

20th-Century Russia

History 3644 Spring 2016 / CRN 18981



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Course Description

“Anyone who does not regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart. Anyone who wants it restored has no brains.”

–Vladimir Putin

From the 2000 presidential campaign

“Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century.”

– Vladimir Putin,

Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, April 25, 2005

These quotes by the president of the Russian Federation speak to a profound, contradictory, and often tragic historical experience with far-reaching implications for the contemporary world. That history is the subject of this course. Beginning with the twilight of the Romanov dynasty and ending with the dawn of the post-communist order, we will explore the unique and compelling drama that was the Soviet experience. We will pay particular attention to the revolutionary origins of the communist state, Stalin’s campaign to modernize the country’s economy, the Soviet Union’s role in World War II, the dawn of the space age and reform movements in the postwar period, and the collapse of communism in the early nineties. By the end of this course, you should have gained considerable insight on Mr. Putin’s enigmatic assessment of a country that no longer exists. Learning about the Soviet experience, and the historic relationship between various regions and ethnic groups will also help you make sense of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

This is a course you make, not a course you take....

While this syllabus provides a road map for the topics we will cover this semester, a large part of our work together will be a collaborative discussion and analysis of the key developments in Soviet History. You will create most of the content for the course by doing research, publishing your findings on your blog, and discussing them with other members of the class. We – the editorial team and the class as a whole, will curate that content into a weekly edition of the motherblog. The motherblog serves as the backbone of a networked learning environment which will use blogging, Twitter, and other learning technologies to help you construct, elaborate and refine a narrative arc and interpretive framework for Soviet history. This is not a “regular” history course! It is a collaborative effort to make sense of a complex and important historical experience in a geographically significant region. This format will help us learn with and from each other. We will create the course together in an immediately accessible, professional, enduring and transparent medium. We are in this together and you must be present to win.

Course objectives

The blogging assignments are intended to leverage the freely accessible resources of the World Wide Web as well as the digitized collections of the Virginia Tech libraries in order to:

- Develop your skills in historical analysis
- Develop your skills identifying, using and citing historical sources
- Develop understanding of the key developments and dynamics of Soviet History

Course Requirements

- Interest in Soviet history and commitment to knowing more about it
- Willingness to explore collaborative networked learning by completing the required web work and participating in F2F class sessions
- Setting-up, developing and maintaining a blog of your research
- Two midterms / self assessments
- A final self-reflection on the collapse of the Soviet Union and your work in the course

Required Text

- **Russia. A History, 3rd Edition** Oxford University Press, 2009), Gregory L. Freeze, ed.

Your Grade Will be Calculated as Follows:

Blog contributions (7 minimum)*	45%
Responding to classmates' blog posts (33 minimum)**	15%
Attendance and participation in F2F meetings***	10%
Two midterm reflections and essays	20%
Final essay and self assessment	10%

***Blogging is learning...**

Everything you need to know about the spirit and logistics of blogging is contained in the “Blogging Soviet History” handout. Just note two things here:

- 1) Individual posts and comments are not graded, but will be considered holistically as evidence of your general commitment to the course and its content.
- 2) There are 11 blogging opportunities in all. You need to post at least 7 times: Three before the 1st MT (the first two weeks are required for everyone); Three more before the 2nd MT, and one more before the final.

****Commenting is Caring**

You need to read and comment on at least 3 posts every time the class blogs (not just when you post).

*****More About Making the Grade**

Because this is a course you make, rather than one where content is delivered to you, you must actively contribute to our learning community for it to thrive. We will be learning with and from each other, and our interactions (on-line and F2F) are essential to making the course work, as is consistent preparation for those interactions. Our networked format expands and amplifies what we do in class, it does not replace class. You cannot “make-up” classes that you miss. The “attendance and participation” component of your grade will be calculated as follows:

- 1) You may miss up to three class sessions without penalty to your overall grade or the “attendance and participation” component of your grade.
- 2) Every class you miss after that will cause your **course grade** to drop by 1/3 for each additional class (so, 4 absences would turn a B+ into a B; 5 would make a B into a B-, etc.). Missing more than three classes will also negatively affect the attendance and participation portion of your grade.
- 3) I will evaluate the attendance and participation component of your grade at the end of the term based on my assessment of your regular, capable contributions to the class sessions and online class activities.

Academic Integrity

Do not cheat. Do not plagiarize. All assignments shall be subject to the stipulations of the Virginia Tech Honor Code. For more information about the Honor Code and the undergraduate honor system see: <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

Special Needs

If you need accommodations because of a dis/ability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment to see me as soon as possible.

Safe Zone

My office is a certified Safe Zone, and I am committed to creating a more inclusive and accepting environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning communities and their allies. For more information on LGBTQ services and opportunities, please visit <http://www.mps.vt.edu/lgbtq/index.html>.

Professionalism and VT's **Principles of Community** will guide our engagement with each other in the web-based components of the course as well as in our class meetings.

Schedule and Assignments

WEEK	TOPIC	COMMON MATERIALS
One		
1/19	Course introduction	
1/21	The Imperial Heritage	Freeze Ch. 7, pp. 199-233
Th. 1/21	→ Create your blog and submit it for syndication by 5pm	
Sun 1/24	1st Blogpost: The Empire That Was Russia	Prokudin-Gorskii photograph collection
	EVERYONE MUST POST	
Two	The Revolutionary Movement	
1/26		
1/28	1905: The First Russian Revolution	Freeze Ch. 8, pp. 234-268
Sun 1/31	2nd Blogpost: Marxism in Russia / 1905	Marxist Internet Archive / Historical New York Times
	EVERYONE MUST POST	
Three		
2/2	Constitutional Experiment & WWI	
2/4	КТО КОГО? The Revolutions of 1917	Freeze Ch. 9a, pp. 269-296
Sun 2/7	3rd Blogpost: Revolutions of 1917	17 Moments (1917); DHR Module 3
Four		
2/9	More revolution...	
2/11	Civil War & War Communism	Freeze Ch. 9b, pp. 296-306
Sun 2/14	4th Blogpost: Revolutionaries to Rulers	17 Moments (1921-1924)
Five	NEP and Stalin's Rise	Freeze Ch. 10, pp. 307-340
2/16		
2/18	— First Exam —	
Six		
2/23	New Soviet Men and Women	
2/25	Collectivization / Industrialization	Freeze Ch. 11a, pp. 341-357
2/28	5th Blogpost: First Five Year Plan	17 Moments (1929)
2/29	Drop Deadline	
Seven		
3/1	Pilots, Purges, Building Socialism	Freeze Ch. 11b, pp. 358-373
3/3	Fascism and the Interwar Period	
	SPRING BREAK	

3/13	6th Blogpost: Pilots, Purges & Building Socialism	17 Moments (1934, 1936, 1939)
Eight		
3/15	The Great Patriotic War	Freeze Ch. 12a, pp. 374-392
3/17	Cold War / High Stalinism	Freeze Ch. 12b, pp. 392-405
3/20	7th Blogpost: WWII / High Stalinism	17 Moments (1943, 1947)
Nine		
3/22	Virgin Lands	Freeze Ch. 13a, pp. 406-434
3/24	Thaw	
3/27	8th Blogpost: Khrushchev and the Thaw	17 Moments (1954, 1956) Current Digest of the Russian Press
Ten		
3/29	Space Age	
3/31	1968	
4/3	9th Blogpost: The Soviet Sixties	17 Moments (1961, 1968) Current Digest; DHR; CIA
Eleven		
4/5	Retrenchment at Home and Abroad	Freeze Ch. 13b, pp. 434-450
4/7	Baikal / Afghanistan	
Blogging Holiday		
Twelve		
4/12	Exam Prep	
4/14	Second Exam	
Thirteen		
4/19	Chernobyl	Freeze Ch. 14, pp. 451-464
4/21	“Everything was Forever, Until it Was no More”	
4/24	10th Blogpost: Rockers, Dissidents, and War in Afghanistan	17 Moments (1973, 1980) Current Digest; Proquest Newspapers
Fourteen		
4/26	From Empire to Federation	Freeze, Ch. 14, pp. 464-488
4/28	Looking Back	
5/1	11th Blogpost: Environmental Disaster, Political Ferment, End of Empire	17 Moments (1985, 1991) Current Digest, Proquest Newspapers
Fifteen		
5/3	The Current Crisis	
5/7	Final Essays Due	