HI273
History of the Soviet Union, 1905-1991
CAS  B20
Tues/Thurs. 12:30-1:45pm

Instructor:
Professor Alexis Peri
alexisp4@bu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-12 and Thursdays 2-3 & by appointment
Office: 226 Bay State Rd. #203

Teaching Fellow:
Rachel Wilson
rkwilson@bu.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays, 10-12
Office: 226 Bay State Rd. # B10

Course Description:
“Those who do not miss the Soviet Union have no heart. Those who want it back have no head.” This infamous statement by Vladimir Putin speaks to the USSR’s complex legacy. The Soviet Union is remembered as the first polity that attempted to build an equitable and just society under socialism. It is also remembered for its violent and authoritarian tactics. In fact, both life in the USSR and the loss of that existence were experienced as traumatic. In 2014, 65% of Russians, Belarusians, Kazakhs and others surveyed claimed they missed the Soviet Union. How do we explain this? What was it actually like to live in that revolutionary society? HI273 will give you a deeper understanding of these questions.
After this class, you will no longer be confused by why the Soviet legacy permeates global politics so deeply today.

In HI273 we will explore the Russian empire’s tumultuous 74-year experiment with socialism. We will chart how it attempted to build a utopian society through re-engineering human bodies, behaviors, and beliefs. By examining secret party documents, novels, diaries, films, jokes, and visual culture, we will immerse ourselves in the dynamics of the Bolshevik party, the experiences of ordinary people, and the centrality of violence, which thoroughly shaped Soviet society. We will end by evaluating the successes and failures of that project.

Course Learning Objectives:
In this class, we will:

- Evaluate conflicting scholarly arguments addressing major events in Soviet history, especially with respect to causality and change over time.
- Formulate original arguments built on sound logic and historical evidence.
- Reflect critically on our own arguments and how they are embedded in our cultural and historical moment.
- Analyze primary sources by using tools from historical, literary, visual, and film studies.
- Compare and contrast official sources generated by the Soviet state and Communist Party to unofficial, personal writings like diaries, letters, jokes, etc.
- Develop a nuanced understanding of Marxism-Leninism and the political purchase it gained and lost over the course of the 20th century.
- Mobilize interpretive concepts like modernity, revolution, socialism, imperialism, and secular religion as frameworks for understanding the Soviet experiment.
- Appreciate the diversity of the USSR’s 30+ ethnic and religious groups, and uncover nationalism’s role in precipitating the Soviet collapse.
- Investigate the intricacy of Soviet identity by working against current politics and Cold War banalities, which present this regime and its citizens in stereotypical terms.

In meeting these learning objectives, we will engage with 2 Hub areas: (1) historical consciousness and (2) Intercultural Understanding and Global Citizenship as well as the Critical Thinking toolkit. As a reminder, the learning outcomes for these Hub areas are:

Historical Consciousness: Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will create historical narratives, evaluate interpretations based on historical evidence, and construct historical arguments.
2. Students will demonstrate an ability to interpret primary source material (textual, visual, or aural) using a range of interpretive skills and situating the material in its historical and cultural context.
3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of religious traditions, intellectual paradigms, forms of political organization, or socio-economic forces, and how these have changed over time.

Intercultural Understanding and Global Citizenship Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will demonstrate, through comparative analysis, an understanding of global diversity as expressed in at least two different languages, cultures, religions, political systems, or societies. Note: A course in this area might, for example, explore the political systems of two countries, while another might explore multiple religious traditions within a single country, and another might explore the literature of a single country and, in assignments, invite comparative analysis of works of other national literary traditions, including those of students’ countries of origin.
2. Students will demonstrate detailed understanding of at least two cultural contexts through foreign language or culture study at BU

Toolkit: Critical Thinking:
1. Students will be able to identify key elements of critical thinking, such as habits of distinguishing deductive from inductive modes of inference, recognizing common logical fallacies and cognitive biases, translating ordinary language into formal argument, distinguishing empirical claims about matters of fact from normative or evaluative judgments, and recognizing the ways in which emotional responses can affect reasoning processes.
2. Drawing on skills developed in class, students will be able to evaluate the validity of arguments, including their own.

Course Materials:
In every class meeting, we will collectively analyze primary sources such as film clips, photographs, paintings, and historical documents. All readings are posted on blackboard with the exception of the books below, which are recommended for purchase. They are available at the BU bookstore and on reserve at Mugar Library:

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (any edition; pdf posted on Blackboard)
Shelia Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds. *In the Shadow of Revolution* (“Fitzpatrick” below)
Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog* (the novel, not the play)
Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment* (“Suny” below)

Because we will analyze all of the readings closely, I require you to bring a copy of the assigned book or blackboard readings to the class meeting for which they are assigned. The only exception to this is the textbook. The textbook, Suny’s *The Soviet Experiment* explains more thoroughly topics I may review quickly. It is a dense textbook. In light of this, below I identify specific page numbers (usually 15-20 pages) from the 2011 edition on which to focus. The textbook is also on reserve in Mugar Library.

Course Assessments:
2 Quizzes (Source Analyses/Close Readings) 12% (1st 5%, 2nd 7%)
Midterm Exam 22%
Creative Project 16%
Final Exam 25%
Attendance & Active Participation 25%
(in lecture, 3 discussion sections, & in-class activities)

Deadlines:
Quiz 1: Feb. 21  Creative Project: April 18
Midterm Exam: March 7  Final Day to Turn in Extra Credit: May 3
Quiz 2: March 21  Final Exam: TBD
Creative Project Partner: March 28
Quizzes (Source Analyses/Close Readings):
You will take 2 in-class quizzes, which will give you practice analyzing textual and visual materials (also called “close reading”). You will be given either a text or an image discussed in a recent class meeting and asked to interpret it by combining a close reading of the item’s content with a consideration of its historical context. You will have 20 minutes to write 2 paragraphs. On Blackboard there are 2 samples of close readings (done by students in a different class) as well as a grading rubric for how you will be assessed (posted under “rubrics”). For extra help with doing close reading, see: http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-guides/ and https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading

Midterm & Final Exams:
The midterm and final exams will assess your abilities to 1. analyze primary sources and 2. evaluate and craft historical arguments. In addition to analyzing visual and textual material (as you do on the quizzes), you will answer essay questions, where you will take a stance on a debate or issue in Soviet history and craft your own argument about it. Study guides will be distributed for both the midterm and final.

Creative Project:
Many of us are drawn to history because we share a fascination with “what life was like” in bygone times and places. For this assignment, you will demonstrate how well you understand the USSR and life within its borders in a more creative way. You and a partner will choose one of several open-ended creative tasks such as writing historical fiction, designing a historical board game, or recreating a fictional exchange between two of our historical actors. You may pursue your own topic as long as you get instructor approval of it (in office hours or over email) 2 weeks before the deadline. No matter which topic you choose, carefully document all of your historical evidence in footnotes. Your project must be 3-4 pages (or 1-2 pages of explanation if you are making a physical object, like a board game, to hand in), typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font and double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Your project must have a title, page numbers, and footnotes formatted in Chicago style. Footnotes should be in 10-point font and single-spaced. A citation guide is posted on Blackboard (under “rubrics”).

Attendance & Active Participation:
The most important way to ensure your success in this class is to prepare for, attend, and actively participate in all class meetings. Every week you will discuss primary sources and engage in collaborative learning tasks designed to help you hone your analytical skills and deepen your understanding of Soviet history. Your participation grade is based on your preparedness for and good faith effort with regard to 3 components:
1. Your attendance in lectures and discussion sections
2. Your active participation during in-class discussions held during our regularly scheduled class time
3. Your active participation in 3 discussion sections held outside of our regular class time, where you will work with longer class readings in greater depth.

Discussion Sections Outside of Class
Discussion Section 1: Friday 1/25 at 3 pm OR Monday 1/28 at 5 pm (attend one)
Discussion Section 2: Friday 2/15 at 3 pm OR Tuesday* 2/19 at 5pm (attend one)
Discussion Section 3: Friday 4/12 at 3pm OR Tuesday* 4/16 at 5pm (attend one)
Discussion Section 4: Friday 5/3 at 3 pm OR Monday 5/6 at 5 pm (attend one)
You are required to attend 3 of the 4 discussion sections. If you attend and participate in all 4, you will earn up to 2% extra credit on your final grade.

*These Tuesday meetings follow BU’s Monday class schedule on those days. Mondays 2/18 and 4/15 are holidays

**Attendance:**
You are allowed 3 unexcused absences from our regularly scheduled classes without penalty. Additional absences will hurt your grade unless they are documented by medical professionals or an advisor/dean at the student’s college. Students who miss 5 or more class meetings will be in danger of not passing the course.

Student athletes, musicians, actors, employees, and others whose extracurricular activities may conflict with class must tell me within first 2 weeks (14 days) of the semester what dates they will miss, so that arrangements can be made for them to make up the work. They also should notify me as soon as possible if conflicts emerge because of postseason play, performances, etc. Any student who is unable to take the quizzes, midterm, or final at the scheduled times must give me 2 weeks (14 days) prior notice for rescheduling.

**Extra Credit:**
You may earn up to 3% extra credit added to your final grade by doing 1 of the following 2 tasks:

1. attend a lecture, conference, talk, film screening, or exhibition in the Boston area on Soviet history and write 2-3 pages reviewing it (what did you learn; how do you evaluate the speaker’s argument; what further questions do you have? etc.). Check the website of Harvard’s Davis Center [http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/](http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/), which has a fully monthly calendar of events. This assignment must be handed in no later than May 3.

2. write a 3-page analysis of a Soviet film that is recommended on the syllabus or that is approved by the instructor. This assignment must be handed in no later than May 3. Specific instructions about how to do your film critique are posted on blackboard.

Also, you may earn up to 2% added to your final grade if you attend and actively participate in all 4 discussion sections.

**Additional Course Policies**

**Completion of all Assignments:**
You must complete all assignments and take all exams to pass this course, even if you are taking it pass/fail. Failure to complete all required assignments will result in a failing grade for the course.

**Late Work:**
Assignments are to be handed in on the date listed below at the very start of class. Papers handed in during the middle or end of class will be considered 1 day late. A paper or exam will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day it is late (an A will become an A-, a B+ will become a B, etc.). I will not accept assignments that are more than 7 days late. If you need an extension, let me know in advance (at least 4 days). I consider extensions only when there is a compelling reason and sufficient notice. Do not ask for an extension a day or so before the deadline.
Laptops and Mobile Devices:
Laptops maybe used to take notes and consult the electronic readings. During discussions, I may ask you to close your laptop, so always have paper and pencil with you for note taking. Cell phones and mobile devices must be silenced and cannot be used at any time. If I find that students are using laptops or other devices for purposes other than taking notes, like web-surfing, emailing etc. during class, I will give one warning. If the problem persists, I will revoke the privilege of using them.

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

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--the passing off of 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
A- = 90-92
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76
C- = 70-72
# Schedule of Lectures, Readings, & Assignments

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| Jan 22 | Introduction: Soviet Historiography & Life under the Tsar  
Textbook: Suny, Intro. (esp. xvi-xx), Ch. 1 (esp. 7-13, 23-25) |
| Jan 24 | **War & Revolution I: 1905 & 1914**  
Textbook: Suny, Ch. 1 (esp. 32-38)  
Recommended Film: Battleship Potemkin (1925)  
**DISCUSSION SECTION 1** Friday 1/25 or Monday 1/28  
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (any edition or pp. 14-32 of pdf on blackboard; the prefaces are optional) |
| WEEK 2 |                           |
| Jan 29 | **What did the Bolsheviks Want?**  
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Lenin, “What is to be Done?” (excerpt)  
Textbook: Suny, Ch. 1 (25-28), Ch. 2  
Recommended Film: October (1928) |
| Jan 31 | **War & Revolution II: 1917**  
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Lenin, “Call to Power” & “On the Inevitability of Civil War” |
| WEEK 3 |                           |
| Feb 5  | **“Birth Pangs of Revolution?” Civil War**  
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Fitzpatrick, 31-65, 73-81  
Textbook: Suny, Ch. 3 (esp. 72-84, 90-4, 101-8)  
Recommended Film: Chapaev (1934) |
| Feb 7  | **How do you Build a Socialist State?**  
Textbook: Suny Ch. 5 (esp. 139-146, 153-155) |
| WEEK 4 |                           |
| Feb 12 | Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Ilin, *New Russian Primer* (excerpts); Trotsky, “Literature and Revolution” (excerpt), Ella Winter, “Designing the New Man” and “Love Must be Changed” in *Red Virtue*  
Recommended Films: Bed and Sofa (1927), Heart of a Dog (1988) |
| Feb 14 | **What was New about the New Economic Policy?**  
Textbook: Suny Ch. 7 (esp. 188-194, 199-205), Ch. 8 (esp. 213-222)  
**DISCUSSION SECTION 2, Friday 2/15 or Tuesday 2/19**  
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog* |
WEEK 5
Feb 19
NO CLASS (MONDAY SCHEDULE)

Feb 21
Lenin Lives!
QUIZ 1 (SOURCE ANALYSIS/CLOSE READING)

WEEK 6
Feb 26
Stalinism & The 1st Five-Year Plan
Textbook: Suny, Ch. 6 (162-166, 184-186); Ch. 9 (235-246); Ch. 10 (252-64)

Feb 28
“Engineering Human Souls”: Socialist Realism
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Fitzpatrick, 235-276, 303-321, 338-341; Ilin, New
Russian Primer, Zhdanov, “Speech to the Writers’ Union”
Textbook: Suny Ch. 12 (esp. 291-300)
Recommended films: Time, Forward! (1965); Road to Life (1931)

WEEK 7
Mar 5
Was the USSR an Empire?
Recommended Film: Circus (1936)
Textbook: Suny (157-161; 181-184)

Mar 7
MIDTERM EXAM

WEEK 8
NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9
Mar 19
The Great Purge: The Party Devours Itself
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Bukharin & Ezhov Testimonies; Fitzpatrick, 394-418, 424-434
Textbook: Suny Ch. 14 (esp. 336-352, 356-61), Ch. 16 (389-93)
Recommended Films: Atonement (1984); Burnt by the Sun (1994)

Mar 21
From Terror to War
QUIZ 2 (SOURCE ANALYSIS/ CLOSE READING)

WEEK 10
Mar 26
A World at War
Recommended Films: Ballad of a Soldier (1959), Ivan’s Childhood (1963), Come
and See (1987)

Mar 28
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Letters from the Dead, Letters from Stalingrad, Women in
Air War
DEADLINE TO NOTIFY INSTRUCTOR OF PARTNER FOR
CREATIVE PROJECT (or one will be assigned)

WEEK 11
Apr 2
The Iron Curtain Descends: Is the USSR an Empire Now?
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: The Yalta Agreement (excerpt)

A. Peri
Textbook: Suny Ch. 15 (esp. 365-377)
Recommended Film: East-West (1999)

Apr 4

**Stalin Denounced!**
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, *Khrushchev Remembers*
Textbook: Suny 407-09, 413-21
Recommended Film: The Cold Summer of 1953 (1987)

**WEEK 12**
Apr 9

**Khrushchev’s Gambles at Home**
Textbook: Suny Ch. 17 (esp. 429-436)
Recommended Film: Hipsters (2010)

Apr 11

**Khrushchev’s Gambles Abroad**
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: The Kitchen Debate, Selections from *Sedition*
Textbook: Suny Ch. 17 (esp. 423-429, 436-443)

**DISCUSSION SECTION 3 Friday 4/12 or Tuesday 4/16**
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*;
“Readers respond to *One Day*” (Letters to Solzhenitsyn)

**WEEK 13**
Apr 16

**Lines, Shortages, & Everyday Socialism, 1970s**
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Natalia Baranskaia, “A Week like Any Other”
Textbook: Suny Ch. 18 (esp. 460, 463-470)
Recommended website: http://kommunalka.colgate.edu

Apr 18

**Why did Dissent Gather Momentum in the 1970s?**
Textbook: Suny Ch. 18 (esp. 447-49, 451-460, 470-74)
Recommended Films: Office Romance (1977), The Irony of Fate (1975), Moscow Doesn’t Believe in Tears (1979)
**CREATIVE PROJECT DUE** in hard copy by 5:30 PM in Instructor’s mailbox in the History Department Main Office, 226 Bay State Road, #308

**WEEK 14**
Apr 23

**Under an Atomic Cloud: Cold War Militarism**
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Soviet Jokes

Apr 25

**Perestroika: Dredging Up the Past**
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: *Voices from Chernobyl*
Textbook: Suny Ch. 19 (esp. 481-7, 494-498)
Recommended Film: Repentance (1987)

**WEEK 15**
Apr 30

Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Yeltsin’s plea to Soviet Soldiers
Watch & Be Ready to Discuss: Gorbachev’s speech dissolving the USSR: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lPjMh1zpEo; Gorbachev’s 2011 interview on Dissolving the USSR: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jG0o9REbY
Textbook: Suny Ch. 19 (esp. 499-513)
Recommended Film: My Perestroika (2010)

May 2

Bittersweet Legacy: Soviet Nostalgia & Putin’s Russia

DISCUSSION SECTION 4 Friday 5/3 or Monday 5/6
Read & Be Ready to Discuss: Dear Comrade Editor; Final exam review

TBD

Final Exam (scheduled by the Office of the Registrar)