HIST491C
Russia's Periphery

Dr. Frederick Corney
email: fccorn@wm.edu
Office: James Blair 321
Office hours: M. 11–12; Th. 2-4 (and by appointment)
Class time: Wednesdays 6.30 - 9.50 pm
Classroom: Blair 219

This syllabus can be found at my website under "Courses Offered" (http://fccorn.people.wm.edu/)

Introduction

This seminar explores the histories of those territories on the immediate periphery of the tsarist and Soviet empires. While we might think of both as 'empires,' we cannot assume they meant the same thing for the subject populations. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, various armed conflicts sprang up in some of these borderlands, notably Chechnya, Karabakh, Ingushetia, Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjaria, Moldova, and Tajikistan, and, most recently, again in South Ossetia. Furthermore, former constituent states of the USSR have forged often difficult paths in the post-Soviet era, and continue to live a conflicted existence that can only be understood in their broader historical contexts, notably the Baltic states, Ukraine, Belarus, and the former Central Asian Republics. In this course, we will explore the histories of Russia's borderland regions and states as a means of explaining their complex and often conflicted situation today. We will not cover Russian history per se, and thus the prerequisite for this course is either part of the two-semester Russian history survey (HIST377 and HIST378).

The course will examine the policies of both the tsarist government and the communist Soviet government towards the ethnic minorities on their peripheries, highlighting both the similarities and differences in these policies. To understand the intricacies of these policies is to understand the often unusual paths of development of ethnic minorities in these areas. We will cover the following regions: the Baltic states; the North; Siberia; Central Asia; Transcaucasia; and the Western borderlands (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova).

Assignments

Your grade will be based on your participation in in-class discussions, on your oral presentations to the group on the weekly readings, as well as your regular written contributions throughout the course. You will each write several short pieces for the wiki (see below), as well as a final research paper of 15-20 pages. That final paper will be decided upon in consultation with me.

Oral Presentations
The week’s readings will be assigned to students prior to each class, although all of the readings are obligatory for all the students. Two or three students will be responsible for a particular week’s reading and will make a presentation to the class, in which they will discuss (i.e. not summarize) the readings and their implications for the course as a whole. These students will be expected to play a major part in leading and directing discussion for that week, but it is the responsibility of the entire class to participate in the discussions.

Wiki

Over the course of the next fourteen weeks, we will together build a "wiki" (a type of collaborative web-authoring tool) composed of pages to support learning about Russia's peripheries. These pages will be reference pages with concise histories, timelines, bibliographic materials, visual materials, and links to other media and websites, and more. This will be a closed site, authored and edited by you as a group. We will decide together on the themes about which we will gather and write information, and also on the kinds of materials the wiki needs. This must not be a simple transferral of information from Wikipedia, but your own authorship of various pieces on the basis of primary sources, secondary sources, and web materials. In light of this, we will have a rotating editorial board made up of five students, who will be the arbiters of both content and form of the information. We will decide on the subjects and authors for each week from class to class. Although this is a closed site, we should regard this as a website that could be open to the public. It must meet scholarly and web-publishing standards. The board will submit information to me and I will enter it into the wiki site.

Grading

Participation: 15%
Presentation of readings: 15%
Wiki pieces: 30%
Final paper: 40%

Required Texts (to purchase from the College of William & Mary bookstore)

Meeting Schedule

I. Introduction to the Course (Jan. 21)

II. Theoretical Thinking on Empires and Ethnicities (the Tsarist Model) (Jan. 28)

- Kappeler, ch. 1, 2, 4.

III. Theoretical Thinking on Empires and Ethnicities (the Soviet Model) (Feb. 4)

- Kappeler, ch. 10
- Stephen Kotkin, "Trashcanistan - A Tour Through the Wreckage of the Soviet Empire," The New Republic Online 226 (15 April 2002) [on Blackboard].

IV. The Baltic States (Feb. 11, Feb. 18)


V. The North (Feb. 25)


VI. Siberia (March 4)

- Willard Sunderland, Taming the Wild Field. Colonization and Empire on the Russian

VII. Central Asia (March 18, 25)
- Kappeler, ch. 5.3-5.6.

IX. Transcaucasia (April 1, 8)
- Kappeler, ch. 5.1 and 5.2

X. Western Borderlands (April 15, April 22)
- Kappeler, Ch. 3.

XI. Final Discussion; Review of our Wiki (April 29)