

Was napoleon a great man? essay sample



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On Bonaparte Napoleon was indeed a great man, in that he made a significant impact on the course of history, although with both positive and negative consequences. He was one of history's greatest military commanders and succeeded in conquering most of Europe and did much to modernize the nations he ruled. He also introduced the Code Napoleon, which brought unity, order, progress and reform to France and Europe and the Code is still used today. However, in the end, he betrayed some of the principles of the French Revolution by suppressing liberties that were fought for during the revolution and brought France back to a monarchy. He was also too ambitious, and made the fatal mistake of invading Russia.

Napoleon's strength as a military commander was a major contributing factor to his success in conquering much of Europe. Napoleon himself said, "Power is my mistress" (Encarta 98). He had a love for action and a boundless ambition. "I live only for posterity," he said, "death is nothing . . . but to live defeated and without glory is to die every day." The battle of Austerlitz was one of the greatest military engagements won by Napoleon and is an example of his incredible military genius. Despite being outnumbered, Napoleon delivered a crushing defeat and as a result of the victory, the third coalition against Napoleon dissolved.

Napoleon's goal was to found a European state "a federation of free peoples." (Encarta 98) This was achieved by the Code Napoleon which was introduced by Napoleon in 1804 and it greatly benefited the French Empire. Even today, the Code Napoleon is still in force in France and its impact still is apparent in the law of all European countries. It laid the foundations for liberal reform, justice and democracy and introduced many reforms and

improvements from the old system of government. Feudalism was abolished, allowing more freedom and equality before the law. Napoleon also encouraged education and fostered science and the arts. He also firmly believed in meritocracy, where people are rewarded for their ability rather than by reasons of birth or social influence.

However, the Code upheld the principles of the French constitution only to a certain extent. Despite the numerous beneficial reforms such as religious freedom, Napoleon contradicted his own promise of liberty and freedom by not allowing freedom of speech and trade unions. Children had no rights under the new code and women also fared badly. In regards to the new code, he said, “ the husband must possess the absolute power and right to say to his wife: Madame, you shall not go out, you shall not go to the theater, you shall not visit such and such a person: for the children you bear, they shall be mine.” http://library.thinkquest.org/17120/data/bios/users/napoleon2/page_3.html

Napoleon also brought France back to a monarchy, which was what was fought against during the French Revolution.

Napoleon was also arrogant and narcissistic, claiming that, “ In Italy I realized I was a superior being and conceived the ambition of performing great things, which hitherto had filled my thoughts only as a fantastic dream.” [He also made the mistake of believing himself to be unbeatable.](#) After 60 battles, Napoleon was quoted saying, “ I do not know anything I did not know before I began.” [\(Encarta 98\)](#) He was too ambitious and his disastrous invasion of Russia eventually led to his downfall. Later, Napoleon claimed to wage war only in self-defence.

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Napoleon's rule had both positive and negative consequences, but it is clear that he made a significant impact in Europe and the world. There is no denying the fact he was a product of the French Revolution. Although much of what Napoleon accomplished seemed to undermine the principles of the revolution, the end result was that many of the achievements of the Revolution were made realities. He was one of the greatest military commanders in history and succeeded in uniting most of Europe. In the states he created, Napoleon granted constitutions, abolished feudalism, created efficient governments and fostered education, science, literature and the arts. However, it can be also said that Napoleon betrayed some of the principles of the French Revolution and his lust for conquest eventually led to his downfall. Whatever the conclusion, it is clear that Napoleon was noted in history as a great man.