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The Effects of the Napoleonic Wars

The Napoleonic Wars were a series of wars that raged all across Europe in the early 19th century, starting in 1803 and ending in 1815, killing over three and a half million people in total. These wars were all fought by France against many different nations, and was one of the first wars that spanned all of Europe. The Napoleonic Wars affected Europe in many economic, political, and social manners, even after the wars were concluded and soldiers went home.

In order to be able to study the effects of the Napoleonic Wars on post-war Europe, it is essential for one to first know the history of the wars and how they started. Napoleon Bonaparte was born on August 15, 1769 on the island of Corsica to an impoverished family. He went to school on the mainland of France, where he learned French and likely where he adopted his French identity from that would later propel him to become the emperor of France. After his education, he went to a military academy, then he became a lieutenant in the French Army. He was at home on Corsica for much of the French Revolution, but later fled with his family back to the mainland during the Reign of Terror. Upon returning to mainland France, the Army promoted him to the rank of general and after a brief period of house arrest, the army asked him to lead a series of attacks set forth by the Directory (the French government at the time). In November of 1799, Napoleon was part of a military coup that overthrew the Directory and replaced it with a three-person consul, with Napoleon himself as the most powerful of the three. He later made a

constitutional amendment which put him in this position for life, then crowned himself as the Emperor of France in 1804. Before he was even crowned as the emperor, he began his campaign of wars across Europe. He suffered both major victories and major defeats in his early years of fighting, such as the Battle of Austerlitz and the Battle of Trafalgar, respectively. The victory of Napoleon at Austerlitz was a crushing defeat to the Russians and Austrians, and is ultimately what dissolved the Holy Roman Empire for good. In its place, Napoleon created the Confederation of the Rhine, a puppet government that he could easily control. In 1806, Napoleon began a campaign of economic warfare against the British, as he could not simply invade the British isles. He prevented any countries and territories that he controlled from trading with the British, thus creating a very difficult time for the British. Napoleon's final defeat came as a result of an attempted invasion of Russia, during which the brutal Russian winter forced Napoleon to retreat, as his troops were ill prepared for such climate. After a final defeat at the hands of the British, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russians, Napoleon abdicated the throne, not by his own choice, and was exiled to the island of Elba. After only about a year of exile, however, he returned to mainland France and gathered his remaining loyal troops, returned to Paris, and attempted to regain control of France. This campaign did not last long, however, as the British crushed him just 100 days after returning to France in the Battle of Waterloo, and forced to abdicate the throne again and returned into exile. Throughout the twelve years that the Napoleonic Wars raged, the wars affected almost the entire continent of Europe, and some of these effects lingered for long after Napoleon was exiled and even continued on after his death in 1821.

The most obvious effects of the Napoleonic Wars on post-war Europe are the political effects, both on France and on the rest of Europe. In Britain, during the war, mass enlistment (similar to the draft in the United States today) was required in order to fight off the threat of Napoleon invading the British Isles. This likely (although it is not well documented if it happened) would have caused major strife in the working class people, those who would be enlisted into the army against their will. This could have flared up again after the war was over and the threat was gone, much as it did after the Vietnam War in the United States during the 1960's and 1970's. France, however, was the victim of the largest political change after the wars. When Napoleon took power and crowned himself the emperor, he reinstated the French aristocracy, which was eliminated in the French Revolution. He also made France an empire again, instead of the democracy that the French Revolution had been striving to create. Within France, however, there were not only negative effects, there were also some positive ones. Some of these positive effects included the Napoleonic Code, which codified all French laws, centralizing the federal government, and instituting sweeping reforms in areas such as education and banking. An extremely obvious and prominent impact on Europe that the wars had was the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, which had been a union of Germanic states in Europe since the Middle Ages. When Napoleon invaded the area, he made a puppet government that he could control there, so that he would have another ally and a buffer between France itself and any enemy nations wishing to invade. While not a direct effect on any one nation or people, a very prominent effect (which would prove itself more over time) is the establishment of nationalism in Europe. The Napoleonic Wars set in stone the ideas and principles of nationalism, which would eventually rear its head again as the Nationalist Social Party (Nazi Party) in

Germany in the 1930's. While many countries were easily able to bounce back soon after the war, and not have their political heads disorganized too much directly after the war, there were some effects that the wars had on these countries that would last for many decades to come.

The second most prominent effect of the Napoleonic Wars on Europe were those in the economic sphere. As previously mentioned, instead of simply attempting to invade Britain by force with his army, Napoleon decided to blockade Britain and cease all trade with the island from all of his territories on Continental Europe. This caused some major repercussions for Britain both during and afterwards. The worst of these effects, however, did not directly come from the blockade from France, but rather than the forces of nature, helped along by the French blockade. In his journal *the Economic Condition of Europe After the Napoleonic War*, J. H. Clapham says "In the latter part of 1815 (December) wheat fell in England ... although no grain imports were allowed, except of oats" (Clapham, 323). This shortage of food would cause many people to starve to death, which would make the manufacturing sector of Britain far weaker than it was before the wars, even though at the time it was mostly still cottage manufacturing, done in small quantities in the home. On France fell another serious economic burden, one that would be repeated several times throughout history, and one which never resulted in a positive outcome. After the war, the victors of the wars decided that France would be required to pay war reparations of 28 million British pounds (in 1815 currency, or ~2.5 billion American dollars in 2018). Out of all of the countries in Europe, however, the Confederation of the Rhine (modern-day Germany, former Holy Roman Empire) was affected the worst. Before the war, the area was almost completely rural, and due to this, the infrastructure of the region was somewhat lagging behind that of the rest of Europe. Not many paved roads existed, and after the war, what roads

were in place were almost completely destroyed. Due to this, combined with the famine after the war, many of the German states were struggling to feed their people. The destruction of the roads made it difficult to transport food from the farms around the region to where it needed to go for trade, and it made the mail almost impossible to distribute when the winter snows came. All of this created a very bad recession in the German states (as well as all across Europe, but it was the worst in the German states), which then led to starvation and widespread death.

The social impacts of the Napoleonic Wars are perhaps the most difficult to discuss. These kinds of effects are generally not documented as well as those of the political and economic spheres, as those are very objective areas of study, whereas the human behavior is not. There were two social effects found that can be generally assumed to be resultant of the Napoleonic Wars. One of these was on the United States of America, and the other was on Britain (although there are very likely to be others as well). During the blockade against the British by the French, Britain started impressing American soldiers into the British navy. This could be taken to have been a result of the French blockade, and the British Navy's need for more sailors and more goods in order to help supply the island nation during this blockade. The second effect is that on the British. Soon after the end of the wars, in 1817, about 300,000 British sailors were discharged and sent back home to their families. This would have greatly affected the lives of many British citizens, considering that the total population of England at the time was roughly 11 and a quarter million. This returning home of about 2% of the entire nation's population could have created a baby boom and added many people back into the British workforce.

The Napoleonic Wars (1803 - 1815) drastically affected the entire western world, but they affected Europe the most, especially continental Europe. Both during and after the wars, there were lasting political, economic, and social effects on the nations and the people of Europe at the time, and for many decades to come.

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