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# Waterloo: Causes, Courses and Consequences Transcript

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## Waterloo:

### Causes, Courses and Consequences

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Today is the exact two hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, shown here in a later painting by the Victorian artist William Holmes Sullivan, **(1)** and in this lecture I want to explore the causes, courses and consequences of the battle. Why was it fought? Who fought it? Who won, and why? And how important was it? To the *Daily Mail* and probably to many other people in this country, the answers to these questions seem so obvious as hardly to merit discussion. It was a battle in which the British, led by the Duke of Wellington, beat the French, led by the Emperor Napoleon, and thus brought his dream of a European dictatorship to an end in what was one of the decisive moments of world history. But in the next three-quarters of an hour or so, I want to persuade you that every single one of these statements is wrong: the British did not bash the French, the Duke of Wellington did not defeat the Emperor Napoleon, and the battle was not one of the decisive moments of world history.

Let's start with the background. Who was Napoleon Bonaparte? **(2)** Born in Corsica in 1769, he became a leading commander in the armies of the French Revolution, defeating the armies of the Habsburg Empire which was the leading power among the enemies of Revolutionary France (it has to be remembered that Louis XIV's Queen Marie Antoinette, executed by the Revolutionaries along with her husband, was an Austrian and the sister of the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II and thus the Aunt of the Emperor Francis I, who came to the throne in 1792 and led the European forces ranged against the Revolution). Napoleon's success as a general gave him enormous influence, which he used in 1799 to stage a coup d'état against the colourless regime of the Directory, then in 1804 to proclaim himself Emperor of the French. In a long series of brilliant military victories, at Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena and Auerstädt – seen here in a painting by the contemporary French painter Horace Vernet **(3)** – Friedland and Wagram, he defeated the successive coalitions put together by the Austrians to try to stop him, and established his domination over the whole of Europe, redrawing its map, abolishing the thousand-year-old Holy Roman Empire, establishing his relations or his marshals on a whole range of thrones of newly created or reorganized European states, from Italy and Spain to Sweden and western Germany, and beating the leading German states, Austria and Prussia, into submission. In the process, the boundaries of France were extended far to the east until they included large parts of western Germany and northern Italy. **(4)**

While Napoleon was almost continuously victorious on land, however, he met with a series of defeats at sea against the British, who fought the French Empire across the globe, as they had the Kingdom of France for most of the eighteenth century, from India to Canada. The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 – seen here in a painting by J. M. W. Turner – **(5)** enabled the British to establish a stranglehold over the Continent with a naval blockade, while Napoleon riposted with his Continental System, aimed at denying Britain access to Continental European markets and sources of supply. It was Tsar Alexander I's refusal to stop trading with the British that provided the trigger for Napoleon to lead the Grand Army, 680,000 strong, in an invasion of Russia in 1812. Victories at Smolensk and at Borodino – the bloodiest battle of the entire Napoleonic Wars, memorably described in Tolstoy's epic novel *War and Peace* – failed to bring the decisive victory Napoleon hoped for. The Russians extricated themselves, retreated and avoided further major encounters, burning Moscow to the ground and denying the Grand Army the quarters and supplies it so badly needed as winter came on. Napoleon was forced to retreat, as shown in the German artist Adolf Northen's later painting, **(6)** losing men continuously to hypothermia, typhus, starvation and guerrilla raids by the Cossack cavalry who harassed the troops relentlessly as they marched back towards Central Europe. Altogether 380,000 to 400,000 soldiers in the Grand Army died, and nearly 200,000 were taken prisoner. Almost nothing was left of it by the end of the year, as was shown in the famous graphic completed by Charles Joseph Minard's in 1869. **(7)**

The retreat from Moscow and the destruction of the Grand Army provided the trigger for the Austrians to put together a sixth and final coalition of European powers, the first to include all the major states, among them Russia, Prussia, Britain, Spain, now largely liberated from Napoleonic rule by guerrilla action and by the military victories of the British expedition led by Wellington, Sweden, Portugal and a number of minor German states. **(8)** The coalition put together a series of armies numbering 800,000 men while Napoleon raised a new army 600,000 strong. After a series of bloody but inconclusive engagements, 430,000 Allied troops converged on Leipzig, where they heavily defeated Napoleon's force of 191,000 in the Battle of the Nations, the largest military engagement in Europe until the First World War. **(9)** Refusing peace terms, Napoleon retreated once more to France, where Wellington was now advancing from the south, while more than 400,000 Allied troops marched in from the Rhine. With only 80,000 troops left in his army, Napoleon did not stand a chance, and his senior officers, led by Marshal Ney, mutinied and refused to continue fighting after the Allies had occupied Paris. Napoleon abdicated in April 1814 and was taken into exile on the Mediterranean island of Elba, between Tuscany and Corsica, allowing him, unwisely, to be accompanied by a military escort of 600 of his troops, while the Allied representatives met in Vienna in September to hammer out a peace settlement. **(10)**

The first thing the Allies did even before they met at Vienna was to restore the French monarchy under Louis

XVIII, brother of the executed Louis XVI (1724-1793). Extravagant, gluttonous and enormously fat – his death in 1824 was ascribed to ‘morbid obesity’ - Louis entered Paris on 4 May 1814 at the invitation of the French Senate and to general public acclaim, travelling in a coach since he was unable to walk. But the new regime got into trouble almost immediately, overwhelmed by the need to pay for the legacy of the war. **(11)** It retained the unpopular taxes imposed by Napoleon, imposed cutbacks in expenditure on the army, disbanded half its men and put 12,000 officers on half pay, creating serious discontent amongst those affected. It alienated liberals by reimposing censorship after decades of impassioned debate. Louis XVIII rejected the Constitution voted through by Napoleon’s last Senate after it had formally deposed the Emperor, and had it publicly burned in a Paris square, because he did not accept that his royal authority derived from an implicit contract between king and people. It came, he declared, from Divine Right, and in the Declaration of Ouen, which served as the basis for the French constitution under the restored monarchy, he made it clear that he was granting the French people their rights of his own free will, as ‘Louis, by the Grace of God King of France and Navarre’. The proclamation of a militant Catholicism as the state religion alienated still more educated Frenchmen. There were widespread fears that the King would try to restore lands confiscated by the Revolution to their original clerical and aristocratic owners and indeed returned aristocrats began behaving with ill-advised arrogance towards their former subjects. At 59 years of age, having grown up in the French court at Versailles before the Revolution, Louis XVIII himself was an intransigent figure. He abolished the universal male suffrage introduced by the Revolution. He refused to fly the tricolor and replaced the tricolor with the royal *fleur de lys* as the official flag of France, refused to recognize the Legion of Honour instituted by Napoleon, and counted 1814 as the nineteenth year of his reign. When a courtier told him in 1814 of Napoleon’s abdication: ‘Sire, you are King of France’, he replied: ‘Have I ever ceased to be?’ The court rituals, titles and ceremonies of the *ancien régime* came back in their full pomp. Louis quickly became unpopular, especially among public servants of the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, who considered him apart from anything else incapable of filling Napoleon’s boots, as in this later cartoon by James Gillray. **(12)**

After several months in exile on the island of Elba, Napoleon began to realize that the restored monarchy was becoming unpopular. The Allies were starting to quarrel with another at the Congress of Vienna. The return of thousands of his troops from captivity in Russia and Germany, along with the discontent of masses of his former soldiers, provided a fertile recruiting ground from which to build a new army. On 26 February 1815, as the British and French guard ships were away, he slipped away from the island with his troops **(13)** (the scene here was painted by Joseph Beaume), landed near Cannes and travelled across the Alps to enter south-east France. His return thus triggered an outburst of popular sentiment in favour of preserving the legacy of the Revolution. ‘The people of the countryside’, reported a local official in central France, ‘are manifesting an extraordinary sense of enthusiasm [for Napoleon]; fires are lit every evening on elevated positions, and there are public celebrations in many communes. It is commonly asserted’, the report noted, ‘that if the Emperor had not returned to put the aristocrats in their place they would have been massacred by the peasants.’ Meeting a detachment of royalist troops, Napoleon stepped forward, pulled open his jacket and declared: ‘If any of you will shoot your Emperor, shoot him now!’ **(14)** They rushed over to join him. Louis XVIII sent Marshal Ney to put down the rebellion. Declaring that Napoleon was a madman who should be put in a cage, Ney led a force of 6,000 southwards, but his resolve melted when he saw the former Emperor and he took them over to his side. This was the decisive moment. Louis and his court fled to the Netherlands. On 20 March 1815 Napoleon entered Paris to a rapturous welcome.

In the south, Louis XVIII’s nephew the Duc d’Angoulême, seen here in a contemporary portrait from the studio of François-Joseph Kinson, **(15)** raised a militia of 100,000 men and set up what was virtually an independent royalist state. Although he was forced to surrender, his supporters re-emerged later to instigate a ‘white terror’ against the former Emperor’s supporters. Demonstrations of support for Napoleon from Parisian workers alienated many bourgeois notables, and the Emperor faced serious hostility amongst the clergy; in areas such as the Vendée and Brittany, traditionally favourable to the royalists, he was unable to win much support. It was above all amongst his former soldiers, angered by the mass dismissals and economy measures imposed by the restored monarchy, that Napoleon was popular. ‘I only have the people and the Army up to captain level for me’, he remarked: ‘The rest are scared of me but I cannot rely on them.’ His arrival exposed the deep divisions in French society left by a quarter of a century of revolutionary change.

Conveniently all assembled in one place, at the Congress of Vienna, **(16)** the Allies immediately declared Napoleon to be an outlaw, ‘beyond the pale of civil society’, as the declaration, penned by his former foreign minister Talleyrand, put it. Anyone could thus murder him without fear of prosecution. Louis XVIII remained the legitimate, internationally recognized head of the French state. The Allies formed a Seventh Coalition in which Britain, Austria, Russia and Prussia each promised to raise 150,000 troops, and undertook not to make a separate peace with Napoleon. Altogether sixteen states joined the coalition, including Spain and Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland, Sardinia, Tuscany and the Two Sicilies, Hanover, Brunswick and Nassau, and of course the Kingdom of France. Within a short space of time they had nearly a million men under arms. 250,000 Russian troops began the long march west towards France, while the British, unable to raise such a large force because a large part of the army was still in North America after having burned down the White House in the war of 1812 against the United States, made substantial sums available to the other coalition powers for arms, ammunition, pay and supplies.

For his part, Napoleon tried to assure the Allies of his peaceful intentions. His emissary Fleury de Chaboulon told the Austrian representative at a secret meeting in the Three Kings Inn in Basel: ‘The only leader we want is

Napoleon, not the conquering, ambitious Napoleon but Napoleon tamed by adversity.' As a compromise the Allies, who were already disillusioned with the tactless and politically incompetent Louis XVIII, offered to place his son on the throne with Napoleon as regent. But this only encouraged the former Emperor. 'These gentlemen are starting to come round, since they're offering me the regency', he told his entourage: 'my firmness is making them respect me. In a month I'll no longer fear them.' His intransigence was to prove his undoing.

Napoleon was no longer the vigorous and healthy man he had been in his heyday. Fleury, his emissary in the talks, told the Austrian representative that the former Emperor 'had become fat and flabby, heavy and sluggish, slept a great deal, and realized that what he needed now was peace and quiet'. **(17)** Of course this was in part designed to reassure the Austrians that he was less of a threat than they feared. But whether or not Napoleon was actually suffering from some kind of illness, he had certainly lost none of his former ambition. Peace and quiet might have been what he needed, but they were not what he wanted. Within weeks he was able to muster nearly 250,000 men, as the provincial administrators, mostly appointed by him, did their job of recruitment as before, and veterans, disillusioned with the Bourbon Restoration, rallied to the tricolor. He left a substantial portion of them to guard the French capital, and large forces troops to prevent royalist insurrections in the south and the west. **(18)** He had to leave a further army to guard against attack by an enormous force of 225,000 men under the command of the Austrian general Schwarzenberg mustered on the far side of the river Rhine. Thus in mid-June when Napoleon advanced with the rest to meet the Allied armies bearing down on Paris from the North he had only a portion of this force under his command. His aim was to prevent them from uniting, and defeat them piecemeal; he wrong-footed Wellington, who expected him to try and surround the two forces, and by advancing swiftly he stole a march on the Allied forces.

The first of the two Allied armies was an entirely Prussian force, commanded by Field-Marshal Leberecht von Blücher. Born in 1742, he was a veteran of the Seven Years' War who had risen to command the forces that defeated Napoleon at the Battle of the Nations in Leipzig, **(19)** a victory for which he received the title of Prince from the Prussian King. Blücher was famous for his impetuosity and daring – he was known popularly as 'General Forwards'; a lifelong soldier, he had played a significant role in the reform and restructuring of the Prussian armies in the wake of their defeat by Napoleon at Jena and Auerstädt. He was a leader of the so-called Patriotic Party in Prussia and an impassioned advocate of war against the French at a time when Prussia had still not made up its mind. Blücher's force in 1815 numbered some 90,000 men, but a third of them consisted of poorly trained militia, and a substantial contingent of Saxons had mutinied and been sent home before the campaign began. Guns, ammunition and equipment were in short supply and were still being delivered during the campaign. Blücher failed to get a substantial part of his army under General von Bülow up to the front in time, but he considered a retreat would damage morale. So he took up a defensive position against the advancing army of some 80,000 led by Napoleon, and waited for the main Allied force under the Duke of Wellington to arrive, as promised. **(20)**

After having a tall observation post built, Napoleon realized that Blücher had arranged his forces in the expectation of being relieved by Wellington, along the road from Quatre Bras (at the top left-hand corner of the map). So he launched a fierce attack on Blücher's right flank, extending it then to the village of Ligny in the centre. The Prussian militias panicked and when Blücher tried to rally the troops his horse was shot from under him and fell, pinning him to the ground. **(21)** The Prussian command thought he was dead. Two French cavalry charges passed over them before he could be rescued. As Ligny fell to Napoleon's Old Guard, the Prussians retreated in disorder, losing 16,000 dead and wounded and another 6,000 who had deserted. However, Napoleon's forces, who had lost around 12,000 men, failed to follow up and complete the rout; by the time the final Prussian units retreated it was three in the morning, and the French troops were tired and unable to make rapid progress over the heaps of dead and piles of abandoned guns and equipment. The Prussian command was able to restore order and rally the remaining troops. Blücher, who was heavily bruised but not seriously wounded, had himself rubbed all over with a potion made of garlic, brandy, gin and rhubarb, put his uniform on and arrived at headquarters just as his second-in-command, Gneisenau, was starting to organize a retreat, as Napoleon had expected. As he roughly embraced his English liaison officer Hardinge, who had just had his arm amputated, Blücher shouted 'Ich stinke! Ha-ha!' and resumed command, ordering his army to carry out the original plan of uniting with Wellington.

Meanwhile a smaller French force of about 24,000 under Marshal Ney took the strategic crossroads of Quatre Bras to prevent Wellington joining up with Blücher. As Allied troops, numbering eventually around 36,000, streamed towards the battle scene, fierce fighting ensued, with the Allied force having the upper hand, but when he learned of Blücher's defeat at Ligny Wellington was forced to withdraw; each side lost around 4,000 troops in the encounter **(22)** [Here you see the two battles in relation to each other]. Realising the Prussian army had managed to regroup, Napoleon sent 33,000 men under Marshal Grouchy to pursue it; Blücher left a rearguard of 17,000 in a defensive position at Wavre under General Thielemann while he set off to join Wellington with his main force of 72,000 Prussians. In fierce fighting throughout the afternoon of 18 June 17,000 Prussians managed to hold off Grouchy's 33,000 long enough to prevent them from joining Napoleon's main army; the order to them to do so arrived too late.

And so to the Battle of Waterloo itself. After these earlier encounters, the main Allied force took up a defensive position along a ridge a mile away from the town of Waterloo, in the knowledge that Blücher had reformed his army and was marching to join him. The Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, born in 1769 and so at that time in his mid-fifties, was a professional soldier who had fought in India and in the Netherlands, before in 1808-9 taking

charge of British forces in the Iberian Peninsula, which was occupied by the French. Wellington was essentially a defensive commander, and he made slow progress against a series of armies led by Napoleon's Marshals before defeating them at the Battle of Vitoria in 1813 and leading his troops into France, the occasion not only for his elevation to a Dukedom but also for Beethoven's *Battle Symphony*, written for a mechanical orchestra and possibly his most lucrative and certainly his worst composition. After Napoleon's defeat and exile to Elba Wellington was made British Plenipotentiary at the Congress of Vienna, but left to take command of the Allied forces in what is now Belgium, with the aim of defending Brussels against Napoleon's army.

The army Wellington commanded at Waterloo was not a British army. Out of 68,000 troops in fact only 25,000 were British. The rest of the army was made up of 6,000 troops from the King's German Legion and 11,000 Hanoverians – both these forces consisting of German subjects of King George III, who was also of course King of Hanover; 17,000 Dutch troops, 6,000 more Germans from the Duchy of Brunswick, and 3,000 from Nassau. In other words, adding them all together, there were more German than British troops in Wellington's army – 26,000 as against 25,000. It was an Allied force, a force of the Seventh Coalition of European Powers against Napoleon. Against them Napoleon could pit around 73,000 men; he outgunned Wellington by 252 guns to 156, and he had 14,000 cavalry as against Wellington's 11,000. The best British troops, veterans of the Peninsular campaign, were in North America. Wellington complained that he has 'an infamous army, very weak and ill equipped, and a very inexperienced Staff.' By contrast Napoleon's troops were mostly battle-hardened veterans. 'Wellington is a bad general', Napoleon told his marshals; 'the English are bad troops, and this affair is nothing more than eating breakfast.' **(25)**

Wellington was in communication with Blücher and knew he was marching to his aid. His task therefore was to hold the line until the Prussians arrived, which would give him a decisive numerical advantage. Napoleon's task was to break the Allied line before this happened, either forcing the Prussians to retreat or enabling him to turn on them and use his numerical superiority to defeat them. Still thinking the Prussians were in disarray after their defeat at Ligny, he thought it would take them two days before they could recover, and that Grouchy could handle them. He was not concerned, therefore, about the delay occasioned by his concern that the ground in the early morning was dangerously soft, causing him to wait until well after ten in the morning before he launched his assault. In the event, the hesitation was to cost him dearly.

Napoleon's plan was to force Wellington to pull in his reserves by attacking Hogoumont farm, before D'Erlon rolled up the line from the left. But as the fighting around the farm became fiercer, so it became more important; and both sides threw in more troops. **(26)** At the height of the battle, depicted here by Clément-Auguste Andrieux in 1852, there were 12,000 Allied and 14,000 French troops battling it out and Wellington later stated that 'the success of the battle turned upon closing the gates at Hougoumont'. Meanwhile D'Erlon launched an attack on a second farmhouse, at La Haye Sainte, which was more to the centre than the left flank of Wellington's army. Fierce fighting developed here too, but the King's German Legion, who were occupying the farmhouse, successfully defended it through the afternoon. Not long after one o'clock, Napoleon learned that Blücher's army was only a matter of four or five hours' march away. The defeat of the Allied army under Wellington became more urgent. D'Erlon managed to beat the Allied armies back, penetrating to behind the defensive ridge, but he was pushed back by a British heavy cavalry charge. Increasingly desperate, Marshal Ney now launched a series of cavalry charges against the Allied right; the Allied infantry formed defensive squares **(27)** seen here in an 1874 painting by Henri Philippoteaux. At seven in the evening La Haye Sainte fell, and the French forces poured into the Allied centre, bringing up guns and opening fire on the squares from above. Wellington, trapped in a square from which he found it difficult to see what was going on, was facing defeat.

But it was already too late for Napoleon. The first Prussian units, under Bülow, had already begun to arrive on the eastern side of the battlefield at 4.30, and D'Erlon had to redeploy his forces to deal with them. As more and more Prussian forces poured onto the battlefield, the village of Placenoit fell to them, as depicted here in 1843 by Ludwig Elsholtz, **(28)** and the French forces were pushed back. A final, desperate charge by the Old Guard against the Allied centre was repulsed by Dutch troops who arrived just in time. As the Guard retreated, Wellington ordered the general advance. Lord Hill's demand for the Guard to surrender was met with the famous retort 'The Guard dies, it does not surrender' (although some have claimed this story is an apocryphal one). The scene is depicted here by the English artist Robert Hillingford. **(29)** As the Allied and Prussian forces advanced, the French retreat turned into a rout, though Napoleon and the units protecting him retired in good order. Wellington and Blücher met at the farm of Belle Alliance, where Napoleon had made his headquarters. Napoleon had left his carriage behind, together with a large collection of diamonds, which were taken by the Prussians and put into their own collection of crown jewels. The scene was painted by Daniel Maclise on a mural in the gallery of the House of Lords in 1861, after the Palace of Westminster had been reconstructed following its destruction by fire in 1834. **(30)**

The battle essentially consisted of two phases. In the first, Napoleon made repeated attempts to defeat the Allied army under Wellington. Here he essentially failed because instead of the tactical flexibility that had led him to victory in earlier battles, he simply launched a series of frontal assaults. Even if his intention had been to roll up the Allied armies from the left flank, he was diverted first by the fighting around Hougoumont, and then by his attack on the centre. D'Erlon did not manoeuvre his forces around the left flank but launched a frontal assault far too close to the centre. Marshal Ney's late attempt to destroy the Allied right was similarly made through a frontal assault. There was no sign of the tactic of encirclement that had made Napoleon famous. Whether he was weakened by illness, or lost his tactical genius in the face of his desperation at the knowledge that the

Prussians would arrive soon, he proved unable to adapt with the speed and the element of surprise that he had shown through most of his career. 'Damn the feller', said Wellington: 'He's a mere pounder after all.'

If the first phase of the battle was fairly evenly balanced, with Napoleon holding a distinct advantage, the second phase of the battle, which began around 4.30 in the afternoon with the arrival of the first Prussian units, was the decisive one. Napoleon was now faced with overwhelming odds, his 74,000 troops pitted against 118,000 Allied and Prussian troops, and had no chance of surviving them. The two phases of the battle can be seen quite clearly on this graphic **(31)** The main French assault began at one in the afternoon, but by three it was clear it had failed. An hour later the Prussians began to arrive, and Marshal Ney launched his desperate attack on the Allied right. By five o'clock it was clear that Napoleon was facing defeat. By eight, the French were almost encircled and it was all over. The Prussians and the Allied armies advanced and drove the French from the field in disorder.

The casualties on the Allied side amounted to 15,000 dead and wounded, while there were 7,000 dead and wounded in the Prussian forces. Napoleon lost around 25,000 men, 7,000 captured, and 15,000 troops deserted either during the battle or shortly afterwards. On the following morning General Grouchy defeated the Prussians under Thielemann at Wavre but all he could do was to retreat; his 33,000 troops could have given Napoleon victory if they had joined him at Waterloo. Napoleon retreated to Paris, and abdicated on 24 June: this time he was taken to St Helena on the British warship HMS Bellerophon, seen here in an 1880 picture by Sir William Orchardson. **(32)** On this remote island in the Atlantic, he managed to dictate his memoirs before dying on 5 May 1821.

How decisive was the Battle of Waterloo? Certainly it finished the Napoleonic dream once and for all. But even had Napoleon proved victorious, he would have still needed to deal with Schwarzenberg's army, over 200,000 strong, beginning to launch an invasion of France from across the Rhine – the contemporary cartoonist Cruikshank indeed portrayed Napoleon being battered by both Blücher and Schwarzenberg **(33)**, like a shuttlecock being driven hither and thither by two irresistible forces. Then there was the Russian force of a quarter of a million men marching towards France from the East; they had already reached central Germany by the time of Waterloo. Another army was threatening Napoleon from northern Italy. The odds were overwhelming and sooner or later, the European powers gathered at the Congress of Vienna would have defeated him.

In this sense, therefore, the Battle of Waterloo was not an all-or-nothing encounter, and it is quite misleading to claim that it prevented Napoleon from re-establishing his Empire and launching a fresh bid to conquer Europe; that was never going to happen. What had the real effect was Napoleon's ability to raise such a large force in such a short time and the fact that he almost defeated the Allied armies under Wellington (it was 'the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life', as the Duke said afterwards). From now on, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the major Allies, Russia, Austria, Prussia and Britain, established a system of international relations, the Concert of Europe, effectively in succession to the Seventh Coalition, to prevent the recurrence of anything like the French Revolution or the Napoleonic Wars. The Congress of Vienna imposed harsher terms on France than it had proposed when it first convened. Periodic international Congresses were to meet to regulate international relations; here's the Congress of Verona, in 1822, for example **(34)**. Uprisings and revolutions were to be crushed by concerted international action, as they were in Italy and Spain in the 1820s.

Yet if peace was restored, and there were no major wars in Europe for a century, until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, this was not achieved solely or even principally by the Battle of Waterloo. What was decisive in reality was the British elimination of the French global empire over the whole course of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Whatever else a Napoleonic victory at Waterloo, or even the re-establishment of a Napoleonic Empire in France might have brought, it would not have brought the re-emergence of a French empire on a global scale: the French had already been defeated in North America and India, and it was Britain's complete domination of the seas, above all following the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, seen here portrayed by Clarkson Stanfield in 1836 **(35)**, ensured that there was no chance of European states becoming embroiled in a worldwide conflict. Not until the emergence of other global empires, and the rise of a rival European power with global ambitions – Germany – at the end of the nineteenth century did this situation look as if it was going to change. Between them, therefore, the Concert of Europe and the British domination of the seas ensured that the nineteenth century, after 1815, was a century of peace in Europe.

Napoleon's legacy proved to be rather different. To some, he appeared as a mere dictator and warmonger. Yet everywhere that Napoleon ruled, he had replaced encrusted custom and privilege with the rationality and uniformity. While his armies rampaged across Europe, his bureaucrats had moved in silently behind, reorganizing, systematizing, standardizing. Local and regional jurisdictions, such as those exercised by hundreds of Imperial knights in the Holy Roman Empire, and by church and seigneurial courts, had been replaced by centralized uniformity administered by a judicial bureaucracy. In all these areas, the Napoleonic Law Code had replaced existing, often tradition-bound laws and ordinances, introducing a key element of equality before the law. Property rights were guaranteed wherever the Code applied, as they had not been in many areas before. The Code proclaimed many of the key ideas of the French Revolution, including the freedom of the individual, and, as Napoleon himself proclaimed in his testament, equality of opportunity, 'career open to talent', and 'the rule of reason'. The early nineteenth-century painter Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse's portrayal of Napoleon writing the Civil Code, crowned by the Allegory of Time, says something about the importance accorded to these measures in France and more generally in Europe after 1815. **(36)** Weights and measures had been at least to some

extent standardized, internal customs tolls abolished, guilds and other restrictions on the free movement of labour swept away, serfs freed (including in Poland). Everywhere, Napoleon had brought change, and as he departed for his final exile on St Helena in 1815, it was clear that much of it could not be reversed.

He left behind a political legend that quickly developed into a potent myth, encouraged by his own turn (whether genuine or not) to liberal ideas during the 'Hundred Days' before Waterloo in an attempt to broaden his support. Very much aware of the weakness of his situation, he had gone to some lengths to reassure the world that his dreams of conquest were over, and France that he would respect the rights and liberties of the citizen and no longer behave like an Imperial dictator. He continued in the same vein in his writings in exile before his death in 1821. **(37)** In subsequent decades the legend of the 'liberal Emperor' gained still further in potency. 'During his life', remarked the writer François Chateaubriand (1768-1848), 'the world slipped from his grasp, but in death he possesses it.' In France, 'Bonapartism' came to stand for patriotism, universal manhood suffrage, the sovereignty of the nation, the institutions of an efficient, centralized, bureaucratic administration that dealt equally with all citizens, the periodic consultation of the people by its government through plebiscites and referendums, an implicit contract between Frenchmen and the state that provided social order and political stability, national pride, and military glory. The image of Napoleon was celebrated in countless popular stories and cheap pamphlets, folksongs, paintings and sculptures, old Imperial coins, tobacco-boxes and trinkets, scarves and caps, even in children's sweets, with chocolates or boiled sugar confections made in the shape of the Emperor or cheap bonbons with wrappings displaying Napoleonic symbols. Men cultivated extravagant moustaches to advertise their admiration for the Grand Army's magnificently bewhiskered Old Guard, and wore violets or red carnations in their buttonholes in defiance of the ban imposed on these Imperial colours by the restored French monarchy. **(38)**

The cult of Napoleon stood for many people outside France, too, for the achievements of the Revolution, translated into purposeful reform after the excesses of the Terror in the early 1790s. Irish republicans and Polish nationalists looked to Napoleon for inspiration in their political struggles, and in Armenia, a potent and widespread legend idolized the mythical figure of 'Panaporté', who conquered the world, destroyed Russia by fire, and strangled the Pope. Native American tribes incorporated Napoleon into their folk tales, while European settlers had named fifteen towns in the USA 'Napoleon' or 'Bonaparte' by 1859. Latin American liberators looked to his military exploits for inspiration. The Venezuelan liberator of large swathes of the continent from Spanish rule, Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), seen here in an anonymous portrait **(39)**, had lived for a while in France and imbibed some of the ideas of Rousseau and the French Revolutionaries, and admired Napoleon so much that he had made the journey to Milan to see his hero crowned King of Italy. 'The St Helena Diary', he wrote, 'the campaigns of Napoleon and everything connected with him are for me the most agreeable reading and the most profitable; there it is that the arts of war, of politics and of government should be studied.' In China and Madagascar Napoleon was worshipped by some as a god. Even in Britain, where he was widely reviled as 'Boney', a rapacious and militaristic despot whose ambitions had threatened to destroy British liberties and traditions and had brought death and destruction wherever he went, there were at least some radicals who retained a very different image of Napoleon as a liberal and democratic reformer.

Retrospectively, in France itself, even the Battle of Waterloo became a kind of victory for the French, a celebration of courage in the face of overwhelming odds, patriotism, and self-sacrifice for the 'Great Nation'. The restored French monarchy did not last long. In France, the legitimate government was quickly restored. But the Allies made sure this time that Louis XVIII made more concessions to the revolutionary and Napoleonic legacy than he had previously been willing to do. At the insistence of the Duke of Wellington, he appointed two of Napoleon's chief aides to leading positions - Joseph Fouché, Minister of Police, and Talleyrand, Foreign Minister and head of the government: 'vice leaning on the arm of crime', as Chateaubriand put it. Louis had to recognize that the émigrés could not get their lands back, and he had to concede an elected legislature, though it had limited powers and was elected on a narrow franchise. The Napoleonic structure of administrative departments was retained, and with it the Napoleonic Law Code. But the French Legitimists never really accepted these changes. Louis XVIII's brother Charles X, seen here in a portrait by Pierre-Narcisse Guérin, succeeded him in 1824, **(40)** and was a far more determined reactionary than his indolent predecessor, and his attempts to turn the clock back led to disaster in 1830, when he was overthrown in a revolution that brought his cousin, the liberal Duke of Orleans, to the throne in the so-called July Monarchy. Bonapartism came to power again in the wake of the 1848 Revolution, in a *coup d'état* by Napoleon's nephew, the journalist Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, portrayed here in 1861 by Jean-Hyppolyte Flandrin. **(41)** He had already secured election as the new Republic's President in a skillful propaganda operation. The echoes of the *coup* which brought the first Napoleon to power prompted Karl Marx to make his famous statement that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. But the Second Empire lasted for two decades, as tight authoritarian control at home, rigged elections, and the rapid development of the economy, kept Napoleon III, as he styled himself, in power, while his ceaseless search for *la gloire* abroad in adventures that would somehow make his reputation live up to that of his illustrious predecessor disturbed not only the European equilibrium, with his involvement in the Crimean War and the wars of Italian unification, but also the American political world, as he sent troops to impose a member of the Habsburg family on the Mexicans as their Emperor, an adventure that did not last for long after the end of the American Civil War. The Second Empire finally met its nemesis in Otto von Bismarck, who engineered a war with a willing Napoleon III in 1870 that ended in a crushing defeat for France, and the creation of the Third Republic and the German Empire.

As for the Duke of Wellington, he entered British politics as a Conservative, becoming Prime Minister for two

years in 1828 and again more briefly in 1834. He carefully cultivated his image as a national hero, and was successful enough to be granted a massive state funeral on his death in 1850. He lost no opportunity to boost the importance of Waterloo, and indeed its reputation as a history-changing event in which he had played the decisive part owes a great deal to his skillful manipulation of its memory. He claimed already in his famous dispatch from the battlefield that the Prussians had arrived far later than they actually did, for example. He even went so far as to suppress a model depicting the Battle that gave full recognition to the role played by the Prussians. **(42)** The battle he wanted remembered was largely this one **(43)**, and not this one. **(44)**

I began by citing the popular view in this country that Waterloo was a battle in which the British, led by the Duke of Wellington, beat the French, led by the Emperor Napoleon, and thus brought his dream of a European dictatorship to an end in what was one of the decisive moments of world history. **(45)** I have argued that the victorious army was not British but multinational, with Germans predominating and British troops very much in the minority. It was not the Duke of Wellington who won, but the Prussians, led by Marshal Blücher, whose bravery indeed cost him his life only four years later, since he never really recovered from his wounds. Wellington's achievement was to defend his lines successfully against the repeated assaults of Napoleon's troops, but he did not manage actually to beat Napoleon. Napoleon was not Emperor of the French, but an outlaw, a renegade and an escaped prisoner. His army did indeed consist of Frenchmen, unlike most of the armies he had led in his earlier campaigns, but many Frenchmen refused to support him, and he can in no sense be said to have represented 'the French'. Indeed, since the legitimate and internationally recognized French government was a member of the Seventh Coalition one would be justified in saying that the French were on the winning side. Napoleon did not aim at creating a European dictatorship but made it clear that he intended his regime to be a liberal one, and indeed that is how he was mostly remembered on the European Continent, where his reforms had brought many new civil freedoms. Waterloo was indeed one of the decisive victories of world history, but the long peace that followed owed far more to British command of the seas. In Europe, what followed the Allied victory in 1815 was a long period of unity, and perhaps the most important lesson to draw from the events of 200 years ago is that European unity is the best guarantee of international peace and stability, as it has indeed been since the end of the Second World War some seventy years ago.