

Columbia College Chicago
600 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605
Humanities, History, and Social Sciences (HHSS) Department
Fifteen Week Session (FF)

Russian and Soviet History
HIST 223/3 credits
Face-to-face:
618 S. Michigan Ave

Faculty: Polina Popova, Instructor, M.A., PhD Candidate

Faculty Columbia E-mail: ppopova@colum.edu

Alternative E-mail: ppopov2@uic.edu

Course Description: The course covers the history of Russia from the 1800s to the demise of the Soviet Union. Special emphasis is given to such concepts as the political and cultural development of the Russian Empire and the U.S.S.R., the role of women in imperial and revolutionary Russia, race and racial relationships in the Soviet Union, and the collapse of the Soviet system.

The course has a special emphasis on cultural and social history, especially gender and race histories, as well as the cultural development of the Russian Empire and the U.S.S.R.

Module III (3 weeks) – Race and Racism in the Soviet Union.



Illustration 1. The cover of Agniia Barto's 1936 book *Bratishki*.

1. Week 1 (Week 7 of the Course): Race in the Early Soviet Union, Internationalism, Stalinism and Race.



Illustration 2. A poster to the 1936 movie *Circus*.

Read (if you can read Russian) and take a look at the illustrations of the following children's books in chronological order:

S. Poltavskii, *Detki-raznotsvetki*, 1927,

<https://arch.rgdb.ru/xmlui/handle/123456789/35800#page/0/mode/2up> or
<http://www.barius.ru/biblioteka/book/2779>

Nikolai Lapshin, *Malen'kii Chon i dlinnii Dzhon*, 1928,

<https://blogs.princeton.edu/cotsen/2016/03/an-anti-imperialist-soviet-flip-book-little-chon-and-long-john/>

Agniia Barto, *Bratishki*, 1936,

<https://arch.rgdb.ru/xmlui/handle/123456789/27816#page/0/mode/2up> or
<http://www.raruss.ru/childrens-books/page-child7/3382-echeistov-barto-brothers.html>

Iskorka journal, <https://pedagogyofimages.princeton.edu/christina-kiaer-afrika-and-iskorka-racial-enlightenment-in-a-soviet-childrens-journal/>

Watch the following cartoon and film (the film is watched in class with the instructor's commentaries):

Samoedskii mal'chik, 1928,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geLJtXAoeJk&list=PLunkRGu19QFa4L3OQB-Q9eWOA4uxt0PTV&index=2>

Grigorii Aleksandrov, *Circus*, 1936, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVAN0A6OWE4>

In-class work:

- “Reading” children’s books and analyzing them (group discussions), reading a blog post “An Image of Japan and Its People in 1920s Soviet Children’s Literature,” *Princeton University Library Blog*, and then discussing children’s literature of the 1920s and the 1930s in the context of race and “affirmative action Empire” (sing Terry Martin’s term). Watching the cartoon *Samoedskii mal’chik*.
- Watching the film *Circus* under the instructor’s guidance and with comments. Q&A from the students. Article for the context (mandatory): Oleg Yegorov, “Trading Lynch Mobs for Satlin: Why did an African-Amerin Live in the USSR?” *Russia Beyond*, <https://www.rbth.com/history/328184-black-among-reds-robert-robinson-in-the-ussr>
- Additional article (print-out) to be distributed during class: Raquel Green, “Constructions of Africa in Early Soviet Children’s Literature’,” *African American Intellectual History Society*, <https://www.aaihs.org/constructions-of-africa-in-early-soviet-childrens-literature/>

Homework:

- Using at least two sources from the list of articles and books (either two articles distributed in class, or any other source from the list: keep in mind that one article, one interview, or a chapter of the book is considered one source), review the film *Circus*, centering your analysis around the topic of race and (supposed) racial equality in the Early Soviet Union. Zoom onto the final “Lullaby” scene – at least one paragraph.
2. **Week 2 (Week 8 of the Course): Race and Racial Relationships in the Soviet Union during the Cold War and the Thaw.**



Illustration 3. Moscow Youth Festival of 1957.

Watch Valerii Todorovskii's *Hipsters*, https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.baaf8687-9908-df47-8f1e-18e9a22f1429?autoplay=0&ref=atv_cf_strg_wb, taking into consideration your viewing of Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Circus*.

Also listen to the first part of Elena Khanga's talk "Black Lives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia," <https://ieres.elliott.gwu.edu/project/black-lives-in-the-soviet-union-and-post-soviet-russia/>

If you have time left, read Charles Quist-Adade's article "The African Russians: Children of the Cold War" (to be distributed by the instructor) which will help you with reviewing of the cartoon and podcast.

In-class work:

- Watching Valerii Todorovskii's 2008 film *Hipsters* and discussing it in class. Group discussion: Black baby in *Circus* and *Hipsters*. Blackness and race in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. Moscow Youth Festival.
- Listening to the excerpts of the interview with Elena Khanga "Black Lives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia," <https://ieres.elliott.gwu.edu/project/black-lives-in-the-soviet-union-and-post-soviet-russia/> Discussing Elena's experiences as a mixed-race person in the late Soviet Union. Q&A from the students.
- Additional article (scan print-out): Charles Quist-Adade, "The African Russians: Children of the Cold War" in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, edited by Maxim Matusevich, Africa World Press, 2007.

Homework:

- Listen to episode 4 of the podcast *Teddy Goes to the USSR* and watch 1963 *Afrikanskaia skazka*. Write a review of the cartoon using the information acquired from the podcast. How was the Thaw different from the Stalinist USSR in terms of the politics of internationalism? What was the ASoviet attitude to the political events of the American Civil Rights Movement Era?

3. Week 3 (Week 9 of the Course): Late Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia: Racist or not?



Illustration 4. Angela Davis in Moscow in 1972.

Let's start from the beginning... read Allison Blakely's "African Imprints on Russia: A Historical Overview" (to be distributed by the instructor). Please, try to remember a great Russian poet and writer who had African roots. Read Frances M. Somers Cocks's "The African Origins of Alexander Pushkin." Watch the following YouTube Interview, "Black Russian on Racism and Being Black In Russia", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bawe_-gsrSo , and discuss racism in the late Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.

In-class work:

- Read Allison Blakely's article and discuss it with your reading partner (working in pairs).
- Read a second article Frances M. Somers Cocks's "The African Origins of Alexander Pushkin" and discuss the two articles in groups (group work).
- Discussion of the modern days Russia and its racial prejudices and discriminations towards people of color.
- Additional article (print-out): "Racism in Russia. Stories of Prejudice," BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53055857>

Homework:

- Watch and reflect on the following academic talk of Hilary Lynd "Race in the Soviet Union," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qthjOT88-Cs> Please, keep in mind your previous homework, and write at least one paragraph overviewing the Soviets' attitudes, their politics, biases, and wins in terms of racial equality and racial relationships. Consider the following: does modern post-Soviet Russia have a chance to be an anti-racist and truly diverse state?

Full Bibliography (and other sources):

- Podacsts/YouTube:

Teddy Goes to the USSR, episode 4 – “Teddy Talks about Race,”
<https://teddytousr.com/2021/12/13/episode-4-teddy-talks-about-race/>

“Black Russian on Racism and Being Black In Russia,” *NFKRZ Interviews*,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bawe_gsrSo

- Books:

James Patterson, *Chronicle of the Left Hand: An American Black Family’s Story from Slavery to Russia’s Hollywood*, New Academia, 2022.

Robert Robinson, *Black on Red: My 44 Years Inside the Soviet Union*, Acropolis Books 1998.

- Children’s Books:

S. Poltavskii, *Detki-raznotsvetki*, 1927,
<https://arch.rgdb.ru/xmlui/handle/123456789/35800#page/0/mode/2up> or
<http://www.barius.ru/biblioteka/book/2779>

Nikolai Lapshin, *Malen’kii Chon i dlinnii Dzhon*, 1928,
<https://blogs.princeton.edu/cotsen/2016/03/an-anti-imperialist-soviet-flip-book-little-chon-and-long-john/>

Agniia Barto, *Bratishki*, 1936,
<https://arch.rgdb.ru/xmlui/handle/123456789/27816#page/0/mode/2up> or
<http://www.raruss.ru/childrens-books/page-child7/3382-echeistov-barto-brothers.html>

- Films/cartoons:

Afrikanskaia skazka, 1963, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpj97RmJQbw>

Grigorii Aleksandrov, *Circus*, 1936, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVAN0A6OWE4>

Samoedskii mal’chik, 1928,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geLJtXAoeJk&list=PLunkRGu19QFa4L3OQB-Q9eWOA4uxt0PTV&index=2>

Valerii Todorovskii, *Hipsters*, 2008,
https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.baaf8687-9908-df47-8f1e-18e9a22f1429?autoplay=0&ref=atv_cf_strg_wb

- Articles/ Interviews:

No author, “Racism in Russia. Stories of Prejudice,” BBC News,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53055857>

Allison Blakely, “African Imprints on Russia: A Historical Overview” in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, edited by Maxim Matusевич, Africa World Press, 2007.

Frances M. Somers Cocks, “The African origins of Alexander Pushkin,” in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, edited by Maxim Matusевич, Africa World Press, 2007.

Raquel Green, “Constructions of Africa in Early Soviet Childrens Literature’,” *African American Intellectual History Society*, <https://www.aaihs.org/constructions-of-africa-in-early-soviet-childrens-literature/>

Faith Hotchkiss, “What Does it Mean to be Black in Russia?” *Glimpse from the Globe*,
<https://www.glimpsefromtheglobe.com/features/op-ed/what-does-it-mean-to-be-black-in-russia/>

Elena Khanga, “Black Lives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia,” *IERES*,
<https://ieres.elliott.gwu.edu/project/black-lives-in-the-soviet-union-and-post-soviet-russia/>

Christina Kiaer: “‘Afrika and ‘Iskorka’: Racial Enlightenment in a Soviet Children’s Journal,”
<https://pedagogyofimages.princeton.edu/christina-kiaer-afrika-and-iskorka-racial-enlightenment-in-a-soviet-childrens-journal/>

Hilary Lynd and Thom Loyd, “Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 81,2, 2022.

Polina Popova, “An Image of Japan and Its People in 1920s Soviet Children’s Literature,” *Princeton University Library Blog*, <https://blogs.princeton.edu/cotsen/2023/01/an-image-of-japan-and-its-people-in-1920s-soviet-childrens-literature/>

Charles Quist-Adade, “The African Russians: Children of the Cold War” in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, edited by Maxim Matusевич, Africa World Press, 2007.

Sasha Razor, “The Only One Left: A Conversation with James Lloydovich Patterson About Grigori Aleksandrov’s ‘Circus,’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*,

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-only-one-left-a-conversation-with-james-lloydovich-patterson-about-grigori-aleksandrovs-circus/>

Richard Taylor, "The Illusion of Happiness and the Happiness of Illusion: Grogorii Aleksandrov's "The Circus," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 74 No. 4, Oct. 1996.

Boris Dralyuk, "On Grigori Aleksandrov and Moyshe Kulbak," *Yiddishkayt*,
<https://yiddishkayt.org/circus-in-stalins-shadow/>

Oleg Yegorov, "Trading Lynch Mobs for Satlin: Why did an African-Amerin Live in the USSR?" *Russia Beyond*, <https://www.rbth.com/history/328184-black-among-reds-robert-robinson-in-the-ussr>