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HIS 240: Russia, the Soviet Union, and the CIS Final Paper Assignment

Overview

This paper is the culminating assignment of this class. It serves as an opportunity to put the critical reading and writing skills you have been building all semester to work in service of a unique historical argument. In these prompts, you are asked to place our sources in dialogue and draw your own, evidence-based conclusions about what they reveal about major developments in the history of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia. These topics are designed to be open-ended and give you room to develop a unique analytical perspective. You may choose one of the topics below or create your own. If you create your own topic you must get my approval by Monday, April 13. I encourage you to be bold, be creative, and have fun!

Requirements

- Length: Your paper must be **1500 words long**, *not including* your bibliography. I will allow a maximum of 200 words deviation.
- Formatting: Include your **name and title** on the first page. **Number** your pages. You must use **12-point font, double spacing, and 1-inch margins**.
- Citations and Bibliography: In the body of your paper, you may use either **internal citations** or **footnotes** (not both). You must also attach a **Works Cited** as a separate page at the end of your text. Both your Works Cited and your footnotes should be formatted using the ***Chicago Manual of Style*** (available online through the Library's website). If you do not have the complete bibliographic information for a source, you can find it on **WorldCat**, which is also available on the Library website.

Instructions

Choose one of the following topics (or create your own, with my approval!) and respond to it using **only** the texts we have read in class. You must formulate a **thesis statement** (an argument in response to the topic), which should appear in the first paragraph of your paper. Your argument should be based on your interpretation of the texts and be backed up by properly cited quotations. Remember to explain your interpretation! The main question for each topic is in **bold**. That's the part you must be sure to answer. The other questions function as suggestions to help you think through your chosen topic. You do not have to address every one of them.

This assignment is scaffolded into three steps:

- 1) **Introduction + Outline.** Choose a topic and write a one-paragraph introduction, which includes your thesis statement. You should also write an outline for the rest of your paper. The Outline should include three main points that build on each other to argue for your thesis statement. Under each main point, you should list your evidence (for example, a quote from a

primary source). This will create a roadmap you can use for writing your paper. You must submit your Intro + Outline as a single document on Sakai by **Sunday, April 19 at 5pm**.

*Remember to check out the **HIS240 Writing Handout** for advice on writing an Introduction and Thesis Statement! You can find it on the course website under Writing Resources.

2) Meeting with me. I will meet with each of you individually for 15 minutes on MS Teams to talk through your Intro + Outline. We will do these meetings as video chats on MS Teams. If you have access issues that prevent you from using Teams, we can do the meeting over the phone. I will share a sign-up sheet with you so everyone can reserve a spot. These meetings will take place on **April 23 and 24**.

3) Final Draft. Your completed paper will be due on **Friday, May 8 at 10pm**, submitted via Sakai. I cannot accept late papers after May 12.

*****In case you missed it before, here is my policy on **plagiarism**: Don't do it! Plagiarism is a very serious offence, which can destroy your academic career and professional prospects. If you plagiarize, **you will automatically fail my class**. I am all-seeing and all-knowing, and I *will* catch you. Please, save us both a lot of time and worry: don't even try it. If at any time you have questions about how to avoid plagiarism, feel free to ask me.

I will do my best to be available to meet with you as often as you like. I will read partial drafts up until May 6.

Good luck!!!! Please let me know if you have any questions!

Paper Topics

Topic One:

Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev are considered the two most significant political reformers in postwar Soviet history. Each one had a very difficult legacy to overcome. For Khrushchev, it was the fear, suspicion, and personality cult of the Stalin Era. For Gorbachev, it was the economic and social stagnation of the Brezhnev Era. Compare Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to Gorbachev's speech "Gorbachev Challenges the Party (Glasnost)" and answer the following question: **Which Soviet leader was a more radical reformer, Khrushchev or Gorbachev?** How does each leader identify the problems to be solved? Which one digs deeper into the underlying roots of the issues at hand? Whose solutions are more far-reaching? Did the experience of Khrushchev's Thaw make Gorbachev more or less of a reformer? What does the comparison of these two speeches reveal about the development of the Soviet Union from the 1950s to the 1980s?

Topic Two:

On the surface, Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* couldn't be more different from Georgii Daneliia's film *I Walk Around Moscow*. Yet, if we look more closely, these two fictional works do have some things in common. Compare the two works and consider the following question: **Was the fiction of the Thaw Era an outgrowth of the fiction of the Stalin Era or a complete break from it?** What are the similarities and differences in the

circumstances of the two heroes, Pavel and Kolya? What are the similarities and differences in their values and outlooks on life? How does each hero think about friendships and relationships? How does each hero relate to authority? Can *I Walk Around Moscow* be considered an example of Socialist Realism? What does the comparison of these two works reveal about the development of Soviet society from the 1930s to the 1960s?

Topic Three:

Throughout this semester, we have been tracing women's experience of Soviet power. As we've learned, many women benefitted from the new opportunities opened up by the egalitarian rhetoric of Soviet socialism. For example, with the Party's support, Pasha Angelina overcame discrimination to become the first female Soviet tractor driver. In the 1960s, the heroine of Natalya Baranskaya's fictional novella "A Week Like Any Other" does not have to face the same discrimination as Angelina did. But her life is not entirely easy, either. Compare Angelina's memoir to Baranskaya's novella and answer the following question: **Did the Soviet Union fully empower women?** Are Baranskaya's heroine Olya and her coworkers living the dream that Angelina fought for? Do they still face discrimination, albeit in a different form? How would Angelina respond to Olya's complaints? If Olya is not entirely happy, is it because of the limits of Soviet socialism, the limits on how much women can truly be equal in any society, or simply her own limitations as a person?

Topic Four:

In his memoir, poet Evgenii Evtushenko recounts how his experiences at Stalin's funeral caused him to decide to use poetry as a vehicle to reshape Soviet society. Writing thirty years later, activist Ludmilla Alexeyeva explained how important writers and poets were to the development of the Soviet human rights movement. Compare Alexeyeva's *Thaw Generation* to Evtushenko's "Mourners Crushed at Stalin's Funeral" and answer the following question: **How did literature help to undermine late Soviet authoritarianism?** Was Evtushenko right that poetry and prose by themselves could change society? Or did change come from how people like Alexeyeva interacted with literature? What role did writers, and their legal battles, play in inspiring the Soviet human rights movement? Were Stalin and Zhdanov right to impose strict limits on literature in the 1930s and 1940s?

Topic Five:

When we look at Vladimir Putin's authoritarian leadership in Russia today, we might wonder why Russians put up with it. Many experts find clues in the hardships that Russians experienced in the 1990s. Compare Tatyana Tolstaya's short story "The Price of Eggs" and Konbinatsiya's song "American Boy" to Putin's "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy" and Singing Together's song "A Man Like Putin" and consider the following question: **How do Vladimir Putin's policies and public persona appeal to Russians who lived through the 1990s?** What traumas did the 1990s inflict on Russian citizens? How did this decade change their perception of their country and its place in the world? In what ways is Putin's approach tailored to answer those concerns? How do the two pop songs capture the mood of the 1990s vs. the 2000s?