

Chapter 15: Napoleon, France, and Europe

The history of France and Europe during the period from 1799 to 1815 is largely the story of Napoleon Bonaparte. A brilliant general in the cause of the French Revolution. Napoleon took power in 1799 and established the Consulate. In 1804, he took the title of emperor of the French. While Napoleon deprived the French people of political liberty, he provided them with an orderly and efficient system of government and confirmed or initiated a number of enduring legal, administrative, and educational reforms. As a conqueror, Napoleon achieved his greatest military successes in the years from 1805 to 1807, defeating Austria, Prussia, and Russia. His ability and power gradually declined, however, and the disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812 marked the beginning of his fall. After abdicating in 1814, Napoleon returned to power for the period of the Hundred Days in 1815. Defeated at Waterloo in June 1815, he entered his final exile on the remote island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic, where he died in 1821.

The Emergence of Napoleon

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) was born in Ajaccio, Corsica, into a family of the lesser nobility. In 1768, France had acquired Corsica from the Italian republic of Genoa; thus, Napoleon was a French citizen by birth. At the age of ten, he entered a military school at Brienne, France, and became a student at the military academy in Paris in 1783. In 1785, at age 16, Napoleon was commissioned a lieutenant of artillery. When the revolution began, he became one of its most ardent supporters. In 1793, during the War of the First Coalition, a plan developed by Napoleon helped the French recapture Toulon, a naval base on the Mediterranean, from the British. In October 1795, Napoleon's artillery dispersed a mob assaulting the National Convention. These achievements brought the young officer to the attention of the revolutionary leaders. Napoleon married Josephine de Beauharnais (1763-1814), a widow six years older than he. Her contacts with leading figures in the government of the Directory helped advance her husband's career.

Napoleon's Early Military Successes

In 1796, at the age of twenty-seven, Napoleon received the command of the French army in Italy. He achieved a great success, defeating the Austrians and their Sardinian allies. Under the terms of the Treaty of Campo Formio, signed with the Austrians in October 1797, France annexed the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium), while Austria acquired most of the Venetian Republic. The Austrians agreed to recognize the independence of the Cisalpine Republic in northern Italy, which was in reality a French satellite. The

treaty ended the War of the First Coalition (1792-1797) against France, although Great Britain continued fighting without allies. During 1798 and 1799, the French extended their control over Switzerland and most of Italy.

Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign

In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt, hoping to threaten British control of the eastern Mediterranean and disrupt the British Empire. A significant byproduct of the Egyptian campaign was the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, which provided the key for deciphering ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.

In July 1798, Napoleon's army won the Battle of the Pyramids near Cairo, defeating the Mameluke army. In August, however, a British fleet, commanded by Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), destroyed a French fleet at Abukir Bay, near Alexandria. This British victory in the Battle of the Nile stranded the French army in Egypt. Leaving his army, Napoleon returned to France. The setback in Egypt did little to injure his prestige or popularity.

Beginning of the War of the Second Coalition (1798-1801)

In late 1798, while Napoleon was still in Egypt, Russia formed a new alliance with Great Britain. Austria, Portugal, Naples, and the Ottoman Empire soon joined, beginning the War of the Second Coalition against France. Although Russia dropped out within a year, France suffered several defeats in Italy and Germany. These defeats, combined with continuing political and financial disorder at home, weakened the government of the Directory.

Napoleon's Seizure of Power – The Consulate

In October 1799, Napoleon landed in southern France. With the help of two of the five directors and his brother, Lucien (1775-1840), who was the president of the Council of 500, Napoleon launched a conspiracy to seize power. On November 9, 1799, Napoleon overthrew the Directory. He was thirty years old.

The Constitution of 1799

Having taken power, Napoleon directed the drafting of a new constitution, the Constitution of the Year VIII (Constitution of 1799), establishing the regime known as the Consulate. Napoleon ruled as first consul, with a term of ten years. There were two subordinate consuls who had no real authority.

After a decade of revolutionary upheaval, the French people wanted order and stability. In a plebiscite held in 1802, Napoleon was made first consul for life, with the right to designate his successor.

Napoleon's Defeat of the Second Coalition

While Napoleon was reorganizing France's government, he also took the offensive against France's enemies in the Second Coalition. In June 1800, he defeated the Austrians at Marengo in northwestern Italy and later in the year, defeated the Austrians again at Hohenlinden in Bavaria. In February 1801, Austria dropped out of the war, signing the Treaty of Luneville.

The British continued the war, forcing the French armies in Egypt to surrender in the summer of 1801. France and Great Britain concluded peace in the Treaty of Amiens, signed in March 1802, which proved to be only a truce in the long conflict between Napoleon and his implacable British foe. Under the terms of the treaty, France kept almost all of its conquests in Europe and regained the colonies the British had taken.

The Napoleonic Empire

In 1804, Napoleon moved to solidify his power, declaring himself to be the hereditary emperor of the French. In 1805, he took the title of king of Italy, while his stepson, Eugene de Beauharnais (1781-1824), ruled as viceroy. In 1809, Napoleon divorced Josephine, who had borne him no children, and the following year married Archduchess Marie-Louise (1791-1847) of Austria, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Francis I. In 1811, Marie-Louise gave birth to a son, whose father gave him the title of king of Rome.

Napoleonic Administration

Napoleon deprived the French people of political liberty and freedom of expression, which, he believed, served to encourage anarchy. On the other hand, he established a highly centralized administration that provided the French people with an efficient and orderly government.

Financial Reforms

Eliminating corruption and waste, Napoleon reorganized and centralized the assessment and collection of taxes. Various government bonds and other obligations that had fallen in value were called in and paid. These actions put the French government on a solid financial basis.

Centralized Government

To increase the central government's control of local affairs, Napoleon appointed a prefect to administer each of the country's eighty-three departments and a subprefect to administer each district. The system of prefects and

subprefects represented an important part of Napoleon's effort to centralize authority in his government in Paris.

The Napoleonic Code

Under the Old Regime, the French legal system had been chaotic, giving rise to widespread protests. During the 1790s, the National Convention had begun the task of unifying the legal system, but much remained to be done. In 1800, Napoleon appointed a commission of legal experts to draft a new code of civil law. This civil code went into effect in 1804 and was renamed the Napoleonic Code in 1807. By 1810, Napoleon's government had also enacted new codes of criminal and commercial law. The Napoleonic legal reforms reaffirmed the revolutionary principle of the equality of all citizens before the law and the abolition of privileges based on birth. Individuals were permitted to pursue occupations of their choice, and employment in the service of the state would be based on ability rather than on social position or wealth. The codes also reaffirmed the right to property acquired during the revolution and the end of the manorial obligations of the peasants, as well as the principle of freedom of religion. In other ways, Napoleon's legal reforms were less progressive. The interests of the state took precedence over the rights of individuals, while men were granted greater authority over their wives and children. Penalties for political crimes were increased. These legal reforms were among Napoleon's most enduring achievements, and their influence spread beyond the borders of France, since they were instituted in lands the French conquered.

The Concordat of 1801

Napoleon was a child of the Enlightenment, and in his personal religious beliefs, he was a deist or perhaps an atheist. However, he recognized the importance of resolving the conflict between the French state and the Catholic Church that had developed during the revolutionary decade.

The Concordat of 1801 established a reconciliation with Pope Pius VII (r. 1800-1823) and governed relations between the French state and the Roman Catholic Church until its abrogation by the French in 1905. The concordat granted the Catholic Church special status as the religion of the majority of the French people, although it was not the established religion of the French state. The French government had the authority to nominate the bishops, who would then be invested in their offices by the pope. The bishops would appoint the priests. The system of electing the clergy established by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was thus ended, and the French government exercised administrative control over the Catholic Church, as had been the case under the Old Regime. The pope

regained control of part of the Papal States, which had come under French control earlier.

The pope agreed to accept the loss of church lands confiscated during the revolution, and the French government agreed to pay the salaries of the clergy. Napoleon's government also paid the salaries of Protestant pastors and rabbis, although this was not a provision of the concordat.

Reforms in Education

Napoleon established a new state-controlled system of elite secondary schools, the *lycées*, and several professional and technical schools, including the *École Polytechnique*, a famed engineering school located in Paris. All public educational institutions and many private ones came under the supervision of a government agency known as the University of France, established in 1806.

The Napoleonic Wars, 1805-1815

The War of the Third Coalition (1805-1807)

In 1803, Great Britain renewed the war against France. In 1805, Austria and Russia joined in the war against France, creating the Third Coalition. Prussia remained neutral at the outset.

Napoleon quickly advanced into Germany, beginning a great march of conquest across Europe. On October 17, 1805, the emperor defeated the Austrians at Ulm, located on the Danube in the south German state of Bavaria.

British Naval Victory at Trafalgar

Four days later, on October 21, the French suffered a major naval defeat, when Lord Nelson's British fleet smashed the combined French and Spanish navies near Cape Trafalgar off the southwest coast of Spain. The British eliminated French naval power for the balance of the war, and Napoleon had to suspend his plans to invade Great Britain.

French Victories on Land

On land, however, Napoleon's victories continued. Moving east from Ulm, he defeated a combined Austrian and Russian army at Austerlitz, north of Vienna, on December 2, 1805. Austria signed the Treaty of Pressburg at the end of December. Under its terms, France gained control of most of Austria's possessions in Italy, including Venice. In July 1806, Napoleon organized a number of German states into a French satellite state known as the Confederation of the Rhine. This new state provided a buffer for France against both Austria and Prussia. In August, Napoleon ordered the dissolution of the Holy

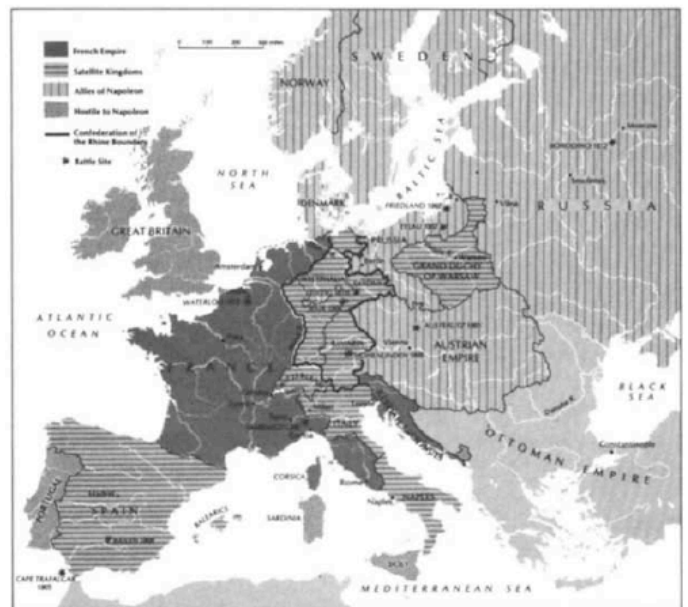
Roman Empire. The last Holy Roman emperor, Francis II (r. 1792-1806), now became the first emperor of Austria, known as Francis I (r. 1806--1835).

Napoleon's actions in Germany brought Prussia into the war against France. On October 14, 1806, however, Napoleon defeated the Prussians at Jena, while, on the same day, another French army defeated a Prussian force at Austerlitz. Napoleon took the Prussian capital of Berlin in late October.

The Treaties of Tilsit

During the spring of 1807, Napoleon moved into East Prussia, defeating the Russians at Friedland on June 13. The emperor then met with Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) of Russia and King Frederick William III (r. 1797-1840) of Prussia. The rulers agreed on the terms of the Treaties of Tilsit, ending the War of the Third Coalition. The Prussians and Russians recognized three of the French emperor's brothers—Joseph (1768-1844), Louis (1778-1846), and Jerome (1784-1860)—as the kings of Naples, Holland, and Westphalia, respectively. (Westphalia was a part of the Confederation of the Rhine.) Later, when Joseph became king of Spain, he was replaced as king of Naples by Marshal Joachim Murat (1767-1815), who was married to Napoleon's sister Caroline (1782-1839). Prussia lost about half its territory, ceding some to Saxony and some to the newly created French satellite state, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw.

Russia gained a free hand to deal as it wished with the Ottoman Empire, although Napoleon refused to allow Alexander I to take Constantinople. The tsar promised to support the French emperor in his struggle against Great Britain.



Europe, 1810

The Continental System

Unable to defeat the British militarily, Napoleon established the Continental System in an effort to destroy the British economy. Created by the Berlin Decree of November 1806, the Continental System was expanded by the Milan Decree of 1807.

The Continental System was designed to make it impossible for the British to trade with the European continent. All European ports were ordered closed to British ships and goods, while French privateers were authorized to attack British ships and ships of neutral countries that cooperated with the British. In practice, the Continental System proved virtually impossible to enforce. Smuggling was widespread, and even the French violated the rules of trade.

The Peninsular War

In late 1807, French troops moved into Portugal, which had failed to support the Continental System. To keep their lines of supply and communication open, the French also occupied Spain. In early 1808, Napoleon deposed Spain's Bourbon dynasty and installed his older brother Joseph as king of Spain.

When the Spanish people rose up in revolt against French domination, the British sent troops to Spain to support the insurgents. These troops were commanded by Sir Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852), who later became the Duke of Wellington. Possessing naval superiority, the British could reinforce this expeditionary force with ease. Continuing until 1814, the Peninsular War created a serious drain on France's military resources and served to encourage Napoleon's enemies elsewhere in Europe.

Conflict on Other Fronts (1808-1810)

In the spring of 1809, Austria renewed the war against France, invading Bavaria. Napoleon quickly defeated the Austrians at the Battle of Wagram (July 1809), however, and French forces occupied Vienna. Under the terms of the Treaty of Schönbrunn (October 1809), Austria ceded the Salzburg area to Bavaria, while the Grand Duchy of Warsaw acquired Austrian Poland. France annexed the Illyrian Provinces, Austrian territory along the northeastern coast of the Adriatic Sea.

On other fronts, the papacy's refusal to support the Continental System led to the French decision in 1808 to take Rome and imprison Pope Pius VII. France now annexed most of the Papal States.

In Scandinavia, Denmark (including Norway) became a close ally of France, while Napoleon recognized the French Marshal Bernadotte (1763-1844) as Sweden's crown prince. Bernadotte became King Charles XIV of Sweden in 1818.

In 1810, Napoleon's brother Louis, the king of Holland, protested against the emperor's determination to enforce the Continental System. Louis argued that ending Dutch trade with the British would ruin the country's economy. Napoleon responded by deposing his brother and annexing Holland.

French Colonial Losses

Even before Lord Nelson's great naval victory over the French at Trafalgar in 1805, Britain's naval power forced Napoleon to give up his plans to restore the French empire in America. While Napoleon compelled Spain to return the Louisiana territory to France, he decided to sell it to the United States in 1803. In the West Indies, the French colony of Haiti won its independence in 1804.

Napoleon's Russian Campaign

The Russians were increasingly dissatisfied with their position of subordination to France, and Tsar Alexander I refused to support Napoleon's Continental System. The French emperor responded by deciding to invade Russia.

Invasion of Russia

For his Russian campaign of 1812, the French emperor assembled a Grand Army of some 600,000 men. In late June 1812, the Grand Army entered Russia. By mid-August, the French had advanced some 300 miles, reaching Smolensk without having fought any major battles. The Russians, under the command of Prince Mikhail Barclay de Tolly (1761-1818), continued to retreat, trading space for time. In September, Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov (1745-1813), who had replaced Barclay de Tolly, engaged the French at the Battle of Borodino, some 75 miles west of Moscow. Both sides suffered heavy casualties, and Napoleon failed to win a decisive victory over the Russians.

On September 14, the Grand Army entered Moscow. The Russians had abandoned the city, leaving it in flames. Napoleon remained in Moscow for five weeks, hoping that Alexander I would admit defeat and sue for peace. The tsar refused to do so.

French Retreat

On October 19, Napoleon began his retreat from Moscow. The Russian winter soon set in, aiding the Russian forces who harassed Napoleon's retreating army. Little of the Grand Army was left when the survivors regrouped near the Russian border in mid-December.

The Wars of Liberation (1813-1814)

In early 1813, Prussia made an alliance with Russia, and the Austrians joined in August. From October 16 to 19, the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian armies defeated

Napoleon in the Battle of the Nations, fought near Leipzig in central Germany. Napoleon retreated across the Rhine back into France.

In November 1813, the Dutch revolted against French rule, while a British army, led by the Duke of Wellington, advanced from Spain and invaded southern France. In January 1814, Russian, Prussian, and Austrian forces invaded France from Germany. On March 31, the allied armies entered Paris.

The Fall of Napoleon and the Hundred Days

On April 11, 1814, Napoleon abdicated. The allies allowed him to retain his title and gave him the island of Elba, located in the Mediterranean Sea off the west coast of Italy, on condition that he promise never to leave. The allies restored the Bourbon dynasty to the French throne with Louis XVIII (r. 1814-1824), a younger brother of Louis XVI, as king.

In early 1815, Napoleon left Elba and on March 1, landed on the Mediterranean coast of France with a small force. The restored Bourbon monarchy enjoyed little popular support, and the French army remained loyal to Napoleon. Troops sent out to apprehend him joined him instead. On March 20, Napoleon entered Paris in triumph, and the period of the Hundred Days began.

The Battle of Waterloo

Once again, the British, Russians, Prussians, and Austrians prepared for war. Napoleon decided to attack the allies in Belgium. At Waterloo on June 18, 1815, a British army commanded by the Duke of Wellington and a Prussian army commanded by Field Marshal Gebhard von Blücher (1742-1819) defeated Napoleon.

Following the Battle of Waterloo, the allies sent Napoleon into his final exile on the remote island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic, where he remained until his death in 1821.

As France's ruler in the years after 1799, Napoleon deprived the French people of political liberty. But he confirmed a number of reforms achieved by the French Revolution – among them, freedom of religion and the principles of equality before the law and equality of opportunity – and made them permanent. Napoleon also introduced a number of reforms--including an efficient centralized administration, the Napoleonic Code, the Concordat of 1801, and a series of educational reforms that became enduring features of French life.

Despite his undeniable genius as a military commander, Napoleon failed in his efforts to make France the master of Europe. In 1814-1815, the statesmen of Europe met in the Congress of Vienna and sought to restore stability and order following a quarter of a century of turmoil.