

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

HIST 518B RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION
SYLLABUS: Spring Semester 2004

Tuesday/Thursday 11:00-12:15 AH 2131
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RUSSIA AND THE FORMER RUSSIAN AND SOVIET EMPIRE

TEXTS

Required texts:

- David Christian. *Imperial and Soviet Russia: Power, Privilege and the Challenge of Modernity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, 1997. A textbook survey of Russian and Soviet history focusing primarily on the issue of modernization and the socialist experiment.
- Orlando Figes. *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*. London: Random House, 1997. Focuses on the revolutionary era, from 1891-1924, the hinge point of modern Russian history. A vivid account which should help you feel what life was like for those who lived through the revolutionary epoch.

Optional text:

- Catherine Evtuhov and Richard Stites. *A History of Russia since 1860: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces*. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. A very recent survey, with a cultural and social focus.

COURSE CONTENT & OBJECTIVES

This course will follow the complex and painful process of entering the modern world through the history of one region of the world, Russia and the Russian Empire. In the mid 19th century, this was a very traditional world of small peasant villages, autocratic politics and widespread illiteracy. Today, Russia is a modern society of large cities, capitalism, almost universal literacy and a relatively democratic political system. Between these two extremes, Russia and the states of its former empire underwent a strange, and ultimately unsuccessful experiment with socialism. What was that experiment about? Why did Russian communists oppose capitalism so vigorously? Why did the Socialist experiment fail? And what did it mean for those who lived through it? These are some of the questions we will be pursuing. Think of them as ways of understanding the nature of the modern, capitalist world by seeing it through the experience of one particular society.

Content Objectives:

By the end of this course, I hope you will

1. **HAVE A CLEARER IDEA OF THE NATURE OF CAPITALISM AND THE TRANSITION TO MODERNITY:** You should have a better idea of what it meant to transform a traditional agrarian society into a modern, capitalist society; what this meant for the population at large and for the ruling elite
2. **HAVE A CLEARER IDEA OF THE GOALS OF SOVIET SOCIALISM:** You should have a better idea of why socialist and anti-capitalist ideas were so common in rapidly changing societies
3. **HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF WHY THE SOVIET EXPERIMENT FAILED:** You should be able to explain why the Socialist experiment failed and why its failure is so important for understanding modern world history

Skills Objectives:

By the end of this course, I hope you will

4. **IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS IN HISTORICAL WRITING & READING:** Learn to read rapidly but carefully, and use your reading as the basis for well-constructed, well-written, essays (a basic skill for many different types of employment)
5. **IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS IN HISTORICAL ARGUMENTATION:** Develop the intellectual discipline needed to support complex arguments with well researched arguments and careful logic (another basic skill in many different areas of employment)
6. **DEVELOP YOUR SENSE OF INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY:** Develop your abilities as an independent learner and researcher, taking more responsibility for your own learning and writing (another basic skill in many areas of employment)

MAJOR THEMES

We will focus on a number of general themes. Choose one of these for your bibliographical paper and your major essay:

Socialism and Russian history
Women in Russian society
The Peasantry
Novels and Russian history
The Russian Intelligentsia and Russian thought
Economic development
War and Russian history
The Russian and Soviet Political systems
Russia as a multi-ethnic Empire

WHAT HAPPENS WEEK BY WEEK: READINGS & DEADLINES

WEEK 1: **Introductory**

Required Readings: Start reading the texts

Jan 13: Organizational: Names, Syllabus, informal quiz

Jan 15: What is Russia? Picking themes and essay topics

WEEK 2: Geography and the Historical Background

Required Readings: Christian, Ch. 1; Figes, Ch. 1

Jan 20: Geography: Inner Eurasia and its peculiarities

Jan 22: Historical Background: Compiling a chronology of important dates up to 1850

WEEK 3: Russia as a 'Traditional Society': Russian Society in the early 19th century

Required Readings: Christian, Ch. 2; Figes, Ch. 3

Jan 27: What were the main features of Russian society? Autocracy, Serfdom, Patriarchy, Class

Jan 29: What was it like living in Russia? Lifeways

WEEK 4: Breaking with the past: the 'Great Reforms'

Required Readings: Christian, Ch. 3; Figes, Ch. 2

Feb 3: The Crimean War and the Abolition of Serfdom

Feb 5: The Abolition of Serfdom

WEEK 5: Russian Capitalism: Entering the Modern World [BOOK REVIEW OF FIGES DUE]

Required Readings: Christian, Ch. 4; Figes, Ch. 5

Feb 10: Economic Changes in the late 19th century

Feb 12: Changing lifeways

WEEK 6: Anti-capitalism: The Socialist Idea

Required Readings: Christian, pp. 91-6; Figes, Ch. 4

Feb 17: What is Socialism? And why did socialist ideologies arise?

Feb 19: What was distinctive about early Russian Socialism? Populism, Bolshevism, Menshevism

WEEK 7: The 1905 Revolution

Required Readings: Christian, Ch. 5; Figes, Ch. 5 & 6

Feb 24: Causes, long-term and short-term: why was there a revolution?

Feb 26: Impact and aftermath: how did 1905 change Russia politically, economically, socially

WEEK 8: War and Revolution: 1917 as the Hinge-point of modern Russian History

Required Readings: Christian, Chs. 6 & 7; Figes, Chs. 7-11

Mar 2: The February Revolution

Mar 3: The October Revolution

WEEK 9: NEP and the 1920s

Required Readings: Christian, Chs. 8 & 9; Figes, Chs. 12-16

Mar 9: Recovery and Economic Growth

Mar 11: Changes in the Leadership and the Party

Mar 15-19: Spring Recess

WEEK 10: The Stalinist Industrialization Drive

Required Readings: Christian, Chs. 10 & 11

Mar 23: Collectivization

Mar 25: The Industrialization Drive

WEEK 11: MID-TERM EXAM [BIBLIOGRAPHIES ON MAJOR THEME DUE]

Mar 30: Consultation

Apr 1: Mid-Term Exam

WEEK 12: The Post-War Era: Reform and Stagnation

Required Readings: Christian, Chs. 12-14

Apr 6: DeStalinization: 1953-1964: how much was changed under Khrushchev?

Apr 8: Stagnation: 1964-1985: what slowed growth in the Brezhnev era?

WEEK 13: **Gorbachev and Perestroika [ESSAY ON MAJOR THEME DUE]**

Required Readings: Christian, Ch. 15 & Conclusion; Evtuhov, et. al., Ch. 26

Apr 13: Economic Changes

Apr 15: Political and Social Changes

WEEK 14: **Rediscovering Capitalism: Russia after the Collapse of the USSR**

Required Readings: Evtuhov, et. al., Ch. 27

Apr 20: Economic and Political Changes

Apr 21: Living in Russia today

WEEK 15: **Revision**

Apr 27:

Apr 29:

FINAL EXAM

Thursday, May 6: 10:30-12:30

ASSESSMENT

1. **20% (c. 5 pages): Book review of Orlando Figes' *A People's Tragedy*: Due Feb 10**
This must compare the book to other histories of the revolutionary epoch; it must summarize the book's basic contents and main arguments; it must describe what is best about the book, and what you find less satisfactory; it should summarize what has been said about the book by other reviewers. This will test your ability to read a large book carefully and absorb its main argument.
2. **20%: Mid-Term (1 Hr): Mar 30**
Essay and ID based exam on weeks 1-10 of the course. This will test your ability to keep up with the basic material of this course.
3. **10%: Annotated bibliography of at least 20 items on one of the major themes: Due Apr 1**
This should be on the theme on which you will write your final essay; it should use the Chicago Manual of Style Citation methods; add comments on each item based on a brief survey of its contents and approach. The bibliography will test your research ability and your ability to successfully skim a large volume of material.
4. **20% (c. 10 pages): Essay on one of the major themes: Due Apr 13**
This should use Chicago Manual of Style for citations and footnotes, and be based on the materials listed in your annotated bibliography. The essay will test your basic skills at reading, writing and historical argumentation.
5. **20%: Final (2 Hrs): May 6**
Essay and ID based exam on the entire course. The final will test your ability to absorb the main ideas of this course and to write well under pressure.
6. **10%: Participation Grade**
This will be based on your active participation in class discussions and your preparation of weekly summaries of the readings. It will test your active contribution to the process of learning.

THE INSTRUCTOR

David Christian. I was born in the USA, and brought up in Nigeria and Britain. I did my BA and DPhil at Oxford University, then taught Russian and Soviet history for many years in Sydney, Australia, before coming to SDSU in January 2001. My early research focused on the material life of 19th century Russian peasants (I once wrote a history of the role of vodka in Russian life). I have also written one of the texts for this course, as well as a more general history of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia from prehistoric times up to the time of the Mongol Empire. In the last 15 years, I have become interested in World History and 'Big History'. For email address and phone, office location and office hours, see the first lines of this syllabus.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

An Informal Contract

Learning is a two-way street. Your instructor's role is like that of a coach. I will try my best to create an environment that encourages you to learn, to set tasks that help you learn, and to give you whatever help you may need during the course. But *you* have to do the hard work of learning; I cannot do it for you. That is why learning requires considerable self-discipline. How hard and how efficiently you work is a choice you must make.

But it's worth making the effort. Quite apart from the content you learn in a course like this, learning the self-discipline needed to become a self-motivated learner is a great preparation for life outside the University. The skills you acquire in reading, analysis, research and writing will be invaluable when seeking employment. You will also find that learning, like any other skill, is enjoyable *if* you commit to the educational process, and approach it with self-discipline.

It may help all of us if we imagine there is an **informal contract**, which goes something like this:

A) *My side of the Contract*: I expect to be disciplined in preparing the structure of the course, in preparing for classes, in managing classes and returning and grading your work. I will try to make myself available for consultations, and through email.

B) *Your side of the Contract*: I expect you to show discipline by attending classes regularly, keeping up with the reading, and submitting work on time. In classes, everyone will learn more effectively if we observe basic rules of courtesy. Please arrive on time; don't talk in class; turn off mobile phones. If you make your class time productive (take good notes, ask questions, participate in discussions), that will save you time out of class.

C) *Enjoy!* Having said that, I also hope you will enjoy this course! When approached in the right spirit, learning is not just useful; it is also enjoyable and exciting.

Grades and What they Mean

In the General Catalog (p. 429), Grades for Undergraduate Students are defined as follows:

Grade A: Outstanding achievement; available only for the highest accomplishment

Grade B: Praiseworthy performance; definitely above average

Grade C: Average; awarded for satisfactory performance; the most common undergraduate grade

Grade D: Minimally passing; less than the typical undergraduate achievement

Grade F: Failing

Here's my interpretation of the different grades:

Grade A: Understands the question fully and answers it precisely; plenty of detailed information to support its main thesis; well written, logically organized, perhaps with some striking and original touches

Grade B: Understands the question and answers it well, but may need a bit more research to support its case, and more care with writing, organization and logic; there may be some errors of fact, the argument may occasionally be muddled or imprecise, and the paper may lack a clear central thesis

Grade C: May only partly understand the question; the writing, research and organization may be poorer than for a B paper; may lack a logical argument and a clear central thesis; may contain many errors of fact and grammar

Grade D: May misunderstand the question, needs much more attention to writing, organization and research, probably lacks a clear central thesis, and contains far too many errors of fact and grammar

Some Advice on Writing History Essays

Advice in this section is relevant both for the main essay and for the exam essays. But it should also help you writing other assignments. Try not to think of assignments as chores. They will not necessarily be easy, but if you work in a disciplined way, you will find that writing and thinking can be immensely satisfying.

When submitting your main essay, make sure to keep a copy of the essay and your notes. I strongly advise you to read and use the advice below on writing essays. Also use some of the many good guides on Study Techniques. Some of the most original are by Tony Buzan. Try Tony Buzan, *Use Your Head*, which is all about using 'Mind Maps' for brain storming, sorting out your ideas, taking notes and revising material.

An ability to make sophisticated use of the Chicago Style Manual (for the Humanities) is a requirement of 500 level courses in History.

History Essays: What graders are looking for

In writing essays, you are learning skills that will be immensely valuable in any career path you may take up. You are trying to do two main things:

- 1) to understand a topic or a problem, and
- 2) to explain that topic or problem to someone else

Understanding the problem means getting the facts right, understanding the relevant evidence, seeing the links between different parts of the problem, and seeing the whole story clearly. To do that you must do careful research.

Explaining your answer to someone else means finding the best way of presenting your understanding of the problem to someone else. That means presenting your ideas clearly, defining and explaining all complex terms that someone else might not understand, writing grammatically and logically. A good essay generally has a central idea, which is explained clearly and backed up with evidence. It must also be organized simply and logically. You will find it is generally a helpful idea to imagine that you are trying to explain the topic to a smart 10-year old child. This will force you to write simply, clearly and logically.

Advice on Good Writing

Good writing is *immensely* important. With a bit of care, you can write clearly and persuasively; and you can even turn boring sentences into things that wriggle. Once you learn to write well, people will sit up and take notice of what you say. Perhaps the simplest way of improving your grades is just to proofread your essay before submission; polishing the style, spelling and grammar.

One of the best and shortest introductions to good writing is: Strunk & White, [The Elements of Style](#). More complex, but very good, is Joseph M. Williams, [Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace](#), 6th ed., 2000. G.V. Carey, [Mind the Stop](#), is a superb short guide to punctuation.

The most important ways I know to improve your writing are:

1) *Start early and revise often.* Most good writing is the product of frequent rewriting and revising. So write at every opportunity. The more you write, the better you'll write. Write something (anything) *even before* you start researching, and your later writing will be easier as it will consist of revision. Revising a rough draft is much easier than starting from scratch. Besides, writing is *the best single way* of clarifying your ideas. By starting early, you help your brain. Writing gets your brain moving; reading feeds it with information. Once you've given it a start, it will work even when you're doing other things (even sleeping). And you'll be surprised to will find that good ideas start popping out when it comes to preparing a final draft of your essay. If you start the night before, your brain has had no chance to 'compost' the material; and you will be starting out cold. That's not fair on your brain!

2) *Think about the needs of your reader.* When you write, you know the subject well, so you may think that what you are saying is clear enough. But often it is not. If you read over your own work after a day or two, this will often be obvious. This is why it helps to imagine you are writing for a reader who is i) very intelligent (i.e. if you write rubbish they will notice); but ii) very ignorant (so that everything needs to be explained very logically and carefully). If you write like this, even the reader who *does* know the stuff already (for example, your instructor!), will find your writing clearer and easier to read. Doing this will force you to write very clearly, to take arguments step by step, and to avoid technical jargon, explaining things, instead, in simple, clear language of your own.

Some Important Steps in Writing a History Essay

1. **Preparing to Write**
 1. Choose your question
 2. Study the question and figure out what terms need to be defined
 3. Draw up a preliminary plan by making an outline, mind map, or by clustering
 4. Start gathering relevant information
 5. Organize information by making an outline, mind map, or by clustering
 6. Create a thesis statement:
 - i. The thesis should answer your question with precise language
 - ii. The thesis is the controlling idea of the paper. It will guide the writing process. It will determine which information you will use in the paper and what you will leave out.
 - iii. The thesis informs readers where the paper will take them
2. **Writing**
 1. A paper should have three main sections: an introduction, body, and conclusion.
 - i. The Introduction should explain the question, engage the reader, and present the thesis.
 - ii. Body paragraphs should develop the thesis with specific details, evidence and examples
 - iii. The conclusion should summarize the main points of the paper and preemptively answer the question, 'so what?' [i.e. why is this conclusion important?]
 2. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence. The topic sentence should relate directly to your thesis. The rest of the paragraph should be dedicated to elaborating the idea presented in the topic sentence.
3. **Revising** [perhaps the most important stage of all!]
 1. Write a first draft that no one else will see; then revise it; then, if possible, revise it again. At each stage, you should be able to pick up some of the things that a grader would see, and correct them *before* the grader sees them!
 2. Proofread your paper [one of the easiest ways of improving your grades]
 - i. Try reading it out loud to see if it flows. You may hear mistakes you did not see
 - ii. To find grammatical errors, try reading it backwards sentence by sentence. When reading a paper from beginning to end, sometimes the flow will pull you through, making mistakes hard to see.
 - iii. As someone else to read it. Since we already know what we are trying to say, sometimes we do not realize that the language we have chosen is vague or confusing

Plagiarism: a Warning:

Plagiarism means presenting the work of others as your own. If you quote from someone else, word for word, you *must* put the quotation in quotation marks, and give the exact source.

Plagiarism is dishonest, and warps the learning process. In the end, you are cheating on yourself. You are teaching yourself dishonesty; and you are missing out on opportunities for *genuine* learning. So plagiarism is *very bad karma*.

For these reasons, we will regard work that contains *any plagiarism at all* as valueless. We reserve the right to give such work *no marks at all*. **There will be no right of resubmission for work that contains any plagiarism. This is in line with University policy. See p. 440 of the 2003-2004 General Catalog.**

HOW TO LOG IN TO THE HIST518b WEBSITE

All students are encouraged to enroll in the course web site. This will contain

1. Announcements
2. All the information in the syllabus
3. Lecture summaries and focus questions for each week's main topics
4. Discussion Boards for group discussions, general discussions and any questions you may have about the course
5. It will also provide a convenient way of communicating with your instructors

NOTE: All Blackboard accounts are now the same as official SDSU ID and PIN numbers. For account information go to the SDSU e-Services website <https://sdsu.edu/e-services>

Logging in to Blackboard

- Go to <http://blackboard.sdsu.edu>
- Enter your user name and password (this is your university ID and PIN number)
- Click the **Login** button
- You will be taken to the **My SDSU** page
- From here you can enter your Blackboard courses, send email and check grades
- If you do not see any courses listed on the page, click the **Reload** or **Refresh** button
- The **My Courses** module will appear
- Only courses where the instructor has chosen to use Blackboard will be visible
- Note: If you do not know your PIN number, go to the SDSU e-Services website <https://sdsu.edu/e-services>
- For more information on using Blackboard, check out the *Moving Around Blackboard* and *Frequently Asked Questions* links on the left side of the **My SDSU** page

Changing Your Personal Information

- Go to <https://sdsu.edu/e-services>
- Click on the **Student** link
- Follow the instructions on screen
- Your Blackboard information (password, email) will be updated within 8 hours

Adding Optional Modules to the My SDSU page

- Click on the **Content** button in the upper right of the page
- Choose any of the modules from the list on the left and by highlighting them, you can **Add or Remove** them to either the right or left panel
- You can also change the order of modules within each panel by using the “up” and “down” arrows to the right of the panel field
- Click on the **Submit** button to save your changes

Personalizing Your Colors

- Click on the **Colors** button at the upper right side of the **My SDSU** page
- Click on the **Pick** button next to each item
- Select a color from the chart
- Click the **Submit** button

More Information

If you have additional questions regarding Blackboard, please contact the Help Desk at Student Computing Services.

Phone: (619) 594-3189 Email: scc@rohan.sdsu.edu (use email if you have a question that doesn't need an immediate response) Web Site: <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~scc>