

**History 242: The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union**  
Spring 2019: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 9:00-9:50

Edward Cohn  
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Office hours: Monday and  
Friday from 10-11  
(HSSC atrium);  
Tuesday from 3-4  
(my office)

***Course Overview***

The history of the Soviet Union is a story of great contrasts. In October 1917, when the tsarist regime fell, Russia became one of the most chaotic and fast-changing revolutionary societies in all of history; by the time the USSR collapsed in December 1991, it was a stagnant, bureaucratic regime led by a corrupt and entrenched elite. The leaders of the Soviet Union claimed that they had liberated their country from centuries of tsarist oppression, but they ended up unleashing mass repression and state-sponsored violence on a massive scale. The Soviet regime could claim great successes—like the dramatic growth of literacy and the launch of the first man-made satellite in history—but it never lived up to the grand rhetoric of its leaders and became one of the world's most repressive states.

This course will examine the history of the USSR from the October Revolution of 1917 until the regime's sudden collapse at the end of 1991, focusing on the country's social and political history. Ever since the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, scholars have debated the meaning and the legacy of the October Revolution; in every period of Soviet history, the country's leaders claimed to be following the true path of Communism, while denouncing their rivals (and sometimes their predecessors) for straying from socialism. This class will examine how the nature of Soviet communism was redefined by each successive generation and will seek to relate each part of the Soviet experience to the larger trajectory of the country's history. Was Stalinism a departure from the revolution's original ideology, or the inevitable result of 1917? Was the Khrushchev era an unprecedented liberalization of the regime's policies, or an attempt to return to the country's Leninist roots? We will not only seek to answer questions like these, but to examine the ways that everyday citizens experienced Communist rule and to understand how the revolutionary enthusiasm that at times dominated the country's political discourse ultimately gave way to the cynicism and corruption of the USSR's final days.

***Learning Goals***

This course has three broad objectives: to help students understand the history of the Soviet Union, to enable them to critically read both primary documents and secondary sources, and to help them improve their analytical writing skills. But it also has several more specific goals:

***Soviet History Goals***

By the end of the semester, students who have completed this course will be able to:

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also be available to meet with students in the HSSC atrium from 10 to 10:50 on Mondays and Wednesdays (immediately after class).

These are drop-in hours; you are welcome to come by without an appointment (and, in fact, I will leave these hours free for drop-ins.) You are also welcome to email me to arrange a different time to meet. I will most likely cancel my regular office hours a couple weeks each semester (say, during registration week) and instead offer meetings by appointment only. I can always find time to meet with you!

Students are welcome to meet with me to discuss any questions they might have about this course, the study of history, or other academic issues at Grinnell. If you're having trouble with a written assignment, I particularly encourage you to come: If you get stuck writing a thesis statement or can't figure out what you want to say in a paper, it's often better to meet with someone about it than to try to just push yourself to get something done. I'm also happy to discuss course readings in more detail, to answer questions, to talk about the history major, or to discuss any academic questions that might concern you.

### ***Assignments and Grading***

Your grade in this class will be based on the following requirements. Note that you must hand in every assignment listed below in order to pass the class, and that if your grades improve steadily over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration in deciding your final grade.

**Two short document analyses** (worth 15% of your grade, or 7.5% each). You will submit two short writing assignments (each 1 to 1.5 pages long); the first (an analysis of the Petrograd Soviet's Order Number 1) will be due by Tuesday, January 28, at 10 PM; a revised version will be due by Wednesday, February 5, at 5 PM. The second (an analysis of the 1922 marriage and family code) will be due at 10 PM on Thursday, February 15.

**A 5-page paper** (15% of your grade). This paper will be an analysis and synthesis of our course readings on the revolution's aftermath. It will be due at 5 PM on Wednesday, February 26.

**A 6-to-8-page oral history analysis** (20% of your final grade). In the second half of the semester, you will write a 6-to-8-page analysis of the oral history interviews of the Harvard Project, which interviewed Soviet citizens on their life under Stalin in the 1950s. You will need to send me a 2-to-3-page proposal for your paper by April 10; the final version of the paper will be due on April 25.

**A mid-term exam** (10% of your grade.) This exam will have two sections: an ID section (in which you explain the significance of several people, places, things, or concepts from the first half of the course) and a section in which you identify and explain passages from the course's primary source readings. The mid-term exam will take place in class on Monday, March 9.

**A final exam** (20% of your grade.) This three-hour exam will have roughly the same format as the mid-term and will take place on Thursday, May 14, at 2:00 PM. The exam will feature ID and primary source sections (like on the mid-term), as well as two essay sections, in which you





in class the next day, it is not possible to get an extension on them (since this would give you an advantage on the paper relative to your classmates.) If you cannot complete one of your short document analyses by the deadline, I will give you the chance to do an analysis of a document from later in the semester instead; however, if you choose to exercise this option, you will not have the chance to get an extension on a later paper except in the case of an emergency.

### ***Paper Revision Policy***

This class is a writing-intensive course that is designed not only to teach students about history, but to help them develop their writing skills. Over the course of the semester, then, you will have two opportunities to revise a paper that you've already handed in and to resubmit it for re-grading. Every student in the class will be required to hand in a second version of the first writing assignment of the semester (the document analysis due in January); after spring break, any student who wants to will be able to hand in a revised version of their 5-page paper or their 6-to-8-page paper. (Keep in mind that you will only have a few days to revise the latter paper, since it's due late in the semester and it will take me roughly a week to grade it and get it back to you.) If you choose to exercise this option, your final grade for the assignment will be the average of your original grade and the grade for your revised paper. (In other words, if you earn a B- on the first version of a paper and a B+ on the rewrite, you'll earn a final grade of B.)

I require that students who want to revise a paper—not counting the initial document analysis—come speak to me early on in the revision process to discuss how you plan to respond to my feedback on the first version of your paper. (Please come to this meeting with a tentative plan for your revisions and a marked-up version of your original paper.) I also encourage students to bring their papers to the Writing Lab (though this is not a requirement.)

### ***Important notes***

My goal is to create as inclusive a classroom as possible and to meet the needs of all of my students. I therefore encourage students with documented disabilities, including invisible or non-apparent disabilities such as chronic illness, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities, to discuss reasonable accommodations with me. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Student Disability Resources, John Hirschman, who is located on the 3rd floor of Goodnow Hall (x3089).

I will also, of course, excuse absences related to religious observance and will be flexible with deadlines that conflict with any religious holidays. Please let me know early in the semester if you expect to miss class because of a religious observance.

## **SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

Wednesday, January 22: Introduction to the Course

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, intro and ch. 1

Friday, January 24: Prelude to Revolution

Reading: Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, ch. 1 [P.R79drweshd( )Tj1e0

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Friday, February 7:

Revolution and Civil War in Context



Wednesday, February 26:                    Everyday Life and the Communist Party

Reading:        Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 1-66

Assignment:    **5-page paper is due at 10 PM**

Friday, February 28:                    A New Society?

Reading:        Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 67-114

Monday, March 2:                    Ostracized Citizens and Broken Families

Reading:        Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 115-189, 218-228

Wednesday, March 4:                    Nationalism in the USSR

Reading:        Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire” [Suny]

Terry Martin, “Modernization or Neotraditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism” [Pioneerweb]

Friday, March 6:                    Soviet Ethnicity: The Case of Georgian Food

Reading:        Erik Scott, “Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table” [Pioneerweb]

Monday, March 9:        **MID-TERM EXAM**

Wednesday, March 11:                    The Purges

Reading:        Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 282–289 [Pioneerweb]

Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 190-217

James Harris, “The Purging of Local Cliques in the Urals Region, 1936-7” [Pioneerweb]

Friday, March 13:        Voices of the Purges

Reading:        Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Nikolai Bukharin, “Letter to Stalin” [Suny]

### **SPRING BREAK: MARCH 16 TO MARCH 27**

Monday, March 30:    The War and After

Reading:        Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 336-361 [Pioneerweb]

Suny reader, pp. 289-297, 336-342:

Suny’s chapter intro, pp. 289-293 [Suny]; The Nazi Soviet Pact [Suny]

Popular reactions to the beginning of the war [Suny] , excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 1: From War to Cold War

Reading: Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, chapters 1-2

Friday, April 3: **No class (the professor is away at a conference)**

Monday, April 6: Stalinist Values after the War

Reading: Vera Dunham, "The Big Deal" [Suny]  
Cynthia Hooper, "A Darker 'Big Deal'" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 8: The Death of Stalin

Reading: Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, "Stalin's Last Struggle" [Suny]  
Miriam Dobson, "1953: 'The Most Painful Year'" [Pioneerweb]  
Evgenii Evtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, excerpts [Suny]

Friday, April 10: Khrushchev's Rise to Power and the Beginnings of De-Stalinization

Monday, April 20: Khrushchev's Cold War

Reading: Zubok, chapters 4-5

Wednesday, April 22: The Space Race

Reading: Amy Nelson, "Cold War Celebrity and the Courageous Canine Scout"  
[Pioneerweb]  
Slava Gerovitch, "The Human Inside a Propaganda Machine: The Public Image  
and Professional Identity of Soviet Cosmonauts" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, April 24: The Brezhnev Era

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 447-475 [Pioneerweb]  
John Bushnell, "The 'New Soviet Man' Turns Pessimist" [Suny]  
James R. Millar, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive  
Socialism" [Suny]

Saturday, April 25: **Harvard Project analysis is due at 5:00 PM**

Monday, April 27: Détente and Cold War

Reading: Zubok, chapter 7-8

Wednesday, April 29: Dissent in the 1960s and 1970s

Reading: "Trial of a Young Poet: The Case of Joseph Brodsky" [Pioneerweb]  
"The Case of Boris Kochubiyevsky" [Suny]  
"Letter from Vladimir Vysotskii to Petr Dimichev" [Suny]

Friday, May 1: Life under Brezhnev

Film: *The Irony of Fate* (Eldar Riazanov, dir.) (available online)

Monday, May 4: The Final Years of the USSR

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, pp. 479-514 [Pioneerweb]  
Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]  
excerpt from Mikhail Gorbachev's memoirs [Suny]

Wednesday, May 6: Reform and its Discontents

Reading: Alexander Dallin, "Causes of the Collapse of the USSR" [Suny]  
Nina Andreeva, "I Cannot Give Up My Principles" [Suny]  
"The Rehabilitation of Bukharin" [Suny]  
"Boris Yeltsin Resigns from the Communist Party" [Suny]

If you have time: overview of Zubok, ch. 9-10

Friday, May 8: The August Coup

Reading: Zubok, epilogue  
"The August Coup" [Suny]  
Mikhail Gorbachev, "Speech of Resignation" [Suny]

Assignment: if you choose to revise one of your papers, the rewrite is due at 5 PM

**FINAL EXAM: Thursday, May 14, at 2:00 PM**