“There are at the present time 2 great nations in the world, which started from different points but seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians & the Americans. [...] they have suddenly placed themselves in the front rank among the nations, & the world learned of their existence & their greatness at almost the same time.” - Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835

“It's not by chance that Russia & the US forge alliances in the most critical moments of modern history. That was the case in WWI & WWII. Even if there was fierce confrontation, our countries united against a common threat, which means there's something that unites us. There must be some fundamental interest, which brings us together.” - Vladimir Putin, 2013

“You Russians & we Americans! Our countries so distant, so unlike at first glance [...] yet in certain features, & vastest ones, so resembling each other. The variety of stock-elements & tongues, to be resolutely fused in a common identity & union at all hazards—the idea, perennial through the ages, that they both have their historic & divine mission—the fervent element of manly friendship throughout the whole people, surpass’d by no other races—the grand expanse of territorial limits & boundaries [...] the fact that both Peoples have their independent & leading positions to hold, keep, & if necessary, fight for, against the rest of the world—the deathless aspirations at the inmost centre of each great community, so vehement, so mysterious, so abysmic—are certainly features you Russians & we Americans possess in common.” - Walt Whitman, 1881

HI541
Comrades & Competitors:
US-Soviet Cultural Exchange
Fall 2019
Mondays 2:30-5:15pm

Professor Alexis Peri
226 Bay State Rd. #203
Office hours: Wednesdays 3:30-5:30pm (3:30-4:30 on dates with talks at BU’s Center for the Study of Europe), Fridays 10-11:30am, and by appointment
Email: alexisp4@bu.edu
Course Description:
Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, politicians and philosophers observed striking commonalities between the US and Russia as two massive, self-proclaimed exceptionalist polities on the forefront of political revolution and social experimentation. So why do we generally think of them as opposites? Many of the attitudes and assumptions that color US-Russian relations today come from this turbulent history of friendship and enmity.

In this comparative seminar, we will investigate the US and USSR, their stances and influences on each other, through the lens of popular culture. Popular culture provides rich material and a key conceptual framework for examining American and Soviet perceptions of each other. It also invites a critical analysis of each society’s "way of being”: their cultural values, political priorities, assumptions, and their personal and national identities. Students will examine how that popular culture informed social movements and international relations throughout the 20th century. Of particular interest is the way that popular culture, which initially was used to drive a wedge between American and Soviet peoples, became an unexpected force of rapprochement in the 1970s and 1980s. This seminar is organized both chronologically and thematically. Our themes include: consumerism, everyday life, education, film, tourism, humor, spying, and diplomatic visits and summits. Students also will consider how race, class, and gender shape inform notions of American and Soviet identity.

Course Goals
• Gain understanding of concepts, events, and problems of 20th-century US and Soviet history
• To develop a nuanced understanding of popular culture as a subfield and method of history
• To collect, analyze and synthesize primary and secondary sources, and to compare and evaluate disparate and conflicting data and arguments.
• To research, construct, and present projects based on written, visual, and digital sources.
• To develop skills in collaboration and teamwork.

Books For Purchase

All other required readings are posted on Blackboard. Students must bring that week's readings to class, either in print or digital form

Recommended Textbooks for Consultation


Any recent edition of these oft-published textbooks is recommended.

**Recommended Resources for Consultation**

Making sense of sources: [http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/makesense/](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/makesense/)


American memory: [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html)

Soviet History: [http://www.soviethistory.org/](http://www.soviethistory.org/)


**Course Requirements:**

Attendance & Active Participation 30%

(10% of this is based on your completion of tasks in the reading questions)

Essay 1 (5-6 pages) 15%

Essay 2 (7-8 pages) 20%

Film Presentation 8%

Final Project (10-12 pages) 27%

Graduate students may be given modified versions of course assignments.

**Attendance and Participation:**

Active participation and careful reading are imperative for success in this course. Students are expected to arrive to every class having thoroughly read the assigned readings and ready to share their questions and insights. Your participation grade will be based on the quality, not just the quantity, of your contributions and on how respectfully you listen to and work with other students. The best way to do this is to make sure you have answers to the reading questions provided for each week below. You may miss 2 class meetings without penalty. Additional absences will hurt your grade. Student athletes, musicians, actors, and others whose extracurriculars conflict with our class must tell me within first 2 weeks (14 days) of the semester what dates they will miss, so arrangements can be made for them to make up all work.

**Academic Essays:**

For the essays, you will develop a specific argument based on your analysis of the class materials. Outside research is not necessary. Topics will be distributed in advance and will ask you to take a stance on a historical question (ex: how did American and Soviet attitudes towards race during the 1920s and what did this reflect about cultural understandings of national identity in each polity? Both the USSR and the US used the educational system to inculcate youth with certain ideological principles. How would characterize their approaches to this during the pre-WWII period?) All essays must be submitted in electronic format as a Microsoft
Word file or a PDF via email by the date and time below. Use Chicago style for footnotes and bibliographies. A rubric for how academic essays are assessed is on Blackboard.

**Film Presentation:**
Film was one medium through which the US and USSR projected a national identity and “way of life.” We will watch several film clips and critique them in class. At one point in the semester, you will be asked to work with a classmate to watch a film NOT shown in class/on the syllabus, to write a 500-word historical critique of it, and to give a joint, 10-minute presentation (maximum) on the film to the class. The presentation should include a 2-3 minute clip from said film and a 1-page handout of key points about the film. Students will sign up for a time slot in advance. Their film must come from the list of recommended films and from the section of that list the matches with that week’s theme of the class. Additional guidelines about how to watch the film and critique it as a historical artifact are posted on Blackboard. For a basic primer in film analysis, please read: Amy Villarejo, “The Language of Film,” “Glossary,” *Film Studies: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24-53, 152-159. It is posted on blackboard.

**Final Project:**
For this project, students will have the choice of doing a creative, critical, or research project. Topics will be distributed in advance, and students are also welcome to submit their own topics for approval. All projects must incorporate all three units of the class: 1910s-1930s, 1940s-1950s, 1960s-90s. Slightly different requirements will be given to graduate students.

**Late Work:**
All assignments must be submitted on time. Exceptions will be made only in dire circumstances. Formal assignments 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 5 or more days late will not be accepted. Assignments are due by the start of the class for which they are assigned to be considered on time.

**Laptops and Mobile Devices:**
Laptops maybe used to take notes and consult the assigned readings. Cell phones and other mobile devices must be silenced and cannot be used at any time. If students are using laptops or other devices for purposes other than taking notes (i.e. surfing the web, texting, instant messaging, etc.), the instructor will revoke this privilege.

**Plagiarism:**
The act of presenting someone else’s ideas, research, or writings as one’s own is taken very seriously in this course. All suspected academic misconduct will be reported to the Dean’s Office. As students, you are bound by the regulations set down by the BU Academic Conduct Code: [http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/). As you take notes, be careful to distinguish your words and thoughts from those of others, and be sure to properly acknowledge information you paraphrase by citing the source of that information.

**Accommodations:**
Students with documented disabilities who need accommodations should contact the Disability Services office as early in the semester as possible. [http://www.bu.edu/disability/](http://www.bu.edu/disability/). All discussions and accommodations will remain confidential.
Recommended Reading & Extra Credit:
A list of a few recommended readings will be provided for students who want to read more on a particular topic for an assignment or out of interest. The list is not exhaustive; it is merely a starting place. I encourage students to add their own recommendations to the list. If you find great resources, let me know! I will give students extra credit, up to 2% added to your final grade, for any sources (primary or secondary) that they recommend. All you have to do is email/hand me a copy of the source along with 3-5 sentences about why you think this is a great source for our course.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

Please note: materials designated as “in-class” are not assigned in advance. They are included as a preview of what we will do during class time.

Unit I. Interwar Period, 1910s-1930s

9/2: NO CLASS. LABOR DAY

9/9: Introduction

Reading Questions:
-What chief ideological tenets undergirded the US and revolutionary Russia of the WWI era?
-What motivates Wilson’s invasion of Russia?
Looking at Wilson’s and Lenin’s addresses, what national values are expressed? How are they similar or different?
-What are the objectives driving these speeches?

- Scholarship

- In-class Materials:
  - Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points Speech, 1918, made before Congress
  - Lenin’s letter to American Workers, 1918, Pravda
  - TV Ads, Jokes from Russia and the US

9/16: New Men, New Women (1910s-1920s)

Reading Questions:
-Why is it important to these societies to create new people?
-What is new about them?
-How do these cultures conceptualize and represent gender, race, class, and ethnicity?
What example from the reading best illustrates contested understandings of identity?

• Scholarship:

• Primary Documents:
  o President Herbert Hoover, “Rugged Individualism” (election speech, 1928)

• In-class Materials:
  o Images of Soviet and American Flappers
  o In-class Film Clip: Miss Mend

9/23: Cultures of Difference: Race & Ethnicity (1920s)

Reading Questions:
-How do these cultures conceptualize and represent gender, race, class, and ethnicity?
-What views of human nature undergird Soviet and American exhibitions/policies on race and ethnicity?
-What role does the scientist/expert play in defining norms of gender, class, race, and other aspects of identity?
-Both the US and USSR tolerated some differences and not others; what normative sets of values and peoples were predominant in each polity?

• Scholarship:

• Primary Documents:
- Claude McKay, “Soviet Russia & the Negro” (1923)  
  http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m_r/mckay/russia.htm

- **In-Class Materials:**
  - In-class Film Clips: *Circus* (1936)

**9/30: Teaching: Formal and Informal (1930s)**

**Reading Questions:**
- How did each society sell its values to children, to tourists?
- How did activities and literature of leisure (for kids and tourists) reflect broader ideas about Americaness and Sovietness?
- In what ways do exhibits or travel promote unity and understanding? In ways do they “other” individuals and groups?
- Pick an image or passage that encapsulates notions of “Americanness” or “Sovietness” during this era and be ready to explain why.

- **Primary Documents:**

- **In-class Materials:**
  - Mr. Twister (Soviet children’s poem)
  - Film Clip: *Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*

**10/4, 9 pm:** Essay 1 Due in electronic format. Please email your essay to the instructor in a pdf or Microsoft word format (do not use Google Docs) and put your surname in the file name.

**Unit II. Hot War into Cold War, 1940s-1950s**

**10/7: Tues. Allies in “The Good War” (1940s)**

**Reading Questions:**
- How does WWII shape US-Soviet relations and how did popular culture reflect these changes?
What common ground, traits, or heritage did the Allies stress to naturalize their alliance against Hitler?

How did wartime popular culture reinforce and challenge notions of gender, racial, and national identity in this era?

- **Scholarship:**

- **Primary Sources:**
  - Selection of wartime cartoons by E. Simmons Campbell

- **In-class Materials:**
  - In-class Film clip: *Mission to Moscow* (1943)
  - In-class Film clip: *Why We Fight: Battle for Russia* (1943)

10/14 NO CLASS. COLUMBUS DAY

10/15: Battling for Hearts and Minds

- What are the chief similarities, ideological and political, between the postwar US and USSR? What are the major differences?
- How was American individualism redefined at midcentury?
- Compare Soviet and American strategies used to influence thinking (at home and abroad)? Did they work similarly or differently as propagandists?
- How did they leverage art, gender, and emotion to guard against the infiltration of foreign ideas?
- Both sides championed freedom and liberty. What happened to civil liberties during this era?

- **Scholarship:**

- **Primary Sources:**
  - Andrei Zhdanov, speeches on founding of Cominform (1947) and duties of a writer (1946)

• In-class Materials:

10/21: Information Wars: Teaching and Learning (1940s-1950s)

Reading Questions:
-What has changed in Soviet-US representations of the other? Why?
-How did those changes get expressed in educational and entertainment materials? What values were being “taught” through those sources?
-What vision of the “other” did these sources foster?

• Primary Sources:

• In-Class-Materials:

Unit III. Comrades and Competitors, 1950s-1980s

10/28: Life in the Atomic Age (1950s-1960s)

Reading Questions:
-How did the Soviet Union and United States treat workers who produced plutonium?
-What was the relative input of ideological and practical/political considerations in how each polity created these atomic villages?

• Scholarship:

• In-Class Materials:
  o Pictures and Videos of Instructions: what to do in a nuclear attack:
    o https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QxVwafUFgY
    o https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFcRhDtkQyQ
11/4: Bringing the Cold War Home (1950s-1960s)

Reading Questions:
- How did consumer activity reflect broader ideas about Americaness and Sovietness?
- In the pre-WWI era, the USSR focused on production; what difference does it make to re-center socialism around consumption?
- Consumerism offers opportunities for conformity and choice—look for examples that offer both.
- In what ways does the home reflect national concerns and Cold War realities?
- Why are kitchens so central to this period?

- Scholarship:

- In class Materials:
  o The Kitchen Debate (1959)
  o Fall-out Shelter Advertisements

11/8: Essay 2 Due by 9 pm in electronic format. Please email your essay to the instructor in a pdf or Microsoft word format (do not use Google Docs) and put your surname in the file name.

11/11: Cultural Exchange (1960s)

Reading Questions:
- What opportunities did popular culture present for citizen diplomacy?
- Compare and contrast American and Soviet attempts to display cultural superiority.
- How would you characterize the era of “peaceful coexistence:” as one of cooperation, competition, or something else?
- Did contact between the US and USSR strengthen or destabilize citizens’ views of their own national culture?
- What is the difference between influence campaigns, propaganda, and advertising?

- Scholarship:


**Primary Documents:**

• *Khrushchev in America* (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1960), 152-176, 198-199


**Reading Questions:**
- What were youth challenging in this period? How are they expressing that?
- How would you compare and contrast Soviet and American forms of rebellion?
- What role do music, humor play in articulating political protest?
- Pick a joke from this week’s materials and be able to explain why it is “funny.” Can you think of a comparable joke from the Soviet/American context?

**Scholarship:**


**Primary Documents:**

• Soviet and American Jokes

**In-Class Materials:**

• Sots Art visuals

**11/25 NO CLASS.**

Your assignment is to watch the film *Dr. Strangelove*. We will discuss it at the start of the next class.


**Reading Questions:**
- How and why is sport infused with political and ideological heft?
- Compare how political views, values, and identities are performed—be they by politicians, actors, TV anchors, or athletes. Be prepared to share an example from the US and USSR.
- In what ways do media representations reinforce and in what ways do they undercut realities?
- Scholars have argued that television was instrumental in bringing an end to the Cold War: do you agree, why or why not? Be ready to supply examples to support your argument.
- How are Soviet peoples depicted on American TV? And vice versa?

  o Scholarship:

  o In-Class Materials:
    o In-class Film Clip: Video of Ronald Reagan’s “Evil Empire” speech (1983)
    o In-class Film Clip: *Rocky IV
    o In-class Film Clips: Opening Ceremonies of Moscow (1980) and LA (1984) Olympics

12/9: Conclusion (1980s)

Reading Questions:
- What have been the defining features of Soviet and American cultures and societies? How have they changed across the 20th-century?
- Much was gained by the end of the Cold War, what was lost or missed in its absence?

  o Scholarship:

12/13: Final Papers Due by midnight in electronic format (if you wish to submit your project in hard copy, please do so by 6 pm on 12/13). Please email your essay to the instructor in a pdf or Microsoft word format (do not use Google Docs) and put your surname in the file name.