

RUSS 353: Russian Civilization

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[Zoom link](#)
[Link to course readings](#)

General Information

Description

This course surveys culture and society in the former Soviet Union and its successor states. We will examine the imperial roots of the USSR and its lasting sociopolitical legacies through literature, history, anthropology, and popular culture.

Course requirements

- **Class participation (10%)** The participation grade comes from (1) contributions to class discussion and (2) peer writing evaluations. It is expected that Zoom cameras will stay on for class discussions.
- **Weekly reflections (25%)** Short reflections (250 - 400 words) either on issues raised by the week's readings or current events in relation to the readings. Due by 5:00 p.m. the Monday before class.
- **Book review (15%)** Critical review of a scholarly book related to the course topic.
- **Analytic essay first draft (15%)** First drafts of writing assignments will be assessed on cohesion and use of evidence.
- **Analytic essay final draft (20%)** Final drafts will be graded on argumentation, cohesion, clarity of exposition, and mechanics.
- **Current events presentation (15%)** Presentation about a contemporary issue in the region.

Readings and assignments

Required Texts

Draitser, Emil. *In the Jaws of the Crocodile: A Soviet Memoir*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021.

Other readings will be made available online.

Assignments

- Weekly reflections (250 - 400 words)
- Book review (600 - 750 words)
- Analytic essay first draft (1000 words)
- Analytic essay final draft (1,200 - 1,500 words)
- Current events presentation

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading	Assignments due
	Imperial Russia	Playlist	
1 1/16	Imperialist Nostalgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia” Media: Vladimir Putin, Address by the President of the Russian Federation, February 24, 2022; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Address to the Russian people, February 24, 2022	
2 1/23	Russia as Empire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Imperial Apocalypse</i> intro and conclusion Media: Film, <i>Burnt by the Sun</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reflection
	Early Soviet	Playlist	
3 1/30	Revolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fitzpatrick, <i>The Russian Revolution</i>, pp. 15 - 67 Media: Vladimir Mayakovsky, “You.” “At the top of my voice”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reflection Choose book for review
4 2/6	Soviet personhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boym, <i>Common Places</i>, pp. 121 - 167 Bulgakov, <i>Heart of a Dog</i>, pp. 1 - 23 Media: Film, <i>Heart of a Dog</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reflection
5 2/13	Collectivization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balzer, <i>Tenacity of Ethnicity</i>, pp. 99 - 145 Media: “Is there Hope for Reindeer in a Warming Arctic?” BBC Earth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reflection Book review presentations
6 2/20	Terror	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goldman, <i>Inventing the Enemy</i>, pp. 1 - 80 Media: Documentary, <i>Gulag: the History</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reflection Book review due

	Late Soviet	Playlist	
7 2/27	Science and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gerovitch, <i>Soviet Space Mythologies</i>, ch. 1 & 7 Media: Film, <i>Dead Mountaineer's Hotel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection
8 3/5	Counterculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fürst, <i>Flowers through Concrete</i>, pp. 185 - 228 Media: Documentary, <i>Soviet Hippies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection
9 3/12	Comedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draitser, <i>In the Jaws of the Crocodile</i>, ch. 1 - 11 Media: KVN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection • Analytic essay first draft due
10 3/19	Glasnost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aleksievich, <i>Voices from Chernobyl</i>, pp. 1 - 64 Media: Soviet rock music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection
	Post-Soviet	Playlist	
11 3/26	Class and Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morris, <i>Everyday Post-Socialism</i>, pp. 53 - 85 • Pomerantsev, <i>Nothing is True and Everything is Possible</i>, pp. 77 - 104 Media: Film, <i>Piter FM</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection
12 4/2	State and Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reeves, <i>Border Work</i>, pp. 1 - 64 Media: Film, <i>The Light Thief</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection
13 4/9	National Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suleymanova, <i>Pedagogies of Culture</i>, pp. 1 - 59 Media: Documentary, <i>The Singing Revolution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection • Analytic essay final draft due
14 4/16	War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uehling, <i>Everyday War</i>, pp. 1 - 91 Media: TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection • Current event presentations

15 4/23	Futures	• Verdery, <i>What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?</i> , pp. 19 - 38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly reflection • Current event presentations
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Course Bibliography

Aleksievich, Svetlana. *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*. New York: Picador, 2006.

Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam. *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Boym, Svetlana. *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Draitser, Emil. *In the Jaws of the Crocodile: A Soviet Memoir*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2021.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*. Fourth edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Furst, Juliane. *Flowers through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Gerovitch, Slava. *Soviet Space Mythologies : Public Images, Private Memories, and the Making of a Cultural Identity*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015.

Goldman, Wendy. *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Morris, Jeremy. *Everyday Post-socialism: Working-class Communities in the Russian Margins*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Pomerantsev, Peter, and Brent Wilcox. *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible : The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*. New York: Public Affairs, 2014.

Reeves, Madeleine. *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Rosaldo, Renato. "Imperialist Nostalgia." *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 107-22.

Sanborn, Joshua. *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Suleymanova, Dilyara. *Pedagogies of Culture: Schooling and Identity in Post-Soviet Tatarstan, Russia*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Uehling, Greta Lynn. *Everyday War: The Conflict over Donbas, Ukraine*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023.

Verdery, Katherine. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Possible Books for Review Assignment

Bruno, Andy. *Tunguska: A Siberian Mystery and Its Environmental Legacy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Finnin, Rory. *Blood of Others: Stalin's Crimean Atrocity and the Poetics of Solidarity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022.

Goldman, Wendy. *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Kassenova, Togzhan. *Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan Gave Up the Bomb*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022.

Kaszeta, Dan. *The Forest Brotherhood: Baltic Resistance against the Nazis and Soviets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Klumbyte, Neringa. *Authoritarian Laughter: Political Humor and Soviet Dystopia in Lithuania*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2022.

Leake, Elisabeth. *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Namikas, Lise. *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960-1965*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013.

Petryna, Adriana. *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens After Chernobyl*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Pozniak, Kinga. *Nowa Huta: Generations of Change in a Model Socialist Town*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014.