Should Napoleon Bonaparte Be Considered A Hero?

What is a hero? A hero can be defined as a common man who rises to greatness on the basis of sheer talent. Should Napoleon Bonaparte be considered as a hero? Many would argue that Napoleon is a hero as his heroic nature provided France with the institutions and sense of national identity they needed. Others would argue Napoleon is not a hero, as his use of propaganda made the French public believe he was their savior. I believe Napoleon Bonaparte was a hero, as his many accomplishments modified the French society and ultimately the civilized world. Not only did he better France through his domestic policy, he also expanded the territory of France with many battles won through strategic warfare. He as well gave the citizens of France the sense of national identity and pride they needed.

Napoleon’s domestic policy, "was his greatest legacy to France" (Mitchner, pg 57). His domestic policies had such an immense impact on the way of life in France that they are used today in the civilized world. Through his domestic policy, Napoleon created the Bank of France. By creating the Bank of France Napoleon stabilized the French economy where the previous leaders of France had failed and made the franc the highest currency in all of Europe. Napoleon claimed "Equality must be the first element in education" (Mitchner, pg 59). This was the basis of the educating system Napoleon strived for. The Education reforms which Napoleon introduced in 1802 called lycees allowed this equality to occur and enhanced the way of learning for all of the citizens. Finally the serious rift with the Roman Catholic Church (which was created during the French revolution) was healed when The Concordat was introduced by Napoleon. Mending the rift between the Church and State allowed freedom of religion and rejuvenated the beliefs within the people of France. This contribution to France ended in French domestic tranquility. Napoleon was not only a great leader, he also was a military genius.

As a military genius, Napoleon won many battles to expand France and was always welcomed back to France as a hero. His use of strategic warfare throughout many battles allowed him to be seen as a hero not only in France but all of Europe. Although his army was outnumbered by the Russians and Austrians in December 2, 1805, Napoleon’ brilliant strategies resulted in a defeat of the opposing armies in the Battle of Austerlitz. In many other battles that were fought and won by Napoleon, he would use his military experience and tactics to anticipate his opponent’s attacks and defeat them no matter the odds. After winning many battles he expanded France by signing treaties with the other countries which he had occupied. Napoleon made himself king of Italy, his brother Joseph, king of Naples, and another brother Louis king of Holland. This shows all of the lands he has conquered through his genius and cunning. The fact that Napoleon won so many battles gave the French people something to be proud of.

Through his works Napoleon gave the French people the sense of national identity and pride which they needed after the losses of the Revolution. This new sense of
nationalism allowed the nation of France to strive and gave the people confidence. The Napoleonic Code was a dramatic change to the lives of the entire nation. Each state was granted a constitution, providing for universal male equality and a parliament containing a bill of rights. The code also gave male French citizens freedom from arrest without due process, equality of taxation and the right to choose one’s work. Also Napoleon established a means by which he could reward citizens for their services and loyalty. This was called the Legion of Honor. The Legion of Honor was such a prestigious reward that the people of France would work harder to improve the economy and formulate the country far superior than any other to receive the reward. As well, his public works advanced the development of the French economy, permitting French society to strive. Napoleon’s public works projects erected numerous monuments for the entire nation to be proud of and approve of. The most notable monument is the Arc de Triomphe which still stands as a landmark in Paris.

Many would say Napoleon is not a hero as his foreign policy killed many people due to wars and mistakes made by Napoleon. As well people would say he is a propaganda machine who manipulated the French public into believing he was great. These people are completely wrong in their opinion. Never in the course of history has there ever been great change with out a few casualties along the way. His foreign policy did not only kill innocent lives, it helped him expand France and allow the people of France to gain nationalism. Many leaders have used propaganda to gain the trust of the people. Napoleon only used propaganda to gain the trust of his people so he can contribute so much for the best of his country. A person can not evoke great change without the trust of society and the nation.

Napoleon Bonaparte should be considered a hero for all of the contributions and accomplishments he gave not only to France but to the entire civilized world. The domestic policies which he introduced furthered the advancement of France by giving the people of the country what they wanted. The citizens of France wanted equality and Napoleon gave them that equality in the education system and the tax system. By being a military genius and winning so many key battles for his country he was seen as a hero and gained much respect all over Europe. By giving the French society some nationalism it helped further the way of living for all. Giving the nation something to work for and be proud of was Napoleon’s goal. As many people in history Napoleon is well known for his great contribution to Society and the fact that he rose to greatness on the basis of sheer talent alone.