

# Personality Types and History:

## A Comparative Biography of Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler

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### Abstract

The research presented here seeks to explore a connection between personality types, more specifically Type A personality traits, and historical figures, especially figures generally demonized by society. In order to bring relevant and detailed example of this possible connection, the research focuses on two of the most infamous historical figures, Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler. By comparing and contrasting these two men's actions, politically, militarily and psychologically (their view of themselves), the research seeks to connect those actions to the Type A personality traits. It is important to note, that this paper is not arguing causation, but rather is a beginning of a conversation, a stepping stone for further research. The result of the research shows that the similarities between these men validates the question: "did their personality traits affect their decisions?"

### Research Concern and Questions

Research Concern: The research seeks to explore a connection between the psychology behind personality types and how that might have affected historical figures actions, especially those demonized by society. So often we as a society write off "evil men" as just that, someone who was evil in nature. This research simply asks a question: "could personality types affect the actions of these men?" This is not to say that these affects would alleviate these men of their fault, their perpetrations are undoubtedly still unfathomable acts of injustice. Rather, this question would lead to further research and work in this area that could eventually answer why. And with this answer, maybe we could prevent repetition of those injustices.

#### Research Questions:

- Conceding that we cannot prove causation, could personality types have had an effect on the acts of demonized historical figures? More specifically Hitler and Napoleon?
- What is the connection between personality type and Napoleon/Hitler's political, military and personal actions?
- How could this idea, or hypothesis, impact the world today or in the future?

### Research Method

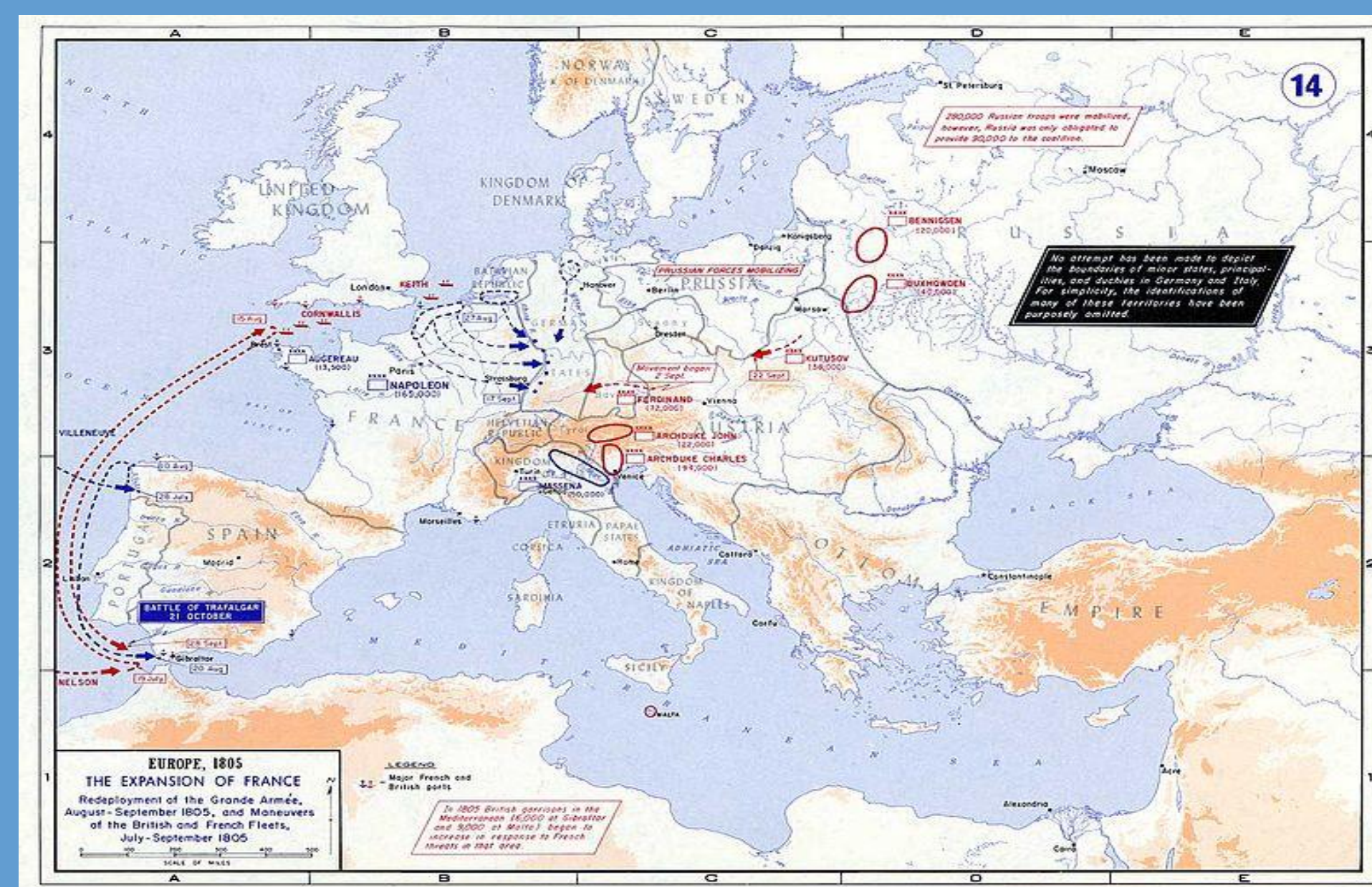
Research was conducted by using a number of precedent writing to provide much of the biographical comparison of Napoleon and Hitler, used as a foundation and a possible explanation of their personality types. Analyses of primary sources were used in the body of the research to give specific pieces of evidence supporting the claim the research makes. This includes writing by Hitler, speeches from both men and an analysis of troop movements of both men, complete with maps seen below.

The evidence was first examined considering political strategies, using speeches to demonstrate how both men used characteristics of Type A personalities, such as ambition, or their high status, to motivate the people of their respective countries.

Comparing and contrasting these maps shows some key similarities in the military strategies of Napoleon and Hitler. Both men chose to attack on multiple fronts, and in both cases, overextended themselves. This shows great zeal on the part of both men, which aligns with the aggressive characteristic found in most Type A personalities.

Finally, evidence from speeches and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was analyzed to show the aggressive self confidence in these men's examinations of their own leadership, again aligning with Type A personalities.

### Napoleon Troop Movements, 1805



### Hitler's Troop Movements, 1939-1942



### Definition of Terms

Type A Personality- The research used Friedman's definition which describes Type A personalities as, "ambitious, rigidly organized, highly status conscious... and proactive."

### Literature Review

Much of the biographical comparison uses a foundational work by Desmond Seward, named *Napoleon and Hitler: A Comparative Biography*. Seward offers concise comparisons between the two men that were beneficial to set the premise that the two men were in fact similar in many ways.

Steve Englund's 2006 journal piece simply titled, *Napoleon and Hitler* carves away at unnecessary fact and gets right to the heart of the issue.

A number of other works were used to a smaller extent, but these two pieces provided a bulk of the information, along with the primary sources. Some of the primary sources used included Hitler's speech at Nuremberg in 1927, showing the confidence of himself and his Nazi army. Also included was Napoleon's proclamation to his troops during his time as a general in Revolutionary Army, early 1876. The methods he used to motivate his troops can be connected to a number of characteristics commonly found with Type A personalities.

### Results

Again, this research is not seeking to bring about definitive answers about the connection between personality types and these men's actions, but rather it is a start of a conversation. As far as that is concerned, the research does a good job of presenting evidence that gives this idea credibility and points further research in the right direction.

### Conclusion

Through examining Napoleon and Hitler's political maneuverings, military actions and personal views of themselves, as leaders, this research validates an exploration of the connection of personality types and what effects they have on the actions of all people, specifically historical figures. Although this might be a more useful connection when looking at demonized figures, the same connection can be examined when talking about historical figures that are generally considered as positive figures, i.e. Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa.

The research is limited in a number of ways. First, although it gives an answer on how personality types may affect actions of these figures, the research cannot answer if they indeed affect those actions. The research lies on the premise that personality types do affect actions in general, so the same would be true for historical figures. Also, it is only a start, a step in the right direction. Further, more in depth research is needed to bring more solidity to the answers discovered.

The research does have a few implications. First, it is a great start to a conversation that could be continued in further research. If solid answers come about that in fact support this hypothesis, the implications would be great. Personality type could become a factor that is considered when choosing leaders in the future.

### Selected Bibliography

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