

Brandon Perry

Title: “The Enlightened Despot: Napoleon”

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My name is **Brandon Perry**, and through this short biography I hope to convince you to aspire to follow whatever dream you may have. I began my collegiate career on track to be a financial advisor, yet I learned that I could never sit behind a desk 10 hours at a time crunching numbers. Instead, I switched my career path to the wonderful world of education in which I hope to inspire the young minds of today. I am in my final year here at IPFW and currently am student teaching at Carroll Middle School, teaching 8th grade Social Studies. Currently the kids and I are tackling the War of 1812. I want you audience member to follow your dream, your pursuits whatever that may be. I am searching for employment out in California, so if you may have a connection, I'd love to buy you a cup of coffee. Believe it or not, I am finishing my collegiate journey with a solid 3.8 GPA. The 20th century is by far my favorite century as the world begins to modernize to what it is today. My favorite invention, the automobile, begins to be experimented and tested in order to complete unbelievable feats. Like the automobile, I too, and so should you member of the audience, aim to aspire to something bigger and extraordinary. Who knows, perhaps the future may call me to become a professional stunt driver. One can dream.

Abstract

The Age of Reason (1685–1800), or the Enlightenment, enabled people to question the natural order, which encouraged *philosophes* (thinkers) such as John Locke, Voltaire and Rousseau to pursue uncharted views. John Locke's words “life, liberty, and property” became a central theme of the Enlightenment and inspired the leaders of the French Revolution that began in 1789. Concepts such as natural universal rights, popular sovereignty, and the general will laid the foundation towards reform. As the Revolution began to go off the rails, the nation's *cahiers de doléances* (notebooks filled with complaints) fed the frustration and resentment against authority; especially among the middle and lower classes, known as the Third Estate. Themes such as abolishing hierarchy, despotism, and privilege overshadowed Locke's teachings, and the French state became consumed by anarchy. The establishment of the Committee of Public Safety in 1793 enacted a terror across France, which prioritized the aims of the Revolution over the well-being of its people. Instead of stabilizing the Revolution's chaotic nature, Maximilian Robespierre headed the Committee of Public Safety, which unleashed a hellish regime that focused on drastically reforming the old order. The radical nature of change continued during the subsequent government, known as the Directory (1795-1799), which presented itself as a constitutional government, but was riddled with corruption.

The Directory collapsed in 1799 when Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in a *coup d'état* and established a governmental order that promoted the people's interest. During Napoleon's reign from 1799–1815, he brought Enlightenment themes back into French society, allowing him to be viewed as an enlightened despot who promoted equality, religious toleration, and meritocracy. Napoleon stabilized internal and external problems that emerged during the reign of the Terror and the Directory. The development of the Civil Code (1804), the establishment of

religious toleration with the Concordat (1801), and a social hierarchy that embraced meritocracy allowed Napoleon to embrace popular sovereignty and the people's general will. He envisioned France to be an all-mighty power, and he wished to incorporate enlightened themes into foreign lands. Individuals could once again believe in life, liberty and property; they could practice their faith without fear of prosecution. As an enlightened despot, Napoleon liberated French society and recaptured Enlightenment ideals that promoted equality, religious toleration, and a meritocratic system.

Bibliographical Note

The majority of all sources I used were primary sources, which I located through various compilations found in source books. I also used IPFW's IUCAT program, which allowed the source hunt to be much smoother. Never once had I thought that IUCAT would be a resource I would contend using, but after my mentor sat down with me and explained how quickly the books arrive, I thought this was magic. While researching, skimming, and annotating numerous primary sources, I determined each source must be associated to one of three themes: equality, meritocracy, and religious toleration in regards to Napoleon. After learning the phrase "Enlightened Despot," I concluded Napoleon to be labeled as such based upon each theme.

Secondary sources helped me to understand and grasp context of specific mechanics such as the Legion of Honor, but they were not a prime focus in terms of research. Instead secondary sourcing was used infrequently to provided context, but not the juicy details of the past. I wanted to find specifics in regards to Napoleon's Civil Code and the establishment of the Concordat. While researching secondary sources, I wanted to gain a historian's perspective on Napoleon; specifically lighting policies or measures enacted that had Enlightenment origins