



Bonapartism

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When Karl Marx wrote that history occurs, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” he was referring to how revolutions start by imitating past revolutions and end by undermining their own ideals. Napoleon Bonaparte and his nephew Louis Napoleon were the examples foremost on his mind. Later, the term Bonapartism came to refer to the historical tendency of a dictator to emerge at the end of a democratic revolution and use the ideals of the revolution as a way of masking his own power. During the Bonapartism project students conducted comparative historical analysis to determine whether the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 followed the same patterns as the French Revolution of 1789. Students were asked to consider the following questions: Do revolutionary processes follow similar patterns or does each revolution follow its own dynamic? Did a Bonaparte figure emerge in Egypt? Students presented their research in the form of creative monologues that were written from the perspective of historical actors. The monologues were videotaped and used in a student made documentary that can be found on YouTube. For exhibition they were performed live in a local public venue.

Teacher Reflection

I appreciate how students deeply explored a historical concept and used a variety of creative ways to communicate their conclusions. The French Revolution and the dictatorship of Napoleon can easily be seen as dusty things without much contemporary relevance, but this project shows how a key concept from the period can be an organizing principle that helps us understand the world today.

Student Reflection

The most meaningful part of the project was how it helped me connect with the emotions of individuals who participated in historical revolutions. I could relate their experiences to my own as well as to current civil rights issues. I walked away from this project with an enhanced sense of empathy that has carried over into my life outside of school.

—Ilona

To learn more visit <http://peterjana1.weebly.com/bonapartism.html>