

<Student's Name>

<Instructor's Name>

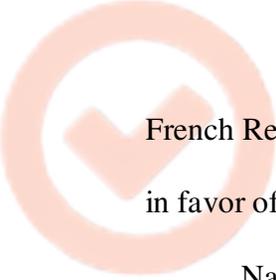
<Course Name>

<Date>

Napoleon and the Rise of Meritocracy

Napoleon Bonaparte emerged from the chaos of the French Revolution to seize control of the country of France and its military. The military that emerged under Napoleon's leadership reflected the ideals of the French Revolution, including a rejection of nobility and nepotism and a rise of meritocracy, or the recognition that one should be given a rank commensurate with one's experience, education, and talents. Napoleon and his military leaders believed that one should achieve the highest level in rank that one earned. This idea clearly resulted from the rejection of the previous ideals held in France. If not for the Revolution, the idea of meritocracy would not have occurred in the new military of France.

Before the French Revolution, which began in 1789, nobility ruled the French world. The nobility was seated at Versailles, the center of French government and its monarchy. Even at Versailles, and among the nobility, there was a clear ranking system regarding who outranked whom, and it was strictly adhered to on a daily basis. No one could ever rise above his or her rank (with the notable exception of when a woman of lesser birth married a man of higher birth). If one were born a peasant, one died a peasant. If a man were born a duke, he died a duke. One's talents, education, and abilities were not considered in one's station in life. This idea was clearly rejected in the



French Revolution, a result of Enlightenment philosophy. The nobility was overthrown in favor of equality (Kagan, Ozment, and Turner, 626-630).

Napoleon and his generals backed the idea of meritocracy. Meritocracy is the idea that one's station should be the result of merit, or earning the position. Napoleon recognized that nepotism, or giving positions to others based upon family ties and close friendships, resulted in the poor choice of individuals for government positions. It should be noted that Napoleon despised the idea of nepotism in political philosophy, yet practiced it for some of his friends and family members. Napoleon truly desired a meritocracy, which represented the ideals of the Revolution. He established the Napoleonic Code to reflect his dedication to the ideals of the Revolution. The code banned any ranking system given to individuals based upon their birth, or the idea of nobility. It also demanded that all government jobs be given to individuals based solely upon the individual being the best suited person for the job, based upon education, experience, and intelligence. The purchase of offices, which naturally favored individuals who came from wealthier families, was specifically abolished. Furthermore, the laws of primogeniture, which gave all property to the eldest son, were also abolished. This ensured that a man could leave property to all of his sons as a means to provide for their future (Kagan et al 671).

His military code also ensured that the best individual would be chosen for a position and a rank. Before Napoleon, over ninety percent of officers in the military came from the nobility. Obviously, these men may or may not have been adequately trained and of adequate leadership skills for their given positions. With Napoleon's changes, only three percent of officers came from the nobility. Those who maintained



their positions did so because they were adequately suited for the roles. The rest of the positions were given to men who rose through the ranks, showing skill and talents in military leadership. Napoleon was particularly fond of promoting individuals who showed bravery during battles (PBS).

Napoleon truly attempted to follow the ideals of the French Revolution, which sought equality and the ability of a person to rise to a rank based upon skill. However, he did use nepotism at times. Despite this, his attempt at meritocracy managed to change the makeup of the military officer corps from nobility to men who earned their positions.



Works Cited

Kagan, Donald, Ozment, Steven and Turner, Frank M. *The Western Heritage*. 7th ed.

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

PBS. "Napoleon at War." 2016. 1 August 2017.

<<http://www.pbs.org/empires/napoleon/home.html>>