

History 419
History of Soviet Russia
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Professor F. Hirsch
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MWF 1:20-2:10
1217 Humanities

Spring 2020

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12-1 and by appointment
4125 Humanities
263-1783

This course examines Soviet history from 1917 to 1991 with a focus on revolutionary Russia and the rise and fall of the Soviet Empire. We will explore revolutionary politics, society, and culture; the violent effort to forge a socialist society; Stalinism; Soviet nationality policy; the experiences and consequences of the Second World War; postwar efforts at reform; and the breakup of the USSR into a collection of independent states. We'll read novels and other original sources, watch film clips, listen to Soviet music, and debate key questions of Soviet history.

Format: Lecture and discussion. (There are no discussion sections.) Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to show up prepared and ready to participate.

Credit Hours: This course meets for 3 hours per week and carries the expectation that you will spend an average of 2 hours outside of class for every hour in the classroom. In other words, in addition to class time, plan to allot an average of 6 hours per week for reading, writing, preparing for class discussion and debate, and/or studying for quizzes and exams.

Learning Objectives: This course will help students develop skills in critical reasoning, research, source evaluation, and analytical writing. Students will work individually and in small groups to do original research in preparation for our in-class debate. Students will share their research findings and arguments in papers and oral presentations. This course will also encourage students to make connections between the past and the present—between the events of the 20th century and the world we live in today.

Readings: Books with an (*) are available at the University Book Store and are on reserve at College Library. All books should be available used. The course packet is available at Student Print.

Grading: Course grades determined as follows: participation 25%, writing assignments (including midterm essay) 40%, debate 10%, map quiz 5%, final exam or final project 20%.

Week 1: The Russian Empire

1/22, 1/24: Introduction; The Russian Empire

Reading:

Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto" (Packet)

Week 2: Revolutionary Russia

1/27, 1/29, 1/31: 1905; The Road to 1917; The February Revolution

Reading:

"Programs of Russian Political Parties" (Packet)

V. I. Lenin, The State and Revolution (1917), chapters 1 and 5 (Packet)

Begin studying map, which I will hand out in class on 1/27.

Bolshevik debate early preparations:

In class on 1/29 students will be divided into "Bolshevik teams" in preparation for the debate—which will take place the week of 2/24.

Week 3: 1917

2/3, 2/5, 2/7: The Bolsheviks; Red October; Culture and Commemoration

Reading:

Eduard M. Dune, Notes of a Red Guard, ed. and trans. Diane P. Koenker and S. A. Smith (1993), pp. 27-87 (Packet)

Map Quiz:

A Map Quiz will be given at the beginning of class on 2/7.

Week 4: The Formation of the Soviet Union

2/10, 2/12, 2/14: Reds and Whites; And Greens; Memorial Library Session

Reading:

Mikhail Bulgakov, The White Guard (1925), selected sections.

Paper One due 2/12: Write a two-page analysis of Notes of a Red Guard and The White Guard, addressing the following question: How effective are these two works—a memoir and a work of historical fiction—at capturing the events and the mood of the time. Give specific examples from each. The paper should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times font. It should be submitted at the beginning of class on 2/12.

Week 5: Whither the Revolution?

2/17, 2/19, 2/21: The Nationality Question; The NEP; Bolshevik Dreams

Reading:

A. Kollontai, "The Family and the Communist State" (Packet)

"Lenin on Nationality Policy" (Packet)

J. V. Stalin, "The Question of the Union of the Independent National Republics" (Packet)

J. V. Stalin, "The Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" (Packet)

Lenin, "The New Economic Policy" (Packet)

Week 6: The Struggle for Power and the Rise of Stalin

2/24, 2/26, 2/28: The Bolshevik Debate!

Reading:

"Lenin on the Prerequisites for Socialism" (Packet)

"Lenin's 'Testament'" (Packet)

"Stalin on Socialism in One Country" (Packet)

Visit Memorial Library and/or College Library and browse www.marxists.org for information about "your" Bolshevik's biography and views on key issues.

Paper Two due 2/28: Write a two- to three-page position paper laying out "your" Bolshevik's position on the future of the NEP, socialist internationalism, and any other key issue that he or she saw as critical. The paper should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times font. It should cite at least two primary sources and one secondary source (in addition to any course readings). It should be submitted at the beginning of class on 2/28.

Week 7: The "Great Break"

3/2, 3/4, 3/6: Collectivization and Industrialization; Cultural Revolution; Hopes and Dreams

Reading:

M. Ilin, "New Russia's Primer" (Packet)

Lev Kopelev, "The Education of a True Believer" (1933) (Packet)

Week 8: The Great Terror

3/09, 3/11, 3/13: Show Trials; Terror; Truth and Fiction

Reading:

Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, ed. Stalinism as a Way of Life, 158-206 (Packet)

*Lydia Chukovskaya, Sofia Petrovna (1965)

Paper Three due 3/13 or 3/23 (It is your choice if you want to submit this paper before or after Spring Break): Write a four- to five-page essay addressing the following question: Some historians have argued that the Soviet Union was a totalitarian state under Stalin and that people participated in state-sponsored campaigns (like collectivization or the constitution campaign or the Terror) out of fear. Other historians have argued that people participated in these campaigns because they believed in the Great Soviet Experiment. In your assessment which position is correct? Support your argument with plenty of evidence drawn from the course readings and the lectures. The paper should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times font. This essay will serve as the midterm exam.

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: The Great Patriotic War

3/23, 3/25, 3/27: Invasion; At War; Wartime Myths and Realities

Reading:

*Svetlana Alexievich, The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II (New York: Random House, 2017).

Please note: You are all invited to a staged reading of The Unwomanly Face of War that I'll be participating in at the downtown Madison Public Library on the evening of April 29.

Week 11: Postwar Stalinism; Field Trips

3/30, 4/1, 4/3: Postwar Stalinism; Chazen and Historical Society Archive Visits

Reading:

*Francis Spufford, Red Plenty (2012), pp. 1-264

Week 12: Introducing Nikita Khrushchev

4/6, 4/8, 4/10: Nikita Khrushchev and De-Stalinization; Life Under Khrushchev; Khrushchev Takes America

Reading:

Spufford, Red Plenty, pp. 265-361

Nikita Khrushchev, "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences," 1956 (Packet)

Paper Four due 4/10: Write a two- to three-page essay assessing the effectiveness of oral history (Alexievich) and historical fiction (Spufford) in helping us to gain a better understanding of the past. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these two genres? Be sure to give specific examples from the books. The paper should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times font. It should be submitted at the beginning of class on 4/10.

Week 13: The Cold War USSR: Stagnation or Ferment?

4/13, 4/15, 4/17: Cold War Dangers; Brezhnev and the Technocratic Society; Crisis and Creativity

Reading:

*Loren R. Graham, The Ghost of the Executed Engineer (1993)

Week 14: Waiting for Gorbachev

4/20, 4/22, 4/24: Springtime for Brezhnev; System in Crisis; Gorbachev

Reading:

*David Remnick, Lenin's Tomb (1994), pp. 3-119

Week 15: From Perestroika to Collapse

4/27, 4/29, 5/1: *Glasnost'* and *Perestroika*; The Collapse of the USSR; And Beyond

Reading:

Remnick, Lenin's Tomb, pp. 412-549

Paper Five due 4/27: Write a two-page paper addressing the following: Graham's The Ghost of the Executed Engineer and Remnick's Lenin's Tomb both attempt to make sense of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Which do you find to be more effective? Why? The paper should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times font. It should be submitted at the beginning of class on 4/27.

Final Exam: For the final exam you will have the choice of taking an exam or producing a work of historical fiction. The due date will be 5/8 at 5 pm.