HIST 490: Russian Borderlands

Dr. Christopher Stolarski
Tuesday 1:00-2:50 PM
Location: Rice Hall 17

Course Description

In many ways, the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the birth of the Russian nation-state. Previously Russia had been either a vast multi-ethnic empire under the Tsars or a multi-national Communist polity under Bolsheviks. Russian history has always been a multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-confessional history. But historians have overwhelmingly focused on the Russia’s imperial core; they have done Russian history from the perspective of the imperial administrators in the “great circle of interior Russia,” to quote Leonid Gorizontov. In this seminar, however, we shall consider the experience of the Russian “periphery” – the regions that have emerged as independent states in the twentieth century, but remain shaped by their imperial and Soviet pasts.

During the semester, students will learn to think about boundaries between states as historically defined and to approach national identity as a “daily plebiscite.” We shall cover the histories of a number of modern-day countries, including Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland; Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; the Central Asian states, namely Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan; and we shall also give attention to the Jewish experience in Russia’s former Pale of Settlement. Among our areas of interest, we shall ask: how did shifting relations with Russia and other imperial systems shape local identities? How and when did nationalist sentiment emerge in these regions? And how did borders affect local identities, particularly when those with similar linguistic, cultural, or religious practices found themselves subjects of different political systems?

Required Texts

- Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: Jewish Encounters with Late-Imperial Russia. California, 2004.
- Yuri Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North. Cornell, 1994

Other readings will be on Blackboard. Books listed above available at the Oberlin College Bookstore and on reserve at the Mudd Center library.

Contact

Email: chris.stolarski@oberlin.edu
Office: Rice Hall 308
Office Hours: MW 3-5 PM, Th 1-3 PM
Telephone: 440-775-8059

The easiest way to reach me is by email or by coming to my office hours. I check my email daily on weekdays and Sunday evenings. Please note that it may take up to 24 hours for me to respond to your email.
Course Objectives

- To identify key figures, concepts, and themes of the history of Russian conquest, empire, and cultural exchange, both during the imperial period and in the Soviet Union;

- To recognize important historical debates about Russian imperial policy, and through course assignments and class discussion, to participate in these scholarly conversations;

- To analyze a wide variety of secondary sources, covering the political, social, cultural, economic, and religious histories of Russian borderland regions;

- To engage critically in discussion of historical problems with your classmates in a respectful and productive manner;

- To synthesize course readings in written assignments, and to communicate in clear and concise written prose.

Accommodations

If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in or out of class, and for which you may require accommodations, please let me know how your learning needs may be appropriately met. For documentation, please visit the Office of Disability Services in Peters Hall, Room G-27/28. For more information: http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/

Learning

It is important that everyone in this course help make our classroom a supportive learning community. Our work in this class will thrive if we create a space where we all are allowed to explore new ideas, perhaps change our minds, and participate in honest yet respectful debate. Since everyone comes to this course with different sets of skills and knowledge, we may have differences of opinion at times – and it is not the aim of this course for us all to reach consensus. We do need to consider each other’s perspectives respectfully, however, and to sharpen our own skills and perspectives through dialogue and learning from each other.
Graded Assignments

I will provide more detailed instructions about the assignments during the semester. See page 6 for due dates.

Participation
Students are expected to participate actively in class. This – one’s oral contributions to discussion – will be the SOLE criterion considered in regards to your grade in this category. Most classes will combine a formal lecture with a more informal discussion of the week’s assigned readings. Please come prepared to talk about course content. Students are recommended to bring copies of assigned texts in order to ground discussion in documentary evidence.

Class presentations (2)
Students will lead TWO [NB. Or just ONE depending on the number of students registered] class discussion over the course of the semester. Students will write and present a short (1000 word) analysis of the book or collection of articles assigned for the week. This paper will provide the basis for introducing the assigned readings before class discussion; it will set the agenda for our following conversation. Also, students will be required to prepare THREE discussion questions about the readings, which should be posted on Blackboard at 12 PM on Monday prior to class. A final determination in regards to this assignment will be made in Week 1 and Week 2, when student will voice their preference as to what readings on which they would like to present.

Book Reviews (4)
Students will review of FOUR books over the course of the semester. A book review should be, in the words of the American Historical Review, “a thoughtful critique that explains the basic argument of the book and assesses its strengths and weaknesses.” For the first book review, you will submit a draft, which will be graded by the instructor, and then you will complete a more polished final product. This assignment should be about 1000-1250 words in length, with footnotes.

Course Etiquette

- This class depends on discussion and community learning, and thus it is important that you attend every class. However, since the academic semester is unpredictable, there will be days when you will be unable to attend. Throughout the semester, I will not keep track of attendance, but I shall rely on your observance of the Honor Code when you miss class due to illness, family emergencies, or other extenuating circumstances.

- Please make sure to turn off and put away your cell phones. Laptops and tablets are allowed for consulting the readings. However, I recommend taking notes with pen and paper. If it becomes clear that laptops are used for other purposes during class, I will no longer allow laptops or tablets in class.

- You are expected to participate actively in class discussions. As our discussions are an important component of the course, it is crucial that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Please come see me to discuss strategies if you feel uncomfortable or unable to participate in class discussion.
**Plagiarism & the Honor Code:**
“The word plagiarism derives from the Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. The expropriation of another author’s work and the presentation of it as one’s own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship.” [American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Contact]. Presenting the work of others as one’s own goes against everything that a liberal education is about. It is a serious affront to the other students in the course, to me as a member of the course, and to the plagiarizer him/herself. The College requires that students sign an “Honor Code” for all assignments. This pledge states: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.” For further information, see the student Honor Code, which you can access via Blackboard. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me or raise it in class.

**Late Work**
Late assignments will receive deductions of one-third of a letter grade per day. So, an “A” Book Review handed in one-day late will receive a “B+”, two-days late, a “B”, and so on.

Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be given in case of emergency/illness or if you ask for an extension because of a heavy workload during the week. In the latter case, an extension will be granted if students provide me with no less than two (2) days notice.

All written work must be turned in for students to achieve a passing grade. All course work must be received by Friday, May 13, 2016 at noon (12 PM).

**Support**
If you find yourself unable or struggling to finish the assigned readings, or to contribute to class discussion, please meet with me so that we can discuss some possible strategies going forward. Please reach out to me if you ever feel you need extra help, or if you would like to discuss the readings more fully, or if there is anything else that concerns you. I am available during my regularly scheduled office hours, as well as by appointment.

**Grading**

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If you wish to dispute a grade, I request that you do so in writing. Please explain your justification carefully. After writing, we shall follow up in person during office hours. Disputes must be submitted to me at least twenty-four hours in advance of an appointment. Please note that a dispute does not guarantee a better grade.
Class Schedule

WEEK 1
Tuesday 2/2: Introduction
No Readings

WEEK 2
Tuesday 2/9: Russia as Empire
Blackboard:
• From the Editors, “The Imperial Turn,” Kritika, vol. 7, no. 4 (Fall 2006), pp. 705-712
• Andreas Kappeler, The Russian Empire: A Multicultural History, pp. 1-13, 114-167

WEEK 3
Tuesday 2/16: The Steppe
Willard Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field

WEEK 4
Tuesday 2/23: The Caucasus
Mikhail Khodarkovsky, Bitter Choices

WEEK 5
Tuesday 3/1: The Western Provinces/Book Review 1 (draft)
Theodore Weeks, Nation and State in Late-Imperial Russia

WEEK 6
Tuesday 3/8: Central Asia/Book Review 1 (final)
Terry Crews, Prophet and Tsar

WEEK 7
Tuesday 3/15: The Jewish Question
Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale

March 19-27: Spring Break!

WEEK 8
Tuesday 3/29: The Soviet Union as Empire/Book Review 2
Blackboard:

WEEK 9
Tuesday 4/5: The Western Republics
Kate Brown, A Biography of No Place

WEEK 10
Tuesday 4/12: The Caucasus...and “Vicinity”/Book Review 3
Blackboard:

WEEK 11
Tuesday 4/19: Central Asia
Douglas Northrop, Veiled Empire

WEEK 12
Tuesday 4/26: Siberia and the Far East
Yuri Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors

WEEK 13/Book Review 4
Tuesday 5/3: The Russian Federation...as Empire
Blackboard:
• Victor Shnirelman, “Stigmatized by History or by Historians? The Peoples of Russia in School History Textbooks,” History and Memory 21:2 (Fall/Winter 2009), pp. 110-149
# Overview of Due Dates

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<th>Book Review 1 (draft)</th>
<th>March 1 (Week 5)</th>
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<td>March 29 (Week 8)</td>
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<td>April 12 (Week 10)</td>
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<td>Book Review 4</td>
<td>May 5 (Week 13)</td>
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<td>Class Presentations</td>
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* Please submit your Reading Responses on Blackboard before our Thursday class sessions.

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**NB. I reserve the right to change the syllabus over the course of the semester. Any changes will be discussed in class at least one week prior to their implementation.**

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## Bibliography


* Available on reserve in the Mudd Center library.