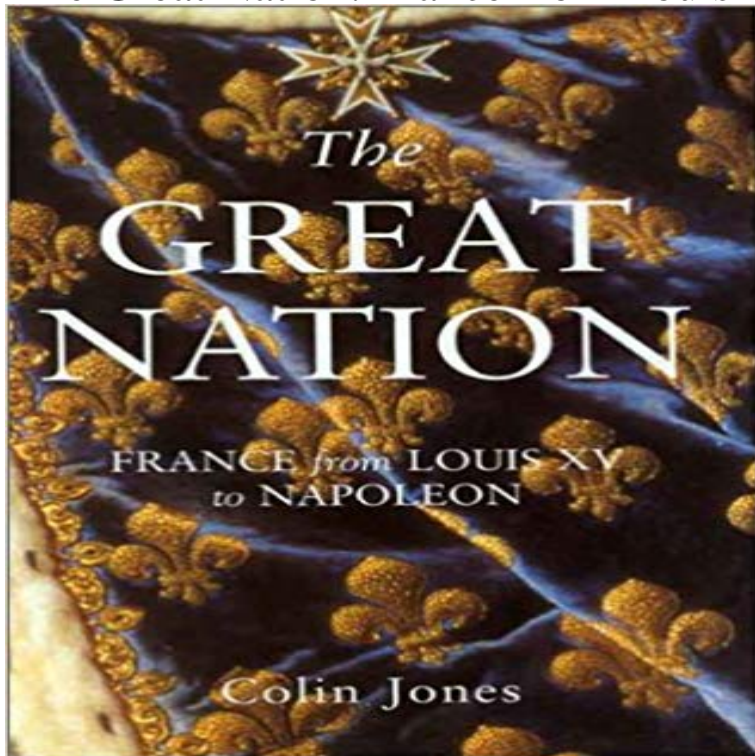


The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon



The French Revolution has never seemed as revolutionary as in Colin Jones magnificent new history of the period from the death of Louis XIV, the Sun King, in 1715 to the advent of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799. During the middle decades of the eighteenth century France was positioned at the apex of the worlds most powerful states, seemingly invulnerable to invasion, with an unparalleled intellectual and artistic life, and the wealth and population to dominate the world. By centurys end, the Bourbon monarchs who had presided over this robust age were killed or in exile, and in their place reigned first Revolution, and then Napoleon. Jones breaks new ground, revealing that the so-called Old Regime, which held power up to 1789, was neither as old nor as doomed as historians have often claimed. In fact, the whole of Europe acknowledged the dynamism, social energy, and cultural prestige of France, whose Bourbon rulers continued to be restlessly experimental and militarily ferocious, even helping the fledgling American revolutionaries destroy arch-rival Englands American empire in the last decade of its rule. The implosive events of 1789 become all the more remarkable in light of Jones brilliant exposition of the vitality of the Bourbon reign, and of the complex of social forces, dynamic personalities, and unpredictable moments of chance that brought down a colossus.

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