During the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Russia saw great political and social reform under the reign of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. Peter the Great tried to incorporate both the foreign and domestic policies of Western Europe and built, like Louis XIV, a great palace, which he called St. Petersburg. He also altered the physical appearance of himself and his nobility by making them embody those of the west. Catherine the Great stressed the idea of the Enlightenment when she succeeded Peter the Great after his death. She allowed a new "public opinion" to help her to appeal to a broader public, and often felt the need to justify her policies to the intellectuals of Western Europe. With Peter the Great's stress on the adoption of Western European policies, and Catherine the Great's encompassing of the ideas of the Enlightenment, Russia experienced a complete transformation politically through some successful changes such as Peter's Table of Ranks and socially through Catherine’s successful Charter of the Nobility.

I. Russia before Peter the Great

A. Political

1. Considered part of Europe by courtesy

2. Did not send permanent ambassadors to Western Europe before 1673

   a) Had sent various diplomatic missions since the 15th c.

3. Lay on the periphery geographically and politically

   a) No warm-water ports

      (1) Hemmed in by Sweden (Baltic Sea) and the Ottoman Empire (Black Sea)

      (2) Chief trade outlet to the west=Archangel on White Sea

         (a) Only ice-free part of the year
4. Vast reserve of largely undeveloped natural and human resources

5. Under the Romanovs
   a) Weak and impoverished
   b) Bureaucracy largely controlled by *boyars* (old nobility)
   c) Barely suppressed revolt of peasants and Cossacks under Stepan Razin
   d) Faced possible mutiny from *streltsy* (guards of Moscow garrison)

6. No real navy

II. Peter the Great

*Westernization:* the term used to describe Peter the Great’s attempts to incorporate western political and social ideas into Russian life. (i.e. western foreign policies as seen in military and Winter Palace which reflects Versailles)

A. Goals
   a) Secure power of tsar from jealousy of the *boyars* and greed of the *streltsy*
   b) Make Russia a military power

B. Methods
   1. *Political*
      a) Military
         (1) Served the tsar not itself
         (2) Effective and ruthless conscription policies
             (a) Drafted unprecedented 300,000 troops by end of reign
             (b) Policies for officer corps and general military discipline patterned off western European armies
b) Navy

(1) Part of strategy to secure warm-water ports, gain trade to the West, an influence European affairs

(2) Used western European shipbuilding methods

(3) Mid 1690s: built ships to protect interests in Black Sea against Turks

(4) 1695: began war with Ottomans

(5) 1696: captured Azov on the Black Sea

(6) Suppressed streltsy revolt that occurred while he was in Europe with private tortures and public executions

   (a) Corpses remained in public display to discourage future disloyalty

(2) Tames boyars through St. Petersburg and the Table of ranks (see separate sections on each later)

c) The Great Northern War

(1) 1700: drive to the west against Swedish territory to gain a foothold in the Baltic (Sweden controlled Baltic and had closed it to Russia)

   (a) 1709: decisively defeated Swedes at Battle of Poltava

   (b) 1721: Peace of Nystad confirmed Russian conquest of Estonia Livonia and part of Finland

d) St. Petersburg

(1) Founded in 1703 on Gulf of Finland

(2) Built gov structures and compelled boyars to construct town houses

(3) Central imperial court

(4) Symbolized Peter’s determination to hold his position on the Baltic coast
e) Senate

(1) Created in 1711

(2) Nine members

(3) Replaced former Privy Chancellery

(4) Directed virtually all aspect of government while the tsar was away with the army

(5) Purpose (of senate and local administrative reforms): establish a bureaucratic structure that could support an efficient military establishment

   (a) Represent authority of the tsar against nobles

(6) Membership shifted as political favorites changed

f) Administrative Colleges

(1) Swedish idea

(2) Bureaus of several persons operating according to written instructions rather than departments headed by a single minister

(3) Look after collection of taxes, foreign relations, war, economic affairs

(4) Each college was to receive advice from a foreigner

(5) Peter used his appointive power to balance the influence in these colleges between nobles and people he knew would be loyal to him

g) Table of Ranks

(1) Published in 1722

(2) Equated nobility\textprime s social position and privileges with his rank in the bureaucracy or the military rather than with lineage

(3) Social standing became a function of a boyars willingness to serve the central state
Political because it keeps the nobles loyal and centralizes the state

h) Achieving secular control of the church

   (1) Wanted to suppress independence of Russian Orthodox Church

       (a) Problem arose in years prior to Peter’s reign and from sympathy some church leaders had for Aleksei

   (2) Church modernized too slow for Peter

   (3) By 1700 he had begun to appoint his own bishops (especially Ukrainians trained in European schools)

   (4) 1721: abolished position of patriarch: bishop who was the head of the church

       (a) Established government department called the Holy Synod in its stead

           (i) Several bishops headed by a layman called the procurator general

           (ii) Would govern church in accordance with tsar’s secular requirements

           (iii) Drew on German Lutheran models

           (iv) Most radical reform of Peter’s reign

2. Social

   a) Taming the streltsy and boyars

       (1) Attacked boyar attachment to traditional Russian culture

           (a)Personally shaved long beards of court boyars

           (b) Sheared off customary long hand-covering sleeves of their shirts and coats

       (2) Gradually stopped granting boyar status to new individuals
(3) Made major decisions without consulting the boyars

b) St. Petersburg

(1) Imitated European monarchs who had copied Louis XIV by constructing smaller versions of Versailles

(2) Symbolized new western orientation of Russia

(3) Employed architects from Western Europe for the most prominent buildings in and around the city

c) Table of Ranks

(1) Published in 1722

(2) Equated nobility’s social position and privileges with his rank in the bureaucracy or the military rather than with lineage

(3) Social standing became a function of a boyars willingness to serve the central state

d) Secular control of the church (**discussed under political**)

C. Success?

1. Political

a) Russia entered fully into European power politics

b) Boyars

(1) Faced opposition from nobility

(2) Never able to fully dominate them

(a) Balanced one group against the another while never completely excluding any

c) Great Northern War

(1) Russia finally possessed ice-free ports and a permanent influence on European affairs
d) Senate
   (1) Became center for intrigue and political opposition to Peter’s policies

e) Administrative colleges
   (1) Balanced influence of the Senate where Aleksei had sympathizers

f) Achieving secular control of the church
   (1) Both Ukrainian and Russian bishops objected to his interference in religious matters
      (a) Mainly b/c they were sympathetic to Aleksei
   (2) Establishment of the Holy Synod produced more opposition from the Old Believers (a group of conservative Russian Orthodox Christians)
      (a) Believed he was leading the church into new heresy

g) Never chose a successor
   (1) After death in 1725 soldiers and nobles again determined who ruled Russia for 30 years
      (a) Had laid foundations for modern Russia but not a stable state

2. Social
a) St. Petersburg
   (1) Didn’t look like other Russian cities
   (2) Seen as an “illegitimate west European growth on Russian culture”
   (3) Symbolized Peter’s autocracy and rejection of traditional Russian life and government

b) Table of Ranks
   (1) Nobles repeatedly sought to
(a) Reassert their independence
(b) Regain control of the Russian imperial court
(c) Bargain w/ later tsars over local authority and nobles dominance of the serfs
(2) Created a self conscious class identity in the nobility
(a) Determined to resist compulsory state service

III. Empress Anna [r. 1730-1740]
   A. Political
      1. 1736: reduced nobles required service to 25 years

IV. Peter III [r. 1762]
   A. Political
      1. Exempted greatest nobles entirely from compulsory service

V. Catherine the Great [r. 1762-1796]
   A. Background
      1. German
      2. Married Peter III (Peter the Great’s grandson)
      3. Count Gregory Orlov (Catherine’s lover) organized a coup against Peter and she took over as tsarina
   B. Goals
      1. Aimed to bring western ideas, culture, and reforms to Russia
      2. Intended to maintain and even extend her own authority
   C. Methods
      1. Political
         a) Expanded borders
         (1) To Black Sea and into central Europe
b) Autocratic rule

c) 1785: Charter of Nobility

(1) Defined the rights and privileges of nobles in exchange for the assurance that the nobility would serve the state voluntarily

(2) Rights included: transmitting noble status to wife and children, judicial protection of noble rights and property, considerable power over serfs, and exemption from personal taxes

(3) Uses Charter of Nobility as a replacement for Peter’s Table of Ranks

Social

d) The Enlightenment

(1) Enlightenment is: being the defender of oppressed innocence, facing and combating the enemies of mankind: superstition, fanaticism, ignorance, quibbling, evil judges, and the powers that rest in their hands

(2) Catherine was an absolutist ruler in favor of religious toleration and wanted to be an “advocate of humanity”

(a) Progress for humanity could only be achieved by rooting out the wrongs left by superstition, religious fanaticism, ignorance, and outmoded forms of justice

(b) Needed to argue and reform social ideals of the time to a more enlightened state

(c) Believed if it did not promote improvement of humanity, it should be abandoned

(d) Favored the spread of education to eliminate ignorance and criticized censorship by church and state

(3) Corresponded regularly with Voltaire, a French writer
Voltaire was always in conflict with French church and state for his Enlightenment ideals.

Writers attacked legal use of torture to extract confessions.

D. Success?

1. Political

a) Charter of Nobility: noble dominance over serfs

(1) Caused 50 peasant revolts between 1762 and 1769

(2) Culminated in Pugachev’s Rebellion between 1773 and 1775

(a) All of southern Russia in turmoil until government brutally suppressed the rebellion

2. Social

a) Enlightenment

(1) Governments still ruled by hereditary monarchs, but now had to respond to a new force known as “public opinion”

(2) Catherine justified her policies to her broader public and the intellectual individuals of Western Europe

(3) Rulers had to portray themselves as modern and open to reform

(a) Had to be responsive to the public

(4) When revolution erupted in France, public opinion had begun to rule the government by democracy: a government that was truly by, and for the people

(5) Writers did not embrace the democracy

(a) They still looked to rulers to effect reform and addressed the educated class as their audience

(6) Peasants and lower classes neither favored political upheaval or revolution
b) Problems with Enlightenment

(1) Most of the elite middle and upper class embraced enlightenment, but the lower classes had little contact with the new ideas.

(2) States had to balance conflicting social pressures: rulers who pursued Enlightenment reforms that enhance state power, and the fear of changes that may unleash popular discontent.

In conclusion, Russia underwent tremendous change from the reign of Peter the Great through that of his granddaughter-in-law Catherine the Great. Peter Modeling after Western Europe, Peter curtailed the power of the boyars and the stryeltsy, through the implantation of a Senate, administrative colleges, the Table of Ranks, and taking secular control of the Russian Orthodox Church. By improving the military and navy and gaining territory, Peter made Russia a prominent influence on European politics. His granddaughter Catherine the Great continued his policies of Westernization. She continued to expand Russia's borders and solidified boyar submission with the Charter of Nobility and greatly improved Russian social life during the Enlightenment.

Works Cited

