By its own definition, the Soviet Union was neither nation-state nor empire, neither capitalist nor communist, neither east nor west. What was the Soviet Union? What was Soviet socialism? Who made it? What was the role of the Communist Party in creating and maintaining Soviet rule? What is a personal dictatorship, and how did the Soviet Union become one? How did the Soviet regime maintain its rule over one-sixth the world’s landmass? Did it enjoy legitimacy among the population, and if so, why? What was the role of violence or coercion in the maintenance of Soviet power? Did people “believe” in the Soviet Union, and if so, in what exactly? How did the Soviet regime use institutions, social class, information networks, consumer desires, ethnic minorities, expert knowledge, cultural production, and understandings of the non-Soviet outside world to advance its ambitions? How and why did it succeed or fail?

In the wake of recent challenges to liberal institutions across the Western world, the history of the Soviet Union offers its students critical insight into the characteristics and functioning of illiberal politics and an unfree society. It also illuminates the experience of people who made and lived through the world’s greatest experiment in organizing a non-capitalist society. This course will examine the project of building socialism—as a culture, economy, and polity—in the Soviet Union and its satellites from inception to collapse. Though focused on the investigation of Soviet institutions, practices, and ideologies, the course aims to situate the Soviet project in an explicitly global frame. As a class, we will assess the claim that Soviet socialism (though not necessarily the Soviet Union) was a project with a shelf life, conditioned by global politics and its own capacities for self-reproduction. Through extensive use of memoir, we will examine individual processes of “illusionment” and disillusionment with the Soviet project. We analyze the life cycles of peasants, workers, bureaucrats, artists, writers, reformers and other members of the Soviet establishment over time. We carry the Soviet engagement with the outside world, and the search for modernity that inspired it, from the First World War, through the creation of a socialist society, the huge geographical expansion of the socialist project and its subsequent implosion, into the new programs of liberalization, marketization, and modernization that succeeded it in the 1990s and 2000s. We trace Soviet dominion, real and attempted, from Berlin to Baku, Vladimir to Vladivostok.

Readings for the course will include both primary and secondary sources, with an emphasis on works of memoir and literature. Readings will average 60-100 pages per week.

**Requirements for the Course**

**Written work:**
Students will compose three primary-source analyses (3-4 pages each) and three argumentative essays (3-4 pages each) over the course of the semester.

Primary-source analysis: This assignment will ask students to deploy a single primary source as evidence for an argument about a critical question in the weeks of the course it covers.

Argumentative essay: This assignment will ask students to argue one side of a debate using thesis statements provided by the instructor, thus modeling what an effective thesis statement
looks like and requiring students to muster a logical analysis and evidence for the statement they choose.

Both essays will invite students to consider questions critical to the study of Soviet non-capitalist society, such as: what was revolutionary about the Russian Revolution? How different was everyday Soviet life from life inside the Gulag (concentration camps)? How did “belief” in the Soviet project change over time? Was the Soviet Union a socialist society? Who or what caused the Cold War? Why did the Soviet Union collapse?

**Exams:**
Students will sit for an in-class midterm and a final exam, consisting of identifications and two short essay questions.

**Grading**
Writing assignments: 50%
Participation: 20%
Midterm: 15%
Final: 15%

**Books**
Resource website “Seventeen moments”: [http://soviethistory.msu.edu/](http://soviethistory.msu.edu/)

Also suggested for purchase (books marked with an *asterisk):
Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog*
Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey Into the Whirlwind*
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

**Lectures and Assignments**

**Week 1: The Russian Empire,**
   A. Petersburg, June 1914: Institutions, Social Classes, Geopolitics
   B. Petrograd, February 1917: Ideologies, Uprisings, Politics

(B)
From *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922* eds. J. Daly and L. Trofimov (2009). (each less than one page long)
--“Excerpts from Soldiers’ Letters, intercepted by Censors”
--“Notes from the Meeting of the Council of Ministers,”
--“Petrograd’s Police Chief Describes the Breakdown of Authority,”
--“The Abdication of Nicholas II,”
--“The February Revolution in Transcaucasia”
From *Documents of Russian History, 1914-1917*, ed. F.A. Golder (1927) PDF online at https://archive.org/details/documentsofrussi027937mbp

--Durnovo Memorandum, pp. 3-23
--Plot to Kill Rasputin, pp. 175-177
--Growing Agitation, pp. 184-187
--War Secrets, the Empress, pp. 213-214
--Village Life, pp. 380-383
--Order no. 1, p. 386

*Hosking, Introduction.

**Week 2: Revolution**

A. October 25, 1917 and the Spread of Revolution

B. War Communism and Institutional Transformation


--“The Workers’ Revolution”
--“The Soldiers’ Revolution”
--“The Nationalities’ Revolution, part (a)”
--“The Peasants’ Revolution”
--“The Promises of Revolution”


--“The Bolsheviks and the opposition press,” pp. 219-224
--“Why the Cheka was Created (An account by Latsis),” “Lenin on the Organization of an Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counterrevolution,” pp. 295-298
--“Establishment of the Supreme Council of National Economy,” pp. 314-315
--“Financial Measures,” How we got control of the State Bank (From an account by V. Obolensky-Osinsky), Nationalization of the Banks, Search of Safe Deposit Boxes, and Opening the Boxes, pp. 319-325


Hosking, ch. 2

**Week 3: Party Life**

A. The Civil War

B. Bolshevik Visions

(A)
--“A Letter”
--“The rebbe”

Seventeen moments website: (images)
--The Antonov Rebellion

(B)

From Daly and Trofimov: (4 pages total)
--“Demands of the Kronstadt Rebels, 1921”
--“Official Statement on Kronstadt”


Hosking, Ch. 4

**Week 4: The Fate of Markets and Nations**

A. Socialism with a Capitalist Face? The New Economic Policy
B. Restoration? The formation of the Soviet Union

(A)
From Daly and Trofimov:


*Mikhail Bulgakov,* *Heart of a Dog*, entire.

(B)

Hosking, Ch. 5
Week 5: Building Dictatorship
   A. Building dictatorship
   B. Building socialism: the countryside

(A) Seventeen moments:
   --Death of Lenin
   --Industrialization debate texts: “Socialism in One Country versus Permanent Revolution,” “Zinoviev on State Capitalism”


(B) “Letter from Feigin to Ordzhonikidze on conditions on the collective farms” (1932) 
http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/aa2feign.html

Joseph Stalin, “Dizzy with Success” (1930)
http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1930/03/02.htm


Hosking, Ch. 6

Week 6: Building Socialism
   A. Building socialism: the city
   B. Building socialism: the empire

(A) John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker In Russia’s City of Steel* (1942/1989), excerpts.

Seventeen moments:
   --Year of the Stakhanovite: Happy Housewarming, Comrade Busygin! (video)
   --Making Central Asia Soviet: images and video
   --Rebuilding of Moscow: New Moscow (video)


(B) Joshua Kunitz, *Dawn over Samarkand: The Rebirth of Central Asia* (1935). Ch. 9. Available online at: https://archive.org/details/dawnoversamarkan00kunirich

Hosking, Chs. 8, 9

Week 7: Into the Whirlwind
A. The Terror
B. Midterm


Hosking, Ch. 7

Week 8: The Great Patriotic War
A. The Front
B. The Homefront

(A)


Alexander Werth, Russia at War Part 2:x, Part 3: vi, viii; Part 5:v.

(B)

Hosking, Ch. 10

Week 9: The Soviet Postwar
A. Homecoming
B. The Gulag

(A)


(B)
*Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962).

Hosking, Ch. 11

**Week 10: Spheres of Influence**

A. Eastern European Expansion and the Onset of the Cold War
B. Party, State, and Society After Stalin

(A)

(B)
“Letter from Beria to Malenkov,” 1 July 1953
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111921

“Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, ‘On the cult of personality and its consequences,’ delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,”
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115995

Hosking, Ch. 12

**Week 11: Developing Socialism(s)**

A. The Thaw
B. Developed Socialism

(A)
“Statements of Cde. N.S. Khrushchev at a CPSU CC Presidium Meeting,” 25 April 1963
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113343

(B)

“Excerpt from the Chernyaev diary on dissidents in the Soviet Union,”
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121194


Hosking, Ch. 13

**Week 12: Shelf Lives**

A. Collisions

Zdenek Mlynar, Nightfrost in Prague: the end of humane socialism (1980), excerpts.

Mikhail Gorbachev, Zdenek Mlynar, Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism (2002), excerpts.

FILM: “Siberiada” dir. Nikita Mikhalkov (1979)

Hosking, Ch. 14

Week 13: Dissolution
A. Perestroika
B. 1989/1991

(A)

(B)


Week 14: Afterlives and Alternatives?
A. The Fate of Markets and Nations, Revisited
