

History 242: The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union
Spring 2018: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 10:00-10:50

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Thurs. 2:00-4:00

Course Overview

The history of the Soviet Union is a story of great contrasts. In October 1917, when the tsarist regime fell, Russia became one of the most chaotic, dynamic, and fast-changing revolutionary societies in all of history; by the time the USSR collapsed in December 1991, it was in many ways a stagnant bureaucratic regime led by a corrupt and entrenched elite. The leaders of the Soviet Union claimed that they had liberated their country from centuries of tsarist oppression, but they ended up unleashing mass repression and state-sponsored violence on a massive scale. The Soviet regime could claim great successes—like the dramatic growth of literacy and the launch of the first man-made satellite in history—but it never lived up to the grand rhetoric of its leaders and became one of the world’s most repressive states.

This course will examine the history of the USSR from the October Revolution of 1917 until the regime’s sudden collapse at the end of 1991, focusing on the country’s social and political history. Ever since the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, scholars have debated the meaning and the legacy of the October Revolution; in every period of Soviet history, the country’s leaders claimed to be following the true path of Communism, while denouncing their rivals (and sometimes their predecessors) for straying from socialism. This class will examine how the nature of Soviet communism was redefined by each successive generation and will seek to relate each part of the Soviet experience to the larger trajectory of the country’s history. Was Stalinism a departure from the revolution’s original ideology, or the inevitable result of 1917? Was the Khrushchev era an unprecedented liberalization of the regime’s policies, or an attempt to return to the country’s Leninist roots? We will not only seek to answer questions like these, but to examine the ways that everyday citizens experienced Communist rule and to understand how the revolutionary enthusiasm that at times dominated the country’s political discourse ultimately gave way to the cynicism and corruption of the USSR’s final days.

Learning Goals

This course has three broad objectives: to help students understand the history of the Soviet Union, to enable them to critically read both primary documents and secondary sources, and to teach them to improve their analytical writing skills. But it also several more specific goals:

Soviet History Goals

By the end of the semester, students who have completed this course will be able to:

- explain how the Communist Party seized power in Russia in 1917, why it lost power in 1991, and how it maintained its power during the years in between;

- explain the ways in which the country’s political leaders both modified and preserved the legacy of the October Revolution in each of the main periods of Soviet history;
- explain the ways in which the Soviet state made use of terror and ideology to achieve its goals (and the extent to which it was a dictatorship during each period of its history);
- explain how the Soviet Union was shaped by its Russian historical and geographical context, and the ways in which it was a modern political system shaped by forces that transcended national boundaries.

Critical Reading Goals

By the end of the course, students will have refined their ability to:

- interpret a primary source (historical document) by analyzing its structure, audience, goals, and biases;
- identify and critique the argument of a secondary source (a book or article by a present-day historian), while situating that source within a larger historical debate or literature.

Analytical Writing Goals

By the end of the semester, students will have improved their ability to:

- craft a clear, specific, and nuanced thesis statement in response to a historical question;
- construct a well-organized, evidence-rich, and cohesive paper in defense of a central argument.

Keep these goals in mind throughout the semester. The content goals, for example, will be useful as you prepare for the mid-term and final exams; class discussions will be based on the analysis of primary sources and secondary sources; writing assignments will be graded based on your ability to develop a nuanced thesis and to defend that thesis in a well-organized paper.

Course Readings

The following books are all on sale at the college bookstore and on course reserve at the library:

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

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents*

Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*

Many readings for this course are primary documents or secondary texts from Ron Suny’s *The Structure of Soviet History* (listed above). On the schedule of readings below, those texts will be listed with the notation “[Suny]”. Other readings (marked “[Pioneerweb]”) will be available on the course’s Blackboard site.

Assignments and Grading

Your grade in this class will be based on the following requirements. Note that you must hand in every assignment listed below in order to pass the class, and that if your grades improve steadily over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration in deciding your final grade.

Two short document analyses (worth 15% of your grade, or 7.5% each). You will submit two short writing assignments (each 1 to 1.5 pages long); the first (an analysis of the Petrograd Soviet's Order Number 1) will be due by Sunday, January 28, at 10 PM; a revised version will be due by Friday, February 2, at 5 PM. The second (an analysis of the 1922 marriage and family code) will be due at 10 PM on Tuesday, February 13.

A 5-page paper (15% of your grade). This paper will be an analysis and synthesis of our course readings on the October Revolution's aftermath. It will be due at 5 PM on Sunday, February 25.

A 6-to-8-page oral history analysis (20% of your final grade). In the second half of the semester, you will write a 6-to-8-page analysis of the oral history interviews of the Harvard Project, which interviewed Soviet citizens on their life under Stalin in the 1950s. You will need to send me a 2-to-3-page proposal for your paper by April 13; the final version of the paper will be due on April 29.

A mid-term exam (10% of your grade.) This exam will have two sections: an ID section (in which you explain the significance of several people, places, things, or concepts from the first half of the course) and a section in which you identify and explain passages from the course's primary source readings. The mid-term exam will take place in class on Monday, March 12.

A final exam (20% of your grade.) This three-hour exam will have roughly the same format as the mid-term and will take place on Friday, May 18, at 2:00 PM. The ID and primary source sections will only include material from the second half of the class; the exam will also feature two essay sections, in which you will answer one of 2-3 essay questions on material from the second half of the course and one of 2-3 essay questions on themes from the entire course.

Class participation (20% of your grade). Although this class will occasionally include brief lectures on the course material, it is primarily intended as a discussion course. The final requirement for the class, then, is active and informed participation in class discussions. You should come to class having read the day's reading and thought about its contents; you should be ready to talk about the course material, to remember the main strategies we'll use for analyzing and discussing primary and secondary sources, and to help the class have a productive discussion in whatever way seems most appropriate to you at the time.

Here are some general observations about class participation:

- Although I hope that all students will take part in the discussion (ideally speaking at least once per class session on average), remember that the quality of your comments is generally more important than the quantity of your remarks.
- Remember that there are many ways to participate in class discussions. The strongest participants in discussion will often make comments that analyze the readings (rather

them merely recapping them), but I expect that active participants in discussion will play different roles at different times: for example, you might answer a question of mine, summarize a reading, provide evidence for a point, pose a question to me or the class, respond to a classmate, or connect the day's reading to an earlier reading or class discussion. In general, any form of participation that shows engagement with the material and helps the class to understand Soviet history is fair game.

- All else being equal, it will help you to provide evidence for your arguments when you speak in class. Ground your participation in the text: be ready to quote the readings or to point out specific passages that you find useful, significant, or relevant.
- You should therefore come to class with copies of the day's reading and with your notes on what you've read. (You are welcome to bring the readings either in hard copies or on a computer, but you should remember that it is often easier to mark significant passages in a paper copy of the readings.) In particular, I recommend that you make note of quotations and details in the readings that you find especially compelling.
- Class participation depends on attendance. I'll therefore keep track of your attendance throughout the semester; missing class once or twice won't affect your grade, but if you have more than two unexcused absences, your participation grade will go down. If you have more than six unexcused absences, you will generally receive a participation grade of F or zero. Please contact me at least a week in advance if you will be missing class because of an athletic event or another campus activity.
- If you will be missing a class, you can make sure your absence does not affect your grade by sending me a 300-to-500 word email on the day's reading. Under normal circumstances, this email will be due within 24 hours of the class period; it should analyze the day's reading using the approach discussed in our primary and secondary source handouts or answer a question I posed by email to the class.
- I have listed several optional events on the syllabus, which are typically lectures by scholars visiting Grinnell. If, within 48 hours of the event, you send me an email that sums up the event and your reaction to it, I will count that toward your participation grade. (As we will discuss in class, the best way to approach these emails is to sum up the speaker's argument, explain how the speaker made his or her case, and tell whether you found the argument convincing and what you found most interesting about the talk.)
- Finally, remember that class participation depends not only on speaking, but on listening—both to me and to your classmates. Be respectful, listen carefully, and be ready to respond to your classmates and not just to me.

I will generally give each student a brief "participation update" each time I send you feedback on a written assignment. I also encourage you to check in with me at any point if you have questions about the class or about how you can become more involved in the discussion.

Extension Policy

Each student in the class can have one (and only one) 48-hour extension on a writing assignment over the course of the semester; this policy applies only to the 5-page paper due in February or to the 6-to-8-page paper due in May (i.e., it does not apply to the two short document analyses.) To claim this extension, send me a brief email asking for an extension before the assignment's deadline; I will grant this extension automatically, so there is no need for you to explain why you

need more time. Keep in mind, however, that once you've received an extension on an assignment, I will not give you an extension on another except in the case of a documented emergency. (Note, too, that you cannot break up your one 48-hour extension into two 24-hour extensions or a 2-hour extension and a 46-hour extension.) In the absence of an extension, late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade per day.

The first two written assignments of the semester—the document analyses due on January 31 and February 16—are due by email the night before class. Since we will be discussing these documents in class the next day, it is not possible to get an extension on them (since this would give you an advantage on the paper relative to your classmates.) If you cannot complete one of your short document analyses by the deadline, I will give you the chance to do an analysis of a document from later in the semester instead; however, if you choose to exercise this option, you will not have the chance to get an extension on a later paper except in the case of an emergency.

Paper Revision Policy

This class is a writing-intensive course that is designed not only to teach students about history, but to help them develop their writing skills. Over the course of the semester, then, you will have two opportunities to revise a paper that you've already handed in and to resubmit it for re-grading. Every student in the class will be required to hand in a second version of the first writing assignment of the semester (the document analysis due on January 31); after spring break, any student who wants to will be able to hand in a revised version of their 5-page paper or their 6-to-8-page paper. (Keep in mind that you will only have a few days to revise the latter paper, since it's due late in the semester and it will take me roughly a week to grade it and get it back to you.) If you choose to exercise this option, your final grade for the assignment will be the average of your original grade and the grade for your revised paper. (In other words, if you earn a B- on the first version of a paper and a B+ on the rewrite, you'll earn a final grade of B.)

In exchange for getting the opportunity to resubmit a 5-page paper, you will need to meet two requirements. First, as you begin the revision process, come speak with me to discuss how you plan to address the critique I gave you in my written comments. (Please come to this meeting with a tentative plan for your revisions and a marked-up version of your original paper.) Second, if I suggested that you go to the Writing Lab in my written comments on the first version of your paper, you'll need to do so for me to accept your revised paper. (Note: although I will of course be happy to meet with you to discuss your revision of the document analysis, you are not required to come talk to me about this assignment.)

Academic Accommodations

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students need to provide documentation to the Coordinator for Student Disability Resources, John Hirschman, located on the 3rd floor of the Rosenfield Center and discuss your needs with him. Students should then notify me within the first few days of classes so that we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course and coordinate your accommodations.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Monday, January 22: Introduction to the Course

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, intro and ch. 1

Wednesday, January 24: Prelude to Revolution

Reading: Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, ch. 1 [Pioneerweb]
Semen Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Friday, January 26: Red October

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, ch. 2
Boris Kolonitskii, "Anti-Bourgeois Propaganda and Anti-Burzhui Consciousness in 1917" [Suny]

Sunday, January 28: **email me a 1-to-1.5-page analysis of Order Number 1 by 10 PM**

Monday, January 29: The Revolution in Documents

Reading: primary documents from the Suny reader, pp. 33-48
Order Number 1 [Suny]
Kerenskii's statement in the Soviet of Workers' Deputies [Suny]
Tsereteli's speech on returning from Soviet exile [Suny]
The April Theses [Suny]
Tsereteli and Lenin's exchange [Suny]
report from Kovno Guberniia [Suny]
Lenin's letter to the Central Committee [Suny]

Wednesday, January 31: Remembering the Revolution

Film: *October* (Sergei Eisenstein, dir.) available online at:
<https://grinnell.kanopystreaming.com/video/october-ten-days-shook-world>

Friday, February 2: Civil War!

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, ch. 3
"Lenin's Decree on Peace" [Suny]
"Decree on the Land" [Suny]
"Decree on Suppression of Hostile Newspapers" [Suny]
"Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia" [Suny]

Assignment: **email me a revised version of your Order Number 1 analysis by 5:00 PM**

Monday, February 5: The Militarization of the Soviet State

Reading: “Iulii Martov’s Letter to A.N. Stein” [Sunny]
 “Lenin’s Letter to V. V. Kuraev, E. B. Bosh, and A. E. Minkin” [Sunny]
 Lev Trotskii, “Report on the Red Army” [Sunny]

Wednesday, February 7: Revolution and Civil War in Context

Reading: Peter Holquist, “‘Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work’: Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context” [Sunny]

Friday, February 9: Faction-Fighting and the Rise of the Dictatorship

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, ch. 4
 Aleksandra Kollontai, “The Workers’ Opposition” [Sunny]
 Resolutions of the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party [Sunny]
 V. I. Lenin, “Letter to the Congress” (first part) [Sunny]

Monday, February 12: Russian Society during NEP

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society” [Pioneerweb]
 Alan Ball, “Private Trade and Traders during NEP” [Pioneerweb]

Tuesday, February 13: **email me a 1-to-1.5-page analysis of the code of laws on marriage and the family (by 10:00 PM)**

Wednesday, February 14: The Contradictions of NEP

Reading: Eric Naiman, “The Case of Chubarov Alley” [Pioneerweb]
 The Code of Laws on Marriage and Divorce, the Family and Guardianship [Sunny]

Friday, February 16: An Overview of Stalinism

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, ch. 5-6

Monday, February 19: Collectivization and De-Kulakization

Reading: Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
 Stalin, “Dizzy with Success” [Sunny]
 Lev Kopelev, “The Last Grain Collections” [Sunny]

Wednesday, February 21: The Stalin Dictatorship

Reading: Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: In the Court of the Red Tsar*, pp. 1-57, 93-101 [Pioneerweb]

Oleg Khlevniuk, "Stalin as Dictator: The Personalisation of Power" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, February 23: Stalin's Personality Cult

Reading: Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Sarah Davies, "Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult" [Pioneerweb]
Sarah Davies, "The Leader Cult in Official Discourse" [Pioneerweb]

Sunday, February 25: **email me your 5-page paper by 5:00 PM**

Monday, February 26: Everyday Life and the Communist Party

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 1-66

Wednesday, February 28: A New Society?

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 67-114

Friday, March 2: Ostracized Citizens and Broken Families

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 115-189, 218-228

Monday, March 5: Nationalism in the USSR

Reading: Terry Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire" [Sunny]
Terry Martin, "Modernization or Neotraditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, March 7: Soviet Ethnicity: The Case of Georgian Food

Reading: Erik Scott, "Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, March 9: The Purges

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 282-289 [Pioneerweb]
Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 190-217
James Harris, "The Purging of Local Cliques in the Urals Region, 1936-7" [Pioneerweb]

Monday, March 12: **MID-TERM EXAM**

Wednesday, March 14: Voices of the Purges

Reading: Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Nikolai Bukharin, "Letter to Stalin" [Sunny]

Friday, March 16: The War and After

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 336-361 [Pioneerweb]
Suny reader, pp. 289-297, 336-342:
Suny's chapter intro, pp. 289-293 [Suny]; The Nazi Soviet Pact [Suny]
Popular reactions to the beginning of the war [Suny]

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 17 TO APRIL 1

Monday, April 2: From War to Cold War

Reading: Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, chapters 1-2

Wednesday, April 4: Stalinist Values after the War

Reading: Vera Dunham, "The Big Deal" [Suny]
Cynthia Hooper, "A Darker 'Big Deal'" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, April 6: The Death of Stalin

Reading: Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, "Stalin's Last Struggle" [Suny]
Miriam Dobson, "1953: 'The Most Painful Year'" [Pioneerweb]
Evgenii Evtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, excerpts [Suny]

Monday, April 9: Khrushchev's Rise to Power and the Beginnings of De-Stalinization

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 413-446 [Pioneerweb]
"Nikita Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" [Suny]

Wednesday, April 11: Reform, Reaction, and Khrushchev's Hare-Brained Schemes

Reading: Zubok, chapter 6; Khrushchev's remarks on modern art [Pioneerweb]
look at the website *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History* (see Pioneerweb for instructions)

Friday, April 13: A Novella of The Thaw

Reading: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
Assignment: **send me a proposal for your Harvard Project paper by 5:00 PM**

Monday, April 16: The Soviet Family under Khrushchev

Reading: Edward Cohn, "Sex and the Married Communist: Marital Infidelity, Family

Troubles, and Communist Party Discipline in the Post-War USSR, 1945-1964” [Pioneerweb]

Deborah Field, “Irreconcilable Differences: Divorce and Conceptions of Private Life in the Khrushchev Era” [Suny]

Wednesday, April 18: Khrushchev’s Cold War

Reading: Zubok, chapters 4-5

Friday, April 20: The Space Race

Reading: Amy Nelson, “Cold War Celebrity and the Courageous Canine Scout” [Pioneerweb]

Slava Gerovitch, “The Human Inside a Propaganda Machine: The Public Image and Professional Identity of Soviet Cosmonauts” [Pioneerweb]

Monday, April 23: The Brezhnev Era

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 447–475 [Pioneerweb]

John Bushnell, “The ‘New Soviet Man’ Turns Pessimist” [Suny]

James R. Millar, “The Little Deal: Brezhnev’s Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism” [Suny]

Wednesday, April 25: Détente and Cold War

Reading: Zubok, chapter 7-8

Friday, April 27: Dissent in the 1960s and 1970s

Reading: “Trial of a Young Poet: The Case of Joseph Brodsky” [Pioneerweb]

“The Case of Boris Kochubiyevsky” [Suny]

“Letter from Vladimir Vysotskii to Petr Dimichev” [Suny]

Sunday, April 29: **Harvard Project analysis is due at 5:00 PM**

Monday, April 30: Life under Brezhnev

Film: *The Irony of Fate* (Eldar Riazanov, dir.) (available online)

Wednesday, May 2: The Final Years of the USSR

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 479-514 [Pioneerweb]

Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

excerpt from Mikhail Gorbachev’s memoirs [Suny]

Friday, May 4: Experiencing Reform

Film: *My Perestroika* (Robin Hess, dir.) (available online; showing TBA)

Monday, May 7: Reform and its Discontents

Reading: Alexander Dallin, “Causes of the Collapse of the USSR” [Suny]
 Nina Andreeva, “I Cannot Give Up My Principles” [Suny]
 “The Rehabilitation of Bukharin” [Suny]
 “Boris Yeltsin Resigns from the Communist Party” [Suny]

Wednesday, May 9: Gorbachev’s Cold War

Reading: Zubok, chapters 9-10

Friday, May 11: The August Coup

Reading: Zubok, epilogue
 “The August Coup” [Suny]
 Mikhail Gorbachev, “Speech of Resignation” [Suny]

Assignment: if you choose to revise one of your papers, the rewrite is due at 5 PM

FINAL EXAM: Friday, May 18, at 2:00 PM