HISTORY 347: THE SOVIET UNION AND CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA
MWF 12:00 – 12:50, Chapman 207

Description: This is an introductory lecture survey course on the history of Russia and the Soviet Union since 1917. It is open to all interested undergraduates, without prerequisite. The Soviet Union had a tremendous impact on world affairs in the twentieth century, and this course meets general education requirements both by virtue of its breadth and because it introduces students to key aspects of history as a discipline. Topics include the causes and course of the Russian Revolution and the political consolidation of communism; social, cultural, and economic change; Stalin’s “revolution from above”; Stalinist terror; the experience of the Second World War in the Soviet Union; the Cold War; the particular character of Soviet culture in the late Soviet period; the collapse of the USSR; and the first post-Soviet decade. In light of recent tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the course will devote particular attention to Ukrainian history as well as Russian history.

Course objectives: Students should come out of this course with knowledge of the major events in Russian, Soviet, and Ukrainian history, as listed above. They should be able to identify the various countries of the post-Soviet region on a map, and know something about the distinctive cultures of some of those countries. They should be able to analyze the causes of several major events, and gain a better understanding of how historians approach the issue of causality. They should be able to draw connections between different spheres of historical experience, such as economy, society, culture, politics, and foreign affairs. As this year’s course focuses more than usual on literary and personal narratives, students will also improve their ability to place such texts in historical context and analyze them as sources.

Grades will be based on an in-class midterm (25%), a final exam (40%), and a paper (35%). Both exams will include factual sections and essays. The final will be cumulative. Active, thoughtful participation in class may raise your grade by a couple of percentage points (e.g. from 82 to 84). Failure to take one of the exams or to turn in a paper, or plagiarism on an exam or paper, will mean an automatic F in the course. Grades will be recorded on Canvas.

Paper: The paper (roughly 7 pages) is a small research paper. The assignment will be posted on line.

Required readings available at the bookstore:

Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Russian Revolution (new edition)
Mikhail Bulgakov, Heart of a Dog
Lidia Chukovskaya, Sofia Petrovna
Vladislav Zubok, Failed Empire

In addition, some readings will be placed on Canvas (the new course management site), and we may be using the wonderful on-line resource “Seventeen Moments in Soviet History” (www.soviethistory.org). This site was hacked and taken off line in January, and a repair is still underway, so this is the chief impediment to finalizing the syllabus right now.

CLASS TOPICS
Part I. Revolutionary Russia

Week 1. Revolution. Reading: Russian Revolution, 1-67. 17 Moments?

M  Mar. 30 Origins of the revolution
W  Apr.  1 The “February Revolution” and its aftermath
F  Apr.  3 Lenin and the Bolsheviks


M  Apr.  6 The Russian Civil War: armies, terror, public support
W  Apr.  8 Focus on Ukraine: Ukraine in the revolutionary period
F  Apr. 10 Revolutionary dreams: art, culture, and utopianism in the Russian Revolution

Week 3. NEP. Reading: Finish Heart of a Dog; Russian Revolution, 93-147.

M  Apr. 13 Discuss Heart of a Dog
W  Apr. 15 Politics, society, and economy in the 1920s
F  Apr. 17 Revolution in the Muslim periphery: Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s

Week 4. Stalin’s “revolution from above.” Reading: Russian Revolution, 120-147; Agrippina Korevanova, “My Life” (on Canvas)

M  Apr. 20 Collectivization: the triple assault on peasant life. Famine: Ukraine and elsewhere
W  Apr. 22 One woman’s experience of socialism. Discuss Korevanova’s memoir.
F  Apr. 24 Soviet society in the 1930s; the Kirov murder and show trials

Week 5. The Great Terror. Reading: Russian Revolution, 148-172; Sofia Petrovna (all)

M  Apr. 27 Discuss Sofia Petrovna
W  Apr. 29 The Great Terror, continued.
F  May  1 Midterm exam. Bring an exam booklet.


M  May  4 Stalin's foreign policy, the German invasion, and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union: focus on Ukraine
W  May  6 How the Red Army won
F May 8  Soviet society during and after the war


M May 11  From the wartime alliance to the Cold War. Prepare Failed Empire, 29-93.

W May 13  The Cold War and Khrushchev’s foreign policy. Prepare Failed Empire, 94-163

F May 15  The "Thaw" in literature and culture. Prepare Failed Empire 163-92.

Week 8. “Developed socialism” or “stagnation”? Reading: Failed Empire, 192-226; Andrei Sakharov et al., “Manifesto II” (on Canvas); 17 Moments?

M May 18  Andrei Sakharov and the dissident movement. Discuss Sakharov, “Manifesto II.”

W May 20  Popular culture in the Brezhnev period.

F May 22  Environmental degradation and politics in Central Asia.


M May 25.  Memorial Day -- no class

W May 27  The Soviet war in Afghanistan and political decline. Prepare Failed Empire, 227-302.

F May 29  Glasnost’ and perestroika. Papers due in class.

Week 10. After communism. Reading: Failed Empire, 303-44; 17 Moments.

M June 1  The collapse of the USSR

W June 3  Russia in the Yeltsin era: a flawed transition.

F June 5  Post-Soviet disorder: focus on Ukraine

Final exam: 10:15 p.m., Tuesday, June 9. Bring two green books.