

Honored Citizens and the Creation of a Middle Class in Imperial Russia

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In an early short piece, Anton Chekhov pointed out and poked fun at the contradictions embedded in the word *grazhdanin* (citizen) in fin-de-siècle Russian society. “The height of citizenship (*grazhdanstvennost'*): I am the son of an honored hereditary citizen (*pochetnyi grazhdanin*), I read *The Citizen (Grazhdanin)*, I wear civilian dress (*grazhdanskoe plat'e*) and live with my Aniuta in civil marriage (*grazhdanskii brak*).”¹ All these phrases evoked the concept of citizenship, but all played with its meaning. Despite its name implying liberal subjecthood, the newspaper/journal *The Citizen* was notoriously anti-liberal; civil marriage was not recognized by the Russian state, and so the narrator was instead living illicitly with probably a peasant woman; civilian dress likewise placed the narrator outside any position of rank within the working world.² In this context, being the “son of an honored hereditary citizen” becomes an empty label, and the “height of citizenship” becomes a mirage. Furthermore the double meaning of the word *grazhdanin*—like the double meaning of the word *Bürger*, both townsman/bourgeois and citizen—places Chekhov’s critique squarely within a related conversation about the presence (or more often the absence) of a middle class in Imperial Russia.³

A persistent trope of writing about Imperial (and for that matter contemporary) Russian society has been a focus on its “missing” middle class.⁴ It was “missing” in comparison to an idealized western middle class associated with economic growth and the rise of liberal governments, an ideal that has been

1. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, “Ober-Verkhi,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 30 vols. (Moscow, 1974–83), 2: 106.

2. Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, 1991), 100; Barbara Alpern Engel, *Breaking the Ties that Bound: The Politics of Marital Strife in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, 2011), 4; Irina Tarsis, “Laws and Lithographs: Seeing Imperial Russia Through Illustrations of Civil Uniforms in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*,” *Slavic & East European Information Resources* 11, no. 2/3 (2010): 156–83.

3. Jürgen Kocka, “The Middle Classes in Europe,” *Journal of Modern History* 67, no.4 (December 1995): 783–806, here 783. On meanings of *grazhdanstvo*, see Aleksandr Kupriianov, *Kul'tura gorodskogo samoupravleniia russkoi provintsii, 1780–1860-e gody* (Moscow, 2009), 126–29 and Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), 3–4.

4. Historians of nineteenth-century Germany have also looked to a perceived weakness in German middle class structures to explain Germany history. See Jonathan Sperber, “*Bürger, Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit, Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*: Studies of the German (Upper) Middle Class and Its Sociocultural World,” *Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 2 (June 1997): 273.

largely dismantled by historians. Jürgen Osterhammel has aptly summarized most contemporary approaches: “Who was a bourgeois and what it meant to be one cannot be reliably defined by objective criteria of family origin, income level, and profession. People were bourgeois—such is the near-tautological conclusion of extensive research and discussion—if they *considered* themselves bourgeois and gave this belief practical expression in the way they led their life.”⁵ Despite this, the ideal of a measurable middle class held and has continued to hold considerable sway over the interpretation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European social and political developments. The idea that Russia lacked a proper middle class, and that the lack was a long-standing disadvantage, dates back at least to the reign of Catherine the Great.⁶ By the middle of the nineteenth century the notion was well enough established that the émigré noble Petr Dolgorukov felt a need to argue against those who used “the absence of a middle status” as an explanation for Russia’s problems.⁷ Since then, the “missing” or “insignificant” middle class of imperial Russia has remained an important part of discussions of Russian society, particularly in scholarship that did exactly what Dolgorukov had deplored, in part blaming it for Russia’s failure to develop liberalism and democracy.⁸

Partly in reaction, other historians of Russia have moved through several different phases of investigation as they have sought to identify or to dismiss Russia’s middle class or “middlings.” Some focused on individual social groups that could stand in for that middle class, including merchants, entrepreneurs, the “people of various ranks,” professionals, and even the middling gentry.⁹ These works often came to a variant of the conclusion that Russia had

5. Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, 2014), 761. The literature on European and global middle classes is enormous. Summary volumes include David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans, eds., *The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century* (London, 1991); Jürgen Kocka and Allen Mitchell, eds., *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1993); Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein, eds., *The Making of the Middle Class: Toward a Transnational History of the Middle Class* (Durham, 2012).

6. Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 1997), 72–75 or Robert E. Jones, *Provincial Development in Russia: Catherine II and Jakob Sievers* (New Brunswick, 1984), 20.

7. Petr Dolgorukov, *O peremene obraza pravleniia v Rossii* (Leipzig, 1862), 22.

8. On the “missing” or “insignificant” middle class, see Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 2nd ed. (London, 1995 [1974]), 191–220; Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York, 1955), 2:720; Pamela M. Pilbeam, *The Middle Classes in Europe, 1789–1914: France, Germany, Italy and Russia* (London, 1990); also Thomas C. Owen, *Capitalism and Politics in Russia: A Social History of the Moscow Merchants, 1855–1905* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981).

9. Valentine T. Bill, *The Forgotten Class: The Russian Bourgeoisie from the Earliest Beginnings to 1900* (New York, 1959); Alfred Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill, 1982); Owen, *Capitalism and Politics*; Jo Ann Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite: A Social and Cultural Portrait of Two Generations, 1840–1905* (DeKalb, 1984); Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West, eds., *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1991); David L. Ransel, *A Russian Merchant’s Tale: The Life and Adventures of Ivan Alekseevich Tolchënov, Based on His Diary* (Bloomington, 2009); Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Structures of Society: Imperial Russia’s “People of Various Ranks”* (DeKalb, 1994); Harley

middling elements, like those very merchants and entrepreneurs, but not a “genuine class society.”¹⁰ Historians have also looked at another vision of the middle class, one based not in terms of social group or economic production but instead on consumption, culture, and sociability, generally finding a variation on a more general bourgeois culture to exist at least in Russia’s towns.¹¹ In addition, historians have also drawn on concepts of the public sphere and civil society to find a version of a quasi-political middle class even in autocratic Russia.¹² As Joseph Bradley put it, this leads to a “change of emphasis from what did not happen to what did.”¹³

Marginalized, if not completely forgotten, in these discussions has been the creation of a new *soslovie*, or estate, of “honored citizens” (*pochetnye grazhdane*) during the reign of Nicholas I. Honored citizens have largely been dismissed as “a quaint group designed to occupy an intermediate position between the common herd and the nobility,” whose status “served no useful purpose and merely added to the complexities of Russia’s cumbersome social structure,” thus reflecting the persistence of social estate, of legal social status, in nineteenth century Russia.¹⁴ That persistence is itself viewed as an archaic sign of Russian backwardness in comparison to developments further west.¹⁵ Even when taken seriously, honored citizens have often been interpreted as more tightly bound by honor and hierarchy, or by ideas of nobility,

D. Balzer, ed., *Russia’s Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History* (Armonk, 1996); Katherine Pickering Antonova, *An Ordinary Marriage: The World of a Gentry Family in Provincial Russia* (New York, 2012).

10. Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs*, 416.

11. Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2001); Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca, 2003); Alison K. Smith, “Eating out in Imperial Russia: Class, Nationality, and Dining before the Great Reforms,” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 757–60; Sally West, *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia* (DeKalb, 2011); Alexander M. Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762–1855* (Oxford, 2013).

12. Mary Stuart, “‘The Ennobling Illusion’: The Public Library Movement in Late Imperial Russia,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 76, no. 3 (July 1998): 401–40; Murray Frame, *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven, 2006); Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009); Christopher Ely, “The Question of Civil Society in Late Imperial Russia,” in Abbott Gleason, ed., *A Companion to Russian History*, 225–42 (Chichester, 2009); Lynn M. Sargeant, *Harmony and Discord: Music and the Transformation of Russian Cultural Life* (New York, 2011).

13. Joseph Bradley, “Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (October 2002): 1094–1123, here 1105.

14. Florinsky, *Russia*, 786. A variation sees honored citizenship as an effort “to guarantee a degree of economic security for a few leading commercial and industrial figures in each Russian city” or as a “dream of a middle class.” In both these visions, the guarantee or the dream remained unfulfilled. See Owen, *Capitalism and Politics*, 5–6 and Walter Pintner, *Economic Policy under Nicholas I* (Ithaca, 1967), 64–66.

15. V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Istoriia soslovii v Rossii* (Moscow, 1913), 11, 33–34; Boris Mironov, *Sotsial’naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii, XVIII-nachalo XX v.: genezis lichnosti, demokraticeskoi sem’i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravovogo gosudarstva*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1999) and N. A. Ivanova and V. P. Zheltova, *Soslovno-klassovaia struktura Rossii v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka* (Moscow, 2004).

to the point that they are brought out of the middle classes into the nobility in all but name.¹⁶

Stories like Chekhov's are perhaps partly to blame for the marginalization of the status in historical memory and for the lack of significant cultural resonance for the term. Lev Tolstoi's world of extreme privilege and lack thereof has no place for them. They appear only around the edges of urban life as portrayed by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, Nikolai Leskov, Aleksei Pisemskii, and Aleksandr Ostrovskii.¹⁷ When honored citizens do play more central roles, their status is often treated as a source of comedy. In his story "Terror," Chekhov introduces a character, "Forty Martyrs," who worked on and off as a servant, but who was dismissed from every post due to bad behavior. At the end of the story, he reveals his status: "I am a free man," he drunkenly cries out to a bunch of horses, "I am a hereditary honored citizen, if you must know."¹⁸ In context, the title is empty, a bit of sound and fury by a marginal figure, signifying nothing.

Elsewhere, honored citizen status may not be a source of satire, but literature still treats it as meaningless. In Fedor Dostoevskii's *Idiot*, Rogozhin, the brutish side of one of the novel's love triangles, is the son of a hereditary honored citizen, but Rogozhin and his family have usually been read as symbols of arch-traditional merchant life, not as exemplars of a new, modern middle class.¹⁹ These literary examples also suggest a particular reason for the general absence of the status in English language scholarship: translators have had a difficult time with the term. In his translation of *The Idiot* David McDuff calls Rogozhin the son of a "hereditary distinguished burgher" and in an endnote explains the status as a title granted for "meritorious deeds." Constance Garnett, however, whose translations popularized so much of Russian literature, simply leaves the status out.²⁰ In other translations, Forty

16. Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite*, 32–33; V. Iu. Rikman, "Pochetnoe grazhdanstvo i ego geneologiya," *Problemy otechestvennoi istorii i kul'tury perioda feodalizma: Chteniia pamiati V. B. Kobrina*, 154–56 (Moscow, 1992); N. A. Ivanova and V. P. Zheltova, *Slovnnoe obshchestvo Rossiiskoi imperii, XVIII-nachalo XX veka* (Moscow, 2009), 399–401.

17. To check this statement, I used text search on all the works by these authors online at <http://az.lib.ru>. Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin's Khreptiugin, who appears in several short stories, is a first guild merchant and hereditary honored citizen. Another appears briefly in Nikolai Leskov's *Nekuda*. A drunken honored citizen named Olukhov is mentioned in Aleksei Pisemskii's *Meshchane*. Aleksandr Ostrovskii fills his plays with merchants, but only a few are also honored citizens.

18. A. P. Chekhov, "Strakh," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 30 vols. (Moscow, 1977), 8:127–38, here 138.

19. He is part of the "problem of the merchant in Russian literature" identified in Beth Holmgren, *Rewriting Capitalism: Literature and the Market in Late Tsarist Russia and the Kingdom of Poland* (Pittsburgh, 1998), 17–53. See also Aleksandra A. Levandovskaia & Andrei A. Levandovskii, "The 'Dark Kingdom': The Merchant Entrepreneur and His Literary Images," *Russian Studies in History* 47, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 72–95, who also identify some of these honored citizens as exemplars of literary merchants (including the one major "good" merchant character they describe, the title character of Petr Boborykin's *Vasilii Terkin*, 89), and, for a corrective, Lina Bernstein, "Russian Eighteenth-Century Merchant Portraits in Words and in Oil," *Slavic and East European Journal* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 407–29.

20. Fedor Dostoevskii, *The Idiot*, trans. David McDuff (London, 2004), 11, 719; Fedor Dostoevskii, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York, 1958), 8.

Martyrs exclaims variously, “I am a nobleman in my own right” or “I was born a gentleman,” again side-stepping his actual status.²¹

Despite these depictions of the status as meaningless and marginal, the establishment of the status of honored citizens was, in fact, a clear effort on the part of the imperial Russian state to construct a middle class for Russia. It was also an example of the imperial state’s consistent reliance on the mechanism of social estate to organize its society and its belief that it could structure society to further economic (or other) goals. It was an effort at social engineering, an effort to create a version of a middle class defined by economic success or professional attainment within the context of a society built out of social estates. Robert Darnton summarized one approach to the history of the rise of the middle classes as one “that operates on three levels, the economic, social, and cultural.” In this account, “changes in the economy produce changes in the social structure and ultimately in values and ideas.”²² In its efforts to establish the status of honored citizens, the imperial state turned this formulation on its head by trying to use changes in the social structure to produce changes in the economy. At the same time, it hoped not to create “changes in values and ideas,” particularly those associated with political change. By creating an estate of individuals without a corporate structure, thereby making them individual liberal subjects without a collective voice in a world of corporate social estates, it largely managed to eliminate any revolutionary potential associated with the middle class.

Honored citizens were the culmination of a process that began during the reign of Catherine II. As Alexander Martin has argued, through reordering the administration, the social structure, and even the physical plan of towns, Catherine II aimed to create a new middling status, if not quite a middle class, for Russia.²³ This marked her reign as different from her predecessors; while Peter I had instituted new urban social groups at the beginning of the century, his efforts have been read as part of a narrative of administration and authority.²⁴ Catherine’s goals were broader. Fitting a middle into Russia’s social structures was a particular challenge, however, because by the beginning of her reign many separate statuses had largely been divided into two overarching groups: a tiny privileged group, freed from obligations to the state, and a massive unprivileged group, bound to pay taxes and to provide military and other services. Residents of towns were marked as middling by virtue of being neither the nobility nor the peasantry, but despite this in-between-ness, they were not quite conceptualized as a separate middle class. During the first

21. Anton Chekhov, *The Party and Other Stories*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York, 1917), 83; *The Oxford Chekhov*, trans. Ronald Hingley, 9 vols. (London, 1971), 6:180.

22. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), 110–11.

23. Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis*, 24–35. On Catherine’s plans, see also Wirtschafter, *Social Identity*, 73; Maiia Lavrinovich, “Sozdanie sotsial’nykh osnov imperii v XVIII veke: zakonodatel’nye praktiki v otnoshenii gorodskogo naseleniia Rossii i ikh zapadnoevropeiskie istochniki,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2002): 117–36.

24. J. Michael Hittle, *The Service City: State and Townsmen in Russia, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); Evgenii V. Anisimov, *The Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress through Coercion in Russia*, trans. John T. Alexander (Armonk, 1993), 199–200.

decades of Catherine's rule, the oddity of their position in the social order only increased, as she more clearly distinguished separate social statuses within towns. Merchants, the highest-ranking town residents, were given increased privilege while *meshchane*, lower-ranking townspeople, had much the same duties and obligations as peasants, which clearly marked them as unprivileged.²⁵ In addition, both these statuses were defined exclusively in terms of current economic well-being. This meant first that town populations were split between the privileged and the unprivileged rather than having their own separate middling status, and second that while noble privilege was primarily hereditary, merchant privilege was based on finances, and a business failure could send a merchant back into the ranks of the unprivileged.

The uncertain nature of merchant status in this social structure created a significant problem in the eyes of contemporary commentators. Noble deputies at Catherine's Legislative Commission, called to discuss the needs of the empire for the unmet goal of writing a new law code, complained that their social inferiors were seeking ennoblement through service as a way of gaining permanent privilege. The arch-conservative Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov believed that this practice damaged the nobility: "The primary basis of the nobility is honor," and as a result, "no one from the lower ranks should gain the rank and privileges of the nobility other than by the monarch's own power."²⁶ In addition, in a later piece of writing, Shcherbatov argued that such ennoblement also harmed Russia's merchantry. Shcherbatov claimed that the "movement of a great number of merchants into the nobility and into the officer ranks" caused "great losses" to the Russian state. As Shcherbatov put it, "rank is the ulcer which, having infected Russian merchants with madness dangerous both to them and to society, is completely destroying Russian trade."²⁷

To solve these problems, Catherine established a new status of "notable citizen" (*imenityi grazhdanin*) in order to grant hereditary privilege without nobility as part of her Charter to the Towns (1785). The Charter granted notable citizens rights and privileges similar to those that had also just been granted to members of the nobility—in particular, they were freed from corporal punishment and the soul tax. Because the status was permanent, it also aimed to eliminate the striving for noble status that threatened both the nobility and the merchantry. In addition, the charter aimed to preserve the current economic function of the new notable citizens by stating that they were not only "not forbidden" from owning factories or sailing ships but, in fact, actively encouraged to continue in their economic roles.²⁸ Although the law did not directly call these notable citizens members of a new middle class, their status was in

25. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, (hereafter *PSZ*), vol. 20, no. 14275 (March 17, 1775).

26. *Sbornik Imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva*, 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1867–1916) (hereafter *SIRIO*), 4:152.

27. M. M. Shcherbatov, "Razmyshleniia o ushcherbe trgovli, proiskhodiashchem vykhozhdeniem velikogo chisla kuptsov v dvoriane i v ofitsery," *Chteniia v imperatorskom obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete* 1 (January–March 1860): Section II, 135–40, here 136. See also Ransel, *A Russian Merchant's Tale*, 103–4.

28. *PSZ*, vol. 22, no. 16188 (April 21, 1785), 132–36.

practice exactly that—it stood in the middle between the privilege of the nobility and the lack of permanent privilege of nearly everybody else.

Moreover, the law went beyond these concerns about Russia's merchantry in a way that also emphasizes Catherine's particular interest in developing a middle class for Russia. Those eligible to take on the new status included the business elite (in the phrasing of the law, "capitalists," a category that included those with more than 50,000 rubles in property: bankers, "those who trade in wholesale and do not have shops," and owners of merchant sailing ships); those who had served particularly well in town government; scholars with attestations from universities or academies; and artists, including architects, painters, sculptors, and composers, again with proper attestations from academies. In other words, it mixed a definition of a middle class based in trade with the beginnings of one based in the professions. Both were to be encouraged, both given honor, both made a part of the official social structure.

Early in the nineteenth century, however, the association of the status of notable citizens with honor rather than simply with a middle class led to its gradual demise. During the eighteenth century, personal conceptions of honor had shifted away from ones based in clan identities to something more individual, and that new individual sense of honor became associated with particular statuses.²⁹ Practically, Catherine's reforms gave some statuses—nobles, merchants, notable citizens—particular privileges that also marked them as honored.³⁰ In the early nineteenth century, more abstract notions of honor came into play. In 1807, as part of a larger new year's manifesto "granting to the merchantry new benefits, distinctions, advantages and new means to expand and strengthen mercantile undertakings," Alexander I described the merchantry as a whole in newly honorable terms.³¹ According to the manifesto, the Empire's merchants engaged in "noble (*blagorodnye*) efforts," and possessed "love for the Fatherland, and particular devotion to Our Person." At the same time, the manifesto also partially eliminated the category of notable citizen. As the manifesto put it, "the status of notable citizens, because it mixes together disparate sources of distinction, is abolished for the merchantry, allowing those who have that title to enter into the guilds according to the general rule." Only "scholars and artists" were to carry the title from then on.³² Later, legal scholars emphasized that the rationale behind the partial elimination of the status was first that it "mixed together" too many separate statuses, and second that the entire merchant estate was now viewed as honorable—they no longer needed extra honors in the eyes of the state.³³

29. Ransel, *A Russian Merchant's Tale*, 39–41, 45, drawing on Nancy Shields Kollmann, *By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia* (Ithaca, 1999), and A. B. Kamenskii, *Povsednevnost' russkikh gorodskikh obyvatel'ei: istoricheskie anekdoty iz provintsial'noi zhizni XVIII veka* (Moscow, 2006).

30. Abby M. Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 2002).

31. PSZ, vol. 29, no. 22418 (January 1, 1807), §15, §17.

32. PSZ, vol. 29, no. 22418 (January 1, 1807), §19.

33. P. A. Mullov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie pravitel'stvennykh mer po ustroistvu gorodskogo obshchestvennogo upravleniia* (St. Petersburg, 1864), 114; A. Gradovskii, *O gosudarstvennom ustroistve*, vol. 1, *Nachala russkogo gosudarstvennogo prava*, (St. Petersburg, 1875), 241.

That question of honor was also at the center of an inquiry conducted by the Ministry of Finance in the early 1820s. The towns of Lokhvitsa and Shchigry had sent the Department of Manufactures reports on local trade, including lists of town merchants. The Department was surprised to discover that each town listed one resident both as a third-guild merchant and as a notable citizen. The Department believed that such a combination of statuses was illogical, for third-guild merchant status did not seem honorable enough to warrant association with the notable citizenry, and also impossible, for mere third-guild merchants had never been eligible for the status of notable citizen. Furthermore, according to the law of 1807, no merchants of any guild should hold the title of notable citizen.³⁴

The Department interpreted the events thus: the men (as well as a number of others in different towns, it turned out) had received the status of notable citizen not because of their merchant status, but rather because of their civil service to their towns, and by extension to the imperial state. As a result, the Department argued, the provisions of the 1807 manifesto did not truly apply to them. Their status had been granted as a “mark of distinction,” and such distinctions could, according to the law, “be removed not otherwise than through falling into crime.” That had not applied to any of these men, and therefore they had kept their notable status after other merchants had been returned to the guilds. The Department went on to recommend that some new, formal distinguished status be created to recognize those merchants who contributed to the health of the Empire. Such a distinction would be, it was thought, “most proper.”³⁵

The Department’s recommendation had no immediate effect, but the new regime of Nicholas I soon took on these questions. The first of Nicholas’ many secret committees, the Committee of 6 December, investigated a series of topics ranging from the organization of the Senate, to provincial administration, to possibly setting out a new “law of estates” for the Russian Empire.³⁶ Its discussions on this last point focused on several related issues: the manumission and sale of serfs, the question of rank in service to the state, and “the creation in Russia of hereditary citizenship (*grazhdanstvo*).” All these issues were seen as linked; the Committee argued that releasing a single manifesto on all these points would show “every status in the State proof of the Most August Monarch’s unremitting care for its well-being.”³⁷

In their discussions, members of the Committee, the State Council, and the Ministry of Finance, as well as the Emperor himself, all of whom weighed in on the problem, largely agreed on several points. They echoed the nobles of Catherine II’s reign, arguing that nobility should be granted only by the tsar’s own will, and that the tendency of Russia’s merchants to strive for nobility

34. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), fond (f.) 18, opis’ (op.) 4, delo (d.) 275, list (ll.) 1–2ob (1823) (O kuptsakh 3i gil’ dui pokazannykh v zvaniu imenitykh grazhdan).

35. *Ibid.*, ll. 12–15 (1823).

36. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley, 1959), 190–91.

37. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 193.

was harmful to nobles and merchants alike.³⁸ They believed that creating a new status that gave honor (in particular freedom from the soul tax and from corporal punishment) and was heritable would help preserve and increase “the well-being of towns [and] the development and improvement of trade and industry.”³⁹ Furthermore, they associated this new status quite clearly with affirming and further developing a middle class for the state.⁴⁰

Discussions broke down, however, over how to conceptualize the new urban social order. Or rather, they broke down over language. Most proposals described a four-part hierarchy: at the top those who had previously been eligible for nobility through service, as well as professors, scholars, artists, and medical professionals; next a hereditary privileged town status of particularly successful merchants; then a personal, not heritable, privileged town status; and finally a non-privileged town status.⁴¹ What to call these different statuses, however, proved to be a contentious issue. Committee members and even Nicholas I himself tried variations on “noble,” “notable,” “honored,” and “first-rank,” but none seemed quite right.⁴² In the end, the Committee decided that although it supported a “new State status, which would mediate between the nobility and the honored or notable merchantry,” it had not yet succeeded in finding the right words to describe it.⁴³

In 1832, a manifesto finally established a “new estate” of Honored Citizens (*pochetnye grazhdane*). It put in place a much simpler vision than the Committee had previously conceptualized, in fact essentially a return to Catherine’s notable citizens under a new name. In particular, it ignored the decades of concern over the idea of honor that had made the question of naming so fraught. Instead, it assumed that honor was unproblematic, and emphasized that it sought to create a proper, prosperous middle class. “Developments of trade and industry,” it claimed, demanded “new distinctions,” and this new status was meant to grant just that.⁴⁴

The manifesto, first of all, focused on the rights granted to those who gained honored citizenship. They were freed from the soul tax and recruit duties; like nobles they were freed from corporal punishment; they had the right but not the duty to be elected to local government positions; and their official status would now be “honored citizen” in all legal documents.⁴⁵ Even the very part of the state bureaucracy tasked with overseeing requests for honored citizen status reaffirmed its specific association with honor—the Office of the Heraldry, an arm of the Governing Senate associated also with overseeing the lists of the nobility.⁴⁶ In practice, too, those who were granted honored-citizen status received formal printed attestations of their status, with the full

38. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 160, 164, 194, 197; vol. 90, 365.

39. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 159, 164, 485.

40. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 159.

41. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 160.

42. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 163–64, 169–70.

43. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 176, 182.

44. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov*, ser. II (hereafter *PSZ II*), vol. 7, no. 5284 (April 10, 1832).

45. *Ibid.*, §§ 2–4.

46. *Ibid.*, § 12.

title of the reigning emperor, the names of all family members included, and signed by four senators and the herald-master of the Senate.⁴⁷

As when Catherine established the notable citizens, the new manifesto had a capacious understanding of the middle class. Honored citizenship did not fully distinguish between mercantile and professional sources of honor. Personal honored citizenship could be attained by certain graduates of Russia's universities, by "artists of free condition" with attestations from the Academy of Arts, and by "foreign scholars, artists, trading capitalists and owners of significant manufactures and factories, even if they have not taken Russian citizenship."⁴⁸ Those with personal honored citizenship could seek hereditary status after performing additional service or demonstrating particular "excellence in the sciences and Fine Arts," as could merchants who had spent ten years in the first guild or twenty in the second without untoward legal entanglements and legitimate children of personal nobles.⁴⁹ In addition, the manifesto specifically noted that Jews, "where they are allowed to live," were also eligible for the status of honored citizen. However, they could access the status "only for unusual efforts" beyond those required for others, and only by "Our own decree." In other words, their access to the status was still governed by arbitrary autocratic authority, unlike others whose access was now essentially bureaucratized.⁵⁰

Throughout these lists of those eligible to take on the status, there were two major trends. First, hereditary status, in particular, was meant to reward consistent success, either on the part of a parent or by a merchant, scholar, or artist himself. Second, it was not only possible but also desirable to hold the status of honored citizen simultaneously with other work. Merchants could still trade (if they paid their guild fees), and university graduates "maintained the right to enter into State service."⁵¹ They also had an incentive to serve, as for the time being they could still obtain nobility through state service, a fact that emphasizes that honored citizenship was a middling status.

In addition, the ways that honored citizenship could be lost emphasized the importance of keeping up one's position. Honored citizens lost their status completely if their "rights of status" were eliminated by judicial decree, if they "lost their good name," also by judicial decree, and for "malicious bankruptcy." Their rights were also curtailed if they lowered themselves by entering into one of the artisan guilds, or if they entered into domestic service. In these cases, they maintained their freedom from corporal punishment, the soul tax, and recruit duties, but were no longer to be called honored citizens.⁵²

The final lines of the manifesto emphasized these themes and made a point of its larger purpose as a piece of social engineering. The status was described as a gift to the Empire's towns, as a sign of the Emperor's "ceaseless

47. RGIA, f. 1343, op. 39, d. 1464, ll. 9ob–10 (O pochetnom grazhdanstve Voznesenskogo posada pervoi gil'dii kuptsa Evsigneia Durdenevskogo, 1866).

48. *PSZ II*, vol. 7, no. 5284 (April 10, 1832), §§ 5–6.

49. Specifically, they could not have had status revoked for loss of funds, nor been brought into legal conflicts. *Ibid.*, §§ 7–9.

50. *Ibid.*, § 15, and on the regularity of other access, §§ 12–14.

51. *Ibid.*, §§ 5, 10.

52. *Ibid.*, §§ 16, 18.

attention to benefits for their inhabitants.” Its goals were that “the honored families of citizens will be protected from decline,” to “give great encouragement to work and good behavior and good habits,” and to allow “hard work and ability to make it possible to find awards, honor, and distinction appropriate to them in this manner of life.”⁵³ These were, at their base, goals of creating a prosperous, stable middle class—or rather, of creating prosperous, stable middle-class individuals, whose hard work would maintain the status of their families and the entire outlook of the urban landscape.

As one legal writer put it in the 1860s, these laws meant that “a new estate—the honored citizenry—had been, by law, established.”⁵⁴ That, however, was only a baseline marker of success—the estate had been established in law, but whether that meant something more was another question. Some nineteenth-century scholars believed the honored citizenry was more than a simple estate. Evdokim Ziablovskii described it as “properly a middle condition” already in 1842, and by the end of the century Aleksandr Gradovskii called it a “middle status along the lines of the middle class of western Europe, particularly of France.”⁵⁵ In so doing, they argued that honored citizens transcended their estate origins to make something entirely new in Russian society. The reality, however, was somewhere in between these two positions. The imperial state had wished to create a new social group that would lead to persistent economic success. It furthermore associated that group with honor, and envisioned it as a social estate, not precisely a class. In many, although not all ways, the state succeeded at these basic goals. The result, however, was not a new social structure for the Empire, but instead an anomaly within a largely unchanged society—an estate of individuals with unusual freedoms rather than a coherent class.

First, a basic goal of the state was simply to have people take on the new status and make it real by sheer force of numbers, and in this it was largely successful. Senate archival holdings list more than 13,000 files of those seeking honored citizen status, each representing an individual or a household requesting the status.⁵⁶ Because sixty to eighty percent of files were submitted on behalf of a household rather than an individual, and because honored

53. *Ibid.*, § 18.

54. Mullov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie*, 120.

55. Evdokim Filipovich Ziablovskii, *Rossiiskaia statistika*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1842), 1:52; Gradovskii, *O gosudarstvennom ustroistve*, 295–96.

56. RGIA, f. 1343, op. 39, which covers petitions for hereditary honored citizenship, 1832–1890, includes 6053 files, some duplicates, some including more than one petition (or 5821 unique names of petitioners). Op. 40, covering petitions for hereditary honored citizenship from 1890–1917, includes 6061 individual files. Op. 41 covers petitions for personal honored citizenship from 1833 to 1917, and includes 415 files. Op. 47 covers 1897–1917, does not indicate whether petitions are for honorary or personal honored citizenship, and includes a further 1109 files. Not all of these petitions were successful; the application of Konstantin Efimov Durdenevskii was rejected because he had not submitted the proper fees. RGIA, f. 1343, op. 39, d. 1465, “O pochetnom grazhdanstve Voznesenskogo posada pervoi gil’ dii kuptsa Konstantina Efimova Durdenevskogo.” In addition, according to Fedor Nikolaevich Panov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo* (St. Petersburg, 1889), 96, those who sought personal status based on their father’s service applied not to the Senate but “to those government organizations, where their fathers served, or from provincial administrations.”

citizenship was usually hereditary, a relatively small number of individual petitions could lead to quite large numbers of honored citizens. According to records from Moscow collected in concert with the ninth revision of the tax rolls, households representing somewhat fewer than 200 separate initial petitions submitted over the past 20 years included a total of 1,021 people (573 men and 448 women) by 1850.⁵⁷ By the end of the century, this movement of people into honored citizenship had created a clear change in town populations. The 1897 First General Census of the Population counted more honored citizens (342,927) than merchants (281,179) in the empire as a whole, although it is true that this likely reflected changes that led to reductions in the number of merchants as much as the greater establishment of the honored citizens.⁵⁸ Even so, Nikolai Rubakin's images of late-imperial society include honored citizens among Russia's social groups, but relegates merchants to the general category of "other," in so doing erasing them from the social map.⁵⁹

In addition, the new status caught on throughout the Empire. The Senate archival registers list the hometown of merchants who applied for honored citizen status. Petitioners came from 444 different towns from all across the Russian Empire, ranging from Akkerman (now Bilhorod-Dnistrovs'kyi) on the Black Sea, to Iakutsk in Siberia, to Zvenigorod in Moscow province. Nor was this a success only in the biggest of Russia's towns. From 1832 to 1889, 29 percent of merchant petitioners were based in Moscow and St. Petersburg, 25 percent in provincial capitals, 36 percent in district (*uezd*) capitals, and 11 percent in other towns.⁶⁰ Honored citizens became part of the social world of towns of all sizes in all parts of the empire.

The imperial state also met its second goal of building a hybrid middling status. From 1832 to 1889, most petitioners were merchants (77 percent), with a substantial second group (19 percent) petitioning based on profession or education.⁶¹ That second group grew over the course of this half century, from only 13 percent in the first two decades of the period to 26 percent in the

57. *Materialy dlia istorii Moskovskogo kupechestva*, 9 vols. (Moscow, 1889), 8:287–98. Based on comparison with the Senate files held at RGIA, by 1850 the descendants of some of the initial petitioners had split into several households each listed separately in the Moscow records. So, Vasilii Sergeev Zubov and Trifon Sergeev Zubov each headed separate households (294), and appear to be the two sons of Sergei Zubov, who took on honored citizen status in 1834 (RGIA, f. 1343, op. 39, d. 1749).

58. "Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii 1897 g. Raspredele-nie naseleniia po sosloviiam i sostoianiiam," *Demoskop Weekly*, at http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_sos_97.php (last accessed February 22, 2017). On the erosion of merchant status at the end of the nineteenth century, caused in part by laws that allowed more people business opportunities without the need to take on merchant status, see Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850–1900* (Berkeley, 1990), 54–56.

59. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Rubakin, *Rossiia v tsifrakh: Strana. narod. sosloviia. klassy* (St. Petersburg, 1912), 53.

60. Numbers do not add to 100 due to rounding.

61. There were in addition 1.9 percent honored citizens, usually personal, apparently reaffirming or changing the nature of their status; 1.1 percent *meshchane*; .7 percent "residents" of primarily non-Russian towns; .3 percent *inorodtsy* (non-Russians with their own *soslovie* identity); .2 percent peasants; .2 percent other (artisans and foreigners accepting Russian citizenship).

last two decades. This growth reflects an increase in their absolute numbers, rather than a decrease in the number of merchants, who continued to submit many petitions throughout the period.

More and more petitioners came from outside the ranks of merchants because over the course of the nineteenth century more and more people became eligible for honored citizenship. In particular, a whole series of educational institutions and professions were deemed honorable enough to warrant granting their graduates or practitioners honored citizen status. Graduates of schools ranging from the commercial (the Moscow Practical Commercial Academy and St. Petersburg Higher Commercial School); the agricultural (Gorygoretskii Agricultural School, School of Agriculture of the Free Economic Society); the technical (St. Petersburg Practical Technological Institute, Moscow Technical School and former Riga Polytechnical School); to the academic (Lazarevskii Institute of Eastern Languages), gained entry to honored citizenship, usually personal at first, but with the possibility of gaining hereditary citizenship through continued success.⁶² Additional professionals also gained greater access to the status. A formal statute on “artists of the Imperial theaters” noted that artists of the first rank were eligible for honored citizen status: personal for ten years of “impeccable and diligent service” and hereditary for fifteen years of such service. Civil servants, doctors, surveyors, musicians, and many others also eventually gained access.⁶³

These lists hide the intense lobbying that went on behind the scenes to make access to the status possible. Lynne Sargeant, for one, describes the lengthy process by which graduates of the St. Petersburg Conservatory gained the right to honored citizenship as one of persistent effort on the part of individuals and organizations. While the school was established formally in 1861, it was only in 1894 that a statute gave its graduates the right to become honored citizens.⁶⁴ Their persistence in pushing for access to the honored citizenship shows the real meaning that the status had—it conferred real privilege, even in the waning decades of the imperial era when some other forms of status distinction had become blurred.

Honored citizenship was attractive because it granted both real privilege and real honor, reflecting the fact that a third aim of creating the new status had been to take seriously the concept of honor. This had been a concern since

62. *PSZ II*, vol. 10, no. 8419 (September 20, 1835); vol. 11, no. 9097 (April 24, 1836), § 8; vol. 14, no. 11971 (January 27, 1839); vol. 23, no. 22257 (May 10, 1848); vol. 26, no. 25269 (June 5, 1851); vol. 37, no. 38439 (July 3, 1862), § 28; *Polnoe sobranie zakonov*, ser. III (hereafter *PSZ III*), vol. 23, no. 22819 (April 21, 1903).

63. *PSZ II* vol. 14, no. 11934 (January 15, 1839). Later laws include vol. 19, no. 18290 (October 10, 1844) (service to the Russian-American Company for at least ten years); vol. 19, no. 1848 (November 28) (various kinds of chancellery work); vol. 20, no. 19085 (June 11, 1845) (military and state service); vol. 20, nos. 19227–28 (July 22, 1845) (merchants who received the Order of St. Vladimir or St. Anna); vol. 24, no. 23022 (February 16, 1849) (doctors, pharmacists, and veterinarians); vol. 34, no. 34480 (May 11, 1859), § 8 (senior surveyors of the Ministry of State Domains); *PSZ III*, vol. 14, no. 10387 (February 28, 1894) (musicians certified by the Conservatory of the Imperial Russian Musical Society).

64. Lynne Sargeant, “A New Class of People: The Conservatoire and Musical Professionalization in Russia, 1861–1917,” *Music & Letters* 85, no. 1 (February 2004): 41–61, here 44–46.

Catherine's time, and most worries about her notable citizen status focused on whether notable citizens properly fit honorable ideals. That concern shifted with the institution of the honored citizenry. Now, concern over honor came to be central to the self-conception of town residents at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. For those who possessed honored citizen status, the "honor" of their title came to hold real meaning.⁶⁵

Honor could mean personal honor. In particular, honored citizen status was explicitly linked to consciously honorable acts in the form of charity. In 1914, Lev Rogovin agreed that "the border between" privileged and non-privileged estates had been "reduced to a great degree," but nonetheless argued that "at the current time honored citizens are considered to be a privileged estate and the granting of the status of honored citizen is considered even now one of the signs of Highest honor for charitable efforts."⁶⁶ This idea persisted elsewhere, as well. Dmitrii Likhachev remembered his ancestors' honored citizen status as something based on continuous good acts. His great-great grandfather had been made an honored citizen "not merely because of his prominence among the businessmen of St. Petersburg, but also for his continual charitable work." Furthermore, that great-great-grandfather's descendants had "confirmed their right to it in each subsequent reign by the award of the Order of Stanislav and the corresponding letters patent."⁶⁷ That statement, too, hints at the way that charitable acts were both perceived of as honorable and were also a method of gaining new status: charitable donations could indeed result in particular awards and honors, which could be reason enough for a petition for honored citizen status.⁶⁸

Even earlier, there had been a trend of publishing short eulogies or remembrances of individual honored citizens who had lived up to the honor of their status.⁶⁹ Nikita Ivanovich Salamanov, merchant and honored citizen of Borovich, was remembered most of all for his strong faith and general

65. This echoes other arguments over the role of honor in late-imperial urban society, as in Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs*, 85–86; Robert W. Thurston, *Liberal City, Conservative State: Moscow and Russia's Urban Crisis, 1906–1914* (New York, 1987), 24; or the story of Ivan Slonov described in Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1985), 173.

66. Lev Mironovich Rogovin, *Pochetnoe grazhdanstvo: Zakony i raz' iasneniia Senata i ministerstv o prichislenii k sosloviu pochetykh grazhdan* (St. Petersburg, 1914), v.

67. Dmitrii S. Likhachev, *Reflections on the Russian Soul: A Memoir*, trans. Bernard Adams (Budapest, 2000), 1.

68. Rieber argues that this was, in fact, "the most reliable road to honorary citizenship," in *Merchants and Entrepreneurs*, 124.

69. For examples, see Iakov, *Slovo preosviashchennogo Iakova, Episkopa Saratovskogo i Tsaritsynskogo, proiznesennoe pri pogrebenii Saratovskogo Kuptsa, pochetnogo grazhdanina Ivan Andreevicha Kanina, skonchavshegosia 12 Noiabria 1836 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1842); Peter Evdokimovich Pokrovskii, *Slovo pri pogrebenii pochetnoi grazhdanki, Verkhotskoi 1-i gil' dii kupecheskoi zheny, Aleksandry Andreevny Bronnikovoi, urozhdennoi Temerinoi, govorennoe Paraskevievskoi Tserkvi, chto v Okhotnom riadu, protoiereem Petrom Pokrovskim 1iulia 6 dnia 1847 goda* (Moscow, 1847); Mikhail Mikhailovskii, *Rech', govorennaia pri pogrebenii glavnogo proizvoditelia rabot na S. Peterburgo-Moskovskoi zheleznoi doroge, Valdaiskogo 1 gil' dii kuptsa i pochetnogo grazhdanina Ivana Gerasimovicha Sharvina, Valdaiskogo Troitskogo Sobora Sviashchennikom Mikhailom Mikhailovskim, 19 Noiabria 1845 goda* ([St. Petersburg], 1849).

goodness, but his eulogizer also touched briefly on the concept of status: “Should I continue to describe his worldly life, how he, serving this society, was evidently raised by the will of the State, and he and his line made blessed by the status of Honored Citizenry?”⁷⁰ In other cases, no explicit mention was made of official status, but individuals were described as particularly honorable and good, through their religious acts, their service in local administration, their charitable works, or even their economic success.⁷¹ In these cases, the fact of being an honored citizen was bound not to official status, but to the concept of being an honorable person.

By establishing the honored citizenry, the imperial state also succeeded in creating not simply a new kind of personal honor but a new kind of honor associated specifically with towns. This success becomes particularly visible in cases where that honor was incorrectly applied. In 1863, the Ministry of Internal Affairs investigated a report from Nizhnii Novgorod, where the town deputies’ assembly, “without the agreement of the whole society, is raising various people to the status of honored citizenry, and without presenting this kind of decision for approval, is handing out certificates.” According to the man who reported on this wrongdoing, possibly the writer Pavel Mel’nikov-Pecherskii, town authorities had given out twelve such certificates, including ones to the former governor, the current governor, and to various other high ranking state officials in the province. Mel’nikov recognized that this action was “out of the ordinary,” and thus presented it to the ministry for investigation.⁷²

In a confidential report from the province’s governor, the situation was explained more clearly. The governor had recently ordered a local bureaucrat, Collegiate Assessor Aristov, to overhaul the town residency books, and to record properly all current residents. According to the governor, Aristov had decided that “no little honor could be brought to the Nizhnii Novgorod society if the pages of its residency book were to be decorated by the names of those individuals whose services were useful to the town.” As a result, the compilers chose twelve individuals of particular note, and included them among the list of the town’s honored citizens.⁷³ Nor was this the only time that such informal use of the title occurred. In 1878, the town head of Ivanovo-Voznesensk offered honored citizenship to Count Sergei Sheremetev, the son of the last owner of the former serf village of Ivanovo. Sheremetev graciously accepted the honor.⁷⁴ By the early twentieth century, even Grand Prince Mikhail

70. Timofei Kostrov, *Nadgrobnoe slovo, skazannoe pri pogrebenii pochetnogo grazhdanina, borovitskogo kuptsa Nikity Ivanovicha Salamanova, 1847 goda dekabria 4 dnia sviashchennikom magistrim Timofeem Kostrovym* (St. Petersburg, 1848), 6.

71. Ivan Fedorovich Baranov was noted for all of these characteristics. See *Nekotorye cherty iz zhizni Aleksandrovsikogo 1 gil’ dii kuptsa i pochetnogo grazhdanina Ivana Fedorovicha Baranova* (Moscow, 1849).

72. RGIA, f. 1287, op. 38, d. 350, ll. 1–10b (O nepravil’nom vozvedenii Nizhegorodskim gorodskim deputatskim sobraniiem raznykh lits v mestnoe pochethoe grazhdanstvo). The report came on plain paper from one P. Mel’nikov, addressed to the head of the Economic Department of the MVD by name, not by title.

73. *Ibid.*, ll. 90b–10.

74. Ol’ga Zakharova, “Pochetnyi grazhdanin g. Ivanovo-Voznesenska,” Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Ivanovskoi oblasti, posted September 8, 2010 at www.ivarh.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=386 (last accessed March 21, 2017).

Aleksandrovich, the tsar's youngest brother, was made Honored Citizen of Elets, Orel, and Sevsk.⁷⁵

The problem, however, was that honored citizenship was not intended to be solely an honor, but had real legal meaning, as well. In all these cases local officials had used the term honored citizen to mean something other than what it really was. After the 1863 case, the Minister of Internal Affairs himself wrote to the Nizhnii Novgorod governor to investigate and to demand that in the future no further such certificates be given. As he put it, it was laudable that the local officials wished to honor those who had served the province and the town well. However, in his case honor ought not be conflated with a title that had real meaning in the empire's social structures.⁷⁶ In 1902, a decree addressed the problem of those who treated the status as merely an honor rather than as a formal legal status. In this case, the issue was that the status of honored citizen was being used within state service as an "initial award," rather than as an official status granted for "extended useful service or for gaining serious scholarly knowledge." The decree stated firmly that it should be returned to its formal usage, and that "various medals and epaulets" were sufficient marks of esteem for earlier service.⁷⁷

The fourth goal of the imperial state was for this new group of honored citizens to be not only honored in principle but also prosperous, contributing members of society in practice. The results on this account are far more ambivalent. Russian literature implies that in this the state failed. Chekhov's *Forty Martyrs*, the hereditary honored citizen who ended as an unemployed drunk, gives no good vision of success. Even literary honored citizens who were less drunk and more employed might nonetheless find themselves objects of fun. A young lover in an Ostrovskii play states: "By my education I am a personal (*lichnyi*) honored citizen!" and is met by a clever pun: "No, you're not *lichnyi*, but *lishnii* (superfluous)."⁷⁸ Although he protests, "No, you're superfluous, I'm necessary, I'm an educated man, I can be useful to society," the reader/viewer is left unconvinced.

This bit of dialogue gets at a central concern: that honored citizens be "useful to society," not "superfluous." One solution to this concern was to use laws: already in 1833, a statute noted that those who became honored citizens on the grounds of their fathers' status had to serve conscientiously, or else run the risk of having their status revoked.⁷⁹ Other laws opened up service or professions to those possessing the status, by regulating how honored citizens could serve in the military or the state bureaucracy.⁸⁰

75. *PSZ III*, vol. 29, no. 32759 (December 4, 1909); no. 32816 (December 20, 1909); vol. 31, no. 35672 (July 23, 1911).

76. RGIA, f. 1287, op. 38, d. 350, ll. 15–16ob.

77. *PSZ III*, vol. 22, no. 21764 (June 24, 1902).

78. A. N. Ostrovskii, "Pravda khorosho, a schast'e luchshe," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v dvenadtsati tomakh*, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1975), 4:279.

79. *PSZ II*, vol. 8, no. 6107 (April 12, 1833), § 2. Other laws, though, emphasized heredity, including the very next law listed in the *Polnoe sobranie zakonov*, which stated that although merchants possessing honored citizenship could exclude sons from their families for disrespect, they could not revoke their sons' now hereditary honored-citizen status. *PSZ II*, vol. 8, no. 6108 (April 12, 1833).

80. *PSZ II*, vol. 24, no. 23239 (May 11, 1849); vol. 26, no. 24862 (January 22, 1851).

Alternatively, they allowed honored citizens (and particularly their children) entry into the new professions and semi-professions established in the middle third of the nineteenth century. Honored citizens could be tutors or engineers or surveyors—all statuses united by their association with specific education.⁸¹

At the same time, laws also created a challenge to ensuring honored citizens remained productive because of the way the status was envisioned as hereditary. Honored citizenship could be passed forward or it could be gained by looking back into the past. Even long-past success by an ancestor could be passed down through families to affect their present lives.⁸² In 1858, the case of merchant's widow Emiliia Flug involved two competing methods of attaining honored citizen status. Flug had petitioned to be given the status of hereditary honored citizen, but the Department of Heraldry was divided on how to decide her case. Flug's late husband had had a business failure that disqualified the family from attaining honored citizen status on the basis of consistent merchant status, but Flug also had a claim based on inherited success. Her late husband's father had been a merchant who in 1799 attained the rank of Collegiate Assessor—a fact that meant the father had personal noble status, which now gave children honored citizen status. The State Council found past success trumped more recent bankruptcy, and ordered that the widow and her family be raised to the status of honored citizen.⁸³

The imperial state soon began to fear that hereditary privilege was leading to stagnation, not growth. An 1853 decree focused on a particular problem with “children of those bureaucrats who have not attained the status of hereditary nobility”—in other words, with those who had gained the status of honored citizen through their fathers' service, not their own. The problem? “Their number, constantly increasing, is creating a category, among other *sosloviia*, having neither duties nor a distinct purpose in social life.” While some had turned to military or civil service on their own, others instead “remained idle,” giving no service to the state, and failing to support their own families.⁸⁴

These fears were not without basis. Before that 1853 decree, at least among files of the Senate archives, only a small percentage—usually less than 10 percent—of petitioners sought honored citizenship based on the attainments of a relative rather than their own. These were (rarely) merchant or (more often) priests' sons, or the children of personal nobles, and their relative numbers were even dropping over those two decades. After 1870, however, their numbers increased to represent at least 10 percent of petitioners, and averaging

81. On tutors, *PSZ II*, vol. 9, no. 7240 (July 1, 1834); on entry into the Institute of Mining Engineers, *PSZ II*, vol. 9, no. 7298 (July 25, 1834); on entry into the Institute of the Transportation Corps, *PSZ II* vol. 11, no. 9739 (November 27, 1836); on becoming surveyors, *PSZ II*, vol. 18, no. 17048 (July 20, 1843).

82. *PSZ II*, vol. 11, no. 9231 (May 27, 1836); vol. 14, no. 12768 (October 16, 1839); vol. 46, no. 49460 (April 10, 1871).

83. *PSZ II*, vol. 33, no. 33907 (December 15, 1858).

84. The apparent solution was to force them into the military if they did not choose alternative ways of making a living and/or serving the state. *PSZ II*, vol. 28, no. 27123 (April 2, 1853).

20 percent by the end of the 1880s. The concern that individuals were increasingly gaining permanent privileged status not through their own attainments was therefore (eventually) justified.

What happened after individuals attained honored citizen status also suggests that the state's successes were mixed. At the time of the ninth revision of the tax rolls (1850–51), the Moscow merchant society collected household lists of its merchants and of Moscow's honored citizens. The household lists of honored citizens note whether the head of each household was currently registered temporarily in one of Moscow's merchant guilds—that is, whether the household was continuing to engage in trade. It is possible to associate 169 of the first 200 households listed in the Moscow records with petitioners from the Senate archives. Of those 169 households, nearly equal numbers fell in merchant status (53) and maintained or rose in merchant status (54). Given the goals of the status, those relatively equal numbers are probably a greater marker of failure than of success.

More mysterious are the remaining 62 households listed as having merchant rank in the Senate files, but not in the Moscow registers. Without such rank, they were no longer trading as merchants, but what they were doing is unclear. Perhaps they were occupying themselves with petty trade, no longer fulfilling the image of a prosperous middle class. If that was true of the majority, it would be strong evidence that the creation of the status had not produced a stable middle class. There were other stories, however. In some cases, one initial household had split between several brothers, with only one of the brothers holding on to the family's guild membership.⁸⁵ In others, the lack of trading rights meant that the family had moved into a completely different role in society. One of the households is that of the late publisher and author Nikolai Polevoi, whose merchant origins marked him as one of the few new men of the 1840s.⁸⁶ He had come to belong to the cultural elite, no longer the economic middle class.

Even successes like Polevoi's did not fit the goals of those who created the status, however. When the Committee of 6 December discussed creating a new honored town status, it addressed the question of what those who held the status ought to do. Some had suggested that one privilege of the status be free entry into the civil service, but the Committee disagreed, in part because "one of the most important goals of founding citizenship should be keeping town residents in their original [economic] situation, and besides the class of civil servants already continually increases without them."⁸⁷ Their vision was of a prosperous bourgeoisie based on trade and the professions, not of a middling bureaucratic status. Those who had fallen out of that role, whatever their eventual contributions, therefore, were failures to that original vision.

A fifth concern of the imperial state had been to create this new status within the context of a society constructed of legally defined identities,

85. For example, Pavel, Vasili, and Petr Fedorov Afans'ev; only Pavel still held merchant status. *Materialy*, 8:288, 290, 291.

86. The household was headed by his widow, Natal'ia Frantseva; the entry has enough detail to make it certain that it is the household of Nikolai Polevoi. *Materialy*, 8:296.

87. *SIRIO*, vol. 74, 486.

sosloviia. By definition it succeeded—what was the honored citizenry if not a legal status created by decree?—but it did so in a way that made honored citizens unique within Russian society. Social estate had many meanings in nineteenth century Russia. Among others, it defined obligations and opportunities and it associated individuals with a location and a collective.⁸⁸ To an extent, the status of honored citizen did all these things, but often in ways that marked the soslovie of honored citizen as distinct conceptually from the other sosloviia of imperial Russia.

At base, most estates were conglomerations of obligations and opportunities established gradually by decrees; honored citizens were unusual, though not unique, because they were invented whole cloth. Like other statuses, laws laid out in great detail the obligations and opportunities allotted to honored citizens. Unlike other statuses, not all honored citizens shared the same opportunities and obligations. In 1851, a Senate decree in fact limited the rights of some honored citizens to some kinds of work. The decree answered a query from officials in Irkutsk, who asked for clarification of the rights of honored citizens to state service. The *Digest of the Laws* was contradictory: honored citizens were not on the list of those eligible for state service, nor were they on the list of those ineligible for state service. State service was not included on the list of the rights of honored citizens, but elsewhere honored citizens were listed among those who might be in state service. The Irkutsk officials thus suggested that the *Digest* be amended to list state service as a right of honored citizens (and honored citizens as among those with the right to state service). Although the Senate agreed that certain laws referred to honored citizens already in the civil service, it also pointed out that other laws limited the rights of honored citizens of merchant background to enter state service. Therefore, its final decision reaffirmed a more limited version of state service: “those of merchant status raised to hereditary honored citizens, if they have not been in the first guild merchants for twelve years in a row, or if they have not received through education the right to official rank (*klassnyi chin*), may not enter civil service on the same basis as those of statuses with the right to enter it.”⁸⁹

Nor was this the only time that laws limited the rights of certain honored citizens to work at the job of their choosing. Other laws restricted access to state service, in particular, for some personal and hereditary honored citizens. The 1851 statute had limited the rights of those who had accessed the status through merchant status; another stated that “sons of non-serving officers’s children, having the rank of hereditary honored citizen due to their grandfather’s service” explicitly did not have the right to enter civil service.⁹⁰ Other laws from the 1850s expanded access to honored citizen status by allowing some personal honored citizens to pass on their status to one son, but simultaneously limited the rights of this new group of honored citizens. One law

88. Alison K. Smith, *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being: Social Estates in Imperial Russia* (New York, 2014), 14–36.

89. *PSZ II*, vol. 26, no. 25481 (August 8, 1851). There were, however, certain regions (including Siberia) where access to state service was more open.

90. *PSZ II*, vol. 35, no. 35469 (February 22, 1860); see also vol. 30, no. 29855 (November 25, 1855).

allowed military officers and state servitors whose origins were in the military, but who had gained personal honored citizen rank, to pass that rank on to one son. That son, however, was forbidden from entering civil service. Other laws followed up on this, by adding to the list of those with this right, by expanding their service options, or, at times, by adding new limits or restrictions to their service.⁹¹ After a decade of laws limiting service rights, only in 1864 did a law formally allow such personal honored citizens the right to enter state service (though at a relatively low rank).⁹² Honored citizen rank alone did not give certain opportunities—the specific origins of an individual's status still mattered. The status, in other words, did not totally erase other identities.⁹³

In addition, estate status placed individuals within the larger social hierarchy, but honored citizenship did so in a way that emphasized the liminality of the status. The *Digest of the Laws* envisioned Russian society as divided into four great groups, each encompassing a number of subsidiary statuses, and clearly arrayed from high to low: nobles, priests and other church people, town residents, and peasants.⁹⁴ A few nineteenth century writers treated honored citizens as a fifth status on par with the other four groups, but more often honored citizens were linked to one or more other statuses.⁹⁵ Usually honored citizens were described as one element of town society—one kind of “town resident.”⁹⁶ Even here, though, they were somehow separate from other town residents; in the *Digest of the Laws*, for example, all other town statuses are treated under the broad outline of “town residents,” while honored citizens receive a chapter to themselves. This slight separateness reflects the fact that honored citizens were also at times categorized with other groups. Some discussions, for example, grouped honored citizens with nobles (and occasionally with priests and monks), emphasizing their privilege. This linkage is most pronounced in larger works dealing with criminal law and punishment, which often involved revoking privileges.⁹⁷

91. *PSZ II*, vol. 30, no. 29425 (June 14, 1855); vol. 31, no. 30942 (September 7, 1856); vol. 33, no. 33001 (April 15, 1858); no. 33528 (September 14, 1858). vol. 34, no. 34565 (June 5, 1859); vol. 35, no. 36140 (September 10, 1860); vol. 37, no. 38659 (September 10, 1837). Another law noted that those sons were allowed to continue their service if they so desired. *PSZ II*, vol. 37, no. 38392 (June 22, 1862).

92. *PSZ II*, vol. 39, no. 40512 (January 20, 1864).

93. On this, see particularly Panov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 93, 97, who notes that the status itself did not give rights to trade or service, but those of merchant origin could join merchant guilds, and those of service origin could enter the civil service. See also A. Ianovskii, in F. A. Brokgauz and I. A. Efron, eds., “Grazhdanstvo pochetnoe,” *Enciklopedicheskii slovar'*, 86 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1890–1907), 9A: 523–24.

94. *Zakony o sostoianiiakh*, vol. 9, *Svod zakonov rossiiskoi imperii, poveleniem gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia Pavlovicha sostavlennyi* (St. Petersburg, 1833), § 2.

95. See, for example, Ziablovskii, *Rossiiskaia statistika*, 47–66 or Nikolai Mikhailovich Korkunov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo: Posobie k lektsiam*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1909), 1:303.

96. Mullov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie*, 116; *Obzor tsarstvovaniia gosudaria imperatora Aleksandra II i ego reform. 1855–1871* (St. Petersburg, 1871), 240; A. S. Alekseev, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 2nd student edition (Moscow, 1892), 247.

97. *Sudebnye ustavy 20 noiabria 1864 goda, s izlozheniem rassuzhdenii, na koikh oni osnovany, izdannye gosudarstvennoi kantseliariei*, 2nd expanded ed., part 4, “Ustav o nakazaniiakh, nalagaemykh mirovymi sud'iami” (St. Petersburg, 1867), 167–68; *Sbornik*

Finally, estate also implied belonging to a particular place and a particular collective, and here, too, honored citizens differed. The status did in many ways link individuals to place. An early discussion of the status suggested that it was intended to “bind” townspeople to town status by means of new honors.⁹⁸ Honored citizens were supposed to be listed in town residency books, and both could and did play a role in local affairs. Indeed, one early case of opinion polling in St. Petersburg suggested that honored citizens were, if anything, more interested in local affairs and local well-being than many others associated with towns. As the author put it, they (and merchants) were “organically connected with the town.”⁹⁹

Honored citizens were linked to a place by their residence there, but not by their membership in a corporate estate society. Townspeople, artisans, and merchants were all members of locally-based societies (*obshchestva*) that governed membership and increasingly provided services.¹⁰⁰ Honored citizens, however, were not granted such a society, a fact that made them unique among the urban population.¹⁰¹ Some viewed this outsidership as a possible danger—Evgenii Blumenbakh, a Riga town bureaucrat, noted that honored citizens did not have recourse to town charitable institutions, and thus that “having fallen into poverty or illness, they are at the whim of fate.”¹⁰² Others also noted the positive roles that collectives could play; honored citizens did not have a collective to draw on for support during legal proceedings.¹⁰³

More generally, though, this lack of a corporate structure suggests reasons that the honored citizens were not and have not been recognized as a viable middle class for Russia. In many understandings of the middle class as an institution and not just as a conglomeration of individuals, corporate structures are central—they are what make the middle class a political actor. Historians of Russia have paid much attention to these structures in their efforts to define a middle class for Russia.¹⁰⁴ But these structures were explicitly lacking in the case of honored citizens—a fact that led one late-nineteenth

uzakononii i rasporiazhenii, izdannykh s 20 noiabria 1864 g. po 1 ianvaria 1868 g., v dopolnenie i raz'iasnenie sudebnykh ustavov (St. Petersburg, 1868), 44, 51–52; Emmanuil Iul'evich Nol'de, *Svod zamechanii na proekt obshchei chasti ulozheniia o nakazaniiax, vyrabotannyi redaktsionnoi komissiei*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1884), 2:671, 674, 693, 700, 707.

98. Karl Osipovich D[iugamel'], *Opyt gosudarstvennogo prava Rossiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg, 1833), 171.

99. A. S.—O, “Gorodskoe ustroistvo,” *Delo* 7, nos. 5, 9, 10 (1873): 301–35, 163–87, 51–75; here 179–80.

100. Smith, *For the Common Good*, 6.

101. According to A. S. Alekseev, the honored citizenry “alone did not have a corporate organization”: Alekseev, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 247. N. M. Korkunov claimed that the only comparable groups were personal nobles, priests, and the so-called “working people,” who had essentially the status of *meshchane* but without membership in a *meshchanin* society. See Korkunov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 1:279.

102. Evgenii Gustavovich Blumenbakh, *Grazhdanskoe sostoianie (soslovie) v Rossii, a v chastnosti v Pribaltiiskikh guberniiax, ego prava i obiazannosti* (Riga, 1899), 13.

103. N. Gartung, *Istoriia ugolovnogo sudoproizvodstva i sudoustroistva Frantsii, Anglii, Germanii i Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1868), 188.

104. V. O. Kliuchevskii, “Istoriia Soslovii v Rossii,” in *Sochineniia: V deviati tomakh*, 9 vols. (Moscow, 1989), 6:233–34; Korkunov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 1:274; Michael Confino, “The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm: Reflections on Some Open Questions,” *Cahiers*

century commentator to argue that the lack of corporate structure meant in part that “honored citizens have not succeeded in creating an independent and influential class within town society.”¹⁰⁵

As a result, by the 1890s legal scholars argued that honored citizenship was an empty reminder of earlier (in their minds) estate distinctions. P. M. Maikov wrote that some of the privileges associated with the status and its predecessor “might at the present time call up the smile of a sceptic,” so far were they from anything with meaning in the current climate of Russia. Honored citizens had been important when established, as they had played a real role in promoting and developing towns in the face of the masses of peasants who came to them. But by now, the disappearance of much of the real meaning of the status had left it as nothing but an “a phantasmagorical specter” with no real relevance in individual lives.¹⁰⁶ Another commentator agreed. He saw *sosloviia* as an “anomaly” of modern life, as “archaic remnants” of an earlier order.¹⁰⁷ Honored citizens were among the most anomalous creations of an entirely archaic social structure.

Furthermore, this seemed all the more true because a whole series of larger changes in the social structures of the empire had made the honored citizen less important. For one, the lines between privileged groups were reduced with emancipation; the major privilege unique to Russia’s nobles was the right to own serfs. With that right eliminated, the larger privileged group was more uniform in its rights. In addition, the very concept of “privileged” status was made partially redundant by late-imperial changes. Universal military service and the elimination of the soul tax meant that the line between privileged and unprivileged was less severe.¹⁰⁸ In this vision, honored citizenship was obsolescent and hardly capable of standing in for a middle class because of its association with hierarchies that were losing meaning.

Despite the comments of legal scholars and the apparent reduction of estate distinctions at the end of the nineteenth century, the status nonetheless continued to draw new members. In fact, the number of petitions for access to the status actually increased significantly toward the end of the imperial era. Petitions submitted to the Senate requesting the status went up from an average of 104 per year between 1830 and 1889 to an average of 216 per year from 1890 to 1917—more than double the earlier rate. Clearly, even if legal scholars and literary figures found the status meaningless, many actual individuals did not. The pragmatic reason for the persistence of the status may lie in the new passport law of 1894—honored citizens were among those

du monde russe 49, no. 4 (October–December 2008): 681–700, here 683–84; and a discussion in Ivanova and Zheltova, *Soslovnoe obshchestvo*, 722–23.

105. Panov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 93.

106. P. M. Maikov, “O pochetnom grazhdanstve,” *Iuridicheskaia letopis'* 3, no. 6 (June 1892): 527–54, here 527–528, 536.

107. V. N. S—v, “Russkie zhurnaly za pervuiu polovinu 1892 goda,” *Iuridicheskii vestnik* 24, no. 11 (1892): 448–69, here 458.

108. For contemporary descriptions of the status that makes this very point, see Blumenbakh, *Grazhdanskoe sostoianie*, 16–17 and Rogovin, *Pochetnoe grazhdanstvo*, v.

granted non-expiring passports.¹⁰⁹ That reason is not sufficient, however, as merchants also had that right. A different reason lies more in the realm of mentalities. Perhaps the status had such appeal in these waning years of the empire because it gave individual, not group, identity, and furthermore made subjects into citizens, in name, at least.

This may be the true paradox of the honored citizen. They were by no means intended to end Russia's reliance on the estate system as a means of seeing and knowing its subjects, let alone intended to end its ability to extract duties and dues from them. The law that established them was clear: this was a *soslovie*, nothing more, nothing less. No wonder commentators hostile to the concept of estate viewed honored citizens as "archaic remnants," as a "phantasmagorical specter." Oddly, though, those commentators missed something important about honored citizens—that it was above all an individual (or perhaps more properly, a family) identity. When the imperial state failed (or perhaps forgot, or perhaps consciously planned not) to give honored citizens a corporate body that might serve as a mediating authority, it envisioned them as uniquely individual before the law.

Chekhov's Forty Martyrs may have been drunk and raving when he shouted out "I am a free man" in connection with his honored citizen status, but he nonetheless spoke the truth. Honored citizens were the closest thing to free men and women in imperial Russian society because they were less bound to institutions than any others—they were individuals in a society built out of collectivities. Honored citizens might be associated with particular towns, but they stood outside, or alongside, the official corporate structures of town society (the merchant and *meshchanin* societies). Given that the corporate structures of Russia's estates had above all disciplinary functions, freedom from those structures, particularly when combined with their other rights, made honored citizens closer to true citizens than any other part of imperial society. Because that citizenship was individual and also because it was phrased in terms of obsolescent estate-based honor, the radical nature of this intervention in social forms was obscured even from contemporaries.

109. Valentina Grigor'evna Chernukha, *Pasport v Rossii, 1719–1917 gg* (St. Petersburg, 2007), 161–65.