

RUSSIA UNDER THE TSARS

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HISTORY 433 • 3 CR

Course Guide: bit.ly/wn19_hist433

Description: A powerful state and imposing international military force is shaken under the pressures of terrorism, political extremism, and fiscal irresponsibility, exacerbated by the pressures of unending war. This may sound like the United States today, but it refers here to the historical experience of Russia in 1917. In this unusual team-taught course, we will study the currents of Russian and Western thought that clashed and combined to form a uniquely Russian cultural mix in the centuries between 1700 and 1917.

Beginning with the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), the Russian Empire began a long and difficult process of economic, social, and cultural development within the framework of tsarist autocracy. Russian elites came to set the standards for the European world with their cultural production—great music, ballet, literature, art, philosophy, and science—but they built their glittering world on the back of oppressed peasants. At the same time, imperial forces swept across the Eurasian continent, building a vast, religiously and ethnically diverse empire. For two centuries the emperors and empresses held together their many lands and peoples through a combination of repression and reform. By the early twentieth century tsarism proved to be unable to resist any longer the social forces it had done so much to create.