

*“My power depends on my glory, and my glory  
on my victories.” —Napoleon*

In 1807, Napoleon Bonaparte, determined to restore French industry to its pre-Revolutionary glory,<sup>1</sup> commissioned a table service from the Imperial Porcelain Manufactory at Sèvres for his personal use. The pieces were decorated with idyllic scenes from the lands Napoleon had conquered across Europe and the cost for the set (44,124 francs) was paid from the *domaine extraordinaire*, a fund compiled from treasure he had looted from those same countries. He kept plates from this table service with him until his death.

A proud and combative man, Napoleon grew up on the outskirts of the aristocracy.<sup>2</sup> He was unkempt and without proper manners, a misogynist who could be startlingly and publicly cruel to his courtiers. A master propagandist from his earliest years, he diverted attention from any blunders<sup>3</sup> with self-published bulletins and commissioned images that painted him as a victorious hero, one who had defeated lesser countries for the glory of France. Napoleon prided himself on his communication strategy and his powers of negotiation, using the lure of celebrity and the dazzle of luxury to enforce his will.

Napoleon’s palatial surroundings emphasized traditional aesthetics and luxurious materials, balanced in public propaganda with stories of his austere private habits. Household staff were carefully instructed that the plain meals<sup>4</sup> he ate off these plates were to last no longer than fifteen minutes. Napoleon did not drink much wine or brandy, but he drank coffee constantly.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Make France Great Again

<sup>2</sup> Queens, NY

<sup>3</sup> Russia

<sup>4</sup> “Campaign food,” the fast food of the era

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the equivalent of twelve Diet Cokes per day