

# IMPERIAL RUSSIA AND THE EXPANSION OF THE EMPIRE

**Coordinators: Michael Marsh, Joe Zuckerman**

We investigate the growth and expansion of Russia from its origin as a small town in the middle of the Great Russian forest into an ethnically diverse empire larger than the North American continent. We analyze the importance of Russian culture, its peasantry, its nobility and its despotic Czars in its explosive growth into a powerful Imperial State. We study the reigns and personalities of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great along with other significant rulers. Our concluding session considers the policies and mentality of Imperial Russia that directly affected the development and evolution of its successor states in the areas of politics, civil liberties and foreign policy as well as the Marxist- Leninist Soviet Union and Vladimir Putin's Russian Federation.

## **Readings and other Required Materials:**

**Note:** Any edition of these books is acceptable. Search online by author and title, not ISBN.

Nicholas V. Riasanovsky; *A History of Russia*

Richard Pipes; *Russia under the Old Regime*

**Michael Marsh** is a retired dentist and a former docent at the New York Historical Society. He has coordinated multiple study groups on American and British history. **Joe Zuckerman** was a litigator in a New York firm for more than 40 years. He has coordinated study groups on Islam, slavery in the Americas and the Russian revolutions.

## \* \* \* \* \* **Syllabus** \* \* \* \* \*

Session 1 – The Environment and The State: Pipes (P) pp 1 -48  
How and why did the geographical and climatic conditions of the early Russian homeland help shape a national mindset that advocated continuous colonial expansion into adjacent independent national entities?

Session 2 – The Appanage State; The Rise of Moscow: Pipes 48-83;  
Riasanovsky - chapters VII, VIII, XI, XIV; (copious reading, some repetition of material, and a unique opportunity to compare historical analysis and stimulate discussion).

How did the 200 year conquest and political, military and economic

domination of the Russian principalities by Genghis Khan's Golden Hoard affect Russia's internal and cultural development? Did the legacy of the Asiatic occupation leave a positive or negative imprint on Russian governance and culture?

Session 3 – Muscovite Russia: Riasanovsky 143-195

How and why did the small principality of Moscow become the major force in the formation of a unified Russian Nation that would become a mighty Imperial Empire?

Session 4 – Peter the Great ; the man; imperial expansion and perpetual warfare: Riasanovsky 213-241

Does Peter fulfill the criteria of the Great Man Theory?

Session 5 – Peter the Great, his reforms, domestic policies and the radical reformation of Russia: Riasanovsky 213-241; **From** Peter the Great to Catherine the Great; Riasanovsky 242— 253

Session 6 – Catherine the Great, her domestic and imperial expansive policies; economic development: Riasanovsky; 254- 276. Suggested Optional readings Riasanovsky Chapter XXIV

Session 7- Alexander I – The Napoleonic Wars, Russia as a major European Power, the Congress of Vienna; the reign of Nicholas I – The Decembrists Rebellion and the Crimean War : Riasanovsky 300- 340

Session 8 – Alexander II: the Great Reforms, the liberation of the Serfs; the period of terror; Riasanovsky 368-390; The Peasantry; Pipes 140-170

Session 9 – Alexander III: Repression; a movement towards Russification, greater Orthodoxy in religion: Riasanovsky 391-396; The evolution of the Police State; Pipes 281– 318; Economic and social development in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Riasanovsky 341-348

Session 10 – Nicholas II: continued repression; the Russo-Japanese War; the 1905 Revolution and the inception of constitutional reforms (1894-1905), Riasanovsky 396-404. The continued economic development of Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries; Riasanovsky 422-434

Session 11 – Nicholas II; the constitutional monarch; World War I:  
Riasanovsky 422-434

Session 12 – The Russian Revolutions Of 1917; Riasanovsky 453-461

Session 13 – We consider what lasting impact Imperial Russia had on the development and evolution of the Russian successor states; the Soviet Union - as a dominant world power - and Vladimir Putin's Russian Federation.