HSTR 595.01: Special Topics - Readings in Soviet History

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HSTR 595: Readings in Soviet History
Fall 2014

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Course Description:
This graduate colloquium explores classic and recent English-language scholarship in the
cultural, political, and social history of the Soviet Union, from revolution to dissolution. Specific
topics include the origins and outcomes of the October Revolution; the formation of the Soviet
state and the problem of violence; the contours of Bolshevik culture and culture-building; the
nature and legacy of Stalinism; post-Stalinist reconfiguration; and questions of ideology,
conviction, and coercion. The chief goals of the course are to expose students to the major
historiographical problems in the field, to investigate new and classical scholarly trends in Soviet
history, and to cultivate critical thinking and analytical skills.

This course is designed for History graduate students and presupposes no intimate familiarity
with Russian and Soviet history. Students interested in Russian-language historical literature
should consult with me. Those in search of a solid and intelligent textbook are advised to seek out
Peter Kenez, A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End (Cambridge:
Cambridge UP, 2006) or Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, A History of Russia
Soviet history is The Cambridge History of Russia, vol. 3: The Twentieth Century, ed. Ronald G.

Course Requirements:
Completion of assigned readings, faithful attendance in class, and consistent active participation
are essential for success in this course.

1. Presentation: Students will be required to lead discussion (either singly or in pairs) twice
during the semester. We will determine a presentation schedule for the semester in the first
week of the course.
   a) Each presenter will email the class (myself included) a list of discussion questions no
      later than Thursday afternoon at 5.00pm. These should be substantive and thoughtful
      questions concerning the methodology, argument, source base, and historiographical
      significance of the book.
   b) We will begin each class with opening remarks from the week’s presenter(s).
      Presenters will lay out the argument, structure, and historiographical significance of
      that week’s texts (both the assigned and recommended texts; in some cases, an
      alternate recommended text or set of articles can be presented; check with me first).
      Presentations should be approx. 10 minutes and will summarize the themes,
      arguments, sources, and contribution of the reading(s) as well as relate the work(s)
      under consideration to both common and recommended course readings. Note: I
      have not ordered copies of the recommended texts at the Bookstore. It is up to you to
      procure a copy of the recommended text(s) in your presentation week; get an early
      start and proceed in timely fashion (check the Mansfield Library, ILL, or Amazon).

2. Writing assignments:
   a) Each student will write a total of nine (9) 750-1000 word book reviews on the
      assigned texts. You will email the class (myself included) a copy of your review by
      11.59 pm on Thursday night. I strongly encourage you to read your comrades’
reviews in advance of our Friday meeting. You will bring a hard copy of the review (stapled and properly formatted) to class on Friday. Ideally, presenters will incorporate one or more of the recommended texts in their reviews.  

b) On weeks that you are not writing a review, you will email the group with thoughtful discussion questions on the week’s readings. These questions are in lieu of writing a book review. Discussion questions are due by 5:00pm on Thursday afternoon.  

c) A longer historiographical essay (15-20 pages) is also required, on a topic of interest to the student (ideally germane to the student’s MA or PhD focus), to be selected in consultation with the instructor. This is due at the end of the semester (during finals week).  

**Final Grade:** Your final grade for the course will be calculated on the basis of your weekly participation (active, engaged, informed); two presentations; nine book reviews; discussion questions; and the final historiographical essay.  

**On Writing Book Reviews:**  
A book review should both summarize and critically analyze/appraise the author’s main arguments, use of evidence, historiographical approach, and conclusions. Ideally, the book review should also comment on the significance of the author’s contribution to the field. Reviews in *Journal of Modern History*, *American Historical Review*, and *Past and Present* are among the best for this purpose, but feel free to use other journals as well. The leading English-language journals for Russian/Soviet history are *Kritika*, *Russian History*, *Russian Review*, and *Slavic Review*. Use the formatting style of published reviews as a template for your review. When in doubt, don’t hesitate to ask me.  

**Books Available for Purchase:**  
(available for purchase at the Bookstore in the UC or via Amazon; plan ahead and procure your texts early) (* = e-book copy available through Mansfield Library)  


Soviet history books, simply put and with some notable few exceptions, do not sell. The result is that cover prices on many texts are so high as to render them cost-prohibitive for classroom use. Fortunately, a full half of the books we’re reading this semester are available as free e-books through the Mansfield Library website; I’ve marked these texts in the list above with an asterisk and also in the course schedule below. This should save you a good deal of money, and I strongly encourage you to avail yourself of this economy. However, I would ask that if you do read the e-version, please bring a laptop or other device to class so that you will have the text in front of you and that we can have a meaningful text-based discussion.

**Course Schedule:**

**Week I (Aug 29): Intro to the course**

**Week II (Sept 5): The Revolution(s) of 1917**

- **Recommended texts:**

**Week III (Sept 12): Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the Soviet State**

- Donald J. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia’s Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-1922* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002); *(e-version @ Mansfield)*
- **Recommended texts:**

**Week IV (Sept 19): Forging a Bolshevik Culture and Society**

- **Recommended texts:**

**Week V (Sept 26): Stalinism**
• Recommended texts:

**Week VI (Oct 3): Soviet Subjectivities/Selfhood**
• Recommended texts:
  • Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh Press, 1999)
  • Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh Press, 2008)

**Week VII (Oct 10): State Violence, Popular Participation**
• Recommended texts:

**Week VIII (Oct 17): Punishment/Redemption/Refashioning**
• Recommended texts:
  • David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009)

**Week IX (Oct 24): The Bolshevik Project in Comparative Perspective**
- **Recommended texts:**

**Week X (Oct 31): Periphery/Metropole; Urban Space & Culture**
- **Recommended texts:**
  - Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013)

**Week XI (Nov 7): After Stalin**
- **Recommended texts:**

**Week XII (Nov 14): Cold War Culture**
- **Recommended texts:**

**Week XIII (Nov 21): Anthropological Approaches to Late (and Post-) Soviet Society**

**Recommended texts:**
• Serguei Alex Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009)

**Week XIV (Nov 28): THANKSGIVING BREAK; NO CLASS**

**Week XV (Dec 5): Comparative Perspectives; Under Western Eyes**

**Recommended texts:**
• Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad After Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011)