

How Did France Change Under Napoleon?

Napoleon has been remembered not only for his military victories, but also as a 'Great Reformer', bringing about improvements to France and French society. Napoleon himself said: "I intend to keep the Revolution's useful changes, but not to abandon the good institutions it mistakenly destroyed." So how did France change under Napoleon? Did it change for the better? To answer these questions, we need to look at France before, and during Napoleon's rule.

Changes To Education

Under the King- Only the privileged went to schools, which were run by the Church. Students were taught respect for elders and religion.

The Revolution- brought some change. Revolutionaries proclaimed that school was for everyone, and state schools were even proposed, but none were set up. The aim was to encourage students to investigate and question.

Under Napoleon- The education system France changed. Four grades of school were set up; primary, secondary, lycées (schools run on military lines) and technical schools. Schools now stressed the importance of obedience and military values- although primary education stayed almost as it had been before 1789. Science and math became more important subjects in secondary schools. In 1814, 9,000 students were attending the 36 lycées- out of a population of 30 million.

1. How much change had taken place in schools? How did this system compare to the American education system today?

Governing France

Under the King- Louis had absolute power, and could not be removed. There was no National Assembly (or Parliament) and there were no elections, so people did not have a say in who was in power in France. The King made all the laws, and as a result, some were very out of date such as the Estates system, and inequality of different groups in society.

The Revolution- There was no single ruler of France, and a National Assembly was elected by voters (all men). The Assembly made all the laws, which meant that many new laws were introduced.

Under Napoleon- More changes were introduced. Napoleon became Emperor of France, and could not be removed from power. There were two National Assemblies, with members chosen by Napoleon from candidates elected by the people. All men could vote, but after 1804, there were no elections. All laws were made by the Assemblies.

2. Create a double bubble map comparing & contrasting Napoleon and Louis XVI (the king).

Individual Rights and Freedoms

France under Napoleon sometimes seemed similar to France under King Louis XVI. The Prison and Courts system was 'officially' different, in that you could no longer be put in prison without charge and everyone was equal in the courts. Nobles did not have special rights anymore, but even in Napoleon's rule there were restrictions. He had a secret police force, which from 1810 could arrest people without trial. Napoleon, like King Louis, and unlike the Revolution, tried to cancel and control the newspapers, and free speech was not allowed in France or the French Empire.

"If the press is not controlled, I shall not remain three days in power." –Napoleon

3. What enlightenment ideals were evident during Napoleon's rule? Which ideals did not live up to Enlightenment ideals?

The Catholic Church

During the Revolution, the land owned by the Catholic Church was sold off and any religion was permitted (only Catholicism was practiced in the Ancien Regime). In 1802, Napoleon made an agreement with the Pope called the Concordat in which the Pope agreed that he Church would not get its land back and in return, Catholicism was accepted as the religion of the majority. It was also agreed that Bishops were to be chosen by Napoleon, and agreed by the Pope. This meant that the government now had greater control over the Church

“The People must have religion, and religion must be in the hands of the government.”
-Napoleon

4. Do you agree or disagree with Napoleon’s quote? Explain.

“The husband must possess the absolute power and right to say to his wife: ‘Madam you shall not go to the theater, you shall not receive such and such a person, for the children you bear shall be mine’. Women should stick to knitting.”

-Comments made by Napoleon when drawing up the Code.

In 1804, the Napoleonic Code was introduced. It had a set of clear laws, applicable to all members of French Society. The Code was also introduced into other parts of Europe conquered by Napoleon, like Italy, Spain and some parts of Germany

The Code Napoleon, 1804

The Code stated that:

- ☐ All people were declared equal before the law. There were no longer any special privileges for Nobles, Churchmen or rich people.
- ☐ Feudal rights were ended.
- ☐ Trial by Jury was guaranteed.
- ☐ Religious Freedom was guaranteed.
- ☐ Parents were given powers over their children.
- ☐ Wives were not allowed to sell or give away property.
- ☐ A wife could only own property with her husband’s consent in writing.
- ☐ Fathers were allowed to imprison their children for any time up to a month.

5. How did the Napoleonic Code resemble Enlightenment principles? How did it contradict those principles?

French Society

Napoleon tried to make sure that all major groups gained from his rule. For peasants, Napoleon made sure that they could keep their land by eradicating Feudalism. He restored the Catholic Church to its former importance though the Concordat, and the peasants no longer had to pay tithes. For the Nobles, Napoleon offered ‘king-like’ stability. He created titles for some people, though these new nobles had no special privileges. Napoleon tried to reward talented and hardworking people by setting up the Legion of Honor in 1802. It is still one of the highest honors you can receive in France today.

HE SAID WHAT???
Quotes from Napoleon

It is not what is true that counts, but what people think is true.

The ignorant class will no longer exercise their influence on making laws or on government

In France women are considered too highly. They should not be regarded as equal to men. In reality they are nothing more than machines for producing children.

Public education does not suit women, as they are not called upon to live in public... marriage is their whole estimation.



6. What do these quotes tell us about Napoleon?

Buildings and Roads

Napoleon ordered the building of new roads, canals and bridges. Huge amounts of money were invested in improving the image of France's capital, Paris. Older buildings were improved, and new buildings were put up. A better network of roads was planned for Paris, and several memorials to the Revolution and to Napoleon himself were built.

Activities for Napoleon

1. Do a vocabulary square for every underlined word. (6 words)
2. How did Napoleon restrict individual rights and freedoms?
3. Why do you think Napoleon felt it was so important to control the press?
4. What was the appeal of Napoleon to:
 - a. Peasants
 - b. Nobility
5. After reading quotes and information about Napoleon, what do the documents tell us about Napoleon's attitude towards:
 - a. His role as Emperor?
 - b. Women?
 - c. The Media?
 - d. The lower classes?



L'arc de Triomphe, Paris- built in 1813 to celebrate Napoleons victories in wars all over Europe.