The Rise of Eastern Europe

Overview.
- The rise of the Russian empire, unlike Western colonial empires, involved only limited commercial exchange.
- Russia, with its Byzantine-influenced culture, had been unimportant in world affairs before the 15th century.
- Russia then entered into new contacts with the West without losing its distinct identity.
- Between 1450 and 1750 many lasting characteristics of the eastern European world were formed.

The Need for Revival.
- The Mongols, content to leave local administration in indigenous hands, had not reshaped basic Russian culture. The occupation did reduce the vigor of cultural and economic life. Literacy declined and the economy became purely agricultural and dependent on peasant labor.
- Ivan III restored the tradition of centralized rule, added a sense of imperial mission, and claimed supervision of all Orthodox churches. Russia, asserted Ivan, had succeeded Byzantium as the "Third Rome."
- Ivan IV continued the policy of expansion. He increased the power of the tsar by killing many of the nobility (boyars) - earning the name of Ivan the Terrible - on the charge of conspiracy.

Patterns of Expansion. Territorial expansion focused on central Asia.
- Russians moved across their region's vast plains to the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains. By the 16th century, they moved into western Siberia.
- Peasant-adventurers (cossacks) were recruited to occupy the new lands.
- The conquests gave Russia increased agricultural regions and labor sources.
- Slavery existed into the 18th century.
- Important trading connections opened with Asian neighbors.
- Russia became a multicultural state.
- The large Muslim population was not forced to assimilate to Russian culture.

Western Contact and Romanov Policy.
- Ivan III dispatched diplomatic missions to leading Western states; under Ivan IV British merchants established trading contacts.
- Italian artists brought in by the tsars built churches and the Kremlin, creating a distinct style of architecture.
- When Ivan IV died without an heir early in the 17th century the Time of Troubles commenced. The boyars tried to control government, while Sweden and Poland seized territory.
- In 1613 the boyars chose a member of the Romanov family, Michael, as tsar. Michael restored internal order, drove out the foreign invaders, and recommenced imperial expansion. Russia secured part of Ukraine and pushed its southern border to Ottoman lands.
- Alexis Romanov increased the tsar's authority by abolishing the assemblies of nobles and restoring state control over the church. His desire to cleanse the church of changes occurring during the Mongol era created tensions because conservative believers resisted changes to their established rituals. The government exiled these "Old Believers" to Siberia or southern Russia.
Russia's First Westernization, 1690-1790.
- Peter I, the Great, continued past policies, but added a new interest in changing the economy and culture through imitation of Western forms. It was the first Westernization effort in history. Peter traveled incognito to the West and gained an interest in science and technology. Many Western artisans returned with him to Russia.

Tsarist Autocracy of Peter the Great.
- Peter was an autocratic ruler; revolts were brutally suppressed. Reforms were initiated through state decrees.
- Peter increased the power of the state through recruitment of bureaucrats from outside the aristocracy and by forming a Western-type military force.
- A secret police was created to prevent dissent and watch over the bureaucracy.
- A successful war with Sweden gave Russia a window on the Baltic Sea, allowing it to be a major factor in European diplomatic and military affairs. Peter’s capital, reflecting the shift of interests, moved to the Baltic city of St. Petersburg.

What Westernization Meant. Peter's reforms influenced politics, economics, and cultural change → The bureaucracy and military were reorganized on Western principles.
- The first Russian navy was created.
- The councils of nobles were eliminated and replaced by advisors under his control.
- Provincial governors were appointed from the center, while elected town councils were under royal authority.
- Law codes were systematized and the tax system reformed to increase burdens on the peasantry.
- In economic affairs metallurgical and mining industries were expanded.
- Landlords were rewarded for utilizing serfs in manufacturing operations.
- Cultural reforms aimed at bringing in Western patterns to change old customs. Nobles had to shave their beards and dress in Western style.
- Peter attempted to provide increased education in mathematics and technical subjects.
- He succeeded in bringing the elite into the Western cultural zone.
- The condition of upper class women improved.

The first effort in Westernization embodied features present in later ventures in other lands. The changes were selective; they did not involve ordinary people. No attempt was made to form an exporting industrial economy. Westernization meant to Peter the encouraging of autocratic rule. Finally, the changes occurring brought resistance from all classes.

Consolidation under Catherine the Great - change resumed after decades of weak rule
- She used the Pugachev peasant rebellion as an excuse to extend central government authority.
- Catherine was also a Westernizer and brought Enlightenment ideas to Russia, but centralization and strong royal authority was more important to her than Western reform. She gave new power over serfs to the nobles in return for their service in the bureaucracy and military.
- Catherine continued patronage of Western art and architecture, but the French Revolution caused her to ban foreign and domestic political writings.
- Russian expansionist policies continued. Territories were gained in central Asia from the Ottomans. Catherine pushed colonization in Siberia and claimed Alaska. Russian explorers went down the North American coast into northern California. In Europe Catherine joined Prussia and Austria to partition Poland and end its independence.
- By the time of her death Russia had completed an important transformation.

Russia's tsars over three centuries had created a strong central state ruling over the world’s greatest land empire. New elements from the West had entered and altered Russia's economy and culture.
Themes in Early Modern Russian History ➔ Russian society was very different from that of the West.

- Serfdom and a deep-rooted peasant culture did not mesh with Westernization efforts.
- The Russian nobility, through state service, maintained a vital position.
- A minority of great landholders lived in major cities and provided important cultural patronage. Smaller, incompletely westernized, landowners lived less opulent lives.

Serfdom: The Life of East Europe's Masses

- Before the Mongol conquest Russia’s peasantry had been relatively free.
- The government from the 16th century encouraged enserfment as a means of conciliating the nobility and of extending state control over peasants. A 1649 act made serfdom hereditary; other 17th and 18th century laws tied serfs to the land and augmented the legal rights of landlords. Serfs were almost slaves; they were bought, sold, and punished by owners.
- Peasant conditions were similar in Eastern Europe. Peasants labored on large estates to produce grain for sale to the West. Peasants did have some rights; village governments regulated many aspects of life. Most peasants remained poor and illiterate; they paid high taxes and performed extensive labor services in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. Their condition deteriorated throughout the 18th century.

Trade and Economic Dependence.

- There were few large cities in Russia; 95% of the population was rural.
- Artisans also were few since most manufacturing was rural-based.
- Small merchant groups existed, but most trade was handled by Westerners. Peter the Great's reforms increased trade, yet the nobility managed to prevent the emergence of a strong commercial class.
- Russia's social and economic system had strengths:
  - It produced adequate revenue for the expanding empire, supported the aristocracy,
  - Commerce was carried on with independent central Asian regions.
- There were important limitations:
  - Agricultural methods remained traditional and peasants lacked incentives to increase
  - Manufacturing suffered from similar constraints.

Social Unrest.

- By the end of the 18th century Russian reformers were criticizing their nation’s backwardness and urging the abolition of serfdom.
- Peasant discontent was more significant. Peasants remained loyal to the tsar, but blamed landlords for the harshness of their lives.
- Periodic rebellions occurred from the 17th century, peaking with the Pugachev rising of the 1770s. The tsar and nobility triumphed, but peasant discontent remained a problem.