

4

Napoleon's Empire Collapses

TERMS & NAMES

- blockade
- Continental System
- guerrilla
- Peninsular War
- scorched-earth policy
- Waterloo
- Hundred Days

MAIN IDEA

Napoleon's conquests aroused nationalistic feelings across Europe and contributed to his downfall.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

In the 1990s, nationalistic feelings contributed to the breakup of nations such as Yugoslavia.

SETTING THE STAGE Napoleon worried that his vast empire would fall apart unless he had an heir whose right to succeed him was undisputed, so he decided that he needed a son. Consequently, he divorced Josephine, who had failed to bear him a child, and formed an alliance with the Austrian royal family by marrying Marie Louise, the grand-niece of Marie Antoinette. In 1811, Marie Louise gave birth to a son, Napoleon II, whom his father named king of Rome.

Napoleon's Three Costly Mistakes

Napoleon's own personality proved to be the greatest danger to the future of his empire. "I love power," he once said, "as a musician loves his violin." It was the drive for power that had raised Napoleon to great heights, and the same love of power led to his doom. In his efforts to extend the French Empire and crush Britain, Napoleon made three disastrous misjudgments.

The Continental System In November 1806, Napoleon signed a decree ordering a **blockade**—a forcible closing of ports—to prevent all trade and communication between Great Britain and other European nations. Napoleon called this policy the **Continental System** because it was supposed to make continental Europe more self-sufficient. It was also intended to destroy Britain's commercial and industrial economy.

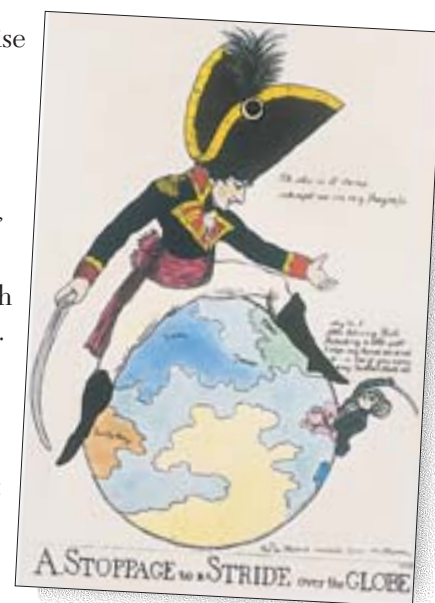
Unfortunately for Napoleon, his blockade was not nearly tight enough. Aided by the British, smugglers managed to bring cargo from Britain into Europe. At times, Napoleon's allies disregarded his order—in fact, Napoleon's own brother Louis, whom Napoleon had made king of Holland, defied the policy. For these reasons, the blockade weakened British trade but did not destroy it.

In addition, Britain responded with its own blockade. The British navy stopped neutral ships bound for the continent and forced them to sail to a British port to be searched and taxed. Because the British had a stronger navy, they were better able than the French to make their blockade work.

American ships were among those stopped by the British navy. Angered, the U.S. Congress declared war on Britain in 1812. The War of 1812 ended in a draw, however, and was only a minor inconvenience to Britain in its struggle with Napoleon.

In effect, the Continental System hurt Napoleon more than it hurt his enemies. It weakened the economies of France and the other lands under Napoleon's control more than it damaged Britain.

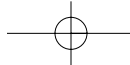
The Peninsular War In 1808, Napoleon made a second costly mistake. Because Portugal was ignoring the Continental System, he sent an army through Spain to invade Portugal. When Spanish towns rioted in protest, Napoleon deposed the Spanish king and put his brother Joseph on the throne. This move outraged the Spanish people and enflamed their nationalistic feelings, since they remained fiercely loyal to their former monarch.



"Little Johnny Bull"—Great Britain—waves a sword at Napoleon as the emperor straddles the globe.

Background

England's navy had been the strongest in Europe ever since its defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.



In addition, Spain was a devoutly Catholic nation with a long history of persecuting those who deviated from the faith. Because the French Revolution had weakened the Catholic Church in France, many Spanish Catholics feared that their French conquerors would undermine the church in Spain. In fact, the French did attack church power by outlawing the Spanish Inquisition, which was still prosecuting people accused of heresy.

Global Impact



Latin American Revolutions

Class conflict had begun in Spain's American colonies long before the Peninsular War. *Peninsulares*, colonists who had been born in Spain, dominated colonial society. *Creoles*, those born in the colonies themselves, were denied power.

When Napoleon forced the Spanish king to abdicate, Creole leaders in the colonies saw the collapse of the Spanish government as an opportunity to take over colonial governments and gain independence from Spain.

Among the leaders who worked for independence were Simón Bolívar of Venezuela and José de San Martín of Argentina. Both Venezuela and Argentina had to struggle long and hard to defeat the Spanish, but they did prevail.

For five years (1808–1813), bands of Spanish peasant fighters, known as **guerrillas**, struck at French armies in Spain. The guerrillas were not an army that Napoleon could defeat in open battle; they were ordinary people who ambushed French troops and then fled into hiding. The British added to the French troubles in Spain by sending troops to aid the rebels. Napoleon lost about 300,000 men during this **Peninsular War** (so called because Spain lies on the Iberian Peninsula). These losses weakened the French Empire.

In Spain and elsewhere, nationalism, or loyalty to one's own country, was becoming a powerful weapon against Napoleon. People who had at first welcomed the French as their liberators now felt abused by a foreign conqueror. Like the Spanish guerrillas, Germans and Italians and other conquered peoples turned against the French.

The Invasion of Russia In 1812, Napoleon's thirst for power led to his most disastrous mistake of all. Even though Alexander I had become Napoleon's ally, the Russian czar refused to stop selling grain to Britain. In addition, the French and Russian rulers suspected each other of having competing designs on Poland. Because of this breakdown in their alliance, Napoleon decided to invade Russia.

In June 1812, Napoleon and his Grand Army marched into Russia. Many of his troops were not French. They had been drafted from all over Europe, and they felt little loyalty to Napoleon.

As Napoleon's army entered Russia, Alexander pulled back his troops, refusing to be lured into an unequal battle. As the Russians retreated toward Moscow, they practiced a **scorched-earth policy**, burning grain fields and slaughtering livestock so as to leave nothing that the enemy could eat. Desperate soldiers deserted the French army to search for scraps of food.

On September 7, 1812, the two armies finally clashed in the Battle of Borodino. During the morning, the advantage swung back and forth between the Russians and the French. After several more hours of indecisive fighting, the Russians retreated—giving Napoleon a narrow victory that allowed him to take Moscow.

When Napoleon finally entered Moscow on September 14, he soon found it in flames. Rather than surrender Russia's "holy city" to the French, Alexander had set fire to it. Napoleon stayed in the ruined city for five weeks, expecting the czar to make a peace offer, but no offer ever came. By then, it was the middle of October, too late to advance farther and perhaps too late even to retreat.

Grimly, Napoleon ordered his starving army to turn back. As the snows began to fall in early November, Russian raiders mercilessly attacked Napoleon's ragged, retreating army. One French sergeant recorded, "Many of the survivors were walking barefoot, using pieces of wood as canes, but their feet were frozen so hard that the sound they made on the road was like that of wooden clogs."

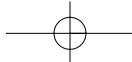
As the soldiers staggered through the snow, many dropped in their tracks from wounds, exhaustion, hunger, and cold. The temperature fell to about 30 degrees below zero, so cold that birds fell dead from the sky. Finally, in the middle of December, the last survivors straggled out of Russia. Of his Grand Army, Napoleon had only 10,000 soldiers who were left fit to fight.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

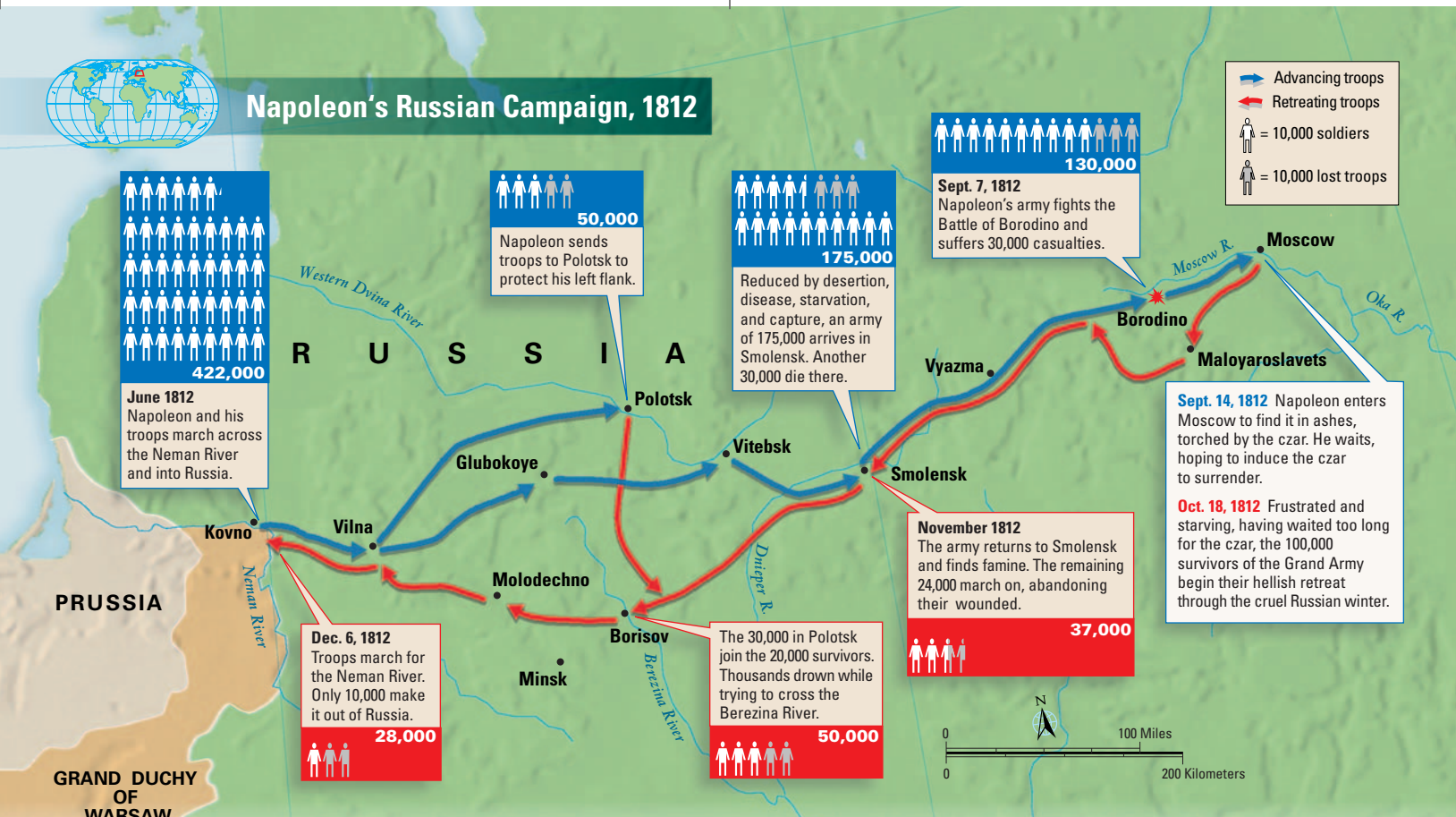
A. Recognizing Effects How could the growing feelings of nationalism in European countries hurt Napoleon?

Background

Napoleon wanted to capture Moscow because it is located near three rivers and thus provides easy access to most of European Russia.



Napoleon's Russian Campaign, 1812

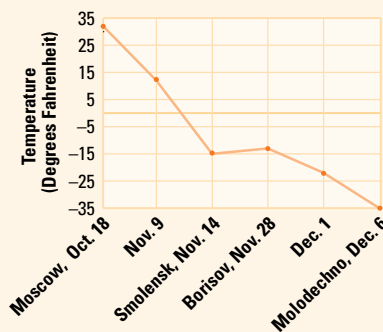


SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps and Graphs

- How many troops did Napoleon start the Russian campaign with? How many survived?
- Review the graph on the right. Why was Napoleon's decision to stay in Moscow until mid-October a tactical blunder?

Source: Chart by Charles Joseph Minard, 1861

Retreat from Russia, 1812



Napoleon's Downfall

Napoleon's enemies were quick to take advantage of his weakness. Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Sweden joined forces against him in the Fourth Coalition. Napoleon had hoped that his marriage to Marie Louise would keep at least Austria on his side, but Austria also joined the coalition. All of the main powers of Europe were now at war with France.

The Coalition Defeats Napoleon In only a few months, Napoleon managed to raise another army. He faced his enemies outside the German city of Leipzig (LYP-sihg) in October 1813. At this crucial point, Napoleon's army no longer consisted of trained veterans. In the Battle of Leipzig, the allies cut his inexperienced army to pieces.

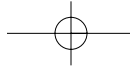
Napoleon's empire crumbled quickly. By January 1814, armies of Austrians, Russians, and Prussians were pushing steadily toward Paris. In March, the Russian czar and the Prussian king led their troops in a triumphant parade through the French capital. Napoleon wanted to fight on, but his generals refused.

In April 1814, the defeated emperor gave up his throne and accepted the terms of surrender drawn up by Alexander I. The victors gave Napoleon a small pension and exiled, or banished, him to Elba, a tiny island off the Italian coast. Although the allies expected no further trouble from Napoleon, they were wrong. Napoleon was a man of action who, at age 45, would find it difficult to retire.

A Comeback Fails As Napoleon arrived on Elba, a Bourbon king arrived in Paris to rule France—Louis XVIII, brother of the guillotined king. (Louis XVI's son and heir had died in prison in 1795.) However, the new king quickly became unpopular among

Background

Royalists had called Louis XVI's son Louis XVII after his father was guillotined.



This portrait by Paul Delaroche, entitled *Napoleon I After His Abdication*, shows Napoleon's depression after he abdicated his throne.

his subjects—especially the peasants, who suspected him of wanting to undo the Revolution's land reforms.

The news that the French king was in trouble was all the incentive Napoleon needed to try to regain power. He escaped from Elba and, on March 1, 1815, landed in France. In a proclamation, he urged the French to rally to his cause. "Victory will march at full speed," he said. "You will be the liberators of your country." Thousands of French people welcomed Napoleon back. The ranks of his army swelled with volunteers as it approached Paris. Within days, Napoleon was again emperor of France. Louis XVIII fled to the border.

In response, the European allies quickly marshaled their armies. The British army, led by the Duke of Wellington, prepared for battle near the village of **Waterloo** in Belgium. On June 18, 1815, Napoleon attacked. The British army defended its ground all day. Late in the afternoon, the Prussian army arrived. Together, the British and the Prussian forces attacked the French. Two days later, Napoleon's exhausted

troops gave way, and the British and Prussian forces chased them from the field.

This defeat ended Napoleon's last bid for power, called the **Hundred Days**. Taking no chances this time, the British shipped Napoleon to St. Helena, a remote island in the South Atlantic. There, he lived in lonely exile for six years, writing his memoirs. He died in 1821 of a stomach ailment, perhaps cancer. Shortly before his death, he attempted to justify all he had done during his life:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Such work as mine is not done twice in a century. . . . I have saved the Revolution as it lay dying. I have cleansed it of its crimes, and have held it up to the people shining with fame. I have inspired France and Europe with new ideas that will never be forgotten.

NAPOLÉON, quoted in *Napoleon at St. Helena*

Without doubt, Napoleon was a military genius and a brilliant administrator. Yet all his victories must be measured against the millions of lives that were lost in his wars. Of his many achievements, only his law code and some of his reforms in France's government proved lasting—and they were not won on the battlefield. A later French statesman and writer, Alexis de Tocqueville, summed up Napoleon's character by saying, "He was as great as a man can be without virtue." Napoleon's defeat opened the door for the freed European countries to establish a new order.

Background

Napoleon was emperor for 10 years; he was exiled to Elba for 1 year; he ruled again for 100 days; then he was exiled to St. Helena for 6 years.

Section 4 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- blockade
- Continental System
- guerrilla
- Peninsular War
- scorched-earth policy
- Waterloo
- Hundred Days

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a two-column chart like the one below, listing Napoleon's three disastrous mistakes and the effects that each one had on his empire.

Napoleon's Mistakes	Effect on Empire

Which mistake was most serious? Why?

3. ANALYZING MOTIVES

What were the main reasons people in other European countries resisted Napoleon?

THINK ABOUT

- why some of his own allies refused to abide by the Continental System
- why the Spanish fought a guerrilla war for several years
- why the Russians destroyed their own crops and cities

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Power and Authority Using information from Sections 3 and 4, create a chart, sketch, or drawing to show what positive and negative effects Napoleon's rule had on France. Then judge Napoleon's use of power, showing your judgment in a visual way. Be prepared to defend your opinion.