

## Topic Page: [Continental System](#)

Definition: **Continental System** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

System of economic preference and protection within Europe from 1806 to 1813 created by the French emperor Napoleon in order to exclude British trade; see France: history 1515–1815, **the Napoleonic Wars**. Apart from its function as economic warfare, the system also reinforced the French economy at the expense of other European states. It failed owing to British naval superiority.

### Summary Article: **Continental System**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

scheme of action adopted by Napoleon I in his economic warfare with England from 1806 to 1812. Economic warfare had been carried on before 1806, but the system itself was initiated by the Berlin Decree, which claimed that the British blockade of purely commercial ports was contrary to international law. It was extended by the Warsaw Decree (1807), the Milan Decree (1807), and the Fontainebleau Decree (1810), which forbade trade with Great Britain on the part of France, her allies, and neutrals. Napoleon expected that the unfavorable trade balance and loss of precious metals would destroy England's credit, break the Bank of England, and ruin English industry. Great Britain retaliated by the orders in council, which forbade nearly all trade between England and any nation obeying the Berlin Decree. One of the most dramatic results of the commercial warfare was the English bombardment of neutral Copenhagen (1807) and the seizure of the Danish fleet. The trade restrictions of the continental system led to a decline of the significance of Amsterdam; it never regained its former prominence. England had control of the sea, and large-scale smuggling thrived all along the European coast (with U.S. privateers taking a large part in the illegal trade). Napoleon himself issued special licenses for trade bringing in colonial goods on the payment of duties. Napoleon's Russian campaign of 1812 was brought on by Russia's refusal to conform to the decrees, and the war between England and the United States, known as the War of 1812, was to some extent a result of the economic warfare. But so difficult was the enforcement of the system that in his effort to impose it on Russia, Napoleon had to violate it in France. Whether the continental system delayed the introduction of the Industrial Revolution to France is much debated, though it did foster the development of beet sugar manufacture and machine spinning of textiles.

See Melvin, F. E. , *Napoleon's Navigation System* (1919);.

Heckscher, E. F. , *The Continental System* (1922);.

Ellis, G. , *Napoleon's Continental Blockade* (1991).

#### **APA**

#### Chicago

#### Harvard

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Continental System. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.).

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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## MLA

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