

HI449

The Revolution Devours its Children: The History of Soviet Terror

Fall 2018

Wed 2:30-5:15 pm

History Dept #504

Пишет сыночку мать:
'Сыночек мой родной,
Ведь и Россия вся-
Это концлагерь большой.'

A mother writes to her son:
'My dear beloved son,
You know that all of Russia is
A big concentration camp.'
-From the song "Vorkuta"



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

The USSR was one of the most violent regimes in history, and most of the terror was perpetrated by the state against its own people. The Soviet regime promised its citizens a life of leisure, peace, and abundance, and one way it sought to establish this utopia was by purifying society through violence. From its founding days, the state used terror to create social stability, build industry, and transform the minds and bodies of its citizens. We will examine how terror played an integral role in the revolutionary project, how its institutions—show trials, confessions, and concentration camps—developed. We will work with a variety of sources including official decrees, secret party documents, diaries, court testimonies, interrogations, fiction, films, and historiography.

Three questions will drive our study:

1. How did the Soviet people experience and understand state violence as a part of everyday life?
2. How was it that mass terror both kept the Soviet state in power as well as eventually unseated it?
3. How can we most judiciously and effectively use personal testimony, which functions both as art and as document, in crafting histories of the terror experience?

Instructor:

Professor Alexis Peri

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226 Bay State Rd. # 203

Office Hours: Mondays 2-4, Fridays 11:00-12:30, & by appointment

Required Readings:

- Veronica Garros, V. Korenevskaya, Thomas Lahusen et al., et al., *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (Perseus/New Press, 1997)
- Lydia Chukovskaya, *Sofia Petrovna* (Northwestern University Press, 1994)
- Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (HBC Trade, 2008)
- Alexander Vatin, *Agents of Terror: Ordinary Men and Extraordinary Violence in Stalin's Secret Police* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2016). Also available as an e-Book through BU's library website.

All other course readings will be posted on Blackboard and on reserve at Mugar Library.

Need to brush up on Soviet history or have a question that needs clarifying? A textbook on Soviet history for your general reference has also been placed on reserve at Mugar: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*.

Because we will work through the readings carefully, please bring them to the class meeting in which they will be discussed

Course Assessments:

Collective Note-Taking (1 page)	4%
Essay 1 (5-6 pages)	16%
Essay 2 (5-7 pages)	20%
Final Creative Project (8-10 pages)	25%
Attendance & Participation	35%

Participation and Attendance:

This seminar's success depends on your preparedness and willingness to engage with each other. Your participation grade will be based on the quality, not just the quantity, of your contributions and on how attentively and respectfully you listen to other students. You may miss 2 class meetings without penalty. Additional absences will hurt a student's grade. Students whose extracurricular activities conflict with class meetings must notify me within first 2 weeks (14 days) of the semester, so that arrangements for them to make up the work.

Collective Notetaking:¹

An essential skill for all students of history is the ability to distill a complex piece scholarship into a few crisp sentences or notes. Once during the semester, each student will take notes on one of the secondary readings, giving the essential information about its driving questions, argument, stakes, methods, and place in the field. The notes may be no more than 1 page in length. These notes must be emailed (as a Microsoft Word document or pdf) to the instructor by 9pm on the Tuesday night before our class meeting. The notetaker for that week will serve as an expert on that reading. Copies will be then be distributed during class time, allowing all students to see different approaches to notetaking and to refine their own style as a result. Moreover, succinct notes on many of the readings will aid students as they prepare their final projects. More specific instructions will be given in class.

Essays:

The two assigned essays ask students to develop original and specific arguments based on their analysis of primary and secondary sources. Topics will be distributed in advance. They will ask students to weigh in on particular historical debates (for ex: was terror motivated more by economic than by political motivations during Stalin's First Five Year Plan? Or: to what extent was terror a top-down policy imposed upon the population and to what extent was it a bottom-up phenomenon driven by denunciation?). All essays must be typed in 12-point, Times New Roman font, double spaced, and have one-inch margins. Footnotes should be in 10-point font, single-spaced, and in Chicago style. (With complete footnotes, no Works Cited page is necessary.) All essays must have a title and page numbers. Essays will be due electronically in a Microsoft Word or PDF format. Please be sure that both the essay document and the name of the electronic file includes the author's name. A rubric showing how your essay will be evaluated is posted on Blackboard.

Final Creative Project:

For the final project, students will have the opportunity to demonstrate their historical knowledge in a non-traditional way by engaging in creative writing and artistic work. Suggested topics and readings for further consideration will be distributed in advance. In the past, students have composed applications to the communist party, wrote letters of denunciation, analyzed visual art, poetry, or film about the terror, or curated articles for a museum exhibition on the gulag. More details about the assignments, along with the suggested topics, will be distributed in class.

Late Work:

All assignments must be completed and submitted by the date and time specified below to be considered "on time." Exceptions to this policy will be made only in dire circumstances. Formal essays will be penalized by one third of a letter grade for each day (including weekends) that your work is late (e.g., a B becomes a B-, a C+ becomes a C, etc., for each late day). Work that is seven or more days late will not be accepted. I consider extensions only when there is a compelling reason and sufficient notice. If you need an extension, let me know in advance (at least 4 days). Do not ask for an extension a day or two before the deadline.

Laptops and Mobile Devices:

Laptops, tablets, and cell phones may be used in class meetings only for the purposes of looking at electronic readings or taking notes. If students use these devices for activities other than these, they

¹ This assignment is adapted from the pedagogical exercise developed by Prof. Aiala Levy of the University of Scranton.

will be banned from classroom use. During discussions, I may ask you to close your laptop, so always have paper and pencil with you for note taking.

Accommodations:

Students with documented disabilities who need accommodations should contact me and the Office of Disability Services at 353-3658 or <http://www.bu.edu/disability/as> early in the semester as possible. All discussions will be confidential.

Additional Resources for Success:

All of us need a little help with writing, research, and mastering historical material. There are many places on campus that offer tutoring and writing help, including assistance for English Language Learners. Look ahead and make appointments before the paper and project deadlines. Tutors are available at the Educational Resource Center <http://www.bu.edu/erc/>. Additional writing help is offered via CAS, COM, and other offices listed here: <http://www.bu.edu/erc/writingassistance/additional-writing-assistance/>

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism—passing off another person’s research, ideas, or writing as one’s own—and cheating will not be tolerated. Paraphrasing without acknowledgment of authorship also is plagiarism. If I witness or hear of any academic dishonesty, I am obligated to report it to the Dean’s Office. As BU students, you are responsible for knowing and following Boston University’s Academic Conduct Code: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

Grade Scale:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72

SCHEDULE of TOPICS, READINGS, & ASSIGNMENTS

I: “Terror is the Order of the Day”
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"We are not carrying out a war against individuals. We are exterminating the Bourgeoisie as a class. We are not looking for evidence or witnesses to reveal deeds or words against Soviet power. The first question we ask is: to what class does he belong, what are his origins, upbringing, education or profession? These questions define the fate of the accused.

This is the essence of the Red Terror."

- M. Y. Latsis, Secret Police Official

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9/5

Introduction

- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Preface,” *Gulag Archipelago*

- Varlam Shalamov, "Through the Snow" *Kolyma Tales*
- Recommended: Marx, "The Communist Manifesto" (selection)
- Hand-out: list of terms in: Stephen Barnes, *Death and Redemption in the Gulag*, 17-27.

9/12

Terror and the Revolution

- Nicolas Werth, "The Red Terror," Courtois, Werth, et.al eds., *The Black Book of Communism*, 71-80.
- Bolshevik Decrees on the Chka, Red Terror, on the Inevitability of Civil War in: Martin McCauley, *The Russian Revolution and the Soviet State, 1917-1921: Documents*
- "Where Laughter is Never Heard," and "The Road to Exile," in Slezkine and Fitzpatrick, eds. *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 66-78, 82-110.
- Leon Trotsky, "Terrorism and Communism" (excerpt)

9/19

Becoming the Elect: Purity & the Party

- Igal Halfin, "From Darkness to Light: Student Communist Autobiographies during NEP," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 45, H. 2 (1997): 210-236
- "A Worker's Life," "Cross-Examination," "The Story of My Life," in Slezkine and Fitzpatrick, eds. *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 342-49, 356-358.
- Shelia Fitzpatrick, "Two Faces of Anastasia; Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Identity in Stalinist Everyday Life," *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, eds. Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 23-34.

9/26

Ideological Explanations: Reforging the Soviet Soul

- Gorky et.al., *Belomor*, 46-64, 117-149, 341-43
- Reader's Letter to the Belomor camp newspaper "Reforging"
- "A Belomor Confession," in Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 282-85
- In-class Film Clip from: "Journey to Life" (1931)

II: Stalinist Terror: Revolution from Above?

"I request that Stalin be informed that I am a victim of circumstances and nothing more [...]
Tell Stalin that I shall die with his name on my lips."

-Nikolai Ezhov, Former head of the Secret Police

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10/3

Economic Explanations: "The Prison Industry"

- Roberta Manning, "The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-40 and the Great Purges," *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (1993), 116-141.
- Lynne Viola "The Second Coming: Class Enemies in the Soviet Countryside, 1927-1935," *Stalinism: New Perspectives* (1993), 65-98.

- “Report on Penal Colony Labor in Nizhni Novgorod” (1932), “Report on Flight from Collective Farms, North Caucasus” (1932) in *Stalinism as a Way of Life*, 89-93.
- “Sent by the Komsomol,” in Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 235-40
- In-Class Film Clip: “Magnitogorsk: Forging the New Man”

10/5 **Essay 1 Due, 8 pm (electronic form)**. Put your name on the document & in the file name!

10/10 Political Explanations: The Great Purge

- Documents on the Kirov assassination & “Two Bolsheviks” in: Getty, *The Road to Terror*, 125-150, 473-77, 518-9, 553-568
- Excerpts from Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code
- Excerpt of Minutes of Party Purge Committee work in Narkomput’ (1932), *Stalinism as a Way of Life*, 126
- Oleg Khlevniuk, “The Great Terror,” *The History of the Gulag*, 170-193.
- In-Class Film Clip: “Burnt by the Sun”

10/17

Social Explanations: Recrimination and Denunciation:

- Letters of Denunciation sent to the Central Committee and to *Krestianskaia Gazeta* in: *Stalinism as a Way of Life*, 151-157, 231-33, 237-8, 322-28, 342-43
- Shelia Fitzpatrick, “Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s,” *Journal of Modern History*, Vo. 68, No. 4 (Dec. 1996): 831-866
- Order No. 486 from the Soviet Penal Code

III: The Momentum of Violence

“Father, father, what have you done to us? We are your children...”
-Georgii Shelest, *The Kolyma Notes* (1964)

10/24

Self-Purging: The Diary

- Diaries of Arzhilovsky, Potemkin, and Podlubnyi in: Garros et al., *Intimacy and Terror*, 111-166, 251-332

10/31

Terror outside of the Camp

- Lidiya Chukovskaia, *Sofia Petrovna* (all)

11/10

How were they arrested, interrogated?

- Evgeniia Ginzburg, *Journey Into the Whirlwind*, 3-69, 70-113, 162-180, 193-200, 209-221, 250-266, 331-360, 403-418

11/7

Who Were the Perpetrators?

- Alexander Vatin, *Agents of Terror: Ordinary Men and Extraordinary Violence in Stalin's Secret Police* (all)

11/9 **Essay 2 Due, 8 pm (electronic form).** Put your name on the document & in the file name!

11/14

The World of the Camp

- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "The Sewage System," "The Fingers of Aurora," "Archipelago Mestasizes," and "Women in the Camp" from *The Gulag Archipelago*, 19-38, 177-237
- Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales* (selection)

IV: Reckoning and Redemption: Terror after Stalin

"Now those who were arrested will return, and two Russias will look at each other in the eye:
the one that sent people to the camps and the one that was sent away."

- Anna Akhmatova, poet

11/21 NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING

11/28

War & Terror

- Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales* (selection)
- Steven A. Barnes, "All for the Front, All for Victory!: The mobilization of Forced Labor in the Soviet Union during World War II," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Vol. 58 (Fall 2000): 239-260.
- Golfo Alexopoulos, "Amnesty 1945: the revolving Door of Stalin's Gulag," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 274-306.
- In-class film Clip: "East/West"

12/5

Release & Rehabilitation

- "Prisoners and the Art of Petition," & "Returnees, Crime, and the Gulag Subculture" in: Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 50-78, 109-127.
- Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (Exeter: Publishing Works, 2010).
- In-class Film Clip: "The Cold Summer of 1953"

12/12

Exhuming the Past: How do we Write a History of the Terror?

- Irina Paperno, "Exhuming Bodies of Soviet Terror," *Representations*, Vol. 75 (2001): 89-118.

12/17 Final Project Due is at 6 pm either in 226 Bay State Road #203 or by 8 pm electronically.