8 October 2012

The Franco-Prussian War and the Commune

Monument to the Victims of Revolution (1909)
Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris
Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century?*

Claude Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines* (1873) painted looking out the window of Nadar’s photography studio

Haussmannization of Paris
1851-1869
4500 acres of parks
87 miles of new streets
15 churches
70 schools
2 hospitals
Opera House

* Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1935)—outline for his unfinished *Arcades Project*
Georges Seurat, *Sunday Afternoon on the Isle de la Grande Jatte* (1886)
Art Institute of Chicago
Gustave Caillebotte, *The Europe Bridge* [Paris], 1877
Petit Palais, Geneva
Edouard Manet, *St. Lazare Station* (1873).
Rise and Fall of the Second Empire

1848  Louis Bonaparte elected president

1852 Second Empire declared

1864 trade unions legalized
1867-68 free press and association

July 19, 1870 France declares war on Prussia
Sept. 2-4, 1870 Napoleon III surrenders at Sedan;
  Govt of National Defence formed in Paris

Sept.-Jan. 28, 1871 Siege of Paris

Jan. 18, 1871 German Empire declared at Versailles

Feb. 4, 1871 national elections (Republican minority)

March 18, 1871 national government tries to take
  weapons from Paris
March-May 1871 Commune controls Paris (similar
efforts in other large cities such as Lyon)

April-May 1871 French army besieges Paris
May 21-28, 1871 Bloody Week (*semaine sanglante*)

Adolphe Braun, *Paris, 1871*
Maximilian Luce, *A Paris street in May 1871* (1903)
L’Année terrible (the terrible year)

July 19, 1870    France declares war on Prussia
Sept. 2-4, 1870  Napoleon III surrenders at Sedan;

Sept.-Jan. 28, 1871 Siege of Paris

Feb. 4, 1871      national elections
March 18, 1871   national government tries to take
                 weapons from Paris
March-May 1871   Commune governs in Paris
April-May 1871   Siege of Paris
May 21-28, 1871  Bloody Week (semaine sanglante)

Anton von Werner, Proclamation of the German Kaiserreich in 1871 (1877)
Sites of Foreign Intervention and Imperial Expansion, 1852-1870

June 1849—French troops help repress Roman Republic, restore Pope to authority
1854-1856—Crimean War (France and Britain support Ottoman Empire against Russian Empire)
1850s—territorial claims in southeast Asia and south Pacific
1859—Napoleon III leads French troops on battlefield allied w/ Piedmont-Sardinia against Austria
1864-1867—supports “Maximilian I” as emperor of Mexico

white= new colonies and international intervention, 1849-1870
black= “old” colonies (Algeria since 1848 is technically “France”)
Central Europe in 1848

1861 William I becomes King of Prussia; liberal parliament refuses funding for military restructuring

1861-1862 popular peaceful demonstrations in support of parliament; King almost flees

1862-1866 Chancellor Bismarck governs “in the gap” between King and Parliament

1863-1864 Schleswig-Holstein controversy (war between Prussia and Denmark)

1866 Austro-Prussian War (also known as the German Civil War) ends with Prussian victory, and creation of North German Confederation

1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War ends with declaration of Second German Empire; Germany annexes Alsace and Lorraine

Sept. 1862 Chancellor Bismarck “The great questions of the time will be decided not by speeches and majority decisions but by iron and blood”
Napoleon the First . . . and the Last?

Europe in the mid nineteenth century

Gros, *Napoleon on the Battlefield at Eylau* (1808)
Napoleon III surrenders to King Wilhelm of Prussia at Sedan, 2 September 1871

Second-Empire coin: profile of Napoleon III, overstamped “Sedan”

Krupp breech-loading gun, c. 1870-1871
Siege of Paris (Sept. 1870-Jan. 1871) and Republican Heroics

“I like Paris as it is today. I wouldn’t have liked to see the Bois de Boulogne in the days when it was crowded with expensive carriages and fine horses, but now that it’s a quagmire, a ruin, it appeals to me! It’s grand!”

Victor Hugo, Dec. 1870, quoted in the diary of Edmond Goncourt

Robida, “The new National Guard” (1870)

Gambetta and the Government of National Defense leave Paris by balloon
The sufferings of Paris during the siege? A joke for two months, but now no one finds it funny … Nobody talks about butter any more, and every other sort of fat except for axle grease has disappeared too. As for the staples in the diet of the poorer classes… cheese has disappeared, and you have to have friends in high places to get potatoes.

Goncourt brothers diary, January 1871

Cham, “The Dangers of having rat for dinner…” (Dec. 1870)
International Consequences of Franco-Prussian War

Alsace and Lorraine
(part of German Empire, 1871-1919)

Revanche! (Revenge)

Anton von Werner, Proclamation of the German Kaiserreich in 1871 (1877)
Paris Commune, March 22-May 28, 1871

culmination of revolutionary tradition

a new kind of revolution

experiment with direct democracy

patriotic frustration with weak leaders

madness

people reclaiming city from Haussmannization

The only limit to the autonomy of the Commune should be the equal right to autonomy for all communes adhering to the contract, whose association shall insure French unity. …Unity, as it has been imposed on us until today by the Empire, the monarchy, or parliamentarism, is nothing but unintelligent, arbitrary, or onerous centralization. Political unity, as Paris wants it, is the voluntary association of all local initiatives; the spontaneous and free concourse of all individual energies in view of a common goal: the well being, the freedom, and the security of all. The communal revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, begins a new era of experimental, positive, scientific politics.

Manifesto of the Paris Commune, April 1871
The women of Paris covered the cannons with their bodies. The officers ordered the soldiers to fire on us, but the men refused. … They understood that the people of Paris were defending the Republic by defending the arms; they understood that royalists and imperialists would have fired on Paris with help from the Prussians. … Some people say I am brave. Not really. There is no heroism; people are simply entranced by events. … It was beautiful, that’s all. Barbarian that I am, I love cannon, the smell of powder, bullets in the air.

Louise Michel, *Memoirs*

The empire, with the coup d'état for its birth certificate, universal suffrage for its sanction, and the sword for its sceptre, professed to rest upon the peasantry. … The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune. Paris, the central seat of the old governmental power, and, at the same time, the social stronghold of the French working class, had risen in arms against the attempt of Thiers and the Rurals to restore and perpetuate that old governmental power bequeathed to them by the empire. Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men.

Karl Marx, *Civil War in France*

caricature of Adolphe Thiers (“that monstrous gnome”—Marx)
Edouard Manet, *Execution of Maximilian* (1868)

Edouard Manet, *Civil War: The Barricade* (1871).
Politics, Culture, and Society after the Commune

Gustave Caillebotte, The Europe Bridge [Paris], 1877

Pecchio, The Executed Man’s Widow (1877)