

Title: "Multi-Storied" America: Ilf and Petrov in New York

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Ilf and Petrov, co-authors of two of the most widely-read Soviet satires, "Dvenadcat' stul'ev" and "Zolotoj teljonok," also wrote one of the more extensive travel narratives of the United States, "Odnochtaznaja Amerika" ["OA"]. Based on their three-month-long 10,000 mile journey the work describes a Depression era US and encounters from "the man in the street" to President Roosevelt and Henry Ford.

Since its first appearance ["Znamja," numbers 10 and 11, 1936] "OA" has been republished a number of times in various censored versions. In 2003 an uncensored edition ["OA; Pis'ma iz Ameriki." Moskva, tekst] appeared under the aegis of Ilf's daughter, Alexandra. This volume also contains a wider and unexpurgated range of the authors' correspondence to their wives along with a selection of Ilf's photographs. The writers' trip to the United States lasted from early October, 1935 to late January, 1936, a significant period in both USSR and US history.

This presentation focuses on the first, New York, section of "OA" contrasting the 1936 and 2003 texts in light of the writers' correspondence and their more candid judgments. On the rare occasions when "OA" has been mentioned it is deemed a relatively mild critique of American life. However, a detailed examination shows a consistent negation of American life. Although the original title in Russian, "One-Storied America," was a metaphor for a US of one-storied houses rather than that of fabled skyscrapers, the "multi-storied" metaphor applies to the authors' multiple layers of discourse: first, the original narrative (2003 edition); second, the 1936 censored narrative; third, the original narrative in the context of the authors' correspondence; and lastly, the narrative in the context of then-contemporary historical, literary, and cultural events as seen from the present.