

Seth Bernstein
Keene Flint Hall 113
MWF: 9:35 – 10:25
Course Site: <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/470711>
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office hours (KF 209):
M: noon-1, Th: 2-4
(or by appointment)

HIS 3942: History Practicum
The Fall of Communism

Course Description:

What is the History Practicum? If you are in the course, you probably know that it is a prerequisite for being a History major. This course has two purposes:

1. To teach the fundamental principles and practices of history.
2. To apply these fundamentals to the case of the end of the USSR.

Every history is a reconstruction of the past. But not every reconstruction of the past is good history. A good history starts with reliable sources. We will discuss what are appropriate primary sources (documents from the past) and secondary sources (works about the past), how to find them, and how to use them in ethical ways. A good historian thinks about problems and biases these sources pose. Then a good historian brings these sources together in a narrative, ideally one that makes a broader point about how the past unfolded or what it meant. Finally, academic historians think a lot about where their work fits in the historiography, which is a fancy way of saying “how does my paper agree or disagree with what other historians have said in the past.”

We are using as our case study the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The end of the USSR was a process that was both fast and slow. After a failed coup attempt by Communist Party hard liners in August 1991, the fifteen Soviet republics declared independence and became sovereign states in a matter of months. Yet the political and social conditions that allowed this rapid dissolution developed over years and decades. Moreover, the Soviet legacy persists in important respects, such as territorial disputes that we have seen recently in the war in Ukraine, but also in arguments over the meaning of the Soviet past. For these reasons, the fall of the USSR is a useful case study not only as a means of reconstructing events but as a way to consider how political change influences historical memory.

Course Assignments:

Class Participation (15%): Engagement in discussions that demonstrate a student’s having read and understood assigned materials. I do not take attendance but always have a sense of who is attending and who is not. Additionally, participation is not possible without attendance, but attendance does not guarantee full participation points.

Weekly Assignments (60%, 12x5%): Most weeks there will be a short assignment, involving no more than a page of writing usually. Some will involve short answers or composing

bibliographies. Unless otherwise noted, weekly assignments are due on Canvas before the beginning of the Friday class.

Final Proposal (25%): The final project will be a proposal of a larger history research project. Students should identify a problem related to the history of the end of the Soviet Union.

Required Text:

Alexievich, Svetlana. *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*. Translated by Bela Shayevich. New York: Penguin, 2017.

Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* 9th ed. Bedford St. Martin's, 2018. (This is the edition I am using. Newer or older editions are also acceptable.)

Academic Integrity: The University of Florida holds its students to the highest standards, and we encourage students to read the University of Florida Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040), so they are aware of our standards. Any violation of the Student Honor Code will result in a referral the Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution and may result in academic sanctions and further student conduct action. The two greatest threats to the academic integrity of the University of Florida are cheating and plagiarism. Students should be aware of their faculty's policy on collaboration, should understand how to properly cite sources, and should not give nor receive an improper academic advantage in any manner through any medium.

Lateness Policy: An important part of students' work is meeting deadlines. Late assignments will be docked three (3) percentage points per day overdue. Under extraordinary circumstances extensions will be granted but every effort should be made to avoid the need to take an extension.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Online Evaluations: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Grading Policy:

You can find University of Florida's grading policies here:

<http://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-gradingpolicies/>

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62

Course Schedule:

Week 1: What Is a Historian?

Jan. 9: Course Introduction

Materials:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 1-7 (Introduction)

Jan 11.: What Is a Historian?

Reading:

Carr, *What Is History?* (excerpt, on Canvas)

Alexievich, *Secondhand Time*, 4-38 (“Remarks from an Accomplice,”
“Snatches of Street Noise and Kitchen Conversations”)

Jan. 13: The Soviet Past

Listen/Read:

Billy Joel, “We Didn’t Start the Fire”

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFTLKWw542g>)

(<https://genius.com/1002308>)

Assignment:

Respond: How are Billy Joel and Svetlana Alexievich different or similar as historians? (300 words)

Week 2: What Are Sources?

Jan. 18: Sources of History I

Reading:

Catterall, Peter. “What (If Anything) Is Distinctive about Contemporary History?” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 4 (1997): 441–52.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/261109>.

Jan. 20: Sources of History II

Reading:

Alexievich, 42-77 (“On the Beauty of Dictatorship...”)

Edele, Mark. *The Soviet Union: A Short History*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2019. 191-215. (Canvas)

Assignment:

Identify the type of source from a list of sources primary and secondary sources and justify your conclusion.

Week 3: Primary Sources and Perestroika

Jan. 23: What Are Primary Sources

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 33-42

Jan. 25: Evaluating Sources

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 12-25

Jan. 27: Perestroika

Reading:

Alexievich, 91-106 (“On Cries and Whispers...”)

Assignment:

Take Alexievich’s chapter and the previous chapter with Anna Ilinichna and Elena Yurievna. Which of the sources do you think gives the most useful recounting of the Soviet past? (500 words)

Week 4: Secondary Sources

Jan. 30: What Is a Good Secondary Source?

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 42-48

Feb. 1: Library Trip

Feb. 3: The Party and the August Coup

Reading:

Alexievich, 107-141 (“On the Lonely Red Marshal”)

Assignment:

Library Hunt (to be distributed after Feb. 1, due Feb. 6)

Week 5: Finding Sources, Finding Arguments

Feb. 6: Sources on the Internet

Feb. 8: What Is a Historical Argument?

Reading:

Slezkine, Yuri. “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414–52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501300>.

Feb. 10: The Soviet Union as a (Former) Empire

Reading:

Alexievich, 236-247

Assignment:

Find five secondary sources about the fall of the Soviet Union. At least one should be an article. For each, write briefly why they are a reliable source. Find one questionable source about the history of the fall of the Soviet Union and explain why it is not reliable.

Week 6: Historiography

Feb. 13: Historiography and Why Historians Care About It

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 54-62

Feb. 15: Historiography and How to Find It

Reading:

Statiev, Alexander. “‘La Garde meurt mais ne se rend pas!’: Once Again on the 28 Panfilov Heroes.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 4 (2012): 769-798. [doi:10.1353/kri.2012.0045](https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2012.0045).

Feb. 17: The Great Patriotic War as Myth and Memory

Reading:

Alexievich, 187-235 (“On the Cruelty of the Flames...”)

Assignment:

Take one article from your list of secondary sources from the assignment above. What is the historiographical question it is asking (in one sentence)? Find three academic articles or books that ask the same question.

Week 7: Gender and Notetaking

Feb. 20: Notetaking I: The Start of Learning

Reading:

Rampallo, *Pocket Guide*, 26-32

Little Vera (<https://sovietmoviesonline.com/melodrama/malenkaya-vera>)

Assignment pt. 1:

We will have a quiz on the viewing for today (think basic “who what when where why” questions). You can use one handwritten page of notes. The quiz is pass/fail. Turn in your notes with the quiz.

Feb. 22: Notetaking II: The Start of Research

Feb. 24: Gender after the USSR

Assignment pt. 2:

Take your notes from the previous class. Now, instead of writing notes as preparation for a quiz, make notes as preparation to write an essay to answer the question: “What were gender norms like after the fall of the Soviet Union?” Turn in a short explanation of how the strategy changed (100 words) alongside the new notes.

Week 8: The Post-Soviet Economy and Research Topics

Feb. 27: Formulating a Research Topic

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 83-103

Alexievich 320-337, (“On People Who Instantly Transformed after the Fall of Communism”)

Mar. 1: Research Topic Workshop

Mar. 3: *Kapitalizm*

Reading:

Bill Browder. *Red Notice: A True Story of High Finance, Murder, and One Man's Fight for Justice*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015. (excerpts)

Assignment:

Take the same article from the assignment above. What is the research topic in the article? What question does the author ask? How is the research topic different from the historiography?

Week 9: Writing and Chechnya

Mar. 6: Writing Like a Historian

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 62-82

Mar. 8: Writing Workshop

Readings:

Alexievich, 414-433 (“On How Nothing Disgusts the Dead and the Silence of Dust”)

Assignment:

Find a short source on the Chechen War other than the Alexievich chapter from this week. Using that source and the Alexievich chapter, write a short comparative analysis (500-750 words). The analysis should do three things: 1. Analyze the content of the first source. 2. Analyze the content of the second source. 3. Describe how the two sources intersect.

Mar. 10: NO CLASS

SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Putinism and Citations

Mar. 20: Citations: Why?

Reading:

Alexievich, 285-304 (“Snatches of Street Noise and Kitchen Conversations”)

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 112-150

Mar. 22: Citations: How?

Mar. 24: Putin and the Color Revolutions

Readings:

Putin, Vladimir. “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”

<https://www.prlib.ru/en/article-vladimir-putin-historical-unity-russians-and-ukrainians>.

Navalny, Aleksei. *Putin’s Palace*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMxqTae75Fs&t>. (at least the first ~15 minutes on Putin’s biography and a bit of the part about the palace that starts at 1:15:00)

Assignment:

Based on a list of works provided, produce footnotes and bibliographic entries for all the works.

Week 11: Plagiarism and Education

Mar. 27: What Is Plagiarism?

Reading:

Corwin, Julie. “Russia: U.S. Academics Charge Putin With Plagiarizing Thesis.” *Radio Free Europe*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1067113.html>.

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 104-111

Mar. 29: Plagiarism Workshop

Mar. 31: Education and Technocracy

Reading:

Josephson, Paul R. “The Crisis in Russian Physics.” *American Scientist* 81, no. 6 (1993): 571–79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29775060>.

Gel’man, Vladimir. “Success Stories amid Bad Governance.” In *The Politics of Bad Governance in Contemporary Russia*, 114–35. University

of Michigan Press, 2022.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.11621795.11>.

Assignment:

Take a section from an article (article TBD). Write a paragraph (~100 words) summarizing this section using your own words and providing a footnote at the end.

Week 12: Unorthodox Sources

Apr. 3: Memory and Oral History

Reading:

“Best Practices.” *Oral History Association*. <https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/>

Alexievich, “On the Darkness of the Evil One and ‘the Other Life We Can Build out of this One’”

Apr. 5: Film and Fiction

Viewing:

Generation P (2011). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpAdOi1Vo5s>.

Apr. 7: Digital History

Reading:

Chatterje-Doody, Tolz, “Regime legitimation, not nation-building: Media commemoration of the 1917 revolutions in Russia’s neo-authoritarian state,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (Canvas)

Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscopic: Big Digital History* (Chapter 1, “The Joys of Big Data for Historians,”

http://web.archive.org/web/20160315231252/http://www.themacroscopic.org/?page_id=595)

Programming Historian (<http://programminghistorian.org>, review briefly)

Assignment:

Submit a preliminary topic for the final paper. Failure to turn in a topic will result in an automatic 10% deduction to the final project.

Week 13: Rethinking and Revising

Apr. 10: Rethinking

Apr. 12: Revising

Apr. 14: History and Current Events?

“Between Memory and History in Ukraine. *SRB Podcast*.

<https://srbpodcast.org/2022/11/11/between-memory-and-history-in-ukraine/>

Assignment:

Take your assignment from March 10. Record yourself reading it aloud (ie, with a phone, computer, tape recorder etc.). Revise the assignment based on problems you noticed in the reading.

Week 14: Workshopping in Small Groups

Week 15: Final Thoughts

Apr. 24: The Historical Profession
Sturtevant, Paul B. “What Can You Do with That History Degree?” *American Historical Association*. <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/why-study-history/careers-for-history-majors/what-can-you-do-with-that-history-degree>.
“Careers for History Majors.” *American Historical Association*. <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/why-study-history/careers-for-history-majors>. (explore various articles)
Mintz, Steven. “What Should We Do About Undergrads Who Want to Pursue a Humanities Doctorate?” *Inside Higher Education*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/what-should-we-do-about-undergrads-who-want-pursue-humanities-doctorate>.

Apr. 26: Summarizing

***Final project due no later than May 4, 2:30pm