

San José State University
College of Social Sciences /History Department

History 221 (01) Seminar in World History, Since 1760

Fall 2025

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Xiaojia Hou
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Office Hours:	Wednesday, 3 pm – 5 PM or by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Wednesday, 6-8:45 PM
Classroom:	Hugh Gillis Hall 221

Course Description

This seminar explores the origins and evolution of communism, beginning with its ideological foundations in Marxism and Leninism. It examines communism's rise to power through the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and its subsequent spread across various parts of the world - including the United States - with particular attention to China. The course investigates the key questions: Why did communist parties gain traction in certain regions? What explains the diversity among communist regimes? Why did some experiments in communism end in catastrophe? And why did most ultimately collapse or undergo fundamental transformation?

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

CLO1: Learn to approach historical concepts and be alert of the complexity of human society. **This learning objective will be assessed by class discussions and presentations.**

CLO2: Identify thesis, evidence, strengths and weaknesses in various texts and critically analyze sources in their contexts. **This learning objective will be assessed by the review essay, presentations and research essay.**

CLO3: Develop skills to work out a topic based on reading primary documents and write historical essays with a strong thesis and clear evidence of historical thinking. **Assessed by essay proposal and essay writing.**
CLO4: Develop skills to examine parallels between the past and present, striving to know how our own contemporary interests, identities or perspectives may influence our analysis of the past. **This learning objective will be assessed by the oral report and the research essay.**

Required Texts/Readings

Textbook

David Priesland, *The Red Flag* (New York: Grove Press, 2009)
Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, third edition (The Free Press, 1999)
Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, (Oxford University, 2011)
Frederic Bender ed, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Norton Critical Edition)

Other Readings

Each week, documents and articles will be posted on the Canvas website, as indicated by “*” in the course schedule. Doing the reading assigned for each class before coming to class is necessary to benefit from what we do in class. Browse website <https://www.marxists.org/> for primary documents and reference.

Library Liaison

The History Department Library Liaison is Nyle Monday (nyle.Monday@sjsu.edu). Contact him for help with any library assignments in your History classes. His telephone number is (408) 808-2041.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practice. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

The course begins with an introduction to the History of world communism through reading four textbooks. Each student will write a review essay (3-5 pages), mainly on *The Communist Manifesto*, to articulate his/her understanding of what communism/socialism should be.

By October, each student needs to choose a research project. The topic can be about a communism event; it can also cover a communism theme. The student's efforts during this stage will be reflected in a series of stage results—including a proposal, a draft bibliography and a research paper, which will be presented and critiqued in class. Please see details below.

Proposal for the research paper.

By October, you should be able to commit yourself to a specific topic on which you will write your research paper. This topic will be presented in a preliminary proposal about one page in length. This proposal will describe in some details three general issues that are of primary relevance to your essay:

1. The specific topic to be investigated;

2. The types of sources you have found for the topic;
3. A justification for the paper and its perceived main arguments.

Draft bibliography for the research paper.

This assignment is essentially a preliminary bibliography with comments. It will be composed of three parts:

First part. It should list all the sources you have consulted so far and it should identify the ones you intend to use in writing the research paper. This list should be fairly substantial. Try to subdivide your list into two categories: (1) primary sources on the topic, and (2) articles, monographs and other secondary sources. Each item should be followed by a brief assessment of the sources' content and usefulness to your topic. Please also identify the primary resource available to you.

Second part. After the entire list, add a brief essay discussing your bibliographic search in general. You might include here a description and assessment of the general quality and nature of the materials available to you so far. You might, for example, need to indicate that you have only found one appropriate prime source at this point, but that you are on the track of others. You might wish to summarize the various arguments you have encountered about the topic and then indicate how your thesis relates to them.

Third part. In about one page, you need to indicate the content of your introduction. Be sure to include the title of your paper.

Oral report:

The oral report is a 15-20 minutes presentation of your research. Your major emphasis should include the portrayal of the relevant background of your topic and an overview of your particular focus on it. You should avoid reading your paper but to summarize your main thesis, your argument, and the materials you use to support your argument. There will then be a general discussion of your work by all the seminar members. This exercise will give you the opportunity to test and further develop the ideas and conclusions you have developed in the paper. Be sure to make notes of the seminar's comments and questions so that you can respond to them in the final draft.

Critique and comments on other's paper.

Each student in the course will specifically read another fellow student's draft paper, make comments and help to edit. The critique should concentrate on the strength and, especially, the weakness of the draft paper, and should suggest ways to improve the paper. He/she should provide the text of the critique to both the paper write and the instructor.

Research paper

The research paper is the most important part of your performance in this seminar. You need to include a title page, text, footnotes, and bibliography. The paper is a combination of the historiography on the topic and your own research with primary source. The paper should be between 20 and 30 pages of text, typed and doubled spaced.

Class participation is essential for success. It is your responsibility to clarify missed assignments with classmates or with me prior to the next class. Class participation will be considered in determining the final grade. Late paper submission will be penalized. The oral report must be given on the day assigned. If you have any question, please contact the Professor before taking action on your own.

Grading Information

- Essay on *The Communist Manifesto* (100)
- Proposal for the research paper (50)
- Draft bibliography (50)
- Oral report (150)
- Written critique and comments of other's paper (50)
- Research paper, approximately 20 to 30 pages (400)
- Class participation (200)

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>930 to 1000</i>	<i>93 to 100%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>900 to 929</i>	<i>90 to 92%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>860 to 899</i>	<i>86 to 89 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>830 to 859</i>	<i>83 to 85%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>800 to 829</i>	<i>80 to 82%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>760 to 799</i>	<i>76 to 79%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>730 to 759</i>	<i>73 to 75%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>700 to 729</i>	<i>70 to 72%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>660 to 699</i>	<i>66 to 69%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>630 to 659</i>	<i>63 to 65%</i>
<i>D minus</i>	<i>600 to 629</i>	<i>60 to 62%</i>

Classroom Protocol

All students are expected to attend the class each week and complete all assignments. Bear in mind that active participation means asking good questions as well as proposing good answers. If you cannot attend a lecture, it is your responsibility to find out what you have missed.

Come to class on time and remain in your seat while class is in session. Do NOT interfere with other students' learning. Do NOT chat, interrupt, pass notes, eat noisily, take calls, check messages, or text in class. If you have a question during class, raise your hand. There will always be time for questions and discussion at the end of the class period.

University Policies (Required)

Per University Policy S16-9 is available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/> Make sure to review these university policies and resources with students.

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Course Schedule

All dates and assignments in this syllabus are subject to modification. Any changes will be announced during the class.

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	Aug 20	Introduction
2	Aug 27	The Founding of Communism and Its Development in Western Europe Readings: Frederic Bender ed, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> <i>The Red Flag</i> , chapter 1-2 Eduard Bernstein, <i>Evolutionary Socialism</i> (1899), Preface * Rosa Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution" (1900), Introduction * R. Tucker, "Marxism and Modernization," *
3	Sept 3	The Bolshevik Revolution and Stalinism Readings: Lenin: "What is to be done" * <i>The Red Flag</i> , chapter 3-4 <i>The Soviet Experiment</i> , chapter 2-12 Review Essay Due
4	Sept 10	The Path of Armed Struggle and Popular Front Readings: <i>The Red Flag</i> , chapter 5 <i>Mao's China and After</i> , chapter 1-4 Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" *
5	Sept 17	Post - WWII Communist Movement Readings: <i>The Red Flag</i> , chapter 6-9 <i>The Soviet Experiment</i> , chapter 13-16 <i>Mao's China and After</i> , chapter 5-9
6	Sept 24	Socialism in Defense and in Advance Readings: <i>The Red Flag</i> , chapter 10-11 <i>The Soviet Experiment</i> , chapter 17 <i>Mao's China and After</i> , chapter 10-20 Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech *
7	Oct 1	No Class, Individual Research.

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
8	Oct 8	Presentation of Research Topic Research Proposal Due
9	Oct 15	No Class, Individual Research.
10	Oct 22	Reforming Socialism and the Fall of Communist States Readings: <i>The Red Flag</i> , chapter 12 <i>The Soviet Experiment</i> , chapter 18-20 <i>Mao's China and After</i> , chapter 21-25 Vaclav Havel, <i>Power of the Powerless</i> *
11	Oct 29	No Class, Individual Research Bibliography Due
12	Nov 5	Oral Reports
13	Nov 12	Oral Reports
14	Nov 19	Oral Reports
15	Nov 26	Happy Thanksgiving, No Class
16	Dec 3	Discussions
Final Papers	Dec 5 Dec 9 Dec 14	Research Draft Due Peer Critique Due Final Essay Due