Rise of Napoleon

Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the island of Corsica in 1769. He was the son of a noble. In 1784 Napoleon won a scholarship to the elite military training college in Paris. In 1785, at the age of 16, Napoleon became second leuitenant in the artillery. Napoleon became sympathetic to the Revolution in 1789. In the Battle of Toulon in 1793, Napoleon led a victorious attack on a Royalist fort (supported by King Louis) and was then promoted to Brigadier General. Napoleon gained more attention in 1795 when he put down a royalist coup in Paris. He was promoted to Major General. In 1796, Napoleon married Josephine Beauharnais. He was put in charge of the French army fighting the Austrians in Italy. Between 1796 and 1797, Napoleon reorganized the French army and inspired the dispirited soldiers. Then went on to win several great victories over the Austrians and Italians. The Austrians were forced to sign a ceasefire in 797. Between 1798 and 1799 Napoleon’s plans to attack the British went badly wrong. His army was ravaged by plague and sickness, and the British destroyed many of Napoleon’s own ships. Still, Napoleon seized Malta and had several victories in Egypt during the expedition. Napoleon returned to Paris in August 1799, after hearing of the military crisis facing France and on November 11, 1799, Napoleon seized control of France in the ‘coup d’etat’ (takeover of power). Following the coup, a new constitution was introduced, and Napoleon was made First Consul of France. Then, on December 2, 1804, in the presence of the Pope, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor.

Both Napoleon’s appointment as First Consul of France and his coronation were put to the French People in a referendum (vote). The French people had had enough of the political quarrels in France and now looked for strong leadership in Napoleon. Many observers abroad found it odd that France had agreed to have an Emperor so soon after removing a King. Many people in European countries had not supported the Revolution and therefore did not like Napoleon.

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.”

Changes to Education

Under the King- Only the privileged went to schools, which were run by The Catholic Church. Pupils 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 pupils to investigate and question.

Under Napoleon- The education system in France changed. Four grades of school were set up: primary, secondary, lycees (schools run by 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 9000 pupils were attending the 26 lycees – out of a population of 30 million.

Governing France

Under the King- Louis had absolute power and could not be removed. There was no National Assembly (legislative body) 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- brought changes. There was no single ruler of France, and a National Assembly was elected by male voters. 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 2 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.

**Napoleonic Code**

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

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 stated that:

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

**Individual Rights and Freedoms**

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

France under Napoleon sometimes seemed similar to France under King Louis. 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 censor and control the newspapers, and free speech was not allowed in the French empire.

**The Catholic Church**

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

During the Revolution, the land owned by the Catholic Church was sold off and any religion was permitted. In 1802, Napoleon made an agreement with the Pope called the Concordat in which the Pope agreed that the Catholic Church would not get its land back and in return, Catholicism was accepted as the religion of the majority. As well as this, it was 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.

**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 through the
Concordat, and the peasants no longer had to pay church taxes. 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 a person can receive in France.

Internal Improvements

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 erected. One of Paris’ most iconic pieces of architecture to this day, L’Arc de Triomphe, was built in 1813 to celebrate Napoleon’s victories over much of Europe.
Napoleon’s Rise to Power

1. How did Napoleon become such a powerful and well-respected figure in France?

2. What was Napoleon’s view of the Revolution?

3. Why did some people think it strange that the French people accepted Napoleon as their new Emperor?

Napoleon Changes France

Make a diagram (similar to below) and take notes on how Napoleon changed France in the following areas:

- Education
- Government
- Society
- Religion
- Internal Improvements
- Napoleonic Code