At the beginning of the eighteenth century Russia began to come into its own as a major European power. Members of the Russian intellectual classes increasingly compared themselves and their autocratic order to states and societies in the West. This comparison generated both a new sense of national consciousness and intense criticism of the existing order in Russia. In this course we will examine different perspectives on Russian history and literature in order to try to understand the Russian Empire as it changed from the medieval period to the modern.

Students are asked to write weekly short papers of approximately 1-2 pages responding to the readings (8 in all). In addition you will write one 8-10 page research paper, due November 2. Each student will lead one class with questions prepared in advance for everyone to consider. At the end of the course there will be a final examination.

Participation in the course will be evaluated as follows: 1) class participation and response papers (25%); 2) one 8-10 page research paper (50%); 3) final examination (25%). Attendance each class is mandatory.

Books for the Course

Leo Tolstoy, Hadji Murad (Orchises Press, 1996)

* indicates readings available on the class website

Week 1.  R 9/9 -- Introduction to the Course
map work and film, "Alexander Nevsky": discussion of the myths of Russian history

Week 2.  T 9/14 -- Introduction to the Russian Empire
Cracraft, Major Problems, pp. 4-21: Pipes, "The Environment and Its Consequences"

Response paper: From your brief acquaintance with Russia’s geography and history so far, what can you tell about the role of geography and ethnicity in Russian history?
R 9/16 -- The Muscovite Heritage
Cracraft, pp. 58-59, 60-67: "The Ulozhenie of 1649"
*Richard Wortman, "Viking Princes and Byzantine Emperors," in his Scenarios of Power, v. 1, pp. 22-41

For discussion: Examine the Ulozhenie of 1649 closely. What did it mean to be a serf in 18th century Russia? What does Wortman’s article tell us about the role of ritual and ceremony in the tsar’s courts? What do you think about Ostrowski’s argument that Peter the Great’s reign shouldn’t be the starting point for Russian history?

Week 3. T 9/21 - Peter the Great and the Petrine Reforms
Cracraft, pp. 81-99, 110-125, 243, 245-48: Anisimov, “Peter I,” Petrine Reform Legislation; Peter Shafirov Justifies the Empire

Response paper: What can you say about Peter’s reforms? Is there a pattern to his reforms that you can see? What do you think of the Table of Ranks in particular?

R 9/23 – The Interregnum: Anna, Elizabeth and the Others
Cracraft, pp. 127-46, 151-53: Anisimov, “Empire of the Nobility”; Peter III’s Manifesto (1762)

Paper topic: Please submit a one-paragraph description of your paper topic. I will be delighted to meet with you to talk about your proposed topics this week.

Week 4. T 9/28 - Catherine the Great as Woman and Ruler
Cracraft, 166-79, 197-212, 153-65, 234-43, 249-51: de Madariaga, “Catherine as Woman and Ruler”; Catherine's Instruction (1767); Charter to the Nobility (1785); Shcherbatov Laments Corruption (1787); Raeff on Catherine II’s Imperial Policies; Potemkin Urges Annexation of the Crimea

Response paper: Catherine II had a number of “enlightened” ideas about how Russia should be run. What do you think of these ideas? How did she instruct the Legislative Commission? What was her vision? Her son Paul was born in 1754. What difference might his birth and attainment of a majority have made? What difference do you think it made (or failed to make) that she was a woman and a foreigner?

film: “Catherine the Great”
R 9/30 -- Critics and Rebels in the 18th century
Cracraft, pp. 179-197, 212-20: Raeff, “Pugachev Rebellion”; Radishchev, Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow (1790)

For discussion: What were some of the many reasons that Pugachev was able to get as far as he did? What aspects of Russian life did Radishchev consider particularly despicable? Why did he think nobles and bureaucrats should change the system?

Bibliography/Methods due: Please bring to class a one-page discussion of the primary and secondary sources you will use for your paper. Feel free to meet with me in person at any time.

Week 5. T 10/5 -- Bureaucratic Monarchy, 1796-1825 [32]
Cracraft, pp. 255-268; 282-91; 302-12: Raeff on the constitutionalism of Alexander I; Karamzin’s Memoir (1811); von Haxthausen on the peasant commune (1844)

Response paper: What do you think of the alleged constitutionalism of Alexander I (ruled 1801-1825)? He has been termed “the enigmatic tsar.” Why do you think that might be the case? Why was Karamzin so committed to defending the established order? With whom do you think he might have been arguing? What did von Haxthausen see in the Russian peasant commune?

film: “War and Peace” (excerpts)

R 10/7 -- The Decembrists and Nicholas I, 1825-1855 [68]
Cracraft, pp. 269-82, 292-302: Riasanovsky on Nicholas I; Marquis de Custine (1839);
*Marc Raeff, The Decembrists, pp. 1-29
*Anatole G. Mazour, The First Russian Revolution, 1825, pp. 273-86

*Reactionary and Repressive Policies of Nicholas I, in Dmytryshyn, ed., Imperial Russia, pp. 234-38

For discussion: The Decembrists have often been referred to as Russia’s first revolutionaries. How revolutionary do they seem to you? Where did they succeed and where did they fail in their endeavors? Why do you think Nicholas I has gone down in history as “the wooden tsar”?

Week 6. T 10/12 -- Bureaucracy in Literature
Gibian, *Russian Reader*, pp. 199-232: Gogol, "The Overcoat" (1842)

**Response paper:** What is Gogol saying in this story about bureaucracy, law & order, and life in St. Petersburg?

**Statement of possible hypothesis:** What might be the central question you are asking or hypothesis you are trying to prove/disprove (one paragraph)?

Film: “Shinel (The Overcoat)”

R 10/14 -- *The Institution of Serfdom*

**For discussion:** Kolchin’s *Unfree Labor* is an example of comparative history at its best. What kinds of sources does he use to compare American and Russian slavery? What findings does he present that might not be as apparent if one were studying only the one or the other? What do you think is his principal thesis, and how do you evaluate it? Do you find it convincing?

Week 7.  T 10/19 -- Serfdom in Literature
*Gibian, pp. 241-73, 293-333: Sergei Aksakov, "Kurolesov" (1856); Goncharov, “Oblomov’s Dream” (1849)

**Response paper:** Aksakov and Goncharov both show the corrosive effects of serfdom not only on the peasants themselves but also on the nobility. Consider two or three ways in which serfdom corrupted both state and society.

Film: “Oblomov”

R 10/21 -- *Alexander II and the Great Reforms*
*Alexander Gerschenkron, “Russia: Agrarian Policies and Industrialization, 1861-1917,” in his *Continuity in History and Other Essays*, pp. 706-63

**For discussion:** What were some of the dilemmas of reform in Russia? Why do you think the reforms took the form they did? What patterns can you see in the ways they were implemented? What were the experiences of the populists who went to the people?

Week 8.  T 10/26 -- The Aftermath of the Reforms
*Cracraft, pp. 344-58: MacKenzie-Wallace on mir and zemstvo (1877)
*Corinne Gaudin, “Ideologies of Authority and Institutional Settings” (ch. 1) in *Ruling Peasants: Village and State in Late Imperial Russia* (2007), pp. 14-46

For discussion: How was peasant life changed and not changed following the Great Reforms? What seem to have been their chief complaints? What were the complaints of other estates? What does Saltykov-Shchedrin seem to think of generals and peasants?

Statement of initial findings in your research (1-page)

R 10/28 - Revolutionary Dreams and Reaction
Cracraft, pp. 316-27: Wortman, "Towards the Rule of Law"
*"The Catechism of a Revolutionary" (1868) and "Demands of Narodnaia Volia [People’s Will]" (1879) in Dmytryshyn, ed. Imperial Russia, pp. 350-59
  Cracraft, pp. 381-89: Vera Figner on assassination (1881);
  Manifesto of Alexander III Affirming Autocracy (1881)
Cracraft, pp. 360-81, 390-97: Pipes, "Towards the Police State"; Pearson, "The Failure of Reform"; Pobedonostsev, "Reflections" (1896)

For discussion: Think about the difference between administration and law. What were the interrelationships between the governor and police, on the one hand, and the courts, on the other? Why did the court fail to convict in the Vera Zasulich case? What were some of the consequences of the government’s failure to modernize the law? What can you say about the nature of conservative sentiment in late Tsarist Russia? Why do you think it was so pervasive? Did the revolutionaries do themselves a favor when they assassinated the tsar? Why did Constantin Pobedonostsev abhor democracy?


R 11/4 -- Exploration and Empire-Building
Cracraft, pp. 398-411; 420-37: Kappeler, “Multi-Ethnic Empire”; Thaden, “Russification”; Gorchakov Circular (1864); Urusov on Russian Anti-Semitism (1907)

For discussion: How did the Russian Empire run? What was the position of the different nationalities? Why do you think anti-Semitism was so virulent? How does Urusov explain the pogroms? Who does he find most culpable? What do his comments tell us about the way the Empire was run?

Week 10. T 11/9 – War and Peace in the Caucasus
Leo Tolstoy, “Hadji Murad” (1904) (125 pp.)
Response paper: Comment on the portrayal of Chechen and
Russian societies, their values, their ways of interacting as portrayed by Tolstoy in this novella.

R 11/11 - Veteran’s Day; no class

Week 11. T 11/16 - Industrialization and Radicalization
*Cracraft, 468-89, 528-48: Gurko on Witte (1920s); Pavlov on life in a textile mill (1901); Kanatchikov, Peasant-worker-activist (1929-1934)

Response paper: What does Gurko, himself a member of the State Council, think of Sergei Witte’s policies as Minister of Finance? How did the conditions discussed in Pavlov help to facilitate worker radicalization, such as that of Semyon Kanatchikov? How do these three articles relate to Gerschenkron’s economic analysis?

Film: “Uncle Vanya”

R 11/18 -- The Revolution of 1905
*Orlando Figes, A People’s Tragedy, ch. 5, pp. 157-92
*Cracraft, pp. 550-51, 593-611: The October Manifesto (1905); Father Gapon (1905); Lenin (1905); Breshkovskaia (1920)

For discussion: Why did the spark of revolution catch fire in 1905 when it had not in previous decades? How did the tsar and his ministers respond? What was Witte’s role? How do you think Russia was changed after this revolution?

Film: “Battleship Potemkin”

Week 12. T 11/23 -- The Constitutional Monarchy and World War I
*Mark Steinberg, “Nicholas and Alexandra, an Intellectual Portrait” in Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev, Fall of the Romanovs, pp. 1-37
*Cracraft, pp. 613-19: Schapiro on Stolypin
*Dominic Lieven, “Russia, Europe and World War I,” in Edward Acton, Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, pp. 37-47
*“Durnovo’s Memorandum,” in Dmytryshyn, ed., Imperial Russia, pp. 491-509

Response Paper: How well do you think the constitutional monarchy worked? What were some of its strengths and weaknesses? What were some of the causes and consequences of WWI for Russia? Why was Durnovo so afraid of the war?

R 11/25 - Thanksgiving

Week 13. T 11/30 -- The February Revolution
Response paper: How did the February 1917 revolution compare to the 1905 revolution? What were the principal issues? What do you think about Trotsky’s comment that the old regime “fell like rotten fruit”?

R 12/2 -- From February to October


*Lenin, “April Theses”; Tsereteli and Lenin Exchange Words (June 1917) in Suny, Structure, pp. 38-43


For discussion: Everything changed between February and October 1917. In what ways and why?

Film: Eisenstein, “Strike”

Week 14. T 12/7 -- The October Revolution


*Lenin, Letter to the Central Committee, in Suny, Structure of Soviet History, 45-47

For discussion: The October Revolution brought about the definitive end of tsarist Russia. Why? Do you think autocratic Russia could have continued in tsarist form?

Week 15. R 12/9 - Review