

[Bonus] AFD Ep 341 Links and Notes - Charles Joseph Bonaparte (feat. Age of Napoleon)

- This is our bonus episode this week, which is unlocked again to encourage people to subscribe to our new patreon. On Arsenal For Democracy, we've been periodically doing feature episodes on specific personalities and celebrities of the American Progressive movement of the turn of the last century, and this week we'll be looking at Charles Joseph Bonaparte of Baltimore, a reformer of that era who was nationally regarded as one of the cleanest and most virtuous political operators in the country, as well as a smart & energetic lawyer, and a compelling & funny orator.
- Link to the Age of Napoleon Podcast: <https://ageofnapoleon.com/>
- Age of Jerome: In many ways, Jerome was perhaps the most odd one out generationally, from the initial Bonaparte dynasty's founding generation. **Who was Jérôme Bonaparte and how did he end up briefly married to an American, initiating a non-dynastic line of Bonapartes?**
- **US-French relations during the rule of Napoleon**
 - **Louisiana Purchase had just happened in Paris before Jerome's 1803 trip**
- The Napoleonic family in American society & politics
 - **"Bo" (Jérôme Napoléon Bonaparte, born 1805)** was the son produced by the annulled marriage of Jérôme Bonaparte and Elizabeth Patterson, a rich Maryland socialite.
 - He was never officially part of the dynasty.
 - He married Baltimore heiress Susan May Williams in 1829. Her father was involved with the new Baltimore & Ohio Railroad company, one of the first real railroads in the US.
 - He founded an elite men's club called The Maryland Club in 1857, which almost immediately supported Southern secession (resulting in his departure as a loyal Unionist) and was briefly shut down by Union troops for the duration of the war. The club itself was used to house former slaves. It reopened after the war and remained deeply obnoxious well into the 20th century.
 - Bo died in 1870, a few months before the collapse of the second Bonaparte regime in France
 - **Bo's first son, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte II** (born 1830, died 1893), graduated from West Point in 1852 and served in the US Army until 1854, when he left for France to serve in the Second French Empire's Army under Napoleon III, his father's first cousin. He served in many of the Second Empire's wars, regularly writing home to his family in the US, until it fell in 1870, at which point he returned to the US. He then married into the prominent American political family of Daniel Webster. He had a daughter who married into the European nobility and a son who married someone from Newton, Massachusetts, which is just an interesting local connection.
 - [For the rest of this, much of this is sourced from Joseph Bucklin Bishop's 1920s biography "Charles Joseph Bonaparte, his life and public services" in the public domain, except where noted with specific links to other websites. [Bishop](#) was also part of Theodore Roosevelt's inner circle and wrote the authorized biography of TR as well, so take some of this with a grain of salt.] **Bo's second son, non-dynastic grand-nephew to Napoleon, attorney Charles Joseph Bonaparte** (born 1851, quite a bit later than his older brother) was probably the most influential of the American Bonapartes as a high-ranking progressive political figure at the turn of the last century. Critics called him the "Imperial Peacock of Park Avenue." [One is reminded of the liberal meritocracy and rationalization reform politics pursued to some extent by Napoleon a century

earlier, although he was a ruler of many contradictions, but he was working at the start of the first industrial revolution when economic power was still diffused, and Charles was working at the height of and in the aftermath of the second industrial revolution, when economic power was very concentrated.]

- Charles became interested in political reform while attending Harvard where he was involved a bit in campus politics and quickly decided it was very corrupt, stupid, and anti-Catholic. (He was devoutly Catholic, but in the liberal tradition.) He also found the US State Department was very reluctant during the Franco-Prussian War and the collapsing second Napoleonic government to send letters to his older brother in the French Army, which he attributed to bad civil service workers, telling his mother "The government exists solely for the good of professional politicians, and its places are filled by such persons as are too dishonest or too imbecile to find support in any other manner."
https://archive.org/stream/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog_djvu.txt
- Baltimore Maryland politics: In 1885, at a time when Baltimore was widely regarded as rivaling New York City's level of ambient corruption, Charles founded the Reform League of Baltimore and waged a 10 year campaign to bring the progressive Republicans to power, using each defeat to prove widespread electoral fraud was occurring, finally succeeding in 1895 in toppling the Baltimore Democratic Machine in a clean sweep, after reformer activists had pressured the Democratic Governor of Maryland to appoint Bonaparte as one of three Supervisors of Elections. A relatively new independent press greatly aided in his campaign for a clean election that year, publicizing the law and penalties for violation, etc. [Notable how close his lifetime relationship to newspapers was, for or against him, although he was using nominally free press, instead of propaganda press.]
 - He advocated for the civil and economic rights of Black Baltimoreans
<https://www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/op-ed/bs-ed-price-0521-20170520-story.html> Even when he was serving in the US cabinet later, he showed up in Maryland to publicly denounce a proposed constitutional amendment to add a Grandfather Clause to disenfranchise most Black voters, alluding to the fact that he himself would be ineligible due to his Corsican grandfather and he continued to campaign against it for years until it was defeated for good.
 - He often represented the poor pro bono in court
 - [notes only] Popular orator: *A common expression heard on the streets at such a time was: "Let's go down to-night and hear Bonaparte give it to 'em." And he never disappointed them. He "gave it to 'em" in his own peculiar way. He was entirely at home either on the platform or before a jury — always deliberate in manner and always wearing the peculiar "Bonaparte smile." But that smile was a terror to the politicians whom he was wont to assail, for they knew what was behind it in the mouth of the speaker. With the most cheerful of faces, and in the manner of a man relating a pleasing anecdote, he proceeded to describe their nefarious dealings and pin upon them the brand of their sins. His*

familiarity with their records from the moment of their entry upon political activity, and his marvelous memory in retaining the minutest details of their proceedings, might well terrify them.

https://archive.org/stream/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog_djvu.txt

- [notes only] He believed that the corruption of Maryland politics in general was directly related to the forceful occupation and minority rule during the Civil War years to prevent secession. He was a fervent Unionist but viewed the corruption as an inevitable outcome of that period, since it necessarily had required disenfranchisement and then the keys to power with that disenfranchisement now in place had been handed back after the war.
- His reform agenda, mostly focused on election law, was considered to be relatively pragmatic, often seeking to make existing laws & government systems actually be implemented legally & cleanly in function, without major idealized reforms to their form. He worried that deferring reforms of existing systems in pursuit of idealized new mechanisms would mean nothing would change. In a 1900 speech in Concord Massachusetts, for example, he praised the conservatism of the American Revolution compared to other revolutions, as basically trying to correctly enforce the laws and customs already in existence, rather than to change them, as other revolutions had done. [Contrast with Napoleonic overhauls of the entire Code]
- Charles was also involved in the National Municipal League and a founding member of the National Civil Service Reform League, which had existed since the 1881 assassination of President Garfield in a dispute over government appointments, and which continued as a significant force for federal government reform through World War I and even into the post-World War II Civil Rights Movement. Many politicians and party hacks were still opposing civil service reform because of the advantages to the patronage system, putting him at odds with them. Through the National Civil Service Reform League from the 1880s onward, Charles became friends with Theodore Roosevelt, a fellow dynast reformer, who went on to serve as New York City's Civil Service Commissioner. Charles was eventually the national chair. They worked closely together when Roosevelt was deployed to Baltimore to investigate corruption in federal offices there for Congress.
<https://millercenter.org/president/roosevelt/essays/bonaparte-1906-attorney-general>
- By 1902, Charles was serving in Roosevelt's Republican federal administration on the Board of Indian Commissioners, basically at the lowest point of this commission just a few years before it was significantly shaken up by reformers with an interest in improving the dire conditions on reservations. He was a special inspector for Indian reservations. *"Conditions in the Indian Territory," [his report] said, "involve immediate danger of ruin to the genuine Indian population and profound discredit to the United States, excite reasonable discontent on the part of all classes of the population and demand prompt and drastic remedies on the part of Congress." This report led in fact, to a radical change in the government's*

Indian policy. Although his overall opinions were not extremely woke, since he believed the natives had failed to reorganize themselves to compete with white civilization and take care of themselves.

https://archive.org/stream/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog_djvu.txt In 1903 he also served as a special prosecutor for postal fraud.

<https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001900/01972/html/01972bio.html>

<https://sites.rootsweb.com/~midmdroots/surnames/men/bonapartecharles.htm> While floated for a possible Senate run, he declined quickly, implying that he felt potential candidacy for elected office would present a conflict of interest in advancing his lifelong mission for clean elections. (Later he similarly rejected being floated as a presidential candidate.) He did agree to serve as a presidential elector, however.

- In 1904, Maryland held a strange presidential election, with secret ballots paid for by the government, instead of party-line open ballots paid for by the political parties, for the first time ever. Voters could cast a non-binding popular vote for one of the candidates, but electors were selected as individual names. Counting took weeks and Theodore Roosevelt, the incumbent Republican president by then and easily re-elected nationally, was counted as the winner by 51 votes in the non-binding direct vote, but there was only one Republican elector chosen out of eight elector spots. That elector was Charles Joseph Bonaparte. Most of the Democratic electors were equally famous in local or state politics, which might have contributed to them defeating the rest of the Republican slate, despite voter preference for Roosevelt to be re-elected.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1904_United_States_presidential_election#Results Detailed explanation at the Maryland State Archives from right after the 2000 election:

<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc2200/sc2221/000031/000000/html/00000001.html> [Napoleonic plebiscite discussion]

- While opponents tried to smear Charles Joseph Bonaparte as a new political machine boss in Baltimore due to his perceived close influence with Roosevelt, he soon departed for Washington to join the cabinet for President Theodore Roosevelt's 2nd term. Charles first served as US Navy Secretary (mid-1905 to end of 1906) supporting a push for a larger American Navy and introducing some of his reformer spirit to the sometimes sketchy Naval military justice system.

- *For many days after his appointment he was the chief subject of comment in the press of the country. His relationship to Napoleon was set forth at length and was made the subject of countless cartoons. In one of these the spirit of Napoleon was depicted receiving an aerial telegram from President Roosevelt reading: "I have made your grandnephew Secretary of the Navy," and Napoleon was saying: "I hope he does better with ships than I did." [...] One of the most interesting comments upon his appointment came from Constantinople, in the Levant Herald: "Never was the truth of the saying about 'the best laid plans of mice and men' more forcibly illustrated than by the news that the repudiated scion of the Imperial Napoleon is to become a Cabinet Minister of the greatest Republic the world has ever seen. As*

Secretary for the U. S. Navy, Mr. Bonaparte will command a fleet vastly more powerful than that of the great uncle who disowned him.

https://archive.org/stream/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog_djvu.txt

- Side note: you can read a letter signed as Navy Secretary and see his signature on the US Navy's history website
<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/manuscripts/b/charles-bonaparte-secretary-of-the-navy-manuscript-14-july-1905.html>
- He then served as US Attorney General, which had been his objective anyway rather than the Navy Department (AG from end of 1906 to end of term early 1909) <https://www.justice.gov/ag/bio/bonaparte-charles-joseph>
He gained the nickname "Charlie, the Crook Chaser" for his trust-busting as Attorney General, such as his targeting of the Tobacco industry.
 - Oct 1906 speech shortly before becoming AG: *"Our big, strong, greedy, over-prosperous trusts are animals of the (pig) order. They crowd their smaller and weaker fellows from the feeding trough so that these don't get their fair share of our national prosperity. The problem is how to so fence off the great beasts as to give the little ones a show. Remember we don't complain of the trust because they are themselves big and fat, but because they keep the others small and thin. The fatter the big pigs become the better for their owner and the more money the trusts make the better for the American people provided in the one case, all the little pigs get fat too, or, at all events, as fat as these can [...] Our President wants and has always wanted a square deal for every one, whether pig, lion, or man, and under his leadership the Republican Party has tried to put and keep each of our trusts in its proper pen where it can't crowd any of the little fellows around it. To these ends he has asked the aid of Congress and of the courts to keep the corporate and individual wealth of the country in due subjection to the law, not to make rich men poor, for to do this would only make poor men poorer, but to make rich men law-abiding so that poor men may become rich if they will. And the two Houses of Congress as well as the courts have responded to his appeal."*
https://archive.org/stream/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog_djvu.txt
 - A newspaper report upon his appointment stated, *"he is an aristocrat in feeling and deportment. He is too proud to be bossed and too cynical to be fooled. No 'interest' or no person does or can control him. [...] Whether he is ambitious or not, in the sense that most men who get into high office in the United States are, is a question which even the very few persons who are his intimates are able to answer. They give it as their opinion that he would rather be Attorney General than President, and that with his natural hatred of vulgar and greedy rich men he will prove a terror to every trust magnate in the country who comes under that head."*
 - Bonaparte helped Roosevelt keep his nerve on antitrust policy during the financial crisis of 1907, which tycoons tried to use as a pretext to "moderate" policy action against them. (They even

- agreed on a proposal to threaten federal receivership for corporate malfeasance, which seems like a threat we should bring back today, and they often spoke to one another about whether or not it would be possible to prosecute and convict high-level executives successfully, instead of always finding some guilty underling.)
- March 1907: *"It has been the aim of this Administration, an aim pursued with unswerving fidelity during the past two years, to show all Americans, whether rich or poor or of whatever class, or condition in life, that the laws made for their common good demand the prompt and unquestioning obedience of all alike."*
 - Dec 1907: *"Americans as a nation think their laws are meant to be obeyed by all alike, by the rich no less than by the poor, by the enlightened no less than by the ignorant. Moreover, they wish and intend their laws to be thus obeyed, and that the richest law-breaker who ever crushed out competition through a 'trust' shall find no greater favors from courts or juries or public prosecutors than the meanest criminal who counterfeits our coins..."*
 - The pro-trust newspapers hostile to Bonaparte waged a relentless campaign to suggest that he did not get along with President Roosevelt and was always on the brink of being fired, but they had been friends for decades and Roosevelt privately often expressed to Bonaparte admiration for his work and his "teamwork" with the rest of the Cabinet Secretaries, while mocking the false reports. Friendly journalists told Bonaparte directly that their publishers had handed down orders to get him out of office to stop the trust-busting. Bonaparte himself often publicly mocked the press attacks, which tended to infuriate them further.
 - American Tobacco Company case:
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Tobacco-Company> By the time of the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, ATC had come to control almost the entire tobacco industry of the United States, with over 150 factories, having been one of the earliest companies to combine all the post-Civil War investment money with new manufacturing technology for machine-rolled cigarettes. In 1906, Charles Joseph Bonaparte began preparing litigation to break them up, which took 5 years to complete, even after he had left office as AG. (In fact there were 7 major antitrust cases he handed off to his successor.) The Supreme Court ordered ATC broken into four companies in 1911 on the same day as they broke up Standard Oil. (The oil case had been launched in late 1906, the month before Bonaparte became AG.)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_v._American_Tobacco_Co.
 - He also founded the Bureau of Investigation, the forerunner to the FBI, in 1908. [Fouché discussion] The Baltimore Sun got absurdly stoked about this fact in the spring of 2017 when all the drama around Trump and Comey and all of that was happening:
<https://www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/op-ed/bs-ed-price-0521-20170520-story.html>

- He happily retired from the cabinet back to his law practice in Baltimore upon the inauguration of President Taft. He had continued throughout all his federal service to campaign for clean government in Maryland.
- He never had children and died 100 years ago this year in 1921.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Joseph_Bonaparte
- *Bonaparte did not like to talk of the Bonapartes, that he refused all applications to write about them and habitually spoke of Napoleon with condemnation. He was badgered constantly to buy Napoleonic relics of one kind or another, and always replied in letters like the following, written from the Navy Department on August 18, 1905 : "You have been misinformed as to my being an 'extensive collector of Napoleonana'; in fact I have made it a rule, for a great number of years, never, under any circumstances, to acquire by purchase a relic or memento of the Bonaparte family."*
https://archive.org/stream/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog/charlesjosephbo00bishgoog_djvu.txt [His father Bo had in fact been a prolific collector of Bonaparte memorabilia.]