

Black Russian White Russian

The creation of vodka has tremendously impacted the world of mixed drinks. Vodka comes from various natural sources including wheat, fruits, grain, and roots. For instance, in the Middle Ages, fig and mulberry vodka had been prepared in Asia Minor (Anatolia) and the Middle East. In the case of Asia, due to its surplus of milk, the natives created milk vodka. The contemporary and commercialized vodka is contributed to its rich and deep history, along with modern day technology. In combination, vodka has been refined and is known and used everywhere.

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Surprisingly, the classic cocktails of Black Russian and White Russian were not created in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, or the present day Russian Federation. It would be logical to think that these drinks were founded in the lands of Tsars like Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, or Rasputin, Stalin and Putin – not only because of the word Russian, but also because both drinks incorporate vodka; stereotypically seen as a Russian favorite. Though we know where the drinks were not created, their origins are more difficult to pinpoint. It is important to understand why it is so tricky to find the origins of these drinks. Until the last three decades of the 20th century, sharing of information was not as easy as it is in today's Internet world. It can be quite common to have one bartender create the same drink as the other, yet the fascinating part of this story is behind the names: Black Russian, White Russian. The Black Russian is made up of vodka and coffee flavored liqueur. The White Russian calls for cream to be added to the Black Russian mix. There are a few theories on the origins of these drinks. One such theory is that the Black Russian was first seen in the Cold War era, in 1949, at the Metropolitan Hotel in Brussels, Belgium. According to this theory, the main bartender of the hotel created the Black Russian in honor of the U.S. Ambassador to Luxemburg, Perle Skirvin Mesta. Mesta was known more for her lavish parties than her political agenda. In this case, the bartender knew exactly who to honor with this drink and perhaps hoped that her popularity would make the drink famous. Now let us backtrack to the Russian Revolution in the second decade of the 20th century. The White Russians, also known as the White Army consisted of those who were against the Bolsheviks, also referred to as the Red Army. The



Info

The Black Russian

2 oz. (1/4 cup) vodka
1 oz. (2 Tbsp.) coffee flavored liqueur

Pour ingredients into chilled glass filled with ice cubes and stir well.

The White Russian

After you've poured the Black Russian mixture into a chilled glass, add 1/2 oz. (1Tbsp) of cream on top, pouring it over the back side of a spoon. Do not stir.

White Russians were the protectors of Tsar Nicholas (Nicolai) II, the Romanov family and the monarchy. As history shows us, they were defeated. Some White Russians made their way to San Francisco, California and this is where our next theory comes in. In this theory, the White Russian cocktail was created in 1920 by members of the White Russians. According to this theory, the White Russian cocktail was created first and consisted of Russians favorites: vodka and cream, and American favorite: coffee. Then, one night, the bartender had run out of cream, but served the drink anyway – without cream, naming it the “Black Russian.” If this theory is true, we must dig deeper into its history. First,

vodka was extremely rare in the U.S. at the time, and second, from 1920-1933, the U.S. was faced with Prohibition, which was also known as The Noble Experiment. The Eighteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution nationally banned alcohol. Though alcohol was banned by law, an underground or black market emerged and bootlegged drinks continued to be sold. If the second theory is true, it is quite possible for the White Russians to create these drinks and sell them underground.

Since December 1917, the U.S. had cut all diplomatic relations with Russia. This included trade, which also prohibited the Russians from exporting vodka to the U.S. Up until World War II, the majority of Americans had not heard of or tasted vodka. According to the U.S. Department of State, “On November 16, 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ended almost 16 years of American non-recognition of the Soviet Union.” *The New York Times'* restaurant critic William Grimes' book, “Straight up or on the Rocks: the Story of the American Cocktail” explains the emergence of vodka in the United States. As the Allied forces toasted their victory, U.S. President Franklin served Stalin and his aides his olive-brine martinis. Grimes writes, “Unimpressed by this capitalist achievement, the Russians hoisted their traditional vodka, neat. It was Bolshevism in liquid form.”

Overall, vodka is a tasteless and odorless drink that allows for creativity. The drink is a white canvas for bartenders around the world to design upon. It is quite feasible that bartenders, housewives, executives, and street bums around the world, at one time or the other, mixed the ingredients: vodka, coffee liqueur and cream. Coffee is one of the most common drinks in various cultures and nations on Earth. Either you drink it black or with cream. Perhaps one day, the caffeine in coffee was not enough, and someone needed an extra jolt, thus adding vodka. ☺