The French Civil Code

by Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) was a French military and political leader who rose to power during the French Revolution. He crowned himself First Consul and later emperor following a coup d'état whereby his forces overthrew the Directory and Council of Five Hundred, the former French government. The French Civil Code established by Napoleon is considered one of the most important changes he brought in France. Despite abolishing feudalism and establishing equality under the law for French males, it did in many ways keep women subservient to men both at home and at work.

Primary Source:

Of the Rights and Respective Duties of Husband and Wife:
Husband and wife mutually owe to each other **fidelity**, **succor**, and assistance.

The husband owes protection to his wife, the wife obedience to her husband.

The wife is obliged to live with her husband, and to follow him wherever he may think proper to dwell: the husband is bound to receive her, and to furnish her with everything necessary for the purposes of life, according to his means and condition.

The wife can do no act in law without the authority of the husband, even where she shall be a public trader, or not in community, or separate in property.

Of Causes of Divorce:
The husband may demand divorce for cause of adultery on the part of his wife.

The wife may demand divorce for cause of adultery on the part of her husband, where he shall have kept his concubine in their common house.

Of the Provisional Measures to Which the Demand of Divorce for Cause Defined May Give Cause:
The provisional administration of the children shall remain with the husband plaintiff or defendant in divorce, unless it shall be otherwise ordered by the tribunal, at the request either of the mother, or of the family, or of the imperial proctor, for the greater benefit of the children.

Glossary:

fidelity: faithfulness

succor: give relief; to aid

Citation: Napoleon Bonaparte, "The French Civil Code," in *The Code Napoleon, 2 Volumes*, trans. Bryant Barrett (London: W. Reed, 1811), I: 47, 49, 57; II: 358.

Effects of the French Revolution

by J. M. Roberts

John Morris Roberts (14 April 1928–30 May 2003) was a British world historian at Oxford University. The following except is from ***A Short History of the World,*** *a work that attempts to capture a broad history of the world from the Neolithic Revolution to the events at the close of the 20th century. This excerpt discusses the consequences of the French Revolution on France and countries in Europe.*

Secondary Source:

When the Estates General met, in May 1789, there began a process by which more and more **grievances** about many matters other than fair taxation broke out in new demands. So, more and more people turned to politics to put things right. In the course of this, the historic constitution of France was swept away, the absolute monarchy turned first into a constitutional one and then into a republic, the king and queen were beheaded, thousands of people died in civil war, the old national religion of Roman Catholicism was given up and the Church's property sold for the good of the state, and a thousand and one other changes, big and small were made. This was the French Revolution. . . .

France had by then broken with much of her past, rebuilding her constitution on the basis of equality before the law (nobility had been abolished), religious toleration, and the government of France by an elected representative National Assembly which could make laws on any matter, without regard to rights or tradition.

Yet a great deal remained. Life in much of the countryside can hardly have changed much, given its deeply **ingrained** ways. The new decimal currency of **francs** and **centimes** (still in use today) was not used in country markets for decades; fifty years after 1789, some peasants still counted in the old coins—crowns and sous—and used old measurements rather than the new kilometers and hectares. The revolution nonetheless turned France upside down.

Glossary:

grievances: reasons to be upset

ingrained: previously established
francs: monetary units in France
centimes: monetary units in used in several European nations

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Citation: J. M. Roberts, *A Short History of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), n.p.