

Towson University  
History 452/Russia and the Soviet Union

Professor Wendy Lower  
Department of History  
[wlower@towson.edu](mailto:wlower@towson.edu)  
Office: Linthicum, 119E  
Office Hours: Mon/Wed: 12:45-1:45; 3:30-4:30

Mon/Wed 2:00-3:15 pm  
Linthicum 313

Required Texts (available at the Towson Bookstore):

John M. Thompson, Russia and the Soviet Union: An Historical Introduction  
Gennady Andreev-Khomiakov, Bitter Waters: Life and Work in Stalin's Russia  
Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon

On reserve in library and for purchase on internet:

Jim Riordan and Sue Bridger, Dear Comrade Editor: Readers' Letter to the Soviet Press Under Perestroika

### Course Description

No other ideology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century captured the hearts and minds of people worldwide, and caused more destruction and human suffering than communism. It dominated the Russian polity for nearly 70 years, eastern European states for about 40 years, and spread to regimes in Asia, Africa, and Central America. What was this Soviet-led experiment in communism and why did it fail so miserably in the Russian empire? What were its roots in Russian history? To what extent can we blame Joseph Stalin for the crimes of the Soviet system during its formative years? What were the legacies of Stalinism? What was everyday life like behind the Iron Curtain? Why did the Soviet Union collapse?

This course will explore these questions beginning with a close examination of the emergence of communism in Russia, Stalinism and the formation of the Soviet Union. Next we will examine the impact of WWII on Stalinist Russia and its role in bringing the Soviet model to Eastern Europe. The death of Stalin in 1953 was followed by a political thaw and amnesties, known as Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization." These events precipitated a reshaping and regeneration of the Soviet polity. But the new generation of activists would become disillusioned and later lead revolutions and dissident movements across the Soviet Union. By the mid-1980s General Secretary Gorbachev was ready to bring political and economic reform to the ailing system. The course will conclude with an examination of these reforms, their revolutionary results in 1989 and their continued course in Putin's Russia.

### Assignments and Goals

Students will be expected to write **two short papers (3-5 pages each)**, **two exams (mid term and final)**, and **one Research Brief (10-12 pages)** based on the book, Dear

Comrade Editor. In addition, as part of your class participation grade, you will be expected to read many primary source handouts and articles for discussion sessions.

### Short Papers

On the days we discuss Bitter Waters and Darkness at Noon you will submit a short critique of the texts. For the Bitter Waters text, you will explain how Andreev-Khomiakov's memoir provides a provincial picture of Stalinist society. Who are the different characters portrayed in the logging and saw mill industries? What was the author's experience in the camps? How does Andreev-Khomiakov present the transformation of labor/work culture, rampant corruption, inefficiencies in the Stalinist system? For the Darkness at Noon text you will briefly summarize the story, and then explain Koestler's aim in writing the book and his insights into the purges. Does Koestler's story help us understand why so many officials confessed at the show trials in the 1930s? How come Rubashov cannot condemn Gletkin? Is Koestler, a Hungarian observer the most reliable source for this history? How does Koestler's account compare with Khomiakov's?

### Dear Comrade Editor Paper:\*

Pretend that you have been asked to write a research brief for the U.S. State Department's Russian Desk. Before Condi Rice visits Putin again she needs background information on the demographics, different social strata of Russia and the emergence of independent and state-controlled media in Russia during Gorbachev era. Drawing almost entirely from the letters excerpted in Dear Comrade Editor, provide: 1) a description of the various social sectors of the Soviet system and the different opinions expressed by them 2) a comment on the role of free journalism and newspapers in Russian civil society. Be sure to properly quote and cite the letters that you analyze.

### Grading:

Discussion Participation	10%
2 short papers	10%
Dear Comrade Editor Brief	15%
Mid Term Exam	25%
Final Exam	40%

A(94-100) A- (90-93) B+ (87-89) B (84-86) B- (80-83) C+ (77-79) C (74-76) C- (70-73)

### Policies

Class participation and attendance are factored into your final grade. Poor attendance can mean the difference between a B and B-. I will take attendance at each class. Excused absences are permitted (illness, family emergence, religious observance, university event) but you must inform me. Students with multiple unexcused absences will fail the course. All cell phones must be turned off during class.

Plagiarism is the taking of another's ideas, words, phrases and presenting it as one's own. Do not copy verbatim text from a source, such as cutting and pasting from the internet and then submit it to me as your masterpiece in prose. This is intellectual theft, which I can easily detect and will not tolerate: you will get an F and suffer even more serious consequences on your academic record. See the University's Student Academic Integrity

Policy, Appendix F of the University Catalogue, Part V. If you have any questions about how to cite your sources, and the use of sources, please do not hesitate to ask. To be safe, always footnote/endnote where you are getting your information from, better safe than sorry!

For any student who may need an accommodation due to a disability, please see me as soon as possible during class, or during office hours. A memo from Disability Support Services authorizing your accommodations will be required.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE: LECTURES, DISCUSSIONS, TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS**

Aug 29 (Mon): Introduction to course: Main themes and problems in Russian and Soviet History. (Thompson, pp. 1-24)

Aug 31 (Wed): The Tsarist Autocracy and Attempts to Reform (Thompson, pp.77-151; Distribute Chekhov Short Stories: Oh the Public! Peasants, Dreams)

Sept 5 (Mon) NO CLASS- Labor Day Holiday

Sept 7 (Wed) Discussion: Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian empire (handout Personal Account of Exile in Siberia, the Kishinev Pogrom, 1903, Anton Chekhov Stories)

Sept 12 (Mon) The Revolution of 1905, Thompson, pp. 151-184.

Sept 14 (Wed) Discussion: Lenin, What is to be done? Father Gapon's Petition, the New Duma, Tsar's Manifesto

Sept 19 (Mon) WWI: Was the Tsar to Blame? (In Class Handout: Willy Nicky Telegrams) Thompson, pp.186-191.

Sept 21 (Wed) The Social, Economic Impact of the War (In Class Handout: Failings of the Russian Army Medical Service)

Sept 26 (Mon) The Revolutions of 1917 and Civil War, 1918-1921; Thompson, pp. 193-217 (Distribute Northrop Essay)

Sept 28(Wed) **CLASS CANCELLED**

Oct 3 (Mon) Revolutionary Dreams, Utopianism, Futurism, Socio-cultural experimentation and mobilization (In Class Handout, Lenin-Gorky letter, Krupskaya's Agitprop, Mayakovskii Poem, Images of a "Talking City" (R. Stites)

Oct 5 (Wed) Discussion: "Nationalizing Backwardness" Sovietizing a multiethnic empire (Article on Muslim Women in Uzbek province, by Douglas Northrop)

Oct 10 (Mon) Lenin's death and the struggle for a successor- Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Stalin (In Class Handout, Appeal from Solovky Gulag, Dec 1926)

Oct 12 (Wed) Bitter Waters Paper Due/Discussion (announce mid terms ids and essays)

Oct 17 (Mon) Rise of Stalinism: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Party, or Stalin? Thompson, pp. 217-229. Economic Policies, When Revolutionary Dreams become

Blueprints- Five Year Plans, Stakhanovites, Ural Boom Towns of the 1930s (In Class Handout, Five Year Plan, and 1931 Speech to Industrial Managers)

Oct 19 (Wed) MID TERM EXAM

Oct 24 (Mon) The Countryside: Famine in Ukraine, Collectivization and the emerging ghost towns (In Class Handout: Views of the Revolution, docs 28.5)

Oct 26 (Wed): Discussion: Politburo meeting no. 93 on Grain problem, Dec 1932, Letters Documenting conditions in the kolkhozes, Dr. Kiselev's memorandum

Oct 31 (Mon) 2) The "Great Terror" How Widespread was it? The Kirov Murder, and Purges, In Class Show Trial (see: Report of the Court Proceedings, Case Against Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Circle, <http://art-bin.com/art/omoscowtoc.html>)

Nov 2 (Wed) Darkness at Noon Paper Due/Discussion: What does a totalitarian state look like, how does it function?

Nov 7 (Mon) Stalin's Foreign Policy and the Start of WWII, (In Class Handout: The Molotov Ribbentrop Pact and Secret Protocol) Thompson pp. 231-238.

Nov 9 (Wed) The Great Patriotic War: Myths and Realities, 1941-1944 (D. Marples, "Understanding the War," A. Weiner, The Test of One's War Record, On-Line Exhibit on War Memorials in the SU "Voice of Russia, 1984)

Nov 14 (Mon) Discussion: The Cold War: George Kennan's memoirs, A Report from Moscow, Feb 1946, Thompson, pp. 241-260.

Nov 16 (Wed) The Emerging Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe (East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia etc.) Film: Ashes and Diamonds, Excerpts: Stalin's Puppets

Nov 21 (Mon): Death of Stalin, Khrushchev Thaw: Consumerism, and the Cold war- Women in the Soviet Union (The Double Burden), Thompson, pp.261-274.

Nov 23 (Wed) NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov 28 (Mon) The Gorbachev years- Glasnost and Perestroika, Thompson, pp.277-332.

Nov 30 (Wed): Discussion: Gorbachev's "Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World" pp.69-82.

Dec 5 (Mon) Dear Comrade Editor Paper Due/Discussion

Dec 7 (Wed) Last Class- Review and Exam Prep

Final Exam Date TBA