HIST 474 “History of the GULAG 1918-1991”

Instructor: Marina Soroka

Time: Tuesday/Thursday 10:05-11:25

Office Hours: Thursday 1-2 PM

Room: L 616

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The lecture/seminar course examines selected topics of the history of political repression and forced labour in the Soviet Union during the 1920s through the 1980s, including its origins and aftermath; the effect it had on the society and the ways in which Stalinist violence is remembered and interpreted in Russia and in the West. The students will be invited to apply the skills learned in the previous courses of Russian history to specific texts and issues.

Format

Lectures, following a roughly chronological order will be delivered on Tuesdays. They will introduce the topic of the week, the key events and figures of the period. Owing to limited time, they will necessarily omit certain interesting details which you will find in the textbook and the primary source anthology:


You can find both of them at the McGill bookstore.

Website with useful information: Russian Memorial Society website (English version) http://www.memo.ru/eng/index.htm

The seminars will usually be based around 2 student-led book presentations and discussion of the presentations. Students are expected to prepare thoroughly for seminars, reading the assigned course materials and reviewing the lecture, in order to be able to maintain the discussion. Students will have an opportunity to debate some of the contentious historiographical issues surrounding the subject and use a wide range of primary sources both in discussions and the essay.

On Thursdays there will be a seminar at 10.05 and another at 10.45. During the first week students will register for one of the sessions. Please remember that a) the class will be evenly divided between the two seminar groups, so you have a choice if you register early; b) you cannot switch groups after registering; c) only attendance in your group will count.

Each seminar consists of 2 concise and brief book reports (10 min each) followed by a general discussion of the topics introduced by the weekly lecture, the readings and the report. The instructor will provide context when appropriate and guide the discussion.
Each report will focus on one book, but in some cases I offer you an option of reporting on either of the two or three books listed under no 1 or no 2.

The books chosen for book reports are, with 1-2 exceptions, at the university library, and, if possible, they will be put on reserve. Others can be ordered through the interlibrary loan.

Assignments

The students’ grade will be derived from an analytical essay (4,000 words), a class presentation (book report) and the participation in seminar discussions.

The essay will draw on the rich primary and secondary source base available through the university library and websites. A brief proposal with a one-paragraph statement of your opinion at this point and a tentative annotated bibliography is due in Week 4 of the course. The paper is due in week 10.*

The essay will answer one of the following questions:

1) How was this system of imprisonment and forced labour different from others known to you? Limit your comparison to 3 cases.
2) How did the Great Terror shape Soviet society?
3) Why did the GULag issue become one of the Cold War battlefields?
4) What do survivors’ testimonies tell you about the factors that increased or decreased the prisoners’ chances of survival?

- Please note that late penalty is 2% a day including weekends and that no written assignments are accepted seven (7) days after the due date.

The book report (10 minutes) should follow the structure of a good review, such as you can find in many academic journals, in the NY Review of Books, etc. It should tell your listeners what they need to know about the author(s), intended audience, sources, the historical context of the book’s publication; the main questions posed by the book and how the author answers them; how persuasive he is, and how significant the book is for our subject.

At the end of a seminar the students will identify three key points of that meeting and discussion, so TAKE NOTES as you listen.

Book reports will begin on week 2 (see the sources indicated for that week). As you can see, I tried to harmonize the topic of the lecture and that of the books. I offer you a selection of sources that ranges from short stories to philosophical reflections to political denunciations and academic monographs. It will be interesting to observe how they complement or contradict each other.

The Grade:

Attendance and participation (25%)
Book Presentation (30%) – consult the course outline and sign up with the instructor
Essay proposal (15%) (due 27 Sept)
Essay (30%) (due 11 November)
Week 1

4.9.12  Cancelled. Election day.

6.9.12  History and historiography


Week 2

11.9.12 “Do not say: ‘I will never be a prisoner or a beggar.’
   Russian society and Russian penal justice system

Readings: Applebaum, ch.1

13.9.12  Seminar: Historiography of the GULag. Russian prisons
   Dostoyevsky, F. M. *Notes from the House of the Dead*. Speaker

   Speaker

   Speaker

Week 3

18.9.12  Before the GULag

Readings: Applebaum, ch.2


20.9.12  Seminar: State repression, personal violence - a Russian and a western view

   1) Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*, or:


   2) Zamiatin, Evgueni Ivanovich. “We”, N.Y. 1952, or:

Speaker

Speaker

**Week 4  The proposal is due in class**

25.9.12  To build a new world, we will raze the old one.

Readings: Applebaum, ch.3,4.


27.9.12 Seminar: Stalinist repression machine


Speaker

Speaker

**Week 5**

2.10.12 Public show trials and secret purges

Readings: Applebaum, ch.5

4.10.12 Seminar. The Great Terror


Speaker

Speaker

**Week 6**

9.10.12 Daily life of the Soviet people in the 1930s

Readings: Applebaum, ch.7, 13 (repression system personnel)
11.10.12 Seminar: Outside the GULag

Readings:


2). Feinstein, Elaine. *Anna of All The Russias: The Life of Anna Akhmatova*. N.Y., 2007, or


Speaker

Speaker

**Week 7**

16.10.12 The camps.

Readings: Applebaum, 10, 14.


18.10.12 Seminar: Life in camps and special settlements

Readings:


2) Viola, Lynne. *The Unknown Gulag. The Lost World of Stalin’s Special Settlements*, (Oxford, 2009), or

Mochulsky, Fyodor V. *The Gulag Boss*, 2011

Speaker

Speaker

**Week 8**

23.10.12 The point and rationale of the GULag?

Readings: Applebaum, ch. 6, 11.
25.10.12 Seminar: Soviet science and Stalinism

1. Pringle, Peter. *The Murder of Nikolai Vavilov*. N.Y. 2000, or:

Harford, James L. *Korolev: How One Man Masterminded the Soviet Drive to Beat America to the Moon*, N.Y., 1997


Speaker

Speaker

**Week 9**

30.10.12 Wartime repression

Readings: Applebaum, ch.19,21.

1.11.12 Seminar: Repression system in 1939/40-1945


2) Buber-Neumann, Margarete, *Under Two Dictators: Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler*.

Speaker

Speaker

**Week 10**  **The paper is due in class**

6.11.12 The Potsdam system, the Cold War, the Iron Curtain


[Recommended: Sholokhov, Mikhail."One Man’s Destiny” in *One Man’s Destiny and Other Stories*. 1923-1963. N.Y.,1962]

8.11.12 Seminar: The twilight: 1945-1953

1) Shalamov, Varlam. *The Kolyma Tales*. 

Speaker

Speaker

**Week 11**

13.11.12 The Thaw

Readings: Applebaum, ch.25

[Recommended: Hardy, Jeffrey S. “Gulag Tourism. Khrushchev’s “Show” Prisons in the Cold War Context. 1954-59”

15.11.12 The XX Party Congress and after

1) Fyodorova, Victoria. *The Admiral’s Daughter*, 1979, or

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. N.Y., 1963, or

Medvedev, Zhores. *Ten Years After Ivan Denisovich*. N.Y. 1973

2) Cohen, Stephen F. *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin*. (N.Y., 2012), or


Speaker

Speaker

**Week 12**

20.11.12 “Stagnation” and “Perestroika” (1970s-1991)

Readings: Applebaum, ch.26, 27.

22.11.12 Seminar: the post-Soviet Russia


2) Smith, Kathleen E. *Remembering Stalin’s Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR*. (Ithaka, 1996), or

Speaker

Speaker

**Week 13**

27.11.12 Two ways of protecting the state: Moscow and Havana in 1977-1990

Readings: none.

4.12.12 Seminar: How many things does “GULAG” stand for?


Speaker

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“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.”

“In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.”