On Russia During Peter the Great

Contextualization: Russia had for a long time occupied only a marginal role in European affairs. Following the end of the reign of tsar Ivan the Terrible in 1584, there was a turbulent period of anarchy and civil war in Russia known as the “Time of Troubles.” Only with the accession of Michael Romanov and the establishment of the Romanov dynasty in 1613 did stability return to Russia. Thereafter, the development of a powerful monarchy would, by the time of Peter the Great’s reign in 1682, allow Russia to become one of the great powers of Europe. Thesis: Russia underwent unprecedented reform during the reign of tsar Peter I, with the introduction of modern ideas into the conservative Russian society, the formation of a powerful imperial monarchy, and the reorganization of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Argument: Peter the Great’s influential rule in Russia would change the nation forever, bringing about major reforms in all aspects of society, including Russia’s political and religious institutions.

Body 1: The reign of Peter the Great saw a great period of westernization in Russia.
- Evidence: Peter the Great traveled to western Europe in 1697.
- Analysis: Peter’s travels in western Europe allowed him to acquire many modern military, commercial, and naval skills and ideas that he implemented in Russia.
- Evidence: In an attempt to expand Russia’s domains in the Baltic, Peter the Great fought the Great Northern War with Sweden, which he was victorious in.
- Analysis: Russia’s new control in the Baltic allowed for the founding of a new capital city, St. Petersburg, in 1703. This became a symbol of Russia’s westernization.

Body 2: Peter the Great instituted a new administration in Russia.
- Evidence: Peter the Great implemented the Table of Ranks in 1722, which provided that social position and privileges be based on an individual’s rank, rather than noble status.
- Analysis: Russia’s traditional nobility, the boyars, had always contended the power of the monarchy. This new policy would assert the tsar’s authority and tame the nobility.
- Evidence: Peter created nine colleges of eleven members each to administer various government duties, following the model of Sweden. He also established a Senate of nine members, with the authority to supervise the administration when the tsar was absent.
- Analysis: These new bureaucratic institutions allowed Russia to have effective governmental organization that would maintain political stability within the country.

Body 3: The Russian Orthodox Church also experienced great changes under Peter the Great.
- Evidence: Peter usurped the independent authority of the Church and appointed his own bishops.
- Analysis: Seeing the Church as a deterrent to his policies of westernization and modernization, Peter appointed ecclesiastical reformers who would support change.
- Evidence: In 1721, Peter the Great abolished the position of patriarch, instead establishing a government agency known as the Holy Synod.
- Analysis: In an effort to reform the extremely conservative Russian Orthodox Church, Peter brought it under secular control, effectively diminishing its traditional influence.

Conclusion: Along with the reign of tsar Peter I came a new era in Russian, and European, history. Peter the Great promulgated policies of reform that were meant to westernize and thus modernize the traditional Russian society. This meant implementing major political and religious reforms, which Peter achieved through his reorganization of the Russian administration and his transformation of the Russian Orthodox Church. Synthesis: The reign of Peter the Great is a lasting example of what an absolute monarch is capable of. Absolutism had been the sole object of monarchical government within Europe, with some nations succeeding in achieving such power, and therefore rising to power, and other nations failing to do so, and thus declining in power. Particularly, the government of Louis XIV, king of France, is the greatest example of absolutism in government. King Louis XIV was able to fully centralize and consolidate power under the sole authority of the monarchy, thus becoming the model after which other nations tried to follow. Peter the Great and his rule in Russia reflects a successful path to power through absolutism.