The Westernizing of Russia under Peter the Great

- Before Peter the Great
  - Russia was isolated from the rest of Europe.
  - Did not send permanent ambassadors to the rest of Europe until the late 1800's
  - Lacked warm water ports – blocked from the Baltic by Sweden and Poland, from the Black Sea by the Ottoman Empire
  - A vast expanse of territory separated them from Europe
  - Their culture was more influenced by their time under the Mongols than it was European

- The Romanovs
  - The period following the reign of Ivan the Terrible was called the Time of Troubles
    - A period of anarchy and civil war, with no true leader
  - An assembly of nobles elected 17 yr. old Michael Romanov (r. 1613-1654) as tsar
  - He and his successors made some small strides in centralizing the government, but it remained weak
  - Ongoing problems
    - The Boyars (nobility) still largely controlled the government
    - Stepan Razin led a revolt of Cossacks and peasants that could barely be put down
    - The streltsy (Moscow guard) posed the threat of mutiny and rebellion

- Peter the Great
  - Became co-tsar in 1682, and took the throne on his own in 1689
  - Peter distrusted the boyars, whom he felt wanted his power, and the streltsy, whom his distrusted
  - Felt the need for increased military power of Russia
  - In 1697, desiring to learn the traditions and secrets Europe held, travelled in disguise to Europe
    - Explored shipyards, docks, royal courts, schools, hospitals, and everywhere else he could
    - Admired western technology only for its ability to advance Russia and himself
  - In 1698, Peter returned to Russia to find the streltsy in rebellion
    - Crushed the rebellion with military force, torture and execution
  - Saw the need for a powerful military that would be loyal to the tsar above all else

- Military reform
  - Drafted 130,000 Russians into the army, later escalating to 300,000
    - Soldiers were drafted on a territorial basis, related to regional population
  - Brought in foreign officers at 1.5x the pay of their Russian counterparts
  - Used western style military uniforms
  - Armed the military with western style muskets
  - Created military regiments similar to those of the west
  - In the 1690’s, he began the buildup of a massive navy
    - Expanded his power in the Black Sea by defeating the Ottoman Empire at Azov

- The Great Northern War
  - 1697- Charles XII became king of Sweden
  - At the same time, Peter was expanding west to gain a foothold on the Baltic
  - The clash led to the Great Northern War (1700-1721)
    - The Russians were defeated early on at the Battle of Narva (1700)
    - The Russians scored a decisive victory at Poltava (1709)
    - The Peace of Nystad (1721) ensured Russia’s place on the Baltic Sea

- St. Petersburg
  - In 1703, Peter began the building of St. Petersburg
  - The boyars were forced to build their homes there, and he began the construction of government administration buildings
  - He made St. Petersburg the new capital of Russia
  - It was designed as Russia’s “window to the west”
    - It would give Russia permanent access to European trade and politics
• It served as Peter’s rejection of Russian culture and government

• The Administrative System
  o To pay for the new military, St. Petersburg and other changes required money
  o Taxation: poll taxes, land taxes, business taxes, marriage taxes, social taxes
    ▪ The burden of taxation fell mostly on the peasants
  o Mercantilism
    ▪ Encouraged exports, built a fleet of trade ships in the Baltic, began mining and metallurgy
  o Serfdom
    ▪ Serfs were very limited in mobility, and could be sold by their owners, either with the land, or independently
    ▪ They were often moved into the new developing industries their owners began purchasing
    ▪ The lives of the owners were not much better, as their primary concern was the betterment of Russia, not profit
  o Administration
    ▪ Created a senate – which had no real power independent of Peter
    ▪ Created 10 territorial governments – gubernii
    ▪ “state service” - almost all land-owning and serf-owning aristocrats were forced to serve in the military or civil service
    ▪ All members of the state service were given a rank (14 classes)
      ▪ Every official began at rank one and worked up. – Table of Ranks
      ▪ Non-nobles gained noble status at the eighth rank (nobility based on merit)
    ▪ Later instituted the ‘college system” in which eight colleges ran day to day affairs

• The Russian Orthodox Church
  o Run by the patriarch
  o Changes to the bible, and other church reforms in the 1650’s created a split in the Church
    ▪ The “Old Believers” clung fiercely to the old ways
    ▪ They came to distrust the church hierarchy, and often, the government as well.
    ▪ They could often be found among the ranks of revolutionaries
  o When Peter came to power, he put the church under the control of the “Holy Synod”
    ▪ Headed by the “Procurator of the Holy Synod – a secular government official
    ▪ The Procurator’s job was to basically keep the church from doing anything displeasing to Peter

• Social Westernization
  o Ordered the writing of a book of etiquette to teach western manners
    ▪ Don’t spit on the floor or scratch oneself at dinner
  o Western styles
    ▪ Enforced the shaving of beards in favor of a western clean shaven look
      ▪ Peter started with the nobles in his court, and enforced the policy throughout Russia
    ▪ Mandated the cutting of robes and coats to a shorter European style
    ▪ Those who did not conform were subject to being “beaten without mercy”
  o Women
    ▪ Upper class women were ordered to remove their veils
    ▪ Social gatherings were to be held three times a week, where men and women would mix for dancing, conversation and cards
    ▪ Women could now marry at their own free will