

Red Square and the Russian Search for Identity

<http://russianculture.ku.edu>

Starting with a tour of Russia's Red Square in its current configuration, this online resource will use artistic renderings and period photographs to trace changes in the square over the course of its 500-year history. Special attention will be given to modifications made over the last century, as communists remade the square in their own image, only to see elements of tsarist Russia rebuilt and restored after the fall of the Soviet Union. Red Square has always played a central role in Russian life, and its current architectural configuration serves as a clear reflection of the country's history and its struggle to define itself in this new century.



- 1) Savior Tower
- 2) St. Nicholas Tower
- 3) St. Basil's Cathedral

- 4) Lobnoye mesto
- 5) GUM department store
- 6) Kazan Cathedral

- 7) Resurrection Gate
- 8) State Historical Museum
- 9) Lenin's Mausoleum

Questions for Discussion

- 1) What changes can you notice in the Savior and St. Nicholas Towers over the last century? What do these changes suggest about Russia over that same time period?
- 2) The real name of St. Basil's Cathedral is The Cathedral of the Protection of Most Holy Theotokos¹ on the Moat. Where is the moat?
- 3) In the nineteenth and early twentieth century there was a large statue in front of the GUM department store. What happened to it? Can you suggest any reasons as to why this may have happened?
- 4) What changes has the Kazan Cathedral undergone over the last century? What do these changes suggest about Russia over that same time period?
- 5) What changes has Resurrection (a.k.a. Iberian) Gate undergone over the last century? What reasons can you see for these changes?
- 6) There is a great deal of debate about whether Lenin's Mausoleum should remain in Red Square. Who is Lenin and why do some people want him removed from the square?
- 7) Many of the structures in Red Square are topped with symbols (for example the crosses on top of Saint Basil's Cathedral). What do these symbols represent and how do they reflect Russia's sense of its own history?

¹ Theotokos is the Greek word for god-bearer, and is used in reference to Mary the mother of God.