

# The overwhelming legacy of napoleon bonaparte

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The legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte began in 1793 and continues to this day. Although the French general Napoleon left France smaller than it originally was at the beginning of the Revolution in 1789, he was widely respected during his lifetime and thereafter. Napoleon Bonaparte produced an everlasting imprint on the history of Europe as a result of his great military genius, development of political ideas, and the remodeling of French law. At the root of Napoleon's success lay his military genius. Much of Napoleon's military genius comes from his studies of history's finest commanders.

Of these influences on Napoleon were Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene, and most of all Frederick the Great. Napoleon used Frederick's strategies and adapted them to his own tactical system (Chandler 70). Napoleon's military tactics were based around the corps d'armee, a small army containing the elements of cavalry, infantry, and artillery. The most important advantage of the small army was its capability of fighting alone for a long period of time against superior enemy forces until help could be attained (Chandler 79).

With speed, good order, and carefully maintained formations, a successful cavalry was developed. Every type of cavalry was placed in one of three categories, each with specific tasks. The heavy cavalry used their size and weight to create holes in the enemies line of battle. The cavalry of the line was expected to protect lines of communication and carry out raids. The light cavalry was mainly used for pursuit and to explore areas in order to gain military information (Chandler 94). Napoleon was the first general to employ cavalry simultaneously to conceal his main troop movements and to recognize the front.

The foot soldiers of the infantry were the backbone of Napoleon's army (Chandler 97). The infantry marched in a column up to the attack instead of a line. This column was more maneuverable than lines, and could swing into a flexible alteration of columns and three-rank lines (Herold 97). Eventually, Napoleon's enemies were influenced by these grand tactics. The enemy reformed and devised countermeasures that proved to bring down Napoleon (Chandler 69). Boldness, the hallmark of the Napoleonic tactics, influenced warfare for a century.

Napoleon Bonaparte carried through a series of reforms that were begun during the Revolution. He established the Bank of France, which has continued to function, more or less unchanged, up to the present time, as a national bank and as the source of the French government for currency, public loans, and the deposit of public funds (Thompson 169). In addition to the influence on Banks, Napoleon also reformed the education system. The present secularly controlled French educational system was begun during the Reign of Terror and completed by Napoleon.

A corporation, known as the University of France was organized. The University was responsible for seeing that all education (including private), would turn out citizens to be attached to their religion, ruler, and family (Cronin 204). Primary schools were reopened with priests as teachers, but Napoleon gave most of his attention to secondary schools, where he changed the curriculum to allow early specialization. At age fifteen, a boy chose to study either mathematics and history of science, or classics and philosophy (Cronin 204). This system of education still remains in France.

One of Napoleon's greatest constructive works lies in the remodeling of French law. The Code Napoleon, although established by Napoleon about 200 years ago, has had lasting effects and influences to this day. This remodeled the entire body of French law, and is contained in five codes dealing with civil, commercial, and criminal law. The civil code established the citizens right to equality before the law, religious toleration, the inviolability of property, and the superior place of the father in a family. The commercial code reordered every part of industrial and agricultural life.

It brought about full employment, more stable prices, and a balance of trade. The criminal code set up a superior system of circuit judges, but rejected the idea of juries (Chandler 104). As a result of the Napoleonic conquests, the code was introduced into a number of European countries, notably Belgium, where it is still in force. It also became the model for the civil codes of Quebec Province, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, some Latin American republics, and the state of Louisiana. Napoleon's influence is evident in France even today.

His spirit has spread throughout the constitution of the Fifth Republic. The country's basic law is still the Code Napoleon, the administrative and judicial systems are essentially Napoleonic, and a uniform state-regulated system of education persists. Napoleon's reforms in all parts of Europe cultivated the ground for the revolutions of the 19th century. Today, the impact of the Code Napoleon is apparent in the law of most European countries. Napoleon Bonaparte, who once studied the greatest commanders to have lived, could now find himself recognized along with those same great names.