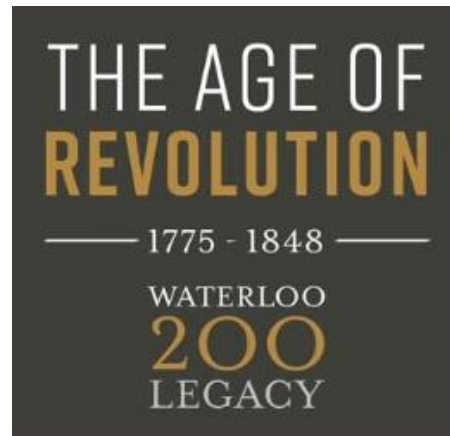


Teacher Fellowship Programme 2018: Teaching the Age of Revolutions



HA Teacher Fellowship resource

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Historical interpretations on Napoleon

Rationale

My resource idea came about for a few reasons: one was that through the HA Teacher Fellowship Programme, I appreciated historiography more than ever. I realised that, as stated earlier, it is part and parcel of the field of history, and that teaching it should be embedded in our schools. The second reason was my surprise at the amount of teachers who have not been teaching historical interpretations in the most effective manner. In addition, from my discussions with many of these teachers, I believe that the teaching of interpretations has also been lacking in passion and relevance. The final reason is a very practical one – I have been teaching coursework for the past three years and I wanted to improve my teaching of it by developing this resource, as well as leaving behind a useful tool for my colleagues to use when I depart my school and move to a new one this year.

The scholarly rationale for my resource is that I wanted to show educators that the process for analysing interpretations is a more complex process than it is often treated as. I wanted to show the nuance between the different forms of interpretations, such as formal and informal ones, and the need for not just educators but also our students to search and use peer reviews. The brilliant exchanges I witnessed on the programme's residential weekend at Waterloo brought home to me how as a society we have become far too complacent about our historical memories. What I mean by this is that we have begun to think of history as a continuing amalgamation of 'facts' – at least among the general public. I fear that our historical memories of the past are taken for granted. But our historical memories are constantly being 'revised' by historical interpretations and they matter a lot. As an example, take the debate over the size of Trump's inauguration and his administration's defence of 'alternative facts' to suggest that the size was larger. This was a fight over the historical memory of that event, almost immediately.

A more *historical* historical memory being fought over is the legacy over the American Civil War – with some people glossing over the role of slavery as a cause and emphasising and idealising the cause of 'state rights'. There is also historical memory of the origin and purpose of the European Union – with some casting it as a covert attempt at German hegemony of Europe. Both examples also show how it's not just academic historians who follow established guidelines having an input on our historical memories – all parts of society can now shape this, from blogs to politicians such as Boris Johnson.

All this shows how the integrity of our interpretation-making process is at risk, and we as educators have a responsibility to defend it. The best way of defending it is by impressing upon our students both the power of interpretations and the complexity of them. We need to build their skills at identifying, questioning and evaluating interpretations to a much higher level. They need to be able to recognise that even academic historians can be

challenged on their processes of interpretation-making. The infamous example I mention in my resource is David Irving, the Holocaust denier, but I also include Claude Ribbe's book on Napoleon's actions in the Caribbean. Ribbe was extremely selective about his evidence, choosing it to cast Napoleon in as negative a light as possible. Those without access to the original sources would never know, and this is why the dialogue, the reviews and the challenges from other historians form a necessary element to historical interpretation-making.

The curricular rationale is my hope that my resource can be used as a guide for educators to teach interpretations more effectively. Many teachers, including myself in the past, have taught interpretations with an optical illusion, showing students that there is no 'right' way of looking at something, just like the past. This is cute, but actually simplifies the process immensely. There are some 'wrong' ways of looking at the past, depending on the process used to arrive at the interpretation, and students need to be aware of this. The reasons for creating different interpretations are not simply looking at a topic from one extreme or the other – serious historians will always consider all views, even if they do favour one.

I envision my resource being used as a PowerPoint lecture for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 students, broken down into a few lessons. I have included some recommended activities to carry out with the students, but the main activity is for them to actually practise analysing interpretations. I have provided a checklist for analysing, plus additional things to consider. I have made this with the students of my new school in mind (who have extremely high targets), but my resource could be adapted by reducing the checklist or reducing the size of the historical extract. In addition, it is my hope that teachers won't be put off by the Napoleon focus, and will be encouraged to replace him with a topic of their choice – Napoleon is my passion, and as a result I have developed my understanding of his historiography. There are some teachers who haven't developed an understanding of a topic's historiography, but if they want to teach their students well then I believe they *need* to pursue this – it can reignite a passion in a topic and can help them to realise the importance of interpretation skills.

The slides in the PowerPoint cover the following corresponding points:

- Slides **1-16** – Teaching of theories of historical interpretations
- Slides **17-22** – Interpretations of three historians on Napoleon for students to analyse and practise their skills
- Slides **23-44** – Additional notes for teachers on the historians covered to supplement teacher subject knowledge