargo, that the U.S. policy of not recognizing the Soviet regime was founded in part on confidence that it did not represent the Russian people and would not endure. Although Kennan thus was not unique in seeing what he wished to see, it was especially striking that a man who had traveled so widely in Russia and learned so much about the country was so badly and persistently wrong. As Kennan's biographer commented, Kennan yearned so ardently for a liberal democracy in Russia that he was unable to accept other possible outcomes.

II. George F. Kennan and Soviet Russia

When George Kennan died in 1924, his distant relative, born on the same day and named after him, was a student at Princeton University. Although the two Kennans met only once, a strong connection developed between them. The elder Kennan, who had no children of his own, viewed his namesake almost as a surrogate son. The younger Kennan, in turn, felt destined to carry on the life work of his predecessor. After graduating from Princeton, George F. Kennan entered the U.S. Foreign Service and, with his distinguished forebear in mind, chose to study Russian. By 1931, when Kennan was completing postgraduate study of Russian language and history with Russian exiles in Berlin, he had developed definite views about the Soviet Union. The Soviet and American systems were inherently opposed, he wrote to a friend, and any attempts to find a middle ground between them, such as resuming diplomatic relations, were "bound to be unsuccessful." The conflict was so sharp, Kennan forecast, that "within twenty or thirty years either will be capitalist or we shall be communist." That prediction, which underestimated the longevity of the Soviet system by three decades, suggested that Kennan had ab-

sorbed the anti-Bolshevik outlook embodied in the Colby Note and propagated by his namesake.

The young diplomat grew less certain about the shape of the future after President Franklin Roosevelt decided to resume diplomatic relations with Russia in 1933 and the State Department sent Kennan to open the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Meeting Soviet officials who sought to reconstruct Russian life on a "finer and sounder" basis led his views of the Soviet system to become more complex than the simple, preconceived hostility he expressed in 1931. While the United States was mired in a confidence-shaking depression, the U.S.S.R. worked uncertainly under the Five Year Plans. Impressed by the vitality and energy he observed, Kennan explained to his sister in 1935 that Soviet society believed it was "going somewhere." Although he thought that belief a delusion, he confided that "some of the visions of the more intelligent communist leaders" were "impelling" and "inspiring." Witnessing the Stalinist purges, which took the lives of most of his Russian friends, re-sharpened Kennan's antipathy to the iniquity of the Soviet regime. In addition, the frustrations of dealing with the Soviet bureaucracy prompted him to reflect on how little had changed since tsarist times.

Yet as he looked back on the first years of American-Soviet diplomatic relations in 1938, Kennan felt not absolute despair but a wistful sense that U.S. diplomats' efforts to overcome "Soviet mistrust and antagonism" had failed only by a "narrow margin." In addition, he fondly remembered interactions with Soviet leaders, especially Soviet Army generals, who enjoyed association with foreigners, sought to learn from the outside world, and hoped to throw off Communist Party control, he believed. Thus, Kennan's memories of the 1930s left him with some hope that Americans could help to shape Russia's future.

When the United States and the Soviet Union became allies in the struggle against Nazi Germany many Americans hoped that a new Russia would emerge from the war as a result of a religious revival the Soviet regime committed the influence and contacts between Russians and Americans. In those years Kennan made new predictions about the future of Russia. Writing from a diplomatic post in Portugal in 1942, Kennan declared that the inevitable failure of Bolshevist attempts to replace spiritual faith with their materialistic doctrine was "obvious to all of us who have been brought up in a Christian atmosphere"—a striking statement from a man who had shown little personal interest in religion in the preceding decades. After Kennan returned to Moscow in 1944 he became increasingly excited by indications that the spirituality of the Russian people could be a foundation for opposition to Soviet totalitarianism. As the war against Germany ended he predicted...
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The "Long Telegram" has often treated as an accurate and prophetic analysis. Kennan's approved biographer, John Lewis Gaddis, for example, has written that in the aftermath of the war Kennan had "a visionary's perspective on the future" and that the telegram was "the geopolitical equivalent of a medical X-ray". Yet the prophecies were to some extent of the self-fulfilling sort. For example, his forecast that Soviet international economic policy would be dominated by the "pursuit of autarchy" disregarded the strong Kremlin interest in a large loan or other financial assistance from Washington, which would continue until the Kremlin concluded in the summer of 1947 that the Marshall Plan was designed by Kennan and others to exclude the U.S.S.R. and drive a wedge between it and its East European satellites. The fundamental flaw of the "Long Telegram" was its essentialism, its positing that Soviet policy stemmed from innate traits (insecurity, xenophobia, "oriental secretiveness and conspiracy") that made it "imperious to logic of reason". Kennan thereby downplayed and dismissed contingency and interaction in the shaping of Soviet decisions. He would soon come to regret advising that the U.S. should not bother to negotiate with the Soviet Union.

A year and a half later Kennan reiterated many of his points in an article in the prominent journal Foreign Affairs. The most famous provocation in the article — that "containment" of Soviet expansionism would lead to the break-up or mellowing of the U.S.S.R. in "ten to fifteen years" — deeply influenced U.S. public thinking about the Cold War. However, Kennan greatly underestimated the durability of the Soviet system, which began to mellow forty years later. By then Kennan believed that what most needed to be contained was "not so much the Soviet Union as the weapons race itself" and the profligate American way of life. Yet when revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 brought the demise of the Soviet empire there, Kennan wrote in his diary that he "saw it coming" and recalled his assertions in the late 1940s that "Russian Communism as an ideology had entirely lost its hold on the Soviet people." (In reality, as scholars have shown, many Russians continued to have faith in communism or socialism long after the 1940s.) Two years later, when the Soviet Union itself disintegrated, U.S. leaders claimed that "containment" worked — a claim that


"See, for example, Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (Princeton, 2005)"
has been refuted by scholars who have shown how late Soviet leaders' values and ideas, more than Western pressures, caused the Soviet collapse.39

Most important for the purposes of this essay, Kennan exaggerated the U.S. ability to promote change inside the Soviet Union. "It is entirely possible", he asserted, "for the United States to influence by its actions, including "informational activity", internal developments within Russia." That line of thinking led toward a dramatic expansion and intensification of U.S. propaganda targeting the Soviet Union, including the creation of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, both of which Kennan helped to found. U.S. "psychological warfare" and covert operations did not achieve the results Kennan expected. Instead, they alarmed the Kremlin, exacerbated communist terror campaigns, and spurred an escalation of anti-American propaganda.40 The Soviet propaganda of a widespread popular belief that the U.S.S.R. faced dangerous and insidious external enemies tended to unify the people and the government in a spirit of militant resistance.41 Yet in the last years of Stalin's rule it became an article of faith for many Americans that U.S. propaganda could make the Russian people America's allies and inspire them to revolt against the Kremlin.42

Reacting against the vogue of "liberation" in America, Kennan warned that U.S. propaganda and political warfare could be counterproductive. In 1952, upon being designated Ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Kennan explained at a press conference that a change of regime in Russia "has got to come through the efforts of the Russian people themselves and if another great country gets in and tries to bring it about and tries to tell people what to do, it's going to confuse that whole issue and perhaps to the detriment of the very things which we would like to see in Russia."43 Despite his wisdom about the need for American self-restraint, Kennan was not able to restrain himself consistently. Frustrated by the isolation of Western diplomats from contacts with Russians in Moscow, Kennan told reporters in Berlin that the situation reminded him of when he was interned in Nazi Germany after

40 Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", p. 581.
close partnerships with two liberal parties: Yabloko and Russia’s Choice. Advising or coaching leaders of those parties, McFaul had a close-up view of their weaknesses. He also observed the need to insulate Russian liberal reformers from the democratic process, through which many Russian voters expressed their dislike of the changes in their country in the 1990s, including higher prices for staples, increased unemployment, rising crime, and a rushed privatization program that enriched a small number of well-connected individuals.

In addition to being an activist, McFaul was a scholar, one of the most influential political scientists in the field of “translating” that flourished in the 1990s. Like many other translitigators, McFaul posited that Russia was in transition toward a democratic society that would more closely resemble the United States. The work of these scholars thus illustrated the observation of political scientist Ido Oren (in a different context) that “American political science is ideological, and its unacknowledged, underlying ideal is America.” As Oren explained, the ostensibly objective discourse of political science serves to reaffirm American identity in relation to other states. That function helps to explain the deep attachment of political scientists to theories that are challenged by developments that do not conform to their ideals.

In much of his academic writing, especially in the monograph that earned him tenure at Stanford, McFaul was cautious about predicting Russia’s future. In Russia’s Unfinished Revolution (2001), he acknowledged that there was no empirical reason to assume electoral democracy was a way station on the road to liberal democracy and he recognized that cultural and historical forces could sustain, liberal institutions and norms for years, even decades. However, as the title suggested, he still focused on the completion of a revolution begun in 1991. “We may have been overly optimistic to expect that a liberal democracy would be installed in the Soviet Union or Russia only a decade after political liberalization began,” he conceded. Yet he remained hopeful and closed with the prediction that “the battle for liberal democracy in Russia will be a long one.” Twenty years earlier, political scientist George Breslauer systematically analyzed five different images of the Soviet future, including “elitist liberalism,” “socialist democracy,” and “Russische fundamentalism.” In contrast, McFaul did not seriously consider any possible Russian future other than democracy.

McFaul’s commitment to the battle for democracy strongly affected his subsequent depictions of Russia and his assumptions about America’s ability to influence

the future. Late in 2001 he published an article in Foreign Affairs whose title, “America’s Real Russian Allies,” recalled the idea of the early 1990s that the U.S. could make the Russian people its ally in the Cold War struggle. Much like George F. Kennan in the 1940s, McFaul posited a divergence between the Russian people and their government, asserted that the people were more pro-American rulers, and urged an expansion of U.S. propaganda to influence Russian attitudes. Unlike Kennan in the early 1990s, who had warned that zealous intervention in politics in a foreign country could be counterproductive, McFaul disregarded the possibility of a major backlash. Underestimating Russian popular disillusionment with the United States in the wake of the 1990s turmoil, the eastward expansion of NATO, and the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, McFaul asserted that the U.S. example continued to shine brightly in Russia. In contrast to the more complex perspective in Russia’s Unfinished Revolution, McFaul and his co-author Timothy Colton downplayed the uniqueness of Russian culture and championed a triumphalist universalism reminiscent of the euphoric illusions of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

During the presidency of George W. Bush McFaul took the role of activist critic, welcoming the administration’s rhetorical commitment to the spread of democracy around the world but complaining that it did not sharply criticize President Vladimir Putin for moving Russia toward autocracy and did not do enough to promote democracy there. In numerous op-ed pieces in American newspapers, McFaul expressed his convictions in bold and simple terms. Writing for academic audiences McFaul did more to acknowledge contrasting evidence but promoted the same basic policy recommendations. In a book he wrote jointly with two Russian scholars, for example, McFaul conceded that Putin enjoyed solid, stable support while moving Russia in the wrong direction, yet he insisted that the forces of modernization and international integration eventually would push Russia in a democratic direction. In a 2005 paper on “regime change,” similarly, McFaul acknowledged that denunciation of the Russian government’s actions probably would not have made a difference, yet he urged “condemnation of Russia’s antidemocratic policies” in order to embolden reformers inside Russia who were still fighting for democracy. He asserted that U.S. silence weakened democratic forces in Russia but did not explain how U.S. words or aid could strengthen those weak forces instead of provoking a crackdown on them.

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The backlash soon began. In January 2006, for example, Putin asserted that “foreign secret services” were financing nongovernmental organizations in Russia, foreshadowing later moves to bar foreign funding of NGOs involved in politics. In the same month, Putin declared that unnamed “Soviétologists” who did not understand what was happening in Russia deserved a terse response: “To hell with you”39. In a major journal article the next year McFaul recognized that when conditions were not ripe — when local democratic activists were not strong and local media were not independent — “foreign assistance to try to foster breakthrough might even be counterproductive”. Yet his enthusiastic interpretation of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine at the end of 2004 appears to have sustained his optimism about the democratization of Russia. In Ukraine, he wrote, imports from the West, especially of election monitoring techniques and resources, had tipped the balance of power from a semi-autocratic regime to its democratic challengers. If it could happen in Ukraine, why not in Russia?40

In other publications McFaul made it clear that his universalist ambitions remained ardent and that a liberal democratic teleology continued to be central to his thinking. His ultimate goal was nothing less than to make autocracy as antiquated as imperialism and slavery. Echoing the famous proclamation by Francis Fukuyama about the “end of history” twenty years earlier, McFaul argued that there was no longer a legitimate alternative to democracy. Yet even dictators had to claim they were democratic or moving toward democracy. (This underestimated the ideological resourcefulness of authoritarian leaders, who could mobilize support precisely in resistance to the liberal universalism he championed.) In a guide for how to advance democracy abroad McFaul used “analogies from the past” to guide his “speculations about the future” and his policy prescriptions. Most notably, he argued that U.S. diplomats should see the successful engagement of General Secretary Gorbachev by President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz as a model for engaging autocratic state leaders and democratic social activists simultaneously. (This analogy neglected the differences between the conciliatory Gorbachev, who led an overstretched, declining superpower, and the defiant Putin, who led a resurgent regional power41.)

During the presidency of Barack Obama McFaul gained opportunities to implement his ideas, first as the top Russian expert on the National Security Council staff and then as U.S. Ambassador in Moscow. After the severe deterioration of U.S.—Russian relations in the last years of the Bush administration, when con-

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McFaul’s tactics did not help make Russia more democratic. Some Russian activists declared that U.S. words and actions had damaged the opposition to Putin, particularly by making it easier to depict opposition activists as pro-American subversives. Putin’s denunciations of alleged American meddling in Russia helped him to win re-election in 2012 by mobilizing working-class Russians outside the most Westernized cities. And after the election the Kremlin clamped down on NGOs, closed the U.S. Agency for International Development, and drove NDI and IRI out of the country. But none of that changed McFaul’s mind. Instead, amid one of the worst crises of the post-Soviet era, the conflict over Ukraine in 2014, McFaul asserted that the clash derived from the fact that the U.S. “did not fully win the Cold War,” called for a moral and ideological struggle like the Cold War, predicted that the United States (together with democratic-minded Russians) would “win this new conflict”, and forecast that his strategy of confrontation would hasten the demise of Putin’s autocracy.

In the wake of the costly war in Iraq and amid the windsing down of the exhausting war in Afghanistan only a few Americans shared McFaul’s zeal for a new ideological battle. On the other side, Putin seized on Western statements about domestic challenges to his rule to raise again the specter of a fifth column of traitors, while Russian approval of climbed above 80% in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm over the reunification of Crimea with Russia. However, prominent American journalists and politicians continued to depict Putin as vulnerable and to forecast his demise. For such journalists and politicians, as for McFaul, belief in a democratic future for Russia continued to be essential to the affirmation of America’s special role in the world.

Conclusion

Predictions were central to the speaking and writing of all three of the American experts on Russia discussed in this essay. In the late nineteenth century George Kennan repeatedly told stories about events in the past past — such as the celebration of the centennial of the Declaration of Independence in a Russian prison in 1876 — that he asserted revealed the likely future of a post-tsarist Russian government.

Costigliola, ed., The Kennan Diaries, p. 538; see also Gaddis, George F. Kennan, p. 654, 660.


like us", Kennan declared flatly, urging Americans to get away from the habit of condescendingly lecturing Russians about how they should govern themselves like Americans did. As Kennan recognized, though, this habit is rooted in American national identity, in Americans' tendency to see themselves "as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world". The fact that Kennan had to repeat his admonition and that after his death in 2005 it went unheeded by American democracy promoters attested to how deeply the drive to remake Russia continued to be bound up with many leading Americans' prophetic orientation and their propagation of a messianic identity for the United States.

William G. Rosenberg

Is Social Memory a "Useful Category of Historical Analysis"?

Introduction: The «Memory Industry» and my Apologies to Joan Scott

When Joan Scott presented her seminal piece on gender as "a useful category of historical analysis" at the American Historical Association meetings more than 25 years ago, gender was still commonly used by historians in the grammatical sense of classification and distinction. A still small group of feminist social historians had just begun to understand gender in terms of the social qualities associated with sex (although "constructed" was still mercifully absent from their vocabulary), and to stress, as Scott put it, "the relational aspect of normative definitions of femininity". Her discussion both of the concept and of the historiography led quickly to the additional problems of subjectivity, experience, identity, and representation — all categories that are now well reflected (some might even say over reflected) in the literature. Scott's own seminal contribution to the discussion was to suggest how gender was an essential point of entry into understandings of power and politics, and how its judicious use in these and other traditional areas of historical exploration could decode the political and social meanings embedded in various kinds of human interaction.

Like gender, social memory has had its seminal theorists, but in contrast to the ways gender opened important new avenues of historical enquiry, social memory exploded into the literature with very little analytical reflection. Despite the complexity of the concept and the inherent imprecision of the term itself, the presence

1 An earlier version of this essay was prepared for the St. Petersburg Institute of History International Colloquium on Historical Memory and Society in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, June 25–29, 2007.