

HIST 205 RUSSIA: REFORM, REACTION AND REVOLUTION, 1801-1929
ESSAYS 2012

1. Martin Sixsmith describes Alexander I's rule as 'a classic reign of two halves', consisting of a liberal youth followed by a conservative later life. Would you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. 'The bacillus of discontent and the yearning for change [resulting from the War of 1812] had infected an important class of Russian society; soon it would germinate and spread, before flowering in the most dramatic circumstances' (Sixsmith). Discuss the influences behind the Decembrist rising of 1825.
3. 'The concerns of the intelligentsia were wide ranging, but no theme received more attention than the destiny of Russia' (Ascher). Discuss in relation to the debates between the Westernisers and the Slavophiles in the 1830s-1850s.
4. 'The liberation of the peasants was the biggest shake-up in Russian society since the time of Peter the Great' (Sixsmith). Why, then, was it such a disappointment to the peasants?
5. 'Alexander II's reforms were a real step towards the creation of civil society and a law-governed state.' Discuss in relation to his reforms following emancipation of the serfs.
6. Why, in your view, did Russian women play such an important role in the revolutionary organisations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
7. What drove Russian radicals to seek change through terrorism in the late nineteenth century? What kinds of change did they seek? With what effects?
8. What was Sergei Witte trying to achieve in modernising the Russian economy, and what obstacles did he face in his attempts?
9. 'The manifesto of October 1905 was an astounding leap forward. After centuries of autocracy, Russia was – overnight – to become a parliamentary democracy. ... But now it was seen as too little, too late' (Sixsmith). Discuss.
10. '1914 offered a last opportunity for the tsarist regime to save itself.' However, instead the Great War brought insuperable difficulties. Discuss the experience of World War I in Russia.
11. 'The February Revolution of 1917 was a spontaneous uprising against a hated regime, driven by an avalanche of grievances. Ultimately, however, the Provisional Government was unable to solve these sufficiently to ensure its own survival.' Discuss.
12. To what extent is it fair to describe the events of October/November 1917 as a turning point in Russian history?

13. Discuss the effects – economic, social and political – of the New Economic Policy adopted in 1921.
14. ‘The revolutions of 1917 had sparked hopes of a golden age for the arts but those who attempted radical innovation were soon disappointed.’ Discuss.