

William H. Thomas, Jr.
Block Yeshiva High School, St. Louis, Missouri.
July 26, 2012

As part of my AP European history class, I plan to incorporate the following two lessons.

Lesson I: Stalinist Collectivization in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan was hit especially hard by Joseph Stalin's drive to collectivize agriculture in the 1930s.¹ I plan to expand my lecture on the Soviet Union in the 1930s by including a description of the conduct and consequences of collectivization in Kazakhstan. My lecture will draw on the articles by Martha Brill Olcott and Niccolo Pianciola.

I will also incorporate a first-person perspective on collectivization by assigning students passages from Mukhamet Shayakhmetov's *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin*. In the first chapter (about seven pages long), Shayakhmetov recounts his childhood in a nomadic family prior to collectivization, in the process providing a concise account of the nomadic economy and culture. As this first chapter says very little about the Soviet government, it could potentially be assigned in other classes that are focused not on communism but on the nomadic lifestyle.

Subsequent chapters detail the persecution nomads experienced under the collectivization program. The book is too long for inclusion in a general survey course, but I am planning on including passages from pages 1-60, as well as from chapter 17, which describes the famine when it was fully underway. Shayakhmetov also recounts his experiences serving in the Red Army at Stalingrad.

Bibliography

Olcott, Martha Brill. "The Collectivization Drive in Kazakhstan," *Russian Review*, 40, No. 2, (April 1981), 122-142.

Pianciola, Niccolo. "The Collectivization Famine in Kazakhstan, 1931-1933," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 25, No. 3/4 (Fall 2001), 237-251.

Shayakhmetov, Mukhamet. *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin* (translated from the Russian by Jan Butler) New York: Overlook/Rookery, copyright 2006, U.S. edition published 2007.

¹ Estimating the number of people who die in any such catastrophe is difficult, but scholars agree that the suffering was immense. Martha Brill Olcott states that "[h]undreds of thousands of Kazakhs died of starvation during this period and untold numbers were killed or arrested while resisting collectivization," and Niccolo Pianciola writes that "[a]ll that is certain is that entire zones were emptying of their inhabitants."

Lesson II: Atomic Testing in Kazakhstan and its Aftermath.

As part of my lectures on the Cold War and its consequences, I will discuss the Soviet nuclear testing program in Kazakhstan and its repercussions for today.

In August 1949, the first Soviet atomic bomb was detonated at the Semipalatinsk test site in eastern Kazakhstan. This was the first of 116 aboveground nuclear tests that the Soviets would conduct at this location. These blasts subjected many in the area to high levels of radioactivity, and studies indicate that people in the region exposed to test radiation have been more likely to develop certain kinds of illnesses.

Radioactive dust churned up by these blasts--and by similar tests conducted by the United States and Great Britain—circled the globe, eventually returning to earth as fallout. Elevated levels of radioactivity appeared in American milk. Mounting concerns over the ecological effects of fallout prompted the Soviet Union, the United States, and Britain to in 1963 sign the partial nuclear test-ban treaty, which barred the aboveground detonation of nuclear weapons. Henceforth, these three powers conducted their nuclear tests underground. The Soviets conducted a total 340 underground atomic tests at Semipalatinsk, although I have not been able to determine from the literature if any of these 340 tests occurred before the signing of the treaty.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, all nuclear testing ended in Kazakhstan, though hotspots of high radiation remain. In one place, reported Richard Stone in *Science* in 2003, the authorities simply capped an area of highly-radioactive ground with a layer of concrete, out of worries that terrorists could use the radioactive dirt to create a dirty bomb.

To prevent the dangerous remnants of Cold War atomic programs from falling into the wrong hands, the U.S. government established the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, which works with Russia and former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan. The United States government is interested in keeping terrorists from obtaining radioactive materials from the Semipalatinsk test site, as attested to by a February 2010 secret cable from the U.S. embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan, released by Wikileaks, which reads in part: “Of all of the projects funded by the CTR appropriation, the most critical is a classified project to secure weapons-grade materials at the former Soviet nuclear weapons test site in Semipalatinsk.”

Bibliography

Barry, Ellen, “Old Soviet Nuclear Site in Asia has Unlikely Sentinel: the U.S.,” *New York Times*, May 21, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/22/world/asia/22kazakhstan.html?pagewanted=all>

Hashimoto, Isao, “1945-1998.”

(Animated video geographically charting atomic tests from 1945 to 1998).

<http://www.ctbto.org/specials/1945-1998-by-isao-hashimoto/>

International Atomic Energy Agency, "The Semipalatinsk Test Site, Kazakhstan," (Assessment of current levels of nuclear contamination from testing at Kazakhstan.)

<http://www-ns.iaea.org/appraisals/semipalatinsk.asp>

Jenkins, Bonnie, "Adapting to the Times: the Evolution of U.S. Threat Reduction Programs," *Arms Control Today* (January/February 2011), 14-21. (Contains an account of the origins and development of the CTR program).

https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2011_01-02/Jenkins

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty." (Contains audio, video, and still images relating to 1963 partial test ban treaty signed by the U.S., the Soviet Union, and Great Britain.)

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty.aspx>

Lewis, Jeffrey, "Operation Groundhog," *Arms Control Wonk* website, January 10, 2011. (Includes link to Wikileaks document regarding Kazakhstan former nuclear test site.)

<https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/203454/operation-groundhog/>

Meyer, Cordula, "Operation Groundhog in Kazakhstan: The U.S. Seeks to Protect Former Soviet Nuclear Testing Site," *Spiegel Online* (January 26, 2011).

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/operation-groundhog-in-kazakhstan-the-us-seeks-to-protect-former-soviet-nuclear-testing-site-a-741679.html>

Stone, Richard, "Plutonium Fields Forever," *Science* 300 (May 23, 2003).

Toghzan Kassenova, "The Lasting Toll of Semipalatinsk's Nuclear Testing," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (September 28, 2009).

U.S. Department of Defense, "Cooperative Threat Reduction."

(Describes the CTR program and includes a link to a page providing a brief description of CTR activities in Kazakhstan). <https://www.state.gov/t/isn/offices/c55411.htm>

U.S. embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan cable regarding Semipalatinsk site, February 22, 2010. <https://wikileaks.kz.wordpress.com/2010/02/22/10astana251-kazakhstan-scenesetter-for-centcom-commander/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Above-Ground Nuclear Blasts."

(Includes graph depicting rise and fall of strontium-90 in milk.)

<https://www.epa.gov/radnet/history-radnet>