

## Napoleon: Success or Failure

### Part A.

**Directions:** Determine which of the following activities of Napoleon were successes and which were failures. Explain the reasons for your choices.

| Activity                              | Success or Failure | Reasons |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| 1. Creation of republics              |                    |         |
| 2. Continental System                 |                    |         |
| 3. Concordat of 1801                  |                    |         |
| 4. Abolition of serfdom and feudalism |                    |         |
| 5. Invasion of Russia                 |                    |         |
| 6. Code Napoleon                      |                    |         |
| 7. Aggrandizement of his family       |                    |         |
| 8. Nationalism                        |                    |         |
| 9. Economic stimulation               |                    |         |

| <b>Activity</b>                               | <b>Success or Failure</b> | <b>Reasons</b> |
|---|---------------------------|----------------|
| 10. Manipulation of law and religion          |                           |                |
| 11. Great military conquests                  |                           |                |
| 12. 1,000,000 French casualties               |                           |                |
| 13. Treaty of Tilsit                          |                           |                |
| 14. Egyptian campaign                         |                           |                |
| 15. Centralized authority                     |                           |                |
| 16. Legion of Honor                           |                           |                |
| 17. Political repression                      |                           |                |
| 18. Financial exploitation of conquered lands |                           |                |

| Activity                           | Success or Failure | Reasons |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| 19. Religious toleration           |                    |         |
| 20. Waterloo                       |                    |         |
| 21. Public works                   |                    |         |
| 22. Contempt for humankind         |                    |         |
| 23. Public education system        |                    |         |
| 24. Monarchical corruption         |                    |         |
| 25. Abolition of Holy Roman Empire |                    |         |
| 26. Battle of Trafalgar            |                    |         |

**Part B.**

**Directions:** Read the following background on the authors and their evaluations of Napoleon. Then answer the questions that follow in preparation for class discussion.

**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on Napoleon**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) was a leading German author and polymath whose collected works fill more than 140 volumes. He searched for the mysteries of nature and human experience in his lyrics and verse and considered the political order in *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* and *Faust*. In *Werther*, Goethe explained that despair was the only reaction one could have in the face of the Old Order, while in *Faust* he preserved the Romantic notion of the pursuit of supernatural power. Like his fellow Romantics, he viewed the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon as the dawn of a new and heroic epoch that would usher in a new world.

Now Napoleon—there was a fellow! Always enlightened by reason, always clear and decisive, and gifted at every moment with enough energy to translate into action whatever he recognized as being advantageous or necessary. His life was the stride of a demigod from battle to battle and from victory to victory. . . . [I]t could . . . be said that he was in a permanent state of enlightenment, which is why his fate was more brilliant than the world has ever seen or is likely to see after him.<sup>1</sup>

**John Adams on Napoleon**

John Adams (1735–1826), a well-read teacher and lawyer, championed American independence when British measures infringed on colonial liberties and self-government. He wrote most of the Massachusetts State Constitution and its Bill of Rights, and served as Federalist President of the United States during the stormy years of trouble with France in the late 1790s. Adams distrusted popular government and strove to create and maintain dignity, ritual, and authority in his administration. Despite the counsel from many in his party to pursue war with France after the XYZ affair, Adams chose an independent course of military preparedness and diplomatic negotiations. His preference for neutrality over war and military conquest precipitated a split in his party and cost him his chance for a second term. Adams later considered his success in avoiding war with France the major accomplishment of his presidency.

What a mighty bubble! What a tremendous Waterspout has [Napoleon] been according to his Life, written by himself? He says he was the Creature of the Principles and manners of the Age. By which no doubt he means the Age of Reason. . . . I believe him. A Whirlwind raised him and a Whirlwind blowed him a way to St. Helena. He is very confident that the Age of Reason is not past; and so am I; but I hope that Reason will never again rashly and hastily create such Creatures as him. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and Humanity will never again, I hope, blindly surrender themselves to an unbounded Ambition for national Conquests, nor implicitly commit themselves to the custody and Guardianship of Arms and Heroes. If they do, they will again end in St. Helena. . . .<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, quoted in *The Horizon Book of the Age of Napoleon*, J. Christopher Herold (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1963), 377.

<sup>2</sup>John Adams, quoted in *The Horizon Book of the Age of Napoleon*, 378.

1. Explain how each individual's assessment of Napoleon reflects his (Goethe's or Adams's) major interests or concerns.
2. Napoleon has been described as a hero, an opportunist, a patriot, or a revolutionary. Based on your evidence, in which category would you place him? Justify your answer.
3. Our concerns and interests tend to shape our view of history. People who are fascinated by military tactics will focus on Napoleon's battles and strategies, points which would be of little interest to a person whose major concerns took a humanitarian direction. Which of the following perspectives best represents your own concerns and interests: politics, the military, social justice, or economics?
4. What aspects of Napoleon's career would each of these four perspectives—politics, the military, social justice, and economics—highlight?