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Russia Has Older Democracy Than U.S. and First Black General Proves It — Elections Chief

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Head of Russia's Central Elections Commission Vladimir Churov

The head of Russia's Central Elections Commission has claimed that Russia has an older democracy than the U.S. because Russia appointed its first black general two centuries before the first African-American made that rank.

"When I meet my colleagues from the U.S. and they get too proud of their democratic achievements, I ask them what to me is a simple question: 'In what year did the U.S. Army get its first black general?'" head of the elections commission Vladimir Churov told state-run TASS news agency on Saturday — a day before Russia's regional elections.

Most Americans struggle to give a precise answer "but in any case nobody claims that such a general appeared before the end of World War II," Churov was cited as saying.

In fact, the first African-American to be appointed general in the U.S. Armed Forces was Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., who made brigadier general in 1940 — a year before the U.S. was drawn into the war and five years before it ended.

Churov said he shows his conversation partners an image of Russia's first black general, Abram Petrovich Gannibal, who, according to the elections chief, was appointed in 1740, TASS reported.

Gannibal, the son of an African aristocrat, was reportedly kidnapped as a child and presented as a gift to Peter the Great, who was impressed with the boy's talents, provided him with a good education and helped advance his career.

Gannibal made the rank of military general sometime after the tsar's daughter, Empress Elizabeth, came to power in 1741.

Churov said the example usually ends all argument on which of the two countries has a longer history of democracy, TASS reported — presumably to Russia's advantage.

Churov did not elaborate on his definition of "democracy" and did not clarify how the appointment of an Afro-Russian as a military general under Russia's monarchy proved the country to be more democratic.

Nowadays in Russia, Gannibal is known less for his military achievements and more for being the great-grandfather of one of Russia's most iconic literary figures — poet and author Alexander Pushkin.

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