

Napoleon bonaparte: a true tyrant



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Ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution were both rooted from the desire to abolish absolute authority, ensure the natural rights of men, and develop a stable government. Napoleon Bonaparte, a prominent military general and French Emperor, strived for these political ideologies, but was corrupt in his way of approaching them. He was strictly egotistical and selfish; these characteristics served only as a catalyst to his abolition. Mohandas Gandhi, a pacifistic revolutionary that led India's emancipation, stated that " power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment".

Napoleon, however, seized control over France by ruling oppressively and ruthlessly; citizens followed him only in fear of his boundless power.

Although Napoleon did help establish political and social equality in France, his uncontrollable desire for personal supremacy suppressed the ideals of the revolution and violated the basic principles of the enlightenment.

Napoleon's personal greed for power drove him to infringe the basic principles of the revolution on the rights to hereditary and absolute rule.

Robespierre, an enlightened leader of the Jacobins, stated that the purpose of the French Revolution was to abolish absolute monarchy and institute a " democratic or republican government" that could help increase political equality within a nation (Robespierre). However, Napoleon rejected any republican form of government; he was solely concerned with maintaining a " hereditary power, which... may endure for generations, even for centuries" (Selected). Ironically though, in hopes to gain popularity among members of the 3rd estate, he abolished the power of the nobility and appointed governors that were loyal to the central government.

Not only did he crown himself emperor of France, but also, “ he established an imperial court and the members of his family were made royalty, while other titles and honors were given to his supporters” (Sarti). He was “ not content merely to create a dynasty for France”, but was constantly looking for ways to improve his family’s reputation (Axelrod). Napoleon’s advice in a letter to his brother, Jérôme Napoléon, revealed his obsessive concern over his own reputation and greed for the “ strength of [his] monarchy”. This unenlightened behavior reflecting unequal treatment of the people strictly goes against the revolution’s purpose, and thus, proves that Napoleon was an extremely authoritarian and ruthless emperor.

Consumed by his insecurity and unbounded ego, Napoleon stripped away the natural rights of his citizens to prevent France from entering utter chaos. In *The Second Treatise on Government*, John Locke, a prominent Enlightenment philosopher, emphasized on the importance of preserving the “ lives, liberties, and estates of the people” when governing a nation. Napoleon, on the other hand, was a strong anti-advocate of the freedom of speech and press; he believed that in order to maintain power over his people, it was necessary to “ never allow the newspapers to say anything contrary to [his] interests” (Leader). In effort to maintain peace within the nation, he also “ banished discussion and proscribed the freedom of press”, and stole his citizens’ rights to the freedom of expression (Selected).

Although this prevention helped preserve serenity within France, it caused them to live in oblivion of the rest of Europe. He most proudly stood against the ideas conveyed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens on the people’s right to “ unrestrained communication of thoughts and

opinions”, because he was strictly concerned with his reputation among his citizens. In order to gain the affection of his people, he also constructed the French Civil Code in 1804, which promised “ equality under the law”.

However, this project created to promote equality within the nation, developed “ conditions that were very unfavorable to wives”; it clearly was not “ designed for... the good of the people” (French Civil Code) (Locke). By restricting the people’s access to their natural rights of mankind and constructing laws for certain groups, Napoleon hoped he could gain admiration from his followers and earn the recognition of his neighbors. This, however, only proved that he was a dictator who oppressed the most fundamental and enlightened ideals of the revolution.

Napoleon was not only egotistical and selfish, but he was also a reckless military dictator who maintained stability using violence and unnecessary invasions. Although he strived for social equality and a utopian society, in reality, very few beneficial changes were made during the time of his rule. In fact, during his invasion of Russia, over 300, 000 French soldiers were killed: it weakened the entire French army. A passage summarizing the French-Russian war stated: “ Although [Napoleon] managed to preserve himself and the core of his Grand Army, much of his forces were destroyed or had deserted him ... fewer than 10, 000 men fit for combat remained in [the] main force” (Phillips).

War general, Philippe de Ségur, who accompanied Napoleon on many of his military campaigns, described him as an insensitive, callous dictator who valued his own life far more than of his soldiers: “ He rapidly descended the northern staircase... and gave orders for a guide to conduct him out the city

... to the imperial castle of Petrowsky” (Selected). Benjamin Constant, an active participant of French politics, also thought of Napoleon as a barbaric conqueror who robbed “ us of the heritage of all the enlightened generations” and took advantage of the French army for his own benefit (Selected). Napoleon’s foreign policies, such as the Continental System that boycotted all British goods, and his unsophisticated military invasions on Russia further reflected qualities of a self-absorbed dictator; he was selfish, uncaring, and insensitive to the physical well being of his citizens.

Although Napoleon helped improve the lives of many, his excessive lust for power and egotistical character deprived him of the admiration from his citizens. By restoring hereditary rule within the nation, he directly violated the main purpose of the revolution; equality was certainly not established. He went against the ideals of the Enlightenment protecting the natural rights of every individual by stripping away his citizens’ right to life and liberty. Napoleon was, in fact, a dictator who ruled unconstitutionally and was constantly preoccupied with the thought of personal success; his selfish personality and overbearing ego served as a strong foundation to his authoritarian rule over France.