

Read and Understand

1. What crisis did the French monarchy face in 1789?
2. What type of government did the National Assembly create, and why did it fail?
3. How did Napoleon gain an empire and lose it?
4. What mistakes caused Napoleon to lose power?

VOCABULARY estate, radical, coalition, coup, plebiscite, blockade, guerrilla, exile

The age of the French Revolution and Napoleon is one of the most studied eras in European history. Historians want to know why millions of French people suddenly rebelled against institutions that their ancestors had accepted for centuries. Historians have also debated the consequences of the French Revolution, many of which still affect the world today. Finally, historians analyze Napoleon's career as an example of the role of individuals in history.

The French monarchy faced a crisis.

Louis XVI became King of France in 1774, when he was only nineteen years old. Although kind and generous, he was not a strong leader. Neither Louis nor his young wife Marie Antoinette was prepared to deal with the serious social and economic problems that threatened France (chart, page 496).

The political and social institutions over which Louis ruled were known as the Old Regime. The Old Regime included three social classes or **estates**. The Roman Catholic clergy made up the First Estate. The Church owned about one tenth of all the land in France. Despite its wealth, the Church paid no direct taxes to the government. The Second Estate consisted of 400,000 nobles. By law, they paid no taxes, despite owning one fifth of the land. The nobles also held the highest offices in the Church, the army, and the government.

The remaining 98 percent of France's population belonged to the Third Estate. This estate included three distinct groups, all of whom disliked the Old Regime. The middle class, or bourgeoisie, included prosperous merchants, lawyers, and manufacturers. Although the bourgeoisie had great economic power, the Old Regime denied them social status and political power. A second group within the Third Estate was the urban workers, or *sans-culottes*. They worked long hours for low wages. When the price of bread rose, they became an unruly mob that often

erupted into violence. The largest group of the Third Estate was the peasants. They bitterly resented the taxes that took about half of their income.

The Third Estate looked to Louis for badly needed reforms. The king, however, was absorbed in a growing economic crisis. He had inherited a huge government debt, which he further increased by aiding the American Revolution and maintaining an expensive royal court at Versailles. By 1788, royal expenses exceeded income by 126 million livres a year. This huge deficit must have seemed unbelievable to peasants earning an average of 500 livres a year.

The king and his advisers hoped to avoid bankruptcy by taxing the First and Second Estates. The nobles, however, refused to pay taxes unless the king called a meeting of the Estates General, the parliament that had not met for hundreds of years. They expected to dominate the meeting and force the king to grant them powers similar to those held by the English Parliament. Louis reluctantly agreed. He called a meeting of the Estates General on May 1, 1789.

Among the members of the third estate, the meeting of the Estates General raised the hope for reform. Their leaders demanded that all three estates meet together, instead of separately, as was customary. When the king refused, the Third Estate changed its name to the National Assembly and took an oath promising not to disband until it had written a constitution. This act of defiance signaled the start of the French Revolution.

Louis XVI now faced a difficult decision. Should he support or oppose the National Assembly? After hesitating briefly, Louis ordered loyal troops to march toward Paris and Versailles. Paris mobs, alarmed by the king's order, responded by storming the Bastille, a prison fortress that held tons of gunpowder. The fall of the Bastille forced Louis to give up his plan of using force to control Paris and dissolve the National Assembly. A few months later thousands of poor women marched to Versailles and forced the royal family to return with them to Paris. The king and his family would never see Versailles again.

Revolution brought reform and terror.

The storming of the Bastille saved the National Assembly and doomed the Old Regime. In dramatic meetings on the evenings of August 4 and 5, 1789, the Assembly voted to end feudalism, serfdom, church tithes, and the special privileges of nobles and clergy.

"Liberty, equality, fraternity" became the slogan of the revolution. Three weeks later, the National Assembly issued the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. This document expressed many ideas drawn from the Enlightenment and the American Revolution. For example, it guaranteed all citizens equal justice, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion.

During the next two years, the National Assembly passed more than 2,000 laws as it sought to govern France. After lengthy debates, the Assembly finally announced France's first constitution. The Constitution of 1791 created a new government based upon a separation of powers. An elected assembly became the legislative branch. A new system of courts acted as the judicial branch. The king lost his absolute powers and became the head of the executive branch. The Constitution of 1791 marked a major step in the rise of democratic ideas. The French people were no longer subjects of an absolute monarch. Now, they were free citizens with a voice in their government.

Louis XVI reluctantly approved the new constitution. In June 1791, the royal family attempted to escape to the Austrian Netherlands, where they could join other political exiles who opposed the revolution. However, the escape failed. Louis's hasty action discredited both the king and the new constitution. It also led to more extreme measures. **Radical** reformers known as Jacobins wanted to remove the king and establish a republic. Nobles in France and in exile had a different plan. In the spring of 1792, Prussian and Austrian armies invaded France to end the revolution and restore absolutism.

The French people now rushed to defend their country. Patriotic citizen-soldiers drove the Austrians and Prussians out of France. Meanwhile angry mobs attacked the palace where the king lived. Although the royal family escaped, they soon became the prisoners of a new governing body called the National Convention. The National Convention promptly abolished the constitutional monarchy and declared France a republic. The delegates then found Louis guilty of treason and executed him.

News of the execution shocked monarchs throughout Europe. Their anxiety grew as victorious French armies promised to spread their revolutionary ideals abroad. Britain, Spain, and Portugal now joined Prussia and Austria in an alliance known as the **First Coalition**. Within a short time, the First Coalition threatened to invade France.

Led by Maximilien Robespierre, the Jacobin group in the National Convention took extreme measures to meet the new danger. Using a military draft, they created a force of 800,000 citizen-soldiers, the largest army yet raised in Europe. Led by dedicated officers, the French scored victory after victory. At the same time, Robespierre also unleashed a reign of terror to

destroy his enemies within France. As many as 40,000 people were executed in the Reign of Terror.

As the threat of foreign invasion declined, many moderates argued that the Terror had gone too far. Robespierre's enemies executed him and ended the Terror. Bourgeois leaders then formed a new government, the Directory, which tried to restore order.

Napoleon conquered much of Europe.

Napoleon Bonaparte was a 26-year-old officer when the Directory took power. After his childhood in Corsica, Napoleon attended a French military school and became a lieutenant in the king's army. Because nobles held the top positions, Napoleon could look forward to a career offering little chance of promotion. However, the citizen army opened new opportunities for ambitious officers.

Napoleon quickly demonstrated his military genius. In 1795, he helped defeat a royalist force that threatened the National Convention. The grateful government rewarded Napoleon by giving him command of an army assigned to fight Austria and the Kingdom of Sardinia. The young general promptly crossed the Alps and crushed his foes. On returning to Paris, he realized that the French people had lost confidence in the Directory. In 1799, Napoleon boldly led a **coup** that toppled the Directory. As France's new First Consul, Napoleon soon defeated the Second Coalition of Britain, Austria, and Russia.

Napoleon once boasted, "I am no ordinary man." French voters agreed. In a series of **plebiscites**, or popular elections, they gave their hero even greater powers. Finally, in 1804, voters overwhelmingly supported Napoleon's plan to make himself emperor. Although Napoleon pretended to be a democratically chosen ruler, he held all the power and made all the decisions. Thus he cleverly used democratic processes to destroy the democracy created by the Revolution.

Napoleon used his vast powers to restore order in France. To centralize finances and balance the government's budget, he created the Bank of France. Napoleon's proudest achievement was to merge more than 300 local legal systems into a unified national code of laws. When completed in 1804, the Napoleonic Code gave France its first national legal system. The code guaranteed religious toleration and granted equal rights before the law to people of all classes.

Napoleon was not content to control only France. When he began to extend his power into nearby countries, the British persuaded Russia, Austria, Sweden, and Prussia to form a third coalition to stop him. In a series of brilliant victories, Napoleon defeated the Third Coalition. His only defeat occurred in a naval battle off the southern coast of Spain. The victory of Britain's Lord Nelson at Trafalgar prevented

Napoleon from invading England and ensured British naval supremacy. Despite this loss, Napoleon now dominated Europe.

Napoleon's empire collapsed.

By 1810, Napoleon ruled an empire (map, page 495) that stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the border of Russia. As French armies marched across Europe, they abolished serfdom, introduced religious toleration, and spread the ideals of liberty and equality. Both Napoleon and his empire seemed invincible.

Like many conquerors, Napoleon did not recognize the limits of his power. As a result, he made three disastrous misjudgments that led to his downfall. His first mistake was to cut off all trade between Britain and the rest of Europe. Napoleon believed that this Continental System would cripple the British economy. However, his plan backfired when the British responded by stopping all ships bound for the continent. Since Britain still controlled the seas, its **blockade** hurt France and angered Napoleon's allies.

Napoleon's second error was to misjudge the power of nationalism. Just as nationalism had inspired France during the 1790's, it now stirred unrest against the French in Germany and Spain. In Spain, bands of peasant fighters known as **guerrillas** used a strategy of surprise attacks against French soldiers. In trying to stamp out the guerrillas, Napoleon lost 300,000 men.

Napoleon's thirst for power led to his greatest mistake. When Czar Alexander I of Russia refused to stop selling grain to Britain, Napoleon decided in 1812 to invade Russia. Napoleon confidently expected his Grand Army to crush the much smaller Russian force. Instead of fighting, however, the Russians retreated toward Moscow. As they withdrew, they burned grain and slaughtered livestock. This scorched-earth policy kept Napoleon's army from getting badly needed supplies. When Napoleon finally entered Moscow, he found it a smoking ruin. Grimly, he ordered his men to retreat. Even in retreat, they suffered from hunger, cold, and enemy attacks (graphic, page 498).

Sensing that Napoleon had been fatally weakened, Britain now formed a Grand Alliance against France. Members of this alliance sought to regain lands conquered by Napoleon and to invade France itself. Within a year, the allies had defeated Napoleon and **exiled**, or banished, him to Elba. In France, they restored the Bourbon family to power.

Despite these setbacks, Napoleon was not yet defeated. In 1815, he escaped from Elba and returned to France for a hundred days. A wave of enthusiasm swept across France as thousands joined Napoleon's army. When British and Prussian armies rushed toward France, Napoleon met them at a small Belgian village named Waterloo. There the opposing armies waged a

desperate battle, with the outcome remaining in doubt until the very end. Napoleon's exhausted troops finally retreated, thus ending his last bid for power. The British exiled Napoleon to St. Helena, an island in the South Atlantic. Napoleon died there six years later.

Chapter Review

Define estate, radical, coalition, coup, plebiscite, blockade, guerrilla, exile

Identify Louis XVI, Bastille, Estates General, Declaration of the Rights of Man, Maximilien Robespierre, Napoleon Bonaparte, Battle of Waterloo

Answer

1. (a) What were the three estates in France? (b) Why did the Third Estate dislike the Old Regime?
2. (a) What type of government did the National Assembly try to create? (b) Why did it fail?
3. (a) How did Napoleon rise to power? (b) Why did he fall from power?

Critical Thinking

4. Napoleon described himself as "a man of destiny."
(a) In what ways was Napoleon a product of his times? (b) In what ways did he affect the history of his times?

Connecting Past and Present

On July 14, 1989, more than a million people lined the Champs Élysées in Paris to celebrate the bicentennial of the fall of the Bastille. A worldwide audience of 700 million people viewed the spectacular parade and fireworks display on television.

As you have seen, the storming of the Bastille launched the French Revolution and helped to remove Louis XVI from power. The French Revolution, however, changed far more than that. It became a vast political and social upheaval that influenced events around the world. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity have inspired many oppressed peoples to revolt against tyranny.

While the French Revolution provided many reasons for celebrating, it also gave important warnings about the excesses of power. While claiming to defend liberty, Robespierre used the Reign of Terror to eliminate his rivals. Napoleon used democratic processes to destroy democracy and seize power. As you will see, Hitler and other modern dictators have also used those same strategies to gain power.

Unit VI Review: Linking Historical Themes

A number of influential leaders dominated European politics and thought during the period 1558 to 1815. This era also produced important cultural developments in England and France and major milestones in the rise of democratic ideas.

Individuals and History The period between 1558 and 1815 produced a number of people who played a key role in shaping modern history. Elizabeth I, Peter the Great, Louis XIV, Voltaire, and Napoleon were individuals whose actions had far-reaching consequences.

Elizabeth I and Peter the Great were rulers who identified and dealt with the great issues facing them. Elizabeth found a compromise for England's religious conflicts, checked the power of Spain, and ruled in cooperation with Parliament. Peter ended Russia's isolation by importing ideas from western Europe and gaining an outlet to the sea.

Unlike Elizabeth and Peter, Louis XIV and Napoleon failed to achieve their objectives. Both rulers held enormous power and tried to use it to dominate Europe. Ultimately their ambitions exceeded their economic and military resources. Both Louis and Napoleon faced crushing defeats.

Voltaire commanded ideas rather than wealth or power. His writings about reason, justice, and liberty helped to end the Old Regime and inspired democratic revolutions in America and France.

Cultural Development The early modern era saw the changes inspired by the Renaissance lead to cultural golden ages in England and France. England's victory over the Spanish Armada released a burst of confidence and pride. Prosperity from trade made London a vibrant setting for Shakespeare's work. His plays became masterpieces of world literature.

The golden age of France at Versailles owed its existence to the patronage of Louis XIV. The Sun King invited artists, playwrights, and composers to his palace. Royal courts throughout Europe imitated French styles of art and fashion.

Rise of Democratic Ideas The two and a half centuries between the crowning of Elizabeth I and the

fall of Napoleon mark an important era in the rise of democratic ideas. At the start of this era, most Europeans were subjects of absolute monarchs. When Louis XIV boasted, "I am the state," he expressed the prevailing view that placed the state above individuals and the ruler above the law.

The first major gains for democracy occurred in England. The long struggle between Stuart monarchs and Parliament ended in revolution and the execution of the king. The Habeas Corpus Act and the Bill of Rights established certain rights for individuals and Parliament. The 1700's saw the rise of parliamentary rule, the cabinet system, and leadership by the prime minister, who was head of the majority party.

Britain's success in limiting royal power inspired political thinkers in the Enlightenment. Both Rousseau and Jefferson argued that government is based on the consent of the governed. Montesquieu emphasized that powers in a government should be separated to avoid any threat to liberty.

The American and French revolutions translated the new political ideas into reality. The American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man identified individual liberties that governments must respect. The United States Constitution created a republic in which citizens had a voice in governing. Adding the Bill of Rights to the Constitution assured the protection of individual rights that are the basis of liberty.

Analyzing Historical Themes

1. (a) What individuals in this unit do you think had the greatest historical influence? (b) Does any of that influence still exist?
2. (a) What factors might account for the golden ages that developed in Elizabethan England and the France of Louis XIV? (b) Which age do you think was more enduring and why?
3. (a) What do you think were the main causes for the rise of democratic ideas as described in this unit? (b) What were the main effects?