Civilization and the Russian Far East

This class awards credit for COLL-C 103, COLL-E 103, or COLL-S 103. It fulfills the College (CASE) Critical Approaches requirement, IUB GenEd A&H credit, and COLL (CASE) A&H Breadth of Inquiry credit.

The instructor is Russell Scott Valentino (Links to an external site.). He will be joined by two Associate Instructors, Rebecca Baumgartner (Links to an external site.) and Alexander Grapp (Links to an external site.).

The class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:30 pm to 3:45 pm, in RB 110.

Office Hours for Professor Valentino are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 to 2:30. At the beginning of that time, he'll be eating his lunch somewhere on the ground floor of the Global and International Studies Building. Feel free to join him. Afterward lunch you can find him in room 4040 of the same building. (4040 is on the fourth floor.) You can also schedule an appointment to meet with him at other times by sending an email to russellv@indiana.edu.

Office Hours for Alexander Grapp will be M and W 1-2 pm on the ground floor of GISB. Office hours for Rebecca Baumgartner will be T and Th 2:30-3:30, also on the ground floor of GISB.

Course Objectives: Students in this class will gain a general knowledge of the cultural history of the Russian East, from the Caucasus (due south of Moscow) to the Pacific Ocean. They will also gain an understanding of the manner in which this enormous territory was explored, colonized, and settled, including through the systems of forced labor (Tsarist and Soviet) and the various “frontier myths” employed since approximately the sixteenth century. Finally, they will gain an understanding of the often tenuous borders that have delineated the region historically, from the American West to the idea of Europe, and from China, Japan, and Korea to the North Pole. The course will also feature readings and discussion of a number of important works of literature, including memoirs, poems, novels, and travel narratives by Russians and non-Russians alike; films and pictorial art; music and architecture.

On the basis of this material, students will be better enabled to think critically about the idea of civilization itself as it has been deployed in various parts of the world at various times, including in the United States. They will see the uses to which myths of sovereignty have been similarly used elsewhere in the world. They will be able to compare, synthesize, and apply ideas about cultural development in different areas of the globe. Finally, they will be enabled to evaluate critically what they read and hear, and articulate clearly their opinions about the manner in which exploration and development have taken place historically.

Course Overview: This course will survey the political and cultural history of the great land mass that extends from Eastern Europe to the Far East from pre-historic times through the early twenty-first century, focusing particular attention on Christianization, the Mongol Empire, the expansion of the Muscovite principality, Russian imperial expansion, and the major cultural encounters, peaceful and not, that have shaped the contemporary picture of the Russian East. At the heart of the course lies a darkly ironic juxtaposition of the goal of “civilization” and the often
brutal means by which this goal was pursued. In this connection, Russia’s push eastward shares marked similarities with the westward expansion of the US, and in fact the meeting of the two powers at the Pacific will mark one of our focal points in the course.

We shall also focus on exploration and settlement, reading accounts of prison life and the gulag, travel narratives, and discussing the development of the various “myths of sovereignty” that aided in colonization. Readings will be supplemented by images of art, architecture, film excerpts, and music. Finally, we shall explore the vast, fascinating, and often tragic history of cultural confrontations that the region has experienced particularly in modern times, including the meeting of the Russian Far East with the American West, and the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet conflicts with Imperial Japan in Manchuria, on Sakhalin, and in the Kuril Islands.

Along the way, we’ll touch on a wide variety of related issues, e.g., the development of modern ecology as formulated by Russian evolutionary biologists, notions of anarchism and cooperation in the writings of Peter Kropotkin, mixtures and crossings of architectural styles and beliefs, the apparent plenitude of natural resources, the diminishing cultural heritage of disappearing languages, climate change in the tundra. Students will be encouraged to follow their interests and expertise in developing final group-based projects on the basis of one such topic introduced in class.

The course is divided into the following nine thematic sections:

1. The Stories We Tell Ourselves (on how narrative shapes personal and national identities); 2. The Explorer's Imagination: "Our Orient" (on Russian expansion into the Caucasus); 3. Heroism, Character, and A Hero of Our Time; 4. Noble Savages and Primitive Socialism (on internalizing encounters with indigenous peoples); 5. Warriors to Capitalists (on the development of commerce as a mark of civilization); 6. Control by Other Means: The "Bottom of the Sack" (on Siberia as prison); 7. Racing the Enemy (on the Trans-Siberian and imperial expansion in East Asia); 8. Wilderness in Civilization (on ecology across Eurasia); and 9. Totalitarianism and You (on paying attention to the world around you).

Each of these sections will feature 2-3 reading selections. Some will also include music, film screenings, and art. Assignments will be provided for each unit beforehand and indicated on the course calendar with due dates, so that you can plan ahead.

Evaluation will be based on a combination of homework exercises (20%); short essays and reflective writing (40%); participation in classroom activities and in-class work (20%); and a variety of other assigned activities, e.g., creating a quiz based on a reading; making a timeline with the most important events leading up to X, and so on (20%). Some of these activities will be group-based, and for this purpose you will be assigned to a five-person group at the beginning of the semester.

Academic Integrity: As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (Code). When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either
written or oral use must be fully acknowledged. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand. All suspected violations of the Code will be handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities, and must include a report to the Dean of Students, who may impose additional disciplinary sanctions.

**Required Books (available at Campus Bookstore in the IMU and TIS):**


**Course schedule overview** (for assignment details see the Canvas calendar):

Unit 1. The Stories We Tell Ourselves: M 8/24-W 9/2

Unit 2. The Explorer's Imagination: “Our Orient”: M 9/7-W 9/16

Unit 3. Heroism, Character and A Hero of Our Time: M 9/21-W 9/30 [NB: This is when we'll reading Lermontov's *A Hero of our Time*.]

Unit 4. Noble Savages and Primitive Socialism: M 10/5-M 10/19 [NB: This is when we'll be reading Rytkheu's *A Dream in Polar Fog*.]

Unit 5. Warriors to Capitalists: W 10/21-M 10/26


Unit 7. Racing the Enemy: M 11/9-W 11/18

Thanksgiving Break

Unit 8. Wilderness in Civilization: M 11/30-W 12/2

Unit 9. Totalitarianism and You: M 12/7-W 12/9