

Russia and the United States: Perspectives from History— Choices for Today

Student Text



CHOICES
PROGRAM
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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Cover image credits (clockwise from top left): Reagan and Gorbachev in Reykjavik, Iceland, 1986, Courtesy of the Ronald Reagan Library; Nixon and Brezhnev, June 19, 1973, Robert Leroy Knudsen, National Archives; Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin in Tehran, Iran, in November 1943, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-32833; Obama and Putin, June 6, 2014, Pete Sousa, White House photo.

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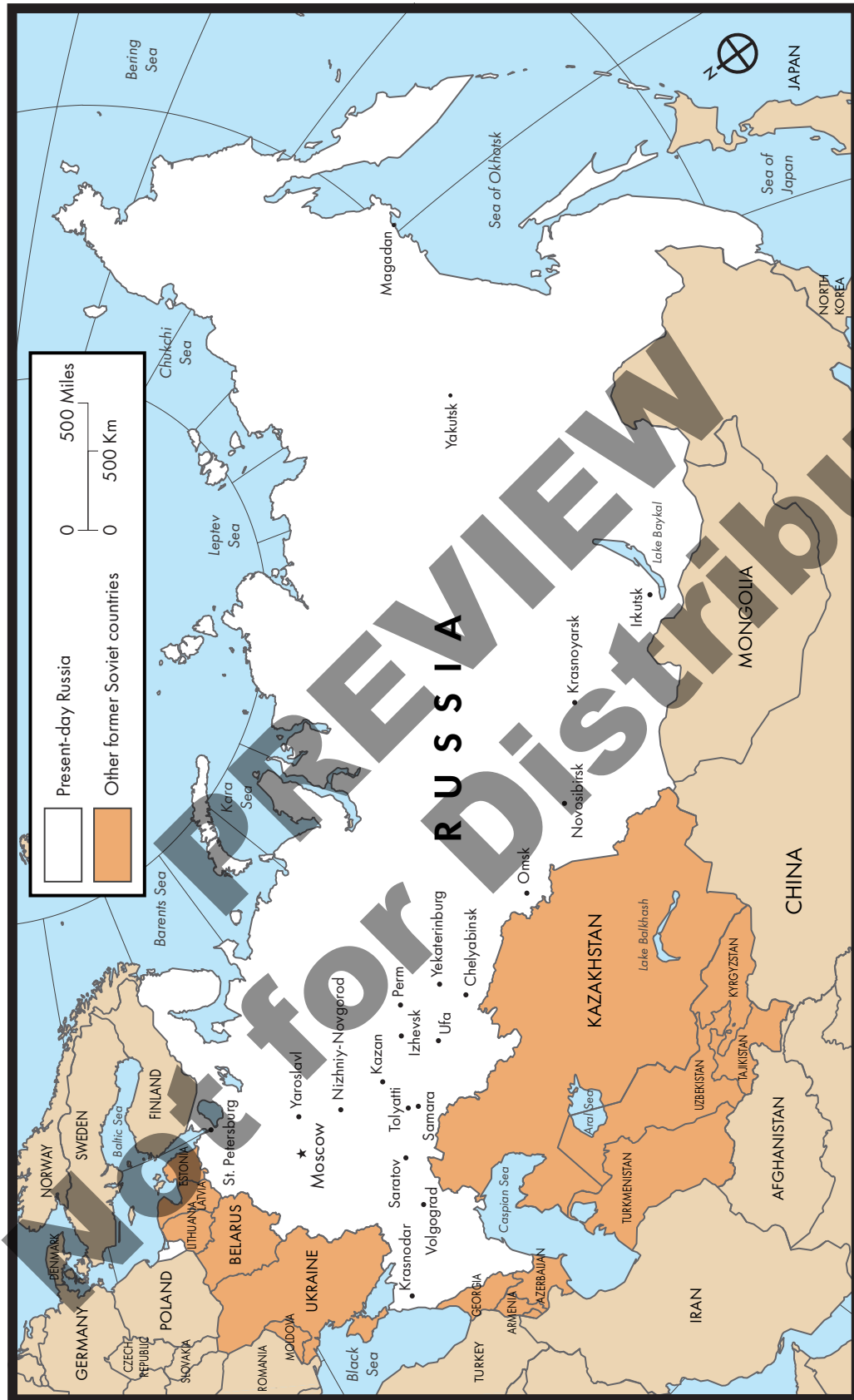
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Russia and its Neighbors Today



The Soviet Union existed for seventy years and contained fifteen republics. Each of these republics became an independent country when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991. Russia was the largest and most influential Soviet republic. The other countries are often grouped by their geographical region. **Baltic States:** Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia. **Central Asia:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia. **Eastern European States:** Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova.

Introduction: Russia and the United States

Between 1947 and 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) were locked in a struggle called the Cold War. The two superpowers built thousands of nuclear weapons capable of destroying civilization and extended their influence across the globe. The U.S.-Soviet rivalry drove the United States to create a worldwide network of alliances and a powerful military. Two generations of U.S. policymakers believed containing the spread of Soviet Communism and spreading capitalism around the world was their principal mission. The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 into fifteen independent countries marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era for U.S. foreign policy.

Today, Russia—by far the largest of the fifteen former Soviet republics—is a giant country. Russia covers one-seventh of the earth's land and has huge reserves of oil, gas, minerals, and other natural resources. Russia took control of most of the Soviet Union's powerful military as well as its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced nearly a decade of economic turmoil and political upheaval. Many Russians felt humiliated by their country's decline from a mighty superpower to a struggling country with a weak economy and ineffective government.

A short period of optimism about cooperative relations between Russia and the United States in the early 1990s gave way to increasing tensions and disagreements between the two countries.

In February 2022, Russia began a full-scale military invasion of the country of Ukraine, its neighbor and a former member of the Soviet Union. The result has been the largest war in Europe since the Second World War. The war has led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people and forced millions of Ukrainians from their homes. The United States and its European allies see the invasion as an extremely serious threat to their security and have been supplying weapons and providing training to the Ukrainian military. There are concerns that the war could spread to other countries or even lead to the use of nuclear weapons. How to address the war in Ukraine and the U.S. relationship with Russia is a matter of serious debate.

In the coming days, you will consider the U.S.-Russia relationship and take part in this debate. You will read about the long history of relations that has varied between cooperation and hostility. You will consider how the fall of the Soviet Union has affected Russia's political and economic development. Then you will consider U.S. policy toward Russia. You will grapple with the same questions that face U.S. policymakers:

- How do Russian policies affect the United States?
- What policies should the United States adopt to manage its relationship with Russia?
- Should the United States and Russia cooperate on issues like nuclear weapons, climate change, and terrorism?

Why Was It Called the Cold War?

The U.S.-Soviet conflict was called the Cold War because the two countries avoided direct military conflict with each other, which would have been a "hot war." Instead, the United States and Soviet Union built up their nuclear weapon arsenals and threatened each other with annihilation should the other try to invade or launch an attack. The United States relied on the policies of "deterrence" (threatening overwhelming force to prevent potential attacks) and "containment" (using force and diplomacy to isolate and limit potential threats from the Soviet Union) during the Cold War. Both nations also engaged in wars and military interventions around the globe in order to aid governments they supported or overthrow those they opposed. In pursuing these policies, U.S. and Soviet officials attempted to force the other nations of the world to choose a side in this sweeping global conflict.

Russia and the United States: Perspectives from History— Choices for Today

Teacher Resource Book



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U.S. and Soviet Propaganda

Objectives

Students will: Analyze portrayals of the United States on posters made in the Soviet Union.

Assess a comic book that contributed to U.S. impressions of the Soviet Union.

Consider the role of propaganda in international politics.

Required Reading

Students should have read the Introduction and Part I and completed “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Introduction and Part I” (TRB 5-6) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Part I” (TRB-7).

Videos

Short videos that you may find useful for this lesson are available at <www.choices.edu/russia>.

- “What can art reveal about history or current events?” (Professor Ian Alden Russell)
- “How do you go about analyzing a work of art?” (Professor Ian Alden Russell)

Resources

A slideshow of the images used in this lesson is available at <www.choices.edu/russia>.

“Soviet Posters of the United States” (TRB 18-21)

“A U.S. Perspective of Communism” (TRB 22-25)

In the Classroom

1. Focus Question—Write the question “What is propaganda?” on the board. Have the class brainstorm; record their ideas. Can students give examples of propaganda from history or today? Is it possible to recognize propaganda? How? Play the short video “What can art reveal about history or current events?” by Professor Ian Alden Russell. Ask students to explain what Russell means when he says, “And those images weren’t truthful representations. They were interpretations.”

2. Work in Groups—Tell students they are going to analyze U.S. and Soviet artists’ representations of communism and capitalism. Play the video “How do you go about analyzing a work of art?” by Professor Ian Alden Russell to introduce students to a framework for analysis.

Divide the class into groups of three-to-four students and distribute the handouts to each group. (You might choose one of the posters to model the analysis method of description, deduction, and speculation with the whole class.) Groups should work through and discuss the questions pertaining to each source. Have one member of each group record their group’s responses on the worksheet.

3. Share Conclusions—Ask groups to share their findings and compare answers with the other groups. Invite students to share their impressions of “Soviet Posters about the United States.” What is the overall image of U.S. society depicted in the posters? How is the role of poverty and class in the United States presented? How is the Soviet Union portrayed?

Invite students to share their impressions of the comic book, “This Godless Communism.” How does this source portray Soviet communism?

What do each of these sources have in common? How are these sources different? What do students think was the goal of the authors/artists of these sources? What emotions do the sources try to convey? Was one of the sources more effective at achieving its purpose? Why?

4. Make Connections and Discussion—Ask students what impressions they hold of the Soviet Union. What has contributed to those impressions? Ask students how public perceptions may have affected international politics during the Cold War.

Ask students what impression they hold of Russia today. Ask them to identify the sources of these impressions. For example, are they news stories, social media, or popular culture? Are students aware of impressions that Russians have of the United States today? Does propaganda play a role in forming these impressions? Challenge students to identify an argument in support of the use of

propaganda by governments and one that argues against its use.

Remind students to use evidence and concrete examples from the images, their readings, and other sources to support their claims during discussion.

Extra Challenges

1. Persuasive Writing: Have students draft a short, evidence-based, persuasive essay about one of the Soviet posters or “This Godless Communism” in response to the prompt: “This source misleads more than it enlightens.” Students should write in the third person, and gather and cite evidence from the readings and other sources.

2. Art Analysis: Have students research propaganda posters of the Cold War using the internet. Tell them to choose a poster that they find interesting or compelling. Students should prepare a short presentation for the class in which they provide a very brief overview of the image. To describe the images, students should use the method of “description, deduction, and speculation,” as explained by Professor Ian Alden Russell in the video, “How do you analyze a work of art?”

Homework

Students should read Part II and complete “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Part II” (TRB 26-27) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Part II” (TRB-28).

Soviet Posters of the United States

Instructions: Soviet films, newspapers, and posters typically portrayed an image of the United States as a society dominated by inequality, racism, poverty, and violence. Look carefully at the poster(s) your teacher has assigned you. Answer the questions on the handout. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

Poster 1

1. Description

What do you see? Provide at least five details about the poster.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. Deduction

- a. What do the details you have noticed in the poster make you think about or feel?
- b. How do the details connect to what you know about relations between the Soviet Union and the United States?

3. Speculation

- a. What do you think the artist is trying to make you think about or feel?
- b. What political, cultural, or social ideas do you think the image is trying to show? What do you think the artist's message is?

Poster 1

"Around 20 million Americans don't have the money to buy more than one liter of milk per month and six kilograms of meat per year."



Public domain via Russia Beyond.

"Only rich people enjoy abundance there, and we want abundance for everyone."

Poster 2

1. Description

What do you see? Provide at least five details about the poster.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. Deduction

- a. What do the details you have noticed in the poster make you think about or feel?
- b. How do the details connect to what you know about relations between the Soviet Union and the United States?

3. Speculation

- a. What do you think the artist is trying to make you think about or feel?
- b. What political, cultural, or social ideas do you think the image is trying to show? What do you think the artist's message is?

Poster 2

"We spread life!"



"Two worlds—
two plans"

"They sow death!"

Public domain. via Russia Beyond.

A U.S. Perspective of Communism

Instructions: The Catholic Guild published *Treasure Chest* from 1946-1971. *Treasure Chest* was a comic book designed to inspire citizenship, morality, and patriotism. It was distributed in Catholic schools throughout the United States. Below is an excerpt from a 1961 issue depicting what life in the United States might be like if it fell under communist control. Read the excerpt and answer the questions on the handout. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

Comic Strip: “This Godless Communism”

1. Description

What do you see? Provide at least five details about the comic.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. Deduction

- a. What do the details you have noticed in the comic make you think about or feel?
- b. How do the details connect to what you know about relations between the Soviet Union and the United States?

3. Speculation

- a. What do you think the artist is trying to make you think about or feel?
- b. What political, cultural, or social ideas do you think the comic strip is trying to show? What do you think the artist's message is?





