

Chapter 19 Viewpoint Activity

Napoleon was a hero to many people in France, but others saw him as a tyrant (text-book page 494). One writer who bitterly opposed him—and was exiled from France—was Madame Germaine Necker de Staël (1766–1817). Napoleon’s soldiers, on the other hand, admired him, as the speech made by one of his officers on his return to Paris in 1815 shows. ♦ *As you read, think about what may have motivated each writer. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Two Views of Napoleon

Madame de Staël What particularly characterizes Bonaparte’s government is his profound contempt for all the intellectual riches of human nature: virtue, dignity, religion, enthusiasm; in his eyes they are “the eternal enemies of the continent,” to use his favorite expression. He would like to persuade men by force and by cunning, and he considers all else to be stupidity or folly. . . .

I do not believe that when Bonaparte became head of the government he had yet formulated the plan for a universal monarchy, but I do believe what he himself said to one of my friends, a few days after the 18 Brumaire [the date Napoleon overthrew the Directory]. “It is necessary,” he said, “to do something new every three months, in order to captivate the imagination of the French nation, with whom anyone who stands still is lost.” His system was to encroach [intrude] daily upon France’s liberty and Europe’s independence. . . . By alternating between cunning and force he has subjugated [conquered] Europe.



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Marshal Michel Ney Officers, sub-officers, soldiers! The cause of the Bourbons is lost forever. The legitimate dynasty France has adopted is about to remount the throne.

To the emperor Napoleon, our sovereign, belongs alone the right to rule over our beautiful country. Whether the Bourbon nobility choose to return to exile or consent to live among us, what does it matter to us? The times are gone when the people were governed by suppressing their rights. Liberty triumphs in the end, and Napoleon, our august emperor, comes to confirm it. Soldiers, I have often led you to victory. Now I would escort you to join this immortal legion which the Emperor Napoleon conducts to Paris, and which in a few days will reach the capital.

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Sources: (1) *Ten Years of Exile*, by Madame de Staël, trans. Doris Beik (Saturday Review Press, 1972); (2) *The French Revolution and Napoleon: An Eyewitness History*, by Joe H. Kirchberger (Facts on File, 1985).

Questions to Discuss

1. What does Madame de Staël say are Napoleon’s only methods of persuasion?
2. What does Marshal Ney say about Napoleon’s right to rule as opposed to that of the Bourbon kings?
3. **Making Comparisons** Both these writers speak about Napoleon and people’s liberty. How do their views compare?