The Soviets didn't gas them, nor did Stalin and Molotov order them machine-gunned: no single episode during collectivization, the Ezhovshchina, or the "liquidation" of peoples rivals the Japanese' Rape of Nanking, the politicide under Pol Pot, or the slaughter of 800,000 in Rwanda.

The author includes scattered information on the "rehabilitation" of the deportees after Stalin's death, but the chapter specifically devoted to the subject amounts to less than one page. One finds no mention of the measures initiated already under Stalin to restore "citizenship rights" to the kulak and minority exiles, usually starting five years after deportation: even if Stalin had lived another decade the exiles' status gradually would have come to approximate that of their 'free' neighbors, only barred from return to their previous homes.


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*The views expressed here are those of the author, and not of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.


Devlin describes and analyzes nationalism in Russian political thought and action since 1986. She views Russian nationalists as "enemies of democracy" because she finds in their pronouncements four strands of thought: authoritarianism, imperial pretensions, hostility towards the West and anti-Semitism. She shows how contemporary nationalists have been able to turn to earlier Russian thinkers for arguments along these lines. Her information comes primarily from her exhaustive reading of opinion pieces and debates in Russian journals and newspapers. In clear prose, she introduces the reader to all the significant figures and groups who have formed or been important influences for the "bad" Russian national movement. Both part I, which focuses on debates within the intelligentsia, and part II, which focuses on political manifestations, proceed in a chronological fashion, so that the evolution of nationalist arguments and strategies comes through. For these reasons, Slavophiles and Commissars contributes to the history of Russian politics over the last fifteen years. Though detailed, it is sufficiently accessible to serve as a supplementary reading in advanced undergraduate courses.

The book invites critical engagement. For me, for instance, questions about her conceptualization arose. She frequently interchanges the terms "right"/"right-wing," "conservative," and "nationalist" (presumably to enhance readability, which it does).
Yet in other places, "right-wing" is used as a modifier of the term "nationalism" to distinguish those who are not socialist from left-wing nationalists (in short, to distinguish between Slavophiles and Commissars). Even this more precise delineation deserves careful scrutiny, because the right-wing in the current Russian political spectrum refers to the pro-Western camp. After all, the most pro-Western major party in 1999 was the Union of Right Forces.

It turns out that, like many American preachers of the 1950s, some Russians perceive rock and roll as the devil's music. Such a belief is not, in and of itself, an authoritarian or imperial or anti-Semitic belief. Moreover, how significant is it for Russian politics even as a sign of hostility toward the West? Nothing in democratic theory mandates a fondness for the West. Relatedly, the inclusion of "Eurasianism" as form of imperialist thought needs to be defended. Many non-imperialist Russians prefer a Eurasian definition of Russia's national interests to a primarily Western-oriented one.

Most fundamentally, what is the most useful way to define "nationalism"? If the term refers to arguments for nationhood (and attendant political statehood), then nationalism can be good or bad. Indeed, scholars such as Rustow and Nodia see it as crucial for democratization. Devlin mostly treats nationalism as a single phenomenon that is maleficent. At other times, she distinguishes good nationalism from bad nationalism. This occurs, for example, when she describes the book's purpose as explaining why Russian nationalism "assumed an authoritarian rather than liberal reformist character" (p. xx). The way in which Devlin conceived of nationalism influenced her choice of materials to analyze and, in turn, her findings. Even granting that Russian nationalism assumed an authoritarian rather than liberal reformist character, one cannot demonstrate that or explain it by examining only the authoritarian nationalists. Perhaps Russian nationalists seem such a bad lot because only the words of "bad" nationalists are presented.

Devlin does not analyze the writings of those who have been in power during the last decade, yet the thinkers and politicians who have transformed the RSFSR into the Russian Federation, with new boundaries, new definitions of citizenship and new foreign policies, are nationalists by any reasonable definition. The version of Russian nationalism that held the reins of power in the 1990s was not authoritarian, imperialist, anti-Western or anti-Semitic along the lines of Devlin's subjects but more nearly the opposite.

Perhaps, then, we can dismiss Russian nationalism (of the authoritarian stripe)? In Devlin's words: "Were these groups really a significant force in the political life of Russia or were they the inevitable product of economic and political upheaval, destined to remain marginal and isolated, indicative only of social malaise?" (p. 34) By Devlin's account, they do seem marginal and isolated. She is careful in noting these groups' weakness. Over and over, she notes how the politicians and parties to which she introduces us lose elections, are foiled in the 1991 coup attempt, fail to stay together, draw blasé reactions from the public, and fade from the limelight. Yet Devlin concludes that to dismiss these nationalists would be a mistake. She argues that authoritarian, imperialist, anti-Western and anti-Semitic ideas have gained a place in Russia's ideological arsenal despite the abject failure of their proponents to gain political power. A vital next step, therefore, would be to trace this proposition through