

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

### **Napoleon: Son of the Revolution or Son of a ...?**

Napoleon claimed that he was a “son of the Revolution.” In fact, he wrote the following in his memoirs:

**“Such work as mine is not done twice in a century. I have saved the Revolution as it lay dying. I have cleansed it of its crimes and have held it up to the people shining with fame. I have inspired France and Europe with new ideas that will never be forgotten.”**

However, a later French statesman and writer, Alex de Tocqueville had the following to say about Napoleon: “He was as great as a man can be without virtue.” So the question remains: Did Napoleon really “save” the Revolution? Did he help France to become a more democratic nation? Stated another way, did Napoleon end the revolution or did he continue its reforms? However, before you can answer these questions you should first ask yourself what the goals of the Revolution were. You should then list the positive and negative things that Napoleon did. (Look at the worksheet entitled “The Accomplishments of Napoleon: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly” along with your notes, videoguides, and readings.) After you have done this, you have to decide if the positive outweighs the negative. Now you are finally ready to answer the original questions.

To deepen the discussion here a few additional related questions to consider: 1) Should Napoleon be judged based on his intentions or his actions? ; 2) Was Napoleon a great man or a great bad man?

### **Goals of the French Revolution:**

**Positive**

**Negative**

# The Accomplishments of Napoleon: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

**Victory against the Austrians:** Napoleon routinely defeated the Austrians in battle. His early victories led to French control of Northern Italy. Napoleon's later victories gave him the ability to force an alliance on the Austrians and marry the daughter of the Hapsburg Emperor. However, in order to do this he will have to divorce his wife Josephine. At this point in his life he is obsessed with producing a male heir and a creating a family dynasty.

**Rags to Riches Story:** Despite being born in Corsica and being viewed as an outsider, Napoleon will use his talents and skill to ascend to the top ranks of the French army. He will then parlay his growing popularity from his military victories to become the Emperor of France. From there he will set out to conquer Europe. He will spread the ideals of the Revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—across Europe. However, Napoleon also practiced nepotism by putting his siblings on the thrones of various client states. A prominent example of this trend would be his brother Joseph being anointed the King of Spain. The citizens of Spain will come to see Napoleon as more of conqueror than a liberator and will rebel against him and his brother.

**The Napoleonic Code:** Napoleon had French law re-written. In order to streamline the confusing, sometimes repetitious elements of French law, Napoleon (like Justinian before him) had the law of the land codified in one supreme law. The Code corrected some injustices (i.e. abolished feudalism and class distinctions), however it also restricted freedom of speech and the press in the name of authority.

**The Concordant of 1801:** During the Revolution the Church was a frequent victim of revolutionary justice. The revolutionaries confiscated Church lands and money. The Concordant gave the Catholic Church status as the official state church, but also allowed followers of other religions such as Judaism and Protestantism to practice their faith.

**Creation of French Empire:** Napoleon's success on the battlefield allowed France to grow into a world power. With Napoleon leading, French armies conquered Holland, Belgium, and Spain adding them to his empire. Napoleon also defeated the Prussians, Austrians, and Russians making the European continent an entirely French possession. Only Britain, Portugal, and Sweden remained outside of his control. However, he eventually overestimated his power. In 1812 when he tried to intimidate Russia into following the Continental System with the invasion of his Grand Army, he instead was dealt a crushing and humiliating defeat.

**Financial Stabilization:** Napoleon ended runaway inflation and stabilized prices. Under Napoleon the French people could afford to eat and succeed. He did this by allowing emigres to return to France with their money without the fear of death. Napoleon began state sponsored projects building roads and canals. His many military victories brought tribute into the country which also helped the economy. Napoleon also established a national bank that exists to this day. However, he also launched the Continental System in 1806 which attempted to destroy England financially, but instead ended up bringing much financial pain to France and continental Europe.

**Construction of Schools:** Schools were built allowing all to gain an education. This was a crucial development because in Napoleon's France one received their job based upon ability not family connections. That is unless you were a member of the Bonaparte family!

**Generosity toward his people:** Napoleon never forget where he came from. Following a victorious battle versus the Austrians, Napoleon announced he would adopt the children of all the French soldiers killed during battle. Napoleon ordered the state to pay for the children's care and education. The government would arrange marriages for the girls and find jobs for the boys. Napoleon also allowed "his children" to take his last name. Yet Napoleon's military campaigns led to the death of 2.5 million men. And he once said the following: "What are a million men compared to I?"

**Centralized Authority:** Napoleon brought order to French society by giving strength to the central government. Under Napoleon taxes were once again collected and used for maintenance of roads, sewers, schools, and a civil administration. This civil service was able to return France to the order that citizens enjoyed King Louis XIV.

**Crowning himself Emperor:** In 1804 Napoleon invited the Pope to Paris to crown Napoleon emperor of France for life. When the Pope was about to crown him Napoleon took the crown from the Pope's hands and place the crown on his own head in essence saying this his power descended directly from God.

## **Eyewitnesses to the Reign of Napoleon**

“I once baked bread for the people of Paris, today I bake bread for the armies of Napoleon. In Paris I never saw more than the neighborhood where I lived and worked. Now I have seen all of Europe. Granted I saw it as I marched across it and I along with the continent have also seen my share of bloodshed and destruction. We might not be staring at death anymore, but what good is food if you have to fight the armies of Europe to get it. At least, so far, we are winning.”—

**Jacques St. Martin, Soldier**

“Since the rise of Napoleon and his signing of the Concordant I am living a new life. No longer am I hunted by the gendarmes (soldiers) of the revolution. God once again has a place in the sun and in the lives of the French. My Church is full and together with Napoleon we are giving order to society. The Church supports Napoleon. He is after all the rightful ruler of France.

Otherwise, the Pope never would have come to Paris to offer the Emperor his crown. This is the way a civilized society acts, crown and cross, hand in hand.—**Bishop Guy Levesque, Catholic priest**

“Thank the heavens for the Napoleonic Code! Today we once again have order in our courts. In fact, I believe this law of Napoleon may be even better than the old laws of the king. Napoleon has taken the best ideas of the revolutionaries and married them to traditional law. He has thrown out the unmanageable dreams of the revolutionary rabble and now we once again have an orderly system of law. Granted Napoleon does rig the votes in the national plebiscites, but so what, at least his laws make sense and give our society order.”—**Rene Montesat, Lawyer**

“I never thought I would return to France. Not after barely escaping the Revolution with my head still attached. However, I must say the Corsican corporal (Napoleon) does have a style to him. He has given the peasants a bit of what they want, but under him there is room for an aristocracy and an aristocracy can thrive. If he wants to crown himself Emperor, so be it. He will always be an imposter, but so long as I keep my neck and my fortune, let him be.—**Marquis Luc Duvalle, Aristocrat**

“Napoleon. Ha! Women fought for the revolution and we were lied to by the revolutionaries. Napoleon comes to power to give order to the revolution and instead rolls back all the hard fought gains. We had more freedoms under the King and under the King we had none. When will France wake up and forget about the money he puts in our pockets and instead realize that he has taken away our freedom!”—**Marie Du’Franc, Peasant**

