The Strawpeople of Russian, Eastern European, and Soviet History in English-Language TV and Film

Erica L. Fraser and Danielle C. Kinsey

Abstract • This special issue features historical scholars of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union analyzing representations of Russian and East European characters and history in contemporary Anglophone television and films, such as The Americans, Black Widow, The Great, For All Mankind, and Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga. They identify several tropes that shore up Anglophone conceptions of progressiveness, liberalism, feminism, and even whiteness in ways that put pressure on geopolitics today, which some have characterized as a second Cold War. Gender and sexuality are dominant themes through which difference between the West and Eastern Europe is commonly staged onscreen. Debate emerges on whether this is a return to twentieth-century thinking or a new vision of Russian and East European otherness.

Keywords • Cold War II, espionage on film and television, public history, Russian representation on film and television, Soviet/post-Soviet history on film and television

The idea for this special issue came out of several discussions both of us have had over the past few years about two popular and award-winning television series set in the 1980s United States. The first was The Americans (2013–2018, FX network), which follows the personal and professional lives of two embedded Soviet spies, a married couple, in Washington, DC. The second was Netflix’s thriller, Stranger Things (2016–2024). Its atmosphere was immediately identifiable to us as Gen X viewers, with kids racing through suburban streets on bicycles to share information about the secrets the adults were keeping—in this case, paranormal experimentation at a nearby military base. Both shows draw on an acute nostalgia for the late Cold War and spotlight Soviet Russian characters, but in vastly different ways. The Americans asks us as Western viewers to flip the script, with spies Elizabeth (Keri Russell) and Phillip Jennings (Matthew Rhys)—whose chosen names mirror the British royal couple and exemplify their efforts to fit in with Anglo-American society—serving as the heroes and their all-American FBI agent neighbor the enemy. The audience roots for the tragic Russians not to get caught, even though they subvert American foreign policy, destabilize the
FBI, and murder and manipulate targets in cold blood to accomplish their goals. Elizabeth’s support for socialist geopolitics never wavers while Phillip’s ideological commitment fluctuates. This throws up a lot of nuances for the audience to contemplate. *Stranger Things*, in contrast, recreates Cold War fantasy without irony or invitation to introspection: once it is revealed that the Soviets are behind it all, the protagonists gun down Soviet soldiers without a second thought. Those characters are simply the “bad guys.” What social or political work do these two takes do for their audiences in this era of renewed tension between “the West” and Russia? How might these portrayals of Russian history, Russians in history, and old Cold War tropes rebooted matter for new audiences today?

Certainly, the wider context of mass culture in the 1980s is missing from the conversation today. We remembered *Top Gun’s* faceless enemy pilots and *Star Wars’* stormtroopers as well as the onslaught of “crazy Arab” enemies in Western popular culture that Edward Said deftly critiqued, all of which belied a racist, pro-American, pro-war takeaway message not always tied to anti-Russian sentiment. But we also recalled many different anti-war messages in the 1980s as the Vietnam War generation processed its own experiences—how endless reruns of the *M*A*S*H* sitcom, movies like *War Games* and *Platoon*, and the song “99 Luftballons” complicated the picture for us, however problematic those productions were in other ways. Remember that 1986 episode of *Family Ties* when Alex P. Keaton played the Soviet chess champion and found out that Ivan Rozmirovich was a person too?, we mused. Of course, that episode did not provide a full critique of First World triumphalism, but in reflecting on the cacophony we experienced during the Cold War, we considered our Gen Z+ students today. Amid a new wave of anti-Russian sentiment on film and television in the 2000s through 2020s, what was complicating the picture for our students now? What representations of Russians and East Europeans (and their histories) are on offer in English-language television and film today? *The Americans* might have made the Russians the protagonists, or at least anti-heroes, and asked us to sympathize with them, but as several of our contributors will show, Elizabeth and Phillip Jennings were still spies who, by virtue of their ideology as well as their Russianness, could never fully understand or access Western ideals. If, as some pundits and scholars alike have called it, “Cold War II” is upon us, how do its cultural productions frame Russian and Eastern European pasts (including what now might be called Cold War I) and with what takeaway messages? Are old tropes being uncritically reanimated (such as in *Stranger Things*), did they ever go away, or are new representations developing and to what effects? And, perhaps most crucially since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, how should historians now confront Russian Otherness in Western culture? Although all the films and shows under analysis here began production before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, it haunts this special issue and is a question contributors overtly take up: when the Russian state has proven itself a vio-
lent aggressor and some Russians openly support President Vladimir V. Putin’s genocidal goal to erase Ukrainian people and culture, what is achieved by urging more nuanced understandings of specifically Russian history and Russianness in Western popular culture?

We invited this volume’s contributors to reflect on these questions with us. Their articles tackle the issue of “Russians on TV” in a variety of ways and through many different contemporary film and television case studies. We mean the “Russians” part of the special issue title facetiously, playing on the tendency of some in the West to collapse all Slavic, East European, and/or characters from communist Europe or Eurasia into the category of “Russians,” making that a shorthand for stereotyped characters who are almost always white, accented, and up to no good—or at least capable of creating chaos at any given turn. Fraser is a historian of gender and culture in the Soviet Union, and Kinsey is a historian of British imperial culture. We, along with our contributors, take an overtly historical lens to a topic for which the scant research that has been done is dominated by US media and film scholars. Of our nine contributors, five are historians of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, a perspective that shapes how those authors analyze recent American and British shows with Russian or East European characters. While some discuss the question of historical accuracy in popular culture—such as Sergei Zhuk’s contribution about The Americans that uses evidence from Ukrainian archives to reveal the reality of Soviet sleeper agents—others delve into how the characterizations of “Russians” reflect only Anglo-American stereotypes, values, and judgments. Our other four contributors come from American political science and European cultural studies, showing how interdisciplinary approaches are also crucial to understanding this moment in Anglophone media. Many of the films and shows analyzed embrace historical settings, from Catherine the Great’s St. Petersburg in the eighteenth century (in Marjorie Hilton’s article) to an “alt-history” version of the space race from the 1960s to the 1980s (from Roshanna Sylvester). Others with more contemporary settings still draw on the recent history of the 2000s and 2010s, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Together, they help us think not only about historicization but also about how film and television carry out public history roles.

In the past couple of decades, public history as a subdiscipline has begun to redefine itself to encompass the foregoing questions. No longer do we assume the historical museum as the only or even main site where the public (or many different publics) form their historical consciousnesses; similarly, we no longer imagine the academy as the keeper and producer of “real” historical knowledge and what happens outside the academy as less important or less complex. As has been argued since at least the theoretical turns of the 1980s, history is not an accumulation of objective facts and memorization of set narratives but a multivocal conversation held in multiple arenas that do not necessarily observe a public versus academic, or professional versus amateur, divide. Thus, the sites for historical storytelling are legion and
include the classroom and academic conferences, certainly, but also comic books, social media platforms, boardgames, tea towels, legislative debates, book clubs, courtrooms, television shows, podcasts, public statues, and ads on mass transit. We could argue about which of these are more politically salient; we could also argue about which present a version of the past that engages with the archive (in its broadest conception) with the most fidelity. But the fact remains that popular culture reaches the masses in a way that academic writing never will, and that some film and television producers consciously understand themselves as public historians. One famous example is Oliver Stone: in press for his revisionist and conspiracy-filled film about John F. Kennedy’s assassination, *JFK* (1991), the director called himself a “cinematic historian” and insisted he had as much claim to tell historical stories as scholars or journalists armed with evidence. The film’s distributor, Warner Brothers, took the issue even further by releasing a “*JFK Study Guide*” to US high schools to try to more permanently orient the narrative toward the film’s version of events. People are confronted with historical storytelling from all directions, it seems, and to “do” public history now is to acknowledge this “historiocopia,” as public historian Jerome De Groot has called it. De Groot notes that historical storytelling also has an important economic element to it: it is big business for entertainment industries from card games to massively multiplayer online games, from the small screen to the big screen, and in all written genres. We consume history as much as we learn it, he argues, and within that political economy, some narratives and topics sell more than others.

Another question for this special issue becomes, then, what is it about Russian and Eastern European pasts, and/or Anglophone appetites for “recognizable” Russian and East European characters, that companies like Netflix, Prime, and Hulu are trying to cash in on? Historical storytelling in for-profit entertainment, it seems, operates much like what Judith Williamson observed of the semiotics of advertising in the 1970s. “Advertisements,” she writes, “clearly produce knowledge . . . but this knowledge is always produced from something already known, that acts as a guarantee, in its anteriority, for the ‘truth’ in the ad itself.” Similarly, televisual storytelling, when it dips into history, trades on what sense of the past the viewer might be bringing to the experience as much as what insight into the past the show seeks to impart. This is grounds for the perpetuation of historical tropes, ethnic stereotypes, and what Catherine Baker, one of our contributors, calls “place-myths.” Moreover, the blurred lines between history, realism, “truth,” and fiction onscreen can have real-world repercussions. In the wake of Donald Trump’s shift from reality TV star to US president in 2016, for example, we have seen that popular culture can indeed, as scholars have argued, make politics (or history) happen. Thus, *Stranger Things* might be targeting Gen X’s nostalgia for a past they know, but it is also imparting an assumed understanding of the Cold War, and of Russian villainy, to populations who came of age in a post-Soviet world and are now experiencing
what looks like “Cold War II.” This special issue aims to provide some historical context and reflection to the continuation of and changes in Cold War tropes after 1991 and their renewed purchase (literal and figurative) in our popular culture today.

How Russians have been, and are now being, portrayed in American and British entertainment remains a small but growing academic topic. We should qualify our slippery use of Anglosphere – or Anglophone sphere, or English-language world – in this special issue by saying that we asked contributors to engage with productions originally made in English. This was done to apply some limits to the issue but also to orient it away from analyzing Russian television and film about Russian and/or Cold War history, of which there is a burgeoning literature. Oftentimes we hear about how Russian audiences were and are so “brainwashed” by state media, but we wanted this collection to begin delving into the question of how the popular shows we have seen also subject their audiences to repetitive, biased characterizations. With this mandate, our contributors chose to focus mainly on US output and to a lesser extent on UK productions. Netflix and platforms like it pull from global sources and also reach global audiences in ways that promulgate English as a global lingua franca but, given the subtitling feature for multiple languages, also complicates any definition of what actually might comprise the Anglophone sphere and/or any show’s given audience. Likewise, by choosing to focus on only television and film, not only is our Gen X-ness showing, but we understand that this issue does not truly delve into the historiocopia available to people today—TikTok, podcasts, video games, and apps we do not even know about might engender the historical consciousnesses of our students in profound ways that will not be contemplated in the pages that follow.

Three intersecting areas of historiography inform this special issue. First, the long history of Western Russophobia and politicized othering of the Russian state has built the foundations on which the contemporary film and television shows analyzed here rest. Larry Wolff’s germinal 1994 text, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, reminded Cold War scholars in particular that the roots of Russian and East European othering by the West were laid in the Enlightenment and were only refreshed, not created, by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the end of the wartime alliance in 1945. Other scholars from political science as well as history have shown that Western foreign policy and diplomacy has persistently drawn lines around Russia, not only due to anticommunism but a deeper “Orientalizing” of Russian claims to geopolitical legitimacy: Western policymakers have long viewed it as unchanging, primitive, and chaotic. “Encouraged by this view that Russia is trapped in the past,” writes James D.J. Brown, “dubious parallels are drawn between modern and historical figures, such as between Vladimir Putin and Peter the Great, Stolypin and Stalin.” Russian state actors and ordinary citizens alike in this view, having remained distant geographically and culturally from European modernity, cannot possibly take up their positions as equals. (Never
mind the copious work by scholars of Marxism and early Soviet history who have shown that the Bolsheviks considered themselves the true inheritors of Enlightenment modernity.\textsuperscript{13}

Second, we draw on the substantial history of Cold War-era Hollywood in both perpetuating and reflecting anti-Russian (largely overlapping with anticommunist) sentiment onscreen. Film and media scholars as well as historians of US culture have written about the anticommunist blacklisting of some Hollywood producers, directors, and actors in the 1950s, how iconic us-versus-them films like \textit{Rocky IV} or the \textit{James Bond} franchise positioned Soviet Russian politics, culture, and women vis-à-vis their American counterparts, and how other films like \textit{Dr. Strangelove} subverted those tropes.\textsuperscript{14} Many of those portrayals revealed just as much if not more about American politics and culture at the time than Soviet, by infusing into Russian characters everything the Western protagonist was not and constructing a “funhouse mirror” out of Russianness onscreen.\textsuperscript{15} The opening article of this volume, by Linda Beail and Lilly J. Goren, further details some of this history. Other scholars have found more nuanced portrayals than we might assume in looking back at Cold War film history or only thinking about two-dimensional characters like the robotic Ivan Drago in \textit{Rocky IV}. Not only Hollywood but also UK-produced cinema and television before 1991 occasionally subverted traditional Cold War binaries and as a result revealed much more about Anglosphere anxieties about big themes like class, race, sexuality, gender, religion, and more.\textsuperscript{16} Denise Youngblood’s contribution furthers this work by engaging with the British spy drama on Netflix, \textit{Treason} (2022). While some productions deviated from the Cold War norms, scholars have shown that those norms themselves shifted from the late 1940s through the early 1990s: as Helena and Margaret Goscilo have argued, for example, the 1985 Geneva Summit led to significant, positive changes in portrayals of Soviet Russian characters in Hollywood even in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The shifting US–Russia relations of the 1990s, moreover, also affected Anglosphere film and television, wherein 1992, 1996, and 2005 could look quite distinct on whether the Russians were friends, foes, or something in between.\textsuperscript{17}

Third, we hope our special issue will join the evolving academic conversation about portrayals of Russians onscreen since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and, more significantly, since the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000.\textsuperscript{18} Much of the work that has been done so far on this topic is by graduate students, indicating that the future of the field is in good hands.\textsuperscript{19} As Denise Youngblood points out in her article in this volume, the published scholarly literature on it is dominated not by historians but rather by communications, film, and English literature specialists. This is the case with Tatiana Prorokova-Konrad’s recent edited collection, \textit{Cold War II: Hollywood’s Renewed Obsession with Russia}, to date the only dedicated volume for this topic. Prorokova-Konrad and most of that volume’s contributors argue, as the title hints, that Hollywood in the Putin era has recreated many of the enemy tropes that dominated the first Cold War in film and television. Instead of
a conflict between communism and capitalism, Prorokova-Konrad writes, we now have “oligarchy and liberal democracy” as well as more nationalist sentiment instead of ideological.20 The “new Cold War” framework for US–Russia relations, especially since Putin returned to power after a brief, orchestrated pause in 2012, has not only come from film; multiple media sources and commenters have generated it, especially in US newsrooms looking for a familiar and simpler way to frame complex US–Russia relations.21 Prorokova-Konrad’s contributors all discuss film and shows produced in the 2010s but set during the first Cold War, adding to the built-in comparison. In contrast, only three of our eight articles in this special issue discuss films and shows with Cold War settings; the rest are set earlier in Russian history or in the present day. Moreover, with the exception of The Americans and the film Red Sparrow (2018), there is no overlap between Cold War II’s case studies and those in this special issue. We find the “new Cold War” framework both intriguing and limiting; as the articles here will show, most contemporary films and shows we have examined, while exhibiting familiar Cold War themes, are also complicated by an absence—or at least a shifting—of ideology.

Individual contributions can certainly be read as standalone articles or in any order, but we have broadly organized them into two groupings: the first five articles investigate intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality for “Russians on TV” and include multiple genres like comedy, action, musical, and docudrama, finding mixed results in evaluating whether a “Cold War II” has overtaken Anglosphere entertainment. The final three articles more overtly discuss espionage tropes and find some remarkable similarities with Cold War-era characterizations of Russians and East Europeans. Together, the articles demonstrate that while a second Cold War framework hangs over nearly every film and show discussed, the details provide much more nuance. Cold War and even imperial Russian nostalgia trade on the teleological security that the West will win, validating Western ideals and lifestyles then and now. But the nuances alive in this moment’s depictions of “Russians on TV” belie how we are not merely retreading a known path. The differences between today and the past could render very different outcomes for Cold War II, a tension that is not only palpable but profitable for screen producers: this idea is made manifest in the turn to alt-history storytelling, as intimated in Roshanna Sylvester’s contribution.

The special issue opens with the broad lens that veteran scholars of Cold War politics on film, Linda Beail and Lilly J. Goren, bring to the “Russians on TV” theme. They focus primarily on the leading women characters in The Americans (2013–2018), Killing Eve (2018–2022) and Black Widow (2021), accompanied by other recent examples of Russian women onscreen from the mid-2010s to today, and find that the “Cold War II” trope becomes particularly visible through a gendered lens. That thematic persistence has much to do with the entrenched familiarity for Anglosphere audiences of the stereotypical Russian female character: she must be sexually dangerous and a bad mother; she has often been a victim of sexual violence involving rape or
forced sterilization; and she usually embodies economic precarity. Her body belongs to the state. While these characteristics during the Cold War served to shore up counterpoint traits for US womanhood, Beail and Goren find that recycling such tropes in today’s America after the 2022 overturning of Roe vs. Wade and the increased criminalization of women’s reproductive health care takes on new meaning for contemporary audiences. It seems that Anglosphere filmmakers and showrunners, especially in the United States, need to delineate even more fiercely that state interference in women’s autonomy is something that only the “Russians” do.

From there, Marjorie Hilton takes us back to the eighteenth century and a young Empress Catherine II in *The Great* (2020–present). The show’s historical inaccuracies are legion, but rather than focusing on those, Hilton discusses the themes of “male privilege that empowers violent, misogynistic, reckless, and offensive man-children.”

Although ostensibly about Catherine, the show’s main historical deviation comes with its failure to kill off her ruling husband, Peter III, in 1762; in keeping him alive and positioning him as a cruel, hedonistic, unenlightened “bro” despot, Hilton argues, the showrunners move beyond a “Cold War II” portrayal to tap into contemporary audiences’ familiarity with the likes of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. The young empress’ navigation of a world dominated by such a violent and unpredictable form of masculinity implicitly codes the Russian past as the embodiment of these characteristics for Anglosphere audiences. The show ventures so far from “real” history, in fact, that one wonders why it is set in eighteenth-century Russia at all. The “Russianness” of the show matters, though, as Catherine’s quest to tame Peter becomes a civilizing mission where Russia is a problem to be solved by the German-born Catherine.

Katharina Wiedlack also investigates portrayals of the imperial era of Russian history by looking at contemporary shows (2018–2022) about the Romanov royal family—the last of the dynasty that ended with Nicholas II’s abdication in February 1917, with the Bolsheviks taking power after nearly a year of the political infighting that followed. Although the family was not killed directly during the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution, as many armchair historians in the West have assumed, they were indeed killed by Bolshevik agents in July 1918, fearful of Nicholas’ possible return. As Wiedlack asks in her article, why is contemporary American television so infatuated with the Romanovs and, more significantly, with their violent deaths? By examining Netflix’s docudrama *The Last Czars*, as well as the episode of *The Crown* that deals with the Romanovs’ execution and a Prime anthology series about Romanov descendants in the United States, Wiedlack argues that nostalgia for imperial Russia in the US invisibilizes Russian imperial violence in a way that consolidates white sympathy and condones Russian expansionism today. Ironically, Western modes of memorializing the tsars reflect contemporary Russian public history efforts. Both wish to identify Russianess with trauma—of a “civilized,” Westernized white elite rather than the colonial populations it exploits.
Catherine Baker also finds notable distinctions from the Cold War era in how Russian sexuality has been portrayed more recently. She brings her expertise as a cultural critic of Eurovision to the 2020 Netflix comedy-musical, *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga*. At once a love letter to the iconic annual music competition and a lampooning of it, the film features a Russian pseudo-antagonist whose song entry is awash in homoerotic lyrics and staging. Baker unpacks the film’s stereotypical yet layered portrayals of different European nationalities and contextualizes the queer Russian character by placing him in a longer history of LGBTQ+ activism by Russian performers since Moscow hosted the event in 2009. As Baker shows, a major difference from the first to a possible second Cold War on film is the twenty-first century delineation of what Mark Gevisser has called the “pink line” in global geopolitics: an LGBTQ+ affirming Europe, represented in the film by a Eurovision entrant from Iceland, counters (and counsels) a homophobic Russia.23

Continuing the special issue’s attention to comedy films and shows, my (Fraser’s) article provides a pause halfway through the volume to venture into a space where Russians are not. Having watched a few episodes of the popular but very crude US sitcom *2 Broke Girls* (2011–2017) when it first aired and noticing what seemed to be an offensive portrayal of a sexually harassing Russian cook in a Brooklyn diner, I set to writing about comedy stereotyping. But the cook was not Russian, a more careful viewing of the show revealed: he was openly Ukrainian, and his character, while still problematic, was allowed more positive characteristics (love, generosity, financial help for friends in need) than would perhaps have been possible for a sitcom portrayal of a Russian. As well, the show added a second East European character late in the first season, a Polish émigré woman who similarly was both an offensive stereotype and a postsocialist success story, a financially independent mentor to the struggling American waitresses of the title. Strolling through some late Cold War American comedy history up to the 2010s with a few of *2 Broke Girls’* contemporaries, I find that zany-but-lovable side characters could be Greek, Czech, Ukrainian, Polish, Latvian, or from completely made up but East European-coded lands, but they were not Russian. Russianness, I argue, would have negated their charm and cued the audience to prepare for trickery or danger.

Opening the unofficial espionage section of the volume, Denise Youngblood offers a useful comparison within the Anglophone sphere, as she discusses the third season of *Tom Clancy’s Jack Ryan* from Prime US in conversation with the Netflix UK drama, *Treason* (both from 2022). Although filmed before Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, both shows center US and UK fears of an acute contemporary threat from the Russian state to their intelligence and governing institutions—one from without, as much of the action of *Jack Ryan 3* takes place in an apparently malleable Czech Republic, and the other from within, as Russian operatives compromise MI6 in *Treason*. Youngblood, a historian of Cold War cinema and the Soviet film...
industry, argues convincingly that in this genre, at least, a “Cold War II” framework dominates.

The last two articles, in exploring themes not only of espionage but of distrust more broadly between Russians and Americans onscreen, reflect on the role of reified historical tropes in two shows for which the historical settings themselves are a major character. Roshanna Sylvester brings her research on the cultural effects in the USSR of the cosmonaut training programs in the 1960s and 1970s to the American show *For All Mankind* (2019–present), which offers an alt-history of the space race where the Soviets land on the moon first. Sylvester shows that the American panic so palpable in the show is not only generated from Cold War I storytelling throwbacks but the context of Russian aggression today. By steeping itself in nostalgia, the show fails to bring much nuance to this question of how today’s context differs from what happened before, perhaps setting up the audience to fatalistically accept the old proverb that history repeats itself. Sergei Zhuk draws on his deep familiarity with KGB archives in Kyiv to discuss the reality of Soviet sleeper agents as dramatized in *The Americans*. His article rightly reminds us that disruptive, violent Soviet and post-Soviet actors are not just figments of the Western Cold War imagination. More importantly, he shows that Soviet espionage policies belied pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian politics and that highlighting such spy tactics in American television implicitly shores up Putin’s “cult of Russian intelligence,” as one of Zhuk’s retired KGB interview subjects put it. Russian state aggression now, and on television as “history,” might transcend Cold War framing altogether, being of a much longer durée.

Again, we are left with the question: what is achieved by critiquing how “Russian” characters are depicted in English-language television and film? Certainly, the near-constant othering of these groups must play a role in how émigré communities across the world see themselves. Critic Tim Goodman wrote in reviewing the new sitcom *2 Broke Girls* in 2011 that, “In a TV world where the Irish and the Italians have all but given up getting pissed off about stereotypes, you have to wonder if people of Russian descent also figure to be heavy-accented thugs and goons for all of eternity.” As our contributors show, however, Russian characters are not always just the singular thug or goon; they might encompass many different characterizations but more significantly, they stand not as individuals but as representations of a real or imagined Russian state—and consistently present as a problem needing to be solved.

With more time and distance from both the Cold War and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, future scholars might find it more fitting to imagine not a first and second Cold War but rather one long engagement that continued through 2024 and beyond. This is, of course, how many historians have argued that World Wars I and II should be properly viewed as parts of a longer thirty-year war. The endurance and, indeed, purchase of tropes about chaotic and untrustworthy Russians beyond 1991 in the West suggest that the culture of the Cold War never ended, particularly in productions that
take themselves seriously as geopolitical thrillers. By revealing nuances that make today’s engagement with the Soviet past somewhat different than pre-1991 versions, the articles in this issue collectively intimate what is missing today: the debates about communism and capitalism that typified the Cold War in the first place. Finally, Baker’s contribution throws up the question of how, by centering the volume on Russia and Russians at all, we have too readily reproduced Russia-as-international-fulcrum in this analysis. Is this the legacy of Cold War acculturation? If we are to critique Russia’s aggression today, breaking out of these Cold War binaries both in storytelling generally and in professional and amateur storytelling about the past, will be crucial.

Erica L. Fraser is an associate professor in the Department of History at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and the author of Military Masculinity and Post-war Recovery in the Soviet Union (University of Toronto Press, 2019). In addition to her interest in portrayals of Slavic characters in Anglosphere television and film, she is working on how narratives of gender and sport have been formed in Soviet history.

Email: erica.fraser@carleton.ca | ORCID: 0000-0002-2919-7244

Danielle Kinsey is an associate professor in the Department of History at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, where she teaches courses on consumption and material culture, imperialism and colonialism, Britain and empire from 1688 to the present, and histories of the body. She is completing a book manuscript for McGill-Queen’s University Press about the diamond trade and the meaning of diamonds in Britain in the nineteenth century.

Email: danielle.kinsey@carleton.ca | ORCID: 0000-0003-3339-423X

Notes

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8. See Baker, this volume.


21. For a useful synopsis of the genesis of some of the “new Cold War” terminology in American media in the last decade, see Vesta Silva and Jon Wiebel, “The Warm Glow of Cold War Nostalgia,” in *Cold War II:* 29–48, here 34–35.

22. See Hilton, this volume.


24. See Zhuk, this volume.
