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**Modern France: Society, Culture, Politics**  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~b357/>

**MIDTERM TAKE-HOME EXAM**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

You may consult books, articles, class notes, and on-line resources while preparing your answers, but you must not confer with your classmates (or with anyone else, for that matter). Please remember that the college has strict policies on plagiarism and academic honesty and that I am deeply committed to enforcing those policies.

If you quote or paraphrase an item from your reading, a website, or your lecture notes, you must provide a citation to it. If you are uncertain about when or how to cite, please see the guidelines on the course website (under “Assignments”; click “how to write”).

**Answer two of the following questions.** Each of your essay answers should be approximately 800 words (three pages) long (double-spaced, normal margins, 11 or 12-point type).

1. If you could place only three dates on a timeline of French history, 1789-1870, what would those dates be? Why?
2. Grade the attached paper on “Was Napoleon an Heir to the French Revolution.” Edit it *fully* for factual, grammatical, and conceptual errors—in addition to writing in the margins and between the lines, write a substantial final comment (at least a full word-processed page; double-spaced, normal margins) in which you advise the author on how to improve this paper. Remember to give the paper a grade!
3. Why did the July Monarchy fall and to what extent did similar factors cause the failure of the Second Republic?
4. Which of the readings for discussion have you found most informative and/or interesting? Pick one of the readings, and explain what it tells you about French history (society, culture, politics) in this period. Please note that this question *is not* asking you to summarize the readings; instead, it is asking you *how* a specific reading relates to a more general history. Though you should focus your answer on one of the readings, you may want to mention other readings (or other sorts of source materials, such as paintings or caricatures) as well.



## Was Napoleon An Heir to the French Revolution?

Of all the Events of European history, the French Revolution of 1789 is without doubt one of the most important and controversial. Similarly Napoleon Bonaparte has to be amongst the most written on and opinion dividing individuals world history has ever seen. Therefore the question as to weather Napoleon was an heir to the revolution, its savior, hijacker, or simply consolidator is probably the most frequently asked question regarding the revolution and Napoleon.

In this paper I will be attempting to answer the question of weather Napoleon was an heir to the French Revolution. This will involve me firstly exploring my definition of the term heir, and my views on the explanations and definitions of the French Revolution. Having done this I will then move on to examine the reign of Napoleon. By doing this I hope to prove my view that, whilst Napoleon may be considered an inevitable consequence of the revolution, he was not its heir.

In my opinion the word heir describes a person's or events natural successor. Therefore the term heir to the revolution would be used to describe the next regime, which came to embody the principles and morals of the revolution. The revolution's heir must be the regime that follows on from where the revolution left France, and presides over, or creates the kind of society the revolutionaries of 1789 intended to. It is my belief that Napoleon and the Napoleonic regime did not either preside over or create this kind of society and as such Napoleon cannot be considered an heir to the French Revolution. In order for this view to be qualified the next aspect we need to look at, is the various definitions and interpretations of the French Revolution.

Put simply the French Revolution was, when in 1789 the old Ancien regime was overthrown, and France went from a monarchy-governed state to a republic. After this, France went through a number of different stages in terms of forms and types of government. The revolutionary government of 1789-1793 was the most immediate, until between 1793-1794, when Robespierre became the most powerful man in France overseeing the era known as the terror. This was followed by the Directory who ruled between the years 1794-1799, and this was the government Napoleon overthrew in the Coup of Brumaire on November 9-10th 1799.

However I believe that the revolution is defined as the result of the power struggle between the old Ancien regime, and the newly emerging bourgeois middle class. The revolution is defined by the events of 1789 and 1789 alone. The founding principles and morals of the revolution were that of the bourgeoisie, and these can best be seen by such documents as the declaration of the rights of man, the decree abolishing the feudal system, the Cashier de Doleances referring to the middle classes, and the actions and constitution of the revolutionary government up until 1793 and the beginning of the terror.

Having established my definition of the French Revolution, it is first important not to gloss over without mention to the years 1793 – 1799, before going on to look at the nature of the Napoleonic regime itself. In my view these years can in essence be described as a crisis created by panic and a power vacuum. The execution of King Louis XVI in January 1793 created much panic within and outside France leading to foreign war and numerous insurgencies and political divisions inside France itself. In these years France became almost ungovernable and the terror can be seen purely as a reaction to the threats the new French Republic was facing. The era of the Directory, in my view, is summed up by the fact that, the revolution was under threat from Jacobins, Monarchists, foreign invaders, and the mass of the French population tired of war and political upheaval. Therefore they tried to create a strong government that could defeat all of these enemies. However such a task soon proved impossible and with the coup of Brumaire in November 1799, France was once again to be ruled by a single authoritarian leader.

Having now explained my understanding of the term heir to the revolution, my definition of the French Revolution, and briefly looked at the years before Napoleon came to power, I will now go on to look at the Napoleonic regime and convey my argument as to why I do not believe it is correct to describe Napoleon as an heir to the French Revolution. In order to prove this I will look the Napoleonic regime from two different viewpoints namely, politically and economically.

Looking at Napoleon from a political point of view, there is much evidence to support the view he was not an heir to the revolution. Many recent historical studies on Napoleon, such as Correlli Barnett's 1997 work *Bonaparte*, look closely at Napoleon's character and motivations, and are often (as in this case) very critical of him. Studies such

as these convey the view that Napoleon had very little political or ideological motivation in taking power, but was only concerned with gaining glory for France, its people, and himself.

I would largely agree with this view and claim there are many pieces of evidence to support it. Firstly is the fact that Napoleon always presented himself as a man above the revolution and the political factions it created. He never allied himself closely with any of the groups involved in French politics between 1789-1799, and one can look at Napoleon from an almost Machiavellian point of view and say that, this was a conscience decision on his part, taken to avoid becoming compromised, and thus allowing him to eventually take power.

Indeed looking at the political nature of the Napoleonic regime only supports this view further. On December 2nd 1804 Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France and this reveals two important things. Firstly it meant that Napoleon was now a single authoritarian leader with absolute power. The ethos of democracy, which had been the founding principles of all the revolutionary forms of government since 1789, had been disregarded completely. This was evident from as early as 1800 when Napoleon's reforms of local government reduced the role of the electorate to simply producing a list of candidates for the legislation assembly, from which the government would select the members. After the revolution the franchise had been extended to almost all male citizens and these action are in direct contradiction to the ideologies of the bourgeois revolutionaries of 1789. In fact I believe its fair to say that all of Napoleon's action during his reign were aimed at him keeping hold of power.

The second thing this event revealed was how Napoleon saw himself. When the pope went to crown him, Napoleon took the crown away from his hands and placed the crow upon his own head. The message was clear; he was the embodiment of the people and as such their natural leader. Such a belief in more in keeping with the beliefs of previous kings who believed they were ordained by god, than with the ideals of the liberal revolutionaries.

The economic nature of the Napoleonic regime is often seen as the strongest area of support for those claiming Napoleon was an heir to the French Revolution. As historians such as Alexander Grab point out Napoleon implemented many economic

reforms that did a lot to consolidate the gains the land owning classes made from the revolution. This is proven by the fact the reforms long outlasted the regime, as Grab himself puts it: “Once Napoleon was gone, France and liberated Europe happily retained the efficient fiscal bureaucracies he had created.”

Indeed I will accept that the Code Napoleon of 1804 for example did do much to protect property rights and his wider economic policies were probably the for-runner of the European common market, which exists today. However I would still claim that such reforms were only made by Napoleon to keep the bourgeoisies on side. Whilst doing this Napoleon also brought back the Catholic Church into a central position within French society with the Concordat with the Pope in 1802, and he even created a new Nobility in 1808. It is my view that, as successful as the economic reforms were, they were not created because of any political or moral ideology on Napoleon’s part, but should be seen as concessions to those who had brought about the revolution. Napoleon clearly made concessions to both sides, as the above examples illustrate, and as this proves his aim was not to create a democratic capitalist society, I believe he cannot be seen as an heir to the French Revolution.

The debate over Napoleon will be one, which can never be resolved. Some will always see him as the revolutions savior, whilst others will continue to claim he was the predecessor of men like Hitler and Stalin. The political beliefs of the historian, unfortunately, normally dictate which conclusion they come to as regards Napoleon Bonaparte. In my view though the French Revolution created a new kind of world; the liberal democracies of today’s Europe can be considered its true heir. Napoleon was just its inevitable, short-term consequence.