Lesson 4 The Fall of Napoleon and the European Reaction

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
What causes revolution?
How does revolution change society?

Reading HELPDESK
Content Vocabulary
conservatism a political philosophy based on tradition and social stability, favoring obedience to political authority and organized religion
principle of intervention idea that great powers have the right to send armies into countries where there are revolutions to restore legitimate governments
liberalism a political philosophy originally based largely on Enlightenment principles, holding that people should be as free as possible from government restraint and that civil liberties—the basic rights of all people—should be protected

Academic Vocabulary
civil involving the general public or civic affairs
constitution the basic principles and laws of a nation, state, or social group that determine the powers and duties of the government and guarantee certain rights to the people in it

TAKING NOTES: Differentiating
1. ACTIVITY As you read, use the diagram below to summarize what led to Napoleon’s downfall and how leaders in Europe attempted to restore order.
IT MATTERS BECAUSE
After the disorder of the French revolutionary years and the final fall of Napoleon, European rulers wanted to return to a time of order. They wanted conservative governments and a balance of power among nations. Liberals and nationalists, however, struggled to achieve more liberal governments with freedoms guaranteed in a constitution, and to form new nations.

The Fall of Napoleon
GUIDING QUESTION How did Napoleon lose his empire?

Napoleon’s downfall began in 1812 when he decided to invade Russia. Within only a few years, he had totally lost power.

Russia had refused to remain in the Continental System. As a result, Napoleon decided to invade Russia to punish the country for ignoring his rule. He knew the risks of invading such a large country, but he also knew that if he did nothing, other nations would follow Russia’s lead.

Napoleon’s Grand Army of more than 600,000 men entered Russia in June of 1812. If Napoleon wanted to succeed, he had to win a quick victory over the Russians. The Russian forces refused to fight, however. Instead, they retreated for hundreds of miles. As they retreated, they burned their own villages and countryside to keep Napoleon’s army from finding food. When the Russians did fight at Borodino, Napoleon’s troops had a victory, but it was not a major one and it cost many lives.

When the Grand Army finally reached Moscow, they found the city on fire. The French army had little food and few supplies, and as a result, Napoleon abandoned the Russian capital in late October. As the winter snows began, Napoleon led the “Great Retreat” west across Russia. Thousands of soldiers starved and froze along the way. When the Grand Army finally arrived back in Poland in January 1813, there were fewer than 40,000 soldiers left.

The military disaster caused leaders in other European states to take action, and they attacked the crippled French army. Paris was captured in March 1814. Napoleon was soon exiled, or forced out of the country. He was sent to the island of Elba, off the northwest coast of Italy. The victorious powers restored monarchy to France. Louis XVIII, brother of the executed King Louis XVI, was put on the throne.

The new king of France had little support, and the French people were not ready to lose the glory of empire. Napoleon was not ready to give up either. Restless in exile, he left Elba and secretly came back into France. The new king sent troops to capture Napoleon. When the troops arrived, Napoleon opened his coat and addressed them directly. He declared that he was still their emperor, and he challenged the soldiers to kill him if they wanted.

No one fired a shot. Instead, the troops shouted, “Long live the Emperor!,” and they supported Napoleon. On March 20, 1815, Napoleon entered Paris in triumph.

Russia, Great Britain, Austria, and Prussia responded to Napoleon’s return. They promised to defeat the man they called the enemy of peace in the world. In the meantime, Napoleon gathered together another army. It contained devoted veterans who came from all over France. He then got ready to attack the allied troops across the border in Belgium.

At Waterloo in Belgium on June 18, 1815, Napoleon met a combined British and Prussian army under the Duke of Wellington. The French suffered a bloody defeat. This time, the victorious allies exiled Napoleon to St. Helena, a small island in the south Atlantic. Napoleon remained in exile until his
death in 1821, but the memory of Napoleon remained a part of French political life for many
decades.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

2. **Analyzing** How did Napoleon’s disaster in Russia affect both his Grand Army and the French nation?

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**European Reaction**

**GUIDING QUESTION** Why did the turmoil of the French revolutionary years result in a conservative European reaction?

After the defeat of Napoleon, European rulers moved to restore the old order. This was the goal of
the victors—Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. They met at the Congress of Vienna in
September 1814 to arrange a final peace settlement.

The Austrian foreign minister Prince Klemens von Metternich (MEH•tuhr•nihk) was the most
influential leader at that meeting in Vienna. Metternich claimed the principle of legitimacy guided
him. By this, he meant that he wanted the monarchs from the royal families who had ruled before
Napoleon to return to power. The Congress believed that this return to the past order would
ensure peace and stability in Europe. The victorious powers had already restored the Bourbon king
to the French throne in 1814 as King Louis XVIII.

Concerns about power on the part of European countries were addressed at the Congress of
Vienna. The great powers rearranged territories in Europe. They believed that this would establish
a new balance of power. They wanted to keep any one country from dominating Europe. In order
to do so, they had to balance political and military forces to make sure all of the victorious
countries would remain independent. For example, Russia had gained territories. To balance Russia's
gains, Prussia and Austria were given new territories.

The decisions of the Congress of Vienna were a victory for those who wanted to hold back the
forces of change that the French Revolution had started. Leaders like Metternich believed in the
political philosophy known as **conservatism**. Conservatism is based on tradition, and it values
social stability.

Most conservatives at that time supported obedience to political authority, such as a monarch.
They also believed that organized religion was necessary to keep order in society. Conservatives
feared revolutions, and they would not accept demands from people who wanted either individual
rights or representative governments.

To maintain the new balance of power, Great Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria (and later
France) agreed to meet at conferences. At these conferences, the states discussed their common
interests and how to maintain peace in Europe. These meetings came to be called the **Concert of
Europe**.

Over time, the great powers adopted a **principle of intervention**. According to this principle, the
great powers had the right to send armies into other countries. If there was a revolution in another
country, they could send troops there to restore legitimate monarchs to their thrones. The British refused to accept the principle, however. British leaders argued that no country should interfere in the internal affairs of other states. The other countries, however, acted on the principle, and they used military forces to stop revolutions in Spain and Italy.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

3. **Identifying Central Issues** Why did European leaders think it was important to apply conservatism at the Congress of Vienna?

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**Forces of Change**

**GUIDING QUESTION** What happened to revolutionary ideas after the French Revolution was over?

Between 1815 and 1830, conservative governments throughout Europe worked to maintain the old order. However, powerful forces for change also were at work. Liberalism and nationalism were sweeping across Europe.

Liberalism is a political philosophy that grew out of the Enlightenment. Liberals believed that people should be as free as possible from government control. Liberals believed that civil liberties—the basic rights of all people—must be protected.

These civil liberties included equality before the law. That is, everyone deserved to be treated in the same way by the government. Civil liberties also included freedom of assembly, speech, and the press. Liberals believed that all these freedoms should be guaranteed by a written document. The American Bill of Rights is an example of such a document.

Many liberals favored a government ruled by a **constitution**. This belief was called constitutionalism. For example, in a constitutional monarchy, a king must follow the laws of the constitution. Liberals believed that written documents would help guarantee people’s rights.

Most liberals wanted all religions to be tolerated, or allowed to be practiced. They opposed churches established by the government. They wanted separation of church and state. Liberals also demanded the right to peacefully oppose, or speak out against, the government. They believed that a representative assembly (legislature) elected by qualified voters should make laws. These liberal ideals were like republicanism. Republicanism is the belief that a government’s power comes from the rule of law and the citizens who are allowed to vote.

Liberals at this time, however, did not believe that everyone had a right to vote. They thought only men who owned property should have the right to vote and hold office. Liberalism was favored by middle-class men, especially those who ran industries and businesses. They wanted voting rights for themselves so that they could share power with the landowning classes. The liberals feared mob rule, and they had little desire to have the lower classes share political power.

Nationalism was an even more powerful force for change. Nationalism arose when people began to see themselves as part of a community or a nation. This community had its own languages,
institutions, and customs. In earlier centuries, people’s loyalty was to the king or to their own town or region. In the nineteenth century, people began to feel that their main loyalty was to the nation. Nationalism did not become a popular force for change until the French Revolution. From then on, nationalists came to believe that each nationality should have its own government. For example, the Germans were separated into many principalities, or small states. They wanted national unity, and a German nation-state with one central government for all Germans. People under the rule of a different country wanted the right to establish their own governments. For example, the Hungarians wanted their own ruler, not the Austrian emperor.

Nationalism, then, was a threat to the existing order. A united Germany, for example, would upset the balance of power established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. In the same way, an independent Hungarian state would mean the breakup of the Austrian Empire. Conservatives feared such changes, and they tried to repress nationalism.

Nationalists gained a great deal of support from liberals. Most liberals believed only people who ruled themselves could be free. Each group of people should have its own state.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

4. **Identifying** Why did nationalism become popular after the French Revolution?

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Answer Key


2. The Grand Army was annihilated, and Napoleon was sent into exile and the monarchy was restored.

3. They saw the revolution as affecting Europe adversely. A monarch had been executed and Napoleon conquered Europe.

4. People could identify themselves as national groups and, consequently, should have their own countries.