

Seth Bernstein
Keene Flint Hall 113
MWF: 8:30-9:20AM
Course Site: <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/553900>
Course Grader: Jerald Cheesborough

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W: 10am-1pm
(or by appointment)

HIS 3942: History Practicum
The Death of Stalin

Catalog Description: Learn the elements of the professional study of history: the critical reading of sources (primary and secondary); research skills; and a variety of historical methodologies.

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 changes the Soviet Union experienced (or did not experience) after the death of Joseph Stalin.

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 death of Joseph Stalin. As General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1922 to his death in 1953, Stalin oversaw massive transformation of the country, including the creation of a planned economy, the Gulag prison labor system, and the victory in World War II. When Stalin died, his successors faced the challenge of reforming a system that had become rigid without upsetting the foundations of Soviet rule. This course will use the changes that occurred after Stalin’s death (or failed to occur) as a way to think about the questions all historians have to ask about continuity and change at critical moments in the past. The transition from Stalin also provides an opportunity to reflect on the connections between history and memory.

Course Assignments:

Class Participation (10%): Engagement in discussions that demonstrate a student’s having read and understood assigned materials. I will 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.

Talk Visits (2.5% x 2, + .5% extra credit for additional talks): Attend at least two history-related talks and write a 1-page (250 word) reaction paper. These include meetings of Phi Alpha Theta. Pass/fail.

Weekly Assignments (~60%, 13x4.6%): 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 Thursday class.

Final Proposal (25%): The final project will be a 1000-word (~four pages, double-spaced) proposal of a larger history research project. Students should identify a problem related to the history of the death of Stalin. These can be issues like reactions to the death of Stalin, memory of Stalinism, or comparisons of continuity and change in policy before and after 1953.

Required Text:

Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* 9th ed. Bedford St. Martin's, 2018. (Other editions may work.)

Other materials will be available on our Canvas page as PDFs or links.

University Policies:

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).

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

I will round grades to the nearest whole number (e.g., 89.5 = 90 = A-). Grades of C or better fulfill the HIS 3942 requirement for the History major.

Course Schedule:

Introduction

Jan. 12: Course Introduction

Jan. 14: What Is History?

Death of Stalin, An Overview

Reading:

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

Carr, E.H. *What Is History?*. Vintage, 1967. Chapter 1. (16 pages, on Canvas)

Viewing:

Iannucci, Armando. *The Death of Stalin*. 2018. Entertainment One Films.

<https://tubitv.com/movies/676665/the-death-of-stalin>.

Jan. 16: What Is a Historian?

Assignment:

Listen/Read: Billy Joel, “We Didn’t Start the Fire”

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

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

Respond: How are Billy Joel and Armando Iannucci (or E.H. Carr) different or similar as historians? (300 words)

Sources of History

Jan. 19: No class, (MLK Day)

Jan. 21: Sources of History I

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 8-12

Jan. 23: Sources of History II

Assignment:

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

Primary Sources + Social Reactions to the Death of Stalin

Jan. 26: Primary Sources

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 33-42

Jan. 28: Evaluating Sources

Reading:

Evgenii Evtushenko. *Precocious Autobiography*. Moscow, 1963. (Reproduced at *Seventeen Moments of Soviet History*, <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1954-2/succession-to-stalin/succession-to-stalin-texts/mourners-crushed-at-stalins-funeral/>)

“Special Report from P. Ivashutin to B.P. Obruchnikov” [Police report on responses to the death of Stalin in Ukraine]. March 7, 1953. Security Services of Ukraine Archive, collection 16, file 875, pages 43-58. (On Canvas)

Jan. 30:

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 12-25

Assignment:

You will receive a source about the death of Stalin. Evaluate the reliability of the source. Who is the author? How would you verify the source?

Library Resources + the Media

Feb. 2: Library Trip with Dr. Helene Huet (8:30am at Library West Instructional Lab)

Feb. 4: Succession and the Media

Harrison E. Salisbury. *American in Russia*. Harper and Brothers, 1955. Pages 158-175. (On Canvas)

Harrison E. Salisbury. “Russia’s Mood Is Grim as Her Dictator Dies.” *New York Times*. March 8, 1953.

<https://login.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/russias-mood-is-grim-as-her-dictator-dies/docview/112620015/se-2?accountid=10920>.

“Announcement of Stalin’s Death.” *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*. March 21, 1953. <https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/13832537>.

Feb. 6: AI Discussion I

Assignment:

Library hunt (due after trip)

Secondary Sources + the Doctor’s Plot/Gulag

Feb. 9: Secondary Sources I: Reliable Sources

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 42-48.

Feb. 11: The Doctor’s Plot and the Gulag

Reading:

Seth Bernstein. "Unfinished Business: Stalinist Anti-Jewish Investigations before and after the Death of Stalin." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* (2024): 35-59.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. "Forty Days of Kengir." (Reproduced at *Seventeen Moments of Soviet History*, <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1954/prisoners-return/prisoners-return-texts/the-forty-days-of-kengir/>)

Feb. 13: Secondary Sources II: The Internet and Sources

Assignment:

Find five secondary sources about the Soviet Union around the time of Stalin's death. At least one should be an article. For each, write briefly why it is a reliable source. Find one questionable secondary source about the history of Stalin's death or related issues and explain why it is not reliable.

De-Stalinization

Feb. 16: Notetaking I: The Start of Learning

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 26-32

Feb. 18: De-Stalinization in Politics

Reading:

Nikita Khrushchev. "Speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU." *Marxists.org*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>.

Assignment pt. 1:

We will have a quiz on the reading from the Khrushchev reading. The quiz will be pass/fail, factual questions. You can use one handwritten page of notes. The quiz is pass/fail. Turn in your notes with the quiz.

Feb. 20: Notetaking II: The Start of Research

Assignment pt. 2:

Take your notes from the previous class on Khrushchev's. Now, instead of writing notes as preparation for a quiz, make notes as preparation to write an essay to answer the question: "What were the limits of de-Stalinization?" Turn in a short explanation of how the strategy changed (100 words) alongside the new notes.

Research Topic Workshop + Destalinization of Morality/Gender Expectations

Feb. 23: Formulating a Research Topic

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 83-103

Feb. 25: Abortion, Atheism and Communist Morality

Reading:

Cohn, Edward D. "Sex and the Married Communist: Family Troubles, Marital Infidelity, and Party Discipline in the Postwar USSR, 1945-64." *The Russian Review* 68, no. 3 (2009): 429–50.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20621049>.

"Protection of Motherhood." *Seventeen Moments of Soviet History*.

<https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936-2/abolition-of-legal-abortion/abolition-of-legal-abortion-texts/protection-of-motherhood/>.

"Repeal of the Ban on Abortions." *Seventeen Moments of Soviet History*.

<https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1956-2/repealing-the-ban-on-abortion/repealing-the-ban-on-abortion-texts/10357-2/>.

Feb. 27: Research Topic Workshop

Assignment:

Take one of three articles (provided on Canvas). What is the research topic in the article? What question does the author ask? What kind of research topic could you propose that would be related to this article but would not be the same?

Historiography + The Soviet Empire

Mar. 2: What Is an Argument?

Mar. 4: The Soviet Empire in 1956

Reading:

Wojnowski, Zbigniew. "De-Stalinization and Soviet Patriotism: Ukrainian Reactions to East European Unrest in 1956." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 4 (2012): 799–829. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/kri.2012.0048>.

Mar. 6: Historiography

Assignment:

Choose one article from the list of secondary sources (Canvas). Look through the text and footnotes of the introduction in particular.

1. What is the main argument of the article?
2. What is a historical article/book that the article cites that is related to this argument?
3. How does the author's argument relate to the cited article? Is it making an opposing argument? Making a concurring argument? Agreeing but taking the field in a new direction?

Writing + the Cultural Thaw (in Film)

Mar. 9: Writing Like a Historian

Readings:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 62-82

(recommended) William Strunk and E.B. White. *Elements of Style*.

https://ia804502.us.archive.org/5/items/pdfy-2_qp8jQ61OI6NHwa/Strunk%20%26%20White%20-%20The%20Elements%20of%20Style%2C%204th%20Edition.pdf.

Mar. 11: The Thaw in (WWII) Film

Viewings:

Sergey Bondarchuk, dir. *Fate of a Man*. Mosfilm, 1959.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7xGW8UvBKQ>. [1 hour 41 minutes]

Mikhail Chiaureli, dir. *Fall of Berlin*. Part II. Mosfilm, 1949.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVp7Nf6pQnI>. [watch last 15 minutes]

Mar. 13: Writing Workshop

Assignment:

Return to the source from the assignment of January 30. Find a source (newspaper article or photograph) in an online database we have explored in class such as *New York Times* archive or the Harvard Project Interviews that intersects with that source. In three paragraphs (~500 words), summarize: 1. The content of the first source. 2. The content of the new source. 3. How these two sources intersect.

SPRING BREAK

Citations

Mar. 23: Citations How?

Readings:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 112-150

Mar. 25: Citations Why?

Mar. 27: Research Proposal Check-In

Assignment:

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

Plagiarism/AI + Ideology and Idealism

Mar. 30: Plagiarism

Reading:

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, 104-111

Apr. 1: Ideology and Idealism

Viewing:

Georgii Danelia, dir. *I Walk Around Moscow*. Mosfilm, 1963.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyVfdz-aF1k>.

“Festival on the Streets” [from the 1956 Moscow International Youth Festival].

Seventeen Moments of Soviet History. <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1956-2/international-youth-festival/international-youth-festival-video/festival-on-the-streets-1957/>.

Apr. 3: AI Workshop

Reading:

Ted Underwood. “AI Is the Future. Higher Ed Should Shape It.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. November 4, 2025.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/ai-is-the-future-higher-ed-should-shape-it>.

Assignment:

Take a section from an article (we will use several, I will put students in groups). Write a paragraph (~100 words) summarizing this section using your own words and providing a footnote at the end. Ask a chatbot (e.g., [https://chatgpt.com/Links to an external site.](https://chatgpt.com/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site)) to summarize the same article. In 250 words, discuss how the process of summarizing the article with a chatbot was productive and in what ways it was problematic. What were the benefits of summarizing the article yourself? Did you come to different conclusions than the chatbot? Or was the process itself important?

Memory + Stalinism and the Fall of the Soviet Union

Apr. 6: Memory and Oral History

Apr. 8: Stalinism at the End of the USSR

Readings:

Svetlana Alexievich. “On a Different Bible and a Different Kind of Believer.”

Secondhand Time. Random House, 2016. https://uf1-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma99383990931706597.

Nina Andreeva. “I Cannot Forsake My Principles.” Translated at ProleWiki.

https://en.prolewiki.org/wiki/Library:I_Cannot_Forsake_My_Principles.

Apr. 10: Prospectus workshop

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.

Digital History + Revising + Stalinism Today

Apr. 13: Stalinism Remembered Today(ish) + Revising

Reading:

Smith, Kathleen E. "A Monument for Our Times? Commemorating Victims of Repression in Putin's Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 8 (2019): 1314–44. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26826664>.

Apr. 15: Digital Workshop

In-Class Work: We will make some maps together

Apr. 17: Prospectus Discussions

Assignment:

Record yourself reading the March 13 writing assignment aloud with your smart phone or computer. After you read the assignment to yourself, revise the assignment on your own.

Wrapping Up

Apr. 20: History Careers

Readings:

Look through pages on this site: "Careers for History Majors." American Historical Association. <https://www.historians.org/resource/careers-for-history-majors/>.

Apr. 22: Final Thoughts/Surveys/Questions on Prospectus

FINAL PAPER DUE APRIL 30, 9:30AM