

The biggest success of Bonaparte

Napoleon Bonaparte, born on the 15th of August 1769, died on the 5th of May 1821¹, predominantly associated with a variety of wars and conquests throughout Europe. It is true, that he was an exceptional strategist and visionary, who looked at the world from a different perspective that was usual for his time. It is worth mentioning, that during the 17th and 18th centuries both the civilisation and the society started to require a change which the old system was unable to provide.

It is understandable, that not only the French, but also the British, Spanish or German aristocracy was not inclined to introduce changes that would be too drastic. The feudal system remained strong, as neither the monarch nor the aristocracy were inclined to share their privileges. At the same time the society begun advancing, became less inclined to participate in wars, which due to the then-developed artillery caused progressively more war invalids.

Akin to this, the development of the press led to a rapid sharing of information. The aristocracy, that lived in palaces and spent fortune on balls, elegant clothing and enjoyed their privileges in the areas of law and administration was not inclined to limit them. At the same time, the poor, often times hungry society, having no one they could turn to with their complaints or their pleas for help or support, started to be progressively more disenchanted with the idea of class division.

It comes at no surprise then, that around the year of 1789 the French Revolution occurred,² adopting: Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, which mean Freedom, Equality and Fraternity, as its Revolutionary Slogans.³ After the fall of French Monarchy, chaos inevitably ensued as the previously existing system, even though far from perfect, but deeply ingrained in the society over the course of centuries fell. Creating a new system, that would be an improvement, more fair, giving a chance to more people became crucial. Introduction of such a system was no simple matter. After all, how do you choose a new group of people to be in power in a way that would be different to the previous one?

The French Revolution fall on a period when a young and ambitious politician, predominantly liked and respected was only 20 years old. Napoleon's rise to power was connected to satisfying the demands of people, who were ready to send all potential traitors to the guillotine. It is important to at this point highlight that such a radical change of the system, in which the Bourgeoisie takes the property and even life of their Lords could not be overlooked other Monarchs who dealt with similar issues and wanted to avoid similar fate as France at all cost.

Ascending to power, Napoleon had to on one hand take into account the necessity of appropriate and very desirable reforms in his own country, as well as the intervention of outside forces, for which the legitimacy and restoration were the highest good. This forced the new Emperor, who in addition to these issues put the crown on top of his head,⁴ rejecting the Christian tradition, to take into account that without war in Europe, all of his potential revolutionary successes will eventually fail.

Therefore, on one hand the war, that had to spread through the entire Europe, and on the other a fundamental reformation of the country were necessary.

The domestic law was not uniform back then. It was not enough to correct one, universal,

1 Jacques Godechot, *Napoleon I*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Napoleon-I>> [Accessed 12th of July 2025].

2 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *French Revolution*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025, <<https://www.britannica.com/event/French-Revolution>> [Accessed 12th of July 2025].

3 Jonathan Day, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité: Znaczenie I h\Historia Narodowego Motta Francji. Trochę Historii I Pełne Znaczenia Przesłanie Na Dzisiaj*, Liberties, 18/05/2021, <<https://www.liberties.eu/pl/stories/liberte-egalite-fraternite/43532>> [Accessed 12th of July 2025].

4 Jacques Godechot, *Napoleon I*, Encyclopaedia Britannica.

legislation, the system of law had to be overhauled. Additionally, it had to be sufficiently efficient and just so that the new, free society could appreciate the efforts of the new administration. It is enough to mention the enormous power of the church, that could not be overlooked too much as majority of the society was made up of Christians, but the Church's monopoly had to be restrained even through introduction of civil marriages rather than religious ones.

The biggest military success of Napoleon, in the battle of Austerlitz, where he managed to win against the unified forces of Russia and Austria, which gave him the influence over Europe,⁵ was not his biggest success at all. It was the reform of civil law that continues to be mentioned as his biggest achievement.

It is also not true, that Napoleon won all of his battles. He led a turbulent life, he went from being the Emperor of the French to being a political prisoner left on the Isle of Elba after his abdication in 1814.⁶ It was not the end of his story, as on the 26th of February 1815 he managed to escape from there and return to France for a hundred days, once again taking on a role of the Emperor. This time, after his defeat at Waterloo, retaining the title of an Emperor until the end of his life, he was banished back to the island where he then passed away.

Taking into account the turbulent

Considering the turbulent course of military victories and defeats, it was not the triumphs on the battlefield that became his greatest legacy. Introducing the centralised system of civil law, which later was adopted by other countries, could be considered his most important achievement. To achieve such change, it was vital for him to Wprowadzenie scentralizowanego systemu prawa cywilnego, które kolejno zostało zaadoptowane przez inne kraje, wydaje się być jego największym sukcesem. To carry out such profound transformations, it was necessary to introduce a concordat with the Pope and to implement an educational reform. Furthermore the administrative reform led to a change from hereditary titles being held for life, to a situation where those positions would be held for a specific period of time and a dismissal from the office became possible. The industrial era that begun then was strongly supported by Napoleon's reforms, who not only funded the French University, but also introduced secondary schools, which allowed the poor society to achieve useful qualifications, used later on for work, which led to higher earnings as well.

5 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Battle Of Austerlitz*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998, <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Austerlitz>> [Accessed 12th of July 2025].

6 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Elba*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025, <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Elba-island-Italy>> [Accessed of 12th of July 2025].

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