The Rhetorical Rise and Demise of “Democracy” in Russian Political Discourse is a multi-volume series that orbits around analysis of rhetoric, public address, and political argumentation from the late Soviet period through the contemporary discourse of Vladimir Putin. Collectively, the volumes examine significant moments and evolving trajectories in Russian political address: from its emergence due to fissures in the ubiquity of Soviet information control occasioned by political disasters such as the 1983 shootdown of a Korean airliner (KAL 007) and technological and environmental disasters such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident; through its “promise” in the open and relatively democratic Yeltsin years; to its slow strangulation under Putin’s creeping authoritarianism. This has been an enormous project, spanning nearly forty years of research and writing.

But it was not planned that way; indeed, it was not really planned at all. Rather, this project began in the early 1980s when Michael Launer and Marilyn Young, an academic couple at Florida State University, found rich ground for collaboration in intersections between their respective disciplines. Michael was a professor of Russian language and linguistics (as well as a technical translator and interpreter), and Marilyn was a professor of argumentation and rhetoric, with a focus on the discourse of the Cold War. She was also the Director of Debate. Together, they began to analyze Soviet public arguments, which perforce meant they were restricted to those initially rare times when the arguments were public. It became clear much later that those times were also the occasions that slowly forced openings in Soviet information control, allowing for public and political contestation of official declarations and positions. Singly, in tandem, or sometimes with another collaborator, Michael and Marilyn published several articles analyzing and evaluating Soviet public arguments (including the use of evidence) that had emerged from events such as KAL 007, Chernobyl, and the 1988 shootdown of the Iran Airbus. They also coauthored a book focusing on the use of evidence in arguments advanced about KAL 007.
In August 1991, even as the coup attempt in the Soviet Union was beginning to unfold, David Cratis Williams, a professor of rhetoric and communication at what was then Northeast Missouri State University (and a former Director of Debate at Wake Forest University), attended a biennial argumentation conference in Utah, where he learned of the upcoming “Conference on the Practical Application of Argumentation Theory to Politics, Business and Industry” to be held in Leningrad, USSR, in January 1992. A former student and debate assistant, who was a colleague of the American co-organizer of the conference, encouraged David to submit a paper proposal. “When will you ever get another opportunity to go to the Soviet Union?” the debate assistant asked. David was enticed, even though his work to that point had been focused on the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke, connections between ideology and rhetoric, and public argument in specific US case studies (including pro-slavery argumentation). He had no academic background concerning the Soviet Union.

Marilyn attended the same argumentation conference in Utah. She and David knew each other through debate (she had judged him several times at college debate tournaments, and later they coached teams that competed against each other), but their relationship did not really extend beyond the debate connection. Neither recalls any conversations with the other during that Utah conference.

As it happens Marilyn had also received a flyer about the Leningrad conference and had already begun to make plans to attend. Marilyn was especially excited, because, although she had been to the USSR twice at that point, both times as a tourist, this upcoming conference was exactly the kind of opportunity she was looking for. Michael had been to the Soviet Union in 1972, and again in 1978, as a Fulbright Scholar; in 1974 as the faculty chaperone for the US National Debate tour; and by the late 1980s was going regularly as an interpreter/translator for post-Chernobyl assistance programs. Marilyn developed a proposal for a paper along the lines of the conference theme, detailing the ability of local action to change government policy, and submitted it to the conference. While this paper looked only tangentially at argument and rhetoric, Marilyn and Michael hoped it would enable them to make contacts in Leningrad that would further their long-term research goal of testing the applicability of Western theories of rhetoric and argument in an information-restricted society.
Neither Marilyn nor David knew the other had submitted to the planned conference. Both submissions were accepted and—individually—David, Marilyn, and Michael prepared for travel to the Soviet Union.

But things changed dramatically before the conference convened in late January. David’s airline ticket to Leningrad instead took him to St. Petersburg, which he knew from the handwritten sign in English posted outside the reception area at the airport: “Welcome to St. Petersburg.” David soon thought it might as well have said, “Welcome to the Wild West” (minus the gun battles). With the magnitude and rapidity of changes attendant to the sudden national independence of the Russian Federation and the declared democratic aspirations of President—and national hero for his opposition to the August coup attempt—Boris Yeltsin, the city seemed nervously euphoric. The old norms of life were vanishing, and what would follow was a great mystery. Tremendous optimism and hope mingled with fear and anxiety against a backdrop of food shortages, material deprivation, political uncertainty, and economic chaos.

Conference participants stayed at the Oktiabrskiaia, a traditional Soviet hotel off Nevsky Prospect near Moskovsky train station, while the conference venue was St. Petersburg State University. Given the disruptions in “normal” life, it should not be surprising that it was not a normal academic conference. The first day, a chartered bus carried conference participants along Nevsky, crossing the Neva River to the University for registration, payment of fees, and official welcomes. Paper presentations would begin the next morning. Following the reception, conference participants learned there was no bus back to the hotel. Indeed, there would be no more buses between the hotel and the University for the duration of the conference.

Every day after that, they walked the length of Nevsky, shivering in the January cold. They met in unheated classrooms, breath condensing as papers were delivered. There was no program; there was no set order for paper presentations. Participants would ask each other, “Have you gone yet? Do you want to go next?” Yet, somehow, Russian college students appeared for each talk to serve as interpreters. When David presented his paper “Argumentation, Rationality, and Ideology: The Case of the Ante-Bellum American South,” which looked at the roles of argument and rhetoric in social change, his interpreter was a student who introduced himself as Maxim. Following the presentation, Maxim engaged David in
conversation, asking more about rhetoric and public argument. Russians, he said, did not know much about such topics since they were banned from the curriculum in the early days of the Soviet Union (excepting narrow considerations of “rhetoric” strictly as a concern with style, primarily meaning literary style).

Maxim then indicated that his major professor, who—he quickly qualified—was not associated with the rather chaotic conference, was very much interested in the subjects of argumentation and social change and would like to meet and discuss them. They would send a car (a car!) to the hotel and drive to see his professor. He encouraged David to invite another American scholar with similar interests to join him. David immediately thought of Marilyn since he knew her, had some familiarity with her work, and understood that she had a good deal of knowledge about the Soviet Union, even if she (like him) did not speak Russian. Moreover, he had by then learned that Michael was a Professor of Russian and a translator and interpreter, which struck him as a good omen, even though Michael would soon leave the conference for an interpreting assignment in Western Siberia.

At the appointed time, Marilyn and David waited together in the hotel lobby. Soon Maxim appeared accompanied by a middle-aged man wearing a grey, seemingly wool, military-style trench coat and a black rabbit fur hat; he had a pale complexion, a virtually expressionless face, and pale blue eyes that were initially obscured behind sunglasses. Maxim introduced him as Vladimir. Here, thought David and Marilyn, was the major professor. But he spoke no English, so questions and further explanations were deferred. They all quickly scurried outside, where sure enough a car awaited them directly in front of the hotel. Instead of a Lada, which they had expected, it was a black Volga, a “Party car.” And there was a partially uniformed driver who wore a military-style jacket, a jaunty driver’s cap, and Western blue jeans. He was not introduced, and it soon became evident that he did not speak English either.

They piled into the car, Vladimir up front and Marilyn and David on either side of Maxim in the back. Although not new, the car was clean on the inside and shiny on the outside; there was a large, wide console between the driver’s and front passenger’s seats. As they merged into traffic leaving the hotel, Marilyn and David expected a quick drive up Nevsky Prospect to the University and the faculty offices. Instead, the driver turned in another direction. Maybe an alternate route? A shortcut? But as
they asked questions, Maxim’s English began to waver. Although he had been David’s interpreter, his spoken English was not in fact very strong, and for some reason it deteriorated the farther the vehicle got from the City Center. Marilyn and David began exchanging questioning looks as two things slowly became clear to them: they were not going, by any route, to the University, and Maxim—for whatever reason—was not going to provide illumination. Soon they were on a major highway, probably a ring road. Their anxiety elevated, Marilyn and David unsuccessfully began to press Maxim about where they were going. But they were interrupted by the wails of a siren—and they were pulled over by the police.

Without waiting for the officer to reach the car, the driver and Vladimir jumped out and intercepted him as he approached. A vigorous and fairly loud discussion followed, but since it was in Russian Marilyn and David had no idea what was going on. Soon the driver and Vladimir marched back to the car with the policeman in tow. They opened the front doors, and then the driver opened the large console between the seats, revealing to Marilyn and David’s shock and amazement a built-in car telephone. He dialed a number then handed the phone to Vladimir, who spoke quietly and quickly into the receiver before handing it on to the policeman. The officer listened, responded with one of the very few Russian words David could recognize (“Da!”), then handed the phone back to Vladimir, saluted, returned to his vehicle, and drove away. As their car pulled back onto the road and continued toward wherever they were going without any word of explanation offered to them, Marilyn and David again shared perplexed and anxious glances. It was evident to them that things truly were far from normal, that someone—presumably the major professor—must be very important.

Eventually they turned off the highway onto a two-lane paved road that wound eastward into a forest of tall, telephone-pole-straight birch trees. (Later, they would learn that the entire area was known as Osinovaia roshcha—Aspen Woods.) The road narrowed, the shoulder virtually disappeared, and the sun did disappear, blocked by the density and height of the forest. Shadows punctuated the road even as the forest swallowed most of the sun’s illumination. Yet on they went.

Increasingly anxious, Marilyn and David kept exchanging glances permeated with apprehension. As they later discovered, they were each re-running in their memories every grade B Soviet spy movie they had ever seen. For all practical purposes, Maxim’s English had withered to nothing.
Soon a painted concrete or mortar wall appeared on their right side, running parallel to the road and set back just a few feet from it. It was seven or eight feet tall and appeared to be thick and solid. They drove parallel to the wall for what seemed like several hundred feet before the road abruptly and sharply curved to the right, suddenly revealing a very large, two-lane wide solid gate in the wall. Two uniformed men carrying automatic weapons, presumably Kalashnikovs, guarded the gate. The car stopped, and the driver got out to speak with the armed guards before returning to the car. The gate swung open, they drove through, then—slam!—the gate closed behind them. They had arrived. Where, they did not know. All they knew at that moment was that they would be there until such time as someone escorted them back through the gate.

They were in a compound with a small number of buildings and, judging from the length of the wall, a sizeable bit of land. The main building was a fairly large but unprepossessing house, a farmhouse by appearances. They were silently guided into the kitchen, where there was a small cluster of people. Maxim regained enough English to introduce them to the central figure in the small cluster: Dr. Alexander Yuriev. He, not Vladimir, was Maxim’s major professor, and he was clearly in charge of whatever was going on. One of the others there was an experienced interpreter.

After resolving the important initial question of tea or coffee, Marilyn and David slowly began to get detailed explanations from both Alexander and Vladimir. The compound at which they had arrived was a government-owned dacha that Stalin had used when in Leningrad during its long siege. Now it was often referred to simply as “Stalin’s Dacha.” Alexander Yuriev was Professor of Political Psychology at the University, but he was also Lead Scientist of the Organization for Social Stability, Justice, and Ecology of Personality (or, as was written on the English language side of his business card, the SSSEL), a research and training center loosely associated with the University. Vladimir Vasiliev was the Executive Director. In addition, Alexander served as an occasional advisor to Boris Yeltsin and, later, Vladimir Putin (whom he knew from St. Petersburg city government). When Marilyn and David visited Stalin’s Dacha, Alexander and SSSEL were conducting a specially developed training program to prepare Yeltsin’s newly appointed Presidential Representatives to facilitate Russia’s transition to a democratic state. The entire program, they were carefully warned, was absolutely Top Secret.
David, who knew little about governmental structure or operations in the USSR, let alone in the Russian Federation, did not understand. So while Professor Yuriev attended to other matters, he and Marilyn sat in Vladimir’s office and were briefed about structural plans for governance and decision making in the new Russia. Maxim, perhaps relieved by no longer having to protect secrecy, regained his English voice and interpreted. But as Vladimir took multiple phone calls, Maxim did much of the actual briefing. Each of the eighty territorial entities (e.g., oblasts, krais, and republics) of the new Federation would have an appointed Presidential Representative who would work with a Council of Deputies to implement Yeltsin’s vision for a democratic Russia. Later, the appointed positions would be phased out in favor of elected governors. As Marilyn and David talked with Maxim, Vladimir increasingly focused on his phone calls. Speaking Russian, he was unconcerned about their presence, knowing they could not understand what was being said.

After lunch, Marilyn and David sat in a conference room and talked about their research, as well as that being conducted at the dacha. Alexander and Vladimir questioned Marilyn about the book she and Michael had written on the Korean Air Lines flight, asking specifically what Russian sources they had used. Michael had taught Marilyn how to pronounce the Russian names of the newspapers and journals they had consulted, and she rattled them off without hesitating. Later, again in Vladimir’s office, waiting to be taken back to the hotel, Marilyn and David noticed that Vladimir began taking his phone calls in another room. They decided he thought they had been sandbagging him about their not knowing any Russian!

Alexander explained that the activities, indeed the charge, of SSSEL moved in three directions: 1) research on the political psychologies of different regions in Russia, including tests of both leaders and everyday people; 2) training of top leaders of the state to be democratic leaders (to underscore the need for that, he emphasized that roughly half of the leaders of the new Federation Council had previously been members of the Supreme Soviet); and 3) teaching students to become democratic leaders and citizens (here he smiled and added, “students like Maxim”). As directed by Yeltsin, SSSEL was deeply engaged in training programs for the newly appointed Presidential Representatives in an effort to transform them from their previous status as Soviet apparatchiks to that of democratic leaders and change agents.
Yeltsin had authorized SSSEL to establish a training center at Stalin’s Dacha, and he also authorized another one outside Moscow. Each was to prepare half of the eighty Presidential Representatives but in groups of no more than eighteen at a time. And there were in fact eighteen of the Presidential Representatives in residence at the time of this initial visit. Alexander shared with David and Marilyn the curriculum and regulations of the twelve-day training session. Participants (all powerful leaders in the Soviet system) were required to stay in the compound at all times, to wear tracksuits and sneakers (e.g., non-power clothing), to surrender their mobile phones, and remain incommunicado from family, friends, or anyone else during the training period. The first two days of the program were dedicated to “psychological evaluation,” which included sleep deprivation and other techniques designed to break down the previous presuppositions of the participants, to—in Alexander’s words—“turn them into pupils.” This was followed by role playing exercises, debates against former Communist leaders and ideologists (to learn how to defeat them with arguments), briefings on democratic theory, practices, and procedures, and democratic skills-training (how to run a meeting, how to conduct a press conference, etc.). In short, the objective was to break down a Communist leader and rebuild him as a Democratic leader.

Marilyn and David were then introduced to the group of eighteen Presidential Representatives in residence at that time (they were not introduced by name); one had been a leader of an influential union that called the strikes that contributed to the economic collapse of the USSR.

Before Marilyn and David left, they again sat with Alexander for an extended conversation. He asked if they could recommend some academic literature to help him better understand various argument techniques, and then he stunned them by proposing a series of projects for collaboration, ranging from student/faculty exchanges to joint research projects (e.g., cross-cultural research on the relative effectiveness of various techniques of argumentation in different cultures, such as Russia and the United States, or similar research on differences in allowable debate topics, debate formats, debate types and functions in Russia and the United States). Marilyn and David quickly agreed to collaborate, although they noted that they could not engage in much of the stress-related research because of US guidelines for conducting human research. Alexander did not see that as a barrier, and he told them that he would be traveling the following month to Hofstra University in order to initiate a similar exchange and
research relationship with the psychology program there. It would be his first trip to the United States.

Marilyn and David thought the relationship needed to be formalized, so they agreed to draft a proposal to establish a legally registered international research center based on a consortium of SSSEL, Florida State University, and Northeast Missouri State University. They would then travel to Long Island, meet with Alexander and Vladimir, and sign the documents to legally charter their Center.

It had been quite a day for them. Marilyn and Michael and David were suddenly research and writing partners. And Alexander had floated prospects of their returning to St. Petersburg to teach classes in his program or to participate in future conferences, some of which would be under his direction. As Marilyn and David reviewed the events of the day back at their hotel, they were somewhat overwhelmed by the magnitude and improbability of what had occurred. How was it possible that two American academics, neither with any kind of reputation or presence in Russia, who had been in the country for less than a week, and who had no well-placed Russian connections, had ended up at a top secret government training center charged with preparing leaders for the nascent national transformation from autocracy to democracy? It certainly reinforced Marilyn's and David's recognition that, at that moment, things were very far from normal.

Marilyn, Michael, and David met with Alexander and Vladimir on Long Island in late February 1992 and signed documents registering the International Center for the Advancement of Political Communication and Argumentation (ICAPCA) as a not-for-profit center to be based at Florida State University. Marilyn was selected as International Director, with Alexander and David on the Board of Directors. David also became Director of the Northeast Missouri Chapter of ICAPCA. Under the auspices of ICAPCA, and with cooperation from the Communication Department at the University of Iowa (especially Professors Bruce Gronbeck and Michael Calvin McGee), Alexander and Vladimir came back to the United States the following year for a speaking tour that included the University of Iowa, Northeast Missouri State University, Florida State University, and the Speech Communication Association, whose annual meeting they attended that year in Chicago. The following summer Marilyn delivered a series of four seminars in St. Petersburg stretching over two months. In addition, Alexander organized lectures, seminars, and
conferences that kept Marilyn and David (and sometimes Michael) traveling to Russia frequently over the next twenty years.

While *The Path from Disaster toward Russian “Democracy,”* Volume One of *The Rhetorical Rise and Demise of “Democracy” in Russian Political Discourse,* focuses on openings created in Soviet information control by environmental and technological disasters, openings that permitted argumentative challenges and rhetorical opposition to gain public visibility, the subsequent volumes in this series begin with consideration of Russian political discourse from roughly the time of our collaboration with SSSEL through the present day. Volume Two, *The Promise of “Democracy” during the Yeltsin Years,* is primarily comprised of articles and papers written under the auspices of ICAPCA, with additional authors involved in several of the papers. As the title indicates, the essays in this volume examine political discourse from the years of Yeltsin’s Presidency, although the focus is not on Yeltsin’s rhetoric *per se.* Among the topics discussed are the early Duma elections, debates and arguments surrounding national identity, arguments about the new Russian federalism and the roles of political parties, as well as positions advanced by Yeltsin in his Presidential Addresses. During the early Yeltsin years, Russia was probably more socially and politically open than at any other period in its history: freedom of speech blossomed, the free and unregulated media exploded, and the entire fabric of society relaxed. The time was as good for rhetoric and public argumentation as it was bad for economic stability and prosperity.

It was mainly during these years that Alexander facilitated many opportunities for Marilyn and David. They attended the Second Annual Russian-American Seminar on Democratic Russian Institutions in August 1993, and presented a co-authored (with Scott Elliott), theoretical paper on democracy and what they called “cultures of democratic communication.” David’s colleague at Northeast Missouri State, John Ishiyama, a political scientist who was newly active in ICAPCA, also presented some results of his research on voting patterns and political party formation. During the conference, they all worked to get to know the Russian participants, aided immensely by John’s passable Russian, and were richly rewarded. They talked at length with Professor Alexei Salmin (it helped that Alexei’s English was impeccable), then affiliated with the Gorbachev Foundation, who described himself as one of the few political scientists in Russia.

The Americans were quite taken with and impressed by Alexei, and, as fellow political scientists, John and Alexei really hit it off, especially...
after they discovered they were both studying the development and roles of political parties in Russia. Following the model that had been so productive with Alexander, Marilyn and David invited Alexei to make a similar speaking tour, albeit with stops only at Northeast Missouri and Florida State. From that point on, whenever Marilyn and David arrived at Sheremetevo Airport in Moscow, Alexei—as a gesture of friendship and gratitude—always had his car and driver waiting for them. They maintained a strong working relationship with Alexei as he moved from the Gorbachev Foundation to help found the first non-governmental political research organization and “think tank” in Russia, the Center for Political Technologies, and then to become the first President of the national professional organization for political science. A member of Boris Yeltsin’s Presidential Council from 1994 to 2000, Alexei died unexpectedly in 2005 at the age of fifty-four, a great loss to Russia—and to all of us.

The most dramatic of the opportunities Alexander facilitated for the Americans was a “moveable conference” he arranged in July 1994. Alexander convened the “Conference on Language, Persuasion, and Human Behavior” in St. Petersburg and presided over a brutally long day of paper presentations, featuring a keynote by Yuri Moskvich, a university professor and the Presidential Representative from the Krasnoyarsk region who might well have been a pupil of Alexander’s in one of the training programs. Marilyn presented a paper, and David also presented with co-author John Ishiyama. They then defied State Department recommendations, hopped on a domestic Aeroflot plane, and flew to Krasnoyarsk where Moskvich, who had flown ahead on a private charter, met their flight. He arranged the second stage of this “moveable conference” at his university in Krasnoyarsk; but first he gave everyone a grand tour of what had been until only recently (earlier in that year) an officially designated “closed city.” Most notably, they saw the massive hydroelectric dam on the Yenisei River, still adorned with an equally massive image of Lenin indelibly embedded across its front.

After the conference, Marilyn and David were to fly by chartered Aeroflot turbojet (a Yak-40) to Irkutsk. But first they had to have a beer—and a tour of the newly renovated brewery of the domestic beer company, Pikra: the beer of Krasnoyarsk. The company was looking for rich investors; the Americans were looking for good beer. In the end, only the Americans left truly happy. So, after several cases of good Pikra beer were loaded onto the plane, Marilyn and David joined several
others from the conference, including Moskvich and his wife, and flew to Irkutsk, where they were met by some dignitaries, including the local Presidential Representative, his wife, a businessman named Boris, and Boris’s bodyguard. They traveled immediately to the docks on Lake Baikal, where they crammed into a large Russian yacht (that turned out to be a converted fishing boat) for a two-day cruise on the lake with the Presidential Representatives, their families, and a few others, including an out of work physicist from Moscow who was part of Sakharov’s group. Moskvich spoke excellent English, and with Ishiyama’s Russian they ensured that Marilyn and David were also able to communicate with others. Most of the conversations gravitated around political, social, and economic issues, at least until the vodka caught up with everyone (What happened to the beer?), at which time the songfest began. Experiences like this enriched their understanding of some concerns in the regions and some of the alignments among political parties.

During the Yeltsin years, Marilyn and David returned to Russia many, many times: they went places, interacted with people, and learned things that at other times—both before and after—would never have been possible. But even before Yeltsin resigned and, effectively, anointed Vladimir Putin as his unelected successor, the wide open, Wild West tenor of the initial years had already faded.

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What we consider in this series to be the “Yeltsin years” is not coterminous with the years he served in office. The “democratic path” along which Yeltsin tried to lead Russia is the same path that our analysis shows Putin followed initially. In our view, the Yeltsin years didn’t really end until the path began to turn, and Volume Two of this collection concludes with articles taking retrospective perspectives on what generally was presumed to have been the first ten years (more or less) of the Russian democratic experiment.

But the trajectory began to bend shortly after Putin won the Presidential election of 2000. The change of direction came, as it had during the Soviet period, as the result of another technological and human disaster: five months after Putin’s inauguration, in August 2000, the nuclear submarine Kursk sank in the Barents Sea. With the President on vacation in Crimea, the early response by his government closely resembled that of the Soviets during the two tragic crises of the 1980s: stonewalling and
attempting to control information. However, the media landscape had changed dramatically since 1986, and—faced with blistering criticism in the press, on television, and from the families of the trapped sailors—Putin belatedly interrupted his vacation and traveled to Severomorsk to meet with the families. Still, he refused aid offered by the United States, Great Britain, and Norway until it was too late: everyone aboard the submarine who survived the initial blasts had perished.

This tragedy marked a turning point in Putin’s relationship with democracy, in general, and the free press, in particular. The path laid out by Yeltsin took a new direction, one marked by a diminution of both press freedom and standard democratic rhetoric. At least through Putin’s first two terms, the lexicon of democracy was still employed, but its meanings began to shift. Thus, Volume Three of our project is entitled Disaster, Putin, and the Redefinition of “Democracy”: 2000–2008.

After the Yeltsin years, the texts for our critical investigations increasingly became presidential speeches—Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly, Inaugural Addresses, Russia Day and other ceremonial speeches, and selected special addresses (e.g., Putin’s 2014 Crimea speech). That was not a planned constriction of focus but rather one which more or less unconsciously followed Russia’s own consolidation of power into what Putin rather euphemistically calls “the power vertical.”

Even as Putin increasingly restricted freedom of the press, reversed or subverted democratic structures and procedures (e.g., the election of Regional Governors), his Presidential Addresses concurrently retained much of the core lexicon of democracy, but he used those words differently. Much of our subsequent work has focused on Putin’s redefinitions of those words and phrases of democracy and on the changes in rhetorical stance that flow from them. For this portion of the project, Marilyn, Michael, and David rely on theories of definition and definitional argument developed by philosophers and critics such as I. A. Richards and Kenneth Burke and by argumentation scholars such as David Zarefsky and J. Robert Cox.

In the aftermath of the Kursk tragedy the discursive environment changed. Shaken by the attacks he suffered in the press, and personally insulted by Bush’s refusal to collaborate in the war against (Chechen) terrorism, Putin began pushing back against the West and reorienting his administration towards Eurasia. In articulating that process, he began moving away from the rhetoric of democracy, adding significant adjectival
restrictions: “managed democracy,” “sovereign democracy.” The studies in Volume Three reveal changes in Putin’s political rhetoric over the first years of the twenty-first century as he degraded the essential elements of a democratic political system, signaling a move towards a more autocratic form of government that continues to this day. These essays, written more or less contemporaneously, analyze the arc of Putin’s rhetoric from the sinking of the Kursk to the end of his second term in office, as he began to look backwards as well as forward for the rhetorical touchstones and ideographs that would move Russia closer to its totalitarian past and farther from the free-wheeling days that promised a democratic form of government, rule of law, and basic individual freedoms.

As Marilyn, Michael, and David began gathering their articles and papers for these volumes, they realized they had written little about Dmitri Medvedev. Some of his discourse, including excerpts from his Presidential Addresses, is discussed in papers that focus elsewhere, but they do not have sufficient directly relevant work to offer coverage of the Medvedev years in this series. And Medvedev’s influence on the rhetorical trajectories of Russian political discourse was lost after Putin’s 2012 return to the presidency. It would have been interesting to see how the history of Russia played out had Medvedev served a second term.

Volume Four of this series, The Demise of “Democracy” after Putin’s Return to Power, offers essays detailing Putin’s further retreat from the discourse of democracy, literally from the moment of his Inaugural Address in 2012—in the middle of massive anti-government protests—through the present time. Some emergent themes over Putin’s most recent years as President include the redefinition and even disappearance of the lexicon of democracy; concurrently, there has been a noticeable shift in the definition of Russian national identity, from the “citizen participant” in the Yeltsin era, to redefinitional truncation, to an identity grounded quite literally in the history of mythic Russia. This transformation provides the basis for the rhetorical justification of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and is a noticeable theme in Putin’s March 18, 2014, speech explaining that event to the nation and the world.

As a way to bring the broad picture of changes in Russian political discourse in the Russian Federation from its beginning to the present time into better focus, Marilyn, Michael, and David have engaged in a longitudinal study of Russian Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly (PAFAs), beginning with Yeltsin in 1994 and continuing to the present.
One facet of this study—which has the working title “Russian Democracy: Defined, Re-defined, and Disappeared”—encompasses the gradual redefinition of terms such as “democracy” in Putin’s speeches over the years; another describes the declining frequency of what they have called “stand-in terms” (such as “civil society” and “the rule of law”) in these speeches.

Collectively, these four volumes will provide a comprehensive view of the discursive changes that took place in the USSR/Russia over the thirty-seven years from 1983 to 2020. This rhetorical and narrative arc discloses not only how language choices drive public understanding of pivotal events, but also how such events can alter our view of the world around us. Through rhetorical and argumentative analysis, the subtle strategies and tactics of Soviet and then Russian leaders to control the discursive environment and therefore public understanding are made apparent.

David Cratis Williams
January 2021

NOTE

1. Maxim, who was really the catalyst for our long collaboration with Alexander, was still an undergraduate at the time of that first St. Petersburg conference. The paper he gave that day caught our attention, and, after finishing his degree, he came to Florida State for graduate school, finishing a Master’s and a PhD in communication studies. Ultimately, Maxim became a US citizen and remains a good friend.