

SECTION 3

The Age of Napoleon

Guide to Reading

Main Ideas

- Napoleon built and lost an empire.
- Nationalism spread as a result of the French Revolution.
- Napoleon was exiled first to Elba, and then to St. Helena, where he died.

Key Terms

consulate, nationalism

People to Identify

Napoleon Bonaparte, Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël, Duke of Wellington

Places to Locate

Corsica, Moscow, Elba, Waterloo

Preview Questions

1. Why did Napoleon want to stop British goods from reaching Europe?
2. What were two reasons for the collapse of Napoleon's empire?

Reading Strategy

Summarizing Information In a table like the one below, list the achievements of Napoleon's rule.

Achievements of Napoleon's Rule	
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Preview of Events



Voices from the Past



Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon once wrote:

“But let that impatiently awaited savior give a sudden sign of his existence, and the people's instinct will divine him and call upon him. The obstacles are smoothed before his steps, and a whole great nation, flying to see him pass, will seem to be saying: 'Here is the man.' . . . A consecutive series of great actions never is the result of chance and luck; it always is the product of planning and genius. Great men are rarely known to fail in their most perilous enterprises. . . . Is it because they are lucky that they become great? No, but being great, they have been able to master luck.”

—*The Mind of Napoleon*, J. Christopher Herold, 1955

Napoleon possessed an overwhelming sense of his own importance. He was convinced that he was the man of destiny who would save the French people.

The Rise of Napoleon

Napoleon Bonaparte dominated French and European history from 1799 to 1815. In a sense, he brought the French Revolution to an end in 1799, but he was also a child of the revolution. The French Revolution made possible his rise first in the military and then to supreme power in France. Indeed, Napoleon once said, “I am the revolution.” He never ceased to remind the French that they owed to him the preservation of all that was beneficial in the revolutionary program.

Early Life Napoleon was born in 1769 in **Corsica**, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, only a few months after France had annexed the island. He was the son of a lawyer whose family came from the Florentine nobility. The young Napoleon



received a royal scholarship to study at a military school in France.

Napoleon's education in French military schools led to his commission in 1785 as a lieutenant in the French army. He was not well liked by his fellow officers because he was short, spoke with an Italian accent, and had little money.

For the next seven years, Napoleon read the works of the philosophes and educated himself in military matters by studying the campaigns of great military leaders from the past. The revolution and the European war that followed gave him new opportunities to use his knowledge.

Military Successes Napoleon rose quickly through the ranks of the French army. In 1792, he became a captain. Two years later, at the age of only 24, he was made a brigadier general by the Committee of Public Safety. In 1796, he was made commander of the French armies in Italy, where he used speed, deception, and surprise to win a series of victories.

Throughout his Italian campaigns, Napoleon won the confidence of his men with his energy, charm, and ability to make quick decisions. These qualities, combined with his keen intelligence, ease with words, and supreme confidence in himself, enabled him to influence people and win their firm support.

In 1797, Napoleon returned to France as a conquering hero. He was given command of an army in training to invade Britain. Knowing that the French were not ready for such an invasion, Napoleon proposed instead to strike indirectly at Britain by taking Egypt and threatening India, a major source of British wealth.

The British, however, controlled the seas. By 1799, they had cut off Napoleon's army in Egypt. Seeing certain defeat, Napoleon abandoned his army and returned to Paris.

Consul and Emperor In Paris, Napoleon took part in the coup d'état that overthrew the government of the Directory. He was only 30 years old at the time. With the coup d'état of 1799, a new government—called the **consulate**—was proclaimed. Although theoretically it was a republic, in fact Napoleon held absolute power.

As first consul, Napoleon controlled the entire government. He appointed members of the bureaucracy, controlled the army, conducted foreign affairs, and influenced the legislature.

In 1802, Napoleon was made consul for life. Two years later, he crowned himself Emperor Napoleon I.

 **Reading Check** **Describing** What personal qualities did Napoleon possess that gained him popular support?

Picturing History

In this painting, Napoleon is shown crowning his wife Josephine empress. During his own coronation, Napoleon seized the crown from Pope Pius VII and placed it on his own head.

How had Napoleon earlier made peace with the Catholic Church?





Napoleon's Domestic Policies

Napoleon once claimed that he had preserved the gains of the revolution for the French people. The ideal of republican liberty had, of course, been destroyed by Napoleon's takeover of power. However, were the ideals of the French Revolution maintained in other ways? An examination of his domestic policies will enable us to judge the truth or falsehood of Napoleon's claim.

Peace with the Church One of Napoleon's first moves at home was to establish peace with the oldest enemy of the revolution, the Catholic Church. Napoleon himself had no personal religious faith. He was an eighteenth-century believer in reason who regarded religion at most as a convenience. In Egypt, he called himself a Muslim; in France, a Catholic. However, he saw the need to restore stability to France, and most of the French were Catholic.

In 1801, Napoleon made an agreement with the pope. The agreement recognized Catholicism as the religion of a majority of the French people. In return, the pope agreed not to ask for the return of the church lands seized in the revolution.

With this agreement, the Catholic Church was no longer an enemy of the French government. At the same time, those who had bought church lands during the revolution became avid supporters of the Napoleonic regime.

Codification of the Laws Napoleon's most famous domestic achievement was his codification of the laws. Before the revolution, France did not have a single set of laws but rather had almost 300 different legal systems. During the revolution, efforts were made to prepare a single law code for the entire nation. However, it remained for Napoleon to bring the work to completion in seven codes of law.

The most important of the codes was the **Civil Code**, or Napoleonic Code. This code preserved most of the gains of the revolution by recognizing the principle of the equality of all citizens before the law, the right of the individual to choose a profession, religious toleration, and the abolition of serfdom and feudalism. Property rights continued to be carefully protected, and the interests of employers were safeguarded by outlawing trade unions and strikes.

The rights of some people were strictly curtailed by the Civil Code, however. During the radical phase of the French Revolution, new laws had made divorce an easy process for both husbands and wives and had allowed all children (including daughters)



French marriage ceremony, nineteenth century

to inherit property equally. Napoleon's Civil Code undid these laws.

Divorce was still allowed, but the Civil Code made it more difficult for women to obtain divorces. Women were now "less equal than men" in other ways as well. When they married, their property was brought under the control of their husbands. In lawsuits, they were treated as minors, and their testimony was regarded as less reliable than that of men.

A New Bureaucracy Napoleon also developed a powerful, centralized administrative machine. He worked hard to develop a bureaucracy of capable officials. Early on, the regime showed that it cared little whether the expertise of officials had been gained in royal or revolutionary bureaucracies. Promotion, whether in civil or military offices, was to be based not on rank or birth but on ability only. Opening government careers to individuals based on their ability was one change the middle class had wanted before the revolution.

Napoleon also created a new aristocracy based on merit in the state service. Napoleon created 3,263 nobles between 1808 and 1814. Nearly 60 percent were military officers, while the remainder came from the upper ranks of the civil service and other state and local officials. Socially, only 22 percent of Napoleon's aristocracy came from the nobility of the old regime. Almost 60 percent were middle class in origin.



Preserver of the Revolution? In his domestic policies, then, Napoleon did preserve aspects of the revolution. The Civil Code preserved the equality of all citizens before the law. The concept of opening government careers to more people was another gain of the revolution that he retained.

On the other hand, Napoleon destroyed some revolutionary ideals. Liberty was replaced by a despotism that grew increasingly arbitrary, in spite of protests by such citizens as the prominent writer **Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël**. Napoleon shut down 60 of France’s 73 newspapers. He insisted that all manuscripts be subjected to government scrutiny before they were published. Even the mail was opened by government police.

Reading Check Evaluating What was the significance of Napoleon’s Civil Code?

Napoleon’s Empire

Napoleon is, of course, known less for his domestic policies than for his military leadership. His conquests began soon after he rose to power.

Building the Empire When Napoleon became consul in 1799, France was at war with a European

coalition of Russia, Great Britain, and Austria. Napoleon realized the need for a pause in the war. He remarked that “the French Revolution is not finished so long as the scourge of war lasts. . . . I want peace, as much to settle the present French government, as to save the world from chaos.”

Napoleon achieved a peace treaty in 1802, but it did not last long. War was renewed in 1803 with Britain. Gradually, Britain was joined by Austria, Russia, Sweden, and Prussia. In a series of battles at Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, and Eylau from 1805 to 1807, Napoleon’s Grand Army defeated the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian armies. Napoleon now had the opportunity to create a new European order.

From 1807 to 1812, Napoleon was the master of Europe. His Grand Empire was composed of three major parts: the French Empire, dependent states, and allied states.

The French Empire was the inner core of the Grand Empire. It consisted of an enlarged France extending to the Rhine in the east and including the western half of Italy north of Rome.

Dependent states were kingdoms under the rule of Napoleon’s relatives. These came to include Spain, Holland, the kingdom of Italy, the Swiss Republic, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and the Confederation of the Rhine (a union of all German states except Austria and Prussia).

Allied states were those defeated by Napoleon and forced to join his struggle against Britain. The allied states included Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Sweden.

Spreading the Principles of the Revolution

Within his empire, Napoleon sought to spread some of the principles of the French Revolution, including legal equality, religious toleration, and economic freedom. He explained to his brother Jerome after he had made Jerome king of Westphalia:

“What the peoples of Germany desire most impatiently is that talented commoners should have the same right to your esteem and to public employments as the nobles, that any trace of serfdom and of an intermediate hierarchy between the sovereign and the lowest class of the people should be completely abolished. The benefits of the Code Napoleon, the publicity of judicial procedure, the creation of juries must be so many distinguishing marks of your monarchy. . . . The peoples of Germany, the peoples of France, of Italy, of Spain all desire equality and liberal ideas. . . . the buzzing of the privileged classes is contrary to the general opinion. Be a constitutional king.”

People In History

Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël

1766–1817—French writer

Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël was a prominent writer of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras in France. She established a salon for the powerful that lasted from 1790 until 1804. It was said of her that she was “so spoiled by admiration for her wit that it [would] be hard to make her realize her shortcomings.” During the Reign of Terror, she helped friends escape France. She also left France but returned in 1795.

Although she at first supported Napoleon, she clashed repeatedly with him. She once asked him, “Who was the greatest woman of history?” Napoleon responded, “The one who had the most children.” Eventually, she denounced Napoleon’s rule as tyrannical. Napoleon banned her books in France and exiled her to the German states, where she continued to write.





Geography Skills

In the inner core and dependent states of his Grand Empire, Napoleon tried to destroy the old order. The nobility and clergy everywhere in these states lost their special privileges. Napoleon decreed equality of opportunity with offices open to talents, equality before the law, and religious toleration. The spread of French revolutionary principles was an important factor in the development of liberal traditions in these countries.

Reading Check Identifying What were the three parts of Napoleon's Grand Empire?

The European Response

Like Hitler 130 years later, Napoleon hoped that his Grand Empire would last for centuries. Like Hitler's empire, it collapsed almost as rapidly as it had been

formed. Two major reasons help to explain this: the survival of Great Britain and the force of nationalism.

- 1. Interpreting Maps** Compare the map of Napoleon's Grand Empire to the map of the Roman Empire shown on page 160 of your text. How were these two empires similar, and how were they different? What geographic factors could help to account for these similarities and differences?
- 2. Applying Geography Skills** Examine the locations of the states that were allied against Napoleon in 1812. What geographic factors would have helped these states to remain independent from Napoleon's control?

formed. Two major reasons help to explain this: the survival of Great Britain and the force of nationalism.

Britain's Survival Britain's survival was due primarily to its sea power. As long as Britain ruled the waves, it was almost invulnerable to military attack.





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Napoleon hoped to invade Britain and even collected ships for the invasion. The British navy's decisive defeat of a combined French-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar in 1805 destroyed any thought of an invasion, however.

Napoleon then turned to his Continental System to defeat Britain. The

aim of the Continental System was to stop British goods from reaching the European continent to be sold there. By weakening Britain economically, Napoleon would destroy its ability to wage war.

The Continental System, too, failed. Allied states resented being told by Napoleon that they could not trade with the British. Some began to cheat. Others resisted. Furthermore, new markets in the Middle East and in Latin America gave Britain new outlets for its goods. Indeed, by 1809–1810, British overseas exports were at near-record highs.

Nationalism A second important factor in the defeat of Napoleon was nationalism. **Nationalism** is the unique cultural identity of a people based on common language, religion, and national symbols. The spirit of French nationalism had made possible the mass armies of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. However, Napoleon's spread of the principles of the French Revolution beyond France indirectly brought a spread of nationalism as well.

The French aroused nationalism in two ways. First, they were hated as oppressors. This hatred stirred the patriotism of others in opposition to the French. Second, the French showed the people of Europe what nationalism was and what a nation in arms could do. It was a lesson not lost on other peoples and rulers.

Reading Check Explaining Why did being a sea power help Britain to survive an attack by the French?

The Fall of Napoleon

The beginning of Napoleon's downfall came in 1812 with his invasion of Russia. Within only a few years, the fall was complete.

Disaster in Russia The Russians had refused to remain in the Continental System, leaving Napoleon with little choice but to invade. He knew the risks in invading such a large country. However, he also knew that if the Russians were allowed to challenge the Continental System unopposed, others would soon follow suit.

In June 1812, a Grand Army of over six hundred thousand men entered Russia. Napoleon's hopes for victory depended on a quick defeat of the Russian armies. The Russian forces, however, refused to give battle. They retreated for hundreds of miles. As they retreated, they burned their own villages and countryside to keep Napoleon's army from finding food. When the Russians did stop to fight at Borodino, Napoleon's forces won an indecisive and costly victory.

When the remaining Grand Army arrived in **Moscow**, they found the city ablaze. Lacking food

The Crossing of the Beresina by January Suchodolsky shows Napoleon's Grand Army in full retreat from Russia.



CONTENTS

What If...

Napoleon had won at Waterloo?

Napoleon dominated much of the world stage until his loss at Waterloo. Waterloo was a close battle against the Duke of Wellington and the allied forces. Military strategists speculate that had Napoleon's commanders been better, Napoleon might have won the battle.

Consider the Consequences Consider Napoleon's impact on history had he defeated Wellington. Explain why this victory might have marshaled enough support for Napoleon to have resumed his rule as emperor.

and supplies, Napoleon abandoned Moscow late in October and began the "Great Retreat" across Russia. The retreat proceeded in terrible winter conditions. Less than forty thousand out of the original army managed to arrive back in Poland in January 1813.

This military disaster led other European states to rise up and attack the crippled French army. Paris was captured in March 1814. Napoleon was soon sent into exile on the island of **Elba**, off the coast of Tuscany. The Bourbon monarchy was restored to France in the person of Louis XVIII, brother of the executed king, Louis XVI.

The Final Defeat The new king had little support, and Napoleon, bored on the island of Elba, slipped back into France. Troops were sent to capture him. Napoleon opened his coat and addressed them: "Soldiers of the 5th regiment, I am your Emperor. . . . If there is a man among you [who] would kill his Emperor, here I am!"

No one fired a shot. Shouting "Vive l'Empereur! Vive l'Empereur!" ("Long Live the Emperor! Long Live the Emperor!") the troops went over to his side. Napoleon made his entry into Paris in triumph on March 20, 1815.

The powers that had defeated Napoleon pledged once more to fight this person they called the "Enemy and Disturber of the Tranquility of the World." Napoleon raised yet another army and moved to attack the nearest allied forces stationed in Belgium.

At **Waterloo** in Belgium on June 18, 1815, Napoleon met a combined British and Prussian army under the **Duke of Wellington** and suffered a bloody defeat.

This time, the victorious allies exiled him to St. Helena, a small island in the South Atlantic. Only Napoleon's memory would continue to haunt French political life.



Reading Check **Examining** Why did Napoleon invade Russia?

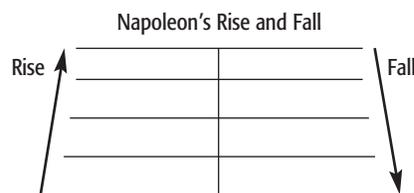
SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

- Define** consulate, nationalism.
- Identify** Napoleon Bonaparte, Civil Code, Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël, Duke of Wellington.
- Locate** Corsica, Moscow, Elba, Waterloo.
- Explain** how nationalism contributed to Napoleon's defeat. Be sure to discuss how French nationalism produced nationalism outside of France.
- List** the powers Napoleon exercised as first consul.

Critical Thinking

- Describe** How did the principles of the French Revolution spread throughout Europe?
- Sequencing Information** Using a diagram like the one below, identify the reasons for the rise and fall of Napoleon's Grand Empire.



Analyzing Visuals

- Examine** the portrait shown on page 545 of your text. Napoleon commissioned this painting in 1800. How does David portray Napoleon, and why do you think Napoleon wanted artists to produce portraits like the one created by David?

Writing About History

- Persuasive Writing** In your opinion, was Napoleon an enlightened ruler or a tyrant? Write a position paper supporting your view. Be sure to include pertinent information about Napoleon's Civil Code.