

Instructor: Joshua First (Professor First)
Office: Bishop Hall 319
Office Hours: MWF 12:30-1:30pm
Mailbox: History Department, Bishop Hall 340
Email: jfirst@olemiss.edu

INST 312: Topics in European Studies
Contemporary Russia: Politics and Culture after Communism

Meeting Time and Place

MWF 9:00-9:50am
Croft 203

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course on contemporary Russian politics and culture will address approximately the last 30 years of the country's past, from the decline and fall of the Soviet Union, through the difficult years of economic transition, and finally to the Putin years. During the 1980s, the Soviet Union experienced a marked decline in its political and economic position in the world. We examine how Mikhail Gorbachev came to power initially to solve fundamental problems in the socialist economy of the USSR, but in the process liberalized the political system, dismantled the organs of government repression, and allowed for a greater range of free speech and individual autonomy. Through this process of reform, new voices emerged which challenged Gorbachev's power. In this course, we look at how nationalism, along with political opposition from both the Left and Right of the political spectrum helped to bring down the Soviet Union in 1991.

What followed was a difficult period of economic and political transition, which, on the one hand, transformed Russia into a capitalist democracy, and on the other hand, brought acute social problems. This course will examine how Boris Yeltsin and his advisors attempted to make these transitions during the 1990s, and how they were understood and experienced among ordinary Russians. During the last decade, Vladimir Putin has resurrected the Russian economy and once again made Russia a powerful player on the global stage. We will look at how he accomplished this, and the implications of a new Russia's place in the world.

The course is structured around active student discussion with a few supplementary lectures. Students are evaluated based on their class participation, informal weekly writing assignments, a book review and a final oral exam.

Required Books

The following books are available at the campus bookstore. You may also purchase new/used copies online if you find this to be a more affordable option. Please be sure to purchase the correct edition if mentioned below.

Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (2007 ed.)

Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (2nd edition)

Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business*

Olga Shevchenko, *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*

There are also several short readings posted on the course's Blackboard site, which are identified with a "BB" on the calendar below.

Course Policies

- You must read this entire syllabus. If you do not understand everything on this syllabus, I expect you to ask questions.
- You must participate actively in discussion. You should also become comfortable asking questions in class, and restrict email to questions and concerns of a more individual nature.
- Attendance for each scheduled meeting is mandatory. Your absence will result in a lower grade for the semester. Note, however, that attendance alone does not guarantee you a good participation grade. If you miss class, you are responsible for the consequences.
- You are responsible for all readings listed on the calendar. You must also bring your readings to class during our discussions of them.
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and you will fail this course if caught violating established university policies regarding academic dishonesty. You are required to view the following video regarding the definitions of plagiarism and University of Mississippi policies:
http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/instruction/resources/plagiarism_ac_honest/plagiarism_academic_honesty.html (you must have Flash Player to render this video properly). I recommend that you also read the official statement in the university's policy handbook:
<http://secure4.olemiss.edu/umpolicyopen/ShowDetails.jsp?istatPara=1&policyObjidPara=10817696> (download the pdf file)
- You must proofread all of your written work, even the informal weekly writing assignments. Sloppy writing will result in a lower grade for the assignment.
- You must act in a respectful and honest manner toward your fellow students and your professor, and you should expect the same in return.

- As a general rule, grades are not negotiable. I will spend considerable time reading and offering comments on your work. If you would like to discuss further why you received the grade that you did, you are encouraged to do so. If, however, you believe that I graded your work incorrectly, unfairly or inconsistently, you have the right to an appeal according to the following policy: <http://secure4.olemiss.edu/umpolicyopen/ShowDetails.jsp?istatPara=1&policyObjidPara=10818079> (download the pdf file)
- You should avoid using your cell phone in class. I realize that accidents happen, but please remember to turn your phone off upon entering the classroom. I will not tolerate, however, either answering a phone call or texting in class. You will be asked to leave if such an incident occurs.
- If you require special considerations based on a disability, religious observance, or participation in sanctioned extracurricular activities, you must inform me of them immediately.

Assignments

Short Quizzes / Homework Assignments

Periodically, I will give quizzes over the readings to assess your comprehension of the material. I will also assign a few short homework assignments throughout the semester.

Discussion Leader

At least twice during the semester, you will prepare a series of study questions (distributed to the rest of the class by Sunday at 2pm on the Blackboard discussion board) for the subsequent week. During class, you will lead discussion, directing other students to answer the questions and problems that you brought up, in addition to pointing toward interesting issues that they addressed in their journal entries. I will provide an example of what this involves during the second week of class. You are responsible for signing up for the week you wish to be the discussion leader.

Reading Journal

You will write short journal entries (approx. 1-2 page) on most weeks responding to the readings. You may focus on the study questions (one of them, a few of them, or all of them) that the discussion leaders and I will submit, or you may address other issues that you found interesting or provocative in the readings. While I intend these assignments to be loose in structure, so that you can address the issues that you want without having to come up with a formal thesis, good writing is essential every time. Your fellow students and I will not tolerate sloppy writing. You will submit your entries to the Blackboard discussion board under the appropriate week, either as an attachment or inline text. If you submit it as inline text, make sure you also have the paper saved in a separate document, as you may

lose your work due to a connection problem. These papers are due before Tuesday at 4pm. I will not accept anything later.

Book Review

You will submit a 3-5-page book review for Olga Shevchenko's *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*. Guidelines will be distributed closer to the due date.

Oral Final Exam

At the end of the semester, each of you will meet with me for 20 minutes to discuss formally two or three broader questions that the course addressed. You will be assessed on your knowledge of the subject matter and critical thinking skills.

Grade Breakdown

Quizzes / Homework:	10%
Discussion Leader:	5%
Reading Journal:	25%
Book Review:	10%
Oral Final Exam:	10%
Participation in Discussion:	40%

Grading Criteria for Class Participation

- "A" – active participation
- "B" – sporadic, but valuable, participation
- "C" – inactive participation
- "D" – refusal to participate
- "F" – more than 4 absences during the semester

How to Read Academic Texts

In this course, you will be reading both for two separate but related purposes: First, you will examine how historians and other scholars construct their arguments and evidence, and second, you will pay attention to what these writers are saying about Russian society, culture, politics and history. As such, you should pay attention to the structure of the texts, their rhetoric, in addition to the "information" contained therein. In a work of historiography, you should be able to identify the argument of a short article within its first two pages, and of a book within the introduction or first chapter. When you find the argument, make sure to write it down in your own words in the margins of the text. If you cannot identify the argument, keep reading. If you are still confused about the argument after completing the text, you should read over the beginning to see if you can find it the

second time. Read the body of the text quickly, and try to underline and take notes in the margin on what you believe the major pieces of evidence and analysis are that support the text's argument. When reading a book, you will also have to identify the specific arguments in each of the chapters, in addition to the over-arching argument of the work. Also take notes on what you believe the text did successfully, and what questions still linger after reading it. What significant problems with the text exist, and how might the author/s have addressed their research questions differently?

Discussion of Current Events

A major portion of class discussion concerns current events. As such, you will be required to keep abreast of Russian news. During the first week of class, you will choose a "beat" to follow for the rest of the semester. You may choose from the following categories:

1. the Kremlin (high politics) and elections;
2. foreign policy;
3. culture, history and religion;
4. social movements, human rights, and public opinion;
5. crime and natural disasters;
6. center / periphery relations;
7. the economy and business

You should follow your beat daily using the following online news resources:

Subscribe to Johnson's Russia List:

email davidjohnson@starpower.net with the subject line, "Johnson's Russia List Subscription." Hands down, this is the most complete list of English-language daily news coverage of Russian affairs. You are encouraged to donate to the list if you subscribe.

News sites:

The Moscow News (www.mn.ru) - Russia's only independent English-language newspaper

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (<http://www.rferl.org/section/Russia/161.html>) -

News focused on democracy and human rights issues

Google News (news.google.com- type "Russia" into the search bar)

Blogs to follow:

Siberian Light (<http://siberianlight.net/>)

Russia Blog (<http://www.russiablog.org/>)

Calendar (These dates are subject to change. Please listen closely for any modifications to the calendar, and write them into your copy of the syllabus.)

Week 1 – Introduction: The Soviet Experience and Contemporary Russia

Monday, Aug 23: Syllabus and Major Problems

Wednesday, Aug 25: The Soviet Union and Its Legacy

Friday, Aug 27: Discussion of Kotkin and Ledeneva

Readings: **[52pp]**

- Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, “Introduction,” and Chapter 1, “History’s Cruel Tricks,” pp. 1-30
- Alena Ledeneva, Introduction and Chapter 1: “Why Are Informal Practices Still Prevalent in Russia?” in *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices that Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business*, pp. 1-17, 22-27 (skip the section, “Conceptualizing Informal Practices”).

Section 1: Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

Week 2 – The Politics and Economics of Late Socialism

Monday, Aug 30: Lecture

Wednesday, Sept 1: Discussion of current events; Discussion of Andropov speech and Bunce article

Friday, Sept 3: Discussion of Kotkin

Readings: **[57pp]**

- Iurii Andropov, “Speech to the Central Committee of the CPSU, November 22, 1982” (BB)
- Valerie Bunce, “The Political Economy of the Brezhnev Era: The Rise and Fall of Corporatism,” (BB)
- Kotkin, Chapter 2, “Reviving the Dream,” pp. 31-57

Week 3 – Everyday Life and Dissent under Late Socialism

Monday, Sept 6 – LABOR DAY

Wednesday, Sept 8: Lecture

Friday, Sept 10: Discussion of Yurchak, “Soviet Anecdotes,” Nathans, and Medvedev

Readings: **[63pp]**

- Alexei Yurchak, “The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretense, and the *Anekdot*” (BB)
- “Soviet Anecdotes” (BB)
- Benjamin Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under ‘Developed Socialism’” (BB)
- Roy A. Medvedev, “On Socialist Democracy” (1975) (BB)

Week 4 – Mikhail Gorbachev and Perestroika

Monday, Sept 13: Lecture

Wednesday, Sept 15: Discussion of current events, Zaslavskaja on Perestroika, and the Gorbachev speech at the UN

Friday, Sept 17: Discussion of Kotkin, chapter 3

Readings: [65pp]

- Tat'iana Zaslavskaja, "Considering the Central Committee Theses and Fundamental Questions of Perestroika," June 1988 (BB)
- Mikhail Gorbachev, Speech at the UN, December 1988 (BB)
- Kotkin, Chapter 3, "The Drama of Reform," pp. 58-85
- Ledeneva, Chapter 2, "*Chernyi Piar*: Manipulative Campaigning and the Workings of Russian Democracy," pp. 28-57

Week 5 – The Soviet Collapse

Monday, Sept 20: Lecture

Wednesday, Sept 22: Discussion of current events and Gorbachev reading

Friday, Sept 24: Discussion of Kotkin chapter 4

Readings: [90pp]

- Gorbachev on the Referendum, February 1991 (BB)
- Kotkin, Chapter 4, "Waiting for the End of the World," pp. 86-112
- Richard Sakwa, Preface and part of Chapter 1, "The Path to Power," *Putin: Russia's Choice*, pp. viii-xi, 1-10.
- Ledeneva, Chapter 3: "*Kompromat*: The Use of Compromising Information in Informal Politics," and Chapter 4, "*Krugovaia poruka*: Sustaining the Ties that Bind," read only pp. 58-92, 99-110, 112-114.

Week 6 – Boris Yeltsin and the Politics of Transition

Monday, Sept 27: Lecture

Wednesday, Sept 29: Discussion of current events and Yeltsin speeches

Friday, Oct 1: Discussion of Kotkin chapters 5-6, and Ledeneva chapters 2-4

Readings: [87pp]

- Yeltsin Speech at OSCE summit, November 1999 (BB)
- Yeltsin Resignation Speech, December 31, 1999 (BB)
- Kotkin, Chapter 5, "Survival and Cannibalism in the Rust Belt," and Chapter 6, "Democracy Without Liberalism?" pp. 113-170
- Richard Sakwa, the rest of "The Path to Power," *Putin: Russia's Choice*, pp. 10-36.

Section 2: The Putin Era

Week 7 – Vladimir Putin and the Political World of the Zero Years

Monday, Oct 4: Lecture

Wednesday, Oct 6: discussion of current events and Putin's Millennium essay

Friday, Oct 8: Discussion of Kotkin chapter 6 and Sakwa chapters 1-4

Readings: [99pp]

- Vladimir Putin, "Russia At the Turn of the Millennium," in Sakwa, pp. 317-328.
- Kotkin, Chapter 6 "Idealism and Treason," pp. 171-198.
- Sakwa, Chapter 2, "Ideas and Choices," pp. 37-52 (stop at the section break; the rest of the chapter is optional), Chapter 3, "Putin's Path," pp. 70-90, 95-100 (skip the section, "Leadership and Style"), Chapter 4, "Parties, Elections, and the Succession," pp. 101 (skip the section "Development of the Party System"), 109-129 (stop at "The Putin Succession")

Week 8 – State and Society in Putin's Russia

Monday, Oct 11: Lecture

Wednesday, Oct 13: Discussion of current events and Putin's "Beslan Speech"

Friday, Oct 15: Discussion of LeVine and Sakwa chapters 5-6

Readings: [58pp]

- Putin's "Beslan Speech," September 2004 (BB)
- Steve LeVine, "Murder on an Elevator: Anna Politkovskaya and the Voiceless of Russia," in *Putin's Labyrinth*, pp. 103-121 (BB)
- Sakwa, Chapter 5, "Regime, State and Society," pp. 135-161, Chapter 6, "Bureaucracy, Incorporation, and Opposition," pp. 162-169 (skip section, "The Public Chamber"), 173-175, 184-185 (try to skim the other sections)

Week 9 – Center - Periphery Relations

Monday, Oct 18: Lecture

Wednesday, Oct 20: Discussion of current events and Putin's television address

Friday, Oct 22: Discussion of Sakwa chapters 7-8

Readings: [40pp]

- Putin, television address, May 2000 [from **CDPSP 52 (20), p. 5**] (BB)
- Sakwa, Chapter 7, "Putin's 'New Federalism'," pp. 186-213, Chapter 8, "Reforging the Nation," (second half of the chapter) pp. 227-239 (skip the conclusion).

Week 10 – Russia and the World

Monday, Oct 25: Lecture

Wednesday, Oct 27: Discussion of current events and Sakwa chapter 10

Friday, Oct 29: Discussion of Wilson

Readings: **[45pp]**

- Jeanne L. Wilson, "The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy" (BB)
- Sakwa, Chapter 10, "Putin's New Realism in Foreign Policy," pp. 267-298.

Section 3: Culture and Everyday Life in Russia Today

Week 11 – Wealth and Poverty

Monday, Nov 1: Lecture

Wednesday, Nov 3: Discussion of current events and Hoffman

Friday, Nov 5: Discussion of Ledeneva chapter 5 and Sakwa chapter 9

Readings: **[74pp]**

David Hoffman, "Alexander Smolensky," in *The Oligarchs*, pp. 31-53 (BB)

Ledeneva, Chapter 5, "*Tenevoi Barter*: Shadow Barter, Barter Chains, and Nonmonetary Markets," 115-141

Sakwa, Chapter 9, "Russian Capitalism," pp. 240-266.

Week 12 – Art, Literature and Religion

Monday, Nov 8: Lecture

Wednesday, Nov 10: Screening of *4* (dir. Ilia Khrzhanovskii, 2005)

Friday, Nov 12: Discussion of *4*, LaRuelle and Sakwa

Readings: **[33pp]**

- Marlène LaRuelle, "Alternative Identity, Alternative Religion? Neo-Paganism and the Aryan Myth in Contemporary Russia" (BB)
- Sakwa, Chapter 8, "Reforging the Nation," (first half of the chapter) pp. 214-227, 239.

Week 13 – Crime and the Law

Monday, Nov 15: Lecture

Wednesday, Nov 17: Discussion of Ledeneva chapter 7

Friday, Nov 19: Screening of *Brother* (dir. Aleksei Balabanov, 1997)

Readings: **[24pp]**

- Ledeneva, Chapter 7, "Post-Soviet *Tolkachi*: Alternative Enforcement and the Use of Law," pp. 164-188

Book Review due on Friday, Nov. 17 at 4pm.

Monday - Friday, Nov 22-26 – Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 14 – Wrapping Up: The Soviet Past and the Russian Future

Monday, Nov 29: Lecture

Wednesday, Dec 1: Wrap-up discussion of current events and the major books

Friday, Dec 3: Review session for final exam

Readings: [23pp]

- Sakwa, “Conclusion: The Power of Contradiction,” pp. 299-316
- Ledeneva, “Conclusion,” pp. 189-195 (nice summaries of the major arguments and threads in these books: read to review for final)

Final Exams scheduled during Monday and Tuesday (Dec. 6-7)