

What Was Russia like in 1855?

3 min starter



Aim - to understand Russia's problems and challenges up to 1855.

Wheat

In 1855, the Russian Empire was a land of extreme **contrast** from frozen northern plains, eastern forests and the fertile **bread** basket of the wheatfields of Ukraine. The sparsely populated Adriatic land east of the Urals contrasted with the heart-land of European Russia where 75% of people lived. There also racial differences with less than half the population being Russian by birth. There was a huge difference between Russia's reputation as a **giant** among nations with a population of 69 million, an empire covering a sixth of the globe and an army of 1.5 million men. The **reality** was one of economic and military weakness.

Nobles

Western

Slavophiles

Contrast

Lie

Between 1825 and 1855 the Russian Empire was ruled by tsar Nicholas I, a member of the **Romanov** Dynasty. Nicholas believed that he had been **divinely** appointed to rule by God. Unsurprising given his title 'Emperor and **Autocrat** of all Russia.' However, controlling this vast empire was a constant challenge. Russia was economically underdeveloped compared with industrialised **western** powers. In 1855 Russia was totally reliant on **serfdom** and it was the serfs who were **conscripted** into the so-called mighty Russian army. The army may have been large but the serfs could only be controlled through strict discipline and often had a little idea what they were fighting for. Even Russia's military reputation was based on a **myth**. Russia was economically divided society with the elite, privileged **nobles**, cut off from the **taxpaying** peasants who made up 90% of the population. c1850, Russian intelligentsia took one of two positions. 'The Westernisers' who believed Russia could only remedy their situation by **copying** developments in Western Europe, while the **Slavophiles** believed that Russia possessed **superior** traditional values and should follow its own path. For Slavophiles the Russian peasant provided an alternative to western capitalism. Tsar Nicholas I, considered change and appointed commissioners to investigate serfdom but it was not until the Crimean war exposed Russian weaknesses that tsar Alexander II 'the Liberator' would begin reforms.

Serfdom

Myth

Autocrat

Taxpaying

Giant

Superior

Hobnobs

Reality

Legend

Copying

Divinely

Conscripted

Filthy

Romanov

1 - In your view, what was the biggest challenge Russia faced by 1855?

2 - What parallels can you draw between the Russian army in 1855 and 2022 (Ukraine invasion) ?

3 - Alexander is also know as 'The Liberator' - what action do you think he may take to earn this title?



Tsar Nicholas I



Russian Serfs



Tsar Alexander II

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Tsar Nicholas I



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Tsar Alexander II

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