Georgi Derluguian and Vladislav Zubok described similar stories from their childhoods that illustrate the historically complicated relationship between the United States and Russia. Both recall the way members of their families remembered finding small gifts—a candy bar, a set of mittens—hidden in the glove boxes of Studebaker cars, purchased by the Russian army at the height of the Cold War. Derluguian and Zubok said these small gestures from Detroit’s auto workers resonate in the minds of many Russians.

Derlugian emphasized that talking about Russian anti-Americanism is somewhat myopic, since Russia is only one country in a world where Anti-Americanism is widespread. He said in one country, Serbia, have negative feelings toward the United States improved, and that was only because starting with a 97% disapproval rating, there was no where to go but down.

In Russia, Anti-American sentiment is strongest among college-educated, urban, youth. He said that he best-informed citizens are usually the most anti-American.

Zubok explained Russian Anti-Americanism by looking at propaganda. He said that during the Cold War, anti-American propaganda succeeded in arousing hatred for the U.S. government, but it unintentionally aroused warm feelings toward the people of the United States. Many Russians were sympathetic to the American people, who were thought to be dominated by and toiling under a system of powerful fat cats. But they also saw the United States as an extreme utopia, even “further west than the actual country,” said Zubok. He added that this extreme pro-Americanism was at its height immediately following Stalin’s death.

This schizophrenic view of the United States lingered for many years, until the end of the Cold War. The shift towards Anti-Americanism was dramatic, he said, and under Putin, people began to believe the messages of old Communist propaganda.

John Brown, former Cultural Affairs Officer in Moscow, offered his take on why this schizophrenic attitude toward American culture runs so deep in the Russian public. He suggested that it may be something as simple as their perception that the United States simply does not have a culture.

He said that most Russians see American culture as vulgar. He added that many people remember it once being distant and appealing but saw it turn into a vulture after the end of the Cold War, and the popular culture that Russians saw coming across the ocean was seen as cheap, and sickening. It may have simply been too much, too soon, said Brown.

Worse, said Brown, the American culture many Russians experience is widely considered a lack of culture. Brown explained that Russians are extremely proud of their people’s cultural contributions, and they define themselves as a people by evoking Dostoyevsky and Chekov. They government supports their own culture and cultural programming. Not true in the United States. Brown surmised that some Russians do not necessary see the validity in American culture since it is highly commercial and not even supported by its own government.