

Russian Stereotypes in American Films and How They Have Changed Since the End of the Cold War

Or: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Find a New Russian Image

“He’s bent as the Soviet sickle, and his heart is the hammer that crosses it.”

-Snatch

“Who started it?” “I don’t know, two toughest kids on the block, sooner or later it was going to happen.”

-Red Dawn

“We have to choose someone to face off against besides the Russians every time.”

-The Sum of All Fears

“I said, premier Kissov is a degenerate, atheist, commie!”

-Dr. Strangelove

We live in a world of stereotype. From how we judge those in our own country to those across the ocean, we use certain preconceived ideas about people we have never met in order to allow ourselves to more easily judge and characterize individuals and entire populations.

Stereotypes allow us to more easily class members of a group that we have likely had very little contact with, thus allowing us to feel as if we know something about them (Hinner, 49). While stereotypes are more often negative than not, they do reveal some interesting insights into the minds of the people who create and follow them. Some of the more interesting and relatively recently changing stereotypes held by Americans, are those towards Russia and Russians.

America and Russia share a long history of poor relations, vilifying of the other country, and the cultural stereotypes that came out of this. From the Cold War era villain or seductress-spy, to the nineties’ emphasis on relatability and unification, Russia and her people have held many roles.

There are many ways to examine and further dissect exactly what each of these many stereotypes meant at each stage of history, but for the purposes of this project, film will be the focus of study,

as it is much more than just a source of entertainment. Film has become a source of information that penetrates every region and class of culture, and a powerful purveyor of stereotype. This is why the focus of my research is American films and the evolving stereotypes of Russians in them.

What is particularly interesting about films is how they filter our view of the world. When we watch films we are essentially watching someone else's interpretation of culture, their view of how the world and the people in it work. Where this is most evident is in films written for "mass appeal," "blockbusters," or Hollywood films, because of the audience they must appeal to. When we watch a play, we are given a view into the mind of either one person, or a very small group of people who wrote the play, who are also writing for a small audience. When we see an independent film, the number of people consulted in the writing of the story expands slightly, and the need to appeal to a larger audience grows. When we watch a Hollywood movie, we are exposed not just to the world view of one writer, or a team of script advisors, but also to the board of individuals funding the film who, in order to draw as large a crowd as possible, produce for us what they think we want to see and already believe. So essentially, studying the views in large films allows us to study the general – if slightly exaggerated – views of a society at that period in time. Of particular note to this argument is the fact that, as Elizabeth M. Goering mentions in her article, many Cold War era Americans had never met a Russian, and so their entire experience with Russian culture was based on what they saw in the media, meaning that in large part films from this period were not just a mirror of society's views, but the primary source. As Arthur K. Davis says in his paper: "...ignorance of Russia left American attitudes towards the Soviet Union predominantly unstructured, so that a relatively small stimulus could have a large effect on public opinion," and this is where films come in. While there is no longer

a dividing iron curtain between the two countries blocking communication, it still holds true that many current Americans have never met a Russian, and so their views are still heavily influenced by the media, meaning that movies are even now a very valid mode of examination.

Even with this explanation, it may be asked why I did not choose to study stereotype as portrayed in television, comics, or video games. Putting aside the fact that this would greatly expand the scope of my topic, there are also more specific reasons. While television does reach as wide of an audience as films, it is more difficult to find a wide enough range of shows that the majority of Americans have seen, in addition to the fact that television has the capability to be more fluid due to there being multiple episodes and seasons, so it does not provide as clear of a snap shot of stereotype at a specific point in time as films do. I have decided not to study comics due to the fact that while they do demonstrate many stereotypes, they also reach a much smaller audience, with a background and tradition that is unfamiliar to the greater number of Americans (myself included) than is the case with films. Finally, I am not studying stereotype in video games due to the fact that while it is a very ripe area for stereotype research, it has a similar problem to comics in that it does not reach as large of an audience as films and has its own subculture that would need to be researched and studied in detail before usable inferences could be drawn. In addition, video games with characters of a recognizable culture have only been around since the late 80s, greatly limiting the time period under study. For all these reasons, film is the best source of information.

In this study, I examine the portrayal of Russians in English language films from the sixties to the current year. In doing so, I investigate the cultural stereotypes of the West with regard to Russians and Russia, and how these have changed over time. I also examine the role of Russians as villains, a part which Russians have filled quite frequently in films, and still do,

although in a different capacity. As an important part of my research, I have conducted a non-scientific survey of individuals of different ages (and thus, with exposure to different decade-related stereotypes) to gain a better understanding of the modern American's stereotypes regarding Russians, and which films involving Russian characters have remained in the public consciousness most clearly – signifying how influential these films may have been on the formation of those stereotypes. In doing all this, I hope to track the progression of the Russian stereotype through film over time, and where it is now.

Literature review and questions raised

Before beginning my research, I first conducted a literature review on articles covering such topics as the purpose and power of stereotypes overall, stereotypes specifically held regarding Russians, and the different ways in which cultural stereotypes are applied to men as opposed to women. In searching for studies that may have previously been done on the stereotypes of Russians in American films, and how these stereotypes had changed from the end of the eighties to the current time, I came up surprisingly short. I found only one article directly covering the topic of the changing Russian stereotype in film, and one other which covered a meeting between Russian and American film makers in 1987. The first study examined only highly grossing films from the nineties, and found in its preliminary results that the image of Russians in film was becoming more diverse (Goering). In the Cold War period, Goering states, Russians in films were almost always part of the military, spies, or members of the government. After the Cold War, Russians could be seen as “taxi drivers, nurses, doctors, journalists, school teachers, hookers, engineers, fighters, dancers, writers, reporters, hearse drivers, pilots, translators, accountants,” and so on (Goering). Russians as a cohesive group had lost some of their reconizability, and could now be anyone (Goering). Recall, however, that this paper was

written in early 2000, allowing plenty of time for Russian stereotype to evolve yet again. The second article describes a meeting between Russian and American film-makers, with both sides readily admitting that they over-use stereotypes. One of the American film makers even states: “We outstereotyped you” (Harmetz C.19). A co-producer of *Rocky IV* states: “It’s common in melodrama to represent characters in one-sided fashion.” (Harmetz C.19). It is out of this habit that many stereotypes arise. People who have little knowledge of a culture are given the same one-dimensional depictions over and over, until they begin to believe that that actually is what a certain culture is like. As another-film maker states: “You need worthy villains,” and at the time, Russians were the ideal villains (Harmetz C.19).

This raises the question of why Russians were almost always portrayed as the villain in movies from the sixties to the eighties. The obvious answer, of course is because we were in a Cold War with the country, and so felt as if they were threatening us frequently, but this does not explain why almost every movie that required “bad guys” until the late eighties had to have a Russian; there were multiple other hostile cultures. In Davis’ paper “Some Sources of American Hostility to Russia,” the author discusses this. According to Davis, there were the obvious economic and political reasons, in addition to sociological reasons, why America was hostile towards Russia. We felt threatened by their attitudes towards property and women’s rights, their lack of value for Calvinism-based “radical individualism,” which Americans valued so highly, lower unemployment, their atheism, and many other traits (Davis, 176). America wanted to glorify its own ideals and bolster its national ego, and as Davis says, one of the best ways to do this, was “by playing down a potential rival.” (Davis, 177) In other words, by making Russia seem weak, backwards, and able to be dominated by the U.S.

This idea of American domination of Russia can also be seen in the difference of the stereotypes held for Russian men in comparison to Russian women. It has long been known (Gal and Kligman, 15), that women are seen as a keeper of a country's purity, and that when two countries are at war, soldiers will often rape the women of the other country in order to demoralize the country and assert their home nation's dominance (Gal and Kligman, 15). This, to a less violent extent, can be seen in films, where often weak Russian women are seen submitting to powerful American men. This base urge could be a large part of the reason why Russian women are often portrayed as very sexy and alluring, while this does not hold true for the men. Additionally, in Eagly and Kite's paper on how the application of stereotypes varies by gender, the authors find that cultural stereotypes in general are closer to those stereotypes held of men, whereas women are generally seen as weaker, with their country's stereotypes also applying to them less strongly. These two points together could very easily be the basis for the stereotype of Russian women being incredibly attractive and in need of rescue from their harsh country and men. However, the image of weakness is completely reversed when the woman buys into Communist ideals, and also quite often when she is old and has lost her "feminine traits," two aspects which are often portrayed as evil in film. Russian men, however, have very defined stereotypes. Until the end of the Cold War they were seen (and Russians in general were seen) as disciplined, serious, strong, cold, restrained, obedient, hardworking, proud, oppressed, orderly, secretive, conniving, conservative, competitive, patriotic, rigid, intelligent, conforming, traditional, never-give-up, uncivilized, and godless (Stephan, Ageyev, Stephan, Abalakina, Stefanenko, and Coates-Shrider, 57; Eagly, Alice H., and Mary E. Kite; Goering, Elizabeth M). Russians were spies, KGB officers, and enigmas, and Russia was a harsh, mysterious land where it was constantly snowing and everyone wore shapkas and headscarves. The question is, has this

changed since the end of the Cold War? Are Russians in films portrayed differently now? And are their new stereotypes any more positive than their old ones were?

Methods

In compiling a list of appropriate movies spanning five decades, I used two different approaches. For the first method, in order to obtain both well-known movie titles and current views on both Russia and Russians, I conducted a non-scientific poll of 48 individuals from the ages of 14 to 73, with 22 being females and 26 males. There were only two questions: “What do you think of when you think of Russia/Russians?” and “What are some movies you have seen with Russian characters?” There were 11 people in the 14-20 range, 24 in the 21-30 range, 4 in the 31-40 range, 3 in the 41-50 range, 4 in the 51-60 range, and 1 in the 71-73 range. I surveyed multiple age groups in order to both create a more comprehensive (although again, non-scientific) data set, gain a wider selection of potential movies, and to determine if there was a variation in views of Russians between the different age groups. From this, I found that the general American today imagines Russia to be cold and snowy, and have a long and bloody history, with slightly fewer people responding that they also thought of political corruption. The general view of the Russian people was that they were drinkers, poor, the same as Americans, had noticeable accents, were “badasses,” very intelligent, hard-working, and friendly. These results helped contribute to the information gained from the articles on stereotype mentioned above. The people polled in this survey also expressed a wide range of stereotypes, so wide in fact, that almost every stereotype in each film reviewed in this paper was mentioned at least once, and a trait that had five or more responses became significant. In addition to this, some people (6) expressed the opinion that a question on stereotype was too general for them to answer, as they did not know any Russians personally, had ever met any, and that Russia was too

large of a country with too many people to characterize simply. They stated that they knew the views of Russia had changed greatly since the 80s, but that they also wanted to reserve judgment until they had actually met a Russian. However, such a view was not the norm, and thus stereotypes still exist. Another answer that also came up occasionally (5) in response to films involving Russians, was that the individual could not think of any films they had seen with Russia characters. As there are still a large number of Russian characters in large, modern films, it is unlikely that the person had not seen any Russian characters, but rather that they either did not remember the character at all, or they did not remember that the character was meant to be Russian. This, in itself, is also an interesting result, as it demonstrates so great an unfamiliarity with the stereotyped character traits of Russians on either the part of the viewer or the movie maker as to not be able to recognize a Russian as anything greater than vaguely Eastern European.

For the second method of compiling a list of films with a Russian theme, I used the Internet Movie Database (IMDB). This site contains information on 2,262,638 movies and has a very extensive search function (imdb.com). In conducting my searches, I used the title search function, narrowed my results to one decade at a time (e.g. 1960-69, 1980-89, etc.) in matching with the layout of my paper, and selected only English language movies with a Russian theme. Once this list came up, I then organized the results by US box office gross to ensure that I selected movies that had been seen by the majority of people (this idea was modified from that found in the paper by Goering). I combined the information gained from both this method and the above mentioned to develop a list of movies that had either grossed greater than \$35 million or had a cult following/had been mentioned frequently in survey results. The end list resulted in

20 movies, with an average of four from each decade, which can be found at the end of this paper.

At this point, I should also mention those movies I excluded, and why I did so. I have excluded the entire decade of the 70s, due to the fact that the IMDB results listed only one film involving Russia grossing above \$35 million and additionally, no one polled mentioned any movies from the 70s. Perhaps this is due to the shifting focus of that decade to Vietnam. The reason why I have also excluded the one result from the 70s, is due to the fact that it was a James Bond film, and these films create an issue if I include all of them. In every single decade, at least one, if not two, Bond films appeared among the top of the results. As the Bond films are based on a book series written mostly in the 50s and 60s, I do not feel that they reflect the changing stereotypes of the proceeding decades well, and so I do not consider them relevant to my research. Additionally, if I were to include every Bond film that came up in the results in this paper, then I would not be writing on the stereotypes present in films, so much as those present in the James Bond universe, which is perhaps the scope of another paper. Furthermore, while many people surveyed (17) did mention the Bond films, most simply said that they knew some of the films contained Russians, or specified *From Russia With Love* or *GoldenEye*, both of which are covered in this paper. For this reason, I have only picked a small selection of the Bond films. Initially, I also had qualms about including any movies based on books not written in the same decade that the movie version was produced. However, since it both says something interesting about our society that we continue to make movies off of books written in the 60s (perhaps, for modern remakes, this means that we miss aspects of Russia as our enemy), and since many of these movies have been adjusted suitably from their book form to be relevant to

the modern day, a few of these films remained on the list. All in all, I believe that these methods and exclusions resulted in a very satisfactory selection of films.

The 60s

The 60s was the decade of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the decade when school children routinely saw instructions during their morning classes on how to duck and cover in case of a nuclear detonation and parents were digging bunkers. It was understandably one of the hottest points during the Cold War, and the fear of that period was often reflected in film. In accordance with the methods described above, four films were picked for examination from this time period: *From Russia With Love* (1963), *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), and *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!* (1966). These films have some understandable differences considering their differing genres, and so each will be examined individually.

The first film is an action film, and not just any action film, but a James Bond film, and so we have certain expectations about how good and evil will be portrayed, as well as the depth of the characters. In the film there are two main Russian characters, with the possibility of a third who is the assassin, although his nationality is never made clear. The problem of determining who is and is not Russian actually comes up frequently across the spectrum of movies, with terrible accents and ambiguous European origins often being the main culprit of this confusion. In this Bond film however, we can be sure that at least two of the characters are Russian. These two characters are both women, and portray two of the most well-known stereotypes of Russian women well.

The audience is first introduced to the older, and crueller of the two Russian women (Rosa Klebb). She formerly worked for the KGB, and is now doing “evil freelance,” accepting a job

from the enemy organization throughout the majority of the Bond films, SPECTER. In her initial interview she is very cold and clearly enjoys violence, punching the assassin she is hiring, without any warning, in the stomach with brass knuckles in order to test him. She is short, stout, unattractive, and clearly conniving. She is what American men often describe as their idea of old Russian women, but without the headscarf. In contrast, there is the young Russian woman (Tatiana Romanov) that this older agent hires in order to seduce Bond and distract him. She is beautiful, and was going to be a ballerina before she became too tall and started working for the Soviet Army Intelligence instead. She has had three previous lovers (a point which may have been slightly more scandalous in the 60s), and the older agent makes it clear that she is expected to use her body to trick Bond. When Tanya questions what will happen to her if she does not accept this assignment, Klebb states, with a smile on her face, that she will be shot. This interaction not only illustrates the cruelty of the older character, but also the idea that young Russian women are willing to be sexual objects. While in our first introduction to Tanya she is portrayed as slightly crafty and unafraid to stand up for herself, this disappears as soon as she meets Bond, and she becomes meek and easily controlled. While it could be argued that this is because she is playing a role, this does not appear to be the case, as after she defects and willingly gives all of her secrets to Bond, she is still nothing more than a pretty character that can do nothing more than stay in a corner and tremble in times of danger. It would appear that meeting Bond (a strong Western man) has caused her to become nothing more than a weak female constantly in need of protection. As mentioned briefly in the above literature review, Bond's dominance over Tanya could be seen as Western dominance over Russia, thus making such a change in Tanya's character make more sense.

In addition to these two Russian characters, there is also the brief, and humorous, depiction of Russian belief in the superiority of their technology when a random Russian male states that “Russian clocks are always correct” just before the Soviet Army Intelligence center blows up. Thus rounding off a large selection of stereotypes.

For the next film, there is the extremely well known, and extremely quotable, *Dr. Strangelove*. Rather than having main Russian characters, *Dr. Strangelove* depicts an overblown version of the attitude of the American people to Russia in general. In the words of the director, *Dr. Strangelove* is a “nuclear war comedy” which takes the thinking of the time to an extreme, but still portrays the attitude and fears of the American people well. In the film, a high-ranking general goes insane, believing that the “Commies” are polluting and sapping the American people’s “precious bodily fluids.” In a monolog rife with stereotypes he says:

“Have you ever seen a Commie drink a glass of water?... Vodka. That’s what they drink, isn’t it. Never water... On no account will a Commie ever drink water, and not without good reason... As human beings, you and I need fresh, pure water to replenish our bodily fluid... Do you see what I’m getting at?”

Indeed, we do see what the general is getting at. In addition to using the old stereotype that Russians drink nothing but vodka, he heavily implies that Russians are not even human, that they are not like Americans on even a basic level. They are completely unrelatable. It is this same general who orders a nuclear strike on Russia, giving his fighter pilots an order which means that Russia has already bombed the US, and we are now retaliating. The fighter pilots are impossible to get in contact with, and a meeting with the president and other high ranking officials is held in the war room, where it is made clear exactly how powerful Russia is: “[if] we have done nothing further to suppress their retaliatory capabilities, we will suffer virtual annihilation.” The

American president finally calls the Russian one, and the immaturity of both nations and their feud is characterized by their phone conversation: “Of course I like to call and just say hello... I am as sorry as you are, Dimitri. Don’t say you’re capable of being sorrier than I am.” In this case, Russians (and Americans) are given the stereotype of being petty, childish, and emotional. Another military man in the room, one who is characterized as an extremely manly American, is constantly hostile towards the Russian ambassador in the room and Russians in general. When the ambassador is allowed in the war room, he declaims: “You’re going to let that lousy, Commie punk vomit all over us like this?” And then wrestles the man to the ground when he thinks he sees a hidden camera. When talking about the possibility of the Russians having a doomsday machine, he insults them:

“The Russkie talks big, but frankly, we think he’s short of know-how. You just can’t expect a bunch of ignorant peons to understand a machine like some of our boys, and that’s not meant as an insult mister ambassador. I mean, you take your average Russkie, we all know how much guts he’s got. Hell, hell, look at all of them the Nazis killed off, and they still wouldn’t quit.”

These are the views of a “manly man” of the 60s. While he does acknowledge that Russians are brave, he also calls them “Commie punks,” and talks about them as if they are horrible, stupid, not as good as Americans, trying to take control, and (as seen in one of the quotes at the top of this paper) degenerate atheists. These viewpoints are exactly what Davis described in his paper, with Russians being downplayed and insulted to make our nation feel more powerful, despite the fact that it was very obvious that Russia was just as powerful as us in many ways, otherwise the US would not have felt nearly so threatened by them. The seemingly never ending race between our two countries is emphasized even further at the end of the movie. When nuclear war is seen

as absolutely inevitable, and the option of the American population living in mine shafts is discussed, that same all-American military man cries “We must not allow a mine shaft gap!”, summing up how laughable the entire situation of the 60s would be, if it were not so serious.

The third film from the 60s is of an entirely different breed, one which was almost not included simply because it was so unlike any of the others. However, it was also among the most common answers given (7) by people surveyed when asked which Russian films they had seen, and so clearly has had a large impact on the formation of the image of Russians. This film is *Doctor Zhivago*. In addition to being based on a great work of Russian literature, *Doctor Zhivago* is also the longest film among those studied in this paper (perhaps the longest English-language film on Russia), contributing to the idea of Russian works being epics. Very common (8) among the views of American people today was the idea that Russia was very poor off, that life there was often sad, or that the people needed help in some way. Throughout the Cold War this view was also present when Americans portrayed pre-revolution Russia, or our government wished to be seen as the “good guy” in the conflict, pitying their poor, fallen allies of World War II and further demonizing the Communist government for destroying its people. For the 60s, this view was accomplished via the film *Doctor Zhivago*. While it is very true that *Doctor Zhivago* is a sad book in its own right and was written by a Russian author, giving one the impression that the film could not be blamed overly for stereotype, it is the aspects of the film which diverge slightly or take creative license in imagery that are particularly interesting to examine. Instead of opening with the death of the male lead’s (Yurii’s) mother, the film begins at the end of the novel, in an overcrowded and grey factory where the workers wait in lines and look unhappy. Before the revolution, Russia is portrayed as a fairly cheerful and enjoyable place, and Russians as very respectable. Even the female lead’s (Lara’s) mother, who in the book came across as

slightly disgraceful, is seen as respectable in the film. The only discordant notes come from those trying to rally the people to revolution (in a manner more than passingly reminiscent of how protestors in America during the 60s behaved themselves, perhaps as a subtle warning to moviegoers). After the revolution, however, everything in the country is in turmoil, everyone is poor, there is violence, and somehow everything in Russia has turned black, as if covered with soot. While it is true that the revolutionary period was extremely tumultuous for the Russian people, it is the fact that this movie was produced in the 60s, allowing Americans to pity Russians and discount them as equals at a time of high tension, and the way that the movie portrays the atmosphere that ring of stereotype. In the novel *Doctor Zhivago*, two of the multiple themes that are emphasized are the ties between people and the joy of working with one's own hands. In the film, a major emphasis is put on how cruel people are in the new system. Yurii and his wife's (Tonia's) housemates steal from them, implying heavily that they were spoiled bourgeoisie. Yurii is constantly "noticed" (i.e. threatened) at a much earlier stage and more obviously in the film, and generally watched. It is not apparent whether the directors put this into the movie as propaganda, or if they simply assumed that this was what Russia must have been like at the time, but the end result still portrays communist Russia and those that buy into her ideals as being much harsher than it ever was in the novel. Hilariously contributing to the stereotype of Russians drinking vodka all the time, Yurii and his family still appear to have vodka even after most of their other food is long gone, and for some reason on the train to Yuriatin, people begin traditionally dancing in the train car. This is also the first film from the 60s in this paper where we actually see Russia, and so the first time among many where we will see the country portrayed as a cold, grey place where it is constantly snowing. While this is a very good film, and demonstrates the fact that Americans of the 60s (and today) still saw Russia

as literary country, it also strongly portrayed Russia as a backwards and sorrowful country suffering under Communism.

The last film from the 60s, is *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!* This film is a comedy that, rather than portray the Russians as evil, demonstrates the fear and panic of the time that could be invoked by even a whiff of Russians. In this film a Russian submarine grounds itself off the coast of New England, and sends a small group of men to land in order to find a boat to dislodge them. The Russians, aside from having very thick accents, are extremely nervous at being in America, and so do everything in a sneaky manner, not helping their stereotype. They do, however, eventually reveal themselves, leading to an escalating series of events. They first meet a family with a little boy who continually shouts that they should shoot the Russians, and that his father is a traitor for talking to them without even having been tortured – clearly a child who has watched far too much TV and is perhaps a representation of the views of gung-ho men of the time. The family, which had previously seen the Russians’ problem clearly, go crazy when they feel threatened and attack one of the Russian sailors left with them, demonstrating American’s reaction to feeling threatened vividly. The Russians then continue their search for a boat, wandering around the island and encountering various others. When an old lady comes out of her house and sees men in dark outfits with guns, she immediately assumes they are Russians and runs back into her house, believing that mysterious men on her lawn must be Russians. When others hear that there are Russians in town, they start worrying that they might start burning, looting, raping. The Russians are like bogeymen. The people express their worst fears, and then believe they are true. Suddenly the townspeople are sure that the Russians have parachuted in, captured the airport, and now have control of all the radio stations. That “the whole dang island is under attack” when not one of them has actually seen a

Russian. They form a militia, and then worry that they don't have enough guns, mirroring the arms race. Meanwhile, the Russians have done nothing more than argue about classical composers when passing a church, hid in a building for fear of being shot, and cut telephone lines. This film was clearly made to demonstrate the fear mongering of the 60s, with the Russians being portrayed as very human, and what fear can do to a culture being made blindingly obvious. Because the Russians are portrayed fairly positively when characters in the film get a chance to know them, it is likely that most Americans who saw this film realized on some level that the Russians were not all evil. For those who watched a particularly large number of action movies, however, this would have been harder to realize, as they were constantly presented with one-dimensional views of Russians.

Thus the 60s saw a large number of images of hostile, threatening Russians, cold and unemotional ones, spies, KGB members, Russians with a desire for violence, the crafty or sneaky Russian, and a Russia buried under snow and destroyed by Communism. However, towards the end of the decade Russians were portrayed as relatable slightly more often, and the awareness of our own stereotypes and fear was reflected back at us. On the other hand, relations between the US and the Soviet Union were still not at their best, and Russians were very easy to cast as villains in films, so the use of Russia as "the enemy" in film continued.

The 80s

The 80s was a period rife with muscle enhancement, a desire for explosions in film, and a need for non-complexly imagined villains. And so unsurprisingly, three of the four movies from the 80s are action films, with only one of them being a children's film. These films are: *Red Dawn* (1984), *Rocky IV* (1985), *An American Tail* (1986), and *Red Heat* (1988).

Red Dawn is perhaps one of the most violent films produced in the 80s. Its basic plot is that Russians invade the US, landing in a high school football field in Colorado as one of their major points of attack, and it is up to a group of escaped high school students to stop them. Despite this sounding like a B movie, it was actually a very highly grossing film with a re-make now in theaters. Needless to say, this movie depicts Russians very one dimensionally. They are evil, and nothing else. The invading Russians shoot down children and school teachers indiscriminately, blow up everything (including random patches of field), and are generally killing machines that do not stop to ask questions. When the kids sneak back into the city after a month, the Russians are not smart enough to catch them even though they are looking for them, despite the fact that the kids continually walk around in public without cover, and visit a shop and a prison camp where the people shout their names. Despite this, the Russians are also smart enough to capture and hold a city for months on end. At the prison camp, they beat the people and force them to listen to anti-American propaganda. They try to rape some of the girls, kill a crowd of Americans for singing "Oh, Beautiful," and the only words they ever say in English are either "Go die, Yankee!" or "Hey! Pretty girl!" When the small group of teenagers then begin attacking the Russians part way through the movie, the Russians are somehow unable to defend themselves, and lose hundreds of men and large numbers of supplies over a few months' time. Russians are portrayed as incompetent, stupid, blood thirsty pigs, and the entire point of the movie seems to be to blow up the Russians as many times as possible. This movie assumed that Russians were pure evil, and so that was what millions of people around the US in the early 80s saw: killing machines who hated America. There is no attempt at reflection, no attempt at a peaceful future, only hate.

The second movie of this time period is yet another action film which portrays Russians at a very shallow level, and yet, it is also one of the best known films with a Russian character. This film is *Rocky IV*, which many people surveyed (6) mentioned. Also known as “that film where Rocky fought the Russian,” it is part of the Rocky Balboa series on a lovable boxer who fights brilliantly. This film is less thoughtless than the last one, but still portrays the main Russian character as a killing machine – actually killing Rocky’s best friend in a fight. The Russian boxer (“creatively” named Ivan) is stated to be “invading US sports,” and for some reason steps off the plane in America wearing a Soviet police uniform. He is very serious, and very quiet, hardly saying more than five heavily accented sentences throughout the whole movie, two of such gems being “You will lose” and “I will break you” – showing that Russians all apparently speak in short, vaguely threatening sentences. As a replacement for Ivan’s silence, his wife speaks for him in almost everything. She is beautiful, and has hardly any Russian accent at all, which often seems to be the case in films. Russian men are expected to have heavy accents because (again relating to one of the arguments in the literature review section) they are more strongly identified with their country’s culture, whereas women are thought of more generally. At one point, the wife voices how Americans see Russians at a press conference, and is greeted by boos: “You have this belief, that you are better than us. You have this belief that your country is so very good, and we are so very bad. You have this belief that you are so fair, and we are so very crude.” With the passage of only one year, there is already acknowledgment in an action movie that the situation and stereotypes between America and the Soviet Union are more complicated than some might like to believe, and this can be seen as progress.

In addition to the above stereotypes, there is also a very strong vein of technological superiority running through the movie. The Russian boxer is seen constantly training with the

latest technology, having his vitals measured, and possibly even taking steroids. This is in contrast to Rocky who travels to Russia (arriving in the middle of a snow storm, naturally) to train at a dacha in the middle of what is potentially Siberia with nothing other than his own body and hard work. Through this dichotomy, it is almost as if the film-makers are saying that Russians have lost sight of Russia. Also appearing in this film for the first time is a stereotype which will continue in future films, the idea that all Russians know how to play chess.

Despite being under constant government surveillance while training, Rocky manages to make it to the fight, and half way through the fight, has the entire crowd of Russians cheering for him rather than their own boxer. It seems to be implied here that Russians are easily swayed away from communism, and that they want American values. This idea is further reinforced after Rocky wins the match, and the producers turn him into a political puppet: "During this fight, I saw a lot of changing... what I'm trying to say is, if I can change, then you can change. Everyone can change!" So while expressing the common stereotypes of Russia and Russians being cold, of them being silent, involved with the government or military, violent, and technologically advanced, this film is also working towards a peaceful resolution of the hostility between the two countries, although in a way that is insulting to Russians. Nevertheless, this action film begins to show a change starting in the 80s.

In a completely different vein from the last two films, there is the children's film *An American Tail*. While this, as a children's film, does not deeply delve into any complex political issues, it does continue the tradition of films about how poor and badly off Russians are in Russia. This film is about a family of mice living in Russia in the mid-eighteen hundreds, who want to escape because of the violent Cossack cats (Cossacks as villains will appear again in later decades, so this is something to pay attention to). The best place for them to go to escape

the violence and poverty of their home country is, of course, the United States. This film also continues another tradition, in making it almost impossible to tell the Russian mice apart from any other Eastern European group. Upon arriving in America, their identity as Russians becomes even harder to pin, as they disappear into American culture with hardly a remnant of their old identity. While just a children's film, this movie does still portray stereotypes, and stereotypes that will be passed down to young children. Children from the period when this movie came out would have remembered Russians as either poor and in need of help, or else not have remembered that the mice were Russian at all, and assumed that their cultural identity was not important.

Finally, there is the film *Red Heat*, which came out just before the fall of communism and is rife with stereotype. In this film, Arnold Schwarzenegger plays Ivan Danko, a Soviet police officer. If we were to stop right here, and examine what it says about the ideas of the 80s to place Arnold Schwarzenegger in such a role, there would be almost enough material for another paper all on its own. Both the fact that an actor best known for his role as a literal killing machine which later turns good and becomes friends with the heroes, and the fact that Americans were happy to see a German actor with a heavy accent playing a Russian because we know that Russians are supposed to have heavy accents (but do not particularly care what the accent sounds like), are noteworthy. However, as there are many other interesting things going on in this film, these two points will have to remain uncommented upon. Ivan Danko is portrayed as an incredibly strong, manly officer who uses brute force because all Soviet officers use brute force. He lives in a grey, snowy Moscow, has friends, and actually does smile and laugh with them. This is a huge turning point, as it actually shows the Russians as relatable human beings. This is brought home even further when he and his best friend's family are all seen attending a police

funeral after Ivan's best friend is killed by some Russian drug dealers. Not only is a police burial a scene that many Americans would be familiar with from other American films, thus making the Russians even more relatable, but this is also the start of shifting the role of "bad guy" away from Russians as a whole, and instead to the Russian underbelly. Due to these drug dealers, Ivan has to go to the US, where he teams up with a stereotype spitting, but still very good, cop. This cop and the views of his fellow officers can again be seen as a stand-in for the views of the typical American "manly man," with the cop immediately voicing his idea that Ivan will not speak English. His fellow officers express views from the idea that Russians have different rules for the leaders compared to the people and that living under Stalin took some real national strength, to the idea that "fucking, bastard, Commie Russians" are poor. The one who demonstrates the most stereotypes, however, is Ivan himself. He is very cold and serious around foreigners, does not smile, but is excellent at chess. He sees part of a porno in a hotel room and immediately blames Capitalism, and argues with his partner that Soviet guns are better than American ones. He is seen as very violent and uncaring of the process of law in that he thinks Miranda Rights are a frustrating hindrance, and states that Russian people deal with their stress with vodka. He is very competitive, but still, admits that Russia is changing from her past. This last point, in combination with the effort at relatability at the beginning of the film, bodes well for the future of Russia-US relations. The final line which makes it clear that relations are heading in the right direction, is when Ivan offers his friend his watch at the end as a gift and says: "We are police officers, not politicians, it is okay to like each other." This is clearly a much different ending from movies from the beginning of the 80s, such as *Red Dawn*.

The 80s saw a large number of negative stereotypes, just as the 60s, but the time period also saw a serious shift in feelings towards the possibility of peace between the nations. The 80s

was a period of slowly changing opinion, in both film and in the real world, culminating with the almost complete disintegration of the USSR, which would finish in the early nineties.

The 90s

The 90s was the decade that began with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the American view of all Russians as enemies. It saw a vast improvement in our relations with the new Russian Federation, at the same time as the country went through an extremely tumultuous period. This period threw the film industry for a bit of a loop, however, as now action films were left scrambling for a worthy enemy. Overall, the films of this period reflected the new feeling towards Russia, although just as the Russian enemy that was impossible to kill in many movies from the Cold War period, old stereotypes did not die easily. The films that will be examined from this period are: *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), *GoldenEye* (1995), *Balto* (1995), *Anastasia* (1997), *Armageddon* (1998), and *The Boondock Saints* (1999).

The Hunt For Red October is yet another extremely well-known film with Russian characters, both grossing very high in American box offices after its release, and being a frequent response among those surveyed (10). As the movie gives perhaps the most positive representation of Russians throughout the entire Soviet period and is so well-remembered by so many, this is a very positive sign for the direction of Russian stereotypes. In the movie, a submarine captain of the most technologically advanced submarine in the Soviet's fleet and his officers decide that they are going to defect and give their ship to the Americans. The fact that this submarine captain is played by Sean Connery, a famous Hollywood star and the original James Bond, shows just how far our attitude towards Russians has come, as by now the American people find it perfectly acceptable to see a famous actor, who once had a role in which he shot Russian spies and terrorists, portray a positive image of one. *The Hunt For Red October*

depicts three different overarching ideas of Russians through the three main groups in the film. There are the intelligent Russian officers who are daring and brave (due to their defection), play chess, violent when necessary (Connery's character kills the overseeing political officer), desire peace, and are relatable (as seen in Connery's character's sadness over the loss of his wife). They are also portrayed as deeply desiring to live in America, to get away from Russia. The second group is the general Russian sailors on the submarine. They know nothing of the officers' plans, and so can be seen to represent the Russian people in general. They are deeply proud of their country (singing their national anthem when they display the capabilities of their advanced submarine), loyal, and care deeply for their comrades. The last group is that of the Russian government, which is portrayed much more negatively. It is an organization that lies, hunts down and kills its own men, and is slightly incompetent, although it is very technologically advanced. Additionally, in the brief glimpse of Russia in this film, it is again portrayed as a grey and snowy place.

This film portrays the high tensions and misunderstandings between Russia and the US, as was still common for the time, but it also depicts an image of Russians as easily relatable, and desiring peace with the United States. As the Soviet Union fell only two years later, it is not surprising to see these depictions appearing at this time.

The second film under review from the 90s, however, defaults to many old stereotypes, largely because it is a Bond film. In *GoldenEye* the portrayal of Russians is only slightly better than it was in the 60s' film *From Russia With Love*. Russians are portrayed as ruthless, killing their own men when they make mistakes, and bent on becoming the most powerful country in the world. They are portrayed as if it is still the Cold War, with one character even saying that "Governments change, the lies stay the same," implying that no progress has been made.

Russians think Americans are stupid, but are very smart themselves, and technologically advanced. The only real concession that is made to the changed atmosphere of the 90s, is that now Cossacks take a much greater burden of being evil, rather than Russians in general.

Perhaps one of the more terrifying stereotype dichotomies in this film, however, is that between Natalya, the sweet Russian woman, and Xenia Onatopp, the deadly female agent. Both are beautiful women, both have very light accents, and both are meant to be very sexy, although in different ways. Natalya worked in a secret bunker as some form of hacker, and later becomes Bond's love interest, although she is at least portrayed as being able to fend for herself, unlike the Bond girl from the 60s. Onatopp on the other hand, was a former fighter pilot for the Soviet Union and is now working for an evil organization, and is a femme fatale in the most literal sense possible. She kills men while she sleeps with them, deriving pleasure from it. She is portrayed as mindless outside of her desire for sex and death, and kills whenever she can. In short, this film, despite promotional material recognizing that they are in a new era, still portrays Russians very negatively.

The third and fourth film I will discuss in one section, as they are both children's films, and not particularly deep or long. The first film is *Balto*, a movie set in Alaska which has a lovable Russian goose named Boris as the main character's uncle. He is emotional, although tries to hide it, and loves his charge like family. He has some form of Eastern European accent, and at one point does a traditional Russian dance. He is wise, but at the same time also fulfills the role of comic relief frequently, a trend which continues in the later 90s. In short, there is nothing evil about him, giving children of the 90s a very positive view of Russians.

The next film, is the animated version of *Anastasia*. In this film, pre-revolutionary Russia and the nobility are glorified, while the revolution is blamed on an evil curse by Rasputin.

In a flash forward to the late 20s (meanwhile, it has been snowing continuously in every scene), the townspeople of St. Petersburg are heard singing while in lines and working: “St. Petersburg is gloomy, St. Petersburg is bleak, my underwear is frozen standing here all week!”

Additionally, the male lead and his friend are only able to survive due to the fact that they forge train tickets and steel official papers. This film is taking the, by now, very well-trodden path of showing Russia as a glorious place before the revolution, which has been destroyed by communism, going so far as to state that the revolution was an evil curse. The Russians portrayed in the film however, are quite kind, although they do retain the stereotypes of drinking vodka and playing chess. Children who saw this film likely would have imagined Russia as a bleak and snowy place full of kind people, which is at least an improvement from previous decades.

Moving away from children films, the fifth film from the 90s is *Armageddon*. In this film, the group of heroes chosen to save Earth from a meteor meet the character of Lev Andropov on an old Soviet space station. The space station itself, which has been in orbit for eleven years and ends up breaking in such a way that the entire station is destroyed, represents the view of 90s Americans towards Russian technology. At one time it was incredibly advanced, to the point that it occasionally surpassed that in the US, but there have not been any innovations since the fall of the Soviet Union, and so many of their things are breaking. Lev on the other hand, is portrayed very positively. While he does have a thick accent, and is first seen wearing a CCCP shirt and a shapka, he is also incredibly intelligent (he is a cosmonaut, after all), very family oriented, committed to teammates (as demonstrated when he risks his own life to save that of one of the Americans he has just met), and patriotic. He is the stereotype that I myself, growing up in the 90s, am most familiar with: slightly weird, intelligent, abrupt, will not explain

much, flippant in the face of danger, and able to easily put others off kilter. He is also frequently comic relief, as mentioned before to be a trend in the 90s. As the audience, we are reminded of the fact that America used to have very tense relations with Russia when Lev relates an anecdote of his uncle who “used to make the tip of the bomb, the thing that finds, uh... New York or Washington, you know?”, but this is not the main focus. Instead the movie focuses on how Russia and the US now peaceably work together, on how Lev helps the team just as much as any of the Americans. He even gets his own victory when he saves one of the manned roving vehicles from destruction and exclaims: “Now I’m really a Russian hero!” Lev is not treated as an outsider, nor does he treat the others as such. Instead, he is a component of the whole.

The last film from the 90s, rather than continuing with the idea of unification and peace, demonstrates what producers of the time did when their go-to villain of the last forty years was lost. In the *Boondock Saints*, one of the multiple sets of villains is the Russian mafia. While this does again show a shift in films from all Russians being evil to only certain groups of them, the Russians here are heavily stereotyped. They have extremely thick accents, are threatening, part of organized crime, and extremely violent. The characters react to them much as would instead have been expected in a Cold War era film, calling them “pinko commies,” and then go on a killing spree. It is also clear that the film producers know nothing about Russians, as the main mob boss has the last name Petrova, which would normally only be held by a female as it ends in an ‘a.’ And yet, this film has a huge cult following, perpetuating the idea that this film’s version of Russians is what Russians are actually like.

Overall, the 90s saw a shift in Russian stereotypes towards relatability, unification, and more “friend-like” characters. While Hollywood was hard pressed to let go of Russians as villains entirely, it did shift its focus to more specific groups of Russians that could be cast as

evil, such as the Cossacks and mafia. Communist Russia was still portrayed as a depressing place to live, and pre-revolutionary Russia was romanticized, and it seems that these two stereotypes may have settled for good. Additionally, it seems that many stereotypes about Russia and Russians are here to stay for the long-term, such as it always snowing, heavy accents for males, sexiness of women, and chess playing, but their default character as a culture has at least shifted from that of pure evil.

The Twenty Aughts

With the beginning of a new millennium, the US also gained a new enemy to direct its animosity and fears towards with the terrorist attacks in 2001. One would assume that this would also take some of the pressure off Hollywood to come up with new villains for their action films, and relieve both script writers and actors with Russian features of the burden of portraying the increasingly dated stereotypes of Russians over and over again. Through the examination of films from the period of 2000 – 09, we will find out if this was the case. The films under examination for the twenty aughts are: *Snatch* (2000), *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), and *Star Trek* (2009).

For the first film of this decade, we have the action-comedy film *Snatch*. As this is both an action and a comedy film, the stereotypes are meant to be overblown and humorous. A neat bundle of such stereotypes with regard to Russians appears in the character of Boris the Blade. He is an arms dealer, and his name alone is enough to invoke fear in most characters. Along with “the blade,” he is also known as “Boris the bullet dodger” and, as one character calls him “Boris the sneaky fucking Russian.” He sells knock-offs, is impossible to kill, accustomed to violence, scarred, part of organized crime, wealthy, has a bad accent, and was an ex-KGB “highly trained undercover agent.” When an American crime boss hears that Boris is involved in

his heist, his immediate reaction is: “Russians. We shoulda known. Anti-Semite, slippery, Cossack sluts,” which is a tight package of stereotype all on its own, assuming that Russians are crafty, always part of the problem, overly sexual, and racist. Additionally, every time Boris appears, traditionally Russian music plays, contributing to the idea of Russians being part of the “old country.”

Through all of these depictions, it might seem as if the image of Boris is one that would fit better in the Cold War period, but I would argue that, as this is meant to be a comedy film, this is actually not the case. The image of Boris is meant to be humorous, we are meant to see all of these outdated stereotypes of Boris as an impossible to kill, violent, former secret agent as funny, because they are so clearly not the case anymore. Even the way the other characters in the film react to him demonstrates this, as they are constantly nonplussed as to how to respond to him. In order to make Boris at least slightly believable, he is picked out as being part of organized crime, and in the above insult is called a Cossack, two groups of Russians that it was acceptable to picture as evil in the 80s and 90s, and apparently acceptable in the 00s as well. Overall, though, Boris is meant to be a caricature, one that the audience is aware of.

The next film from the aughts, *Enemy at the Gates* is in a completely different category. It is a period piece on the World War II Russian sniper Vasily Zaitsev, and meant to be a non-romanticized depiction of war. For this film, there is almost no point in measuring how relatable the Russian characters are as there was in films from past decades, as the Russians are our point of contact, our protagonists, our main characters – they cannot be evil or despicable. Aside from the fact that our first view of Russia is in the middle of winter, there are relatively few stereotypes in this film due to the fact that the Russians are our heroes. The officers are shown as being ruthless towards their own men, shooting them when they try to turn back, but this did

actually happen during WWII, and so it cannot be claimed to be stereotype. The people of Stalingrad are shown to be living in a grey place of complete chaos, but then again, it was the site of one of the largest and most important battles of World War II, so it would look like this. Even Russian women receive a fair depiction for one of the first times, frequently being shown fighting alongside the men in defense of Stalingrad. The group that is shown as evil (and many would argue rightly so, as this is World War II) is the Germans. This theme of Germans as “bad guys” is one that will be seen to continue in other films from the aughts, perhaps again due to the fact that film makers were searching for new villains.

The third film from the aughts, *The Sum of All Fears*, starts off in such a way that the audience assumes it is a Cold War film, as the president is in emergency procedures to launch a nuclear weapon at Russia. We quickly find out that this was just a drill though, with one of the characters even stating: “We have to choose someone to face off against besides the Russians every time.” This opening scene sharply illustrates the fact that we no longer consider the Russians enemies, and that to even place them in that role is outdated thinking. The fact that we used to have tense relations with the Russians but no longer do is illustrated throughout the film, with the head of the CIA remarking while touring a Russian bomb manufacturing warehouse at how many times his men had tried to get in there over the years. Even the American’s reaction to Russia invading Chechnya is much further on the side of exasperation than tension. The fact that we are still afraid of each other to a certain extent is demonstrated, however, when secret Nazi fascists try to pit the US and Russia against each other. Rather than the Russians being portrayed as conniving or evil throughout this tense situation, though, they are instead shown to be just as frightened as us at the prospect of nuclear war. Again, there is little stereotype portrayed in this film (aside from, once again, Russia being completely covered

in snow, this time with the addition of onion domes). Instead what is shown is how similar Russians are to Americans and the fact that neither of us want to end the world. What can be examined as interesting, is the fact that film-makers are once again using an old enemy, as they still have not found an entirely suitable replacement for the Russians. Hollywood was searching for an enemy that we were on equal footing with, which had not been found in Afghani or Iraqi villains.

The fourth film from the aughts, is that of the most recent *Star Trek* reboot. While this film is based on a television series which was originally produced in the 60s, it has been considerably updated for the modern times, and it is interesting to examine how, or if, the Russian character of Pavel Chekov changed to reflect more modern views.

As has been common since the portrayal of Russian characters in the 90s, Chekov plays a role of comic relief frequently. Contrastingly, he is also demonstrated to likely be the most intelligent person on the ship, while also being the youngest. Chekov also has an accent but, slightly hilariously, it is a Polish accent, not a Russian one. Additionally, Chekov is the only person of an obviously different culture who is also not an alien on the ship. In examining this character and interviews with the actor and director, it is fairly clear that they decided to stay true to the original interpretation of Chekov from the 60s, even acknowledging that the character's accent was completely incorrect, but deciding to keep it. His character fits in well for the 60s, as a super intelligent, accented ship pilot included to demonstrate the unity that the future held, but appears to be slightly anachronistic in modern times. However, this harkening back to earlier depictions of Russians may begin to appear more logical with the examination of some present day films. This idea will be further examined in the next section.

During the 00s, a large shift occurred in the realm of Russian stereotypes, with previous stereotypes being jeered at as ridiculous and Russian characters being more relatable than ever. Some negative stereotypes did still remain, but the majority were positive. Even movie villains were frequently no longer Russians. As we move out of the aughts and into the beginning of the present time however, we see this distinction fluctuate slightly yet again.

2010 to Present

In the last leg of this paper, we will examine the current time. While it is difficult to examine too much of the present due to the fact that it is still being shaped and transformed, several interesting trends can still be observed. In order to do this, the films *Salt* (2010) and *Mission Impossible – Ghost Protocol* (2011) will be examined.

The first film, *Salt*, demonstrates Hollywood's unflagging affinity for portraying Russians as villains and spies, although it does so in a more complex way than films from the Cold War period. In this film there are two depictions of Russians: Angelina Jolie, who plays the character of Salt, a CIA agent who it is later discovered is actually a sleeper agent from an old Soviet program meant to kill the president and other officials; and the men of the Soviet program who trained her. First, there is the character of Salt. While she does not have an accent, as is a common stereotype for Russian women (although this would also make sense for a sleeper agent), she is also not portrayed as overtly sexual. This is a huge improvement over past stereotypes, which seems to have continued from the 00s. However, this is where the lack of stereotypes ends. Her parents were a star Soviet wrestler and a chess grandmaster, and once Salt seemingly completes her mission she immediately changes into an outfit involving a shapka and fur wrap which make her look as stereotypically Russian as possible. She is very mysterious, and her character contributes to the idea that all Russians are involved with the military or

government in some way. Those who trained her, and the Russian plot however, are much worse offenders on the stereotype front. To begin with, the idea of a sleeper agent program is something that should be out of an old Bond film (unlike the shoe knife that appears in one scene, which actually is something used by a Russian in *From Russia With Love*), with the McCarthy-like fear it is meant to induce that anyone could secretly be a Russian spy. Next, there is the idea that Russians are ruthless and cold-hearted, as demonstrated by the fact that Salt's spymaster kills her husband in front of her simply to test her. Additionally, there is the Russian plot to destroy the US. First, they want the Russian president to be killed by a CIA agent (Salt) in order to make it appear as if America had a hand in his death and plunge relations between the two countries into complete chaos (it is also heavily implied that they want him dead because he has destroyed the country by taking it away from Communism, and the secret Soviet group want a return to the old ways). After this is accomplished, they want to steal control of all of America's nuclear weapons and aim them at major Middle Eastern capitols so that they will destroy the US in retaliation (in the process of all this, they also want to kill the president). This entire plot seems as if it was ripped out of the Cold War period, with a few minor modifications to allow for the fact that it is not all Russians that want Americans dead, but simply a Soviet splinter group. This film tries to disconnect the idea of Russia from the Soviets, in an attempt to resurrect America's favorite Cold War super villains. The fact that there is an attempt at this differentiation is actually positive though, as it shows a continuation of Hollywood's attempt to find suitable replacement villains for their blockbuster action films while still not portraying the entire country of Russia as one massive enemy. The film even seems to mix cultural stereotypes at one point, when one of the sleeper agents blows himself up in an attempted suicide bombing of the president, normally something a Middle Eastern villain would do in film. If this film

portrays a trend, then perhaps in the future there will be villains who are a hybrid of Russian and Middle Eastern stereotypes.

The next film from the current era is *Mission Impossible – Ghost Protocol*. The plot of this film revolves around Russian nuclear launch codes, making it the third film since the beginning of the 2000^{nds} to focus on the possibility of nuclear war between Russia and the US. Despite the plot, this film portrays Russians and Russia in a positive light. For scenes where the film takes place in Russia it is, astonishingly, not snowing. As this is the first movie in all of those reviewed not to show Russia as a land of constant snow, this deserves note. The country is also shown to be clean, beautiful, and welcoming to foreigners – when the Kremlin is not being blown up. After this occurrence, the Russians are hostile to the US, as they were given reason to believe that American forces were responsible for the bombing. As this does not result in immediate nuclear aggression however, it demonstrates the fact that we now believe that Russia would not attack us without serious forethought. As for Russians themselves, they are also given a generally positive image. While it is true that the main villain of the movie is Russian, it is acknowledged by several different characters that he is completely insane, and thus not representative of the country as a whole. Additionally, the main villain was not even born in Russia, but rather Sweden, giving Russia an even smaller portion of possible blame in his creation. The other Russians in the film generally appear as some form of comic relief. There is the Russian officer who believes that Ethan (the main character) is responsible for bombing the Kremlin, dogging him down over multiple countries and constantly interrupting Ethan just as he is about to catch up with the actual villain. There is the arms dealer who, while falling into the stereotype of Russians dealing in weapons, is not overly threatening and ends up helping Ethan. Lastly, there is the Russian character who was Ethan's friend while in jail. He is the most

comedic presence, saying that his friend is not an arms dealer, but rather an “independent defense coordinator.” Another pleasant surprise is that none of these men have very heavy Russian accents, the first time male Russians have been portrayed as such in all of the films examined in this paper. Overall, this film demonstrates many firsts for Hollywood, especially for a big-name action movie. The fact that all of these portrayals are positive points to what could be a new era of stereotypes for Russians in film.

Conclusions

The relationship between Russia and the US is one that has been fraught with both fearful tension and the equivalent of playground name calling, but it is one that has also improved greatly in the last two decades. This change is reflected in the films made about the country and its people over the course of the last fifty years. In the 60s, Russia and the majority of Russians were portrayed as hostile, threatening, cold, unemotional, spies, KGB members, ruthless, crafty, sneaky, buried under snow, and destroyed by Communism. The 80s had very similar views towards Russia as the 60s, with slightly more emphasis on how dangerous Russians could be. There was, however, a major shift in depictions of the possibility of Russians and peace, with this resolution seeming much more likely than it had been in the past. The 90s, while still retaining some persistent stereotypes of Russians (both negative and otherwise), did have a large shift towards ideas of relatability, humorousness, unification, and friendliness with regard to Russians. This was also the decade that really began to portray specific groups of Russians as evil, rather than all Russians. The 00s brought us even farther from the end of the Soviet Union, and thus even further from outdated and negative stereotypes. This decade demonstrated many positive views of Russians, such as their determination and complete relatability, making them appear just as human as any American. This brings us to the current day.

In the current era, it appears that there has been a resurgence of films with Russian characters or themes involving Russia. While in the 90s there were only 68 films made with Russian themes, in the 00s there were 142, with another 63 films already having been produced in the period from 2010 to 2012. Additionally, when looking at the last five years alone (2007 to the present), 122 films are found with Russian themes, meaning that already in this short period of time almost double the number of films as were produced in the 90s on Russian themes have come out. This clearly marks a resurfacing of interest in storylines involving Russians which had dropped immediately after the end of the Cold War. While there are many reasons as to why this could be the case, I believe that three are the most likely. Firstly, Americans have missed seeing Russians in their films, missed the vaguely threatening presence of a country that they at one point viewed as just as strong as America, just as intelligent as America, and just as likely to plunge the world into a nuclear winter as America. This leads into my second point, which is that Hollywood finally figured it out. They finally figured out how to include all of the story arcs and familiar stereotypes that would have normally been expected and enjoyed in a film involving Russians in the past, and do so in such a way as to not offend and demonize an entire country. Instead, Hollywood has picked specific groups to carry the weight of all of these past stereotypes: the Cossacks, the Russian mafia, secret splinter groups of Soviets left over from before the fall of Communism, and others. Now it is these groups which are portrayed as threatening, ultra-violent, deceptive, and heavily accented villains, while normal Russians are instead portrayed as serious, but also slightly humorous individuals who are able to confuse or marginally disconcert the main character easily. This however, still does not do the wide range of Russian depictions justice, as now a Russian character could hold almost any role: friend, adoptive uncle, small business owner, heroic soldier, or everyday person. This wide portrayal of

character traits in recent films, none of which involve poverty or suffering, contributes to my last point as to why Russians have reappeared in modern films after a brief drop in the 90s: we no longer feel bad for Russia. During the Cold War period, intermixed with all of the other stereotypes we held on Russians, there was also the idea that they were poor and suffering, that Communism had fundamentally damaged them in some way. This idea continued into the 90s, only aided by the fact that the end of the USSR plunged the country into chaos for several years. During that decade, we did not feel as justified in our depiction of Russians, as we no longer considered them to be our equals while they were so clearly in the process of restructuring and rebuilding their country. In general, since Russia was no longer our enemy, we did not wish to make fun of her (in the majority of films) while she was down, projecting instead views of peace and friendship. The fact that filmmakers have again begun to portray groups of not-quite-Russians as antagonists then, is actually a positive development. This demonstrates not so much that we are back to our old ways of disrespecting the Russian character, but instead that we view Russia as once again strong enough to handle some abuse. We have begun to see Russians as equals again, perhaps not in the same ways as we did during the Cold War, but in a way that allows for an altogether more healthy interaction between our two nations.

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Films:

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| <i>From Russia with Love</i> (1963) | <i>Balto</i> (1995) |
| <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (1964) | <i>Anastasia</i> (1997) |
| <i>Doctor Zhivago</i> (1965) | <i>Armageddon</i> (1998) |
| <i>The Russians are Coming!</i> (1966) | <i>The Boondock Saints</i> (1999) |
| <i>Red Dawn</i> (1984) | <i>Snatch</i> (2000) |
| <i>Rocky IV</i> (1985) | <i>Enemy at the Gates</i> (2001) |
| <i>An American Tail</i> (1986) | <i>The Sum of All Fears</i> (2002) |
| <i>Red Heat</i> (1988) | <i>Star Trek</i> (2009) |
| <i>The Hunt for Red October</i> (1990) | <i>Salt</i> (2010) |
| <i>GoldenEye</i> (1995) | <i>Mission Impossible – Ghost Protocol</i> (2011) |

Results of survey can be provided upon request.