

HIST 129d. Socialist Popular Culture.

Spring 2025 ver. 1-16-25

Part 1: Course information

Time and place: In person Tuesdays and Thursdays noon-1:15 p.m. in BRH 208.

Instructor information

Instructor: Aaron J. Cohen, PhD.

Office hours: TuWeTh 3-4 p.m. or by appointment in Tahoe Hall 3092 OR via Zoom @ <https://csus.zoom.us/my/cohenofficehours>.

E-mail: cohenaj@csus.edu.

Catalog description

A historical survey of popular culture and mass culture in the Soviet Union and other socialist states in the twentieth century. Emphasis on the role of political and economic systems in cultural production, the relationship between culture producers and audiences, and interactions between socialist and nonsocialist countries as expressed in a variety of genres and media. Focus on film and music with references to literature, social pastimes, and the performing and visual arts.

Registration details

Graded: Graded Student.

Units: 3.0.

Prerequisite: None.

GE area: **C1 (Arts).**

A note on the films and other primary source materials in this course

A very small number of materials in this course may contain certain content that some students might find offensive or disagreeable. These materials are products of their time and may depict racial, ethnic, gender, or class stereotypes, misogyny, political ideology, domestic violence, nudity, murder, war, sex, implied miscarriage, rape, or suicide, or other subjects in ways that differ from today. These depictions are presented as they were created because to do otherwise would be to suggest that they never existed. Your enrollment in this course indicates your awareness of this fact and your willingness to approach these films in a critical manner.

Textbooks and course materials

Required texts

1. Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992. ISBN 978-0521369862. Note: The original edition of this book was entitled (correctly) *Soviet Popular Culture*.

2. Various required readings and videos posted on Canvas and Panopto and listed on this syllabus. These materials are free of charge.

Course technology requirements

Handouts and assignments are distributed only via Canvas. **Students have a responsibility to access course materials and assignments in a timely manner**; the instructor will not be held responsible for any circumstances, technical or personal, that prevent access to course material. **Students who have not logged into Canvas by 11:59 p.m. Monday, January 27, will be administratively dropped and may not be allowed to add the course.**

All required technology is available at low or no cost through student support services at Sac State. The CSUS library and Instructional Resource Technology office provide **free laptops** and Microsoft Word for students to use on a short- or long-term [basis](#). Students may use personal computers, but they must meet the following requirements:

- High-speed internet connection.
- Access to Canvas throughout the semester.
- Ability to use Zoom, Microsoft Word, and Adobe software.

Please do NOT use Google Docs OR portable devices as word processors in this course. The history profession uses Microsoft Word for its robust tools, especially footnotes. Google Docs often does not format footnotes correctly, and it is good to practice using the industry standard. **Use a computer and the desktop version of MS Word.** To obtain your free desktop version of MS Word (and Microsoft 365), go to office365.csus.edu and login with your Sac State login and password. Click on "Install and more."

For technical questions about Canvas, please:

- See [Canvas for Students](#) for common Canvas questions and solutions.
- Email the [Academic Technology Center](#) in AIRC 2005.
- Call (916) 278-7337.

The use of artificial intelligence to complete assignments without instructor permission is considered by the university to be academic dishonesty. The goal of education is not to complete assignments but to learn. Learning involves direct engagement with material and practice. Anything that prevents students from engagement and practice (such as plagiarism, buying a paper from someone else, or using AI to write papers) does not contribute to learning but in fact undermines it. Any work determined to be AI generated in this class will therefore be treated as the equivalent of plagiarism according to the policies in this syllabus. However, spelling and grammar checkers that do not write or rewrite papers are allowed.

Cell phones and personal devices

Personal devices in the classroom are distracting and disrespectful for many students and faculty. Students may bring personal devices to the classroom but may not use cell phones unless approved by the instructor. Laptops may be used to follow class notes posted on Canvas, but the instructor may request that they be put away if distracting. Students who refuse to put away personal devices will be asked to leave the classroom and be marked as absent for that day.

Video viewing on Panopto

Videos are hosted within the university's Panopto system. Panopto sometimes has difficulty interacting with various devices and technologies. **To ensure that you receive proper credit for viewing videos and films:**

- **Make sure to use a laptop computer** and web browser. **Do not use** an iPhone or iPad or the Canvas app as portable device privacy settings can interfere with Panopto.
- **Disable ad blockers (e.g., Adblock) and browser extensions/plugins that block analytics or anonymize.** These can interfere with Panopto.
- **Avoid having open multiple windows while viewing.** If you would like to have a different page open while viewing, use a separate device.
- To take a break from a film, **exit the film and close the browser. Do not put the computer to sleep** before you exit the film and close the browser.

The instructor does not verify Panopto viewing. Please follow these instructions to check whether Panopto correctly registers your viewing:

1. Go to "My Folder" in Panopto (<https://csus.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto>).
2. Select the "Everything" folder on the left navigation bar.
3. Click on the bar graph icon ("stats" button) on the top right of the green "Everything" folder banner.
4. Make sure you are on the "User Dashboard" page.
5. Review the "Percent completed" figure for the relevant film or video.

If Panopto is not correctly registering your participation and you are sure you have followed the above guidelines, inform the instructor and [open a service ticket](#) with the Information Resources and Technology (IRT) department.

Crisis Assistance & Resource Education Support (CARES)

If you are experiencing challenges with food, housing, financial or other unique circumstances that are impacting your education, help is just a phone call or email away. The [CARES](#) office provides case management support for any enrolled student.

Disability Access Center (DAC)

Sacramento State is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you

believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class, please immediately contact the [Disability Access Center \(DAC\)](#) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from DAC is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided.

Title IX information

Sac State is committed to supporting students and fostering a campus environment free of sexual misconduct and gender-based discrimination. If a student chooses to disclose to a faculty or staff member an experience related to sexual misconduct which includes, but is not limited to rape, relationship violence, or stalking, all faculty and staff members are obligated to report this disclosure to the university's Title IX Coordinator. Contact Sac State's Title IX Coordinator, Skip Bishop, at (916) 278-5770 or email at william.bishop@csus.edu. Upon receipt of the report, the Title IX Coordinator will contact you to inform you of your rights and options as a survivor and connect you with support resources, including resolution options for holding accountable the person who harmed you.

Students who elect not to discuss their experience with the Title IX Coordinator can speak confidentially to the following confidential resources: Student Health & Counseling Services at The WELL On Campus Phone Number: 916-278-6461 Website: www.csus.edu/shcs. Campus Confidential Advocate – Laura Swartzen Email: weave@csus.edu. On Campus Phone Number: 916-278-5850 (during business hours) WEAVE 24/7 Hotline: 916-920-2952.

Student Health and Counseling Services

Your physical and mental health are important to your success as a college student. [Student Health and Counseling Services \(SHCS\)](#) in The WELL offers medical, counseling, and wellness services to help you get and stay healthy during your time at Sac State. SHCS offers: Primary Care medical services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, transgender care, and immunizations; urgent care for acute illness, injuries, and urgent counseling needs; pharmacy for prescriptions and over-the-counter products; mental health counseling, including individual sessions, group counseling, support groups, mindfulness training, and peer counseling; athletic training for sports injury rehabilitation; wellness services, including nutrition counseling, peer-led health education and wellness workshops, and free safer sex supplies; violence and sexual assault support services. Most services are covered by the Health Services fee and available at no additional cost.

All students are expected to follow the [Hornet honor code](#). Students will:

- Promote an inclusive campus and community.
- Listen and respect each other's thoughts, interests, and views.
- Value diversity and learn from one another.
- Engage daily with mutual trust, care, and integrity.
- Support a culture of honor and adhere to campus policies for honesty, ethics, and conduct.
- Be proud to be Sac State Hornets.

Important notes: Any form of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, may be reported to the office of student affairs. **This syllabus and course policies are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances or typographical errors. In case of a conflict between the syllabus and Canvas instructions, the syllabus will take precedence unless the syllabus shows a clear error.** Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas. It is the student's responsibility to check Canvas for corrections or updates to the syllabus.

Part 2: Course objectives

In this course, students will be able to:

General course learning outcomes

- Demonstrate a broad knowledge of the history of socialist popular culture and mass culture from 1917 to 1991.
- Evaluate popular culture and mass culture as they relate to issues of politics, social class, gender, and ethnicity in socialist states.
- Recognize how form and content are both important in understanding the meanings of film, literature, music, the visual arts, and other media.
- Create arguments about the history of socialist popular and mass culture based on empirical evidence and critical thinking.
- Apply written communication skills as practiced in history, teaching, and related professions.

GE Area C1 (Arts) learning outcomes

- Think conceptually and critically about medium, performance or presentation, and production for at least one art form.
- Demonstrate knowledge of artistic production, aesthetic properties, and the way creative work is shaped by artistic and cultural forces.
- Have an acquaintance with a broad understanding of artistic forms, genres, and cultural sources.
- Be able to develop and defend informed judgments about creative work. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions of at least one of the disciplines in the arts.

Part 3: Course assignments

Students will meet the objectives listed above through a combination of the following course activities. Details on rubrics, grading criteria, and assignment information are posted on Canvas. All deadlines are Pacific Time.

I. Classroom attendance. For each class meeting, students will receive 1 point for attendance and 0 points for non-attendance. Points will be added together and scored using the standard percentage scale. **No late work accepted**, but

students will receive 2 “free passes” before the grading scale is implemented to allow for circumstances that might cause students to miss class, e.g., 5 absences over 30 class sessions will be calculated as $(30-5) \div (30-2) = 89\%$ (B+). Exceptions will be made for students who contact the instructor in advance and in person with reasonable requests for absence.

II. Panopto video viewing. For each assigned Panopto film regardless of length, students will receive 1 point for watching at least 95% of the film at normal speed **before 11:59 p.m. Wednesday in the same week the video is assigned** (e.g., the week 3 film deadline is for the week 3 assigned film). Points will be added together and scored using the standard percentage scale, e.g., one missed film and two films viewed less than 95% = 12/15 or 80% (B-). **No late work accepted.** Please follow the instructions above to verify Panopto viewing registration accuracy.

III. Identification quizzes. There are **three (3)** thirty-minute **in-class** identification quizzes as indicated on the class schedule. For each quiz, **seven quiz items** (people, places, dates, and concepts) will be chosen from lecture material and primary source assignments. Students will identify, describe, and state the significance of **four (4)** out of these seven items. Each answer should be at least a paragraph containing the “who, what, where, when, and why” for that item in as much detail as possible. Quizzes are not cumulative. **No late work accepted.**

IV. Primary source analyses. The primary source analysis assignment is an online space where students **argue for the historical significance of one (1) aspect of any one (1) primary source assigned for the same week** (e.g., the week 3 analysis is on a week 3 primary source), whether **a reading, a piece of music, image, or a specific aspect of a film** (“one aspect” might include a scene, style, character, or theme). The due dates are **Tuesdays, 11:45 a.m. Pacific Time**. **No late work accepted, but students will receive 5 “free passes” over the semester to allow for circumstances that might cause students to misunderstand the assignment or to miss assignments**, e.g., the lowest 5 scores out of the 14 weekly assignments will be dropped.

“Historical significance” for this assignment means how that one aspect of the primary source helps us to understand the time in which it was created, that is, what it shows us about the past. The instructor encourages you to read the essay questions and choose examples that you can use to make your argument in the essay. In this way you will be able to scaffold your work, i.e., use the analyses to help write the essays, but **do not analyze multiple sources or multiple aspects in any single analysis or submit an essay rough draft as an analysis.**

V. Formal take-home essays. There are **three (3)** short (750-word minimum) formal take-home essays due when indicated on the class schedule. **Late work accepted with a penalty.**

VI. Final examination. The final examination will take place in our classroom. Students must complete the final exam to pass the class. **No late work accepted.**

Optional assignments. There will be opportunities for extra credit, revision assignments, or makeup assignments during the semester.

Part 4: Course schedule

Note: Readings and film viewing should be completed for the week they are listed. The instructor may add assignments or alter the schedule for special events. Changes will be communicated via Canvas.

Module 0 (Read first and use as a reference). **Information and instructions.**

Week 1 (January 21, 23). **Introduction.** Watch the video on modern cultural production. Read Stites, introduction; Parker, "Popular Culture" (2011).

Week 2 (January 28, 30). **Bolshevik mass culture.** Watch both *Kino-Nedelia*, no. 1 (1918) and *Kino-Pravda*, no. 1 (1922). Read Stites, chapter 1; Taylor, "Birth of Soviet Cinema" (1985); Lunacharsky, "Self-Education of the Workers" (1918); Lenin, "Directives on the Film Business" (1922); "Iron Messiah" (1918); "Little Apple" (1918); "Young Guard" (1918).

Week 3 (February 4, 6). **The roaring twenties.** Watch the feature film *The Cigarette Girl of Mosselprom* (1924). Read Stites, chapter 2; Kollontai, "Theses on Communist Morality" (1921); Vertov, "We" (1922); Trotsky, "Vodka, Church, and Cinema" (1923); Krupskaya, "Young Pioneers" (1925).

Week 4 (February 11, 13). **Socialist (sur)realism.** Watch the feature film *Volga-Volga* (1938). Read Stites, chapter 3; Bulgakov selected letters (1930-1939); "March of Happy-Go-Lucky Guys" (1934); Ostrovskii, *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1932-1936), excerpt; Kollontai, "Soviet Woman" (1946).

Week 5 (February 18, 20). **World War II and Cold War.** Watch the feature film *For Eyes Only: Streng Geheim* (1963). Read Stites, chapter 4; Sukovataya, "Spy and Counterspy" (2017); "Katyusha" (1938); "Wait for Me" (1941).

Week 6 (February 15, 27). **Thaw. Essay 1 (February 27).** Watch the feature film *Carnival Night* (1956). Read Stites, chapter 5; Ehrenburg, *The Thaw* (1954), chapter 1; "Moscow Nights" (1955).

Week 7 (March 4, 6). **Producers and consumers in socialist Europe. Quiz 1 (March 6).** Watch the feature documentary *East Side Story* (1997). Read Drakulić, "The Trivial is Political" and "On Doing Laundry" (1992).

Week 8 (March 11, 13). **"Developed" socialism as reality and farce.** Watch the feature film *Ivan Vasilevich Changes Profession* (1973). Read Stites, chapter 6; VIA Semiprecious Stones, "My Address is the Soviet Union" (1973); Pugacheva, "Harlequin" (1975).

Week 9 (March 18, 20). **Postwar counterculture.** Watch both feature documentaries *Soviet Hippies* (2017) and *After Leto* (2018). Read "Stilyaga" (1949); Vysotskii letter (1973); Voznesensky, "Nostalgia for the Present" (1976); "Interview with Boris Grebenshchikov" (1984).

Week 10 (March 25, 27). **Maoism and cultural revolution.** Watch the feature film of the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* (1970). Read "Mass Line," "Youth," "Women," and "Culture and Art" from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (1966); Ji-li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl* (1997), selected chapter.

Spring recess (March 31 through April 5).

Week 11 (April 8, 10). **Socialist Yugoslavia as spectacle. Essay 2 (April 10).** Watch the feature documentary *Cinema Komunisto* (2010). Read Mihelj, "Dreamworld of New Yugoslav Culture" (2012); Burton diary excerpts (1971).

Week 12 (April 15, 17). **Perestroika. Quiz 2 (April 17).** Watch the feature film *Little Vera* (1988). Read Stites, chapter 7; Aria, "Hero of Asphalt" (1987); Shvarts, "The Dump" (published 1987).

Week 13 (April 22, 24): **The rise and fall of the Berlin Wall.** Watch the feature documentary *Whisper and Shout* (1988). Read Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the GDR" (1993); *Do You Know About the GDR?* (1983).

Week 14 (April 29, May 1): **The DPRK (North Korea).** Watch the feature film *Comrade Kim Goes Flying* (2012). Read Kim, introduction to *Illusive Utopia* (2010); "We Will Follow You Only" (2013).

Week 15 (May 6, 8): **After socialism. Essay 3 (May 8).** Watch the feature film *Hipsters (Stiliagi)* (2008). Read Stites, Greetings and farewell.

Final examination: Tuesday, May 13, 12:45 - 2:45 p.m., in our classroom.
Quiz 3 will take place during the final exam period.

Deadline for late work: Thursday, May 15, 11:59 p.m.

Important policies: Course deadlines are enforced by Canvas and cannot be extended for any reason. Keep copies of all your work on a hard drive, flash drive, or paper in the event of a computer malfunction or other technical problem.

Part 5: Grading policy

Graded course activities

The course grade will be based on average grades in each activity category, not a cumulative point system. **To pass the class, students must demonstrate passing competence (at least 60%) in at least 60% of assignments within categories AND at least 60% of categories. In this class, students**

who have a failing grade in more than four categories will fail the course. Students must also complete the final examination to pass the class.

Students are expected to follow the writing guide posted on Canvas in categories with formal writing.

Activity categories will be combined using this weighting:

| Category | Activity category | % of course grade |
|----------|---|-------------------|
| I | Classroom attendance (2 "free pass" absences) | 10 |
| II | Panopto video viewing | 10 |
| III | 3 identification quizzes | 20 |
| IV | 14 primary source analyses (5 "free passes," 9 required to pass the category) | 20 |
| V | 3 formal written essays | 20 |
| VI | Final examination | 20 |

Late work

To be fair to students who work hard to make deadlines, late essays will receive a full letter grade penalty. **No other assignments will be accepted late.** Late essays will normally be graded at the end of the semester, not when submitted, except upon request by the student directly to the instructor.

These late policies will be in force also for foreseeable scheduled power outages, COVID-19 physical distancing regulations, travel, and work schedule changes. Students are expected to be aware of technical and social limits that may impact their area of residence and to plan around them by completing work in advance and notifying the instructor.

Viewing grades in Canvas

This class does not use the Canvas gradebook for calculations. Grades and student progress indicators are calculated in an Excel spreadsheet and uploaded by the instructor. They can be viewed in the Canvas gradebook or Canvas assignments section (**click "View By Type"**). **For information see module 0 in Canvas.** The instructor will update the online grades each time a grading session has been complete (typically 7 days after the completion of an activity but often quicker).

Letter grade assignment

Grades for most work are given as letter grades, calculated and averaged using a 12-point system. Some assignments may be graded on a percentage basis. All are computed and rounded by Canvas or Excel. Missing work will be scored as 0.

| Letter grade earned | Points used in calculation | Percentage equivalent | GPA equivalent | Standard |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| A | 12 | 93-100 | 4.0 | Excellent work |
| A- | 11 | 90-92 | 3.7 | Nearly excellent work |
| B+ | 10 | 87-89 | 3.3 | Very good work |
| B | 9 | 83-86 | 3.0 | Good work |
| B- | 8 | 80-82 | 2.7 | Mostly good work |
| C+ | 7 | 77-79 | 2.3 | Above average work |
| C | 6 | 73-76 | 2.0 | Average work |
| C- | 5 | 70-72 | 1.7 | Mostly average work |
| D+ | 4 | 67-69 | 1.3 | Below average work |
| D | 3 | 63-67 | 1.0 | Poor work |
| D- | 2 | 60-62 | 0.7 | Very poor work |
| F | 1 | Below 60 | 0.0 | Failing work |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | Not attempted |

Part 6: Course policies

Build rapport

If you find that you have any trouble keeping up with assignments or other aspects of the course, make sure you let your instructor know as early as possible. As you will find, building rapport and effective relationships are key to becoming an effective professional. Make sure that you are proactive in informing your instructor when difficulties arise during the semester so that we can help you find a solution.

Complete assignments

All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through Canvas. Assignments must be submitted by the given deadline. Late or missing assignments will impact the student's grade.

Understand when you may drop this course

It is the student's responsibility to understand when they need to consider disenrolling from a course. Refer to the Sac State Course Schedule for dates and deadlines for registration. After this period, a serious and compelling reason is required to drop from the course. Serious and compelling reasons include documented and significant change in work hours, leaving student unable to attend class, or documented and severe physical or mental illness or injury to the student or student's family.

Incomplete policy

Under emergency or special circumstances students may petition for an incomplete grade. Incompletes will not be given except for a documented emergency that prevents completion of the final assignments (missing online work is not eligible).

Communication policy

Feedback: The instructor normally only gives feedback through Canvas rubrics but is happy to provide more personal feedback during office hours.

Email and Canvas messaging: The instructor monitors email daily and will respond quickly when contacted with questions. Students should wait 24 hours before sending follow-up communications. **The instructor might not respond fully to emails that contain a disrespectful tone or to email requests for retroactive excused absences, primary source analysis make-ups, or Panopto viewing verification (see pp. 3-6).** The instructor would be happy to answer any questions or concerns during office hours or by appointment, so please do stop by if you do not get an answer to your email or Canvas message or need more detailed information.

Exceptions: Please contact the instructor immediately if you are hospitalized or experiencing a documented direct and acute emergency that may require arrangements for the completion of missed coursework. **An accommodation for a planned absence is also possible if you contact the instructor in advance and in person (not post facto by email).**

Part 7: Commit to integrity

By taking this class you agree to abide by the guidelines described in this syllabus and on the academic honesty page available on the Canvas site.

Students must respect the intellectual property of others in this class. Make sure to cite sources of other people's ideas; do not pass them off as your own. Copying

from other students, assigned course work, or outside web sites without quotation and attribution will be treated as plagiarism and dealt with according to university policy. Students who plagiarize will be warned and receive an F for that assignment. On the second infraction, the student will receive an F for the course.

Turnitin tool

Formal written essays are reviewed using the Canvas Turnitin tool for writing feedback and originality check purposes.

Consistent with Sacramento State's efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool called Turnitin to compare a student's work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student's work with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a "similarity score." The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student's work.

Students should submit essays to Turnitin assignments without identifying information included in the paper (e.g., name or student number), the system will automatically show this info to faculty in your course when viewing the submission, but the information will not be retained by Turnitin.

Sac State's academic honesty policy & procedures

"The principles of truth and honesty are recognized as fundamental to a community of scholars and teachers. California State University, Sacramento expects that both faculty and students will honor these principles, and in so doing, will protect the integrity of academic work and student grades."

Definitions (from the Sacramento State University Library)

At Sac State, "**cheating** is the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work through the use of any dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means." For clarity, "**plagiarism is a form of cheating**," defined by the university as "the use of distinctive ideas or works belonging to another person without providing adequate acknowledgement of that person's contribution."

The use of artificial intelligence to complete assignments without instructor permission is considered by the university to be academic dishonesty. Any work determined to be AI generated in this class will be treated as the equivalent of plagiarism according to the policies in this syllabus.

Read more about Sac State's [Academic Honesty Policy & Procedures](#).