

PART 3

**The French Revolution**

*bureaucracy*      *disband*  
*crisis*

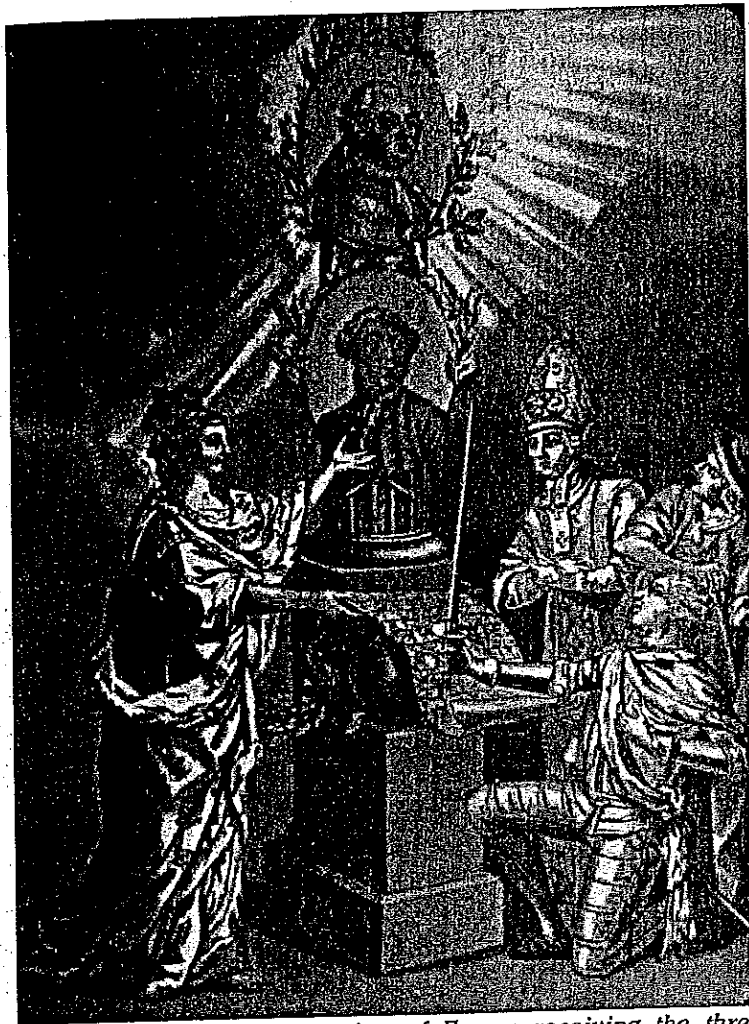
**I**n the early 1770s France was probably the wealthiest nation in Europe. French culture was the standard for the Western world. Throughout Europe, most educated people spoke French. Many of the most important ideas of the Enlightenment came from French thinkers.

The French king, Louis XVI, was an absolute monarch supported by a large *bureaucracy* [byu RAHK ruh see]. However, there were many basic problems in France. One major problem was that French society in the 1700s still resembled the feudal societies of the Middle Ages. Another big problem was that the king was not a very effective ruler.

**French Society Was  
Divided Into Three Estates**

French society was divided into three classes, or estates. The clergy [KLER jee] made up the First Estate. This small class of religious leaders owned 10 percent of the land in France while making up only one percent of the population.

The nobility made up the Second Estate. The nobility held all the most important positions in the government of France, with about five percent of the population. The



*The picture shows the nation of France receiving the three orders of society: the clergy, the nobility, and the common people. The king's portrait is at the top.*

Second Estate also controlled most of the wealth.

The Third Estate included three very different groups of people. At the top were doctors, lawyers, teachers, bankers, and businessmen. In the middle were city workers who worked for wages. At the bottom

were peasant farmers who made up more than 80 percent of the population.

The clergy and the nobility paid no taxes to the government. The burden of taxation fell on the Third Estate. Members of the Third Estate paid taxes on income, land, and jewelry. Taxes were collected when salt and tobacco were purchased. There was even a tax on soap. Peasants paid about half of their income in taxes. They were also required to work on government projects without pay once a year. Although heavily taxed, members of the Third Estate had little or no political power.

### **The French Revolution Begins**

In the 1780s the city of Paris had many poor people. Their meals consisted mostly of bread. If the price of bread increased, the urban poor faced starvation. It was not uncommon for mobs of hungry

people to seize carts of grain and bread.

In 1788 the grain harvest in France was poor. Bread doubled in price. The mood of the urban poor turned ugly in the spring of 1789. This was only one *crisis* that the government of King Louis XVI faced. The French treasury was empty. The government was heavily in debt

from aiding the American colonies in their revolt against Great Britain.

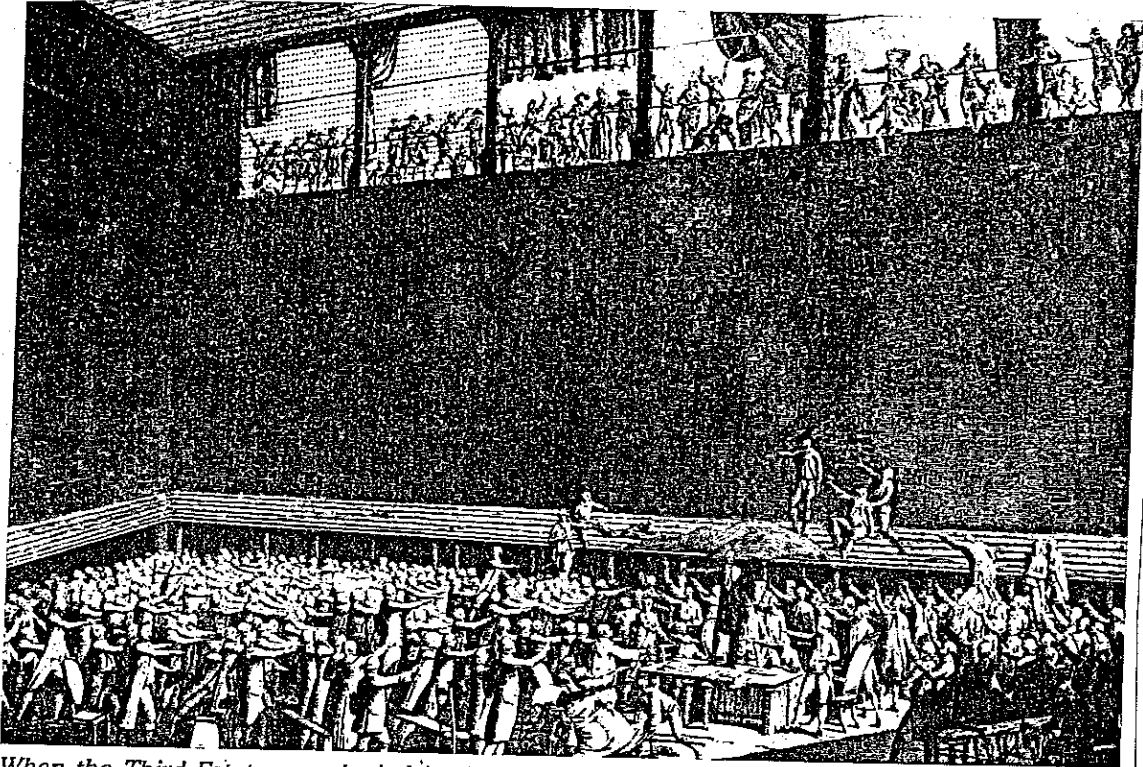
To raise money, the government sought a way to tax the nobles. The nobles said that they could not be taxed unless the king called a meeting of the Estates General. The last time the Estates General met was in 1614. Louis XVI reluctantly agreed to the nobles' demand. He called a

meeting of the Estates General at Versailles on May 1, 1789. The purpose of the Estates General was to vote for or against a proposal. From the Middle Ages, each estate had only one vote. Any vote would, therefore, be dominated by the clergy and nobles.

The 610 representatives of the Third Estate wanted the Estates General to meet together and vote as individuals. By this rule the Third Estate could outvote the 591 representatives of the other two estates. The king demanded that the old rules be followed. In a bold move, the Third Estate de-



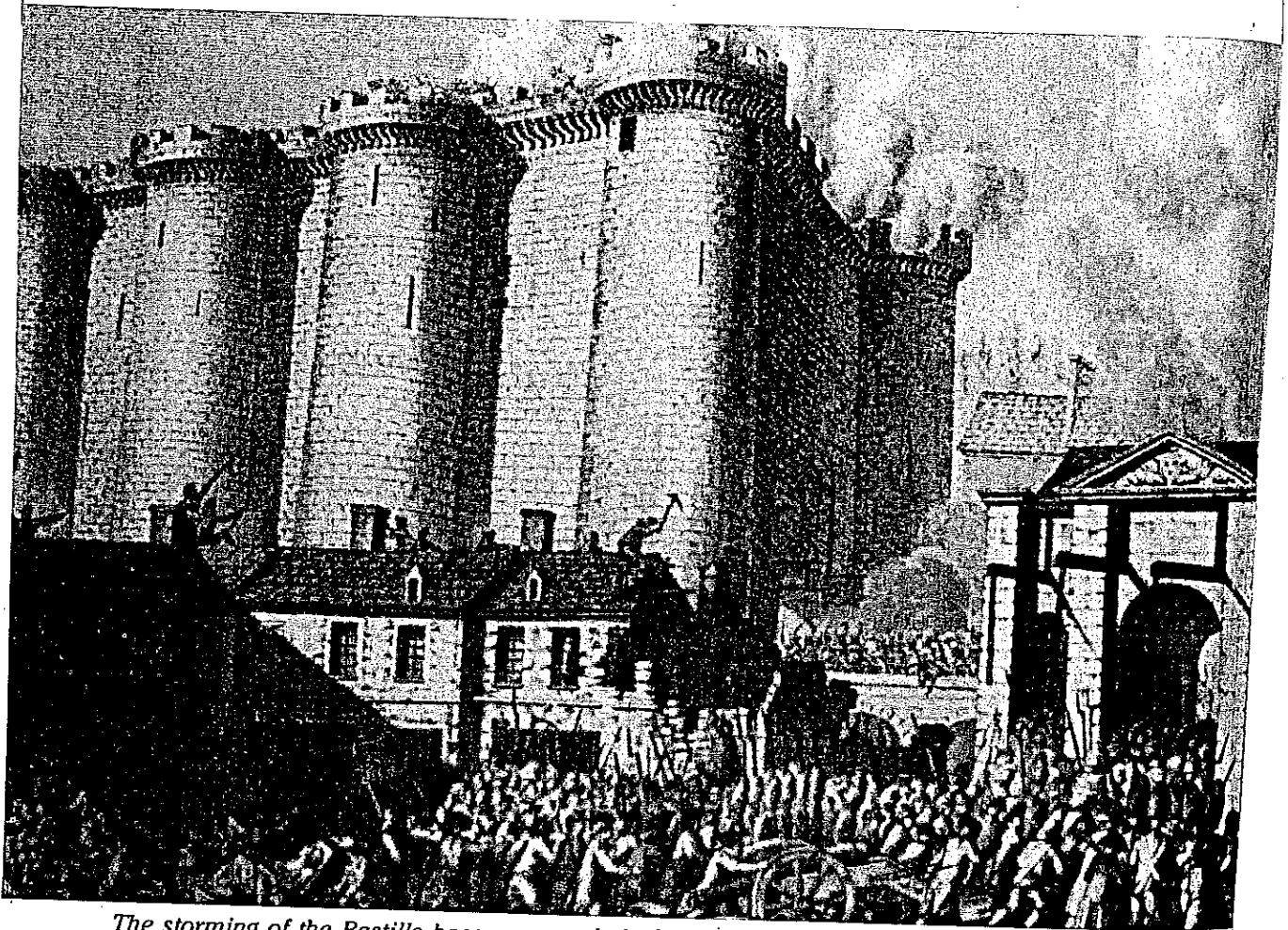
*Louis XVI was a weak king who lost touch with his nation's problems. His poor decisions eventually cost him his life.*



*When the Third Estate was denied its demand that the Estates General vote by individuals, it left the assembly and met in a tennis court. There these people pledged they would stay together until France had a constitution.*

clared that they were a National Assembly which represented the French people. The king locked them out of the meeting hall. Moving to a nearby tennis court, members of the new National Assembly took an oath on June 20, 1789: they would not *disband* until they had written a constitution. This became known as the Tennis Court Oath, a call for an end to absolute monarchy. Under pressure, Louis XVI ended the Estates General, telling the clergy and nobles to join the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, in Paris, mobs were rioting over the high price of bread. On July 14, 1789, they attacked a city prison called the Bastille [BAS teel], where a few political prisoners were held. The mob was after gunpowder stored there. When the mob was joined by French troops, the Bastille fell. Awakened from his sleep, Louis XVI was told the news. In anger he said, "Why, this is a revolt!" "No, sire," answered the duke. "It is a revolution." Today, Bastille Day is celebrated as a national holiday in France on July 14.



*The storming of the Bastille became a symbol of the start of the French Revolution.*

**STOP AND REVIEW**

**Directions:** Write *True* if the statement is true or *False* if the statement is false.

1. In the early 1770s, France was the poorest nation in Europe.
2. French society was divided into three different classes of people.
3. Members of the Third Estate supported the idea of a written constitution for France.
4. A French mob attacked the Bastille, the home of the king.
5. The French Revolution began in 1779.

## PART 4

**Revolutionary  
Reforms and Terror**

*dictator*                 *reforms*  
*guillotine*             *treason*  
*radical*

**T**he National Assembly quickly started many political and social reforms. On August 4, 1789, the feudal privileges of the clergy and nobles were ended. Near the end of the month, the Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Using many of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the document gave citizens the right of free speech, freedom of religion, and equal justice under the law.

In October of 1789, thousands of women rioted over the rising price of bread. They marched on Versailles and demanded that the king and queen move to Paris. Shockingly, they broke into the palace and killed several guards. Frightened by the dangerous mob, Louis and his queen, Marie Antoinette [MAH ree an twah NET], agreed to move to Paris. Louis and his family would never return to his beautiful Versailles.

In June of 1790, Louis XVI and his family tried to escape from France. He was recognized and re-



*Jacques-Louis Marat wrote pamphlets supporting the cause of the common people. He was a hero for the average Frenchman.*

turned under guard to Paris. Before he fled, he left behind a letter condemning the revolution. Because of the king's action, radical leaders called for an end to the French monarchy. However, more moderate leaders opposed the elimination of the king.

**The French Formed  
a New Government**

The National Assembly continued to make changes. By 1791 the Assembly had created a new form of government that limited the power of the king by a written constitution. The new government was a constitutional monarchy. The



In September of the same year, the French abolished the Legislative Assembly. A National Constitutional Convention was elected. The purpose of the Convention was to form a new, more democratic government for France. The Convention governed France for the next three years. The new government stripped Louis XVI of power. It also stated that France was now a republic. All French men were given the right to vote and hold political office. The Convention denounced all kings and announced that France would fight to bring "liberty, equality, and fraternity" to all of Europe. The armies of Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Spain joined together to try and defeat the French and destroy the revolution.

Louis XVI, now considered an ordinary citizen, was tried for treason in December 1792. He was convicted by a single vote and executed on January 21, 1793. During that year France raised a citizen army of

300,000 men. Many French women, who were denied the right to form their own army units, went to war with the men.

### The Reign of Terror

At the same time that the French were fighting a war abroad, revolutionaries faced many enemies at



This pamphlet is the story of the downfall of King Louis XVI of France. After the Revolution he was known simply as Citizen Louis Capet.



## PART 5

**Napoleon and the French Empire**

*abandoned*                      *inspire*  
*alliance*                              *tactic*  
*conquest*

**N**apoleon Bonaparte was born in 1769 on the small island of Corsica [KOR si kuh] in the Mediterranean Sea. As a boy, he attended a military school in France. He joined the army of Louis XVI when he was sixteen years old. When the French Revolution began in 1789, he was a little-known, low level military officer. The Revolution gave him an opportunity to advance quickly. He developed the new military *tactic* of moving his soldiers rapidly, then concentrating them at an enemy army's weakest point.

He was an excellent administrator who also had the ability to *inspire* his soldiers to fight and win against stronger forces. Within four years, he was promoted to the rank of general. He was just twenty-four years old. Six years later, on November 9, 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte took control of the disorganized government of France. He said later, "I found the crown of France lying on the ground, and I picked it up with a sword." For the next fifteen years, Napoleon ruled France as a military dictator. Eventually he conquered most of Europe. The actions of Napoleon dominated

### A Song for the Revolution

In 1792 a battalion of more than five hundred French soldiers from the town of Marseilles march on the king's palace in Paris. This peoples' army were all volunteers. They were average people caught up in the spirit of the Revolution. On the way to Paris, the marching army sang a rousing song. It was called "The War Song of the Rhine Army." As the army passed through the countryside, the stirring song drew crowds of people. This emotional song of liberty had captured the feeling of hope and revolutionary change. The patriotic song was written by Claude-Joseph Rouget de L'isle. He was a 32-year-old French army captain. The song challenged people to support the Revolution.

*Arise, ye sons of France!  
 Your day of glory has arrived!  
 Oh army of citizens!  
 Form your battalions.  
 March on, march on!  
 All hearts dedicated  
 to liberty or death!*

The song was renamed "The Marseillaise." Three years later, in 1795, "The Marseillaise" became the national anthem of revolutionary France. When France became an empire, Napoleon Bonaparte banned "The Marseillaise." He feared that the song would continue to rouse the French to revolution. In 1875 France, once again, adopted "The Marseillaise" as its national anthem. This inspiring song has remained the national anthem of France to the present.

European history from 1800 to 1815. These years are known as the Age of Napoleon.

### **Napoleon Becomes an Emperor**

Napoleon dreamed of making France into a mighty empire like that

of ancient Rome. As a military leader, he viewed himself as a modern-day Alexander the Great, the Macedonian conqueror. The fact is that for a few years his dream of a French empire appeared to be coming true. His army seemed unstoppable.



*Napoleon the Grand! Napoleon saw himself as another great conqueror like Alexander the Great. The portrait shows him dressed in the royal robes of an emperor.*

When Napoleon first came to power, he pretended that he was the elected leader of a democratic republic. In 1800 he asked the people of France to approve another new constitution. The people's choice was simple: yes or no. The new constitution was approved.

The constitution gave Napoleon the title of First Consul. "Consul" was the name of the chosen leader of the ancient Roman republic. As First Consul, Napoleon had more power than any other French official.

Two years later, in 1802, the French people voted to make him First Consul for life. Out of more than three million voters, less than nine thousand voted no.

On December 2, 1804, Napoleon took the next step to becoming the unchallenged dictator of France. On that day, the Pope waited at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris to crown Napoleon emperor of France. Napoleon, dressed in the traditional purple robe of a king, walked up to the Pope and boldly took the crown from him and placed it on his own head. Through his own ability, he rose to power in France. And, by his own hand, Napoleon had officially made himself Emperor Napoleon I.

### **Napoleon Conquers Europe**

In 1805 Britain, Austria, and Russia formed a military *alliance* against France. Napoleon quickly defeated the armies of Austria and Russia.

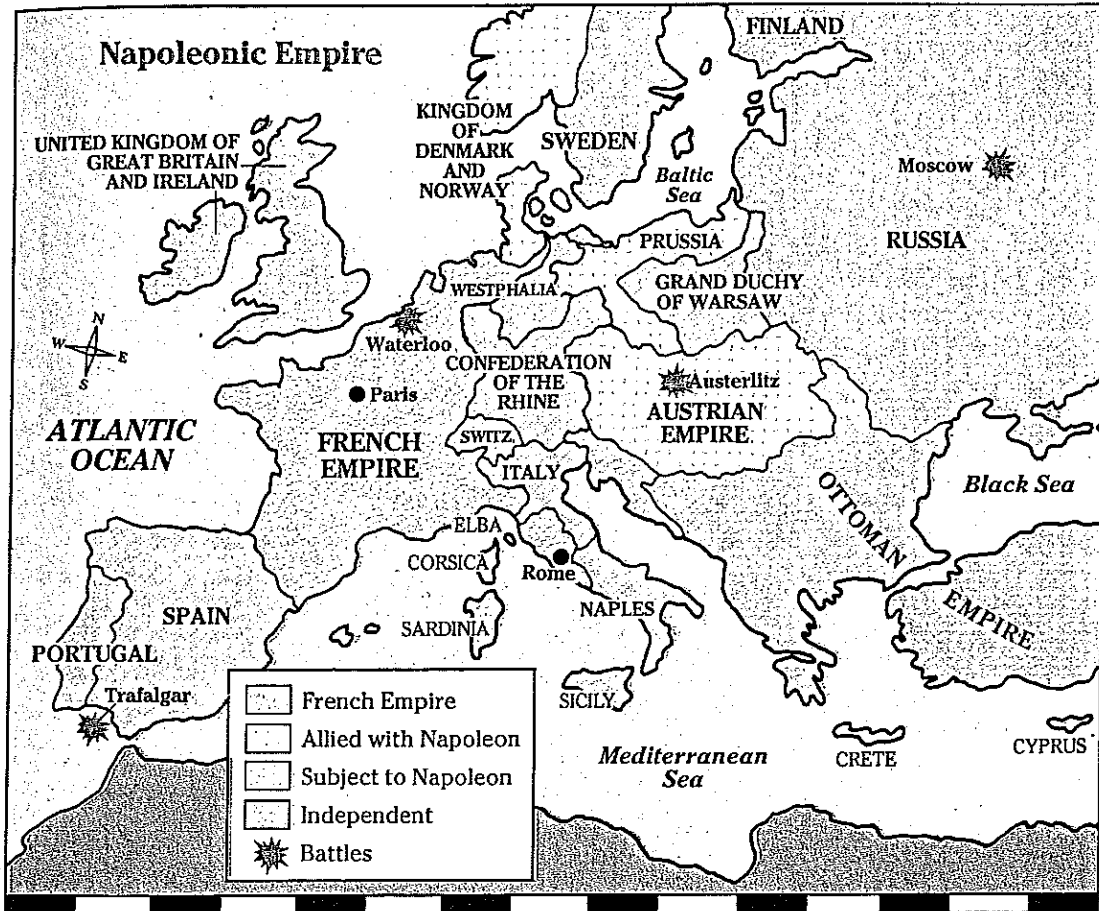
From 1806 to 1812, Napoleon's power increased in Europe. He took control of Italy and made himself king. He ended the centuries-old Holy Roman Empire. In its place, he created a loose *alliance* of German states called the Confederation of the Rhine. Napoleon gave his brothers rule over some of this conquered land. Louis Bonaparte became king of Holland. Jerome Bonaparte ruled over the Kingdom of Westphalia [West FAYL yuh] in Germany. Joseph Bonaparte ruled over the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily and eventually became the king of Spain.

Only Great Britain stood against the spreading French power. After the French fleet was destroyed off the coast of Spain in 1805, Napoleon lacked the power to invade Great Britain. In 1806 Napoleon decided to ruin the British economy by cutting off all European trade with Great Britain. Napoleon ordered that no European country should trade with Britain. This plan was called the Continental System. Britain responded by declaring that all ships in route to France had to first stop in Britain and pay a tax. Napoleon misjudged the power of the British navy. The British navy was able to prevent trading ships from entering French ports as well as the ports of other European countries.

The successful actions of the British navy hurt the economy of France and other countries. The neutral European nations quickly turned against France because of their lost trade. The Continental System turned out to be a costly mistake for Napoleon. It weakened French power. In 1812 Napoleon made an even greater mistake — he decided to invade Russia.

### **Napoleon Invades Russia**

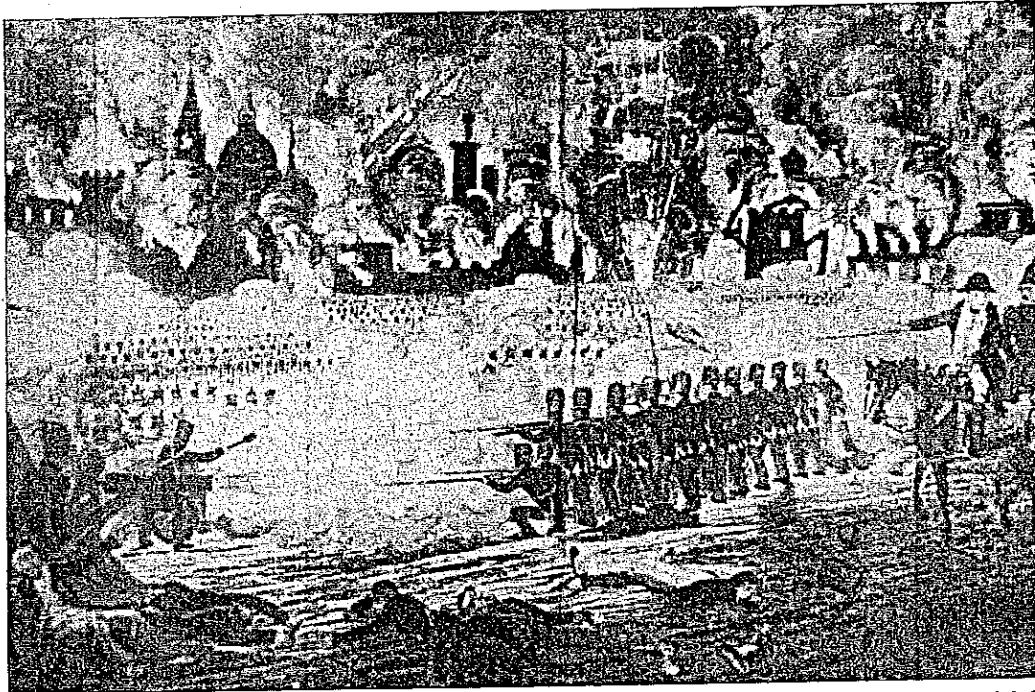
The ruler of Russia, Czar Alexander I, had agreed to support Napoleon's Continental System in 1807. The lack of trade was seriously hurting the Russian economy.



**Map Study:** True or False. Using the map, tell whether the following statements are true or false. Russia was part of the Napoleonic Empire. Spain was subject to French control. Rome was part of the Napoleonic Empire. At one point the Austrian Empire was allied with Napoleon. The Confederation of the Rhine was given its independence by Napoleon.

In 1812 Alexander began to trade with Britain. Alexander's decision angered Napoleon. To punish Russia, Napoleon organized the largest army in history up to that time. The Grand Army of 600,000 was composed of soldiers from several nationalities within the French empire. The Grand Army set out to invade Russia in May of 1815.

Napoleon thought that he could defeat Russia in a few months. But the Russian army was not willing to fight a major battle. As the French Grand Army moved deeper into Russia, the Russian army retreated eastward. As the Russians pulled back, they destroyed anything that could be of value to Napoleon's invading army. The French Grand



*Napoleon's invasion of Russia proved a disaster. He lost most of his Grand Army, which weakened his grip on power.*

Army found only burned fields and destroyed houses.

Near the city of Moscow, the French and Russian armies finally met. The French army won the battle, but Napoleon faced another Russian surprise. When the French army entered the capital city of Moscow in September, Napoleon found it deserted and in flames. Once again the Russians had destroyed food and shelter needed by Napoleon's army.

Napoleon sent several messages of peace. However, he heard nothing from the Russians. In October of 1812, after five weeks of waiting, a frustrated Napoleon ordered the

remainder of his army to return to France. The Grand Army had already lost thousands of soldiers. Many died of disease. In retreat, thousands more would die. In fact, Napoleon's retreat from Russia was a military disaster. The French army faced a harsh Russian winter without proper winter clothing or supplies. The hard Russian winter proved as deadly an enemy to Napoleon's soldiers as the Russian army. As the French army moved slowly back to France, thousands of soldiers died of starvation. Many froze to death when the temperature fell to 30 degrees below zero. Fewer than 40,000 French soldiers

made it back to France, with less than 10,000 of those still able to fight.

### Napoleon Is Defeated

Seeing the weakened French army, Napoleon's enemies attacked. Napoleon *abandoned* his destroyed army and quickly returned to Paris to raise a new army, but it was too late. In March of 1814, the armies of Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria captured the city of Paris.

Napoleon was removed from power and sent to Elba, an island off the coast of Italy. The monarchy was restored to France. The brother of Louis XVI, who was executed during the French Revolution, became King Louis XVIII.

A year later, in March of 1815, Napoleon returned to France. Declaring himself emperor, he began to raise an army. An alarmed Louis XVIII sent his soldiers to stop Napoleon. When Napoleon met the king's

*Napoleon was a military genius who changed the history of warfare. At Waterloo Napoleon met his final defeat. Napoleon was ill during the battle and outnumbered. The armies of several nations had joined to attack his troops.*



troops, he challenged them. He asked if there was one soldier who wished "to kill his emperor." The king's soldiers cried, "Long live the emperor!"

For the next three months, Napoleon was once again the hero of France. During these "Hundred Days," he organized an army of 125,000 men. On June 18, 1815, Napoleon's new army met the combined armies of Britain and Prussia at Waterloo in present-day Belgium. On the battlefield at Waterloo British and Prussian troops, led by the British Duke of Wellington, finally defeated Napoleon. Napoleon was taken prisoner and once again sent in exile to an island. In 1821, six years after the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon Bonaparte died at the age of 52 on the rocky South Atlantic island of St. Helena.

### Effects of Napoleon's Rule

Napoleon's leadership had many important effects. In France, he achieved one important goal of the French Revolution by making every man equal before the law. This was accomplished by a new code of laws called the Code of Napoleon. Napoleon's success as a military conqueror changed the political boundaries of Europe. The French *conquest* also spread the ideas of liberty and equality from the French Revolution throughout Europe. There was opposition to Napoleon

by conquered peoples who demanded a nation of their own. The rising spirit of nationalism would be a continuing factor in shaping European history throughout the nineteenth century.

### STOP AND REVIEW

1. What years in French history are known as the Age of Napoleon?
2. What was Napoleon's occupation before he came to power in France?
3. When did Napoleon become the emperor of France?
4. How successful was Napoleon's invasion of Russia?
5. At which battle did Napoleon meet his final defeat?

## Why the French Accepted Napoleon As Emperor

*The French had fought a bloody revolution to rid themselves of a king and the French nobility. Yet in a few years the French accepted Napoleon as a dictator. In this account, Madame de Remusat, the wife of one of Napoleon's secretaries, discusses why she thinks Napoleon was allowed to have such great powers.*

In France and throughout Europe, opinions about Napoleon's becoming emperor were divided. It is, however, quite certain that it did not displease the great majority of the nation.

I can understand how it was that men, worn out by the Revolution and afraid of that liberty which had been so long associated with death, looked for peace under an able ruler. I can see that they regarded Napoleon's rise as an order of destiny. I know that those persons believed quite sincerely that Napoleon would use his authority to save us from anarchy.

None dared to utter the word Republic, so deeply had the Terror stained that name. And the government of the Directory had fallen into the contempt with which its chiefs were regarded. The return of the descendants of Louis XVI would never have been acceptable. And the slightest disturbance terrified the French people, in whom enthusiasm of every kind seemed to be dead.

The belief, or rather the error, that only the iron rule of a strong individual could keep order in France was very widespread. Napoleon had some grounds for his belief that he was necessary; France believed it

too. And he even succeeded in persuading foreign kings that he formed a wall against republican influences, which but for him might spread widely. At the moment when Napoleon placed the crown upon his head, there was not a king in Europe who did not believe that he wore his own crown more securely because of that event. Had the new emperor added to that decisive act the gift of a liberal constitution, the peace of nations and of kings might have come about.

Well-meaning, honest folk asked nothing of him but peace. They did not trouble themselves about the form under which it was to be given. And then, he knew well that the secret weakness of the French nation was vanity, and he saw a means of gratifying it easily by the showiness that goes along with monarchical power.\*

\*Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France, Vol. I: 1715-1799*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963).

### Stop and Review

1. According to the writer, why did the people of France accept Napoleon as their leader?
2. What terror do you think Madame de Remusat is referring to that occurred when France was a republic?
3. What benefit did the kings of Europe gain by having Napoleon rule France?
4. According to the writer, what do the average people of France want from Napoleon?
5. What does the writer think is the secret weakness of the French? How did Napoleon take advantage of this weakness?