
ENVIRONMENT AND EMPIRE

Prof. Masha Fedorova | MWF, 10:50-11:50 (CST) | mfedorov@macalester.edu |

Office hours: 8:30-9:30am or by appointment

Course objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- understand major historical developments in the environmental history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union;
- place the development of environmental policies and projects in the global context;
- understand the interrelationship between empire and the environment;
- build critical thinking skills through the analysis of primary sources and constructing historical arguments;
- imagine the lives of others to help better understanding and appreciation of the world around you;
- think more critically about history, how it is written and interpreted, and how it can be abused;



By protecting nature, you protect the Motherland!

Охраняя природу - охраняешь Родину!

This course examines the relationship between empire and environment in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union from the 18th to the 20th century. We will explore how imperial and socialist projects transformed the livelihoods and landscapes of Northern Eurasia. We will also consider how the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union enacted policies that sought to tame and protect the environment simultaneously. Among the topics that we will cover in the course are plants and animals of the empire; fur trade, hunting, and animal extinction; agricultural landscapes, famines, and food resources; the Virgin Lands campaign; industrialization and the environment; the exploitation of labor and nature in the Gulag; nuclear landscapes; environmental disasters.

Course Policies

Learning Tools

Moodle. The schedule of readings and assignments is posted on Moodle. Please check it frequently as the schedule is subject to change.

Communication | Office Hours

Communication is key to our success this Fall. You can always reach me by email. I will usually get back to you within a few hours, and always within 24 hours on weekdays.

I will hold my office hours in HUM 207 on MW from 8:30 to 9:30 am. If you can't make my standing times, email me with a handful of times that will work for you that I can check against my schedule.

Late Assignments

- Each student has five "late days" which can be applied to any of the homework assignments. A late day extends the due date by 24 hours. At most three late days can be used on any single assignment. This allows me to grade your assignments and return them to you within a reasonable period.
- Late days are intended to help you manage your time effectively. They are not meant to be a substitute for starting assignments early. If you exhaust your late days, a 10% penalty will be applied per day, up until a week after the original deadline. After that, the assignment will not be accepted.
- Late days are not meant to be used for medical emergencies or extenuating circumstances. In those situations, please contact me.

Macalester Recording Policy

The Macalester College Classroom Recording (MCCR) policy sets forth community expectations regarding the recording (whether audio, video, or streaming) of class lectures, discussions, office hours, and other course-related activities. As an academic community, we value the free exchange of ideas and the privacy of community members. We are also committed to providing appropriate accommodations to students who require recorded lectures as an academic adjustment for documented disabilities. The MCCR policy balances the legitimate uses of classroom recording, the intellectual property of the faculty, and the privacy of individual students and faculty. The entire policy can be found here, <https://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/academicpolicies/>.

In short, the policy requires students to submit a completed Student Recording Agreement to the appropriate office (Disability Services for students with approved accommodations; Academic Programs and Advising for all others) before engaging in any type of recording. The faculty member who signed the Recording Agreement (or is notified by Disability Services that recording will occur as an accommodation) is responsible for notifying the class that recording will be

occurring. The required Student Agreement Recording form is available here, <https://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/academicadvising/forms/>.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy

In this course, you may use AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to help you generate ideas and to brainstorm. However, you should note that the material generated by these tools may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that overuse of AI may stifle your independent thinking and creativity, and use any tools (for generating text, code, video, audio, images, or translation) wisely and carefully.

You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material—including both ideas and language—generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material, both in this course and at Macalester College in general. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Advice, Counsel, and Mandatory Reporting

I am happy to meet and converse with you if you are experiencing personal issues, mental health issues, or have experienced some form of harm. You should know that I am also a mandatory reporter of abuse, assault, or other significant harm. This means that if you share such details, I am required to contact the Dean of Students office who will be able to further help you with any necessary next steps, from counseling onwards.

Assignments

Participation | 30 %

Participation is an essential part of this course. In-class discussions, group discussions, answers to exit tickets, reflections at the end of units will be factored into your participation grade. Engaging with the (synchronous and asynchronous) classroom space — including by helping to create an environment where all of us can learn and think well about one another — will also be factored into participation. In addition, your contributions to class discussions, not simply the amount you speak, will be assessed. See the rubric below.¹

If you have any concerns, questions, or need for consideration for flexibility, connect with me as soon as possible to determine an appropriate plan.

Please note: It may be that illness or other unexpected situations will require you to be away for class for more than half of a module, necessitating that we consider the possibility of withdrawal or an

¹ The rubric was created by Prof. Devlin Kennedy, UW-Madison.

incomplete. We will stay in contact, and will seek support from colleagues in Student Affairs and in Academic Advising, should that situation arise.

Excellent (90-100)	Good (80-90)	Competent (70-80)	Inadequate (60-70)	Fail (0-60)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mastery over readings and previous discussion - Explores questions rigorously - Comes to class with interpretations and questions - Engages others respectfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knows readings well; - Consistent preparation and involvement; - Offers analysis of texts in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic grasp of reading; - Mostly offers facts and surface-level interpretations; - Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient command of reading; - Attempts to contribute facts or interpretations when called but unable to offer substance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uninvolved; - Unexcused; - Disruptive

Art and Environment | Visit to the Museum of Russian Art | 10% - October 6

In this assignment, you will write a short analysis of an artwork from the Museum of Russian Art (Minneapolis, MN). We will visit the museum on September 21 as a class. If you cannot visit, please let me know. The instructions for the artwork analysis will be provided before the museum visit.

Midterm | 20% | October 16

The in-class midterm will consist of three parts.

- 1) Historical Geography. Identify several geographical and political markers on a contour map. The list of markers will be given four to five days before the exam.
- 2) Primary Source Analysis. You will analyze a primary source or an excerpt from a primary source.
- 3) Short response based on Akif'ev's travelogue *To the Far North*.

Research Project | 25%

For this assignment, you will write a 1,500-word mock research proposal addressed to an individual or an agency of your choice. In this proposal, you will develop a research question on a topic related to the course. Your goal is to present an engaging project that will receive funding.

Oral Final Exam | 15%

For the final exam, you will meet with me for a 15-minute conversation during the final exam week. The list of topics will be distributed a week before the exam. You can use your lecture notes and

other materials (primary/secondary sources) during the oral exam. Your goal is to demonstrate the knowledge of a particular topic and the ability to explain its historical significance.

Assessment

Final grades in the course will be on a plus/minus scale, as following:

94-100 = A	87-89.5 = B+	77-80 = C+	67-70 = D+
90-93.5 = A-	84-86.5 = B	74-76.5 = C	64-66.5 = D
	80-83.5 = B-	70-73.5 = C-	60-63.5 = D-

Readings

- Nicholas Breyfogle, ed., *Eurasian Environments: Nature and Ecology in Imperial Russian and Soviet History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018). Online access.
- Ivan Akif'ev, *To the Far North: Diary of a Russian World Traveler* (2024).
- George Gilbert, *Reading Russian Sources: A Student's Guide to Text and Visual Sources from Russian History* (2020).

College Policies and Resources

Mac Stays Safer: Our Shared Community Commitment

Our individual and community health depends on our choices and actions. Our ability to stay safer is only as strong as our shared commitment to each other. We are asking each of you—students, staff, and faculty—to be flexible and adopt new behaviors to support the well-being of our community and keep each other as healthy and protected as possible. The elements of our community commitment come from the Minnesota Department of Health and other public health guidance. We each have a role to play in our culture of mutual care, accountability, and safety.

The coronavirus does not differentiate an individual's particular identities, characteristics, or roles. Inequitable societal structures, however, have led to disparate impacts, resulting in higher burdens of illness among members of BIPOC communities and other historically marginalized groups. Macalester College reaffirms its commitment to creating a community free of any form of bias, harassment, or discrimination.

For more information, see: <https://www.macalester.edu/covid-19/return-to-campus/community-commitment/>

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their college work; violations of academic integrity are serious offenses. Students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty -- including, for instance, forgery, cheating, and plagiarism -- are subject to disciplinary action. For more information, see: <https://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/academicpolicies/academicintegrity/>.

Disability Accommodation

I am committed to ensuring access to course content for all students, including those with disabilities. If you have a disability, please send me an email or a message via Slack early in the module to discuss your accommodation plan. If you have not yet obtained a plan or are unsure if you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact Disability Services: disabilityservices@macalester.edu, or call 651-696-6974.

Library Resources

Working to integrate the disciplinary literature into your research can be a complex process. Consulting with the research and instruction librarians for the discipline(s) in which you are studying will save you time and help you discover better, more scholarly sources. You can make an appointment using the Ask Us page on the library website, which can be accessed at <https://www.macalester.edu/library/askus/>, or email your librarian(s) directly.

MAX Center Resources

The MAX Center is Macalester's academic resource center. I strongly encourage you to take full advantage of any and all of the excellent resources they provide there, as they are committed to supporting all students to succeed at Macalester.

Religious Observance

Students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this module. If you have a religious observance/practice that conflicts with your participation in the course, please contact me before the end of the first week of the module to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Schedule of Readings* (*subject to change)

Week 1. Thinking Eurasian History Environmentally

Wednesday, September 4.

- Introduction. Syllabus

Friday, September 6. Thinking Russia's History Environmentally

- *Thinking Russia's History Environmentally*, Introduction and John R. McNeill "Russian and Soviet Environmental History: Unexceptionalism and Exceptionalism" (35 pp.)

Week 2. Environment and Empire

Monday, September 9. Key Concepts: Empire and Environment

- Lecture; no readings

Wednesday, September 11. Imperial Space

- Jane Burbank, "All Under the Tsar: Russia's Eurasian Trajectory" in *The Limits of Universal Rule* (2021), pp. 342-372. (30 pp.)
- Willard Sunderland, "Imperial Space: Territorial Thought and Practice in the Eighteenth Century," in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (2007): 33-66. (33 pp.)

Friday, September 13. Maps as Historical Sources

- Jennifer Keating, "Imperial Maps," in *Reading Russian Sources: A Student's Guide to Text and Visual Sources from Russian History*, ed. George Gilbert, p. 61-72.
- In class: Working with Maps

Week 3. Steppe Environments: Making Land Suitable for Agriculture. Part I

September 16, Monday. Steppe Environments

- Jennifer Keating, "Amid the Horrors of Nature: 'Dead' Environments at the Margins of the Russian Empire," in *Empty Spaces*, pp. 33-57.

September 18, Wednesday. Seeds, Scientists, and Colonialism in the Steppe

- John Seitz, "Seeds of the Settler Colony: How Peasant and Kazakh Knowledge, Environment, and Bureaucracy Shaped Steppe Agronomy in the Late Russian Empire," *Technology and Culture* 65, no. 2 (2024): 531-552. (PDF on Moodle)
- Sarah Cameron, "People Arrive but the Land Does Not Move," in *Eurasian Environments*, pp. 43-59.

Friday, September 20. Environment in Literary Works

- Sarah Hudspith, "'It's only a story': What value are novels as a historical source?" in *Reading Russian Sources*, pp. 77-82.

Week 4. Steppe Environments: Making Land Suitable for Agriculture. Part II

September 23, Monday. Eastern Eden: Irrigation and "Greenification" of Central Asia

- Maya Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin*, ch. 2 "Eastern Eden" (selected pages, TBD);
- Jennifer Keating, "'There are Few Plants But They are Growing and Quickly': Foliage and the Aesthetics of Landscape in Russian Central Asia, 1854-1914," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 37, no. 2 (2017). (PDF on Moodle)

September 25, Wednesday. Fighting Against Nature

- Ian W. Campbell, "The Scourge of Stock Raising: Zhüt, Limiting Environments, and the Economic Transformation of the Kazakh Steppe," in *Eurasian Environments*, 60-74.
- Stephen Bittner, "American Roots, French Varietals, Russian Science: A Transnational History of the Great Wine Blight in Late-Tsarist Bessarabia," *Past & Present* 227, no. 1 (2015): 151-177.

September 27. Friday. Late Imperial Press as a Source

- George Gilbert, "The Late Imperial Press," in *Reading Russian Sources*, 93-98, 101-102.
- In class: Working with Late Imperial Newspapers

Week 5. Animals in the Russian Empire

Monday, September 30. Empire and Animal Extinction in the Far East

- Ryan Tucker Jones, "'Havock Made among Them': Animals, Empire, and Extinction in the Russian NorthPacific, 1741—1810," *Environmental History* 16, no. 4 (2011): 585-609. (JSTOR)
- Stepan P. Krasheninnikov, "Sable Hunting in Eastern Siberia in the Early 18th Century," *Polar Geography* 28:2 (2004), 147-161.

Wednesday, October 2. Animal Protection in Late Imperial Russia

- Amy Nelson, "The Body of the Beast: Animal Protection and Anticruelty Legislation in Imperial Russia," in *Other Animals: Beyond the Human in Russian Culture and History*, edited by Amy Nelson and Jane Costlow (2010), 95-112.

Friday, October 4. Travel Accounts as Historical Sources

- George Kennan, *A Tent Life in Siberia and Adventures among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia* (1881), 60-61, 162-164.
- Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 1-11. (PDF on Moodle)

Week 6. Cold and Science in Late Imperial Russia

October 7, Monday. "The Cold" as a Historical Concept

- Pey-Yi Chu, *The Life of Permafrost: A History of Frozen Earth in Russian and Soviet Science* (2020), ch. 1 "Mapping."

October 9, Wednesday. The Russian Cold: Book Discussion

- Julia Herzberg, Andreas Renner, and Ingrid Schierle, *The Russian Cold: Histories of Ice, Frost, and Snow* (2021). Read 1 assigned article.

October 11, Friday. To the Far North: Discussion

Week 7. To the Far North

October 14, Monday. To the Far North: Discussion

- To the Far North: Diary of a Russian World Traveler

October 16, Wednesday. Midterm

- Midterm

October 18. Fall Break

Week 8. Stalinism and the Environment

Monday, October 21. Stalinism and the Environment

- Lecture
- Stephen Brain, "The Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature"
- William Husband, "'Correcting Nature's Mistakes': Transforming the Environment and Soviet Children's Literature, 1928-1941"

Wednesday, October 23. Gulag and the Environment

- Alan Barenberg, "From the Margins to the Home Front: Vorkuta as an Outpost"

- Professor Barenberg's visit

Friday, October 25. War on Agriculture

- Collectivization: Primary Sources
- In class: Kubanskie Kazaki (excerpt)

Week 9. Nuclear Race

Monday, October 28. Nuclear Race

- Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*, Introduction and Part 2.

Wednesday, October 30. Nuclear Race

- Brown, *Plutopia*, Part 3

Friday, November 1. Nuclear Race: Primary Sources

- Hydrogen Bomb: Primary Sources (explore all tabs)

Week 10. Agricultural Dreams: The Virgin Lands Campaign and the Corn Crusade

Monday, November 4. Khrushchev's Reforms and Environmentalism

- Lecture
- Laurent Coumel, "A Failed Environmental Turn? Khrushchev's Thaw and Nature Protection in Soviet Russia," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 40 (2013): 167-189.

Wednesday, November 6. The Virgin Lands Campaign

- The Virgin Lands Program(1954); The "New Course" in Agriculture (1953); Posters; Video.

Friday, November 7. The Corn Crusade

- Corn Campaign Texts
- Corn Campaign Images
- Corn Campaign Video

Week 11. Soviet Environmentalism and Cold War Politics

Monday, November 11. Soviet Environmentalism and Cold War Politics

- Lecture
- Stephen Brain, “The Appeal of Appearing Green: Soviet-American Ideological Competition and Cold War Environmental Diplomacy,” *Cold War History* 16, no. 4 (2016): 147-180.

Wednesday, November 13. Red Leviathan: Soviet Whaling

- Ryan T. Jones, *Red Leviathan: The Secret History of Soviet Whaling*, ch. 11-12

Friday, November 15. Cold War Environmentalism: Comparing the US and the USSR

- Soviet posters: Online Exhibition

Week 12. Soviet Environmentalism and Society in the 1970s and '80s

Monday, November 18. Soviet Environmentalism

- Lecture
- Discussion: Nicholas Breyfogle, “At the Watershed: 1958 and the Beginnings of Lake Baikal Environmentalism,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 1 (2015): 147-180.

Wednesday, November 20. Soviet Environmentalism in Literature and Film

- In class: Farewell (dir. Elem Klimov and Larisa Shepit'ko, 1981), part 1

Friday, November 22. Soviet Environmentalism in Literature and Film

- Movie Discussion

Week 13. Finishing the Project

Monday, November 25. Finishing the Project

- Individual work in class. Attendance is not required.

Wednesday-Friday, November 27-29. Thanksgiving break

Week 14. Perestroika and Late Soviet Disasters

Monday, December 2. Gorbachev's Perestroika and Econationalism

- Lecture

- Marc Elie, “Late Soviet Responses to Disasters, 1989-1991: A New Approach to Crisis Management or the Acme of Soviet Technocratic Thinking?” (2013)

Wednesday, December 4. Chernobyl

- Raab, *All Shook Up: The Shifting Soviet Response to Catastrophes*, ch. 5 (everybody)
- Group 1: ch. 2; Group 2: ch. 3; Group 3: ch. 4; Group 4: ch. 6.

Friday, December 6. Chernobyl: Primary Sources

- Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, excerpts (PDF on Moodle)

Week 15. Post-Soviet Environment

Monday, December 9. Environment in Post-Soviet Spaces

Togzhan Kassenova, *Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan Gave Up the Bomb*, ch. 9 (PDF on Moodle)

Wednesday, December 11. Final Reflections

No readings.