CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Communism and Nazism Reflected in the Arts
Course code: POLI 3019 PRAG / ARTS 3001 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

Film, literature, and the arts have always played a central role in reflecting the attitudes towards the twin ideologies of Nazism and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. They were central to propagandizing these ideologies and building their strength after World War One. However, they also provided the most vibrant forum for those challenging the totalitarian regimes established by Nazis and Communists. In the period since their fall, politics and academia have frequently failed to enable an accessible debate on their legacy. Thus, film and literature remain the site of a debate. This course will explore this theme in a multi-disciplinary way, drawing on history, political science, literature, film studies, and psychology. There is a broad and deep amount of material to draw upon which will allow students to easily inquire into areas of particular interest to them. In order to reinforce the point that the issues we are examining have meaning across regions and times, we will work thematically rather than chronologically. In this course we will be mixing approaches to how we explore the issues. Prague is one of the few capitals that experienced liberal democracy, Nazism, Communism, and a return to liberal democracy in little more than 50 years. Therefore, many opportunities emerge to meet people and visit events which can increase our understanding of the topic.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

Drawing on a significant engagement with the core films, literature, and art, students will develop a significant understanding of and critically engage with different aspects
of life and resistance in the region during the last century. In particular, students will assess and illustrate the origins and experience of totalitarianism, the origins and experience of civil resistance to Nazi and Communist totalitarianism, and the role of artists reflecting it as part of a common discourse and memory.

Course Prerequisites

The principal requirement for this course is a willingness to engage with the issues that will be raised and to use the opportunity of being in Prague to go beyond the material discussed in class.

Methods of Instruction

This is a flexible and participative course. In class we will watch and discuss films, explore ideas contained in literature, hear from those who have deep personal experiences of Nazism and Communism and use the opportunity of the active life of Prague to attend any relevant events that occur during the semester. The specific topics and order of classes will change to reflect both the opportunities for visits and guests as well as the interests of the students. Where a film is the principal instruction aid for a class it will only be shown in excerpt to illustrate the wider topic under discussion. Should students wish to see the complete film, most are available on DVD and loanable.

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Midterm Examination 20%
2. Final Examination 25%
3. Essay 15%
4. Presentation 15%
5. Class Participation 25%
   TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Midterm Examination
Final Examination

There will be midterm and final examinations that will be held in class and involve a review of the core themes covered in the class. Details will be provided via Canvas course site.

Essay

Each student will choose one film, book, or artist and write an essay (1700-2500 words) on a relevant topic approved by the instructor ahead of time. Details will be provided via Canvas course site.

Presentation

Each student will choose one film, book, or artist and present an excerpt from the work in class, followed by a discussion led by the student (presentation – maximum of 15 minutes; follow-up discussion – ca 10 minutes). Details will be provided via Canvas course site.

Class Participation

Class participation is an essential element of this course. It is through the interaction of the instructor and guests with students that most of the ideas will be explored effectively. Class participation also includes regular preparation for class, including mandatory readings and film viewing.

CIEE Prague Class Participation Policy

Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.
Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor’s or other students’ line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students’ active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

**CIEE Prague Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences are treated equally regardless of reason for any affected CIEE course. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursions or events, as well as Internship.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

Missing classes will lead to the following penalties:

90-minute semester classes:
180-minute semester classes:

Persistent absenteeism (students approaching 20% of the total course hours missed, or violating the attendance policy in more than one class) will result in a written warning, a notification to the student’s home school, and possibly a dismissal from the program.

Missing more than 20% of the total class hours will lead to a course failure, and potential program dismissal. This is a CIEE rule that applies to all CIEE courses and is in line with the Participant Contract that each CIEE student signs before arriving on-site.

Late arrival to class will be considered a partial (up to 15 minutes late) or full (15 or more minutes late) absence. Three partial absences due to late arrivals will be regarded as one full class absence.

Students must notify their professor and Program Coordinators (PC) beforehand if they are going to miss class for any reason and are responsible for any material covered in class in their absence.

If missing a class during which a test, exam, the student’s presentation or other graded class assignments are administered, make-up assignment will only be allowed in approved circumstances, such as serious medical issues. In this case, the student must submit a local doctor’s note within 24 hours of his/her absence to the PC, who will decide whether the student qualifies for a make-up assignment. Doctor’s notes may be submitted via e-mail or phone (a scan or a photograph are acceptable), however the student must ensure that the note is delivered to the PC.

Should a truly extraordinary situation arise, the student must contact the PC immediately concerning permission for a make-up assignment. Make-up assignments
are not granted automatically! The PC decides the course of action for all absence cases that are not straightforward. Always contact the PC with any inquiry about potential absence(s) and the nature thereof.

Personal travel (including flight delays and cancelled flights), handling passport and other document replacements, interviews, volunteering and other similar situations are not considered justifiable reasons for missing class or getting permission for make-up assignments.

For class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips, make-up classes and other instances), always contact the Academic Assistant to decide the appropriate course of action.

Course attendance is recorded on individual Canvas Course Sites. Students are responsible for checking their attendance regularly to ensure the correctness of the records. In case of discrepancies, students are required to contact the Academic Assistant within one week of the discrepancy date to have it corrected. Later claims will not be considered.

CIEE staff does not directly manage absences at FAMU and ECES, but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

**CIEE Academic Honesty Policy**

CIEE subscribes to standard U.S. norms requiring that students exhibit the highest standards regarding academic honesty. Cheating and plagiarism in any course assignment or exam will not be tolerated and may result in a student failing the course or being expelled from the program. Standards of honesty and norms governing originality of work differ significantly from country to country. We expect students to adhere to both the American norms and the local norms, and in the case of conflict between the two, the more stringent of the two will preside. Three important principles are considered when defining and demanding academic honesty. These are related to the fundamental tenet that one should not present the work of another person as one’s own.

The first principle is that final examinations, quizzes and other tests must be done without assistance from another person, without looking at or otherwise consulting
the work of another person, and without access to notes, books, or other pertinent information (unless the professor has explicitly announced that a particular test is to be taken on an “open book” basis).

The second principle applies specifically to course work: the same written paper may not be submitted in two classes. Nor may a paper for which you have already received credit at your home institution be submitted to satisfy a paper requirement while studying overseas.

The third principle is that any use of the work of another person must be documented in any written papers, oral presentations, or other assignments carried out in connection with a course. This usually is done when quoting directly from another’s work or including information told to you by another person. The general rule is that if you have to look something up, or if you learned it recently either by reading or hearing something, you have to document it.

The penalty ranges from an F grade on the assignment, failure in the course to dismissal from the program. The Academic Director is consulted and involved in decision making in every case of a possible violation of academic honesty.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class 1.1

Overview of the course, its structure, papers to be prepared, reading and viewing required and recommended.

Sergej Ejzenstejn’s “The Battleship Potemkin” (1925) as first propaganda film.

Class 1.2

The nature and significance of civil resistance facing totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.


Week 2
Class 2.1

The notion of absurdity of any given totalitarian regime, the exploration of the situation of an innocent individual being treated as a potential criminal or enemy of the state, being young in Central Europe.

“The Rhythm in My Heels” by Josef Škvorecký and Andrea Sedláčková

Class 2.2

Intelligent individuals trusting and serving a dictatorship e.g. in the communist Soviet Russia under Stalin and realizing too late what the real foundations of such a regime are.


Week 3
Class 3.1

Another option for an intelligent, honest person in the Soviet Russia – trying to stay out of the historical events, an impossible attempt to live without either compromising with the regime or fighting it.


Class 3.2

The general analysis of a non-democratic, oppressive system, whether it is Communism or Nazism and the striving of individuals for love, freedom, and truth.

George Orwell: “1984”.

Week 4
Class 4.1

The appeal of totalitarian ideology to some artists and intellectuals – by opportunism, by conviction? Leni Riefenstahl and Albert Speer serving the Nazi regime and their different perception of guilt later on.

“The Triumph of the Will” and Gita Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer.

Class 4.2

An opposite reaction of students fighting the same oppressive regime and believing in democracy as a fair social environment.


Week 5
Class 5.1

How totalitarian ideology deals with its real or imagined opponents. Mass human rights abuses in Soviet Russia and witnesses who had difficulties to be trusted in Western liberal democracies.


Class 5.2

Another example of an abusive regime dealing not only with its opponents, but other groups as well – Jews, Slaves, Romas, handicapped mentally or physically. Individual versus collective guilt.


Week 6
Class 6.1 Midterm Exam Period
Surviving inhuman conditions of war, occupation, ghettos, and concentration camps. The notion of human solidarity, believing in good as a realistic concept after all, as well as friendship and love. The notion of guilt and shame.


Class 6.2 Midterm Exam Period

Mid-term paper

Week 7

Class 7.1 Midterm Exam Period

A more skeptical vision of people conforming to occupation and rules of the dictatorship.


Class 7.2 Midterm Exam Period

Jews as a persecuted group, the psychology of victimization and marginalization of a given social group by the majoritarian society.


Week 8

Class 8.1

The loneliness of those who came back – from the front, from a prison, from a camp. Original beliefs confronted with today’s reality.

Methods generally used by any totalitarian ideology whether it is Communism or Nazism or any current extremist movement.

Brain washing, psychological humiliation, physical torture, attacks on one’s beliefs and morals, isolation from the outside world.


Week 9
Class 9.1

An attempt to catalogue and analyze the crimes of Communism over seventy years.

Revelation of the actual, practical impacts of the ideology around the world – terror, torture, famine, mass deportations, massacres.

Karel Bartošek’s chapter in Stéphane Courtois and coll.: “The Black Book of Communism” (1999)

Week 10
Class 10.1

What is it like to live in a society that is essentially not free and how do people react towards power. Conformity versus protest.


Class 10.2


Week 11
Class 11.1
A very different look at the social reality of the 80’s – although the abuse of power is omnipresent, a revolt is possible. Background of the Gdansk events just before the declaration of the martial law.


Class 11.2.

Walking visit of the key central Prague sites of the November 1989 revolution and discussion of the dynamic of the sparking of a revolution.

Week 12
Class 12.1.

Dissent and civil resistance as a phenomenon of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe. Life in truth as a response to the totalitarian regime, possibilities of help from the outside world.


Class 12.2.

Secret police and its collaborators as an omnipresent control of people’s lives. Personal files and their critical evaluation.

Visit to the European Platform for Studying Totalitarian regimes which published extensive studies on both the Communist and the Nazi periods.

Week 13
Class 13.1 Final Exam Week

Final Exam

Class 13.2 Final Exam Week
Course wrap-up discussion

Course Materials

Readings

In addition to works mentioned with each class, the following represents a fuller range of texts which can help explore the themes addressed. A reader of select texts will be made available.

Secondary Sources


Fromm, Erich. To Have or To Be. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015.


Gorbachev, Michail. Glasnost and Perestrojka in the USSR


Milgrams, Stanley. An Experimental View. Pinter & Martin Ltd., 2010.


Primary Sources (Books)


Patočka, Jan; Hájek, Jiří; Havel, Václav. The Charter 77 Declaration


Seifert, Jaroslav. All the Beauties of the World. 1986.


Films & Documentaries


