

## Conference on Serf Emancipation

In this course we will have a two-part conference on one of the most important issues in Russian history: serf emancipation. At this conference several groups of the population (state bureaucrats, serfs, nobility, the intelligentsia), as well as Emperor Alexander II and the ghost of Emperors past, will be represented. Each student will be expected to represent one of these groups or persons and to write a basic position paper from the standpoint of that person or a member of that group. The papers should be distinctly *subjective* in the sense that you will seek to represent the outlook, interests, and values of the historical persons in question and in the sense that it should be written in the first person ("I," "we," "our," etc.). Note that writing a subjective paper of this sort needs to be done very carefully and under no circumstances should degenerate into a caricature. You need to be sensitive to the range of factors that influenced the particular person or group that you represent. These would include a sense of previous historical development; the political, social, and economic circumstances currently facing both the particular person/group in question and the country as a whole; the cultural outlooks of the given person or group (i.e., the basic values and categories that the person or group uses to evaluate the world and his/her/its place within it); the basic economic interests of the person / group (for all you Marxists out there); the sense of obligation that the person or group feels towards the sovereign or other individuals and groups. The essay should treat the period leading up to the emancipation, as well as its aftermath.

You should draw on any and all relevant sources. These would include – depending on your group or person – the textbook by Bushkovitch, the analysis and primary documents in Moon's Abolition of Serfdom, anything relevant from the web reader, and any external sources that you consult with my guidance. I strongly encourage you to avoid internet sources in the broad sense of the term, as I believe that these may well confuse you and lead you astray or into the realm of plagiarism. It is my assumption that you will have ample material with which to complete this exercise using just the required material of this course. There may be Stakhanovites, however, who wish to read further in preparation for the paper, and this is something I can only encourage, even as I refrain from requiring it. I do not believe in "extra credit" as such, but obviously if you put extra work into your presentation and paper by reading outside sources (e.g., an article), then I will view this favorably when I evaluate your work. Moon's book has a nice bibliography, including several articles of manageable length, and anything there would be acceptable. Beyond that, it would probably be best to consult with me, as consulting silly readings will merely detract from your paper and presentation. The web site has a number of [direct links to specific articles](#), and by even just glancing at these you will perform a major good deed by increasing traffic on the library's web site and increasing journal usage (which are being measured for the purposes of determining what to cut next in the library's budget). Any required readings for the course should be referred to using parentheses, e.g., (Moon, 37) and (Bushkovitch, 117). Any other sources should be referenced using footnotes. See my [general guidelines](#) on how to do this. Your paper should 4-5 page in length.

For the conference, you should be prepared to articulate the central concerns of your group or person and to anticipate the concerns of others. It is of course crucial that you listen carefully to the concerns of other persons and groups. It would seem advisable to have a series of concrete assertions that you feel are essential to make (index cards with talking points are entirely legitimate in this regard). Be in a position to make the main points quickly and effectively, but also to elaborate at greater length if the discussion should require this. It is absolutely unacceptable to walk into the room either day of the conference without any clear idea of what you wish to say, and students who arrive in such a clueless state will have their nostrils slit. In speaking before the group, try to avoid the word "like" as a qualifier (e.g., "they were, like, dissatisfied"); obvious anachronisms (such as "dude"); and sports metaphors of dubious relevance ("stepping up to the plate" is one that I dislike in particular). Try also to keep to a minimum intervening expressions, such as "...um...", "...uh...", and "...eebedah, eebedah..." This of course means thinking in

advance about what you wish to say and how to say it. Profanity, even when used as a suffix (e.g., "bad-ass"), is not acceptable. An important element of public speaking involves knowing what kind of language to use. In this case I'm telling you up front. The larger point is to raise the level of discourse and thus to make for a more intelligent and informative exchange of ideas. Note that the conference has two parts divided along these lines: you'll want to be able to say something both days.

A sign-up sheet will be distributed in class in order ensure that we cover all the needed persons and groups. It is obviously crucial that you be present on the day of the conference, and I will be very irate if you do not show up that day. If you sign up to represent someone and then drop the course, common decency would suggest that you tell me about this. I will be available for consultation during office hours and other times, if you should desire further guidance. Please note that [general guidelines](#) for the submission of all papers are available on the web and will govern these papers.

On what basis will the papers be judged? Although it is hard to establish completely transparent standards, the following offers a fairly basic set of rubrics:

<p>A = excellent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The paper is well organized with clear structure and organization.</li> <li>• The prose is lucid and precise, with clear topic sentences.</li> <li>• The paper offers a clear set of propositions (arguments) and supports them with evidence</li> <li>• The paper takes account of the historical context in Russia in ca. 1861.</li> <li>• The paper reconstructs a historical mentality different from that of the student-author.</li> <li>• The paper deploys both secondary material (e.g., textbook, the "analysis" portion of Moon's book) and primary documents from the back of the book</li> <li>• Though this is not necessary for an "A," the consultation of an article beyond the required reading will certainly be taken into account.</li> </ul>
<p>B = good</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization and structure are strong in general, but also exhibit certain deficiencies.</li> <li>• The prose is intelligible (with good topic sentences) but at points imprecise or not clear.</li> <li>• The paper offers certain propositions, but these are vague, contradictory, or only partially supported by evidence.</li> <li>• Some evidence that would either support or refute the paper has been ignored.</li> <li>• The outlook of the student, rather than the historical actor, is too strongly represented.</li> <li>• The paper ignores important elements of historical context.</li> <li>• The paper deploys both primary and secondary evidence.</li> </ul>
<p>C = marginally adequate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More serious deficiencies in organization, structure, and prose that begin to compromise the intelligibility of the essay.</li> <li>• A clear absence of proofreading, which is very vexing.</li> <li>• Paper offers few propositions and gives poor indication about what it is trying to say.</li> <li>• There is little effort to enter into a different historical mentality.</li> <li>• The paper makes only the most limited use of primary documents and relies too heavily on the analysis of others.</li> <li>• Major pieces of evidence are ignored or not engaged with.</li> <li>• The paper provides almost no historical context.</li> </ul>

<p>D = seriously deficient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very poor organization and prose.</li> <li>• No effort to offer any propositions, assertions, or arguments.</li> <li>• Bad or no topic sentences.</li> <li>• Almost no use of any evidence.</li> <li>• No signs of proofreading.</li> <li>• No use of primary documents and only very limited reference to secondary</li> </ul>
<p>F = horrible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any paper not actually turned in or turned in too late.</li> <li>• Any paper exhibiting any clear signs of plagiarism (if you don't know what that means, then ask).</li> <li>• The writing is senseless, incomprehensible, and/or bizarre.</li> <li>• Absolutely no signs of proofreading.</li> </ul>

**What's the point?** The purpose of this exercise is at least five-fold. First, it compels us to engage in historical imagination, which involves placing ourselves, to the extent that we can, outside of our present circumstances and compels us to try to make something that is alien our own. Second, it compels us to read carefully and critically in both primary material and a secondary work. Third, it requires that we express relatively complex ideas orally, which is something that university courses focus on far too little. Fourth, it requires us to do the same in a written form, thinking about how best to formulate, organize, and prioritize a series of ideas. Finally, the exercise allows us to do something a little bit different, thus perhaps breaking up any monotony that may have developed already in the course. You will note that almost all of these elements are critical to career success, modern citizenship, and sentient existence on the planet.