This volume contains thirty-three papers written for the conference "Summerfolk: Summer Dwellers and Summer Dwellings in the Baltic Area," which took place over a period of ten days in summer 2006 in Repino. Although, presumably, most contributions underwent revision for publication, many still have the ring of oral presentations. Scholars employ informal diction and, at times, use personal reminiscences of visits to Russian dachas to support their observations. Papers vary in both quality and approach; some focus on such narrowly defined topics and problems (specific dacha regions; dachas in relatively minor works of literature) that they will most likely interest only those with similar specialized interests.

As this description probably suggests, The Dacha Kingdom resembles a volume of conference proceedings more than a polished edited collection, and most readers will probably want to pick and choose from its contents rather than move through it cover to cover. That being said, the book does contain a good deal that is interesting and new. It adds in significant ways to our knowledge of the dacha as a cultural phenomenon and also specifically to our understanding of Baltic resort areas that, as a result of wars, revolutions, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, passed from state to state repeatedly over the course of the twentieth century.

Readers curious about relations between Russian dacha dwellers in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia and the native populations that surrounded them will find much to interest them in this book. The Dacha Kingdom contains a whole series of articles on the life of Russian dacha dwellers in the Soviet Union's Baltic republics in various periods, including an article by Liubov Kiseleva on Else, one of the Estonian vacation spots favored by faculty from the University of Tartu. An interesting piece by Irina Belobrovtseva considers the extent to which long-time Russian dacha owners managed to gain acceptance in Estonian villages and briefly notes how their experience changed following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Dacha Kingdom features a diverse list of contributors, including some scholars who have already published extensively on Russian leisure-time activities and/or the dacha as a phenomenon specifically. Stephen Lovell contributes a short paper entitled "In and Out of Petersburg and Moscow: Towards a History of Exurban Russia," which suggests that historians may have exaggerated the divisions that existed between Russia's cities and its countryside in the imperial period. Although much divided the two environments, Lovell notes, they were always joined by "regular back-and-forth traffic" (27), including the seasonal movements of dacha dwellers. Focusing primarily on Pavlovsk, Richard Stites provides an account of the entertainments that enjoyed popularity among nineteenth-century dacha dwellers. Tatiana Tsivian offers readers a brief analysis of the dacha from the perspective of semiotics and cultural studies.

Other particularly interesting contributions to the volume include an article by Inna Kopoteva on the economic relations between dacha dwellers and year-round residents in Russian villages that relies on data collected in a survey conducted in Karelia and the Nizhegorodskaya oblast in 2005. In neat statistical tables, Kopoteva reports where dacha dwellers get their groceries, in what situations they pay year-round residents for assistance, and whether they consider their relations with the locals cordial, neutral, or distant. In her conclusion, Kopoteva argues that, while in some cases dacha dwellers clearly help to invigorate local economies and sustain villages, in others, the interests of dacha dwellers and villagers may conflict. In another, equally interesting contribution, Mari Ristolainen discusses the involvement of dacha dwellers in local preservation efforts and cultural patronage in general.

The middle third of the book is devoted to studies of the "dacha text" in literature and includes papers on the work of Konstantin Paustovskii, Aleksei Remizov, Elena Guro, and Joseph Brodsky, all of which will interest specialists in Russian literature. Articles by Elena Dushechkina and Valentina Gavrishina describe the prerevolutionary periodicals that chronicled dacha life and/or catered to the needs and interests of dacha dwellers.
The Dacha Kingdom is broadly international in its scope. Ten of the thirty-three papers included in this collection were written by scholars based in Finland; ten by Russians; and three each by Estonian, Latvian, and Italian scholars. Contributions by scholars from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States are also included. Approximately half of the papers appear in Russian; half in English. This volume would make a nice addition to most research libraries and is certainly likely to interest anyone working on leisure culture in Russia or the history of the dacha specifically.

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The authors of this long book purport to present an interpretation of a century of American perceptions of Russia and China, and they argue that it is essential to examine deeply held attitudes if we are to appreciate the tortured history of U.S. policies toward two of the most important protagonists Washington has faced and continues to face. Policy, they contend, has followed attitude, not the reverse. There is much to endorse this approach, as it breaks from narrowly conceived diplomatic history that emphasizes bureaucratic policymaking, formal diplomacy, and official archives. Instead, Davis and Trani focus on a select group of writers, commentators, and officials to uncover what they believe has been a pattern of generally negative feelings toward Russia as opposed to generally positive sentiments toward China. These have been so persistent that the authors characterize them as prejudices, akin to those expressed about race or gender in other circumstances.

Their story begins at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries where they identify key opinion-makers who establish narratives that are then reproduced throughout the following years by a variety of players. For Russia, their bête noire is George Kennan, who establishes the image of Russian barbarism and irredeemable autocracy in the American mind, setting the basic direction of subsequent American policy. As they say, Kennan is at the start of “an almost straight line” (11) that runs directly to William C. Bullitt, and then to George F. Kennan, militant anti-Soviet Cold Warriors such as Paul Nitze, and to today’s pundits who dismiss Vladimir Putin and other Russian leaders as simply the latest incarnations of tsarism. Along the way, the authors comment on Russia experts, Samuel Harper, Robert Kelley, Eugene Lyons, and a wide range of other Russia specialists in and out of government. Franklin D. Roosevelt and his “Yalta” view, and a few other fleeting moments, are deemed the exception to the “Riga” approach that has dominated American thinking.

In contrast, the American attitude toward China has been one of consistent, but unfounded, romanticism, idealization, and friendly optimism. Beginning with William W. Rockhill’s beguiling portrayal of China as a sort of Shangri-la, a China mystique has seduced Americans, who have pursued policies at odds with actual conditions and American interests. Along the way, we become acquainted with Americans who wrote sympathetically of China. These include John Dewey, who developed close friendships with liberal Chinese intellectuals, the famed journalist Edgar Snow, who gained unusual access to the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the novelist Pearl Buck, Henry Luce of the Time-Life publishing empire, and the peripatetic Henry Kissinger.

Curiously, two presidents receive unexpected praise. Ronald Reagan is presented as someone who favored accommodation with Moscow, reviving the promise of Roosevelt’s Yalta approach. In this view, the Reagan-Gorbachev summits overshadow Reagan’s early dismissal of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire.” President George H. W. Bush is complimented for introducing a note of “realism” into the U.S. relationship with China, replacing the previous blind “idealism.” Bush is not remembered so much for coddling Beijing after the Tian’anmen tragedy, but for his administration’s new attitude of frankness toward China’s rulers.