HIST 468: HISTORY OF STALINISM


Instructor: Prof. Steven E. Harris
University of Mary Washington – Spring Semester, 2015
This class meets TR, 12:30pm-1:45pm, Monroe Hall 233
Office Hours: M, 11am-12:00pm; 1:30pm-4:00pm; TR, 3:15-4:00pm; and by appointment
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Description
This seminar examines the Stalin period in Soviet history (1929-1953) and the main historiographical schools of thought that have shaped our understanding of this era. One of the most brutal dictators of the 20th century and leader of one of the century’s most ruthless totalitarian regimes, Stalin has long held center stage among historians attempting to make sense of the Soviet Union, socialism, and totalitarianism. The political system, economy, society, and cultural life over which he ruled have also captivated the imagination of historians seeking to explain how people in the Soviet Union lived, died, survived, fought in wars, and worked for a regime such as Stalin’s. Stalinism, historians argue, was more than a political ideology but a way of life and a civilization distinct from anything the modern world had yet experienced.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, historians have gained unprecedented access to state and party archives in the former Soviet Union, which they have used to re-examine much
of its history, especially the Stalin era. From the inner workings of the Politburo and Stalin’s own archival file to diaries of committed communists and letters of complaint from ordinary citizens, historians have cultivated many new sources to study the Stalin period. In this seminar, we will focus upon a selection of the most formative works of this new historiography, their interpretative frameworks, methodological tools, and contentious debates. To appreciate this new historiography fully, we will begin by examining the schools of thought and methodologies that preceded it and continue to shape our understanding of Stalin and Stalinism. The major project for each student in this course will be a historiography paper on a topic in studies of Stalin and Stalinism. The goals of this assignment are to study a subfield of Soviet history in detail and, more generally, to learn how to master a body of literature on a specific topic.

**Course assignments**

- Class participation (including blog entries): 20%
- Book review: 20%
- Paper proposal and bibliography: 20%
- Final paper and presentation: 40%

**Course readings**

Schedule

January 13: Introduction to the course

From the Russian Revolution to the Stalin Revolution

January 15: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (intro., chapters 1-2)
In-class review of paper instructions for this course (blog)

January 20: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (chapters 3-6; conclusion)

Thermidorian Reaction and the Great Retreat

January 22: Trotsky, excerpt from *The Revolution Betrayed* (blog)
Timasheff, excerpt from *The Great Retreat* (“The Scope and the Meaning of the Great Retreat”) (blog)

Suggested reading:
Articles in “Ex Tempore: Stalinism and the ‘Great Retreat’” in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2004).

Totalitarianism: The Classic Model of Stalinism

January 27: Arendt, excerpts from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (“The Masses” and “Totalitarian Propaganda”) (blog)
Malia, excerpts from *The Soviet Tragedy* (“And They Built Socialism, 1929-1935”) (blog)

Suggested reading:

The Revisionist Turn: Social Histories of a Totalitarian Regime

January 29: Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Stalin and the Making of a New Elite” (blog)
Moshe Lewin, “The Social Background of Stalinism” (blog)
* Historiography paper proposal due today.

Suggested reading:
Articles on revisionism in *Russia Review* 45, no. 4 (1986).

**Stalinist Ideology and Modernity**


**Suggested reading:**

**Stalin**

February 10: articles from *Stalin: A New History* (blog)

February 12: articles from *Stalin: A New History* (blog)

**Suggested reading:**

**The Soviet Empire and Gender Relations**

February 17: Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire*.

February 19: Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire*.

**Suggested reading:**

**Stalinism and the West**

February 24: Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*.

February 26: Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*.

**Suggested reading:**

**February 28-March 8: Spring Break**

**Stalinist Cinema**

March 10: Viewing and discussion of the film *The Bright Path* (1940).

March 12: Viewing and discussion of the film *The Bright Path* (1940).

**The Great Purges and The Gulag**

March 17: Barnes, *Death and Redemption*.

March 19: Barnes, *Death and Redemption*.

**Suggested reading:**

**The Soviet Union in World War II**

March 24: Merridale, *Ivan’s War*.

March 26: Merridale, *Ivan’s War*.

* Start viewing *War of the Century* (2005)
March 31: Viewing and discussion of *War of the Century* (2005)

April 2: Viewing and discussion of *War of the Century* (2005)

**Suggested reading:**

**Stalinism and Science**

April 7: Krementsov, *The Cure*.

April 9: Krementsov, *The Cure*.

**Suggested reading:**

**Stalinism outside the Soviet Union**

April 14: Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*.

April 16: Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*.

**Suggested reading:**

**Class Presentations on Historiography Papers**

April 21: Presentations

April 23: Presentations

**Final Exam: Historiography Paper deadline: Thursday, April 30, 12:00pm**