Name ..... Date ..... Class

Historical Significance ACTIVITY 22



Three Ways Napoleon Changed the World

Although assessments of Napoleon differ widely, no one denies that he was one of the most colorful and famous people in all of history. He was also among the most influential. Napoleon helped spread the ideas of the French Revolution throughout Europe. The passages below discuss three additional ways Napoleon changed the world. Read them and then answer the questions. Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.

1. The Napoleonic Code

"One of Napoleon's reforms . . . was destined to have an impact far beyond the borders of France. That was the creation of the French civil code, the [Napoleonic Code]. In many ways the code embodied the ideals of the French Revolution. For example, under the code there were no privileges of birth, and all men were equal under the law. At the same time, the code was sufficiently close to the older French laws and customs to be acceptable to the French public and the legal profession. On the whole, the code was moderate, well organized, and written with commendable brevity and outstanding lucidity. As a result, the code has not only endured in France (the French civil code today is strikingly similar to the original [Napoleonic Code]) but has been adopted, with local modifications, in many other countries."

2. The Invasion of Spain

"Napoleon also had a large, though indirect, effect on the history of Latin America. His invasion of Spain so weakened the Spanish government that for a period of several years it lost effective control of its colonies in Latin America. It was during this period of *de facto* autonomy that the Latin American independence movements commenced."

3. The Louisiana Purchase

"Of all Napoleon's actions . . . the one that has perhaps had the most enduring and significant consequences was one that was almost irrelevant to his main plans. In 1803, Napoleon sold a vast tract of land to the United States. He realized that the French possessions in North America might be difficult to protect from British conquest, and besides he was short of cash. The Louisiana Purchase, perhaps the largest peaceful transfer of land in all of history, transformed the United States into a nation of near-continental size. It is difficult to say what the United States would have been like without the Louisiana Purchase; certainly it would have been a vastly different country than it is today. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the United States would have become a great power without the Louisiana Purchase.

"Napoleon, of course, was not solely responsible for the Louisiana Purchase. The American government clearly played a role as well. But the French offer was such a bargain that it seems likely that any American government would have accepted it, while the decision of the French government to sell the Louisiana territory came about through the arbitrary judgment of a single individual, Napoleon Bonaparte."

—From *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* by Michael H. Hart

1. Which change has affected the most people? Explain your answer.
2. Which change was the most significant one for your ancestors? Explain your answer.
3. Which has had the most significant effect on your life? Explain your answer.
4. Which change do you think is the most significant overall? Why?