

History 4446

Soviet Russia Summer 2011 M-F, 10:00 am –12:15 pm

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Office Hours: M-F 2pm – 3pm, or by appointment

The course will introduce students to the history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1991. We will cover selected topics in political, social, and cultural history, with a particular focus on the Stalinist period from 1929 to 1953. We will examine the evolution of the Soviet system: the visionary expectations of its founders, the bureaucratization and brutalization of the Stalinist period, the movement for reform under Khrushchev followed by the reactionary conservatism of the Brezhnev era, the return to reform and "New Thinking" under Gorbachev, and finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the wake of serious economic decline, rising nationalism, and the discrediting of Soviet ideology. We will explore the relationship between state and society and evaluate Soviet communism as a mobilizational political culture. We will consider the multi-ethnic structure of the Soviet Union and how this shaped its history and eventually contributed to its denouement. Although we will be focusing on Soviet leaders and outstanding figures who have shaped Soviet history, we will also examine the lives of ordinary Soviet citizens, their experiences, hopes, and tragedies. Our goal is to understand the multiple factors that shaped the Soviet system, why it enjoyed popular support, why it collapsed, and why its appeal may not be entirely extinguished.

The format for the course is a seminar, organized around discussion of assigned readings, supplemented by informational and background lectures. In order for the class to succeed, everyone must be ready to discuss and ask questions. **This means that you must do the readings for each day and be prepared to take part in class.** The textbook will provide chronology, basic facts and historical background, while the supplemental readings will give you a deeper understanding of and exposure to Soviet life and society.

Required Texts:

All of the following are available for purchase in the campus bookstore.

David G. Rowley, *Exploring Russia's Past: Narrative, Sources, Images*. Volume 2: Since 1856. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006. Abbreviated in the syllabus as TEXT.

Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*. Penguin Press. 1995

I. Grekova, *The Ship of Widows*. Northwestern University Press, 1994 (first published in the Soviet Union in *Novy mir* in 1981)

Natalya Baranskaya, *A Week Like Any Other*. Translated by Pieta Monks. The Seal Press, 1979 (first published in the Soviet Union in *Novy mir* in 1969).

Grading:

Mid-term Exam: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Research Project Oral Presentation and Synopsis: 15%

Readings and Film Response Journal: 10%

Primary Document Review Paper and Presentation: 5%

Writing Assignments/Quizzes/Class Participation: 10%

I. Grading--Examinations

There will be two examinations, a midterm and a final. These may consist of any or all of the following: identification questions (write a detailed paragraph explaining the significance of specific terms or explaining the connection between two terms), map questions, short-answer questions, and essays. The final will not be

comprehensive, but the essays may ask you to reflect on the entire course and/or the legacy of Soviet history. The essay questions will be given to you in advance. For the essays, you may bring to class for each three pages of notes and any primary source materials (photocopies) that you would like to use in answering them. The exam questions will be drawn from lectures, the textbook, the supplemental novels, assigned document readings, class discussions, and films and documentaries shown in class.

II. Grading: Oral and Written Assignments

In addition to the exams, your grade will be based on oral presentations and formal and informal writing assignments.

1). Each student will give a ten to fifteen minute oral presentation during the final two class periods based on a research project. See the end of the syllabus for details on the choices. You will be graded both on content and style. Be sure to speak clearly and provide visual aids to show your sources and main points. On the day of the presentation you will turn in a one page synopsis of the project and a list of sources used.

2). Each student will keep a journal that will have entries on the supplemental fictional readings and at least two of the feature films shown in class.

A) First, for each of the assigned supplemental readings, *Kolyma Tales*, *The Ship of Widows*, and *One Week Like Any Other*, you will write an entry that discusses the work and what you have learned from the source about Soviet life and society. You are to evaluate the reading as an historical source, and consider the value and viability of using memoir and fiction as a basis for studying history. You should give a brief overview of the contents (an analytical summary, not a retelling of the story), explain the historical context, the main purpose or theme, and analyze the significance of the reading for understanding Soviet history. What insight into particular aspects of Soviet history do these readings provide? How can individual experiences contribute to an understanding of historical development in the Soviet Union? How can you relate the personal experiences depicted in these texts to the textbook's presentation of events during a particular period? What intersections are there between these personal experiences and the larger events in Soviet history? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using fiction as historical sources?

After evaluating the work as an historical source, you should record your own individual reactions to the readings. What have you gained from reading this work? What do you find to be most significant or most striking about the reading? Questions to consider include: What do you learn from the work that you could not learn from a textbook? To what extent are the experiences described unique to Soviet society, and to what extent are they universal? Can you relate in any way to the individuals in these works? What does the human experience recorded in these works tell us about the Soviet system, the Soviet people, or even about the twentieth century as a whole and modernity?

On the days noted in the syllabus for discussion of the three novels, there will be an in-class reading quiz.

Secondly, as an additional part of your journal, each student must also include entries discussing the feature films watched in class. There must be at least two entries, each a minimum of two pages reviewing and analyzing feature films watched in class. These entries should identify the film, provide a brief synopsis of the film's plot or narration, and analyze the film as an historical source in terms of the following:

- 1) What period in Soviet history is the film depicting?
- 2) How does the film relate to the theme or themes that are raised in the readings assigned for the day it is shown in class? How does the film depict the period or event—can you see contrasts to the textbook description, or contrasts to the experiences and descriptions of the time period in your supplemental readings?
- 3) What is the main purpose of the film relative to its historical theme? Was it intended primarily to entertain, or did it have propaganda value? What about the film seems to be “Soviet”? How might the film have been different had it been by a non-Soviet filmmaker, by a Hollywood director for example?
- 4) What insights into Soviet society and culture can you draw from watching this film? Do you know whether or not the film was popular among Soviet audiences? What might account for the film's popularity?

- 5) What are the benefits of using this film as a source for studying Soviet society and its history?
- 6) What are the shortcomings of the film as an historical source? Is it one-sided, or perhaps overly narrow in its portrayal of a person, event, etc.? Does it contain factual inaccuracies?
- 7) What differences can you see in Soviet filmmaking from the Western films you have watched?

These entries are meant to be entirely in your own words. They are to be your personal response to the educational content in the film. These entries are not to be based on any encyclopedia or internet synopses of the films; I want to know your response to the film, and your understanding of its historical content, not an outside source's. Be forewarned—any use of such sources without acknowledgement will constitute academic dishonesty and will be considered plagiarism, which is a serious academic offense.

Journal entries for each book and film should be at least two pages. Preferably journal entries should be typed; they may be handwritten if kept in a notebook, but **YOU MUST PRINT CLEARLY**. Entries that are difficult to read will not be considered. Specific dates for collecting the journals are noted in the syllabus. Therefore, be sure to keep up with them. Journals will be graded on a point system, with each entry worth twenty points. The greatest weight will be given to content. I am interested in your ideas and in your responses to the readings and to key questions concerning Soviet history. However, points may be deducted for writing that is excessively sloppy or careless. Even with informal writing, you must follow the rules of grammar and punctuation.

3). Each student during the semester will pair up with a classmate and select one of the textbook chapters; you will then be responsible for leading class discussion of the chapter's written and visual documentary sources. You should provide some summary of the main points and help the class to see how the sources relate to issues raised in the chapter, but you are also to devise questions and/or activities that will facilitate class discussion and engagement with the sources. Each of you will write separately a three-page review and analysis paper of the written and visual sources to be turned in on the day that you are assigned to lead the class discussion. You must include at least three of the written sources and two of the visual sources in your analysis, and preferably try to draw lines of connection between them, rather than analyze each separately. You will receive a grade that is based on both your performance as class leaders and on your written analysis. You should share equally the oral part of the assignment.

III. Grading--Class Participation

You should take part in class discussions, ask questions, and be present for in-class writing assignments and activities. The more you participate, the more you will learn, and the more likely it will go in your favor if you are in a borderline grading situation. Included in class participation are announced and unannounced quizzes and writing assignments.

Assignments:

Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings in advance of each class session and to be able to discuss them. Some of the readings are lengthy, so plan ahead and budget your time accordingly. Try not to fall behind! **All written assignments are due on the specified date; unexcused late work will lower the grade by one grade level for each late weekday.**

Cheating Policy and Plagiarism:

Anyone caught cheating or helping someone to cheat will be asked to leave the class and will receive a course grade of "F." Plagiarism, or claiming someone else's work as your own, will result in failure. This rule is in effect for all assignments, examinations, quizzes, and extra credit work.

Attendance:

Make every effort to be in class and on time. You are responsible for all materials and announcements presented in class. If you must be absent, be sure to get the notes from a classmate. More than one unexcused absence will affect your final grade. More than two may lead to a W/F. Absences due to illness or school business will be excused if you bring me a written note. Being late to class or leaving class early will also lower your grade. Two tardies will count as one unexcused absence, and the same for leaving early. If you are tardy, it is your responsibility to inform me of your presence at the end of class. Regular attendance and

punctuality will enhance your learning experience and can work in your favor in borderline grading situations (or against you, if not maintained). Missed quizzes cannot be made up, so repeated absences can bring down your class participation grade.

Office Hours:

My office is Room 3222 in the TLC Building and the hours are Monday through Friday from 2pm to 3pm, or by appointment. My office phone number is 678-839-6048, and my email address is emclarn@westga.edu. Please see me if you have questions or concerns with any part of the course.

Tentative Course Outline and Readings Schedule

Week One: The Experiment Begins: War and Revolution in the Russian Empire

Monday, June 6: Introduction to Soviet Russia

Readings: Text, 1-28

June 7: Empire, Autocracy and the Challenge of Marxism and Modernization

Readings: Text, 29-78

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, accessible online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

June 8: Revolutions of 1905 and 1917

Readings: Text, Chapter 14, 79-92, 102-104, and Ch. 15, 105-111

Vladimir Lenin, excerpts from *What is to Be Done?*, Read Chapter 4, "The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organization of the Revolutionaries", located at the Lenin Archive, Marxist Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/index.htm>

***Try to focus on what Lenin says about the organization of the revolutionary party. How does he characterize Russian workers? How does Lenin's conception of the revolutionary party represent a reinterpretation of Marxism to fit the conditions of Russia?

June 9: The October (Bolshevik) Revolution and Civil War (1918-1921)

Reading: Chapter 15, 108-130

June 10: Building the New Soviet State/Soviet Nationalities Policy

Reading: Vladimir Lenin, excerpts from the *State and Revolution*, pp. 1-18, 39-48 and 56, accessible online at http://www.cym.ie/documents/State_Rev.pdf

Week Two: The Economic and Political Foundations of Stalinism

Monday, June 13: The New Economic Policy: A Step Back, or an Alternative Path Forward

Reading: Text, Chapter 16, 131-154

Reserve Readings, TBA

June 14: Stalin's Revolution from Above--Forced Industrialization, Collectivization, and Terror

Reading: Text, Ch. 17, 155-179

June 15: The Contradictions of Stalinism: Mass Enthusiasm, Mobilization and The World of the Gulag

Reading: *Kolyma Tales*, all

June 16: The Failure of Collective Security/World War II

Reading: Text, Ch. 18, 180-206

*****Journal entries due**

June 17: Midterm Examination/Late Stalinism

Reading: Text, Ch. 18, 180-206

Week Three: The Postwar Era--Cold War, Liberalization, and the Challenge of Productivity

Monday, June 20: Khrushchev and The Thaw

Readings: *Ship of Widows*, all
Text, Ch. 19, 207-232

June 21: Soviet Life and Society in the Postwar Era

Readings, Text, Ch. 19, 207-232

*****Journal entries due**

June 22: The Soviet Union and Developed Socialism: The Brezhnev Years

Readings: Text, Ch. 20, 233-256

One Week Like Any Other, You are only required to read the story by this title; the others are optional

June 23: Film, TBA

Special writing assignment to be handed out in class; incorporate the writing assignment into your journal

June 24: Library Day—work on your research for your final oral presentations

Week Four: Stagnation, Reform, and Collapse

Monday, June 27: The Soviet Union at a Crossroads

*****Journal entries due on *One Week Like Any Other* and the Questions on the film shown in class on June 23**

Readings: Text, Ch. 21, 257-283

*****Oral Presentations**

June 28: The Gorbachev Era and Beyond

Readings: Text, Ch. 22, 284-311

*****Oral Presentations**

June 30: FINAL EXAMINATION: 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Soviet Russia Research Projects: Topic To be Approved by Instructor no later than June 13

Choose from one of the following three projects, or speak with me about your own ideas.

- 1) Take an event in Soviet history or a major figure (Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Khrushchev, Yuri Gagarin, Brezhnev, Andrei Sakharov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Gorbachev, Yeltsin), and research how that event or person was reported on in different American or Western media organs, principally newspapers and magazines, television, film, etc. To what extent was the event or figure covered in the American media; how balanced was that coverage? You are to examine media coverage during the time that the event took place, or during the time that the individual was alive and figured prominently in Soviet society and politics. Did the coverage change over time, becoming more positive or negative? What might account for the change? Do you see a difference in coverage among the various news sources you have examined? Does one media organ tend to be more balanced or thorough than others in coverage of the Soviet Union? Find out information about the media organs you use to help account for the coverage you note.

Be sure to specify the time period in which you have examined the media, and justify your choice of that chronological framework.

You must consult at least five media sources, including major national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor*; news magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*; television news programs; feature films, documentaries and newsreels.

List of Events—you may choose one of these or speak with me about your own ideas. You may also choose a leading figure from Soviet history.

You must have your topic or person approved in advance by the instructor.

Russo-Japanese War
Revolution of 1905
The Russian Revolutions of 1917: February Revolution, October Revolution
The Russian Civil War, 1918-1921
The Famine in Russia, 1920-1923
Lenin's death in 1924
Stalinist industrialization and collectivization campaigns
The First Five-Year Plan
The Ukrainian famine 1932-33
Stalin's purges
The Nazi-Soviet Pact
Operation Barbarossa/Nazi invasion of USSR June 22, 1941
The Battle of Stalingrad
The Siege of Leningrad
Berlin Blockade
First Soviet detonation of the atomic bomb
The death of Stalin, 1953
Soviet invasion of Hungary, 1956
Launching of Sputnik
Successful Soviet space launches, including that of the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin
The ouster of Khrushchev, 1964
Soviet dissidents and their arrests
Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968
Gorbachev reforms
Nuclear accident at Chernobyl

Boris Yeltsin's political comeback in 1989
August Coup, 1991
Gorbachev's resignation, December 25, 1991

An alternative approach to this project would be to select a three- to five-year period and survey at least three leading Western media organs during that time to evaluate coverage of the Soviet Union. What types of stories did American newspapers and magazines publish about the Soviet Union? Was there more coverage of political leaders than of society, of economic problems, of military operations, etc? How balanced overall does the coverage seem to be? You might look at major British newspapers during that same time frame and see whether there was more coverage in general in the British media than in the American.

2) You may choose to design a board game that could be used as an educational tool for examining and analyzing a key aspect of Soviet history. This could be either military (the Soviet civil war, Soviet engagement in World War II, Cold War proxy wars) or non-military (a Soviet monopoly game, for instance). All artwork must be original, and you would bring the board game to class on the day of your presentation. You should have a game board, game pieces, a set of rules, and an explanation of the purpose of the game and what elements of Soviet history it illuminates. The game must provide a means for players to examine a key event in Soviet history, or to illuminate or illustrate particular aspects of Soviet life, such as living in a planned economy, in communal apartments, etc. The game must also indicate analysis of these particular aspects, and be based on research in at least four scholarly books or journal articles. The list of sources will be turned in with the game board, rules, and explanation of purpose.

3) You may choose one of the following sets of questions and prepare a presentation answering this question, providing explanation of at least three key factors. You may approach this as a sample lesson plan for a class or as a research presentation at an academic conference.

What were the chances for a liberal democratic outcome in 1917 for Russia? Why were the Bolsheviks able to overthrow the Provisional Government?

Why in the wake of World War II, when the Soviet Union and the United States had been military allies, did a Cold War between the two countries develop that resulted in a massive arms race and destructive proxy wars all across the globe?

Why did the Soviet Union collapse in 1991, after seventy-plus years of existence, over four decades of which the Soviet Union had been considered one of two world superpowers?