Why start with Napoleon?

Arc de Triomphe (started in 1807)
Paris, France (photo 2005)
Dr. Rebecca L. Spang  
History Dept., Ballantine 711  
Office Hours: Mon., 2:00-3:30  
rlspang@indiana.edu

Jennifer Boles  
Assistant Instructor  
jboles@umail.iu.edu

Today’s class structure
Sample lecture: Why Napoleon?  
Course mechanics: website, requirements, discussion classes

“Europe and the Spirit \((\text{genius})\) of Europe,”  
Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Milan (Italy), 1860s.
Why start with Napoleon?

fascinating and easily recognized heroic figure

understood by referring to the past

Hannibal (general from Carthage—modern-day Tunisia—who crossed Alps and defeated Roman Republic in approx. 180 BCE)

Charlemagne (“Frankish” emperor who conquered much of Italian peninsula and created an empire covering much of Western and Central Europe, 800)

Jacques Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1800). oil painting (approx 10.5 x 7 feet)
Questions about Napoleon Bonaparte

WHO was he?

WHAT did he do?

WHY does it matter to us? (significance)

HOW have people explained what happened? (interpretation)

Rowlandson, “The Beast as described in the book of Revelations, chapter 13, resembling Napoleon Buonaparte” (1808)

13:1 Then I saw a beast come out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads; on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads blasphemous names...
13:3 Fascinated, the whole world followed after the beast. …
13:7 …and it was granted authority over every tribe, people, tongue, and nation.

History 104: some basic types of historical questions, developed with reference to Napoleon
Napoleon Bonaparte

1769 born “Napoleone Buonaparte” in Corsica
1779-1784 attends Royal Military School (on scholarship)

Jan. 1796 commander-in-chief of Italian Army
1798-1799 invades Egypt with 35,000 soldiers and 165 scholars, artists, writers

9 Nov. 1799 military, political coup brings Bonaparte to power as part of “Consulate”

May 1804 Referendum makes him “Emperor Napoleon”
Napoleon Bonaparte

1807-1808  French Empire extends to its largest
1812     attempted invasion of Russia (fails)
1814  Napoleon abdicates; sent into exile in Elba

1815  Napoleon returns to rule for “100 Days”;
       defeated at Waterloo, imprisoned on St. Helena

1821  dies in St. Helena;
1840  remains returned to France

Questions about Napoleon: WHO?
Napoleon: The Heroics of Failure

Minard’s graph (1861) depicting Napoleon’s invasion of Russia, 1812

\[ \text{tan} = \text{size of Napoleon’s “Great Army” on the way into Russia} \]
\[ \text{black} = \text{size of Army on return} \]

Questions about Napoleon: WHO?
Some factors contributing to Bonaparte’s successes

war of movement
• biggest armies known in European history, divided into semi-autonomous *divisions*
• used *where* battle was fought as strategy

loyal soldiers
• paid them in hard cash by demanding that conquered states paid tribute
  (this ensured that armies were paid in locally accepted money)
• ideology of merit

Image management, as exemplified by creation of military press (*Great Army Bulletin*) and invasion of Egypt

David, *Distribution of the Eagles in 1804* (1810), detail
Bonaparte in Egypt

“Soldiers! You have come to these lands in order to pull them from barbarism, to bring civilization to the Orient, and to free this beautiful part of the world from English control. We are going into battle. Remember that from the top of these monuments, forty centuries are watching you…”

Bonaparte to the French troops, July 1798.

Questions about Napoleon: WHAT?
WHY is Napoleon Bonaparte significant for *modern* history?

meritocracy, genius, the self-made man

23 years of war (1792-1815) makes peace and stability a European priority

invasion of Egypt and modern “Orientalism”

Questions about Napoleon: WHY?
Bonaparte, Egypt, and Orientalism

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon a distinction made between “the Orient” and the West… It is an institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, ruling over it…


The multivolume *Description of Egypt* and special desk made to hold it

Questions about Napoleon: WHY?
“Orientalism” makes the West historically important by denying that other people have their own history.

Antoine-Jean Gros, *Napoleon visiting the plague stricken at Jaffa, 1799 (1804)*, detail

Questions about Napoleon: WHY?
Napoleon, For and Against

David, *Napoleon in his Study* (1812)

Angell, “The Corsican Usurper’s New Imperial Arms” (1803)

Questions about Napoleon: HOW was he understood?
Napoleon, For and Against

This question—as to the *means* whereby freedom develops itself into a world—leads us to history itself... The great men in history are those whose own particular aims contain the substantial will that is the will of the World Spirit. They can be called *heroes*, because they have drawn their aim and their vocation not merely from the calm and orderly system that is the sanctified course of things, but rather from a source that is hidden. ... The final destiny of these world-historical individuals is by no means happy... But world history is not the place for happiness. Periods of happiness are empty pages in history, for they are periods of harmony, times when the antithesis is missing.


“This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased”
(satire of baptism of Jesus in book of Matthew)
German caricature, c. 1813

Questions about Napoleon: HOW was he understood?
Course Requirements:

- reading (background textbook and sources)
- attendance and thoughtful participation
- completion of all written work
  - four responses to Reading Questions
  - two midterm exams
  - one final exam
  - two papers (only for students taking the course for Honors credit)
Europe from Napoleon to the PRESENT

If you miss more than two discussion classes, you will be in danger of failing the course—regardless of your other grades. If you attend but do not engage constructively in the conversation, you will receive at best a “C” grade for participation.

Wednesdays 1:25-2:15 (Sy 002)
Wednesdays 1:25-2:15 (Bu 429; Dr. Spang) only 5 students
Wednesdays 3:35-4:25 (JH A107)

Thursdays 9:05-9:55 (FR C147B; only 7 students)
Thursdays 11:15-12:05 (Sy 001)