



# Western Civilization from 1650 to the Present

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## TOPIC 6.2. THE AGE OF NAPOLEON

Supplement to Chambers, *The Western Experience*, Chapter 21: The Age of Napoleon, pp. 737-767.

<p><b>THE DIRECTORY</b></p>	<p>After the Reign of Terror was over, the more moderate members of the middle class once again came to power. They wrote a new constitution and established a new ruling body called the Directory in October, 1795.</p> <p>The DIRECTORY was neither royalist nor democratic. It was dominated by the PROPERTY-OWNING CLASS. It was headed by a council of five men called DIRECTORS, who were chosen by a two-house legislature. The universal male suffrage of 1793 was rejected, and the VOTE WAS GIVEN ONLY TO MEN WHO PAID TAXES. Women and poor men, who did not own property, were deprived of the vote.</p> <p>POLITICAL POWER was in the hands of the UPPER MIDDLE CLASSES and FORMER NOBLES, who had been pardoned and returned from exile.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The new government became CORRUPT AND INEFFICIENT.</li> <li>■ It was unable either to solve the country's problems or to achieve national unity.</li> <li>■ The time was RIPE FOR A STRONG LEADER to seize power.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NAPOLEON'S RISE TO POWER</b></p>	<p>A strong new leader for France appeared in the person of NAPOLEON BONAPARTE. Napoleon advanced from the position of lieutenant in the artillery to full-fledged general, was put in charge of the French army in northern Italy, DEFEATED THE AUSTRIANS, and became a hero.</p> <p>In November 1799, he led a conspiracy to OVERTHROW THE DIRECTORY. Soon after seizing power, he held a REFERENDUM in which all French men could vote to approve or disapprove of the new regime. (The people accepted Napoleon by a vote of 3 million to 1,500.)</p> <p>Although Napoleon sounded like a liberal reformer, he had every intention of becoming a dictator and, with the support of the French people, moved to LIMIT POLITICAL RIGHTS by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Crushing all opposition.</li> <li>■ Limiting free speech.</li> <li>■ Censoring the press.</li> </ul> <p>In spite of these actions, the French people liked Napoleon because after years of chaos, defeat, and disorder, he offered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ ORDER</li> <li>■ STABILITY</li> <li>■ EFFICIENCY</li> <li>■ MILITARY VICTORY</li> </ul> <p>By 1804, Napoleon's popularity was so great that he was able to change France's government from a Republic to an Empire and crown himself Napoleon I, EMPEROR of the French.</p>
<p><b>NAPOLEON'S ACHIEVEMENTS</b></p>	<p>During his 15-year rule, Napoleon carried out several IMPORTANT REFORMS. In many ways Napoleon FINISHED THE WORK OF THE REVOLUTION. No privileges were allowed and the tax system was reformed. Promotion within the government or army was based on ability and achievement.</p> <p>In addition, Napoleon made an AGREEMENT WITH THE POPE. He confirmed the government's control over the Catholic Church and guaranteed its safety, after a decade of</p>

	<p>turmoil and repression. He established freedom of religion for everyone.</p> <p>His best known work was the MODERNIZATION OF FRENCH LAW. The NAPOLEONIC CODE established the principle of equality for all citizens before the law. The work is still the basis for French law today and has been adopted by other countries around the world. His national bank, system of elite education, Legion of Honor awards, and prefectorial system of administration institutionalized his HIERARCHICAL, CENTRALIZED, AND PROPERTY-DOMINATED vision of social order.</p> <p>Napoleon's IMPERIAL AMBITIONS, not his internal dictatorship, led to his undoing. On the continent, he subdued his adversaries -- Austria, Prussia, Russia, the smaller German states -- so that by 1808, he had EXTENDED FRENCH POWER and EFFECTED POLITICAL REORGANIZATION on a grand scale.</p> <p>His CONTINENTAL SYSTEM of economic boycott, designed to choke Britain's overseas trade, worked hardship on merchants, manufacturers, and consumers from one side of the Atlantic to the other. However, rebellion might never have broken out if Napoleon had not exposed his fatal weaknesses by trying to conquer Russia.</p> <p>Invading Russia in 1812, Napoleon's ARMY WAS DESTROYED by the harsh winter, guerrilla attacks, poor logistics, and the refusal of the Russian army and government to surrender when Moscow was occupied. By 1814, former allies Prussia and Austria had joined Britain and Russia in a FINAL COALITION that occupied Paris and forced Napoleon's abdication.</p> <p>Napoleon himself was banished to the island of Elba, which lay off the coast of Italy. He soon escaped, returned to France, and for 100 days claimed the role of emperor again. For a second time, the other countries of Europe united against Napoleon and defeated him in a battle at the Belgian village of WATERLOO in 1815. This time they sent him to the distant and isolated south Atlantic island of St. Helena.</p>
<p><b>NAPOLEON'S IMPERIAL AMBITIONS</b></p>	<p>Napoleon was a monarch and a dictator, but he always claimed to be fighting IN THE NAME OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ His soldiers and officials brought many of the PRINCIPLES OF THE REVOLUTION to other countries of Europe.</li> <li>■ FEUDALISM AND SERFDOM WERE WIPED OUT.</li> <li>■ The NAPOLEONIC CODES, which stressed equality before the law, were put into effect.</li> <li>■ RELIGIOUS FREEDOM became the law. TAXES WERE REFORMED.</li> <li>■ Even after Napoleon's downfall, when conservative monarchs returned to power, many of Napoleon's REFORMS REMAINED in effect.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NAPOLEON'S FAR-REACHING INFLUENCE</b></p>	<p>For more information on this topic, explore one or more of the following online resources:</p> <p><a href="#">News from the Front</a>: Newspaper articles from 1815.</p> <p><a href="#">Napoleon</a>: PBS site on the television series about Napoleon. Very well done.</p> <p><a href="#">Napoleon 1<sup>st</sup></a>: Multimedia site covering the life and times of Napoleon Bonaparte.</p>
<p><b>ONLINE RESOURCES</b></p>	<p>Drawing on the resources you have had an opportunity to explore (textbook, course documents, online resources, library resources), answer one or more of the following questions:</p> <p><b>Explain the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. Can this be considered a classic example of man making history, or were conditions favorable to the emergence of a "Napoleon-like" leader?</b></p>

**"Napoleon was no military genius. His victories depended on the weakness and disorganization of his enemies rather than upon his skills as a general." Comment on this statement. Do you agree or disagree? Be specific in your examples.**

**"Napoleon's success depended more on propaganda and less on his actual achievements and abilities." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What image did Napoleon want to project about himself, his laws and his empire?**