

Napoleon



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Napoleon made numerous mistakes that led to downfall and exile, which one was the biggest? Napoleon was one of the great political and military leaders of all time. Few can deny his extraordinary charisma, ability to inspire his followers, and military acumen. During the course of his reign, he changed Europe forever. But there was a reason why he did not last and why he was eventually imprisoned at St. Helena. He made mistakes. In hindsight there are a number of questionable decisions Napoleon made, but surely the biggest one was the invasion of Russia. Russia was a tempting prize for Napoleon. It was a huge and rich country and invading it would eliminate a serious threat. But it is hard to overestimate the size of Russia and the country's terrible weather (this was also discovered more than a hundred years later by Hitler at Stalingrad). The Russians avoided Napoleon's forces and lured him and his soldiers deeper into the heartland where winter came, decimating the French forces (Spielvogel, 417). The Russians practised scorched earth policies on their own territory and the result was that the French had little or nothing to forage. All the livestock and crops were destroyed. Supply lines back then would not have been sophisticated to properly supply Napoleon's massive army. Famously, the French invaded with 400, 000 troops but returned with only about a tenth of that number. Essentially this campaign showed that Napoleon's eyes were bigger than his stomach. He felt he could do anything, even invade a massive country with little preparation. The result was a cruel reversal and the beginning of the end of his reign. Work consulted Spielvogel, Jackson J. *Western Civilization: A Brief History*. Cengage Learning, 2010.