

NAPOLEON THE GREAT PDF, EPUB, EBOOK



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Why Napoleon merits the title 'the Great' - HistoryExtra

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The man who had conquered Europe and enjoyed the attentions of over 20 mistresses while doing so, was alone with a handful of retainers with nothing to do but write his memoirs. Still he did not collapse, enjoying playing children's games with the kids of the locals, who appreciated him as one would a fun grandpa. Hundreds of thousands died during his time in power, but what a guy! May 01, Philipp rated it it was amazing Shelves: biography, france, war. If you're looking for an overview of Napoleon's life and google around, this is usually the biography you end up finding, readable, engaging, thrilling, more than pages long. Roberts is a military historian, so the focus is definitely on military action, less on other interesting aspects of Napoleon's life like, for example, the specific art style of the Napoleonic era.

The majority of this book's maps are maps of battlefields and positions, the largest part of the text is descriptions of the If you're looking for an overview of Napoleon's life and google around, this is usually the biography you end up finding, readable, engaging, thrilling, more than pages long. The majority of this book's maps are maps of battlefields and positions, the largest part of the text is descriptions of the various battles, which is perhaps unsurprising for a biography of a man who made his name in war. The focus on war is the trick that makes book so fast-paced, the battles are almost described like sports matches with tactic errors and routes and whatnot, you almost almost!

Roberts' viewpoint is, let's say, conciliatory - he likes to look at instances where history judged Napoleon harshly and tries to defend Napoleon, often by assuming the most positive view 'Yes, Napoleon wrote this error in his letter, but he was probably betting on it being intercepted, thereby confusing the English! There are a few cases where Roberts criticises Napoleon more than other historians: his treatment of women and the laws he introduced sexist even for his time, women as birth machines for the army, or the way he treated Jews 'Napoleon therefore hardly deserves his present reputation in Jewry as a righteous Gentile'. What's ridiculous is how fast-paced Napoleon's life is, you can't help but compare your own life. He learned French at 9, joined the army as a secondary lieutenant at 16, brigadier general at 24, commander of a whole army at 27, Emperor of France at 35, lost everything and was exiled at 45, died as Roberts is adamant, of stomach cancer like his father, not of any poisonous plot at That to me is the biggest strength here, how Roberts succeeds in depicting Napoleon's sheer energy and speed often by citing from Napoleon's many micro-managing letters.

Another fun thing I learned is that if there are indeed infinite universes where everything possible has happened, then we live in one of the few universes where Napoleon didn't die on the battlefield. I think there are at least 20 sentences like this, perhaps somebody else should count? With the Emperor riding beside him, Desvaux was cut in half by a cannonball. Overall, very, very interesting reading, I can see why this is generally recommended as the general Napoleon biography.

I didn't! Nov 17, Omar Ali rated it it was amazing. Roberts is an unabashed hero-worshipper when it comes to Napoleon. That can become a little irritating. But he has also done tremendous research and presents a very thorough, very readable and very up to date biography of Napoleon up to date because new information, including s of perviously lost letters, have continued to turn up and all that information is included in this work. His hero worship does not affect my five star rating because he does not hide any of Napoleon's faults, mistake Roberts is an unabashed hero-worshipper when it comes to Napoleon. His hero worship does not affect my five star rating because he does not hide any of Napoleon's faults, mistakes or disasters. If you do not share his Napoleon-love, you can still benefit from reading this book. As someone who grew up hearing about Napoleon from Justice Sipra an admirer at the Andrew Roberts level, with several editions of Emil Ludwig's classic biography always present in the house, I am not exactly an unbiased observer, but I think the book really IS worth a read.

Factually accurate, extremely detailed and highly readable. Go for it : Best "new thing I learned from this book"? Exactly how much money the British spent very effectively as subsidies to various European powers to keep Napoleon in check. I knew they spent money but it had never been clear to me how systematic, well thought out, effective and extensive that effort was. That too shows up occasionally in the book View 1 comment. Oct 22, Leah rated it it was ok Shelves: , new-to-me, abandoned, history, biography. Abandoned at a third of the way through. The book's getting great reviews so it must be one of those cases where the author and reader simply don't 'gef' but I'm finding it as turgid as wading through treacle. After reading some truly great, well-written histories and biographies over the last few years, this one is simply failing to inspire my interest - despite the fact that Napoleon must surely be one of the most fascinating characters in history.

Oh well! Nov 26, Jean rated it really liked it Shelves: history, non-fiction, napoleonic-war, biography. I have been fascinated with Napoleon for as long as I can remember. Needless to say I have read extensively about him. This new book about Napoleon was given to me by a friend who knows of my obsession. He was a general by age 24 an emperor at age He promoted on merit not birth ran I have been fascinated with Napoleon for as long as I can remember. He promoted on merit not birth rank or political favor and changed the French military and government accordingly. In research for this book Roberts walked almost everyone of the 60 battlefields. The effect is a huge, deep, witty, humane, and admiring biography of pages.

The Napoleon painted here is a whirlwind of a man, not only a vigorous and supremely confident commander, but an astonishingly busy governor, and correspondent. Roberts points out that Napoleon was a master of multitasking, had a great sense of humor and was a great negotiator. Napoleon would therefore be delighted to know that he is the subject of historical obsession nearly two centuries after his death.

Robert has been indefatigable in tracking down memorabilia and visiting sites of battles, palaces and places of exile. This is all richly depicted and woven into a narrative that is told with the aplomb of an accomplished historical storyteller. Roberts points out that the laws and structure of modern France, indeed, to a significant degree, of all Europe, derive from those created by Napoleon. If you are interested in Napoleon I would recommend this book. Sep 12, Abeselom Habtemariam rated it it was amazing Shelves: biographies-memoirs , all-things-france , want-to-own , history , mystar-rated-books , french-revolution , napoleonic-wars.

One of the sixty famous battlefields he led such as Jena or Waterloo, can yield volumes worth of content. This book is by no means a light read. All in all, this is an absolutely remarkable biography on one of history's most iconic figures. The book is rich with references from letters written by Napoleon himself as well as from his family, his generals, his rivals, his friends and his close companions. The added anecdotes, factual corrections and personal notes of the author make it so easy to put everything into a historical context. Of course, like many historical figures Napoleon was not perfect.

He was nearly ten years old before he learned French and throughout his life, he spoke it with a thick accent. The Corsican independence movement had a massive effect in his early political and military career. For all his education in the French military school, he credits his love of books for his superior knowledge in history, military strategy, the arts, philosophy and many more.

He also possessed a phenomenal memory. While in his final exile in St. Napoleon instinctively understood what soldiers wanted, and he gave it to them. And at least until the battle of Aspern-Essling in he gave them what they wanted most of all: victory. He had an undeniable charisma and aptitude in the presence of intellectuals of his time. The vivid and magnificent portrayal of the battles of Jena, Austerlitz, and Friedland is much better than documentaries I have seen on them. Especially the chapter on Austerlitz for me is a masterpiece in historical writing. The details were simply magnificent. It makes owning the expensive hardcopy of this book absolutely worth it. But the one disappointment I have with the book is in the chapter on Waterloo. The return of the French army after occupying Moscow in notoriously icy conditions was depicted with much vivacity, anguish and attention to details. For me, it takes a tiny bit of quality away from the book. Napoleon was one of the most consequential leaders the world has ever seen.

He built institutions that will be, as he puts them, masses of granite in the soul of France. Overall, the book is engaging, detailed and highly researched. Especially, if you are someone who enjoys military history, this is a must-read book. Another motivation to pick up this book might be the fact that understanding the Napoleonic wars comes in handy when reading classic literature written or based upon of this era of French and European history. I realize this is one of the longest reviews I have even written but it is also one of the longest books I have ever read. This book is a 4. Mar 09, Sonny rated it really liked it Shelves: history , europe.

Andrew Roberts is a British historian, biographer and journalist. Since numerous books have been written about Napoleon, one must wonder why we need yet one more. Napoleon was not French at all. He was born Napoleone di Buonaparte in Corsica to a relatively modest Italian family. He was a lonely, introverted boy whose only real friends were his books and he developed into an immature, self-conscious man, always seeking approval. His favorite pastimes were intellectual rather than social. He rose to prominence during the French Revolution and led several successful military campaigns. Not being a part of the French elite, he worked his way up the ranks through hard work and natural talent, particularly in mathematics and artillery.

But grasping national power for himself, Napoleon first had to defeat the enemies of revolutionary France, particularly Austria and Italy. As Emperor of France from 1804 until 1814, Napoleon took a country in the midst of acute fiscal crisis and social unrest and made it the dominant power in Europe. He tried to restore glory and order to France, lost in the days after the storming of the Bastille, by making a series of legal, educational and administrative reforms. The central pillars of his reign were low taxes, property rights, centralized authority, and national glory. Before the Napoleonic Code, France did not have a single set of laws. The Code standardized and modernized a conflicting set of local customs and provincial laws that consisted mainly of exemptions, privileges, and special charters that had existed for centuries.

Napoleon also brought enlightenment to people. In the new French Empire, talent mattered more than birth and glory depended on achievements rather than status. He abolished noble privilege while bringing religious tolerance. He was the hero of the growing middle class and he made Paris a great center for culture and learning. Napoleon was a talented genius, yet he failed on occasion as he grew older. His ability as a master tactician on relatively localized battlefields failed him when he invaded Russia, where he was outthought and outmaneuvered in the open spaces he found there. While his engineers were able to help him and his army make an amazing escape, he was defeated again at Leipzig.

Despite significant advancements, Napoleon empire was flawed, to be sure. He was driven by violence and the love of power. Prior to the Code, women had enjoyed wide freedom, separate property rights, and an influential place in society. The Code also gave immense powers to the state. Roberts is an excellent writer and a good storyteller. He brilliantly conveys the vigor and charisma of Napoleon, especially his military genius. He is at his best when describing the battles.

Still, this is a worthwhile epic biography. I sat before this very daunting looking book, coming in at over pages, feeling slightly excited as my expectations were high after Dr Roberts last offering. I have read a few books about Napoleons campaigns before but never had I taken a look at the entire life of the man. I am pleased to write that this book delivers an informative and enthralling read that sees the pages melt away as you are pulled into Napoleons life. This book is very balanced, with the author trying to peel back the st I sat before this very daunting looking book, coming in at over pages, feeling slightly excited as my expectations were high after Dr Roberts last offering.

This book is very balanced, with the author trying to peel back the stories and legends around the man to tell as best as possible the real story behind the man. This book is a must read for anyone that loves history. Apr 29, Chris Dietzel rated it it was amazing. This was excellent and exceeded my expectations. I feel like I just completed a college course dedicated to Napoleon and am now an expert on him. Part of what makes this biography so wonderful for me is that Roberts spends a lot of time giving readers each take on the key moments in Napoleon's life, from those who hated him to those who loved him, and then provides historical context to let readers know what is most likely in each instance.

This makes the entire book feel much more worthwhile than if the author took a simple black-or-white stance on Napoleon as previous biographers have done. Roberts does a great job of not taking sides while providing as much context as possible on everything Napoleon said and did. Highly recommended for history lovers. Aug 11, Christopher rated it it was amazing Shelves: history , biography-memoir , europe , military-affairs , arcs-and-giveaways. Full Disclosure: I received an advance uncorrected copy of this book for free through Goodreads' First Reads program. However, the views expressed are my own and do not reflect that of the author, the publisher, or Goodreads.

Like the great ancient conquerors which he admired, Napoleon stands as a colossus on the historical stage. Yet he is little known nor well understood by people today, especially as his reputation has been marred by superficial similarities to Hitler and the "Black Legend" Full Disclosure: I received an advance uncorrected copy of this book for free through Goodreads' First Reads program. Yet he is little known nor well understood by people today, especially as his reputation has been marred by superficial similarities to Hitler and the "Black Legend" of libelous claims made by his detractors after his fall from power. Enter this wonderful biography by Mr. Roberts, who has written a couple of books on the Napoleonic era and is currently a fellow of the Napoleonic Institute.

Roberts dispels the Black Legends that cropped up and shows Napoleon to be not some kind of proto-Hitler, but as the last and greatest of the Enlightenment despots that appeared on the world stage during the 18th century. Napoleon had all of the admirable qualities of an enlightened dictator including being intimately involved in the regeneration of France after the devastation of the Terror during the French Revolution, being a true patron of the arts, establishing equality under the law through the Code Napoleon that would be copied on every continent except Antarctica, and the establishment of a semi-meritocratic system with the legion d'honneur.

He also had the bad qualities too, including the launching of a coup that overthrew an unpopular, but democratic government, the end of most forms of political freedom, especially press freedom, the rare execution of dissidents, the tacit approval of mass murder tactics in the Peninsular War, and, most famously, his pride. Of course, what Napoleon is best known for are his battles and Mr. Roberts does not fail to deliver as he describes Napoleon's military reforms and his tactical and strategic brilliance quite clearly. His descriptions of specific battles are almost pulse pounding in their descriptions of cavalry and artillery and acts of bravery.

Robert's also brings two very interesting arguments to the table as well. The first is that Napoleon, in contrast to his portrayal by proponents of the "Black Legend", was actually quite warm and forgiving to nearly everyone, like his hero Julius Caesar. Not until the end does Napoleon seem to hold a grudge against anyone, but Napoleon never seems to avenge any slights against himself. The second interesting argument is that, contrary to popular belief, the Russian invasion was not the product of massive hubris and ego, but rather the culmination of a series of miscalculations after the peace at Tilsit that any body in a similar position could have made.

Is there any way Napoleon could have planned for the Typhus fever that would ravage his army? And many of his best advisors had been killed or were unavailable to dissuade him from war with Russia in any meaningful way, though many of his advisors at the time did try to. And, yes, there were a few places where Napoleon could have stopped his army and gone into winter quarter before arriving in Moscow, but he reached those sites so early in the campaign that he could be forgiven for wanting to drive into Moscow and seek out a decisive victory.

Certainly Napoleon was a proud, perhaps even egotistical man, but Mr. Roberts ably argues that Napoleon was just as brilliant as Napoleon thought himself to be. Napoleon's personal life is also given equal weight and one feels a sense of sadness from Josephine's infidelities at the start of their marriage, the pain of their divorce for dynastic reasons, and the fact that though his second marriage to Marie Louise seemed a happy one and would produce a son whom Napoleon would dote on, after leaving her for the front in Napoleon would never see his second wife or son again and Marie Louis would soon cheat on him and seemingly hate him so soon afterwards, even going so far as to trying to turn their son against him after his death.

And speaking of his death, the last chapter of the book describing Napoleon's exile on St. Helena is almost excruciating as the great man seems to slowly dissolve away within a few years after his death. Roberts brings Napoleon to life quite well. The only black mark I have against this book is that Mr. Roberts argues that Napoleon was a witty tease and that many of his more eyebrow raising quotes were made in jest.

But this is one area where Mr. Roberts fails to make that case convincingly as some quotes would have a remark that this was said in jest and others wouldn't. However, this is a rather small mark against an otherwise great biography. I highly recommend this to anyone who is interested in knowing more about the great Emperor of the French Empire.

Jul 12, Sud rated it it was amazing Shelves: favorites , history. Sometimes life can be strange. When I was a newly minted Ph. While there I was introduced to a visiting lecturer named Dr. Andrew Roberts from Cambridge. It is funny that several years later I stumbled upon this book and was surprised to see Dr. Robert's name. I am certainly glad that I picked this one up and proudly add it to my library. It is truly magnificent. Robert's writing style draws the reader in with witty sayings uttered by Napoleon, fascinating side notes, and detailed maps of the various conflicts. It is in the writing of the conflicts that Dr. Roberts shines. Some people generally heretics find military history to be boring. Robert's wonderful accounts of the battles should dispel that vile calumny.

But there is so much more to the complex character that is Napoleon. He is generally associated with his Wars and that is understandable, but far fewer know about the tremendous changes that occurred after his conquest of Europe. Many of the old traditional structures came undone due to his new Napoleonic Code. In many ways, his progressive ideas and successes were overshadowed by the myth of this ogre-like Anti-Christ coming to burn a city near you.

Beautifully written, fascinating to read, and always entertaining- this is the must-have version of Napoleon's history. Using new research, Dr. Roberts gives the reader an idea as to the truly complex mind of Napoleon. It is also interesting that Robert shows that Napoleon did make mistakes, sometimes ignoring his own maxims such is the case during the Battle of Waterloo.

There are many wonderful illustrations and maps in this book. The scope of the story is vast and wonderfully complete. Not only will you learn about the man Napoleon, but you will see how his actions changed the face of Europe forever. A brilliant book by a brilliant historian about a brilliant man. What could be better? Not much. If you are going to read one history book this year, let this be the one. Highly recommended.

May 12, John rated it really liked it Shelves: , non-fiction. This book gave me such a better appreciation of who the man Napoleon was. May 03, Andy Miller rated it it was amazing. This fine biography is as thorough as it is balanced. The exhaustive research by Andrew Roberts included thousands of letters written by Napoleon that were not available to other biographers as well as letters written by others and memoirs of many people from the day. The balance comes from critical examination of the sources, Roberts discusses whether certain letters and memoirs were self serving or accurate and looks to other sources to aid in that balance The biography adds not often found nuance This fine biography is as thorough as it is balanced. The balance comes from critical examination of the sources, Roberts discusses whether certain letters and memoirs were self serving or accurate and looks to other sources to aid in that balance The biography adds not often found nuance to Napoleon.

As a soldier he witnessed the surrender of the Swiss Guards by Louis XVI, Napoleon remembered that when he later ruthlessly crushed citizen resistance in Paris before he went to Egypt. Shortly before the fall of Robespierre, Napoleon was plotting with Robespierre's brother, after the fall, Napoleon was justifiably concerned that his involvement would be discovered The biography recounts Napoleon's victorious Italian campaign giving credit to Napoleon's superior strategy and military reforms.

The Egyptian campaign is detailed and is an example of Roberts' balance. Napoleon brought many writers and scientists with him and Roberts shows that Napoleon's intellectual curiosity and respect for Egyptian history was sincere, but Roberts also contrasted Napoleon's record of respect and magnanimous treatment of defeated soldiers with his barbaric treatment of the defeated soldiers in the Egypt and Palenstine campaigns with Roberts concluding was due to the color of their skin The biography follows Napoleon's return to France when he learns of military advances against France.

This included Napoleon's coup to become ruler. It was not democratic, the legislative assemblies were against it but were intimidated by Napoleon's injection of military force but Roberts notes that such force was unsuccessful earlier in the French Revolution due to citizen revolt, but by this time the citizens were tired of the upheaval and welcomed Napoleon's ascension to power. Roberts describes Napoleon's victories against France's enemies, not only eliminating threats to France but expanding territory and gaining allies through force and intimidation. Roberts gives credit for defeating superior forces to Napoleon's superior tactics and reformed, modern armies.

He also gives credit to Napoleon's easy rapport with his soldiers something his rivals would never even consider Roberts spends much time on Napoleon's political, social and legal reforms which had impacts long after his defeat. Even while Napoleon became more and more of a dictator, he instituted egalitarian and republican reforms which were welcomed not only by the French people but also the people of defeated countries. Contrary to much of our history, even the dictator Napoleon was not simply another Bourbon king, his reforms were real and may well have prevented a long time Bourbon restoration after Napoleon's defeat. Roberts makes a convincing argument that Napoleon was just as interested in reforming France and Europe as he was in making war The lead up to Napoleon's defeat is of course recounted.

Roberts notes that many of his enemies eventually copied Napoleon's military reforms such as younger generals, merit promotion and modern strategies. Napoleon also made mistakes, his attempted blockade against England may have lead to his war with Russia and while Napoleon did not initially plan on going to Moscow in that war he later made mistakes which caused him to change his mind and go there with disastrous results. Napoleon needlessly added enemies and a draining and dilution of his armies, he did not have to make Sweden an enemy and his campaigns in Spain and Portugal took needed soldiers and resources against the real threats to France The biography intersperses the military campaigns and political reforms with Napoleon's personal life.

He initially loved Josephine and was faithful to her only to learn of her infidelity. But Napoleon forgave her though he went on to a series of mistresses and his eventual divorce from her for a male heir and political alliance pursuant to new marriage was done so with tempered feelings, they maintained a long and warm correspondence long after the divorce. His marriage to the Austrian princess was not just of convenience but the one woman who repeatedly appeared in his life, even in his defeat, was his Polish mistress. There is much in this thorough and complete biography that is not touched upon in this review; all the more reason to read it yourself!

Feb 17, Antenna rated it it was amazing. I embarked on this great slab of a historical biography - pages excluding sources and notes - in an attempt to understand to what extent Napoleon was truly "great", particularly after reading a popular biography of Josephine which seemed to sell him short. In the course of wading through the mud and slaughter of his interminable military campaigns, I concluded that he was a remarkable man whose greatness stemmed from enormous energy and vision, insatiable curiosity, the capacity to absorb a h I embarked on this great slab of a historical biography - pages excluding sources and notes - in an attempt to understand to what extent Napoleon was truly "great", particularly after reading a popular biography of Josephine which seemed to sell him short.

In the course of wading through the mud and slaughter of his interminable military campaigns, I concluded that he was a remarkable man whose greatness stemmed from enormous energy and vision, insatiable curiosity, the capacity to absorb a huge volume of facts, the confidence to take risks in putting ideas into practice, great tactical skill, flexibility and speed in conducting campaigns - when he had a single enemy to contend with and a small enough army to control personally - undeniable courage, a keen sense of self-publicity and understanding of how to motivate men at all levels - this sometimes deserted him - through a mixture of praise, rewards and decisive orders when needed. He was also capable of moments of refreshing candour and regret as to his shortcomings, and possessed a sense of humour and charm which captivated even some of his enemies. On the downside, his desire to emulate Caesar and Alexander the Great may have led to megalomania, his attention to detail made him a control freak, as Emperor he made himself an unbridled political dictator, although he listened to the opinions of others and adopted a more democratic approach towards the end when he was fatally weakened.

His continual exaggeration of enemy losses and playing down of his own may have been judicious PR, but suggests a failure to face up to his

frequent squandering of the lives of the men he had inspired to follow him. He was a male chauvinist - although perhaps most men were at the time - and he made some major errors. The most costly of these was the attempt to fight on two fronts simultaneously - Russia and Spain, and to allow himself to be lured as far as Moscow, over-extending his supply lines and then underestimating the time needed to limp back to France before the onset of winter. The shocking death toll of more than half a million soldiers, and the destruction of his horses made it hard to put up an effective defence with fast-moving cavalry when the extent of his conquests set most of the rest of Europe against him. He picked the wrong issues for stubborn obsessions, such as an unworkable scheme to block trade with Britain with which he annoyed the Tsar by trying to impose it on Russia, or the rejection of fairly reasonable peace terms when his luck had run out.

In an academic yet mainly very readable text, the author fired me with some of his own enthusiasm for Napoleon. I found myself rooting for him and wishing he had desisted from some campaigns to build his reputation as a social reformer - even as a prisoner on Elba, he arranged the provision of fresh water, improvement of roads, irrigation schemes, etcetera. He may of course have been in a cleft stick, in that he had to wage war to avoid being overrun by belligerent neighbours outraged by his assumption of a crown. I realise that many chapters on military campaigns are unavoidable, and was impressed to learn that the author had clearly tramped many of the sixty main battle sites in person, but I found the information perhaps inevitably too condensed with indigestible lists of names of commanders, companies, details of troop movements, villages and rivers. It is frustrating that maps are not always supplied, and when included, often omit place names mentioned in the text, an indication of location, topography and scale to help one understand the course of events.

I did not want to interrupt my reading to go and search for these details elsewhere. It would have been helpful to include more of the factual information in clear tables, charts and timelines - together with better maps- for easier reference. Overall, this is an impressive work which has increased my understanding and appreciation of a fascinating historical figure. This review and others can be found on BW Book Reviews. For most of the book, I legitimately thought that Napoleon was a part of the original Revolutionary government and then he weaved through to the top or was at the top for a while.

That's why I was always super confused when I read about Marie Antoinette and why they never mentioned Napoleon. All because I never really looked into post-revolutionary topics since I just like dear Marie. This book, alas, is not for a noob such as myself. It's about pages long and I listened to it. If I had been reading it, I may have given up and shelved it under a book I'm pausing for whatever reason. There were just so many names, some were important and some weren't. It covered basically everything about Napoleon. I would have been much happier with a book only about his childhood or rising through the ranks or his downfall or his marriages and affairs. It came down to me literally knowing no names and having to try to get everything down. My caveat is that this book is well-written. It truly is, and Roberts tackles this huge topic very well. Even though I had no clue who some people were, I could keep track of most things and make some connections to an earlier part of the book.

The biggest thing was that this book challenged my view of Napoleon. I've always heard of him as a horrible man and no one really liked him, but, really, he seemed pretty decent and respected people no matter what rank they were. Sure, I don't agree with his land grabs, but he wasn't some demon antichrist I've heard for most of my life. While I wouldn't recommend this book for a beginner, I do think it's something valuable that people who actually have background knowledge to read or have in their collection of books about him. Oct 11, Bookshark rated it did not like it Shelves: abandoned. I tried to read this but couldn't stomach the unremitting, fawning, implausible praise the author heaped on Napoleon. May 05, Ben rated it really liked it Shelves: history. This is an intriguing biography. I learned a lot, clearing up my own fuzzy impressions.

But I read this after Roberts's Churchill biography, and it just doesn't compare. Partly, Roberts doesn't do as good a job here in conveying the historical environment around Napoleon. In a movie, it would be a tight shot of Napoleon's face, with everything else out of focus, for the whole show. Partly, though, Napoleon actually isn't as interesting a character as Churchill. The Churchill biography is filled with little anecdotes that show his personality—his wit or his drive. In , while Napoleon was at the academy, his father died of stomach cancer. This propelled Napoleon to take the reins as the head of the family. Graduating early from the military academy, Napoleon, now second lieutenant of artillery, returned to Corsica in Back home, Napoleon got behind the Corsican resistance to the French occupation, siding with his father's former ally, Pasquale Paoli.

But the two soon had a falling out, and when a civil war in Corsica began in April , Napoleon, now an enemy of Paoli, and his family relocated to France, where they assumed the French version of their name: Bonaparte. Napoleon stood about 5 feet and 7 inches tall, making him slightly taller than the average Frenchman of his time. Much has been made of Napoleon's height, and legends claim that he was unusually short, giving rise to the term "Napoleon complex," an inferiority complex sometimes associated with people of short stature.

The turmoil of the French Revolution created opportunities for ambitious military leaders like Napoleon. The young leader quickly showed his support for the Jacobins, a far-left political movement and the most well-known and popular political club from the French Revolution. Ultimately, these acts led to the rise of Maximilien de Robespierre and what became, essentially, the dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety. The years of and came to be known as the Reign of Terror , in which many as 40, people were killed. Eventually the Jacobins fell from power and Robespierre was executed.

In , the Directory the French Revolutionary government took control of the country, a power it would assume until After falling out of favor with Robespierre, Napoleon came into the good graces of the Directory in after he saved the government from counter-revolutionary forces. For his efforts, Napoleon was soon named commander of the Army of the Interior. In addition, he was a trusted advisor to the Directory on military matters. In , Napoleon took the helm of the Army of Italy, a post he'd been coveting. The army, just 30, strong, disgruntled and underfed, was soon turned around by the young military commander. Under his direction, the reinvigorated army won numerous crucial victories against the Austrians, greatly expanded the French empire and squashed an internal threat by the royalists, who wished to return France to a monarchy.

All of these successes helped make Napoleon the military's brightest star. Napoleon's image - and that of France - were greatly harmed by the loss, and in a show of newfound confidence against the commander, Britain, Austria, Russia and Turkey formed a new coalition against France. In the spring of , French armies were defeated in Italy, forcing France to give up much of the peninsula. In October, Napoleon returned to France,

where he was welcomed as a popular military leader.

Following his return to France, Napoleon participated in an event known as the Coup of 18 Brumaire, a bloodless coup d'etat that overthrew the French Directory. The Directory was replaced by a three-member consulate after a series of political and military machinations orchestrated in large part by Napoleon's brother Lucien Bonaparte. Additionally, with the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, the war-weary British agreed to peace with the French although the peace would only last for a year. Napoleon then returned to war with Britain, Russia and Austria. In 1805, the British registered an important naval victory against France at the Battle of Trafalgar, which led Napoleon to scrap his plans to invade England.

Napoleon Bonaparte - Biography, Facts & Death - HISTORY

But it never caught on, even as a way of differentiating Napoleon from his distinctly less impressive nephew Emperor Napoleon III. He came to power through a military coup only six years after entering the country as a penniless political refugee, and eventually gave his name to an age. As first consul and later emperor, he almost won hegemony in Europe, but was eventually overwhelmed by a series of coalitions put together to bring him down.

Although his conquests ended in defeat and ignominious imprisonment, over the course of his short but eventful life he fought 60 battles and lost only seven. For any general, of any age, this was an extraordinary record. Having walked the ground of 53 of his 60 battlefields, I was amazed by his genius for topography, his acuity and sense of timing. For here was a talented, humorous, emotionally generous and forgiving man with great ideals who emancipated the Jews and had nothing personally in common with Hitler. Their dictatorships were utterly different, as were their invasions of Russia. Far from pursuing Lebensraum and extermination, Napoleon only wanted to fight a short border war in Russia. Their decrying of his imperialism was pure hypocrisy, however, given that Britain herself was busily building a vast empire at the time. Whereas France had been forced back to its pre-Napoleonic frontiers by the end of 1815, many of his civil reforms stayed in place.

The Napoleonic Code forms the basis of much of European law today, while various aspects of it have been adopted by 40 countries on all six inhabited continents. He also dispensed with hyper-inflation, the unsustainable revolutionary calendar of day weeks, the absurd theology of the Cult of the Supreme Being established by Maximilien de Robespierre following the revolution and the corruption and cronyism of the previous Directory government of France. His letters show a charm, humour and capacity for candid self-appraisal. Of course there were great costs. Like much of the rest of Europe of the day, Napoleon employed censorship and a secret police. The plebiscites he held seemingly to give the French people a political voice were regularly rigged. Instead, he set his sights on Austria and Russia, and beat back both militaries in the Battle of Austerlitz.

Other victories soon followed, allowing Napoleon to greatly expand the French empire and paving the way for loyalists to his government to be installed in Holland, Italy, Naples, Sweden, Spain and Westphalia. On March 21, 1804, Napoleon instituted the Napoleonic Code, otherwise known as the French Civil Code, parts of which are still in use around the world today. The Napoleonic Code forbade privileges based on birth, allowed freedom of religion, and stated that government jobs must be given to the most qualified.

The Napoleonic Code followed Napoleon's new constitution, which created the first consul — a position which amounted to nothing less than a dictatorship. Following the French Revolution, unrest continued in France; in June of 1799, a coup resulted in the left-wing radical group, the Jacobins, taking control of the Directory. Working with one of the new directors, Emmanuel Sieyès, Napoleon hatched plans for a second coup that would place the pair along with Pierre-Roger Ducos atop a new government called the Consulate. With the new guidelines, the first consul was permitted to appoint ministers, generals, civil servants, magistrates and even members of the legislative assemblies. Napoleon would, of course, be the one who would fulfill the first consul's duties. In February 1800, the new constitution was easily accepted. He also negotiated a European peace, which lasted just three years before the start of the Napoleonic Wars.

His reforms proved popular: In 1804 he was elected consul for life, and two years later he was proclaimed emperor of France. In 1812 France was devastated when Napoleon's invasion of Russia turned out to be a colossal failure — and the beginning of the end for Napoleon. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers in Napoleon's Grand Army were killed or badly wounded: Out of an original fighting force of some 600,000 men, just 10,000 soldiers were still fit for battle. News of the defeat reinvigorated Napoleon's enemies, both inside and outside of France. A failed coup was attempted while Napoleon led his charge against Russia, while the British began to advance through French territories.

With international pressure mounting and his government lacking the resources to fight back against his enemies, Napoleon surrendered to allied forces on March 30, 1814. On April 6, 1814, Napoleon was forced to abdicate power and went into exile on the island of Elba in the Mediterranean sea off of Italy. His exile did not last long, as he watched France stumble forward without him. In March 1815, Napoleon escaped the island and quickly made his way back to Paris. But the enthusiasm that greeted Napoleon when he resumed control of the government soon gave way to old frustrations and fears about his leadership. On June 16, 1815, Napoleon led French troops into Belgium and defeated the Prussians; two days later he was defeated by the British, reinforced by Prussian fighters, at the Battle of Waterloo. It was a humiliating loss, and on June 22, 1815, Napoleon abdicated his powers.

In an effort to prolong his dynasty he pushed to have his young son, Napoleon II, named emperor, but the coalition rejected the offer. Helena in the southern Atlantic. For the most part Napoleon was free to do as he pleased at his new home. He had leisurely mornings, wrote often and read a lot. But the tedious routine of life soon got to him, and he often shut himself indoors. His treatment of the civil code, for instance, is far more uncritical than it need have been. One could present Napoleon not simply as the great institution-builder he was, but as the man who ensured the French male property-owner would sleep easily at night in coming decades.

Amid the pomp and circumstance that Roberts has such a keen eye for, the figure of Napoleon the hero of the emergent bourgeoisie passes us by. Similarly, the larger impact of Napoleonic administration on law and politics across Europe — the subject of an excellent recent book by Charles Esdaile — gets relatively short shrift. Perhaps the best way to think of this book is as a view — essentially positive — from inside the imperial entourage. Roberts has been indefatigable in tracking down memorabilia and visiting the sites of battles, palaces and places of exile. This is all richly

depicted and woven into a narrative that is told with the aplomb of an accomplished historical storyteller. The financing of war is touched on, but the difficulty Napoleon faced in matching France against the fiscal superpower across the Channel is not discussed in any detail. Did Napoleon really usher in a new bourgeois order that his nephew would then clamber to power to defend 25 years later?

For such questions, it is probably better to read other works. But for a fast-paced and comprehensive narrative, told with affection and sympathy, many readers will want to turn to Napoleon the Great. It is a book that sets out for a new generation exactly why he mattered and will continue to matter so long as people argue about faith, and property, and kings, and the future of Europe. Biography books. Mark Mazower. Thu 13 Nov Topics Biography books History books France Europe reviews.

Napoleon - Wikipedia

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His letters show a charm, humour and capacity for candid self-appraisal. Of course there were great costs. Like much of the rest of Europe of the day, Napoleon employed censorship and a secret police. The plebiscites he held seemingly to give the French people a political voice were regularly rigged. And then there was the cost in lives. The wars had been going on since he was a lieutenant of artillery in , of course, but once he was in power the British declared war on him in , the Austrians invaded his ally Bavaria in , the Prussians declared war on him in and the Austrians in The attacks on Portugal and Spain in and and Russia in were indeed initiated by Napoleon, although Russia was planning an attack on him in He made no fewer than four separate and genuine peace offers to Britain between the collapse of the Treaty of Amiens which ended war between Britain and France and Considering that he had planned to invade Britain between and , it was understandable that the British government should have relentlessly pursued his destruction; similarly Austria, Prussia and Russia had impeccable motives for wanting to destroy him.

But he cannot be fairly accused of being the only, or even the principal warmonger of the age. His intellect places him in the front ranks of monarchs, alongside Marcus Aurelius and Elizabeth I. His correspondence with astronomers, chemists, mathematicians and biologists expressed a respect for their work to be expected from a member of the Institut, the headquarters of the French Enlightenment of which he was so proud to have been elected a member.

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But the tedious routine of life soon got to him, and he often shut himself indoors. Napoleon died on May 5, 1821, on the island of St. Helena at the age of 51. In early he was bedridden and growing weaker by the day. In April of that year, he dictated his last will: I die before my time, killed by the English oligarchy and its hired assassins. Originally a royal chapel built between 1763 and 1770, the Invalides were turned into a military pantheon under Napoleon. We strive for accuracy and fairness. If you see something that doesn't look right, contact us! Subscribe to the Biography newsletter to receive stories about the people who shaped our world and the stories that shaped their lives. Maximilien de Robespierre was an official during the French Revolution and one of the principal architects of the Reign of Terror. He took power in 1793 after the July Revolution, but was forced to abdicate after an uprising in 1794. He was married to Marie Antoinette and was executed for treason by guillotine in 1794. Under his reign, France became a leading European power.

He served as president from 1800 to 1801. During his presidency, he sold oil to Cuba and resisted efforts to stop narcotic trafficking in Colombia, and subsequently strained relations with the United States. He revoked the Edict of Nantes and is known for his aggressive foreign policy.

Napoleon The Great by Andrew Roberts - Penguin Books Australia

As a boy, Napoleon attended school in mainland France, where he learned the French language, and went on to graduate from a French military academy in 1785. He then became a second lieutenant in an artillery regiment of the French army. The French Revolution began in 1789, and within three years revolutionaries had overthrown the monarchy and proclaimed a French republic. During the early years of the revolution, Napoleon was largely on leave from the military and home in Corsica, where he became affiliated with the Jacobins, a pro-democracy political group. In 1791, following a clash with the nationalist Corsican governor, Pasquale Paoli, the Bonaparte family fled their native island for mainland France, where Napoleon returned to military duty. In France, Napoleon became associated with Augustin Robespierre, the brother of revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre, a Jacobin who was a key force behind the Reign of Terror, a period of violence against enemies of the revolution.

During this time, Napoleon was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the army. However, after Robespierre fell from power and was guillotined along with Augustin in July 1794, Napoleon was briefly put under house arrest for his ties to the brothers. In 1795, Napoleon helped suppress a royalist insurrection against the revolutionary government in Paris and was promoted to major general. The following year, the Directory, the five-person group that had governed France since 1795, offered to let Napoleon lead an invasion of England. Instead, he proposed an invasion of Egypt in an effort to wipe out British trade routes with India. That summer, with the political situation in France marked by uncertainty, the ever-ambitious and cunning Napoleon opted to abandon his army in Egypt and return to France. In November 1799, in an event known as the coup of 18 Brumaire, Napoleon was part of a group that successfully overthrew the French Directory.

Additionally, with the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, the war-weary British agreed to peace with the French although the peace would only last for a year. Napoleon worked to restore stability to post-revolutionary France. One of his most significant accomplishments was the Napoleonic Code, which streamlined the French legal system and continues to form the foundation of French civil law to this day. In 1804, a constitutional amendment made Napoleon first consul for life. Two years later, in 1806, he crowned himself emperor of France in a lavish ceremony at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. In 1806, Napoleon married Josephine de Beauharnais, a stylish widow six years his senior who had two teenage children. More than a decade later, in 1810, after Napoleon had no offspring of his own with Empress Josephine, he had their marriage annulled so he could find a new wife and produce an heir.

In 1804, he wed Marie Louise, the daughter of the emperor of Austria. In addition to his son with Marie Louise, Napoleon had several illegitimate children. From 1804 to 1815, France was engaged in the Napoleonic Wars, a series of major conflicts with various coalitions of European nations. However, in December of that same year, Napoleon achieved what is considered to be one of his greatest victories at the Battle of Austerlitz, in which his army defeated the Austrians and Russians.

The victory resulted in the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire and the creation of the Confederation of the Rhine. Beginning in 1806, Napoleon sought to wage large-scale economic warfare against Britain with the establishment of the so-called Continental System of European port blockades against British trade. In 1809, the French defeated the Austrians at the Battle of Wagram, resulting in further gains for Napoleon. During these years, Napoleon reestablished a French aristocracy eliminated in the French Revolution and began handing out titles of nobility to his loyal friends and family as his empire continued to expand across much of western and central continental Europe. In 1812, Russia withdrew from the Continental System. In retaliation, Napoleon led a massive army into Russia in the summer of 1812. In September, both sides suffered heavy casualties in the indecisive Battle of Borodino.

Retreating Russians set fires across the city in an effort to deprive enemy troops of supplies. After waiting a month for a surrender that never came, Napoleon, faced with the onset of the Russian winter, was forced to order his starving, exhausted army out of Moscow. During the disastrous retreat, his army suffered continual harassment from a suddenly aggressive and merciless Russian army. At the same time as the catastrophic Russian invasion, French forces were engaged in the Peninsular War, which resulted in the Spanish and Portuguese, with assistance from the British, driving the French from the Iberian Peninsula. Napoleon then retreated to France, and in March coalition forces captured Paris.

On April 6, 1814, Napoleon, then in his mid-40s, was forced to abdicate the throne. With the Treaty of Fontainebleau, he was exiled to Elba, a Mediterranean island off the coast of Italy. He was given sovereignty over the small island, while his wife and son went to Austria. On February 26, 1815, after less than a year in exile, Napoleon escaped Elba and sailed to the French mainland with a group of more than 1,000 supporters. There is

something of the swash-buckler in such behavior which is intriguing and captivating--but again, is such decadence worth the hundreds of thousands rotting across Europe? And so, while Roberts has saved Napoleon from the pathetic over-analyzers and the postmodernists, he has not moved on to perform the greatest task of the historian: To make us understand Napoleon's time and context.

Without an understanding of the appeal and fault of the Old Regime, we can never be sure what NB is really up against, or if the wars he waged to defeat its tenets were really worth it. Perhaps such consideration is not necessary. Napoleon was intriguing enough without such considerations, perhaps. But Roberts cannot succeed in his larger project--convincing us that Napoleon was of another league than Hitler, Stalin, etc.

And he simply hasn't done this. He's only succeeded in forgetting the dead. These considerations aside, Roberts does a nice job of letting us inside the mind of this great genius. Most interesting are Napoleon's letters to Josephine, and his other ruminations on the romance. The image of NB waiting on Elba, rooms reserved for his son and empress, is incredibly moving, no matter who the tyrant. His letters are funny, his personality is affable, his heartache is sincere. Proust said that falling in love is the only poetic thing most men ever achieve. Greater than his faux-royal processions and bloody military feats, his success and failure in romance stuck with me the most throughout reading. Nonetheless, I still can't help but think that Roberts has not achieved his goals.

Yes, Napoleon was a "great man" in the Carlyle sense, but by creating the modern state he ruined the conditions whereby later men might become great. He modernized his country, but so did Jefferson and Hamilton, without the bloodshed. He led an army, but led it to endless war, unlike General Washington who led his to peace and prosperity. Even America's murderer-tyrant, Abe Lincoln, attempted no coup and wouldn't even disallow the election which may have ruined his war. These are acts of true character; acts of true moral courage. Napoleon, as one man, may have bettered this group, but his faults and crimes loom much larger. His hubris alone killed more than his weak principles. Roberts never captures Napoleon's strange contradictions, the mix of the squalid and the grand in the man. For now, it does us readers well to remember how many of the great patriots we dote upon might have just as well become our oppressors, lashing us alongside of the Turks.

View all 3 comments. Jan 31, Laura Noggle rated it it was amazing Shelves: , history , biography-autobiography. Excellent coverage of Napoleon. You think you know—but do you really? An epic beast of a book about the man who only lost 7 of the 60 lifetime battles waged. These were the joys and debaucheries of my youth. View all 4 comments. May 18, Nooilforpacifists rated it liked it Shelves: napoleonic-other , french-history. Gushing bio--unusual for an Englishman. Roberts claims that newly available letters present a vastly more favorable portrait than previously available to scholars. One example--Roberts extols Napoleon's re-created nobility: "Unlike anywhere else in Europe, a French family's noble simply lapsed if the next generation hadn't done enough to deserve its passing on. Instead, he digresses into a discussion of the exact mix of liberty, equality and fraternity the new scheme supplied. Similarly, Roberts's discussion on Napoleon and the Jews is muddled.

On one page, he touts reasonably enough the Decree on Jews and Usury. A page later, Napoleon is upholding prosecutions of Jewish moneylenders, and the best Roberts can manage is that "Napoleon was personally prejudiced against Jews to much the same degree as the rest of his class and background. Lots of facts; snippets of stirring writing the best of which is when Roberts called something "yet another example of the luck that [Napoleon] was starting to mistake for Fate. In sum, Roberts is unparalleled as a researcher. But he doesn't provide the reader reasons why any particular piece of previously accepted Napoleonic legend should be rejected in favor of his new interpretation.

Rodger, however. Born in quasi-obscurity on Corsica, Napoleon a native Italian and Corsican speaker was trucked off to learn French, then to a military academy. Napoleon not only was an excellent student but -- ill-dressed and awkward, with plenty of time on his hands-- he read of heroes and conquerors past: Caesar, Alexander the Great, etc. Napoleon's fascination for the non-French is in part because he may have been history's most successful autodidact.

For that reason alone, more bios, and more reading, are justified. Was that possible? No' He sent Berthier and Monge to Paris with the treaty to expound its merits. They did such a good job, and so enthusiastic was the public enthusiasm [sic] for peace, that the Directory ratified it swiftly despite several of its members privately regretting the lack of republican solidarity shown to Venice. It is said that when asked about the Venetian clauses, Napoleon explained 'I was playing vingt-et-un, and stopped at twenty. He was particularly careful to give no cause for jihad. Respect their mufis and imams as you respected rabbis and bishops. The Roman legions protected all religions. The people here treat their wives differently from us, but in all countries the man who commits rape is a monster. You came to this country to save the inhabitants from barbarism, to bring civilization to the Orient and subtract this beautiful part of the world from the domination of England [sic--England was not running Egypt at the time].

From the top of those pyramids, forty centuries are contemplating you. It was nine at night and the tide had already risen three feet. We were in a terrible situation, when it was announced that a ford had been found. General Bonaparte was among the first to cross; guides were situated at various points to direct the rest. We were happy not to have to have shared the fate of the Pharaoh's soldiers. For a man who wrote an average of fifteen letters a day, this time everything was to be done by word of mouth. When it came down to a choice between obeying those giants of their profession or the politicians baying for their arrest in the Orangerey, there was simply no contest.

When Napoleon years later asked him how he had made his fortune, he insouciantly replied 'Nothing simpler; I bought rentes [government securities] on the 17th and sold them on the 19th. When the British foreign secretary, Lord Grenville, responded by saying that Napoleon should restore the Bourbons, Napoleon replied that if the same principle were applied to Britain it would result in the restoration of the Stuarts. Not even His Italian victories brought Napoleon more popularity. Spread them first in the salons, and then put them in the papers. He had also corresponded with William Wickham. It hardly constituted strong enough grounds to have him executed, however, except as a ruthless message to Louis XVIII to call off my further plots. The Emperor "took the somewhat convoluted and seemingly contradictory style 'Napoleon, through the grace of God and the Constitution of the Republic, Emperor of the French. He did, however, crown Josephine.

On 5 June we were attacked in our cantonments by the Russian army, which misconstrued the causes of our inactivity. It perceived, too late, that our repose was that of the lion, now it does penance for its mistake... From the shores of the Vistula, we have reached those of the Nieman with

the rapidity of the eagle. Years later, Napoleon said--"Perhaps I was happiest at Tilsit. I had just surmounted many vicissitudes, many anxieties, at Eylau for instance; and I found myself victorious, dictating laws, having emperors and kings pay me court. His military administration was incapable of dealing with the enormous strain that he was putting on it.

Each day, in his desperation for a decisive battle, he had fallen further into Barclay's trap. It was advice that Drouot was to regret for the rest of his life. Dec 16, Steven Peterson rated it it was amazing. A magnificent biography. The author notes that he has access to thousands of previously unavailable letters of Napoleon. These letters add a great richness to this volume, and provides a somewhat different picture of Napoleon than I had had before. One of the strengths, too, is that Andrew Roberts has a cool eye toward Napoleon.

He speaks highly of his major accomplishments, such as a massive change in the legal system, and he criticizes him for his weaknesses--such as the Russian campaign, his A magnificent biography. He speaks highly of his major accomplishments, such as a massive change in the legal system, and he criticizes him for his weaknesses--such as the Russian campaign, his lethargic performance at Leipzig leaving his best field commander, Davout, on garrison duty with a large force when he was badly outnumbered, and his subpar performance at Waterloo. Hence, a nuanced biography. The book takes a chronological perspective on the life of Napoleon Bonaparte.

We follow the trajectory of his life--from his youth on Corsica to his developing military career to his first experiences in battle to his rapid rise in the military hierarchy to his leading of armies to his accession to leadership of France to his reforms to his leadership in wars. Over time, his victories became more labored than Wagram and then he suffered reverses as he began to forget some of his own maxims of war and battle. The arc from the Russian campaign to Leipzig to Waterloo shows him performing with little brilliance as he had, for instance, at Austerlitz. His best generalship in the late period, in fact, was his fighting retreat from Waterloo. The book discusses his short exile on Elba and his return to France as well as his longer and more miserable exile to St. On a personal level, we see the tensions within his own family, his relationship with Josephine, his children, the varying relationships with his top commanders Davout, Oudinot, Ney, Murat, Bernadotte, Kellerman, and so on.

And so on. The book also details his reforms in administration, his interest in science and literature, his intellectual curiosity. We see a complex and intriguing human being--flawed but also a major force within France. Some pluses: numerous maps, to provide perspective on campaigns and battles although some are not as useful as others; nice slick pages of paintings of key actors of the era. Overall, a major look at Napoleon and well worth reading. Jan 15, Boudewijn rated it it was amazing Shelves: non-fiction, biography, audio, on-mp3, english, downloaded, favorites.

After reading his excellent account of the Storm Of War, I had high expectations of Robert's newest release, his biography of Napoleon. I was not disappointed. I suspect you can fill half of the New York's library with books dealing with Napoleon and as I understood these can be divided in two sorts: you either hate him, or you love him. Andrew Roberts is comfortably between these two camps. He does not praise him, but is here and there rather critical of Napoleon's decisions. He is unbiased and s After reading his excellent account of the Storm Of War, I had high expectations of Robert's newest release, his biography of Napoleon.

He is unbiased and stays to the facts, but while reading the book my admiration for Napoleon has grown quite a bit. I mean, who can compare his self to this guy, who was emperor at 38? I'm 38, and all that I've managed is to become a consultant at an energy company. As a novice reader in the Napoleon subject I am ashamed to admit Andrew stays to the facts, which is quite comfortable in that respect. He does deliver his tale with objective reasoning, introduces a lot of names that I've never heard of, but this is not a hinderance. Andrew Roberts seems to have had access to a lot of letters from Napoleon to various friends and relatives, which gives you the feeling that you get to know Napoleon quite personally.

Also, here and there you can't suppress a quick smile if Andrew mentions some nice anecdotes and some interactions between Napoleon and the common soldier. So this book met in all aspects my expectations. I can imagine that for the more experienced Napoleon reader, this will not hold many surprises, but for a beginner in the Napoleon subject, this is an excellent introduction. All in all, 5 stars! View 2 comments. Mar 02, John Blumenthal rated it liked it. One more page and I would have fallen on my sword. Nov 29, Cliff rated it it was amazing Shelves: biography. This book had me thinking of it even when I wasn't reading from it, more so than any other book I've read. The story is epic, larger than life.

Man is attracted to war. The threat of death seems distant when a declaration of war is made and the identification of the self with great national power, the bonding of fellow citizens that cared nothing for each other a day before, and the spectacle of masses of uniformed men marching in step puts reason at a distance as emotion overwhelms. And it all i This book had me thinking of it even when I wasn't reading from it, more so than any other book I've read. And it all is concentrated on the person of the leader, be it a Caesar, a Washington or a Napoleon. This has been true over all of history until technology made slaughter of civilians greater than that of soldiers and the immediacy of missile borne nuclear weapons made total destruction likely before people would even know a war is underway, let alone rush out to celebrate it. Napoleon came along at the time when all of the factors that glorify war were present for those in the cities while the chance for heroism at the scenes of battle was high.

He was the man for the time. And what a fascinating man! Read this book to find out why Robert E. Lee said that it is good war is so terrible else we would love it too much. Napoleon was to a great degree self educated. His idols from youth were Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great. This would not distinguish him from many other boys, but his phenomenal talent on the battlefield made him one of a kind. I cannot understand how in a time before airplanes and instant communication a general could have any idea what tens of thousands of troops were doing and where they were doing it let alone command them in a timely enough manner to counter, even to anticipate what the enemy was doing. It all relied on finding some high ground for an overlook, even if it were only a church tower, and to send and receive messengers on horseback. This could not be done effectively if the commander were away from the scene, nor could a commander have the respect of his troops were he not seen in action.

Napoleon was heedless of danger. He had horses killed under him and he regularly saw people at his side wounded or killed, on occasion being dismembered or disemboweled in the act of taking his orders. If any environment could bring on post traumatic stress disorder, this would be the one yet he functioned effectively for many years in it, and after, never suffering more than a grazing wound. His ability as a commander is legendary. The British general, Wellington, who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, remarked that in battle he would rather hear that tens of thousands of enemy reinforcements had arrived than that Napoleon had come to direct the fight. Andrew Roberts relates how Napoleon achieved

this fame. Consider his qualities. He had a compartmentalized mind that could put everything else aside for the subject at hand.

He had a phenomenal memory and a love of detail, particularly helpful on the topography of battlegrounds. He was never emotional in action, remaining cool and collected even when it seemed that everything was going wrong. He did not hesitate to use the lives of his troops as a tool when a costly maneuver was called for as did Grant in the American Civil War. He continually asked himself "what if" questions. What if another army appears on my left?

What is my plan Y and Z if my plan X is not successful? He was incessantly active, never taking a break. He had a sense of humor even under the worst conditions. He verbally encouraged his officers and men and accepted even their negative comments to him without the least resentment. He would not tolerate incompetence and he rewarded bravery and initiative. He had no vanity on the battlefield, dressed without ostentation with no care for a chest bedecked with ribbons or signs of rank. He routinely interacted with his men, asking them how they were doing, what they needed, and responded by seeing that they were taken care of. His speeches before battle were electrifying. No one could complain that he thought he always had the right idea, because time and again he had proven that he did.

In addition to all of this, he was trustworthy and pleasant to be with, knowledgeable on many topics that would engage intellectuals. He earned the devotion so many felt for him who saw him regularly if not daily. War was an adventure that made life vivid and demanding. He was not vindictive, even to the point of trusting some, like his foreign minister, Talleyrand, that he should not have trusted.

Only his family members would have reason to complain of him ordering their lives. In short, until the end of his time in power, he was a tyrant whose subjects believed he had earned the right to it. He got things done and put into practice ideas that the French and the rest of Europe had never been exposed to before. For all of the foregoing, it might seem strange that he wanted to be crowned emperor and was anxious to have a son to provide hereditary rule. But it was a time when only the United States had a democracy. There appeared to be no other way to keep order than monarchy and royalists who wished to see the return of the Bourbon kings were numerous in early 19th century France and Europe. To his credit, it has to be said that during the time he was ruler, he gradually relaxed the total hold on power he had when first crowned. You probably know what went wrong: the Russian campaign. I discovered that Napoleon had intended to overwinter at least once before attempting a march on Moscow, but unfortunately when Moscow did not seem distant, he went for it and succeeded in taking it, undefended, with ease.

The famous burning of Moscow took place afterward. The Russians had cleverly removed all firefighting equipment so that when fires started in this city of wood there was no way to keep them from spreading. The French for all their armed might had to watch helplessly as the city turned to ash. It was winter that brought disaster even though Typhus had decimated the army before it reached Moscow. Improper food given to the horses had them dying at the rate of 1, a month before Moscow was gained.

This, even without a serious battle the Russians wisely retreated greatly reduced what began as a force of, at the Russian border. I had heard that Napoleon took his army in without winter clothing, but this isn't true. In fact they had that clothing but in the late summer when first the army crossed into Russia, the weather was very hot upper 90's F and the troops simply dumped their winter gear. Once snow and subzero temperatures arrived, retreat was the only option and it was too late to prevent tens of thousands dying in the process. The most incredible account in the book is of the construction of two bridges to allow Napoleon's army to get back across the Berezina River, feet wide and with air temperatures well below freezing. Engineers had to wade in shoulder deep to erect wooden trestles. Of mostly Dutch engineers only 50 survived, but the rickety bridges got the army across even as a Russian army nearby failed to see it happening, a major blunder that if avoided would have ended Napoleon's career, and probably his life, right there.

It was only two years from the retreat from Moscow to the invasion of Paris by the Russian army. Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba between Corsica and mainland Italy, escaped easily, returned to Paris, and raised another army only to be defeated at Waterloo. He was not a man given to despair or the idea that a thing could not be done.

The Allies vowed not to be fooled again and his next place of exile was the island of St. Helena in the Atlantic thousands of miles from Europe. The man who had conquered Europe and enjoyed the attentions of over 20 mistresses while doing so, was alone with a handful of retainers with nothing to do but write his memoirs. Still he did not collapse, enjoying playing children's games with the kids of the locals, who appreciated him as one would a fun grandpa. Hundreds of thousands died during his time in power, but what a guy!

May 01, Philipp rated it it was amazing Shelves: biography , france , war. If you're looking for an overview of Napoleon's life and google around, this is usually the biography you end up finding, readable, engaging, thrilling, more than pages long. Roberts is a military historian, so the focus is definitely on military action, less on other interesting aspects of Napoleon's life like, for example, the specific art style of the Napoleonic era. The majority of this book's maps are maps of battlefields and positions, the largest part of the text is descriptions of the various battles, which is perhaps unsurprising for a biography of a man who made his name in war.

The focus on war is the trick that makes book so fast-paced, the battles are almost described like sports matches with tactic errors and routes and whatnot, you almost almost! Roberts' viewpoint is, let's say, conciliatory - he likes to look at instances where history judged Napoleon harshly and tries to defend Napoleon, often by assuming the most positive view 'Yes, Napoleon wrote this error in his letter, but he was probably betting on it being intercepted, thereby confusing the English! There are a few cases where Roberts criticises Napoleon more than other historians: his treatment of women and the laws he introduced sexist even for his time, women as birth machines for the army, or the way he treated Jews 'Napoleon therefore hardly deserves his present reputation in Jewry as a righteous Gentile'.

What's ridiculous is how fast-paced Napoleon's life is, you can't help but compare your own life. He learned French at 9, joined the army as a secondary lieutenant at 16, brigadier general at 24, commander of a whole army at 27, Emperor of France at 35, lost everything and was exiled at

45, died as Roberts is adamant, of stomach cancer like his father, not of any poisonous plot at That to me is the biggest strength here, how Roberts succeeds in depicting Napoleon's sheer energy and speed often by citing from Napoleon's many micro-managing letters. Another fun thing I learned is that if there are indeed infinite universes where everything possible has happened, then we live in one of the few universes where Napoleon didn't die on the battlefield. I think there are at least 20 sentences like this, perhaps somebody else should count?

With the Emperor riding beside him, Desvaux was cut in half by a cannonball. Overall, very, very interesting reading, I can see why this is generally recommended as the general Napoleon biography. I didn't! Nov 17, Omar Ali rated it it was amazing. Roberts is an unabashed hero-worshipper when it comes to Napoleon. That can become a little irritating. But he has also done tremendous research and presents a very thorough, very readable and very up to date biography of Napoleon up to date because new information, including s of perviously lost letters, have continued to turn up and all that information is included in this work. His hero worship does not affect my five star rating because he does not hide any of Napoleon's faults, mistake Roberts is an unabashed hero-worshipper when it comes to Napoleon.

His hero worship does not affect my five star rating because he does not hide any of Napoleon's faults, mistakes or disasters. If you do not share his Napoleon-love, you can still benefit from reading this book. As someone who grew up hearing about Napoleon from Justice Sipra an admirer at the Andrew Roberts level, with several editions of Emil Ludwig's classic biography always present in the house, I am not exactly an unbiased observer, but I think the book really IS worth a read.

Factually accurate, extremely detailed and highly readable. Go for it : Best "new thing I learned from this book"? Exactly how much money the British spent very effectively as subsidies to various European powers to keep Napoleon in check. I knew they spent money but it had never been clear to me how systematic, well thought out, effective and extensive that effort was. That too shows up occasionally in the book View 1 comment. Oct 22, Leah rated it it was ok Shelves: , new-to-me , abandoned , history , biography. Abandoned at a third of the way through. The book's getting great reviews so it must be one of those cases where the author and reader simply don't 'gel' but I'm finding it as turgid as wading through treacle. After reading some truly great, well-written histories and biographies over the last few years, this one is simply failing to inspire my interest - despite the fact that Napoleon must surely be one of the most fascinating characters in history.

Oh well! Nov 26, Jean rated it really liked it Shelves: history , non-fiction , napoleonic-war , biography. I have been fascinated with Napoleon for as long as I can remember. Needless to say I have read extensively about him. This new book about Napoleon was given to me by a friend who knows of my obsession. He was a general by age 24 an emperor at age He promoted on merit not birth ran I have been fascinated with Napoleon for as long as I can remember. He promoted on merit not birth rank or political favor and changed the French military and government accordingly. In research for this book Roberts walked almost everyone of the 60 battlefields. The effect is a huge, deep, witty, humane, and admiring biography of pages. The Napoleon painted here is a whirlwind of a man, not only a vigorous and supremely confident commander, but an astonishingly busy governor, and correspondent. Roberts points out that Napoleon was a master of multitasking, had a great sense of humor and was a great negotiator.

Napoleon would therefore be delighted to know that he is the subject of historical obsession nearly two centuries after his death. Robert has been indefatigable in tracking down memorabilia and visiting sites of battles, palaces and places of exile. This is all richly depicted and woven into a narrative that is told with the aplomb of an accomplished historical storyteller. Roberts points out that the laws and structure of modern France, indeed, to a significant degree, of all Europe, derive from those created by Napoleon. If you are interested in Napoleon I would recommend this book. Sep 12, Abesalom Habtemariam rated it it was amazing Shelves: biographies-memoirs , all-things-france , want-to-own , history , mystar-rated-books , french-revolution , napoleonic-wars. One of the sixty famous battlefields he led such as Jena or Waterloo, can yield volumes worth of content. This book is by no means a light read.

All in all, this is an absolutely remarkable biography on one of history's most iconic figures. The book is rich with references from letters written by Napoleon himself as well as from his family, his generals, his rivals, his friends and his close companions. The added anecdotes, factual corrections and personal notes of the author make it so easy to put everything into a historical context. Of course, like many historical figures Napoleon was not perfect. He was nearly ten years old before he learned French and throughout his life, he spoke it with a thick accent. The Corsican independence movement had a massive effect in his early political and military career.

For all his education in the French military school, he credits his love of books for his superior knowledge in history, military strategy, the arts, philosophy and many more. He also possessed a phenomenal memory. While in his final exile in St. Napoleon instinctively understood what soldiers wanted, and he gave it to them. And at least until the battle of Aspern-Essling in he gave them what they wanted most of all: victory. He had an undeniable charisma and aptitude in the presence of intellectuals of his time. The vivid and magnificent portrayal of the battles of Jena, Austerlitz, and Friedland is much better than documentaries I have seen on them.

Especially the chapter on Austerlitz for me is a masterpiece in historical writing. The details were simply magnificent. It makes owning the expensive hardcopy of this book absolutely worth it. But the one disappointment I have with the book is in the chapter on Waterloo. The return of the French army after occupying Moscow in notoriously icy conditions was depicted with much vivacity, anguish and attention to details. For me, it takes a tiny bit of quality away from the book. Napoleon was one of the most consequential leaders the world has ever seen. He built institutions that will be, as he puts them, masses of granite in the soul of France. Overall, the book is engaging, detailed and highly researched. Especially, if you are someone who enjoys military history, this is a must-read book. Another motivation to pick up this book might be the fact that understanding the Napoleonic wars comes in handy when reading classic literature written or based upon of this era of French and European history.

I realize this is one of the longest reviews I have even written but it is also one of the longest books I have ever read. This book is a 4. Mar 09, Sonny rated it really liked it Shelves: history , europe. Andrew Roberts is a British historian, biographer and journalist. Since numerous books have been written about Napoleon, one must wonder why we need yet one more. Napoleon was not French at all. He was born Napoleone di Buonaparte in Corsica to a relatively modest Italian family. He was a lonely, introverted boy whose only real friends were his books and he developed into an immature, self-conscious man, always seeking approval. His favorite pastimes were intellectual rather than social. He rose to

prominence during the French Revolution and led several successful military campaigns. Not being a part of the French elite, he worked his way up the ranks through hard work and natural talent, particularly in mathematics and artillery.

But grasping national power for himself, Napoleon first had to defeat the enemies of revolutionary France, particularly Austria and Italy. As Emperor of France from 1804 until 1814, Napoleon took a country in the midst of acute fiscal crisis and social unrest and made it the dominant power in Europe. He tried to restore glory and order to France, lost in the days after the storming of the Bastille, by making a series of legal, educational and administrative reforms.

The central pillars of his reign were low taxes, property rights, centralized authority, and national glory. Before the Napoleonic Code, France did not have a single set of laws. The Code standardized and modernized a conflicting set of local customs and provincial laws that consisted mainly of exemptions, privileges, and special charters that had existed for centuries. Napoleon also brought enlightenment to people.

In the new French Empire, talent mattered more than birth and glory depended on achievements rather than status. He abolished noble privilege while bringing religious tolerance. He was the hero of the growing middle class and he made Paris a great center for culture and learning. Napoleon was a talented genius, yet he failed on occasion as he grew older. His ability as a master tactician on relatively localized battlefields failed him when he invaded Russia, where he was outthought and outmaneuvered in the open spaces he found there. While his engineers were able to help him and his army make an amazing escape, he was defeated again at Leipzig.

Despite significant advancements, Napoleon empire was flawed, to be sure. He was driven by violence and the love of power. Prior to the Code, women had enjoyed wide freedom, separate property rights, and an influential place in society. The Code also gave immense powers to the state. Roberts is an excellent writer and a good storyteller. He brilliantly conveys the vigor and charisma of Napoleon, especially his military genius. He is at his best when describing the battles. Still, this is a worthwhile epic biography. I sat before this very daunting looking book, coming in at over pages, feeling slightly excited as my expectations were high after Dr Roberts last offering. I have read a few books about Napoleons campaigns before but never had I taken a look at the entire life of the man. I am pleased to write that this book delivers an informative and enthralling read that sees the pages melt away as you are pulled into Napoleons life.

This book is very balanced, with the author trying to peel back the stories and legends around the man to tell as best as possible the real story behind the man. This book is a must read for anyone that loves history. Apr 29, Chris Dietzel rated it it was amazing. This was excellent and exceeded my expectations. I feel like I just completed a college course dedicated to Napoleon and am now an expert on him. Part of what makes this biography so wonderful for me is that Roberts spends a lot of time giving readers each take on the key moments in Napoleon's life, from those who hated him to those who loved him, and then provides historical context to let readers know what is most likely in each instance.

This makes the entire book feel much more worthwhile than if the author took a simple black-or-white stance on Napoleon as previous biographers have done. Roberts does a great job of not taking sides while providing as much context as possible on everything Napoleon said and did. Highly recommended for history lovers. Aug 11, Christopher rated it it was amazing Shelves: history , biography-memoir , europe , military-affairs , arcs-and-giveaways. Full Disclosure: I received an advance uncorrected copy of this book for free through Goodreads' First Reads program. However, the views expressed are my own and do not reflect that of the author, the publisher, or Goodreads.

Like the great ancient conquerors which he admired, Napoleon stands as a colossus on the historical stage. Yet he is little known nor well understood by people today, especially as his reputation has been marred by superficial similarities to Hitler and the "Black Legend" of libelous claims made by his detractors after his fall from power. Enter this wonderful biography by Mr. Roberts, who has written a couple of books on the Napoleonic era and is currently a fellow of the Napoleonic Institute. Roberts dispels the Black Legends that cropped up and shows Napoleon to be not some kind of proto-Hitler, but as the last and greatest of the Enlightenment despots that appeared on the world stage during the 18th century.

Napoleon had all of the admirable qualities of an enlightened dictator including being intimately involved in the regeneration of France after the devastation of the Terror during the French Revolution, being a true patron of the arts, establishing equality under the law through the Code Napoleon that would be copied on every continent except Antarctica, and the establishment of a semi-meritocratic system with the legion d'honneur. He also had the bad qualities too, including the launching of a coup that overthrew an unpopular, but democratic government, the end of most forms of political freedom, especially press freedom, the rare execution of dissidents, the tacit approval of mass murder tactics in the Peninsular War, and, most famously, his pride. Of course, what Napoleon is best known for are his battles and Mr. Roberts does not fail to deliver as he describes Napoleon's military reforms and his tactical and strategic brilliance quite clearly.

His descriptions of specific battles are almost pulse pounding in their descriptions of cavalry and artillery and acts of bravery. Robert's also brings two very interesting arguments to the table as well. The first is that Napoleon, in contrast to his portrayal by proponents of the "Black Legend", was actually quite warm and forgiving to nearly everyone, like his hero Julius Caesar. Not until the end does Napoleon seem to hold a grudge against anyone, but Napoleon never seems to avenge any slights against himself.

The second interesting argument is that, contrary to popular belief, the Russian invasion was not the product of massive hubris and ego, but rather the culmination of a series of miscalculations after the peace at Tilsit that any body in a similar position could have made. Is there any way Napoleon could have planned for the Typhus fever that would ravage his army? And many of his best advisors had been killed or were unavailable to dissuade him from war with Russia in any meaningful way, though many of his advisors at the time did try to.

And, yes, there were a few places where Napoleon could have stopped his army and gone into winter quarter before arriving in Moscow, but he reached those sites so early in the campaign that he could be forgiven for wanting to drive into Moscow and seek out a decisive victory. Certainly Napoleon was a proud, perhaps even egotistical man, but Mr. Roberts ably argues that Napoleon was just as brilliant as Napoleon thought himself to be.

Napoleon's personal life is also given equal weight and one feels a sense of sadness from Josephine's infidelities at the start of their marriage, the pain of their divorce for dynastic reasons, and the fact that though his second marriage to Marie Louise seemed a happy one and would produce a son whom Napoleon would dote on, after leaving her for the front in Napoleon would never see his second wife or son again and Marie Louise would soon cheat on him and seemingly hate him so soon afterwards, even going so far as to trying to turn their son against him after his death.

And speaking of his death, the last chapter of the book describing Napoleon's exile on St. Helena is almost excruciating as the great man seems to slowly dissolve away within a few years after his death. Roberts brings Napoleon to life quite well. The only black mark I have against this book is that Mr. Roberts argues that Napoleon was a witty tease and that many of his more eyebrow raising quotes were made in jest. But this is one area where Mr. Roberts fails to make that case convincingly as some quotes would have a remark that this was said in jest and others wouldn't. However, this is a rather small mark against an otherwise great biography. I highly recommend this to anyone who is interested in knowing more about the great Emperor of the French Empire. Jul 12, Sud rated it it was amazing Shelves: favorites , history.

Sometimes life can be strange. When I was a newly minted Ph. While there I was introduced to a visiting lecturer named Dr. Andrew Roberts from Cambridge. It is funny that several years later I stumbled upon this book and was surprised to see Dr. Robert's name. I am certainly glad that I picked this one up and proudly add it to my library. It is truly magnificent. Robert's writing style draws the reader in with witty sayings uttered by Napoleon, fascinating side notes, and detailed maps of the various conflicts. It is in the writing of the conflicts that Dr. Roberts shines. Some people generally heretics find military history to be boring. Robert's wonderful accounts of the battles should dispel that vile calumny. But there is so much more to the complex character that is Napoleon. He is generally associated with his Wars and that is understandable, but far fewer know about the tremendous changes that occurred after his conquest of Europe.

Many of the old traditional structures came undone due to his new Napoleonic Code. In many ways, his progressive ideas and successes were overshadowed by the myth of this ogre-like Anti-Christ coming to burn a city near you. Beautifully written, fascinating to read, and always entertaining- this is the must-have version of Napoleon's history. Using new research, Dr. Roberts gives the reader an idea as to the truly complex mind of Napoleon. It is also interesting that Robert shows that Napoleon did make mistakes, sometimes ignoring his own maxims such is the case during the Battle of Waterloo. There are many wonderful illustrations and maps in this book.

The scope of the story is vast and wonderfully complete. Not only will you learn about the man Napoleon, but you will see how his actions changed the face of Europe forever. A brilliant book by a brilliant historian about a brilliant man. What could be better? Not much. If you are going to read one history book this year, let this be the one. Highly recommended. May 12, John rated it really liked it Shelves: , non-fiction. This book gave me such a better appreciation of who the man Napoleon was. May 03, Andy Miller rated it it was amazing.

This fine biography is as thorough as it is balanced. The exhaustive research by Andrew Roberts included thousands of letters written by Napoleon that were not available to other biographers as well as letters written by others and memoirs of many people from the day. The balance comes from critical examination of the sources, Roberts discusses whether certain letters and memoirs were self serving or accurate and looks to other sources to aid in that balance The biography adds not often found nua This fine biography is as thorough as it is balanced. The balance comes from critical examination of the sources, Roberts discusses whether certain letters and memoirs were self serving or accurate and looks to other sources to aid in that balance The biography adds not often found nuance to Napoleon.

As a soldier he witnessed the surrender of the Swiss Guards by Louis XVI, Napoleon remembered that when he later ruthlessly crushed citizen resistance in Paris before he went to Egypt. Shortly before the fall of Robespierre, Napoleon was plotting with Robespierre's brother, after the fall, Napoleon was justifiably concerned that his involvement would be discovered The biography recounts Napoleon's victorious Italian campaign giving credit to Napoleon's superior strategy and military reforms. The Egyptian campaign is detailed and is an example of Roberts' balance. Napoleon brought many writers and scientists with him and Roberts shows that Napoleon's intellectual curiosity and respect for Egyptian history was sincere, but Roberts also contrasted Napoleon's record of respect and magnanimous treatment of defeated soldiers with his barbaric treatment of the defeated soldiers in the Egypt and Palenstine campaigns with Roberts concluding was due to the color of their skin The biography follows Napoleon's return to France when he learns of military advances against France.

This included Napoleon's coup to become ruler. It was not democratic, the legislative assemblies were against it but were intimidated by Napoleon's injection of military force but Roberts notes that such force was unsuccessful earlier in the French Revolution due to citizen revolt, but by this time the citizens were tired of the upheaval and welcomed Napoleon's ascension to power. Roberts describes Napoleon's victories against France's enemies, not only eliminating threats to France but expanding territory and gaining allies through force and intimidation. Roberts gives credit for defeating superior forces to Napoleon's superior tactics and reformed, modern armies. He also gives credit to Napoleon's easy rapport with his soldiers something his rivals would never even consider Roberts spends much time on Napoleon's political, social and legal reforms which had impacts long after his defeat.

Even while Napoleon became more and more of a dictator, he instituted egalitarian and republican reforms which were welcomed not only by the French people but also the people of defeated countries. Contrary to much of our history, even the dictator Napoleon was not simply another Bourbon king, his reforms were real and may well have prevented a long time Bourbon restoration after Napoleon's defeat. Roberts makes a convincing argument that Napoleon was just as interested in reforming France and Europe as he was in making war The lead up to Napoleon's defeat is of course recounted.

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