Reform and Revolution 1815-1848: Crash Course European History #25

Crash Course: European History
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Hi I'm John Green and this is Crash Course European History so today we're looking at early 19th century Europe, which is to say everything from 1815 to 1848, when various forms of excrement hit various fans.

You'll recall that at the Congress of Vienna, Prince Metternich and his allies tried to extinguish the fires of social ferment and prevent another French Revolution—or indeed any hint of revolution. But despite the Congress of Vienna's determined efforts to prevent them, reform and activism heated up after 1815 alongside industrialization. [Intro] In the 19th century, people were looking inward at the domestic policies of each kingdom or state, which was a sharp difference from the early modern period when kingdoms were constantly fighting one another with domestic issues being much less of a concern.

But much of what was happening outside of Europe did affect Europe, of course. In the 1810s and 1820s, for instance, North, Central, and South American people gained their independence from Portugal and Spain. Simón Bolívar, one upper-class leader of the independence movement, took his inspiration, and to some extent his aesthetic, from Napoleon, who, he believed, had freed people from the old regime of absolutism.

Which is an interesting take on Napoleon. Oppressed by the heavy taxation inflicted by "enlightened" administration on the colonies, native peoples, African slaves, and other poor people backed elite, locally-born leaders like Bolívar. And they were all united in their resentment of Spanish domination.

By 1830, colonists' victories put mainland Spain at its weakest in three centuries. So, while distant ferment liberated much of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, within post-Napoleonic Europe, citizens' groups of all sorts blossomed across the continent and reformist uprisings against rulers flourished, often having developed in secret given the operation of censorship and not-so-secret police. Literacy grew following the Enlightenment's emphasis on education, technology, and rational thought.

Constitutions and the rule of law were increasingly longed for and valued. Even many aristocrats were themselves surprisingly restless and ready for change. Russian aristocrats feared that, despite their own centrality in defeating Napoleon, the czar would exercise his dictatorial inclinations.

Because, you know. Czars. And many in the Russian nobility were now acquainted with the possibilities for a different kind of political system—especially one guided by the rule of law and constitutions.

In December 1825, some of the aristocratic elite challenged the new Tsar Nicholas I in order to make his supposedly more liberal older brother Constantin tsar instead. But these "Decembrists" were mowed down or captured by loyal units of the army. Some were executed and many were sent into exile in Siberia, where they made new towns and cities into cultural centers.

Albeit, cold ones. By this time, a large contingent in the Russian aristocracy were more deeply cultured and polylingual than the upper classes in any other European kingdom, but the possibility for a non-autocratic Russia seemed to end with the Decembrist defeat. Nicholas and his successors upheld the monarchy, relentlessly clamping down on any threats to it, including a Polish uprising in 1830-31, continuing Poland's run of poor fortune that would remain essentially the only constant in European history for another 160 years.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble. 1. In 1830, another revolution broke out in France, 2. bringing about a quick but consequential change in government. 3. It began after Charles X ushered in strict censorship, 4. compensation for aristocratic losses in the revolution of 1789, 5. and similarly regressive measures such as imposing the death penalty for any pilfering of church objects. 6.

Opponents, many from the well-educated and land-owning upper class 7. and others from the religious object pilfering class, 8. took these moves as harbingers of a return to absolutism, 9. which to be fair, they were. 10. As street protests erupted, these opponents also worried that commoners would demand that France become a republic once again. And they didn't want that. 11.

In what is known as the "Three Glorious Days" of July 1830, 12. they installed Charles's cousin Louis-Philippe as king and created a constitutional monarchy 13. —that is, they returned the country to the situation of the early 1790s with a government based on a form of popular sovereignty instead of divine right. 14. The new king Louis-Philippe expanded voting rights, known as suffrage, to around 170,000 men, 15. but that was still a tiny fraction of the 30 million French citizens. 16. Social unrest remained high as France became a more industrialized economy with more people living in cities. 17.

Both living and working conditions for common people were often terrible. 18. The silk workers of Lyon, for instance, went on strike in 1831 over poor pay, 19. and even briefly seized the city's arsenal 20. before the revolt was eventually put down. 21. In short, the entrenched system of power wasn't going to allow another fully populist revolution.

Thanks Thought Bubble. So, Prince Metternich's ambitions for a tranquil citizenry had clearly failed to materialize. Across the Austrian lands there was the kind of discussion and agitation that came from reading books, meeting in cafés, and having a better education: More people wanted a say in their governance, and expected rights that would be protected by the state.

But this agitation percolated mostly in secret, thanks to Metternich's censors and secret police. In Italy, the Carbonari, a secret society aiming for constitutional government in parts of Italy, directed uprisings in 1820 and 1830. But the forces of the Holy Alliance of Austria, Prussia and Russia put down both revolts.

Also during these decades, Hungarian nobility, also operating in Metternich's orbit, lobbied for separation from the Austrian empire, but without much luck. Serbia and Greece had more success in pulling away from the Ottomans. The Serbs became an independent principality under the Ottomans in 1817 after an uprising in 1815.

And the Greeks won complete independence from the Ottomans in 1831. For romantics such as the English poet Lord Byron, these were the struggles of heroes seeking revolutionary freedoms. Did the Center of the World just open?

Is my Norton Anthology of Poetry in there? Ah Lord Byron. He wrote a poem from Greece in 1824 called, "On this Day I Complete My 36th Year." In that poem he writes, "Awake!

Not Greece, She is awake." In fact, Byron went to Greece in the 1820s to aide in the independence movement. He also died there. Just a few months after this poem was written, actually, in which he says, "my days are in the yellow leaf.

The flowers and fruits of love are gone. The worm, the chancre, and the grief are mine alone." That's what it was like to be 36 in 1824. Ah god, I hope my days aren't in yellow leaf.

OK, let's talk about Peterloo. Struggles in Britain during these decades were tinged with the rebellions of Irish Catholics against official religious discrimination. Simultaneously, in the difficult years

immediately following Waterloo when harvests failed and the cost of living rose, crowds of working people by the tens of thousands gathered in cities across Great Britain to listen to calls for change.

Parliament wanted to protect aristocratic agricultural interests, which tells you a lot about the British Parliament at the time, and so they raised the price of grain by passing the Corn Laws. Orators demanded their repeal. And the upper classes were on edge.

Then in 1819, during a protest in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, police shot into the crowd and killed some 15 people and wounded 500. The so-called "Peterloo Massacre"--a term created by pundits to invoke Waterloo--was followed by the draconian Six Acts that allowed government searches, prohibited large assemblies, and punished anti-government publications.

But outrage and activism continued in Great Britain and Ireland. The Irish were especially hard hit by the economic downturn, which resulted in the confiscation of peasant lands by Great Britain. And in 1801 a series of laws joined Ireland to the rest of Great Britain (together, the laws are referred to as The Act of Union).

And despite this purported unity, discrimination among Catholics remained powerful allowing almost unchecked confiscation of Catholic property and other assets. In 1823, Irish activist and lawyer Daniel O'Connell formed the Catholic Association which lobbied for allowing Catholics to have high positions, including membership in the British Parliament. And the Catholic Association's activism plus the accumulation of middle- and working-class grievances eventually led to the Great Reform Act of 1832.

This act eliminated "rotten boroughs"—that is, districts where aristocrats would become members of parliament almost by birthright, even in some "districts" that had no actual residents. The Great Reform Act also gave representation to new industrial cities—like Manchester—that had no parliamentary representation at all. And more men got the right to vote, including middle-class property owners and those paying an established minimum rent.

But of course the definition of that minimum rent was kept high enough to keep lots of other people, including most ordinary workers, and all women, were still left out. OK, so we saw in our episodes on industrialization that in France a group of aristocrats, calling themselves socialists, wanted to better society due to a belief that the late eighteenth century revolutionary era had focused too much on the individual and should focus more on the health of the whole. Their socialism entailed philanthropy.

And by the 1820s a new group of socialists, especially prominent in England and France, had a different take on the issues of the day. In Britain, Robert Owen, who had made his fortune in textiles, inspired the creation of utopian communities. In these communities, factory hands would work a limited number of hours and have benefits including education.

And profit was to take a back seat to the overall well-being of the community and all of its individual members. Owen's ideas gained traction among reform-minded industrialists, and officials, and workers, and thinkers, especially since industrialization with its child labor and incredibly high rates of maiming and workplace death was rather dystopian. Similarly in France during the post-Napoleonic period, Claude Henri Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Auguste Comte devised ideas for well-run communities that emphasized harmony and efficient management.

One common idea was belief in the rational organization of human societies. Engineers and planners featured prominently in utopian ideas as their skills would make society operate without tensions and uprisings—that is, like a well-designed machine. These thinkers' "socialism" contributed to the formation of modern social sciences: sociology, economics, anthropology, and government.

And around the world, people set up phalansteries--the name of communities based on Fourier's writings--organized around the personality characteristics he outlined. Although German lawyer and theorist Karl Marx scorned these ideas and the communities based on them, they also helped pave the way for the socialism to come. Now God knows that we're going to talk more about Marx.. what's that Stan?

Oh, Stan informs me that I can't talk about Marx and God knowing anything, because to Marx religion was the opiate of the masses. We'll talk more about Marx, and his use of the term "socialism," in the next episode. Then and now socialism had many meanings, and its definition was ever evolving.

The same could be said of the word "liberal," which was also evolving from a seventeenth-century belief in basic liberties at birth to the idea of free trade in the eighteenth century to the concern with accessibility to suffrage in the nineteenth and twentieth. But for now, I just want to note that as people became better-educated and were exposed to ideas of individual rights and popular participation in government, it became very difficult for the powerful to hold onto that power without popular support. Your education, and mine, is similarly an opportunity to be exposed to many different ideas, so that we might be productive, critical, and thoughtful contributors to the political and social lives of our communities, as well as the economic life of our community.

And just as the people of early 19th century Europe were shaped by the voices they listened to and the ideas they encountered, we are also shaped by those voices. So listen carefully, and as my friend Amy Krouse Rosenthal once wrote, Pay attention to what you pay attention to. Thanks for being here.

We'll see you next time.