

Syllabus

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NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS A SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union

The Socialist experiment in Russia has changed the whole world and the global history of the twentieth century. Historians though still have polar opinions on several aspects of the Soviet project, its decay, and its final collapse. The Soviet state (1917-1991) was, at least initially, an attempt to break up an existing, “unjust” social and economic order. The ideas of the World Revolution and creating a new global entity fueled the project, but as the Soviet state was maturing these ideas became more abstract and the timelines to achieve them more distant. The starting point of our course is pre-revolutionary Russia and its intellectual climate. It covers the chaotic years of the Civil War, the tensions of Stalinist industrialization, and the ultimate challenge the Soviet state faced during World War II. It also traces the gradual decline of the Soviet project in the 1970s and the mid-1980s and the attempts to revive it during the Perestroika. It concludes with the Soviet state’s collapse in 1991 and how it shaped the world we live in today. To reach these goals, I want to use the range of primary and secondary sources including paintings, photos, cartoons, and movies. No knowledge of Russian is required.

After taking this course, students:

- Should be able to critically read primary sources asking questions about the content, the goals of their author, and their context;
- Would be familiar with chronological span of Soviet history;
- Would be familiar with the most important historiographic debates in the field;
- Should be able to see the relevance of the Soviet experience to today’s global social and political context;

This course is discussion-based. Readings should be completed before the class begins. All the readings would be available on Canvas. Some primary readings would be done in class. Since the class is taught on remote basis,

Student grades:

Attendance and participation in discussions is a requirement for the class. There is no mid-term or final exam for this course. there would be five quizzes at the beginning of each week (beginning from Week 2). Two essays (mid-term essay and final essay) are required. Mid-term essay should be around 500 words long and final essay should be roughly 1000 words long. Both essays should cover the part of the course you want to reflect about. The final essay is due after the last class. I encourage you to talk about your essays during office hours if you have any questions about them. Please note that there are general rules regulating academic ethics at Rutgers.

Quizzes – 10%

Attendance and Participation – 30%

Two mid-term essays – 30%

Final Essay – 30%

Course Schedule

Jul 13 What Is Socialism?

Readings: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More. Binary Socialism*, and *Everyday Realities*, 4-10.

Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, XIII-XVII.

Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (URL: <http://activistmanifesto.org/assets/original-communist-manifesto.pdf>) SKIP THE PREFACES, excerpts

Christen Ghodsee, *Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism*, NY Times, 12 Aug 2017. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/opinion/why-women-had-better-sex-under-socialism.html>

Images: the nostalgic memes (available on Canvas. Translations are available as well).

Jul 15 A Colossus With Feet of Clay? The Last Years of Russian Empire

Readings: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution. The Setting*, 16-33.

Laura Engelstein, *Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Ciècle Russia*, 1-8.

Anton P. Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*.

Images: Paintings of the First Russian Revolution (available on Canvas)

Jul 20 The World Upside Down? The Great Russian Revolution

Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, 47-67.

Mark Steinberg, *Voices of the Revolution*, 1917, selected documents.

Images: Russian avant-garde posters and pictures

Jul 22 Friendship of Peoples? Making Nations in the Soviet Union

Terry Martin “An Affirmative Action Empire”, in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, 67-86

Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931*, 210-221; 225-233.

Adrienne Edgar, *The Tribal Nation. The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, 1-14.

To watch: Screening: Tsvetushchaia lunost' [The Blooming Youth], available on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtMSvRuSkTE>

[\(no subtitles needed, the movie is silent\);](#)

Jul 27 Socialism in One Country? Stalinist "Revolution from above"

Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing Diaries Under Stalin*, 223-285.

Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, 1-26.

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, 89-115.

Images: Pictures of Moscow Subway (available on Canvas)

Jul 29 Fear and Ashes? The Great Purges

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution*, 150-174.

Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*, 166-179.

Lion Feuchtwanger, *Moscow, 1937: My Visit Described to My Friends*, 112-140.

Eugeniia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*. Selected Chapters.

Aug 3 The Ultimate Challenge? The Soviet Union and WWII

Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, 336-362.

Alexis Peri, *The War Within: Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad*, 4-7.

Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City that Defeated the Third Reich*. Selected Documents.

Images: Soviet war posters (available on Canvas)

To Watch: Yuri Levitan, 22 June 1941, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsupHQtfr7k> (English subtitles available)

Aug 5: Return to Leninist Truth? The Thaw

Russia's Long Twentieth Century: Voices, Memories, Contested Perspectives, ed. Choi Chatterjee, Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, Deborah A. Field, 176-195.

Khrushchev's Secret Speech, excerpts:

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115995.pdf?v=3c22b71b65bcbb99fd9419c995>

Images: Prague Spring, 1968 <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/08/photos-50-years-since-a-soviet-invasion-ended-the-prague-spring/567916/>

To Watch: The Caucasian Prisoner, or the New Adventures of Shurik (1967).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmaZOSlyZ9E> (English subtitles available)

Aug 10: Developed Socialism or "Stagnation"? Late Socialism and the Soviet State

Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, 447-476.

James Millar, The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism, in *Slavic Review*, 1985, Vol. 44 (4): 694-706.

Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Imaginary West (Ch.5), 198-202 (pay attention to the cartoons!)

To watch: Eldar Riazanov, *Garage* (1979). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqsa4u00GXM> (English subtitles available)

Images: Seventeen Moments, 1980 <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1980-2/>

Aug 12: Utopia or Dystopia? Perestroika and the end of the Soviet state

Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, 58-85.

Vladislav Zubok, *Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 305-311.

Mikhail Gorbachev's Speech in the UN, 8 Dec 1988. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/08/world/the-gorbachev-visit-excerpts-from-speech-to-un-on-major-soviet-military-cuts.html>

Film Screening: *Little Vera* (English subtitles available):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ygvVJLhcxE>

To Watch: Music Video – Alliance *Na Zarie* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sLpG4MG5J8>)

Images: <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1991-2/the-august-coup/the-august-coup-images/>

Final essay is due to: Aug 18 (the last day of the session) 23:59 EST.