

# Napoleon's rise to power



**The Paris Times**  
November 8, 1799

**The Reign of Terror in France has finally ended! The latest victim of the guillotine was Robespierre himself! Under the new constitution of 1795, a five member committee made up of conservative leaders called the Directory was created to restore order in France. But the Directory has proven to be corrupt and useless! It has not solved the financial problems of the country. Bread prices are starting to rise again and the people are thinking about rioting. Internationally, we are still at war and Frenchmen are dying everyday! What are we going to do?**

*What problems did France face after the Reign of Terror? What kind of leader might France need to help solve these problems?*

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## Napoleon Senses Opportunity

The conservative members of the Directory could not effectively deal with the continuing war and poverty. Sensing an opportunity, Napoleon Bonaparte, an experienced Army commander, went to Paris. He had commanded the French Army in Italy where his successes against England and Austria gained him much popularity. In October of 1795 Napoleon was asked to quell a crowd of angry Persians who were trying to topple the Republic. Napoleon used all his weapons. He killed about a hundred people, but the riot was over in less than an hour. Below, Napoleon describes the situation in his own words:



"They put the matter in my hands, and then set to discussing whether or not I had the right to repel force by force. "Do you intend to wait?" said I, "until the people give you permission to fire at them?" You have appointed me, and I am compromised. It is only fair that I should do the business my own way. On that I left the lawyers to drown themselves in their flood of words, and got the troops on the move."

*What is Napoleon's view on handling the current chaos in France? What is his criticism of the Directory?*

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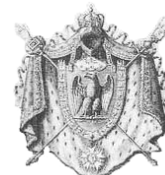
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## Napoleon as Politician

**DIRECTIONS:** *With a partner, create a timeline in your notebook which shows the chain of major events that led to Napoleon's rise to political power\**

By 1799, the Directory had lost control of the political situation and the confidence of the French people. Only the directors' control of the army kept them in power. Upon Napoleon's return from Egypt, many urged him to seize political power. Napoleon and Josephine, his lovely socialite wife, set a plan in motion. Napoleon met with influential persons to discuss his role in the Directory, while Josephine used her connections with the wealthy directors to influence their decisions. The action began on November 9, 1799, when Napoleon was put in charge of the entire military. It ended the next day when his troops drove out the members of one chamber of the national legislature. The legislature voted to dissolve the Directory. In its place, the legislature established a group of three consuls, one of whom was Napoleon. Napoleon quickly assumed dictatorial powers as the first consul of the French republic. A sudden seizure of power like Napoleon's is known as a coup from the French phrase *coup d'etat* (KOO day.TAH), or "blow of state." At the time of Napoleon's coup, France was still at war. In 1799, British diplomats assembled the Second Coalition of anti-French powers Britain, Austria, and Russia with the goal of driving Napoleon from power. Once again, Napoleon rode from Paris at the head of his troops. Eventually, as a result of war and diplomacy, all three nations signed peace agreements with France. By 1802, Europe was at peace for the first time in ten years. Napoleon was free to focus his energies on restoring order in France. On August 2 1802, the senate proclaimed Napoleon Bonaparte "Consul for life" following a plebiscite (a popular election) which three and a half million (3,500,000) Frenchmen voted in favor of the proposal and only eight thousand (8,000) people voted against him. With this vote of confidence in Napoleon, he begins organizing his new France.



## The Coronation of Emperor Napoleon

In 1804, he decided to become Emperor. Again, the people supported his actions. The Pope wanted to crown him in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Traditionally, the Pope would place the crown on the head of the new ruler. However, Napoleon took the crown from the Pope and placed it on his own head.



*Why did Napoleon take the crown from the Pope and place it on his own head? What does this say about the power of the Church?*

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### Napoleon's Personality

*With a partner, write a brief newspaper editorial (in your notebook) describing the personality of Napoleon Bonaparte. Use at least two references from the quotes below to back up your views.*

IN NAPOLEON'S OWN WORDS	ACCORDING TO SOME WITNESSES
<p>A) "I shall be considered an extraordinary man. I have fought fifty battles, almost all of which I have won."</p> <p>B) "Many began to shout with enthusiasm: Viva Bonaparte! Here are men who are moved by my presence. They would do anything for me."</p> <p>C) "My power proceeds from my reputation, and my reputation proceeds from my victories."</p> <p>D) "If there are problems with a government that is too strong, there are many more with a government that is too weak."</p> <p>E) "The Revolution is over. I am the revolution."</p>	<p>A) "He always derived amusement from causing any one uneasiness and distress. His great general principle, which he applied to everything... was that there could be no zeal (enthusiasm) where there was no disquietude (insecurity)"</p> <p>B) "He utterly lacked patience to do anything whatever with his own hands." - Madame de Rémusat: From Memoirs</p> <p>C) "Napoleon had two ruling passions, glory and war"</p>

*Was Napoleon the kind of leader that France needed? Why or why not?*

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