

**Volume 19**

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**History's Turning Points (7) –**  
**Ambitious Corporal – I**

**Lead: Historical study often helps reveal twists in the human journey. Consider history's turning points: the ambitious corporal.**

***Intro: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts***

**Content: French historian and romantic author, Francois-René Vicomte Chateaubriand, wrote of Napoleon Bonaparte, “the mightiest breath of life which ever animated human clay.” He can be forgiven a flight of hyperbole, but for the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there is little**

doubt that Bonaparte straddled the wide continent of Europe virtually unimpeded. He was the Corsican corporal whose ambition made him Emperor of the French and whose military genius and daring shattered all before him. Yet, perhaps it was not his conquests which were fleeting or his empire which faded at his fall which set Napoleon firmly astride one of history's great turning points. It was the system of aristocratic rule that he wounded, the legal system that he established wherever his armies conquered, and the dark and vicious concept of nationalism that lingered long after its author perished on St. Helena. Those things transformed him from transitory tyrant to a figure

**whose influence approaches the eternal.**

**Napoleon was certainly no republican, though he served the French republic as long as it served him, but he did understand that something significant and permanent had happened to the French in 1789. Though there were many similarities between his rule and the ancient regime which the Revolution brought down and those regimes that followed him, Napoleon always tipped his hat to revolutionary principles such as equality before the law, but he also cynically believed that humanity required a strong hand. He said, “men must be very bad to be as bad as I**

**think they....are.” Next time:  
Napoleon’s second life.**

**At the University of Richmond’s  
School of Professional and Continuing  
Studies, I’m Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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