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DREAMING OF RUSSIA: WESTERN IDEOLOGICAL EMIGRATION TO RUSSIA



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Russia's positioning as a challenger to the Western liberal democratic model on the international stage has a well-documented history. Extensive literature exists on the existential threat to democracy posed by Russia's anti-democratic governance.¹ Similarly, there is abundant literature on Russia's adoption of conservative branding and its global positioning in opposition to Western liberal democratic values.² More recent examples refer to this opposition as "illiberal."³ While some caution that the "platonic ideal of modern autocracy"⁴ may not necessarily be actively working to transform liberal democracies into imitations of the Russian model,⁵ Russia undeniably has an interest in promoting open questioning of the Western liberal order.

On the other hand, Russia's opposition to Western liberal values and its apparent embrace of autocratic rule have been identified as a form of soft power.⁶ This influence and the allure of its soft power have often been discussed in the context of Russia's appeal among Western political figures, particularly those aligned with conservative and right-wing orientations.⁷ This was certainly true

¹ Ivan Krastev, "Democracy's Doubles," *Journal of Democracy* 17 (2006); Vladimir Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015); David G. Lewis, *Russia's New Authoritarianism: Putin and the Politics of Order*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2020)

² Marlene Laruelle, "Conservatism as the Kremlin's New Toolkit: An Ideology at the Lowest Cost," *Russian Analytical Digest* 138 (November 2013): 2-4; Maria Engström, "Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 3 (September 2, 2014), 356-379, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2014.965888>; Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "The Pussy Riot Affair and Putin's Demarche From Sovereign Democracy To Sovereign Morality," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 4 (2014): 615-21.

³ Julian Waller, "Elites and Institutions in the Russian Thermidor: Regime Instrumentalism, Entrepreneurial Signaling, and Inherent Illiberalism," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 1, no. 1. (2021): 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.53483/VCHS2523>.

⁴ Olga Oliker, "Putinism, Populism and the Defence of Liberal Democracy," *Survival* 59, no. 1 (2017): 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1282669>.

⁵ Marlene Laruelle, "Making Sense of Russia's Illiberalism," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 3 (2020): 115-129.

⁶ Marlene Laruelle, "Russia's Niche Soft Power: Sources, Targets and Channels of Influence," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 122, Ifri (April 2021); Vincent Charles Keating and Katarzyna Kaczmarek, "Conservative Soft Power: Liberal Soft Power Bias and the 'Hidden' Attraction of Russia," *Journal of International Relations and Development* no. 22, (2019): 1-27.

⁷ Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister, and Neil Barnett, "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses," *The Atlantic Council*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/kremlin-trojan-horses/>; Aleksandr Fisher, "Trickle Down Soft Power: Do Russia's Ties to European Parties Influence Public Opinion?," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17 no. 1, (January 2021): oraa013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/oraa013>; Glenn Diesen, "Russia as an International Conservative Power: The Rise of the Right-wing Populists and their Affinity Towards Russia," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 28 no. 2 (2020): 182-196, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1705770>.

prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, an event which prompted Russian sympathizers to reassess their stance.⁸ What is largely absent from the literature is an exploration of how Russia's conservative appeal affects ordinary citizens. While literature exists documenting Russia's ability to influence opinion in Western countries, especially through Russian media,⁹ there is an understudied subset of Western conservatives who take the image of Russia as an alternative model to heart and act accordingly by opting to relocate to Russia.

Therefore, it is significant that in early 2023, Russian news announced a plan to build an expat village for such Westerners.¹⁰ Dubbed the American Village, reports suggested that up to 200 families would relocate to this new project, generating considerable attention in English-language media.¹¹ Upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that the organizers of this American Village are highly committed, and it appears that significant efforts, including an active petition to Russian officials, have been undertaken to facilitate the immigration of committed individuals to Russia.

Go East

There is already well-established research on ideological migration. Previous studies indicate that individuals residing in communities ideologically misaligned with their own values are more likely to opt for relocation.¹² Similarly, extensive literature exists on the clustering of politically like-minded voters and political partisanship.¹³ Considerably more has been written about the attitudes and attitudinal adjustments that migrants undergo when moving to a new country.¹⁴

Less prevalent in literature are studies of ideologically driven international migration. Bove, Efthyvoulou, and Pickard's study of migration patterns in OECD countries between 1990 and 2016 provides the first systemic evidence of the crucial role played by ideology in determining migrant destination choices.¹⁵ The understudied factor of political preferences may be attributed to an

⁸ Marlene Laruelle and John Chrobak, "Russia and European Illiberalism: A Partial Decoupling?" *Riddle*, May 12, 2022, <https://ridl.io/russia-and-european-illiberalism-a-partial-decoupling/>.

⁹ Aleksandr Fisher, "Demonizing the Enemy: The Influence of Russian State-Sponsored Media on American Audiences," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 4 (2020): 281–296, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2020.1730121>.

¹⁰ "V Podmoskove postroyat derevnyu dlya amerikansikh immigrantov," *RIA Novosti*, May 11, 2023, <https://realty.ria.ru/20230511/derevnya-1871001155.html>

¹¹ Matthew Loh, "Russia is Floating a Plan to Build a Village for Conservative Americans Who Want to Move to a 'Christian Country' and are Tired of Liberal Ideology in the US," *Business Insider*, May 12, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-build-village-catholic-christian-americans-tired-liberals-claim-lawyer-2023-5?op=1>; Tim Hume, "Russia Wants to Build a MAGA Colony for US Conservatives, Lawyer Claims," *Vice*, May 12, 2023, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgwdew/russia-maga-colony>.

¹² Matt Motyl, Ravi Iyer, Shigehiro Oishi, Sophie Trawalter, and Brian A. Nosek, "How Ideological Migration Geographically Segregates Groups." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 51 (2014): 1-14; Ian McDonald, "Migration and Sorting in the American Electorate: Evidence from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study," *American Politics Research* 39, no. 3 (2011): 512-533.

¹³ Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-minded America is Tearing Us Apart*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009); Lütjen, Torben, and Robert Matschoß. "Ideological Migration in Partisan Strongholds: Evidence from a Quantitative Case Study." *The Forum*, 13, no. 2 (2015): 311-346.

¹⁴ Paola Giuliano and Marco Tabellini, *The Seeds of Ideology: Historical Immigration and Political Preferences in the United States*, no. w27238, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, (2020); Rafaela Dancygier and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "A New Electorate? Comparing Preferences and Partisanship Between Immigrants and Natives," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 962-981.

¹⁵ Vincenzo Bove, Georgios Efthyvoulou, and Harry Pickard, "Government Ideology and International Migration," *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 125, no. 1 (2023): 107-138.

assumption that ideology remains secondary to other, more impactful considerations for migrants, especially distance¹⁶ and economic factors.¹⁷ Indeed, for many migrants, uprooting and moving to a new country is a costly ordeal, both financially and emotionally. Yet, for some, particularly those with the means, the costs may be deemed worthwhile.

Instances of ideologically driven migration from Western liberal democratic countries to Russia are uncommon but are relatively easy to find with a little effort. In some cases, expats from Western countries have notably prominent profiles. The most famous individuals include French actor Gerard Depardieu¹⁸ and American actor Steven Seagal,¹⁹ but many others, such as MMA fighter Jeff Monson²⁰ and German blogger Alina Lipp,²¹ have adapted well to living in Russia. Some expats, like Eva Bartlett and Russell “Texas” Bentley, have built careers contributing to Russian media narratives about Russia’s activity in Ukraine.²²

However, a subset of conservative Westerners has chosen to relocate due to their dissatisfaction with or outright opposition to the values of Western liberal democracy. John and Anna Platt, an American family from Rochester, New York, are a notable example. They converted to Orthodoxy in 2016 and moved to Russia in 2019, driven by their concerns regarding the Black Lives Matter movement and “LGBT propaganda.”²³ Numerous similar instances of such migration exist.²⁴

The motivations of this particular subset of migrants to Russia can generally be described as falling within a few broad categories. Firstly, they may find themselves ideologically opposed to the embrace of the so-called “gender ideology” in the West. Many specifically cite their opposition to what they describe as the promotion of LGBTQ+ “ideology” in Western schools and society at large, expressing concern that these ideas may be forced upon their children. For these migrants, Russia’s official

¹⁶ Ernst G. Ravenstein, “‘The Laws of Migration’, Journal of the Statistical Society of London (1885), excerpts.” In *The Urban Working Class in Britain, 1830–1914 Vol 1*, pp. 53-54. Routledge, 2021.

¹⁷ George J. Borjas, “Economic Theory and International Migration,” *International Migration Review* 23, no. 3 (1989): 457-485.

¹⁸ Joshua Keating, “Why is Gerard Depardieu becoming Russian?,” *Foreign Policy*, (January, 2013), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/03/why-is-gerard-depardieu-becoming-russian/>.

¹⁹ “Putin Gives Russian State Award to Actor Steven Seagal for “Humanitarian Work”,” *CBS News*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/vladimir-putin-steven-seagal-russia-award-order-of-friendship-humanitarian-work/>.

²⁰ Karim Zidan, “Jeff Monson’s Journey from American MMA Muscle to Russian Propagandist,” *The Guardian*, June 7, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/jun/07/jeff-monsons-journey-from-american-mma-muscle-to-russian-propagandist>.

²¹ Oliver Moody, “German Social Media Influencer Parrots Pro-Russian Propaganda,” *The Times*, January 10, 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/german-social-media-influencer-parrots-pro-russian-propaganda-m39xxhfl>.

²² Justin Ling, “In Russia, a ‘Sham Tribunal’ Investigates What it Says are Ukraine’s War Crimes,” *CBC*, July 17, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/russia-tribunal-ukraine-1.6512853>; Jamie Burton, “Exclusive: Russell Bentley, Texas Man in Russian Army, Says He’s ‘Liberating’ Ukraine,” *Newsweek*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russell-texas-bentley-interview-pro-russia-donbas-ukraine-1684450>.

²³ “To Russia - With Faith and Love: How a Family With 8 children From the USA Moved to Sergiyev Posad.” *Noviye Izvestiya*, June 24, 2022, <https://en.newizv.ru/news/2021-06-24/to-russia-with-faith-and-love-how-a-family-with-8-children-from-the-usa-moved-to-sergiyev-posad-384143>.

²⁴ “American Settlers in Rural Russia - Living, Praying, Dreaming (Video),” *Russian Faith*, June 14, 2023, <https://russian-faith.com/video/american-families-living-praying-settling-rural-russia-n6570>; Matthew Adams, “Young Christian Couple Leaves Brazil, Moves to Russia (PHOTOS & VIDEOS)” *Russian Faith*, May 29, 2023, <https://russian-faith.com/news/young-christian-couple-leaves-brazil-moves-to-russia-n2306>.

opposition to LGBTQ+ rights and legislation prohibiting the “promotion” of LGBTQ+ values to children and adults appears as a positive quality.²⁵ Previous research into the connections between Russian Orthodoxy and the American right by Riccardi-Swartz has highlighted the new position held by Russia in the American Orthodox perspective. As she succinctly summarizes,

“Since the 2000s, America’s new generation of conservative Christian warriors, who continue to fight back over overt public displays of sexuality, the fluidity of gender, and abortion, are engaging not only with American groups, such as World Congress of Families, America First, and the GOP, but they are also collaborating with Russian conservative actors in their fight to redefine moral ethics in the United States. Russia has become, for many Western conservatives, a moral ally.”²⁶

Among conservative American Christians with whom I have worked, there was a deliberate moral outrage focused on the human rights afforded to LGBTQ+ communities, with special attention placed on transgendered people as a sign that the United States and the Western world more broadly are trying to play God in rethinking what gendered bodies should look like. For conservative converts, who fear the “LGBTQ+ agenda in the US” and the “lavender mafia,” Russian president Vladimir Putin’s signing of “anti-gay” propaganda laws in 2013 signaled a very public stand for the traditional family and, by extension, a traditional public or society.”²⁷

The decision by some within the Orthodox community to leave their home country and relocate to Russia aligns conceptually with the philosophical ideas of conservative political commentator Rod Dreher. In his book, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, Dreher argues that the Western liberal order is responsible for the erosion of morality and poses an existential threat to the Christian faith. According to Dreher, the remedy is for Christians to live their faith in the face of this threat, promoting traditional Christian revival at the local community level, and partially withdrawing from society to weather the storm.²⁸ Indeed, some of those who have made the move explicitly cite Dreher and his advocacy for Christians to live their faith in counter-cultural communities as an apt description of their decision to leave America.²⁹

Others are less concerned with religious reasons but may still wish to relocate due to disagreements with Western foreign policy practices. In this context, John Mearsheimer and Patrick Buchanan, rather than Dreher, may be cited as succinctly capturing the reasons why Western (especially U.S.)

²⁵ Elena Bakhrusheva, “Amerianets s tremya det’mi poselilsya v rossiiskoi glubinke. Posmotrite, kak oni sejchas zhivut,” *NGS.RU*, April 8, 2023, <https://ngs.ru/text/world/2023/04/08/72203996/>; Pjotr Sauer, “Russia Passes Law Banning ‘LGBT Propaganda’ Among Adults,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/24/russia-passes-law-banning-lgbt-propaganda-adults>.

²⁶ Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, *Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia*, (Fordham University Press, 2022), 73.

²⁷ Riccardi-Swartz, *Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia*, 73.

²⁸ Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, (New York: Sentinel, 2017).

²⁹ Hal Freeman, “Rod Dreher, John Mearsheimer and the Expat Option,” *Between Two Worlds*, February 1, 2019, <https://halfreeman.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/rod-dreher-john-mearsheimer-the-expat-option/>; Joseph Gleason, “We are Excited About Moving to Russia, Restoring Close-Knit Family Communities, Centered Around Traditional Orthodox Christian Churches.” *Facebook*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MovingToRussia/permalink/626464364181745>.

leadership is deemed morally bankrupt.³⁰ Frequently, America's foreign policy record, particularly in the context of the 2003 Iraq war but also in Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya, is criticized for directly leading to civilian suffering and the violation of the very international norms it accuses Russia of violating.³¹ This juxtaposition of the United States and Russia in a classic case of "whataboutism" often traces examples back to Kosovo and ultimately frames the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a terrorist organization.³² In comparison, Russia is hailed as a responsible global player that protects vulnerable populations or, at the very least, stands defiant of Western imperialism.³³

Key Figures

Fr. Joseph Gleason, an American citizen raised in McKinney, Texas,³⁴ is the son of religious parents. He commenced his religious journey as a Calvinist, attending Redeemer Seminary, before converting to Anglicanism. Subsequently, he switched to Cranmer Theological House Anglican Seminary and relocated to Omaha, Illinois.³⁵ After a prolonged period of reflection, Fr. Joseph and his family converted once again, this time to Orthodox Christianity.³⁶ Increasingly frustrated with the political trajectory of the United States, particularly the legalization of same-sex marriage and the increasing tolerance toward the LGBTQ+ community, Fr. Joseph and his family decided to move to Russia in 2017.³⁷

When asked about their choice of Russia, Fr. Joseph consistently points to Russia's intolerance towards LGBTQ+ individuals, its permissive attitude toward homeschooling (Fr. Joseph and his wife homeschool their eight children), and his admiration for Russia's strong cultural Orthodox tradition.³⁸ They settled near Rostov Velikii, 200km north of Moscow, where Fr. Joseph serves as a local priest.³⁹

³⁰ Freeman, "Rod Dreher," <https://halfreeman.wordpress.com/2019/02/01/rod-dreher-john-mearsheimer-the-expat-option/>; Tim Kirby, *Pochemu Rossiya?! Moi pereezd iz amerikanskogo doma v getto v rossiskuyu khrushchyovku v moskve*, (Editus, 2017) p 63.

³¹ Kevin Michelizzi, "Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire," *Information Warfare Analysis*, May 2, 2023, <https://www.infowars.press/p/liar-liar-pants-on-fire>; Sams Russian Adventures, "Should Vladimir Putin Be Arrested? - What Russians Think?," *Rumble*, April 5, 2023, <https://rumble.com/v2gcr9p-should-vladimir-putin-be-arrested-what-russians-think.html>.

³² Kevin Michelizzi, "North American Terrorist Organization," *Information Warfare Analysis*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.infowars.press/p/north-american-terrorist-organization>; Tim Kirby, "U.S. Troop Removal From Germany: A NATO Skeptic POTUS Always Wins," *Strategic Culture Foundation*, August 2, 2020, <https://strategic-culture.org/news/2020/08/02/us-troop-removal-from-germany-nato-skeptic-potus-always-wins/>, Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200803185102/https://strategic-culture.org/news/2020/08/02/us-troop-removal-from-germany-nato-skeptic-potus-always-wins/>.

³³ <https://orthochristian.com/111566.html>; Hunter Cawood, "Why Russia Sent Humanitarian Aid to the US and Why That's a Good Thing," *RU-PAC*, April 28, 2020, <https://medium.com/ru-pac/why-russia-sent-humanitarian-aid-to-the-us-and-why-thats-a-good-thing-3c33db304f8>.

³⁴ Mark Bradshaw, "A Calvinist Anglican Converts to Orthodoxy," *Orthodox Christian*, December 16, 2016, <https://orthochristian.com/99482.html>.

³⁵ Bradshaw, "A Calvinist Anglican Converts to Orthodoxy."

³⁶ Bradshaw, "A Calvinist Anglican Converts to Orthodoxy."

³⁷ Artemy Schmidt, "All Roads Lead to the Third Rome," *Orthodox Christian*, March 3, 2018, <https://orthochristian.com/111566.html>.

³⁸ RUSSIAMOVE, "Father Joseph Gleason on the 3 Reasons to Move to Russia. American Orthodox Priest," April 9, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmzyCBb5oIU>.

³⁹ Dmitrii Anokhin, "Borisoglebskie repatrianti. Chego ischut i shto nakhodyat pereselentsy v tikhom ugolke Yaroslavskoi mitropolii," *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov'*, June 21, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5945639.html>.

He is also an editor of and contributor to several English-language websites dedicated to Russian Orthodox news and political commentary.⁴⁰ Additionally, he runs a newsletter on his Substack called “Moving to Russia,” sharing information to assist foreigners in immigrating to Russia.⁴¹

Over the years, Fr. Joseph has gained prominence in Russia. His story and perspective on American politics and US-Russia relations have been featured on numerous major Russian news outlets⁴² and even formed the focus of a special episode of *Amerikanskii metod*, a documentary series hosted by Arkady Mamontov.⁴³ In recent years, he has cultivated a relationship with local authorities in the Yaroslavl region, collaborating to welcome several other American families into the area.⁴⁴

Fr. Joseph’s story may be unusual, but it is far from unique among foreigners moving to Russia for ideological reasons. Among those making such a move, some engage in creating content on Russian society and politics for an English-speaking audience, often collaborating with each other. Joseph Stephen Rose is one such example, a protestant Christian who produces YouTube content, providing insights into life in Russia.⁴⁵ He met his wife, Svetlana Anokhina-Rose, at a Christian conference in the United States, and after living together in Tallahassee, Florida, for a decade, they moved to Russia in February 2022, just before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁴⁶ Their decision was driven by a desire to instill Christian values in their five children and expose them to Russian culture.⁴⁷ Joseph has previously collaborated on video content with Fr. Joseph Gleason and they have both individually created content with a third, more prominent figure, Tim Kirby.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Kirby spent two years in Kazakhstan with the US Peace Corps.⁴⁸ In 2006, he relocated to Moscow and has since served as a program presenter for various radio and television

⁴⁰ "Fr. Joseph Gleason," Russian Faith, n.d., <https://russian-faith.com/authors/fr-joseph-gleason>; Russian Christian News Syndicate, n.d., <https://orthodox.substack.com>; "Fr. Joseph Gleason", Russia Insider, n.d., <https://russia-insider.com/en/fr-joseph-gleason>; "Fr. Joseph Gleason", Global Orthodox, n.d., <https://gorthodox.com/en/columnist/fr-joseph-gleason>.

⁴¹ Substack, Fr. Joseph Gleason, n.d., <https://substack.com/@movingtorussia>.

⁴² Joseph Gleason, “Globalisti nachali voinu v 2014 godu. Seichas Rossiya pitaetsya eyo zakonchit’,” *RG.RU*, December 12, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/12/11/sviashchennik-dzhozef-glison-globalisty-nachali-voynu-v-2014-godu.html>; Sergei Istomin, "V Amerike k vlasti prishli nechestivie lyudi" Religioznie inostrantsi brosayut vsyo i perezhkhayut v Rossiyu. Shto oni zdes' ischut?," *Lenta.ru* August 30, 2021, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2021/08/31/gleason/>; Elizaveta Korolyova and Yana Dovgalenko, “Eto khoroshee mesto’: kak pravoslavonii amerikanets pomogaet perezhkhat’ v Rossiyu drugim inostrantsam,” *RT*, June 25, 2021, <https://russian.rt.com/russia/article/876011-amerikanec-svyaschennik-v-rossii>; Andrei Kuznetsov, "Pravoslavonii svyaschennik Joseph Glison rasskazivaet amerikantsam pravdu o Rossii," *Novosti. Pervyj kanal, 1TV*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.1tv.ru/news/2019-02-26/361026-pravoslavnyy-svyaschennik-dzhozef-glison-rasskazyvaet-amerikantsam-pravdu-o-rossii>.

⁴³ Arcady Mamontov, “Joseph Gleason. Amerikanskii metod,” January 21, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vghh0bT8kd8>.

⁴⁴ Dissident Mama, “Dissident Mama, Episode 65 – Father Joseph Gleason,” October 17, 2022, <https://youtu.be/0YE8qNVBhOg?t=3841>.

⁴⁵ EXPAT American, “ARGUING with a RUSSIAN Priest! SPORIT’ s russkim svyaschennikom,” May 5, 2023, <https://youtu.be/75kkn107K1o>.

⁴⁶ “Vozvraschenie domoi: kak perezhkhat’ iz SSHA v Rossiyu,” Radio Sputnik, March 4, 2023, <https://radiosputnik.ria.ru/20230304/1855830901.html>.

⁴⁷ “Vozvraschenie domoi: kak perezhkhat’ iz SSHA v Rossiyu,” Radio Sputnik, March 4, 2023, <https://radiosputnik.ria.ru/20230304/1855830901.html>; EXPAT American, “WHY I Left Moscow, RUSSIA. Pochemu ya uekhal iz Moskvy, ROSSIYA.,” February 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDh0ITLp98k>.

⁴⁸ Vector585, Rossiya glazami amerikantsia.avi” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyb-i3Ephxs>.

shows. He obtained Russian citizenship in 2018⁴⁹ and currently resides south of Moscow, managing niche but successful YouTube and Rumble channels where he posts videos in English about life and politics in Russia.⁵⁰ Kirby has made frequent appearances on Russian television and radio programs, explaining his decision to leave the United States. His story typically begins with an account of his childhood in Cleveland, describing the challenges of growing up in a dangerous and predominantly Black neighborhood rife with racism.

In his book, *Why Russia?! My Move from an American Home in the Ghetto to a Russian Apartment in Moscow*, he details an anecdotal story from school where Black classmates faced no consequences for cursing at the teacher, while he was suspended for an outburst at a classmate. This story is used to illustrate his opposition to what he describes as “Gestapo whites punishing other whites for the sake of complying with anti-racism.”⁵¹

He recounts several experiences that left him disillusioned with life in the United States, including incidents such as a warrantless search of his family’s home conducted by the police⁵² and bullying at the hands of classmates.⁵³ He also touches on broader social problems, such as high suicide rates among the youth, gun violence, and drug abuse.⁵⁴ However, Kirby also identifies Western liberalism and his fundamental ideological opposition to those ideals as reasons for moving to Russia.

“- I don't agree, neither with the political course of the country, nor with liberalism in general. My views are in constant conflict with American society at the deepest level, which is why I can't watch, neither the news nor programs about politics. Americans are individualists, the main factor in moral decision-making for them is "their own rights as individuals," while for me that factor is "the opportunity for the country to become a great state/empire." At its core, my political views are, for some unknown reason, very Eastern.

- I am a man, and the feminization of Western society is unbearable for me. They say it's hard for poor transsexuals to live in the wrong body. I agree with that, I'm a man, and I don't want to act like a girl or be a girl.

- The cultural masochism of the Western world preached by social justice activists, progressives, and cultural Marxists. I don't want to hate myself or hear them tell me what a terrible person I am.”⁵⁵

The American Village: The Concept

Kirby’s newfound commitment to living in Russia and his popularity as an individual who fled the West for ideological reasons have positioned him as a public figure for like-minded individuals interested in relocating to Russia. Tired of repeatedly addressing the same questions and assisting

⁴⁹ “Uaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 28.11.2018 № 676 “O grazhdanstve Rossiyskoy Federatsii”,
<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201811280028?rangeSize=1&index=2>

⁵⁰ “Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded”, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/@TimKirbyRussiaReloaded>; Rumble, “Tim Kirby Russia,” n.d., <https://rumble.com/c/c-655623>.

⁵¹ Pochemu Rossiya?! p 13.

⁵² Pochemu Rossiya?! p 20

⁵³ Pochemu Rossiya?! p 32

⁵⁴ Pochemu Rossiya?! p 40-42

⁵⁵ Pochemu Rossiya?! p 58

people on an individual basis, he conceived the idea of establishing an American village to facilitate the successful migration of multiple families and individuals to Russia. He organized this project with the assistance of Russian immigration lawyer Timur Beslangurov, the founder and managing partner of the immigration consultation firm VISTA Immigration.⁵⁶ VISTA Immigration is dedicated to “[providing] professional advice in the field of migration legislation covering all aspects of employment of foreign citizens in Russia.” The firm also promotes its services on the website movingtorussia.ru, highlighting “affordable medicine, free public education, [and] low taxation” as reasons to consider moving to Russia, while emphasizing, “Last but not the least – Russia is a strong supporter of traditional values! Globalist, neoliberal agenda will never be supported in Russia.”⁵⁷

Both Kirby and Beslangurov have petitioned the Russian government and regional authorities to amend the Russian immigration system and accommodate the American village project. In February 2023, the Russian Duma hosted a session dedicated to ideological migration from Western countries.⁵⁸ During this session, Russian MP Dmitry Kuznetsov reportedly announced the establishment of a new agency dedicated to assisting migrants from NATO-affiliated countries.⁵⁹ It was further reported⁶⁰ that this agency would include Tim Kirby, Fr. Joseph Gleason, Svetlana Anokhina-Rose, Joseph Rose, former Russian expat Stanislav Filin (who returned to Russia for ideological reasons),⁶¹ Deputy Chairman of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Committee on Intellectual Property and Creative Industries Anatoly Semenov,⁶² and head of the Russian Center in New York Elena Branson.⁶³

Subsequently, Tim, Joseph, and Svetlana testified at a follow-up session of the Moscow Civic Chamber titled “Improvement of Migration Processes and Mechanisms for Attracting Highly Qualified Specialists to Russia.” All three reiterated a consistent narrative of foreigners sharing traditional Russian family values, expressing interest in moving to Russia, highlighting the value that these immigrants would bring to the country, and detailing the challenges faced in dealing with the bureaucratic process.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Vista Immigration, n.d., <https://vista-immigration.ru>. About Us: Moving to Russia, n.d., <https://movingtorussia.ru/about>.

⁵⁷ “Immigration”, Moving to Russia, n.d., <https://movingtorussia.ru/immigration>

⁵⁸ Tatiana Zamakhina, “V gosdume predlozhili mery po uproshcheniiu ideologicheskoy emigracii iz ssha i evropy v rossiiu,” *RG.RU*, February 15, 2023, <https://rg.ru/2023/02/15/v-gosdume-predlozhili-mery-po-uproshcheniiu-ideologicheskoy-emigracii-iz-ssha-i-evropy-v-rossiiu.html>.

⁵⁹ “V Rossii sozdali koordinatsionnii shab pomoschi pereselentsam iz strn NATO,” *Ria Novosti*, February 14, 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230214/shtab-1852026290.html>.

⁶⁰ Tatiana Zamakhina, “V gosdume predlozhili mery po uproshcheniiu ideologicheskoy emigracii iz ssha i evropy v rossiiu,” *RG.RU*, February 15, 2023, <https://rg.ru/2023/02/15/v-gosdume-predlozhili-mery-po-uproshcheniiu-ideologicheskoy-emigracii-iz-ssha-i-evropy-v-rossiiu.html>.

⁶¹ Olga Childs, “The Point of Return: Global Russians that Choose Russia,” *Russia Beyond*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.rbth.com/lifestyle/331694-global-russians-returning-emigrants>.

⁶² Semenov Anatolii Vyacheslavovich, Legal Academy, <https://legalacademy.ru/speaker/4738481>.

⁶³ Alex Woodward, “Who is Elena Branson? US-Russia Citizen Charged with Illegally Acting as Russian Agent,” *The Independent*, March 8, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/crime/elena-branson-us-russia-agent-b2031628.html>.

⁶⁴ Itogovii Forum, “Soobschestvo” / 2-3 noyabrya, Moskva, “Sobershenstvovanie migratsionikh protsessov i mekhanizmov po privlecheniyu vysokokvalifitsirovannykh spetsialistov v Rossiyu,” VKontakte, https://vk.com/video-88216110_456239819?access_key=b65dc89d45997f0a73.

In June 2023, Tim, Joseph, Svetlana, and Timur attended the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum, participating in two panel discussions. The first, titled “Returning to Russia: The Potential of Compatriots for Regional Development,” was chaired by Yevgeny Primakov Jr., the head of Rosstrudnichestvo and grandson of former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, with Joseph and Svetlana as panelists. The focus was on the need to facilitate the process for Russian compatriots to return to Russia. Joseph Rose offered his perspective as a recent immigrant to Russia, stating, “What makes Russia great and productive now are traditional family values,” adding that Russia needs more people who will “follow the rule of law, be productive, and not challenge traditional family values that Russia has.”

His broader point was that Russia needed to embrace people ideologically aligned with the country’s values rather than attempting to repatriate Russian emigrants.⁶⁵ His wife, Svetlana, spoke about the complicated legal process potential immigrants faced. She also provided testimony of an increasing number of foreigners in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand, who have written to her asking for help to migrate to Russia, explicitly invoking the idea of Russia as a safe haven, a “Russian ark where they and their children will be safe.”⁶⁶

The second panel, “From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Why are Europeans Choosing Russia?” featured several Western foreigners who had moved to Russia, with Tim Kirby among them. Yevgeny Primakov Jr. specifically spoke about the low current number of foreigners interested in moving to Russia but claimed that the number of people “emotionally ready to move” is high.⁶⁷ Tim presented his reasons for leaving the United States and painted a bleak picture of mandated gender indoctrination in schools, enforced by the state, describing it as a war against “heterosexuals, white people, and the middle class.”⁶⁸ Timur highlighted that, unlike previous waves of migration waves (specifically during the rule of Catherine the Great),⁶⁹ this situation is unique. Russia isn’t overtly inviting people in, but nevertheless, they wish to come.⁷⁰ He also explained the legal process of emigrating to Russia and drew parallels with the American Diversity Program, suggesting that Russia adopts a similar approach to encourage immigration from Western countries.

The overall message from the group was clear: there are productive Westerners, ideologically in harmony with Russia’s traditional conservative values who seek to emigrate, and Russia should work to change its immigration laws to facilitate their move.

Under Russia’s current immigration laws, foreigners without significant ties to Russia (e.g., being married to a Russian citizen),⁷¹ must initially come to Russia on a temporary visa and then apply for a temporary residency permit. If granted, they are limited to living and working in the region of

⁶⁵ “Vozvrashenie v Rossiyu: potencial sootchestvennikov dlya razvitiya regionov,” Roskongress, June 14, 2023, <https://roscongress.org/sessions/spief-2023-vozvrashchenie-v-rossiyu-potentsial-sootchestvennikov-dlya-razvitiya-regionov/translation/> (40:56-42:41).

⁶⁶ “Vozvrashenie v Rossiyu: potencial sootchestvennikov dlya razvitiya regionov,” June 14, 2023 (45:10).

⁶⁷ “Vozvrashenie v Rossiyu: potencial sootchestvennikov dlya razvitiya regionov,” June 14, 2023 (27:55).

⁶⁸ “Vozvrashenie v Rossiyu: potencial sootchestvennikov dlya razvitiya regionov,” June 14, 2023 (37:15).

⁶⁹ During her reign, Catherine the Great issued two Manifestos inviting thousands of Europeans, especially from German-speaking lands, to move to the Russian Empire. Many heeded the call and emigrated to new settlements along the Volga River.

⁷⁰ “Vozvrashenie v Rossiyu: potencial sootchestvennikov dlya razvitiya regionov,” June 14, 2023. (46:40)

⁷¹ Kremlin.ru, Federal’nyy zakon ot 25.07.2002 r. № 115-FZ O pravovom polozhenii inostrannykh grazhdan v Rossiyskoy Federatsii, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/18669>.

application. Issuance of this temporary residency permit is subject to stringent quotas. In 2022, there were 18,955 spots available, with the largest sub-quantities dispersed to the city of Moscow (1,500 spots) and Moscow Oblast (1,250).⁷² Most cities are allotted only 100 spots, and even Saint Petersburg, the second largest city in Russia, was only allotted 600 spots.⁷³

In the event of their application being denied, individuals must depart Russia when their visa expires and restart the entire process. The procedure is streamlined for American nationals, as US citizens have the distinctive option to apply for a three-year multiple-entry visa.⁷⁴ While this does not prevent applicants from making additional attempts, it makes the procedure quite costly. A further complication arises from the fact that the overwhelming majority of quota spots (over 90%) are filled by citizens of countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, this is precisely the route followed by several ideological migrants from Western countries.

The American Village: The Reality

Regarding the agency that would assist migrants from Western countries, Tim, together with Fr. Joseph, Joseph Rose, and Svetlana Rose, has established a self-described non-state social initiative called the Immigration Aid Centre. Another colleague featured on the website is Frenchman Fabrice Sorlin, one of the organizers of the first World Congress of Families in Paris in 2017.⁷⁶ Fabrice's inclusion is noteworthy due to his past affiliation with the militant French far right, having been a candidate of the then-named Front National and the director of the Nationalist Catholic fundamentalist organization *Dies Irae*.⁷⁷

The website, registered in February 2023,⁷⁸ encourages interested individuals to contact the center for assistance throughout the immigration process. It also provides updates on the American village and features a letter sent by the organizers to former US president Donald Trump, encouraging him to leverage "the offer of Maria Butina" and to "apply to the Russian government to obtain the status

⁷² Rasporyazhenie Pravitel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 11.10.2021 № 2856-r, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202110120023?index=1>.

⁷³ Rasporyazhenie Pravitel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 11.10.2021 № 2856-r.

⁷⁴ "O vstuplenii v silu Soglasheniya mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiey I Soedinënnymi Shtatami Ameriki ob uproschenii vizovykh formal'nostey dlya grazhdan Rossiyskoy Federatsii i grazhdan Soedinënnnykh Shtatov Ameriki," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, September 6, 2012, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1620384/.

⁷⁵ Andrey Nikolaevich Yakimov, "Regulirovanie migratsionnykh protsessov v SNG, EAES i Rossiyskoy Federatsii," BF PSP-fond, 2021, p 26, http://migrussia.ru/images/Migratsionnye_protsessy_v_EAES_i_SNG.pdf.

⁷⁶ Antoine Malo, "Fabrice Sorlin, ce catholique traditionnaliste français devenu soldat discret des réseaux russes," *Le Journal du Dimanche*, October 24, 2022, <https://www.lejdd.fr/International/fabrice-sorlin-ce-catholique-traditionnaliste-francais-devenu-soldat-discret-des-reseaux-russes-4142516>; Hélène Barthélemy, "How The World Congress of Families Serves Russian Orthodox Political Interests," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/16/how-world-congress-families-serves-russian-orthodox-political-interests>.

⁷⁷ Hélène Barthélemy, "The Strange Alliance Between Russian Orthodox Monarchists, American Christian Evangelicals and European Fascists," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/09/18/strange-alliance-between-russian-orthodox-monarchists-american-christian-evangelicals-and>.

⁷⁸ "Whois Expatrussia.org," n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20230729001018/https://www.whois.com/whois/expatrussia.org>

of refugee.”⁷⁹ The letter explicitly extends a special offer to Trump to acquire a plot of land in the American village.

Details about the village itself have changed considerably throughout the duration of the project’s development and are dispersed across Tim Kirby’s numerous livestreams and the official Telegram account for the project.⁸⁰ Initially, it appeared that the proposed village would be located south of Moscow, near the town of Serpukhov in the Moscow Oblast, on the south bank of the Oka River. Estimates regarding the number of people who would have relocated to the village vary, but it was initially expected to accommodate between 100 and 200 families. Tim had previously mentioned that, while the general plan was to settle everyone in this village, there is apparently no requirement to join it, and participants in the project could choose to settle elsewhere in Russia, presumably by qualifying within the local quota system.

Tim had also expressed his aim was to have all the houses in the village built by a single company, though he also indicated that those desiring a more custom dwelling could potentially arrange something independently or through the contracted company. Regarding the houses themselves, Tim at one point claimed that they would be constructed using 3D printing technology and would be left empty for settlers to furnish on their own. There are provisional blueprints of the homes that have been released. Interested participants were requested to submit photocopies of their passports to Tim via Telegram, allowing him to present them to the local Russian authorities as proof of how many people were genuinely interested in moving to Russia and participating in the project.

One of the original hopes was for the American village to attain classification as a “socially significant project” in early 2024, with actual construction anticipated to commence in the summer of 2024. Bestowing the status of a “socially significant project” would, in theory, qualify investors in the project to obtain permanent residency in Russia. This eligibility stems from a newly enacted law in January 2023,⁸¹ allowing foreigners to apply for permanent residency by investing 15 million rubles (approximately \$150,000 as of September 2023) in a socially significant project, within one of Russia’s regions.⁸² The hope was that this approach would be the most feasible means of legitimizing the project within the framework of current Russian immigration law. Tim alluded to the possibility of establishing a separate entity that would offer loans to cover the investment in the project, allowing individuals to meet the requirements for an investment. They would then repay the legal entity for the loan after moving. However, it appears that this initiative has fallen through.

⁷⁹ Russian Immigration Center, “Pismo Trampu,” n.d., https://web.archive.org/web/20231207215652/https://static.tildacdn.com/tild3432-6238-4662-b034-363562633138/AID_CENTER_page-0001.jpg

⁸⁰ “American Villages in Russia (Official),” Telegram, n.d., <https://t.me/AmericanVillageSerpukhov>

⁸¹ Timur Batirov, “Mishustin utverdil pravila vydachi VNZH investoram-inostrantsam,” *Forbes.ru*, January 3, 2023, <https://www.forbes.ru/investicii/483450-misustin-utverdil-pravila-vydaci-vnz-investoram-inostrancam>.

⁸² Postanovlenie Pravitel’sтва Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 31.12.2022 No. 2573 “Ob utverzhdenii kriteriev, kotorym dolzhen sootvetstvovat’ inostrannyi grazhdanin, osuchshestvivyshiy investitsii v Rossiyskoy Federatsii, dlya vydachi vid ana zhitel’stvo v Rossiyskoy Federatsii bez polucheniya razresheniya na vremennoe prozhivanie.” <https://web.archive.org/web/20230113215848/http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202301040004?index=0&rangeSize=1>

On September 10, 2023, a somber Tim provided an update on the status of the American village, addressing questions about why the project was taking so long. He stated that they had successfully persuaded the Russian authorities that the project was viable and should move forward, but they faced the challenge of advancing to the next stage of breaking ground on the land. He described the current status as a paradox where the project requires funding to pay for the rezoning of the land and connecting the village to the main power grid, estimated to cost between two and three million rubles (\$20-30,000).⁸³ However, despite actively seeking investors willing to contribute funds for this phase, they were unsuccessful.

Tim went on to clarify that the initial hope of classifying the village as a socially significant project had been dashed. According to Tim, the Moscow regional government was unwilling to grant the project that special status.⁸⁴ Furthermore, he claimed that the government mandated an investment of 25 million rubles for real estate classified as a socially significant project. He argued that this amount was considerably higher than the cost of an individual house, stating, "The [problem] is that we couldn't build anything expensive enough, especially if it's at the government appraisal value." Thus, residents will not be able to obtain Russian residency by building a home in the village and will need to apply through different methods.

A few days later, Tim posted an update on the village Telegram channel, stating that, through Fr. Joseph Gleason, he had connected with a construction company willing to provide the funds required for rezoning and subdividing the land.⁸⁵ However, when I reached out to Tim for comments on the project, he responded that he considered it effectively dead and declined to be interviewed. Nevertheless, he announced on the Telegram channel that a website dedicated to the American Village project was currently under development and would be released soon.⁸⁶ In a subsequent message, he implied that the project would be reconceived to collaborate with the town of Mosalsk in the Kaluga Oblast.⁸⁷

In late January, Tim announced that the new website was ready and launched. It is the most comprehensive and clear picture of the American Villages project released thus far. It lists a number of current projects (hence the plural of village) which includes the originally envisioned location of Serpukhov, but also pending locations in Yoshkar-Ola, Yaroslavl, Bashkortostan, and Kaluga.⁸⁸ There are currently only two active projects. The first is "Big Water" in Istra.⁸⁹ Tim explained in a livestream and in subsequent messages over Telegram that the location in Istra was being developed with a construction company in a gated community on the outskirts of Moscow. Homes here would cost 16

⁸³ Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded, "Why is The American Village taking so long?," September 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWTQBML6Em8>.

⁸⁴ Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded, "Why is The American Village taking so long?," September 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWTQBML6Em8>.

⁸⁵ "American Villages in Russia (Serpukhov / Serpukhov)," Telegram, n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20230920233854/https://t.me/AmericanVillageSerpukhov/67>

⁸⁶ "American Villages in Russia (Serpukhov / Serpukhov)," Telegram, n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20231207210923/https://t.me/AmericanVillageSerpukhov/108>

⁸⁷ "American Villages in Russia (Serpukhov / Serpukhov)," Telegram, n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20231207211431/https://t.me/AmericanVillageSerpukhov/124>

⁸⁸ American villages in Russia, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240205072914/https://americanvillages.tilda.ws/>.

⁸⁹ "Big Water" Istra, Moscow Region, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240207030556/https://americanvillages.tilda.ws/bigwater>.

million rubles (US\$178,000) and the construction company requires a downpayment of 51%. It is important to note that, while interested individuals can actively purchase those plots of land, there are a number of Russians living in the community already and the plots are not be exclusively reserved for foreigners participating in the American Villages project.⁹⁰

The second project is not advertised on the website, but was announced by Tim in a separate livestream.⁹¹ “Orlovsky” in the Shchyolkovo region north of Moscow is similar to the “Big Water” location in that it is a small, existing community with a few plots available for purchase by foreigners. Homes here would cost 14 million rubles (\$156,000) and the construction company would need 52% of the money up front. The size of the projects is also quite small. “Big Water” in Istra has a maximum of 20 spots (which can also be bought by Russians) and Orlovsky has of 14 spots available (again, which can also be bought by Russians).⁹² Tim repeatedly emphasized that this opportunity was limited and that, for people to secure one of those spots, they would need to submit a downpayment by February 24.

Hence, the fate of the project remains uncertain. It appears that the American Village, as originally conceived, may not materialize anytime soon, if at all. That being said, even if there may never be a true American Village of purely expats living in a new community together, Tim has been able to successfully get the Russian government to allow those who buy homes through the project to bypass the quota system.⁹³ Therein is the key component of Tim’s work: exclusive bypass of the quota system for those participating in the American Villages project. Moreover, it is clear that, at the very least, Tim and some active users in the Telegram channels associated with the project, such as Fr. Joseph Gleason, Joseph Rose, and Timur Beslangurov, have succeeded in building a small community of dedicated individuals eager to make the move. The community regularly shares updates on changes to immigration law in Russia, along with recommendations for navigating the bureaucratic process. They also exchange advice on transferring savings from the US (or other Western countries) to Russia, as well as how to address potential tax implications and pension considerations. Despite clear setbacks, it appears that the global project of aiding Westerners interested in moving to Russia has established a solid foundation, even if it is only a community of individuals eager to share resources and testimonies.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen how many families will successfully be able to resettle in Russia. The initially estimated numbers that gained attention are indeed very small, and it is unclear how many of those expressing interest in moving to Russia will actually follow through. Thus, in the broader context of Russia’s immigration figures, the scale of this project is quite small.

⁹⁰ Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded, “The American Village In Russia Opens! Buy your way to a home and life in Russia!,” January 27, 2024, <https://youtu.be/KrjoHK49kfU?si=ALhXavh1W9uEw7Qj&t=2391>.

⁹¹ Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded, “The American Villages Project HUGE POST LAUNCH UPDATE!,” February 4, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D1mR8K5XM4>.

⁹² Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded, “The American Villages Project HUGE POST LAUNCH UPDATE!,” February 4, 2024, <https://youtu.be/2D1mR8K5XM4?si=PrQ1jGwEFqL8V-mI&t=1316>.

⁹³ Tim Kirby Russia Reloaded, “The American Village In Russia Opens! Buy your way to a home and life in Russia!,” January 27, 2024, <https://youtu.be/KrjoHK49kfU?si=4SiybCbwpqgetu1h&t=2719>.

It is further important to recognize the ideological nature of this emigration. Ideological emigration is not a new concept; there are instances, for example, of left-wing Americans vowing to move to Canada based on the results of the next election.⁹⁴ There isn't necessarily anything conceptually wrong with the idea of relocating to a different country that shares your values to make a better life. That being said, the philosophical convictions of those desiring to move to Russia cannot be ignored. It is specifically Western conservatives with a particular worldview that reject the values of plurality and protection for minorities. Furthermore, in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is a group that either intentionally overlooks or tacitly accepts Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its neighboring states.

Another significant aspect is the notable attention this group of expats has garnered from Russian officials. Their participation in two panel discussions at the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum, ongoing discussions with the Russian Duma and regional authorities, and coverage in major Russian newspapers are all good examples of the substantial attention generated by this project. It serves as a compelling illustration of the message that a segment of the liberal democratic West is dissatisfied with certain elements of liberal democracy, views Russia as a country aligning with their philosophical and moral convictions, and is willing to physically relocate to a country that would welcome them.

Furthermore, the unique proximity with which these expats can engage with Russian officials extends beyond Tim Kirby, Fr. Gleason, or Joseph Rose. Kevin Michelizzi, an American expat and former engineer for the US Department of Defense, relocated to Crimea in the early 2010s and has lived there ever since.⁹⁵ He manages his own YouTube channel and podcast and contributes to the blog "Information Warfare Analysis," focusing on international politics.⁹⁶ Of particular interest is his interview with Maria Butina regarding her experience in the United States and insights into Russia's immigration system.⁹⁷ He appears to have cultivated a special relationship with Butina and her team, mentioning that he facilitates connections for those interested in moving to Russia, guiding them through the legal immigration system.⁹⁸ Clearly, these connections exist, and the Russian authorities are taking notice.

The Russian government and Russian officials consistently convey the message that Russia welcomes Russian expats and foreigners who uphold traditional values. Since the commencement of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, various videos promoting Russia as a desirable destination or cautioning Russians about gay people, Black people, and vegetarians have circulated widely on the internet.⁹⁹ Vmeste RF (Together-RF), the official broadcasting channel of the Federation Council of

⁹⁴ Matt Motyl, "If He Wins, I'm Moving to Canada': Ideological Migration Threats Following the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election," *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 14 no. 1 (2014): 123-136.

⁹⁵ American in Crimea, "TKR#51 American Podcasting from Occupied Crimea with Kevin Michelizzi," March 25, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-NZRnnpd5Ko>.

⁹⁶ Information Warfare Analysis, n.d., <https://www.infowars.press>.

⁹⁷ American in Crimea, "American in Crimea Interviews Maria Valeryevna Butina," July 1, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWbkfQzhg5k>.

⁹⁸ American in Crimea, "Moving to Russia: Update from Peter, Arkady, and my wife," August 19, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/live/HFXM8Om3i7U?si=Yp9mwqeIMrxVxV6t&t=4403>.

⁹⁹ @EmbajadaRusaES, "Time to move to Russia ❤️💎💎," Twitter, July 29, 2022, <https://twitter.com/EmbajadaRusaES/status/1552886838926479360?s=20>; @KermlinRussia, "V RF zapustili roliki protiv lavinoobrazonoy emigratsii." Twitter, October 5, 2022, <https://twitter.com/KermlinRussia/status/1577768742066524168>.

Russia, has produced a documentary series titled *Ne Inostranets* (Not a Foreigner), released in January 2022. The series focuses on showcasing success stories of immigrants to Russia,¹⁰⁰ taking care to highlight the wonders of life in Russia, its robust culture, and often subtly pointing out contrasts with the individual's home country.

Most recently, the All-Russian Association for the Development of Local Self-Government organized the inaugural All-Russian municipal forum, *Malaya Rodina—Sila Rossii* (Small Motherland is the Strength of Russia). During this event, President Vladimir Putin remarked on the growing number of Russian expats returning to Russia after encountering gender-neutral bathrooms, stating, "It is very difficult to live in such conditions for people with traditional, normal human values."¹⁰¹

Though modest in size, the community formed around the American Village project serves as a clear and concrete example of the compelling ideological attraction of Russia. While some may mock videos portraying Western countries as cesspools of deprivation, lacking morality or sense, and praising Russia as an idealized society of culturally rich people who, despite enduring some hardships, are spiritually better off, there are individuals for whom this message resonates. The model presented by Russia as an alternative to Western liberalism—specifically, a society that upholds traditional values—is perceived as a success story by certain segments of Western populations. It is a narrative that warrants attention.

¹⁰⁰ Vmeste RF, *Ne inostranets*, n.d., <https://vmeste-rf.tv/programs/ne-inostranets/>

¹⁰¹ Aleksandra Frans, "Putin zayavil, chto mnogie rossiyane khotyat vernut'sya v Rossiu iz-za obchshikh tualetov na Zapade," *Gazeta.ru*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2024/01/16/22124923.shtml?updated>.