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**Choi Chatterjee and Beth Holmgren (eds.),  
*Americans Experience Russia: Encountering the Enigma, 1917 to the Present* (New York:  
Routledge, 2013, \ \$125.00). Pp. 232. isbn 978 0  
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Choi Chatterjee and Beth Holmgren (eds.), *Americans Experience Russia: Encountering the Enigma, 1917 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013, \$125.00). Pp. 232. ISBN 978 0 4158 9341 1.

This collection of essays looks back over the Russian–American relationship since the Bolshevik Revolution and reevaluates entrenched Cold War binaries with an emphasis on “lived experience, emotional interactions, and intricate social relations” (xi). The title references Winston Churchill’s frequently quoted characterization of Russia as “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma” that became axiomatic in popular, policy, and scholarly understandings of the Soviet Union. The essays in the volume, however, show that Russia was not unknown to many who shaped academic, government, and public knowledge of the Soviet experiment. Rather, Americans drew on their personal and professional lived experiences in the Soviet Union and these physical, emotional, and often highly individual encounters substantially shaped American knowledge of Russia.

The editors frame the volume as an engagement with postcolonial theories, suggesting that the US–Russian relationship can be usefully understood as part of the history of how orientalizing narratives and knowledge production shaped imperial power relationships. They crucially draw on insights from postcolonial scholarship that point to the value of highlighting on-the-ground interactions and Russians’ key role, both within Soviet Russia and in the émigré diaspora, in shaping American knowledge and of engagement with Russia. The perspective offers a significant standpoint from which to question Cold War assumptions about binary oppositions and clear separations between Soviets and Americans. These connections also suggest that positioning the Russian–American relationship as part of the history of imperial modes of relation can offer a useful addition to the field because while Americans and Russians sometimes engaged with each other on highly uneven footings, in other respects they also “long coexisted in a tense parity” that included a range of stances from alliance to antagonism (4).

Beginning with a reprinted version of David Engerman’s important essay on the development of Russian studies in the American academy, the collection is divided into five parts that thematically and roughly chronologically trace American engagements with Russia over the past hundred years. Three essays explore the foundational roles that on-the-ground experiences in Russia played in the careers and thinking of three well-known Americans: director and playwright Hallie Flanagan, diplomat and influential policymaker George Kennan, and journalist Harrison Salisbury. For example, Kennan’s intimate and emotional enchantments and disillusionments in Russia contributed to his understanding of Soviets that became seminal in shaping American Cold War policy. Two essays by the collection’s editors on Russia in American fiction and film show that in popular cultural narratives orientalist notions of difference often blended with romances that connected Russians and Americans. In the next section, American consumer culture in the years after the Second World War travels to Soviet Russia. One essay analyzes the journey of the CEO of an American brassiere company looking to expand to Russian markets as part of Cold War efforts to sell Soviets on American products, and the other looks at the complex effects that gift giving by American journalists in Moscow had on the Soviet human rights activists they covered. The fourth part of the book is composed of two

essays that reflect on how varying levels of access for research in Russia have affected two American academics' projects, one based on oral histories of Russian village women and the other a comparative work on Russian and American plutonium cities. The final section offers an interview with a documentary filmmaker and an essay by a news editor and drama critic, two personal accounts of lives that cross contemporary Russian–American boundaries.

The authors of these essays are predominantly scholars of Russian history and culture who have turned in these contributions to the study of American–Russian interactions or who offer self-reflections on their own positions as Americans studying Russia. But the collection also concludes with the interesting observations of two cultural producers who moved between Russia and the United States and includes the particularly valuable contributions of two historians of the United States' engagement with the world. The range of disciplinary perspectives, source bases, and topics covered means that this volume will appeal to scholars in several fields who study Americans, Russians, or culture and international relations. They also point to multifaceted forthcoming work on the American–Russian relationship and suggest a variety of vibrant directions for future research.

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