

History – chapter 3

Napoleon, Britain and Europe (1799-1815)Key questions.

What changes did the French Revolution introduce in France and in Europe? Why did wars break out and tear apart Europe? What role did Britain play at that time? In what ways did Napoleon represent a major threat to the equilibrium between powers in Europe?

Lesson plan.**1. The French Revolution – a European affair? 1789-1799**

- 1 a. French revolutionary values vs despotism.
- 1 b. Britain and the French wars : 1793-1797
- 1 c. The Revolution falls apart : 1793-1799

2. Europe torn apart by Napoleon's wars : 1802-1815

- 2 a. The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte : 1796-1799
- 2 b. Napoleon against Britain : 1802-1805
- 2 c. War in Europe : 1806-1812
- 2 d. The defeat of Napoleon : 1813-1815

Conclusion : Napoleon, a European but controversial figure.

Timeline :**The French Revolution.**

1789 : creation of the National Assembly (June 20) ; storming of the Bastille (July 14) ; abolition of Feudalism (August 4) ; *Declaration of the rights of Man* (August 12-27)
1791 : Constitutional monarchy ; royal flight to Varenne;
1792 : abolition of royalty ; First French Republic ; election of a Convention; war in Europe;
1793-1794 : Robespierre, the CPS and the Terror
1795-1799 : the Directorate takes on executive power.

Napoleon and the Empire.

1796 : Napoleon Bonaparte commands the French armies in Italy
 1799 : Coup of 18 Brumaire, Napoleon became Consul.

1802 : peace between Britain and France (Treaty of Amien)

1804 : Napoleon crowned Emperor.

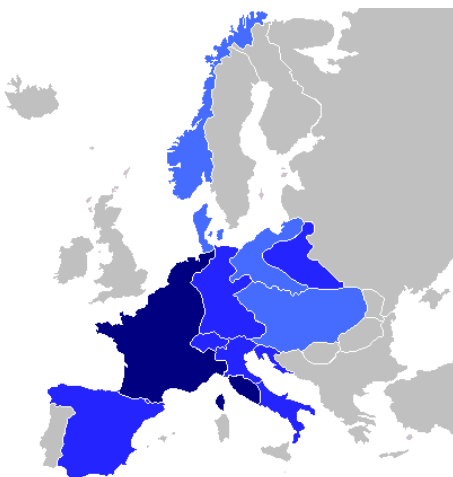
1805 : France victorious at the Battle of Austerlitz but defeated at Trafalgar by admiral Nelson.

1812 : invasion of Russia, fire of Moscow, then forced retreat of the Grand Army.

1813. Napoleon defeated at the Battle of Nations at Leipzig ; exile to Elba ; Louis XVIII king of France

1815 : the '*Hundred Days of Napoleon*' = return from exile on Elba, exile of Louis XVIII, Napoleon defeated at Waterloo ; exile to St-Helena.

Second restoration of king Louis XVIII ; Congress of Vienna



Map : Napoleon's Empire at its greatest extent : (dark) French Empire (with 130 departments) ; (medium) client-states (once conquered) ; (light) allies

Napoleon Crossing the Alps (1800),

by J-L David.



History – chapter 3

Napoleon, Britain and Europe (1799-1815)Introduction.

Malnourishment and harsh taxes turned the French Third Estate against an inept crown. Politically inspired, the Third Estate demanded popular representation, forming the National assembly, in order to create a Constitutional Monarchy in which it would be more fairly represented politically.

After declaring their wishes to reorganise the French government in the “*Tennis Court Oaths*,” the Third Estate was met with violent repression. Though he recognized the need to compromise politically, Louis XVI soon started a campaign to re-establish power and put an end to the Revolution.

But rioters stormed the Bastille fortress on July 14, 1789 and a wave of revolutionary fervour and widespread spirit of freedom swept the country and eventually put an end to the old order.

There were three major social groups in France, referred to as “estates.” The three estates were the nobility, the clergy, and the common people known as the Third Estate. This estate comprised over 95% of the French population. A political and philosophical awakening spearheaded by thinkers such as Voltaire and Rousseau inspired the members of the Third Estate. This transformation, known as Enlightenment, created rising expectations among the French people.

Key questions.

What changes did the French Revolution introduce in France and in Europe? Why did wars break out and tear apart Europe? What role did Britain play at that time? In what ways did Napoleon represent a major threat to the equilibrium between powers in Europe?

1. The French revolution – a European affair ?1 a. French Revolutionary values versus despotism.

(Changes in France) From 1789 onwards the National Assembly passed a series of laws which

- Abolished all feudal privileges and unfair taxation (August 4, 1789);
- Issued the *Declaration of The Rights of Man* (August 12-27, 1789);

Case study n°1: The Declaration of The Rights of Man

- Drew a new Constitution which set up a constitutional monarchy after the British model, in which the king was trusted with a limited power to govern by and according to the laws

- Reformed the Church: its lands were nationalised and priests were to be elected by the local people, paid a salary from the government. In return they had to take an oath of loyalty to the Constitution.

(Effects on Europe) These revolutionary ideas contributed to weakening the power of absolute rulers not only in France but also in the whole of Europe.

In France, Louis XVI – who first seemed to play the role of an English-style constitutional monarch in the years 1789-1791, signing the decrees of the Assembly so that they became law – eventually suggested kings of Prussia, Spain and Austria to meet and form a military alliance to put down the Revolution and set him back on his absolute throne! That's why he decided to flee from Paris and reach the north-eastern border and join European counter-revolutionaries armies. But he was recognised at the last moment when reaching Varennes, forced to return to Paris and accept the Constitution.

Neither he nor the other autocratic rulers of Europe accepted this downgrading of a monarch. The members of the National Assembly also realised that France faced a great threat of invasion by other despots in Europe, looking to restore the French monarch to power.

Case study n°2 : the spirit of Revolution spreads to Europe.

In April 1792, the new Republican government – which succeeded the constitutional monarchy – declared war on Austria. This led the Convention – or Assembly – to pass the *Edict of Fraternity* (see exercise n°3) which promised to help lower classes everywhere to overthrow their despotic rulers.

1 b. Britain and the French wars: 1793/7.

Once the Republic had been decreed, the Convention put the king Louis XVI on trial. He was found guilty of plotting against the Revolution, and thus sentenced to death. A wave of Terror – decided by Robespierre and other members of the Committee of Public Safety (CPS) – was then targeted at those who were counter-revolutionaries, or simply convinced of.

Case study n°3: Pitt and the French Revolution at war.

In Britain, **William Pitt** – who had been appointed at the head of Government by king George III – referred to the Terror and also to the growth of French trade interests in Europe to arrange a military coalition against France in 1793. It included Spain, Holland, Austria, Prussia, England and Sardinia (SHAPES), and also Russia. Britain would provide her allies with subsidies (gold) to buy materials and pay soldiers, attack French colonies in the West Indies and use the navy to blockade the French ports and cut

France off from foreign trade. It would help the other allied armies to attack the French coast (near Toulon, or in the Vendée) and join counter-revolutionary forces.

From September 1793 onwards, new and well-led French armies won a string of victories. By the start of 1794 France had occupied Belgium, attacked Holland, and its armies crossed the Rhine and were advancing into Austrian and Prussian territories.

1 c. Revolution falls apart : 1793-1799

As war went on, Terror developed at an increasing pace: nobles, failed generals and anyone thought to be lukewarm about the Republic were sent to the guillotine. Robespierre – a leading figure of the CPS – assumed the main responsibility for imposing a radical turn on the Republican regime.

In October 1793 Christianity was abolished. Some refractory priests – who refused to be loyal to the Revolutionary Constitution – were persecuted; a new civic religion introduced the worship of the '*Supreme Being*'. Acting as a dictator, Robespierre was eventually overthrown in July 1794 by those he had threatened to death, and led out to the guillotine.

In 1795, a new Convention – or Assembly – appointed a five-man Directorate to run the state; but the regime was too weak and relied essentially on the army, that is to say on the good will of generals, among others Napoleon Bonaparte.

2. Europe torn apart by Napoleon's wars : 1802-1815.

2 a. The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Born to a minor Corsican noble family, Napoleon became an artillery officer in the French army in 1785. He was first noticed because of its defence of Toulon to prevent the British fleet from invading the coast. He later supported the Directorate and became general.

In 1796 he was given command of the French Army which invaded Italy and defeated Austria. The later was compelled to yield to France several territories, including Belgium, the Rhine Frontier and Lombardy.

As the Directorate was weakened by many royalist opponents, Napoleon decided to overthrow the regime and dismiss the Assemblies with the help of his loyal troops. In November 1799 Napoleon planned the '*Coup of 18 Brumaire*', seized power – as a

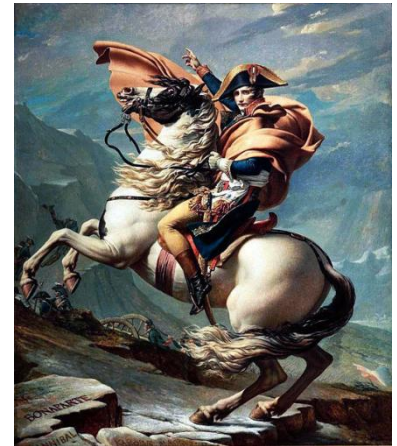


Napoleon on his Imperial throne by Ingres.

Consul – and created the Empire in 1804. He dominated nearly all of Europe, except Britain.

2 b. Napoleon against Britain: 1802-1805.

Britain organised coalitions with Russia and Austria to drove the French from Italy and the Rhine. This Third Coalition was defeated **at Austerlitz in 1805** and Britain remained alone, waiting for a possible invasion. But admiral Nelson managed to catch the French and Spanish fleets on their way and won the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, which ensured that Britain remained in full control of the seas.



Napoleon Crossing the Alps (1800), by J-L David.

2 b. Napoleon's economic war against Europe: 1806-1812.

After Trafalgar Napoleon tried to defeat Britain by attacking his trade thanks to a '*continental system*' which forbade any country to trade with Britain. The latter replied with a sea blockade to stranglehold the French economy.

As many countries depended on British industrial goods, the ban on trade with Britain was not efficient and Napoleon was forced to issue licenses, allowing even the French to trade with Britain. Few countries, like Russia, could no longer accept it in 1810. Fearing that other countries might copy this rebellion, Napoleon **invaded Russia, in 1812** but he was soon forced to retreat on a march in which hundreds of thousands died.

2 b. The defeat of Napoleon : 1813-1815.

Austria, Prussia, Russia and Sweden joined Britain in a Fourth Coalition which defeated Napoleon's troops at the **Battle of the Nations at Leipzig in October 1813**, and went on occupying Paris. Napoleon abdicated and sailed into exile on the island of Elba.

After 10 months he escaped, returned to Paris – the king Louis XVIII fleeing – and gathered yet another army. **In June 1815**, Napoleon marched to the Netherlands, where he was outnumbered and defeated at **Waterloo** by the allied forces made up of Prussians (led by Blucher) and British troops (commanded by Wellington).

The political map of Europe was redrawn by Napoleon's victors at the **Congress of Vienna** in 1815. They imposed a stifling reaction - or 'Conservative Order' – on Europe, where the liberties and civil rights associated with the American and French Revolutions were de-emphasized, so that a fair balance of power, peace and stability, might be achieved.

Napoleon was the exiled to the lonely island of Saint-Helena where he died in 1821.

Conclusion.

✓ A major legacy

Napoleon worked to restore stability to post-revolutionary France.

- Feudalism was abolished, the nobles lost their powers and the peasants were given access to land – and the right to pay only their fair share of taxes;
- Universal suffrage is open to all adult male citizens – women did not get the vote – and is at the basis of all political systems, even if Napoleon did not hold any fair elections;
- Marriage became a civil (state) ceremony and divorce was allowed by Napoleon;
- The Code Napoleon was established to reform the French legal system with one set of laws for the whole country instead of local rules applying to different provinces as was the case before 1789. It continues to form the foundation of French civil law to this day;
- Laws apply to all citizens, whatever their rank or fortune;

He centralised the government by creating Prefects who represent the state in each department ; he also instituted reforms in such areas as banking - with the creation of the *Franc Germinal* - and education – with the creation of Imperial Lycées -;

He negotiated the *Concordat* of 1801 with the Pope and the Catholic Church, which sought to reconcile the mostly Catholic population to his regime, which had suffered during the revolution.

✓ A hero or a villain?

Napoleon may be seen as a conservative heir of the French Revolution and a modern conqueror - imitating Alexander the Great – who wished to unify Europe under his rule;

But he is also an authoritarian despot who torn apart Europe in continuous warfare.

Yet, by the changes he made in the map of Europe, Napoleon encouraged the growth of nationalism, particularly in Spain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and so on, paving the way to modern Nation-States.