

**Understanding and Misunderstanding Russia: Past, Present, and Future**

or

**Russia Through the Western Eyes: Past and Present -**

Georgetown University

Liberal Studies Degree Program

Fall 2020

ICC 113 OR Zoom Video Platform

DAY Thursday, TIME 6:30pm-9:00pm

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**DRAFT SYLLABUS**

**Subject to Revision**

Alone in the world, we [the Russians] have given nothing to the world, taken nothing from the world, bestowed not even a single idea upon the fund of human ideas, contributed nothing to the progress of the human spirit, and we have distorted all progressivity which has come to us.

Petr Chaadaev, "Philosophical letters," 1826.

This empire [Russia], vast as it is, is only a prison to which the emperor holds the key. Marquise de Custine, *Journey for Our Time*, 1839.

For some hundred years, Russia has never been at rest, except for a period suitable to prepare her future means to attack, and await her projected aggrandizement.

Robert Mignan (captain) *A Winter Journey through Russia, the Caucasian Alps, and Georgia...* 1839

You cannot grasp Russia with your mind  
Or judge her by any common measure,  
Russia is one of a special kind –  
You can only believe in her.

Fedor Tutchetv, 1866.

It has been my conviction for many years that the Russian and the Englishman are as it were the complementary halves of a man. What the Russian lacks the Englishman has; what the Englishman lacks, that has the Russian. The works of Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoievsky, Tolstoi, Tchekov—the amazing direct and truthful revelations of these masters—has let me, I think, into some secrets of the Russian soul, so that the Russians I have met seem rather clearer to me than men and women of other foreign countries.

John Galsworthy, "Englishmen and Russian", 1916

Were the Soviet Union to sink tomorrow under the waters of the ocean, the American military-industrial establishment would have to go on, substantially unchanged, until some other adversary could be invented. Anything else would be an unacceptable shock to the American economy.

George F. Kennan

My fellow Americans, I am pleased to say that I have signed a legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We began bombing in five minutes.

Ronald Reagan, off-the-record joke made during the preparation for the radio address. 1984

In Russia there are no business stories. And there are no politics stories. There are no love stories. There are only crime stories.

Andrew Miller, *Snowdrops*, 2011.

## Course description

There are numerous obstacles that impede one nation's understanding of another. Naturally differences in political views, historical traditions, value systems, cultures and stereotypes can have a negative impact on mutual understandings and relations between countries. While stereotypes are often inaccurate, they nonetheless affect the relationships between the nations. In the eyes of foreigners, Russia long has/had been perceived as a huge country with enormous natural resources, a very cold climate, confronted with financial difficulties, extreme poverty, social turmoil, drunkenness, bizarre and flamboyant people, suffering under cruel regimes, but also one that possessed a mysterious and romantic soul.

The Russians themselves also have held different views and ideas about their Motherland and culture. For example, in his *Philosophical Letters*, [1836] Piotr Chaadaev, a famous nineteenth century Russian intellectual, claimed that Russia never contributed anything to the history of Western civilization. According to Chaadaev, the turning point in Russian history came in the year 988, when the Great Prince of Rus Vladimir chose Orthodoxy over Catholicism. This decision, Chaadaev believed, severed Russia's connection with Western Europe and the progress associated with its subsequent Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment. As a result, Russia stood apart from the "global" community, belonged to no cultural system, and contributed nothing to the progress of humanity. Remarkably, but today some Russian intellectuals hold similar ideas.

The British journalist and historian Peter Hopkirk attributes the creation of the "Russian bogey" to Sir Robert Wilson, a decorated British general, who personally witnessed the 1812 burning of Moscow. Wilson initially admired Russia. However, upon returning to London after Napoleon's defeat and disgusted by the atrocities committed by the Russian army against French soldiers he alleged to have witnessed, discarded his romantic image of Russia.

The Marquise Astolphe-Louis-Léonor de Custine, the famous French aristocrat, traveled to Russia in 1839 and subsequently penned a widely read and very negative memoir in which he mocked the Russian nobility, the Orthodox Church, and Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855), whom he condemned for suppressing the Polish uprising of 1831–32. "Russia's governing style is absolute monarchy moderated by assassination," he wrote. Custine claimed that the air became freer when he crossed the Prussian border. Much later, the American diplomat George Kennan would say that this description of Nicholas I predicated the emergence of Joseph Stalin.

During the Cold War, peoples in the United States and the Western Europe lived in constant fear of the outbreak of the new World War. During this period an image of Russia as totalitarian state led by a bloodthirsty communist regime that ruled over an extremely poor,

obscure, drunken, brutish population was widespread in the West. Yet, in 1991, the Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet Union disintegrated, and the Cold War came to the end. Despite predictions of the “end of history,” in the decades since relations between Russia and the West have remained very tense and the perception of Russia largely negative.

In fact, Russian actions in recent years have solidified this view. In seeking to understand fully current Western images it is vital to trace their history. To this end, this course will examine both the continuity and changes in Western perceptions of Russia and its people as well as the events, in and outside of Russia, which informed and influenced them. In addition, it will look at Russia’s historical images of itself and of the West.

### **Course Objectives**

This course is grounded in the belief that without knowledge of the past one cannot understand the present. The course is based on a diversity of sources, including fiction, travelogues and variety of professional fields including history, political science, and journalism. Students will examine different and often opposing points of views on Russia’s past, present, and conceivably future. To complement class readings, the class also will view three films.

A key goal of this course is to promote a better understanding of the role of Russia in today’s world by looking at the historical and present-day images of it in order to understand they have affected Russia’s relations with the West. An additional goal of the course is to help students think critically about modern political events in part through drawing on historical precedent. Historical analysis is at its core an examination of cause and effect and change over time. As the historian Robert B. Marks noted in book *The Origins of the Modern World*, “...a long-term historical perspective does enable us to draw some meaningful conclusions about the past and present and to make educated forecasts for the future.”

### **Course Requirements**

#### **I. Discussion Sessions**

The class will feature weekly discussions based on the assigned reading(s). The purpose of the discussion sessions is to provide opportunities for students to exchange opinions, interpretations, and ideas about the readings and the topics they address. A good discussion is one where the participants feel that they have learned something new, something that they would not have learned by simply reading the materials on their own. Note - the value of each discussion section ultimately rests on a willingness to come prepared to talk. Thus, all students are expected to do all of the assigned readings. Failure to do so will impair your ability to follow, benefit from, and actively participate in discussion, as well as diminish the value of the session for those students who are prepared.

Active, informed, thoughtful and constructive class participation is a critical part of the assessment criteria for the course. Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to engage in a critical analysis of the assigned readings. Strong and effective class participation is characterized by:

- Demonstrated mastery of the assigned material;
- Critical examination of the assumptions and implications of the assigned readings;
- Ability to identify key issues, synthesize information (including making connections or exploring contrasts with previously assigned readings);

- Respectful but probing examination of the contributions of your peers and effective facilitation in clarifying different points of view, thereby contributing to the learning of the whole group.

### **Guide for Briefings**

Each class will begin with a student briefing on the week's reading. The briefing (which should last approximately 7 to 10 minutes) should consist of the following:

- It should begin with an introduction that provides a very brief overview of the contents of the reading and your evaluation of the reading.
- Next, you should provide a concise summary of the main points of the reading.
- Who are (or were) the authors? What, if any, training or experience qualified them to write about these issues? You also might note how the book has been received and if there are similar or competing books.
- Next, you should evaluate the quality and consistency of the author's argument. Your evaluation should include discussion of the sources the author used. Examine the references in the footnotes or endnotes and the bibliography, when available. If this is historical study or work of political scientist, upon what types of sources is the book based? How extensive is each author's research or how deep is the author's knowledge? What is the range of sources consulted by each author, when applicable?
- The briefing should end with a conclusion that ties together the issues raised in the reading and relates them to the general themes of the course.

The briefing will be followed by an open discussion. Each class meeting several students will be assigned the responsibility of preparing questions for the class (plus the student providing the briefing on the reading). **These students must post at least one question on-line at least 48 hours before class. Failure to submit a question for discussion will result in the student receiving a "zero" for the day's discussion grade.**

- The questions must be designed to provoke discussion on the readings (while they primarily should focus on the assigned reading, they also may consider links to previous readings as well as any broader implications of the work to global history, international relations, or other inter-societal relations).
- Do not assume additional knowledge on the part of your classmates (outside of the week's reading). If you desire to reference additional material, make it available to the rest of us.
- When including quotes or referencing specific points in the reading, please provide page numbers.
- Do not post a question that already has been asked (refrain from asking a follow up question to one that already has been posted – save that for class).

## **II. Written Assignments**

Two short papers: Students are supposed to write two critical reviews on any topic listed topic. Review and discuss any assigned books. You can pick up a topic from the upcoming class. You can also supplement your paper with other readings of your choice. %10 for each paper.

One long fifteen -eighteen pages long paper. You should address a topic of "path to the present." This paper has them find a relatively recent news headline and then answer the question - how did this situation get to this point by tracing the history of the issue/situation

from the past. This paper should be based on several primary and secondary sources and needs to be discussed with me in advance. Again, this is an excellent way to show that some understanding of the past is important for understanding the present.

### **Analytical/Critical Reviews**

An analytical/critical review essay is intended to be an in-depth analysis of a primary and secondary text, **not a summary** of the work's content. Keep in mind that a critique consists of thoughts, responses, and reactions. It is not necessarily negative (i.e., "critical" does not mean negative; skeptical does not mean cynical). If you believe a book is well written and presents an original thesis supported by convincing evidence, say so. A good analytical review does not have to be negative; it does have to be fair and analytical. Regardless of the position you take, you must justify and support by your arguments.

Your finished product should be original and well-argued and demonstrate thoughtful consideration of all relevant readings. It also should be well-organized, clearly written, and grammatical. In grading, analytical and critical thinking skills are as important as mastery of facts and content.

### **Writing Center**

Since writing is an important part of this class, you are encouraged to visit the Writing Center (217a Lauinger) and work with one of the trained tutors. While you solely are responsible for the work you submit, and the Center's tutors will not do your work for you, Writing Center tutors can talk you through any stage of your writing process, from brainstorming a thesis and organizing your thoughts to revising, editing and proofreading. To set up an appointment, visit <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>

Feel free to contact Professor Kathryn Temple, Writing Services Coordinator for Continuing Studies, at [templek@georgetown.edu](mailto:templek@georgetown.edu) for further information on the Writing Services.

### **Academic Integrity**

**You are required to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of the course. Any violations will result in failure of the course. If you have any questions regarding Honor Conduct Standards, please reference the following:**  
<https://gushare.georgetown.edu/eeg23/Faculty%20Guidance/Honor%20Conduct%20Standards.html>

### **Standard Paper Format**

- Typewritten on 8.5 x 11-inch white paper
- Double spaced
- Standard size and style font (i.e. Times New Roman 12)
- Standard margins (margins of 1 inch [top and bottom] and 1 or 1.25 inches on the sides)
- Numbered pages

- Introduce: thesis paragraph(s) to start (be clear: present your main argument/question and how you will address/answer it in the body of your paper); conclude: concluding paragraph(s) at end
- Avoid unnecessary jargon, informal expressions (slang), and use of the first person. Keep quotations short and to the point; indent and single space if using a long citation. You may use either footnotes or endnotes, or cite the work in the body of the text as follows: “quote” (Author, page). **Note - all quotations, as well as ideas, interpretations, conclusions, etc., that are not the original work of the student, must be properly cited.** An exception can be made for facts in common knowledge
- List outside sources used in the paper in a bibliography (not counted in page total)
- Avoid weak/questionable source material (e.g., Wikipedia). Did you know that Georgetown University provides access to Encyclopedia Britannica?

### **The Elements of Good Expository Writing**

- 1) All essays should present a **clear argument (thesis)**. A **thesis** is what you have to say about the topic, the angle (interpretation) from which you think the topic should be viewed, your attitude toward it, your opinion, and/or your evaluation.
- 2) All paragraphs should contain one and only one main idea, accompanied by supporting ideas, evidence, and facts. The main idea is often expressed in a **topic sentence** that makes an assertion the rest of the paragraph provides support for. All paragraphs must have unity, development, coherence, and completeness.
- 3) All assertions must be supported with **evidence**. Evidence is “the something that makes another thing evident.” It is the incontrovertible fact, the acceptable interpretation, or the logical statement that your reader will accept without further proof. Facts, figures, statistics, authorities, experts, illustrations, examples, common knowledge, personal observation, logic, reasoning, and quotations all can serve as evidence in expository writing. For the topics assigned here, the best evidence is information and ideas derived from the assigned class readings, the lectures, and discussion.
- 4) All evidence derived from the work or statements of others must be acknowledged using the proper forms of **citation**.

### **Grading**

**Note - more than one absence may require that the student withdraw from the course**

- Classroom discussion and briefing —25%
- Written assignment: two short essays five-six pages each: 10% + %10 (%20)
- One long essay 12-15 pages long: % 40
- Three critical essays on the films – 15% (5% for each)

**Failure to fulfill any of the course requirements may result in failure of the course.**

Critical reading, consistent attendance, and active engagement in class discussions all are vital to your learning and the success of this course. To earn an A level grade for discussion participation, you must come well-prepared for class, consistently interact with your colleagues and move the discussion forward with your own questions, interpretations, and ideas. If you attend every session and occasionally contribute to discussion, demonstrating good preparation on the whole, you will receive a B level grade for participation. If you attend but never participate, your grade will be no higher than a B-.

### **Instructional Continuity**

Should classes be canceled, students should await case-by-case directions from the instructor.

### **Attendance Policy**

- Attendance is mandatory.
- All students will be allowed one absence without penalty during the semester.
- Each unexcused absence will result in 5 points being deducted from the student's discussion participation grade.
- Students receiving an excused absence must submit a **2 page reaction paper** to the week's assigned reading. These papers should be your critical reaction to the reading (or some portion of it). These papers are graded on a pass/fail basis; a hardcopy must be submitted no later than the beginning of the following class.

### **Excused Absences:**

- Absence for religious observances: Please notify me by person and email at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with classes.
  - "Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work."
- Absence for documented illness: Students who miss multiple classes due to prolonged illness should provide documentation of such to the Dean's Office, which will communicate with the student's professors. A prolonged absence may necessitate the student's withdrawal from the course or from the University for the semester.

### **Liberal Studies Program, General Learning Goals and Outcomes**

The Graduate Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University offers a course of study that engages students in reading, research, reflection, discussion, and writing. In the pursuit of the degree, students are to discern and wrestle with the content generally associated with the "liberal" arts in the root meaning of that term, namely, what it means for human beings to be endowed with freedom and what ennobles and enhances human freedom. The two general goals of the program, therefore, are to analyze and assess human values (who are we and what ought we to do?) and to undertake such study in an interdisciplinary fashion. The program thus draws from the social sciences as well as from those fields generally defined as the humanities (e.g., theology, philosophy, literature, and art), recognizing that the moral dimension of human life embraces social, political, and economic relationships as well as personal choices. The program is to culminate in a thesis that successfully analyzes a question of value related to a student's chosen curricular field of study.

### *Academic Integrity*

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, harassment, or assault. University policy requires faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role it is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct.

### **Required Textbooks (available at the bookstore)**

- Keith Gessen, *A Terrible Country* (a novel) (Penguin, 2018), 338 pages, \$16
- Stephen Cohen, *War with Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate* (Skyhorse Publisher, 2019), 225 pages, \$18.99
- Andrew Miller, *Snowdrops*, (a novel) (London: Atlantic, 2011) / \$10 e-book, 273 pages, \$14.86
- Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019) [506 pages selection]. \$12.20
- Guy Mettan, *Creating Russophobia: From the Great Religious Schism to Anti-Putin Hysteria* (Clarity Press, 2017) 390 pages, \$28.76
- Richard Pipes, *Russian under the Old Regime* [1974]; (Penguin books, 1995), 350 pages, \$15.30

\$107 total. All prices taken from Amazon as soft cover though used books and kindle versions are much cheaper,

For general references on History of Russia look at

Paul Bushkovitch, *A Concise History of Russia*, [Cambridge Concise Histories] (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

### **Recommended but not required:**

Dominic Basulto, *Russophobia: How Western Media Turns Russia Into the Enemy* (Druzhba Project: 2015)

John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950)

Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)



Three films will be viewed

- *Ninotchka* (1939) [US], directed by Ernst Lubitsch
- *The Russian Ark* (2002), [Russia] directed by Alexander Sokurov.
- TBA

### **Week 1. Introduction**

### **Week 2. What is Orientalism? Can we apply the term Orientalism to Russia? What did Russian thinkers have to say about their own country?**

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, "Introduction," (1978).

Nikolai Karamzin, *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, 1811.

Peter Chaadaev, *Philosophical letters*, 1828-1830.

*Apology of a madman*, 1837.

On e-reserve.

### **Week 3. Russia through the eyes of a French traveler.**

Marquis de Custine, *Journey For Our Time: The Journals of the Marquis de Custine Russia 1839*,

Available online for free but the quality of upload is not very good.

[https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.120181/2015.120181.The-Marquis-De-Custine-And-His-Russia-In-1839\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.120181/2015.120181.The-Marquis-De-Custine-And-His-Russia-In-1839_djvu.txt)

Also on e-reserve.

### **Week 4. Europe through the eyes of a great Russian writer. And Russia through the eyes of the German traveler.**

August von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire: its people, institutions, and resources in 2 volumes 1847-1848*. Selection, pages TBA

F. M. Dostoevsky, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 1863

On e-reserve.

**First paper is due! Please discuss with me your long paper!**

### **Week 5. Is Russia totally incapable of being a democratic country?**

Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (2nd ed. 1995). On e-reserve.

**Selected pages TBA, though reading the whole book is recommended,**

### **Week 6. Was the previous statement really obvious?**

Nancy Shields Kollmann, *By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 312 pages. Available online through

Georgetown University Library.

Whole book!

### **Week 7. Does Russia have a "slave soul"?**

Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of*

*Suffering* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995) 330 pages.

Available online through Georgetown University Library.

**Week 8. Who is to blame?**

Guy Mettan, *Creating Russophobia: From the Great Religious Schism to Anti-Putin Hysteria* (Clarity Press, 2017) 390 pages [selection, pages TBA!]

**Second paper is due! Please show me an outline of your long paper.**

**Week 9. Is Russia a “terrible country”?**

Keith Gessen, *A Terrible Country* (a novel) (Penguin, 2018)

**Week 10. “Are there only crime stories in Russia?”**

Andrew Miller *Snowdrops* (a novel). (London: Atlantic, 2011)

**Week 11. Are we in new Cold War with Russia?**

Stephen Cohen, *War with Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate* (Skyhorse Publisher, 2019). Whole book!

**Week 12. Are We in new Cold War with Russia? Part 2**

Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019) [506 pages selection, pages TBA]

**Week 13. Russia’s- Georgia War, 2008: who is to blame?**

Thomas Golts, *Georgia Diary: A Chronicle of War And Political Chaos in the Post-soviet Caucasus* (New York, M. E. Sharpe: 2009).

Svante E. Cornell, S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009)

Thomas, de Waal, *The Caucasus. An Introduction*, (NY and London: Oxford UP, 2019). [second edition]

Selection on e-reserve, pages TBA

**Week 14. Russia under Putin and the new conflicts with the West ! (?)**

Russia’s election, the Crimean (Ukrainian) Crises, Russia’s interference into the US election, Sanctions and Contra-Sanction, Putin’s declaration of the end of liberalism in the World. –

Reading TBA.

**Final paper is due on the last day of the class**