

## **Exploring Russian Colonial Identities Through a Native American Lens**

**Shandiin Largo, Class of 2023**

I worked on two projects this summer: an annotated bibliography for a course syllabus titled, "Inter-Ethnic Encounters in the Russian Cultural Space" and a research paper focused on Indigenous responses to trauma within Indigenous literature in the United States, former Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.

The first project, an annotated bibliography, highlights different Russian identities from time periods spanning pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia. With the guidance of Professor Gillespie, I gathered literature, films, podcasts, and other media about and by diverse Russian identities, including Black people, people of the North Caucasus region, Central Asians, and Indigenous peoples in Russia. The main goal of this annotated bibliography is to highlight different works from different regions, ethnicities, and cultures within Russia in the hopes that students make the connection that, just like the United States, Russia has rich racial and ethnic diversity.

The second project was a research paper that explores the connections between Native American literature in the United States and Native Siberian literature in Russia regarding Indigenous authors' literary expressions of trauma. The oppression, genocide, and forced assimilation of Indigenous communities by colonial powers led me to analyze recurring themes such as loss of ancestral homeland, loss of language and culture, and concern for future generations of Indigenous peoples in both countries.

This comparative analysis between Indigenous responses to trauma is important because, after years of misrepresentation and mistreatment, my research allows for reclamation of Indigenous identity and self-agency by centering Indigenous voices. Hardly has there been accounts as personal and powerful as the stories from the people who are directly impacted by colonization and forced assimilation. As a Diné woman from the Navajo Nation, this reclaiming of Indigenous identity through literary expression provides a universalizing mode for thinking and argumentation that connects cultures and ways of thinking separated by geography and language.

I hope that my research will further de-colonize and re-humanize underrepresented voices in Russia and the United States. These 10 weeks of research improved my analytical thinking and writing abilities -- tools that will serve me well no matter what I choose to do in the future. But in addition to giving me tools, it also gave me a comparative perspective. The United States and Russia are more connected than we think, even when the geographical and cultural spaces are not.

**Faculty Mentor: Alyssa Gillespie**

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