Modern European History

Unit 6 - Revolutions

Napoleon Bonaparte Readings

**Who was Napoleon Bonaparte?**

*By Max Sewell*

Napoleon was born in Ajaccio, Corsica, on 15 August 1769, the second of Carlo and Letizia Bonaparte’s eight children. In 1778, Napoleon began his education at Autun and later attended school in Brienne, excelling in mathematics and science. Following a year’s study at the Ecole Militaire in Paris, he was commissioned in the artillery in 1785. The year 1789 saw the outbreak of the French revolution, which created an atmosphere of opportunity that would not have existed under the Bourbons, and Napoleon was to make the most of it.

The first opportunity came in 1793, when Bonaparte was promoted to brigadier general for the decisive part he played in the siege of Toulon, which ousted the British from mainland France. After the coup de Thermidor in 1794, Napoleon fell out of favor and was imprisoned. After his release he ended up preserving the new government from the Parisian Mob with artillery fire, an event that has become known as the ‘Whiff of Grapeshot.’ A grateful government later appointed Napoleon to command of the Army of Italy. Before his departure, Napoleon married Josephine de Beauharnais on 9 March 1796.

Campaigning in Italy in 1796 and 1797, he inspired the impoverished army with the promise of “honor, glory, and riches,” and enjoyed a succession of victories, which resulted in Austria signing the Peace of Campo Formio. His display of bravery, intelligence, and leadership proved an inspiration to the common soldier and formed an enduring bond. Returning to France, he was given charge of an expedition to Egypt, control of which would threaten English possessions in India. The victory at the Battle of the Pyramids gave French control of Cairo, but the naval defeat at Aboukir Bay isolated the expedition from France. After some unsuccessful campaigning in Syria, he departed by ship with a small group of friends and sailed to France, abandoning his Army.

In 1799, public sentiment had swung against the government, and following the coup d’etat de Brumaire, Napoleon became the defacto ruler of France. The country was still at war however, and after a dramatic crossing of the Alps, Napoleon defeated the Austrians at the battle of Marengo on 14 June 1800. This victory solidified his reputation of invincibility, and combined with other successes, led to a general peace.

After a decade of war, a grateful France made Napoleon Consul for Life and effective sovereign of the nation. Napoleon proved to be an equally skilled statesman and remodelled the country’s economy and administration. He signed a Concordat with the Pope in 1801 which restored religion to France, but his greatest achievement was the Civil Code which in part is still used today. His growing popularity resulted in his being proclaimed Emperor in 1804. At the coronation, Napoleon crowned himself, taking the crown from the Pope in a symbolic manner to show that power stemmed from the state and not the church as with previous monarchs.

It was an uneasy peace however, and plans were made to invade Britain by crossing the English Channel, but these were abandoned when Napoleon marched his highly trained Grand Armée into central Europe to meet the converging forces of Austria and Russia. Capturing a large part of the Austrian army at Ulm, Napoleon crossed the Danube to face the remaining Austrians and the Russians at Austerlitz. The result was a decisive victory known as the ‘Battle Of Three Emperors’ on 2 December 1805. Austria sued for peace, but a new coalition was formed of Britain, Russia and Prussia. Napoleon defeated the Prussians at Jena in 1806, and the Russians at Friedland in 1807.

Following these victories, Napoleon was at the pinnacle of his career. With a great display of pomp he met the Tsar of Russia at Tilsit and a new Franco/Russian alliance was born. Portions of Prussia were divided into new states, and Napoleon later announced a new policy of economic warfare that was to become known as the Continental System. Its goal was to destroy Britain’s economic dominance by closing all continental ports to British trade. In pursuit of this policy, Napoleon sent troops to conquer Britain’s ally Portugal and close the port of Lisbon. Following that success, he used those same troops to bully the Spanish King into abdicating in favor of his brother Joseph. The Spanish revolted and Britain landed an army in Portugal to support them. Napoleon marched the Grand Armée to the Peninsula, defeated the Spaniards and drove the British to the coast.

In 1809, another coalition was formed between Britain and Austria, forcing Napoleon to return and wage a campaign in Germany before Spain was pacified. Successful battles resulted in the French occupation of Vienna, but Napoleon suffered his first clear defeat in an attempt to cross the Danube at Aspern-Essling and come to grips with the Austrian army led by Archduke Charles. A later crossing led to victory at Wagram on 5-6 July 1809 and the signing of the Treaty of Schonbrunn.

Napoleon, still legally childless and desiring an heir for his growing empire reluctantly divorced Josephine and arranged a marriage with the daughter of the Austrian Emperor. She soon bore him a son, Napoleon II, christened the King of Rome on 20 March 1811.

Most of Europe was then an ally or under the direct control of France, but Spain and Portugal remained openly contested and large portions of the French army became embroiled in a long war that was to become known as the ‘Spanish Ulcer.’ Relations with Russia also deteriorated when the Tsar broke with the Continental System and in 1812 Napoleon invaded with a multinational army of 600,000 men. The battle of Borodino resulted in Napoleon’s occupation of Moscow, but he was unable to bring the Tsar to terms, and was soon forced to retreat. The ‘scorched earth’ policy employed by the Russians combined with extreme weather caused the Grand Armée to disintegrate and the campaign ended in disaster. The defeat in Russia prompted Prussia, Sweden, and Austria to declare war on France. Napoleon raised another army but was decisively defeated at the great Battle of Nations. Napoleon fought a last brilliant campaign in France to defend Paris, but in April 1814 abdicated and went into exile on the island of Elba. The Bourbon king was restored to the French throne.

While the Allies debated a realignment of the map of Europe in Vienna, Napoleon planned his return, and in March 1815, he landed in France and regained his throne in a bloodless coup. Rather than await another invasion, Napoleon surprised Allied forces in Belgium. After initial success, Napoleon fought the Duke of Wellington leading an Anglo/Allied army at Waterloo, and was decisively defeated on 18 June 1815. Napoleon was exiled to the island of St. Helena situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, where he resided until his death on 5 May 1821. His remains were removed from St. Helena in 1840 and his body now rests at les Invalides in Paris.

*http://www.napoleonseries.org/faq/who.cfm*

**Napoleon and Josephine**

John Schneider

Napoleon became a general at a very young age and was put in a position of authority where the generals and almost all other officers he commanded were older than him. He felt that this wasn’t a satisfactory situation and concluded that if he married a woman older than himself, he might claim to be older than he actually was and thereby obtain a little more respect from his officers. He also wanted to marry a rich, older woman.

After the battle of Toulon and after saving the Directory from the Paris mob, Napoleon was invited to a party given by one of the Directors, Paul Barras. In effect, Barras was the next best thing to being king of France at the time. Barras envisioned using Napoleon’s military talents for his own political and personal benefit. Barras also had at that time a mistress that he wanted to get rid of (Marie-Josephe-Rose de Beauharnais) because he had decided to take her best friend as his new mistress and couldn’t afford to keep both. He knew that Napoleon was looking for a wife. He therefore decided to marry his mistress off to Napoleon; however, he didn’t tell her this. He just told her that he wanted her to entertain Napoleon at the party and show an interest in him and praise his military skills. Well, this was all Napoleon needed. A beautiful woman fawning over him, apparently well to do, a member of the old aristocracy that had escaped the guillotine, she was older than himself but not too much (he thought), and she displayed keen interest in him (he thought). This, and a little urging from Barras after the party, was all that Napoleon needed to pursue her hand in marriage. Barras assured Napoleon that she had money, that she was a good catch, and that she would make a perfect wife for him.

Napoleon began to pursue Rose. By the way, he didn’t like her name so he told her he would call her Josephine. He pursued and pursued and Josephine kept humoring him. Finally, Barras strongly advised her to marry Napoleon. She said she would not. Then Barras told her that he had a new mistress, that he couldn’t afford to maintain them both, that she was very expensive to maintain, and that if she didn’t marry Napoleon he would stop providing for her and she would, in effect, be thrown out on the street. This was the one thing that Josephine couldn’t bear. She was a compulsive spender. Another concern was her two children, Eugene and Hortense. Therefore, she gave in and agreed to marry Napoleon. By the way, she was much older than Napoleon thought and, although she said she was still of child bearing age, knew that she was barren and had been so for some time.

They were married and a few days later Napoleon departed to Italy. He genuinely loved Josephine at this time. She despised him and thought he was a total bore. As soon as he was gone she began playing around on him. As time went on she had a string of lovers, pretended to miss him very much in response to his daily love letters, and did everything in her power to avoid going to join him in Italy as he was constantly urging. She even went so far as to pretend she was pregnant and couldn’t travel. All this time she was attending balls and parties and committing adultery. From time to time, when Napoleon begged her to join him, she required Barras’ assistance to convince Napoleon that she should not go. During this time some of Napoleon’s officers, Murat, for example, had returned to Paris for one reason or another and had occasion to attend one of Josephine’s parties or a party that she attended. In Murat’s case, Napoleon had sent him back to Paris with the express mission of escorting Josephine to Italy, willingly or unwillingly. This was when Josephine made up the pregnancy story, which Murat “took” back to Napoleon instead of Josephine. While in Paris, Murat also heard all the gossip about Josephine and how she was making a fool out of Napoleon. Finally, it got to the point where Napoleon was getting so edgy that Barras was afraid he would return to France and forget about the Italian Campaign. This didn’t suit Barras because he was making a lot of money out of that campaign. So he ordered Josephine to go to Napoleon. She did. Napoleon expected a pregnant Josephine. When she arrived she explained to him that she had had a miscarriage. He was torn with grief over losing his “son.”

Anyway, the Italian Campaign was finally over and Napoleon returned to Paris. Josephine had to be good (or at least try to be better) while he was there. Then Napoleon decided to go to Egypt. Barras thought this was a good idea because Napoleon was beginning to become too popular. When he left, Josephine went back to her old ways. Napoleon was still genuinely in love with her and doted over her. On 19 July 1798, while marching toward Cairo in the scorching sun, Bourrienne, Napoleon’s Secretary, out of the corner of his eye, noticed Napoleon and Junot walking together. Bourrienne wrote,

“I noticed Bonaparte walking alone with Junot. I was only a short distance away, but I do not know why my eyes fastened on him during that conversation. The general’s pale face was paler than ever. His features were suddenly convulsed, a wild look came into his eyes, and several times he struck his head with his fists!

Some fifteen minutes later, he left Junot and came toward me. I had never seen him so distraught, preoccupied. As I went to join him, he burst out with: “You are not genuinely devoted to me, or you would have told me what I have just learned from Junot. There’s a true friend for you. Josephine! And I six hundred leagues away! You should have told me! Josephine-this to have deceived me! Damn them, I shall exterminate that whole breed of fops and coxcombs! As for her, divorce! Yes divorce-a public divorce, open scandal! I must write immediately. I know everything. It’s your fault, you should have told me!”

Bourrienne reasoned the subject of the conversation between Junot and Napoleon, had no personal knowledge of this himself, and was certain that what Junot had stated to Napoleon must have been exaggerations of the truth. They were not. The fact is that many of Napoleon staff officers were aware of Josephine’s activities and it was common knowledge in Paris. Junot, unlike the rest of Napoleon’s close friends, never achieved the rank of Marshal of France but stopped at general. It is believed by many historians that Napoleon never forgave Junot for telling him about Josephine and for this reason withheld the rank of Marshal from him.

This information, once he confirmed it, totally destroyed Napoleon’s love for Josephine. From this time onward, he never really loved another woman the way he had loved Josephine. When Josephine learned that Napoleon was coming back from Egypt early and that he had found out about her, she panicked. She departed with her daughter, Hortense, to meet Napoleon at the port so that she could persuade him that she had been faithful. But Napoleon landed at another port and got back to Paris ahead of them. When Josephine got back to Paris, she found that Napoleon had arrived ahead of her and had secluded himself in a room in the house. All of a sudden, after all of her affairs, Josephine had finally fallen in love with Napoleon-very deeply. But she was too late. He wouldn’t see her until Hortense interceded and begged him to. Basically, he informed Josephine that she had killed his heart and that he could never love again.

They remained husband and wife but from that point onward he was not a faithful husband. Strangely, she had become a faithful wife. The tables had turned. Napoleon had mistress after mistress. Now, although Napoleon didn’t live Josephine, he did hold a deep devotion to her two children and he respected her abilities as a hostess and her persuasiveness in getting people to do things for him. He knew that while he was married to Josephine he could not produce a legitimate heir of his own, so eventually, when Hortense and his brother Louis had a son, Napoleon named him his heir.

Now that Napoleon had an heir he felt that he could divorce Josephine. Then, in December 1805, he became Emperor of the French. He brought the pope to Paris to perform the coronation. Shortly after the pope’s arrival Josephine accidentally let it slip that she and Napoleon had never had a church wedding, only a civil marriage. In the eyes of the church, therefore, they were not married and had been living in sin all this time. Napoleon was furious. Josephine had trapped him. Now, in order to be crowned Emperor he had to make the marriage respectable first and had to lay aside the design for divorce. Time marches on and so do the French armies, triumphantly across Europe.

Napoleon still wanted an heir of his own blood. Therefore, he began negotiations with the Czar Alexander of Russia to marry his sister. This would serve three purposes:

1. It would create a strong alliance with another major power

2. It would help to legitimize Napoleon’s somewhat shaky claim to royalty, and

3. It would give Napoleon a young wife whom could bear his heir.

Negotiations soon fell apart. Napoleon’s foreign minister, Talleyrand, did not want this alliance and made sure it wouldn’t occur by leaking information concerning Napoleon to the Russian Court. The Czar’s mother refused to let her daughter enter into the marriage. Therefore, Napoleon turned his sights on Austria. As you know, he arranged to marry Maria-Louisa (whom he renamed Marie Louise because he didn’t like her real name), who was the Emperor of Austria’s favorite daughter and an Archduchess of Austria. I won’t go into Marie Louise except to say that she was not at all what Napoleon had expected. (There are books about her and maybe one of these days you can read about her and how much of a disappointment she was.) Anyway, to marry Marie Louise he first had to divorce Josephine, which he did. However, he had grown to love her again-not the great love he held for her in the beginning-but a respectful love. He insisted that she retain the title of Empress and provided for her and her children.

In 1814, when Napoleon abdicated, Marie-Louise returned to Austria with her father, taking her son with her. Napoleon never saw them again. Josephine continued to love Napoleon and later in the year, as she was dying from diphtheria, Napoleon’s name was one of the last words she uttered, if not the last. Hortense and Eugene continued to be faithful to Napoleon.

*http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/napoleon/c\_napjos.html*

*To Josephine*

*Dec. 29, 1795*

*I awake all filled with you. Your image and the intoxicating pleasures of last night, allow my senses no rest.*

*Sweet and matchless Josephine, how strangely you work upon my heart.*

*Are you angry with me? Are you unhappy? Are you upset?*

*My soul is broken with grief and my love for you forbids repose. But how can I rest any more, when I yield to the feeling that masters my inmost self, when I quaff from your lips and from your heart a scorching flame?*

*Yes! One night has taught me how far your portrait falls short of yourself!*

*You start at midday: in three hours I shall see you again.*

*Till then, a thousand kisses, mio dolce amor! but give me none back for they set my blood on fire.*

*http://www.napoleonguide.com/lovejos1.htm*