

1848  
A YEAR OF UNFINISHED  
REVOLUTIONS



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## The 1848 Revolutions

We plan to do three things:

First, we will see what happened in 1848. Interestingly, we will discover that the late George Washington was partially responsible for it. Think about the American Revolution of 1776 as well.

Second, we will consider what happened to what had happened in 1848.

Third, we will investigate why 1848 failed to be a historical turning point.

## The Impact

We are at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. No matter what happened in the immediate future, 1848 was a phenomenally revolutionary year in Europe.

## France

Historians Dennis Sherman and Joyce Salisbury used the phrase “the Dam Bursts,” to define 1848 events, and said, “The dam broke first in France.”

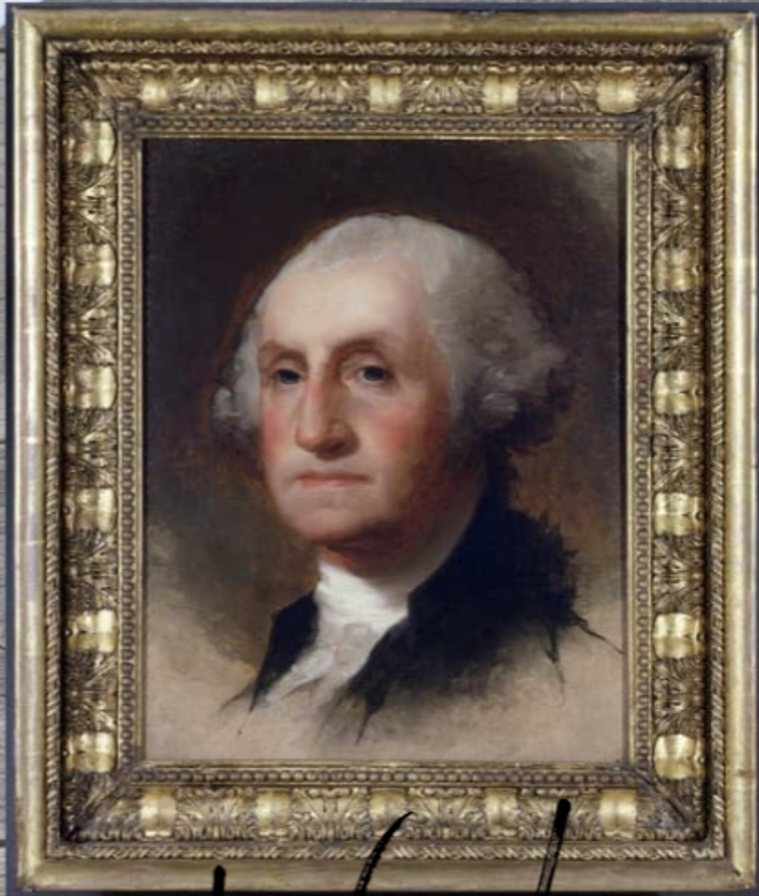
King Louis Philippe governed France in 1848. This was a constitutional monarchy rooted in an alliance of moderate conservatives, moderate liberals, and wealthy property owners. Like the negotiators and signatories of the Congress of Vienna 1815 we met in a previous lecture, this constitutional monarchy aimed at keeping conservative and radical opponents under control.

## France

The King had a moderately liberal historian Francois Guzman (1787-1874) as Chief Minister in the 1840s. They resisted workers' demands for further extension of the suffrage. The workers had not benefitted from the relative prosperity of the period. In addition to the right to vote, they also sought the right to organize unions but got neither.

Besides the rising social discontentment, the economy was not helpful. It suffered from poor harvests and financial crisis in 1846 and 1847. Unemployment was as high as 40% of the workforce.

# Happy Birthday



*George Washington*

## France and George Washington

The parliamentary opposition and bourgeois reformers supported the workers' cause. They chose to hold banquets to rally support for widening the right to vote and planned to host one in Paris on February 22nd in honor of George Washington's Birthday. The United States was a symbol of democracy for them.

## France

The Phillippe regime realized that the event promised to attract thousands of sympathetic workers. So, they tried to prohibit it. In response, a protest erupted in the Parisian streets.

Louis Philippe tried to quiet people by dismissing his unpopular Prime Minister Francois Guzman. There was an immediate reason for his ouster. He had responded to those not rich enough to have the right to vote to get rich and then vote. The King's move failed to appease the mob gathering around the government buildings.

## France

The troops panicked in the overwhelming presence of protestors and fired a murderous volley into the mob. This triggered a full-scale insurrection.

The protestors erected barricades against governmental troops. Paving stones became a convenient weapon in the hands of protestors. In a crucial move, the National Guard began to take the rebels' side. Louis Philippe followed Guizot into exile.



## France

Alphonse de la Lamartine (1790-1869) and a group of bourgeois liberals proclaimed the Second Republic. They set up a provisional Republican government with only one prominent radical member, the socialist writer Louis Blanc (1811 -1882).

## France

The provisional government immediately called for the election by universal male suffrage of an assembly to draw up a new constitution.

This government, however, did not yield to women's demands for political and economic rights. Under pressure from the Paris populace, the provisional government did admit workers to the National Guard, thereby, giving them access to arms.

## France

The provisional government also took several initiatives to provide relief to the workers. It guaranteed the means of subsistence of the working man by labor and labor to all citizens. It also recognized the workers' right to enter associations. They granted limited debt forgiveness.

In response to popular demand for the right to work, they established national workshops. The socialist Louis Blanc had advocated for them but lamented that the government deliberately planned for them to fail.

## France

The government scheme assigned labor to hastily improvised projects. Labor from the province also joined the Parisian hopefuls. The labor supply, thus, far exceeded the requirement. So, the government paid the surplus job seekers as well.

Instead of success, the workshops demoralized Labor while the cost to the taxpayers frightened the electorate.

The elections held in April 1848 swept conservative Republicans and monarchists back into office.

## Habsburg Empire

Austria was another place for 1848 events. Vienna was the seat of the Habsburg government. The developments in Paris mobilized the students, middle-class reformers, and workers. They charged into the streets clamoring for an end to Metternich's system.

Women, like elsewhere in Europe including France, joined the effort, building the barricades, taking care of the wounded, supplying the fighters with meals, and sometimes taking part in battles against armed forces.

Metternich fled for his life.

Emperor Ferdinand I immediately abolished the country's most repressive laws, ended serfdom, and promised constitutional reform.

## Habsburg Empire

In Hungary, the Magyars, under the leadership of Louis Kossuth (1802-1894) rose and demanded national autonomy from Austria.

The Czechs followed suit in Bohemia and called for a Pan-Slavic Congress to meet in Prague.

In Austria's Italian provinces of Lombardy and Venetia, the rebellious populace drove the Austrian forces into defensive fortresses and declared their independence.

By June 1848, it appeared that the Habsburg empire was splintering along ethnic lines and that its German core would commit to liberal reforms.

## Prussia

Prussia's Frederick William IV (r.1843-1861) responded to the events in Austria granting some reforms and promising a liberal constitution.

Paris and Vienna inspired middle-class liberals and artisans to throng to the streets of Berlin, nonetheless.

Williams retaliated. Some three hundred protestors had lost lives in Berlin by March 1848. This brutality stiffened support for the revolutionary cause. William withdrew the deployed troops and promised more reforms and support for German national unity.

Hohenzollern Prussia like Habsburg Austria appeared on the road to liberal government.

In several other German states, rulers acceded to the revolutionary demands.

## Prussia

A self-appointed group of liberal leaders went beyond the regional perspectives, called, and later convened a popularly elected assembly representing all German states in Frankfurt. The Assembly sought to construct a liberal German nation. It wrestled with three crucial questions:

- i) Whether German-speaking portions of the multilingual Habsburg empire and other states should be included in the projected German nation.
- ii) What should be done with non-German ethnic groups living within German States, and
- iii) Who should head the new nation?

After about a year of deliberations, the Frankfurt Assembly decided on a smaller Germany and offered the crown to the King of Prussia.



## Italy

Several states in Italy established new constitutions. Giuseppe Mazzini-led movement for national unification morphed into an insurrection employing guerrilla warfare.

Within a year of revolt in France, popular demonstrations ousted the papal government.

Pius IX bolted from Rome.

Mazzini headed the newly formed Republic of Rome.

# What Happened to the 1848 Revolutions?

## France

The revolutionaries of 1848 changed the leadership and constitutional map of Europe but generally only for a while. The resilient forces of order staged a comeback when events took more radical turns.

In France, dissensions cropped up in the once-unified anti-monarchy camp. The social groups had divergent views of possible reforms. Rural conservative peasantry and landowners begrudged the radical reforms demanded by Parisian artisans, shop owners, and intellectuals. For the middle class, the reforms had gone far enough while workers agitated for more social programs.

# What Happened to the 1848 Revolutions?

## France

The Constitutional Assembly which had been elected in the late spring of 1848, abolished the national workshops. Desperate men and women of the Paris working class resorted to arms and barricades. A four-day war between them, armed with the National Guard rifles, and the regular army. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) admired how the women were the last to yield.

By the time, the last barricade fell, these June days had taken some 1500 lives of working men. The regime sent several hundred more sent overseas to French colonial prisons. Louis Blanc escaped to Great Britain.

## What Happened to the 1848 Revolutions?

### France

In a final setback to the revolutionaries, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873), a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, won the December presidential elections. He promised something for everyone and projected an image of order and authority. He held the elected office for three years and then destroyed the republic in 1851 by taking power for himself in a coup d'état.

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# What Happened to the 1848 Revolutions?

## Habsburg Empire

In Austria, the Habsburgs prevailed over the inexperienced and ethnically divided rival groups, playing one group against another. They also deployed their formidable military force to defeat the liberal and national revolts one after the other.

In Hungary, the reactionary Nicholas I helped them with his army to overwhelm the Magyar rebels.

In Italy, Austrian military powers and, in Rome, French arms, eventually prevailed.





**AUSTRIA-HUNGARY  
FROM ONE EMPIRE  
TO MANY NATIONS**

- Austria-Hungary in 1914
- Current political boundaries
- ★ Current national capitals

# What Happened to the 1848 Revolutions?

## Prussia

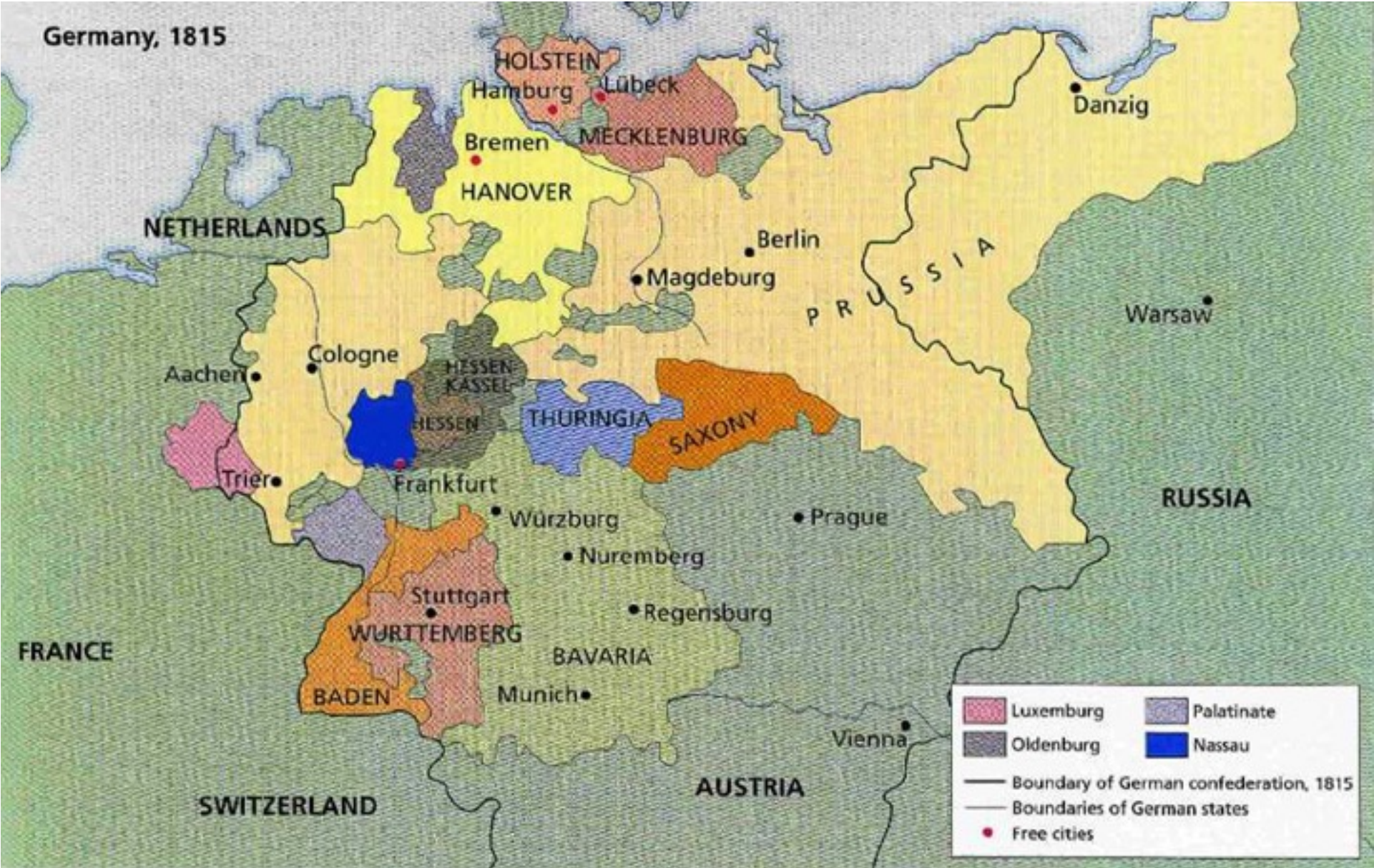
In Prussia, Junker advisers stiffened Frederick William IV's resolve to disregard the reformers.

William IV spurned the German crown offered to him by the Frankfurt assembly and blasted the Frankfurt assembly's hopes for a united liberal Germany.

He accused liberals in the Frankfurt assembly of fighting the battle of godlessness, perjury, and robbery, and the kindling of war against the monarchy.

His Prussian troops expelled the few remaining liberals determined to keep the assembly alive





## Why did these Revolutionary Processes Stall?

Several reasons including:

Internal divisions—there was no shared basis for the alliances among middle-class liberals, radical socialists, artisans, and workers. They opposed the status quo together but their views of the reform and future differed. Their interests were too divergent for the alliances to endure.

France experienced these divisions to the utmost. A frightened middle-class and conservative peasantry there conflicted over the extent and nature of reforms required.

## Ideologies Differed

Essentially, conservatism opposed the revolutionary notion of equality and believed in order and hierarchy. The participants in the Vienna Congress were conservatives. They also resented the idea of individualism based on Enlightenment because it would fragment society and lead to anarchy.

Liberalism drew on the promises of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. Liberals wanted a society that promoted individual freedom, or liberty, and opposed the dominance of politics and society by monarchs, aristocrats, and clergy. They demanded reform and fought resisting conservatives.

## Why did these Revolutionary Processes Stall?

Governance was a complex task as the partners in opposition often stood at cross purposes. This lack of harmony between liberals and nationalists was particularly pronounced in central Europe where the nationalist aspirations of German, Polish, Magyar, Croatian, Serbian, and other groups conflicted with efforts to form new governments.

In the Frankfurt assembly, the efforts to unify Germany antagonized other nationalities that rose against German rule in Austria.

# Why did these Revolutionary Processes Stall?

Prussian conservatism remained strong.

The middle and working classes both discontented with the conservative status quo were still weak.

Revolutionary leaders were inexperienced.

Conservative regimes joined forces and marshaled their resources to overcome the divided revolutionary forces.

Once reassured of their victory, conservative leaders reversed most of the reforms and imprisoned, executed, or exiled revolutionaries. In December 1848, Pope Pius IX summarized the views of angry conservatives saying that we declared null and have no effect and altogether illegal every act of reform during 1848.

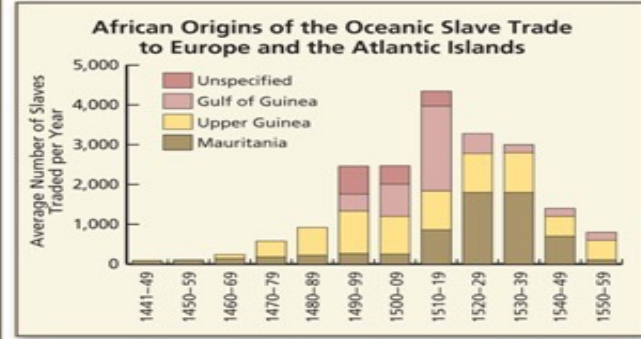
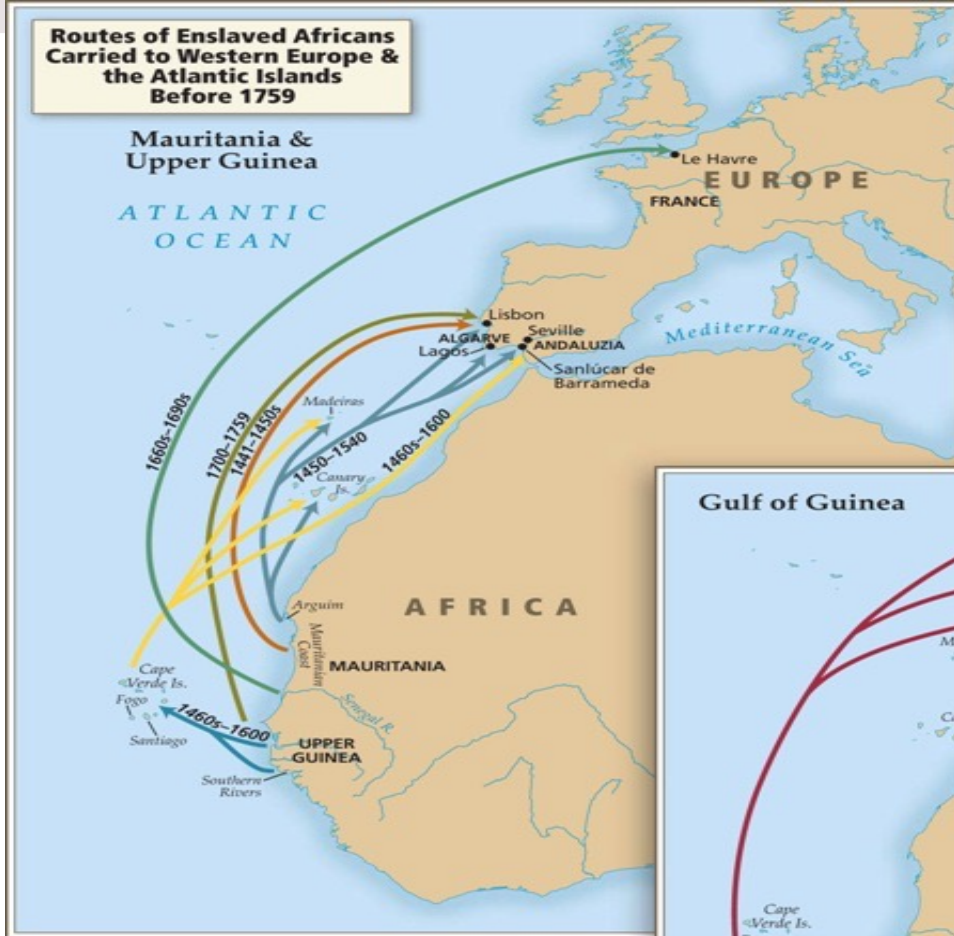
## Why did these Revolutionary Processes Stall?

Some of the liberal reforms survived. Examples are the abolition of serfdom in Austria and Hungary and the limited constitutions in Piedmont and Prussia.

This also answers our question from last week about slave traffic toward Europe. Serfdom had existed in Central Europe and did not end in Russia until 1861.

Europe did not need imported labor although we see a limited number of slaves trafficked to European destinations.

**Routes of Enslaved Africans Carried to Western Europe & the Atlantic Islands Before 1759**



## Why did these Revolutionary Processes Stall?

The overall failure of 1848 did not necessarily ensure a permanent victory for conservatism. As industrialization and urbanization spread relentlessly, life in the old order kept crumbling.

Italy unified in 1861, and Germany unified in 1871.

We will get back to them in while discussing the aftermath of the First World War.



## Conclusion

The revolutions of 1848 unmistakably showed that economic and social realities can galvanize people into political action.

The temptation to think about the American Revolution of 1776?