

The French Revolution and Napoleon

Section 4

Napoleon's Empire Collapses

Terms and Names

blockade Forced closing of ports

Continental System Napoleon's policy of preventing trade and communication between Great Britain and other European nations

guerrilla Spanish peasant fighter

Peninsular War War that Napoleon fought in Spain

scorched-earth policy Policy of burning fields and slaughtering livestock so that enemy troops would find nothing to eat

Waterloo Battle in Belgium that was Napoleon's final defeat

Hundred Days Napoleon's last bid for power, which ended at Waterloo

Before You Read

In the last section, you read how Napoleon built his power.

In this section, you learn why he lost it.

As You Read

Use a chart to take notes on mistakes Napoleon made and the impact they had on the French Empire.

NAPOLEON'S COSTLY MISTAKES

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What mistakes did Napoleon make abroad?

Napoleon's own personality posed a threat to his empire. His love of power pushed him to expand his empire. His efforts to extend French rule led to his empire's collapse.

Napoleon made three costly mistakes. His first mistake was caused by his desire to crush Britain. He wanted to hurt the British economy. So in 1806 he ordered a **blockade**. This was an effort to stop all trade between Britain and the other European nations. Napoleon called this policy the **Continental System**. It was supposed to make continental Europe more self-sufficient.

The effort failed because some Europeans secretly brought in British goods. At the same time, the British put their own blockade around Europe. Because the British navy was so strong, it worked well. Soon the French economy, along with others on the European continent, weakened.

Napoleon's second mistake was to make his brother king of Spain in 1808. The Spanish people were loyal to their own king. With help from Britain, bands of peasant fighters called **guerrillas** fought Napoleon for five years. Napoleon lost 300,000 troops during this **Peninsular War**. (The war gets its name from the Iberian Peninsula on which Spain is located.)

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Napoleon’s third mistake was perhaps his worst. In 1812, he tried to conquer Russia, far to the east. He entered Russia with more than 400,000 soldiers. As the Russians retreated, however, they followed a **scorched-earth policy**. They burned their fields and killed their livestock so Napoleon’s armies could not eat what they left behind.

Although the French got as far as Moscow, winter was coming. Napoleon was forced to order his soldiers to head back. On the way home, bitter cold, hunger, and Russian attacks killed thousands. Thousands more deserted. By the time Napoleon’s army left Russian territory, only 10,000 of his soldiers were able to fight.

1. What happened to Napoleon in Russia?

Sweden, and Austria joined forces and attacked France. Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Leipzig, in Germany, in 1813. In 1814, Napoleon gave up his throne and was exiled, or sent away, to the tiny island of Elba off the Italian coast.

Louis XVIII took the throne in Paris. But he quickly became unpopular. The peasants feared the new king would undo the land reforms of the Revolution.

News of Louis XVIII’s trouble was all Napoleon needed to try to regain his empire. In March 1815, he escaped from Elba and boldly returned to France. He took power and raised another army.

The rest of the European powers raised armies to fight against Napoleon. Led by the Duke of Wellington, they defeated Napoleon in his final battle near a Belgian town called **Waterloo**. This defeat ended Napoleon’s last attempt at power, which was called the **Hundred Days**. He was then sent to the far-off island of St. Helena in the southern Atlantic Ocean. He died there in 1821.

2. What was Napoleon’s last attempt at power, and where did it end?

NAPOLEON’S DOWNFALL

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What other defeats did Napoleon suffer?

Other leaders saw that Napoleon was now weaker. Britain, Russia, Prussia,

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As you read about Napoleon’s downfall, write notes in the chart to explain how each action contributed to his final defeat.

1. Ordered a blockade to prevent trade and communication between Great Britain and other European nations	→	
2. Sent an army to invade Portugal and began the Peninsular War	→	
3. In June 1812, invaded Russia with his Grand Army	→	
4. Entered Moscow on September 14, 1812, and stayed in the ruined city for five weeks	→	
5. Raised another army and fought the Battle of Leipzig	→	
6. Escaped Elba, reclaimed title of emperor, and fought Battle of Waterloo	→	