



# Comparing the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Gwangju Uprising of 1980

By George Katsiaficas

Woodblock by Hong Sung-dam

# Beginning of the Paris Commune

March 18, 1871



# Franco-Prussian War



Otto von Bismarck



In September 1870, the French army was totally defeated by the Prussians. Napoleon III and tens of thousands of his troops were captured. The government surrendered. The Prussians moved on to Paris, but people there refused to submit.

On March 18, 1871, with the roll of drums, the National Guard declared the Paris Commune



# National Guard









The old government withdrew with its troops to Versailles. The Communards allowed the departure, and the city's rich left Paris.



# Hotel de Ville



# Defending the City



The people  
of Paris  
united  
against the  
enemy





# Barricades



# Barricade



# Joy and Eros



On March 26, 287,000 men voted in fresh elections (women were not permitted to vote). Ninety members of the Commune were elected—but they included fifteen government supporters and nine citizens against the government but also against the March 18 “insurrection.”

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE  
LIBERTÉ — ÉGALITÉ — FRATERNITÉ

COMITÉ CENTRAL

ÉLECTIONS A LA COMMUNE

CITOYENS.

Notre mission est terminée; nous allons céder la place dans votre Hôtel-de-Ville à vos nouveaux élus, à vos mandataires réguliers.

Aidés par votre patriotisme et votre dévouement, nous avons pu mener à bonne fin l'œuvre difficile entreprise en votre nom. Merci de votre concours persévérant; la solidarité n'est plus un vain mot: le salut de la République est assuré.

Si nos conseils peuvent avoir quelque poids dans vos résolutions, permettez à vos plus zélés serviteurs de vous faire connaître, avant le scrutin, ce qu'ils attendent du vote aujourd'hui.

CITOYENS,

Ne perdez pas de vue que les hommes qui vous serviront le mieux sont ceux que vous choisirez parmi vous, vivant de votre propre vie, souffrant des mêmes maux.

Défiez-vous autant des ambitieux que des parvenus; les uns comme les autres ne consultent que leur propre intérêt et finissent toujours par se considérer comme indispensables.

Défiez-vous également des parleurs, incapables de passer à l'action; ils sacrifieront tout à un discours, à un effet oratoire ou à un mot spirituel. — Évitez également ceux que la fortune a trop favorisés, car trop rarement celui qui possède la fortune est disposé à regarder le travailleur comme un frère.

Enfin, cherchez des hommes aux convictions sincères, des hommes du Peuple, résolus, actifs, ayant un sens droit et une honnêteté reconnue. — Portez vos préférences sur ceux qui ne brigueront pas vos suffrages; le véritable mérite est modeste, et c'est aux électeurs à connaître leurs hommes, et non à ceux-ci de se présenter.

Nous sommes convaincus que, si vous tenez compte de ces observations, vous aurez enfin inauguré la véritable représentation populaire, vous aurez trouvé des mandataires qui ne se considéreront jamais comme vos maîtres.

Hôtel-de-Ville, 25 mars 1871.

*Le Comité central de la Garde nationale :*

AYOUBE DE, ARL BERAUD, D'ARNOULD, ARL ANDRUSSEN, BOUFFE, JACQUES BOULLIERET, BABON, BARRIS D, BILLET-DUVAL, L. BOUQUET, BLANCHET, CANTON, CROSTEAU, C. DUPONT, FARRÉ, FERRAT, FLEURY, FULCHERIEU, G. GAIQUER, GOURIER, H. GUESNIEU, GRELLER, GIBBLARD, JONVAL, D. JOURDIN, LAVALETTE, HENRY (Proudhon), MALOUX, MAUGER, MOREAU, MORTIER, PROUDHONNE, ROUSSEAU, SANSYER, VAILLÉ.

# Crowd after elections





When the election results were announced, the crowd cheered and then went home (or out to celebrate).



# Elected Delegates





REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

LIBERTÉ - ÉGALITÉ - FRATERNITÉ

N° 38

# COMMUNE DE PARIS

La Commune de Paris étant actuellement le seul Pouvoir,

## DECRETE :

1° Les employés des divers services publics tiendront désormais pour nuls et non avenus les ordres ou communications émanant du gouvernement de Versailles ou de ses adhérents.

2° Tout fonctionnaire ou employé qui ne se conformerait pas à ce décret sera immédiatement révoqué.

Paris, le 20 mars 1871.

Pour la Commune et par délégués :

Le Président,

LEFRANÇOIS.

Les Secrétaire,

RANC. Et VAILLANT.

# Crowds gathered to read the proclamations of the new government:

- > separation of church and state
- > no more night work in bakeries
- > no back rent for the poor
- > the arrest of priests
- > the re-opening of abandoned factories
- > the abolition of fines against workers



# RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

N° 50

LIBERTÉ — ÉGALITÉ — FRATERNITÉ

N° 50

## COMMUNE DE PARIS

### LA COMMUNE DE PARIS,

Considérant que le premier des principes de la République française est la liberté;

Considérant que la liberté de conscience est la première des libertés;

Considérant que le budget des cultes est contraire au principe, puisqu'il impose les citoyens contre leur propre foi;

Considérant, en fait, que le clergé a été le complice des crimes de la monarchie contre la liberté;

### DÉCRÈTE :

**ART. 1<sup>er</sup>. L'Église est séparée de l'État.**

**ART. 2** Le budget des cultes est supprimé

**ART. 3.** Les biens dits de mainmorte, appartenant aux congrégations religieuses, meubles et immeubles, sont déclarés propriétés nationales.

**ART. 4.** Une enquête sera faite immédiatement sur ces biens, pour en constater la nature et les mettre à la disposition de la Nation.

**LA COMMUNE DE PARIS.**

Paris, le 3 avril 1871.

LIBERTÉ — ÉGALITÉ — FRATERNITÉ

# Return of Workers' Property



# RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

N° 322

LIBERTÉ — ÉGALITÉ — FRATERNITÉ

N° 322

## COMMUNE DE PARIS

Tous les ouvriers terrassiers sont invités à se faire inscrire à la Mairie de leur arrondissement pour prendre part aux travaux concernant la défense de Paris.

Ils recevront 3 fr. 50 cent. par jour.

Paris, le 14 mai 1871.

*Le Délégué civil à la Guerre,*  
DELESCLUZE.

# Uprisings Spread

The established governments isolated both cities.

- Cut off from the provinces, the Paris Commune nevertheless found many supporters, and similar communal experiments erupted in many cities, from Marseilles to Tours. In Paris, Communards flew balloons filled with letters to the provinces to try to spread the revolt, and circulars for farmers were dropped successfully.
- In Gwangju, the revolt spread to at least 16 neighboring sections of South Cholla province. Many people were killed attempting to break out of the military cordon around Gwangju to spread the revolt, and dozens more died trying to get into Gwangju to help in its defense.



# Parisian Feminism



Strong feminist sentiment emerged in Paris, particularly within the ranks of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). Elisabeth Dmitrieff, a young member of the Russian section of the IWA, helped found the Women's Union for the Defense of Paris and Care of the Injured. In this sense, women played traditional female roles as in Gwangju, where high school girls took care of the many corpses and helped care for the wounded.

The IWA demanded gender equality and the abolition of prostitution. The Women's Union took part in many of the Commune's action-committees and also organized work cooperatives, like the restaurant *La Marmite*, which served free food for indigents. Although some women carried arms during the Gwangju Uprising, a separate female battalion of the Parisian National Guard fought to defend *Place Blanche* when the Prussians and friends attacked.



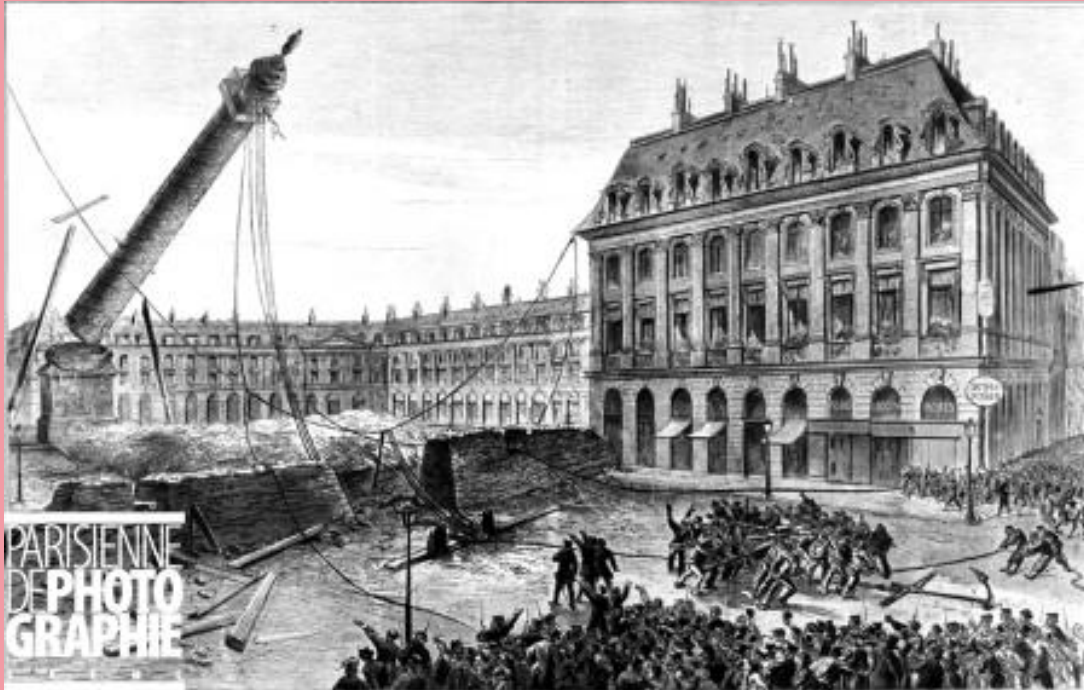
# Louise Michel



“The Red Virgin”

# Place Vendôme

A group of Communards lead by artist Gustave Courbet, tore down the Vendôme column.





This statue of Napoleon had been on top of the Column Vendôme



# Traitors and Spies

- In Gwangju, government agents took the detonators from the basement of Province Hall, thereby rendering useless the dynamite brought there by Hwasun coal miners. In Gwangju, the “poison needle incident” is but the most famous incident in a series of internal problems.
- Paris was “full” of internal enemies, and there were riots at Vendome Place and the Bourse, instigated by “loyal” citizens in constant contact with Versailles.

# The Bloody Week

From May 22 to May 28, French and Prussian troops poured through undefended gates. The Communards fought valiantly at barricades.





# Intense fighting



House-to-house fighting continued all night. The Communards, worn and exhausted, fell back before the better armed professional soldiers.

# Barricade



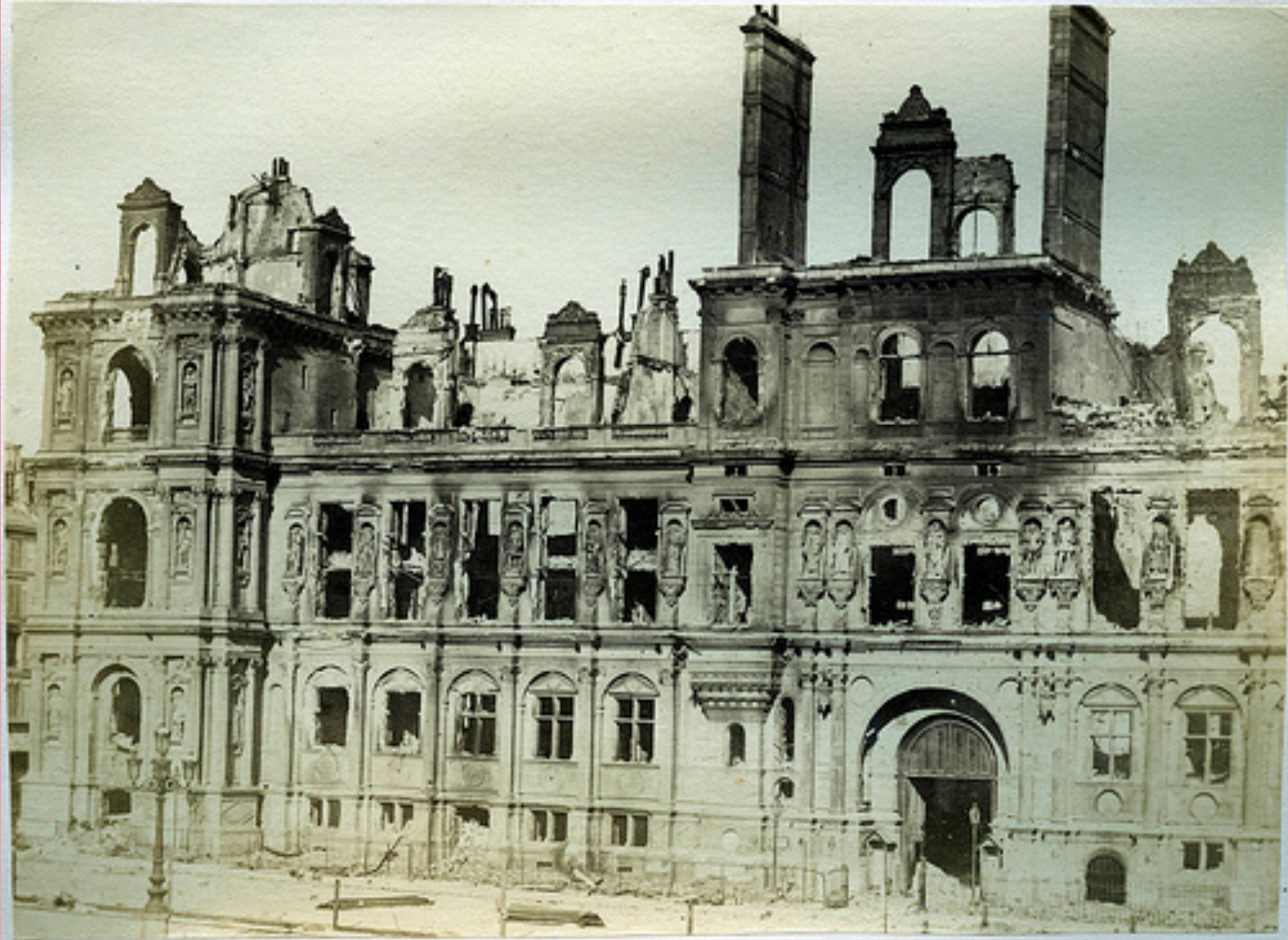


# Gwangju May 21, 1980



# Rue de Rivoli





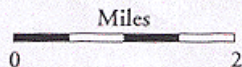
*Hotel de Ville.*



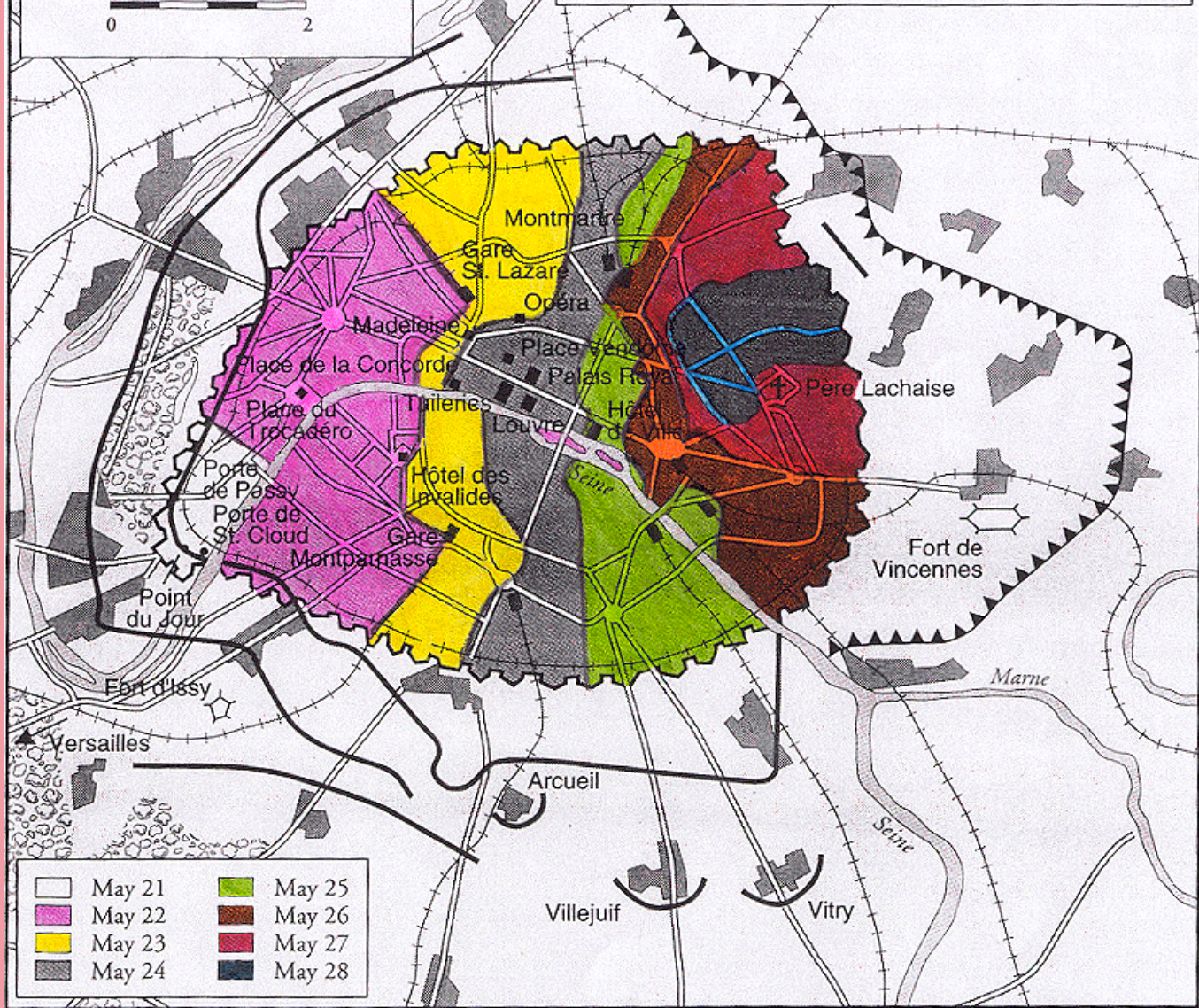
# THE BLOODY WEEK

Paris

May 21-May 28, 1871



- Railroad Lines
- Roads
- Forests
- Communard Defensive Lines on May 21, 1871
- Prussian Lines After the Armistice
- Government Lines



- May 21
- May 22
- May 23
- May 24
- May 25
- May 26
- May 27
- May 28

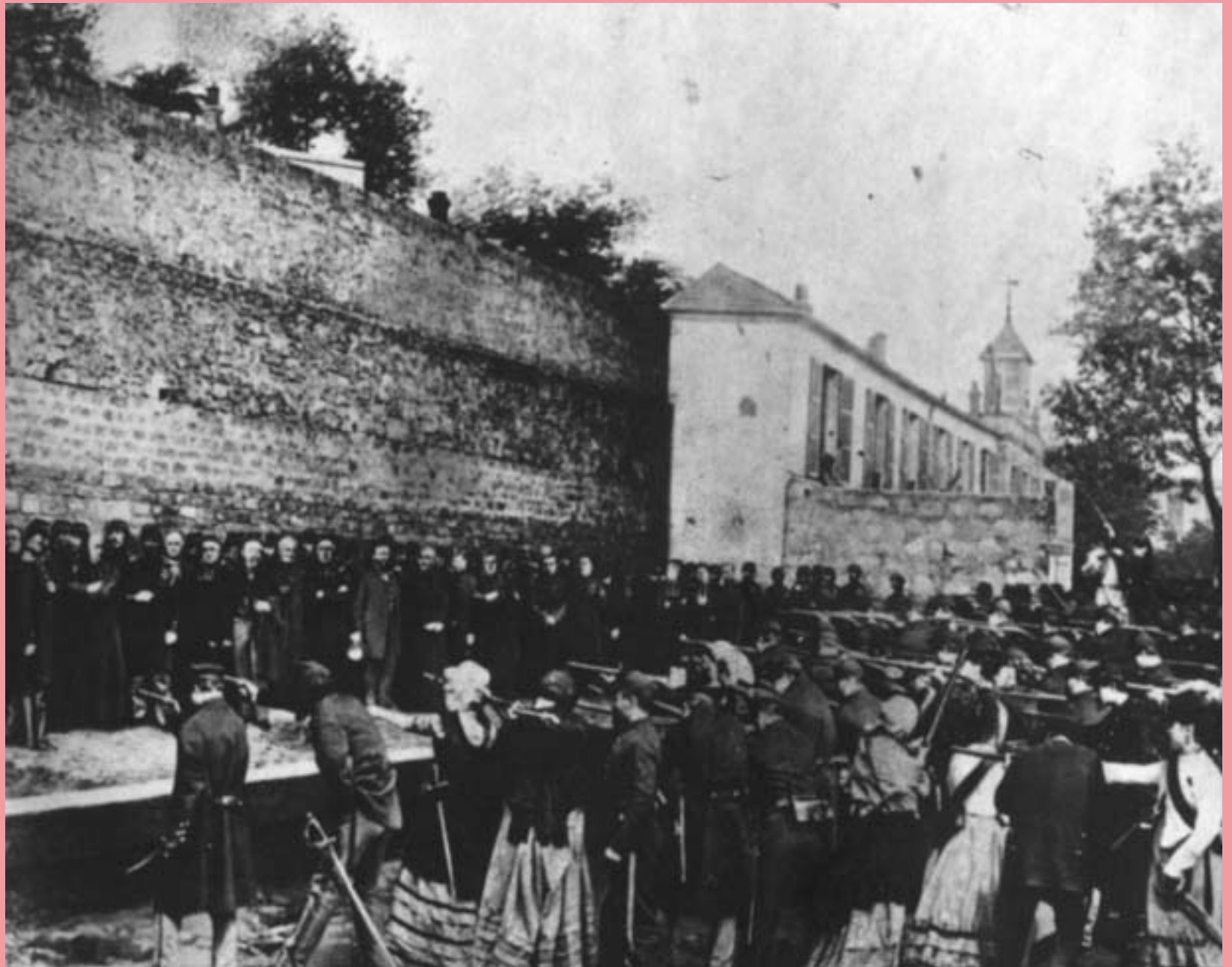


# Government Bloodshed

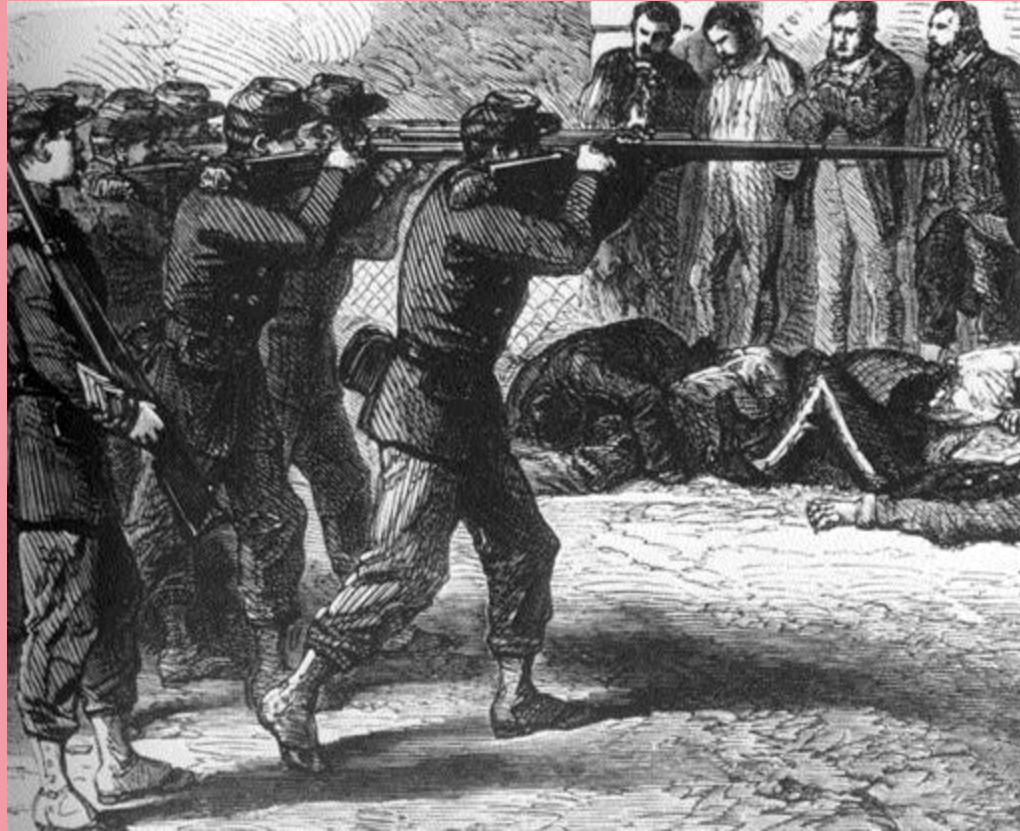
- In both 1871 and 1980, after the halcyon days of liberation were bloodily brought to an end, brutal repression was the order of the day.
- Estimates of the number of people executed in the aftermath of Commune exceed 30,000, a number that does not include thousands more who were summarily deported to distant Pacific holdings of the French Empire.
- In Korea, hundreds of people simply disappeared. Although the official count of the dead hovers around 200, most people believe that as many as 2000 died in the uprising.

# Executions





# Executions



# Corpses



Paris



Gwangju

# Corpses of the Executed



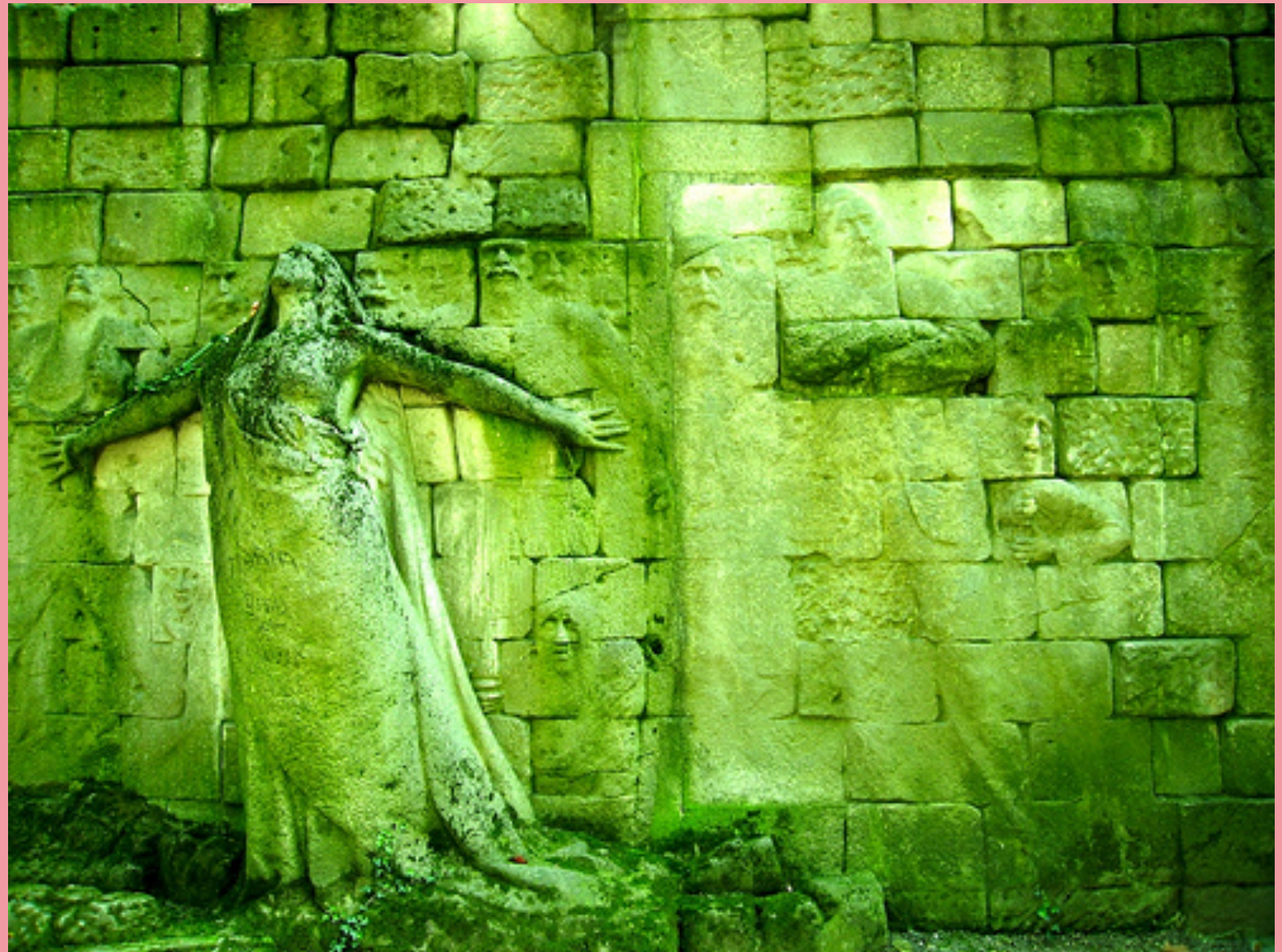
Gwangju

Paris



# Wall at Pere Lachaise Cemetery







# Mangwoldong Cemetery



# Similarities Between The Two Uprisings

There are remarkable ways in which the two events converge. Within these liberated territories, a number of similar dynamics occurred:

1. Spontaneous emergence of popular organs of democratic decision-making
2. Emergence of armed resistance from below
3. Attenuation of criminal behavior in the cities
4. Existence of genuine solidarity and cooperation among the citizenry
5. Suspension of hierarchies of class, power and status
6. Appearance of internal divisions among the participants

# Role of Artists

As in Paris, where Courbet participated in an artists' group that supported the Commune, artists in Gwangju also played vital roles. Clown theater group took a central role in organizing the rallies; Hong Sung-dam and visual artists made posters for the movement and helped with the daily newspaper.



“The Union World” by  
Hong Sung-dam

# Differences Between the Two Uprisings

- The Paris Commune lasted from the insurrection of March 18 to the final suppression on May 27—some 70 days.
- The Gwangju People's Uprising held liberated Gwangju for only 6 days—May 21-27.

# Differences

- A more significant difference is that in Gwangju, no preexisting armed force like the Parisian National Guard led the assault on power. Rather a spontaneous process of resistance to the brutality of the paratroopers threw forward men and women who rose to the occasion. Many had little or no previous political experience. Some had little or no formal education. All emerged in the concrete context of unfolding historical events.
- Liberated Gwangju was organized without the contrivance of governments or planning by political parties.

# Freedom's Promising Future

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, (which in South Korea includes military training for every man) the Gwangju Uprising is one indication of the capacity in millions of people to govern themselves far more wisely than military dictatorships or tiny elites all too often ensconced in powerful positions.

# Gwangju's Direct Democracy

- People's capacity for direct self-government (as well as the deadly absurdity of elite rule) is evident in the daily rallies of tens of thousands of people in Gwangju. These provided a forum for direct democracy where differences of opinion could be aired and free-ranging perspectives expressed. People from all walks of life were able to address the entire city—including leaders of criminal gangs who promised solidarity.
- Shoeshine boys, prostitutes, and people normally considered to be at the “bottom” of society participated as equals in the liberated city.
- While in Paris, elected leaders made decisions for people and issued proclamations, in Gwangju people made decisions directly.

# Gwangju's Direct Democracy



The seven daily rallies became the setting for a new kind of direct democracy where everyone had a say. Nearly everyone was present at some point, especially the Citizens' Army, who "took the results of the rallies and planned and implemented the people's decisions." Tens of thousands of people daily participated in this unique form of direct democracy.



### Rallies in Liberated Gwangju

Date	Time of Rally	# People	Topics/notable events
May 22	Afternoon	30,000-40,000	“huge meandering discussion”
May 22	5 pm-7pm	>100,000	<p>Homage to the dead                      CSC announced results of negotiations;                      Vice-governor Chung chaired; 8 negotiators introduced; Chang Hyu-dong “give up weapons”—jeered; Kim Jeong-bae took mike and was cheered when he declared the need for resistance. CSC backs off stage.</p> <p>Leaders of the two major gangs in Gwangju—Obi’s and Hwasin—address the rally and declare cooperation with the struggle</p>
May 23	11a.m.	10 a.m. 50,000 11 a.m.: 50,000 to 100,000  11:30 a.m.: 150,000  3 p.m.: 100,000+	<p>“1st Citywide Rally” scheduled for 3pm but began at 11:30 am because people came;                      Kim Tae-jong presided;                      Donations of Love for the Injured collected;                      1 pm: Kim Chang-gil returned with 34 prisoners exchanged for 200 rifles; Kim also brought a secret Army explosives expert who removed detonators;                      SSC: Decision to collect arms—2500 guns collected (50% of the 5400 seized by citizens)</p>
May 24	2:30-6 p.m.  Pouring Rain	100,000  3pm: 50,000+	<p>“2nd Citywide Rally”: crowd against CSC—people demand details; CSC refuses to allow use of sound system; unplugs rally loudspeakers; no electricity so tear gas truck used; Chun effigy burned;                      7PM SSC meeting: Yoon Sang-won and Jeong Hae-jik criticize Kim Chang-gil.                      Afterwards YWCA meeting                      After that Posong Construction Co.</p>
May 25	3 p.m.-7 p.m.	50,000	<p>“3rd Citywide Rally”: Demand for SC to resign; local problems discussed</p> <p>9 p.m. Kim Chang-gil leaves Province Hall                      Citizens-Student Struggle Committee formed</p>
May 26	10:30 a.m.	30,000	<p>“4th Citywide Rally”: demand for “new government of national reconciliation”; 30,000 people marched to cordons and called for “direct democracy”</p> <p>Military helicopter circles overhead, drops leaflets</p>
May 26	3 p.m.	30,000	<p>“5th Citywide Rally”: Organizers announced that Military would attack; demonstration of 6,000 marches led by high school students</p>

# Gwangju's "Absolute Community"

- Indicative of the lack of discipline and unity in Paris was a poster of the Central Committee of the National Guard: "Death for Looting, Death for Stealing"
- In liberated Gwangju, by contrast, incidents of looting or stealing were practically nonexistent.

# Parisian Internationalism

- Polish, German, Swiss and even Russian expatriates participated as equals in the Paris Commune.
- Korean xenophilia today indicates foreigners may have been welcome inside the movement if they had desired to participate. Journalists and even missionaries were applauded and aided in public and private.

# Parisian Feminism

- One final difference between the two uprisings can be found in the emergence of strong feminist sentiment in Paris.
- The Women's Union for the Defense of Paris and Care of the Injured meant women played traditional female roles as in Gwangju, where high school girls took care of the many corpses and helped care for the wounded. Yet in Paris, some people demanded gender equality and the abolition of prostitution.
- Although some women carried arms during the Gwangju Uprising, a separate female battalion of the Parisian National Guard fought to defend *Place Blanche*.

# The Paris Commune's Role in the Gwangju Uprising

- In the course of dozens of interviews with former fighters in Gwangju, I found many people for whom the historical memory of the Paris Commune provided inspiration.
- During 29 interviews in 2001, many participants in the uprising told me they had been part of study groups on the Paris Commune before the Gwangju Uprising.
- One person remembered that Yoon Sang-won had attended a 1976 speech given by poet Kim Nam-ju at Nokdu bookstore in which Kim Nam-ju discussed the Paris Commune.
- During the uprising, Yoon Sang-won spoke publicly at least once about the Paris Commune in his discussions with other leading activists.

# Uprisings' Legacy

The legacy of uprisings, whether in Paris or Gwangju, consciously or not, is to educate and empower humans in their future struggles for freedom.

Even when an uprising is brutally suppressed—as in both cases here—its public experience creates new desires and new needs, new fears and new hopes in the hearts and minds of participants and all those standing in the path of the ripples sent out by the uprisings.

As the global revolt of 1968 prepared the ground for the epochal events of 1989 in Russia and Eastern Europe and subsequent Asian uprisings, so the Paris Commune paved the way to the Gwangju Uprising.



Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix, "La Liberté guidant le peuple" (1830).

# Montmartre





# Sacred Heart



On h



# STRIKE FOR THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNE!

Revolutions in 1871: England it will be; Germany it will be.  
9th Anniversary of the Revolution of March 18th, 1871.



## GRAND FESTIVAL CONCERT, BANQUET AND BALL

AND UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
Societe des Refugies de la Commune, the Socialistic Labor Party, the Free-thinkers, Women's Socialistic Society, Sozialistische Liedertafel, and Arbeiter Liedertafel.

WITH THE COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE OF  
**Mme. DESIRE, Mons. CORNEILLE,**  
Mons. GEORGE, Comique de l'Alhambra de Paris, and a number of Soloists.

For the Benefit of the Prisoners in New York, and the Widows and Orphans of the Commune.  
**SATURDAY, MARCH 20th, 1880,**  
AT 8 O'CLOCK P. M. AT  
**GERMANIA ASSEMBLY ROOMS**  
**291 & 293 BOWERY.**

**FAMILY TICKETS, 25c.**

Managers: President, LUTHER WICKEL, and President of New York, GEORGE T. DUFFY.  
Vice-Pres. JOHN SWIFTON, America. Vice-Pres. SCOTTIE BIRD, France. Vice-Pres. WILLIAM BULLOCK, England.  
FREDERICK B. BOWMAN, Germany. Vice-Pres. WILLIAM TRAFERNA, Italy. Vice-Pres. EDWARD HOLLAND, Spain.  
S. WATSON, & Son, Boston. John Thomas, & Son, New Orleans. Wm. Parker, New York. American Society, New York.  
S. WATSON, & Son, Boston. JOHN THOMAS, & Son, New Orleans. Wm. PARKER, New York. AMERICAN SOCIETY, New York.  
ORGANIZED BY THE SOCIALISTIC PARTY, AMERICAN, IN 1871. call 115G

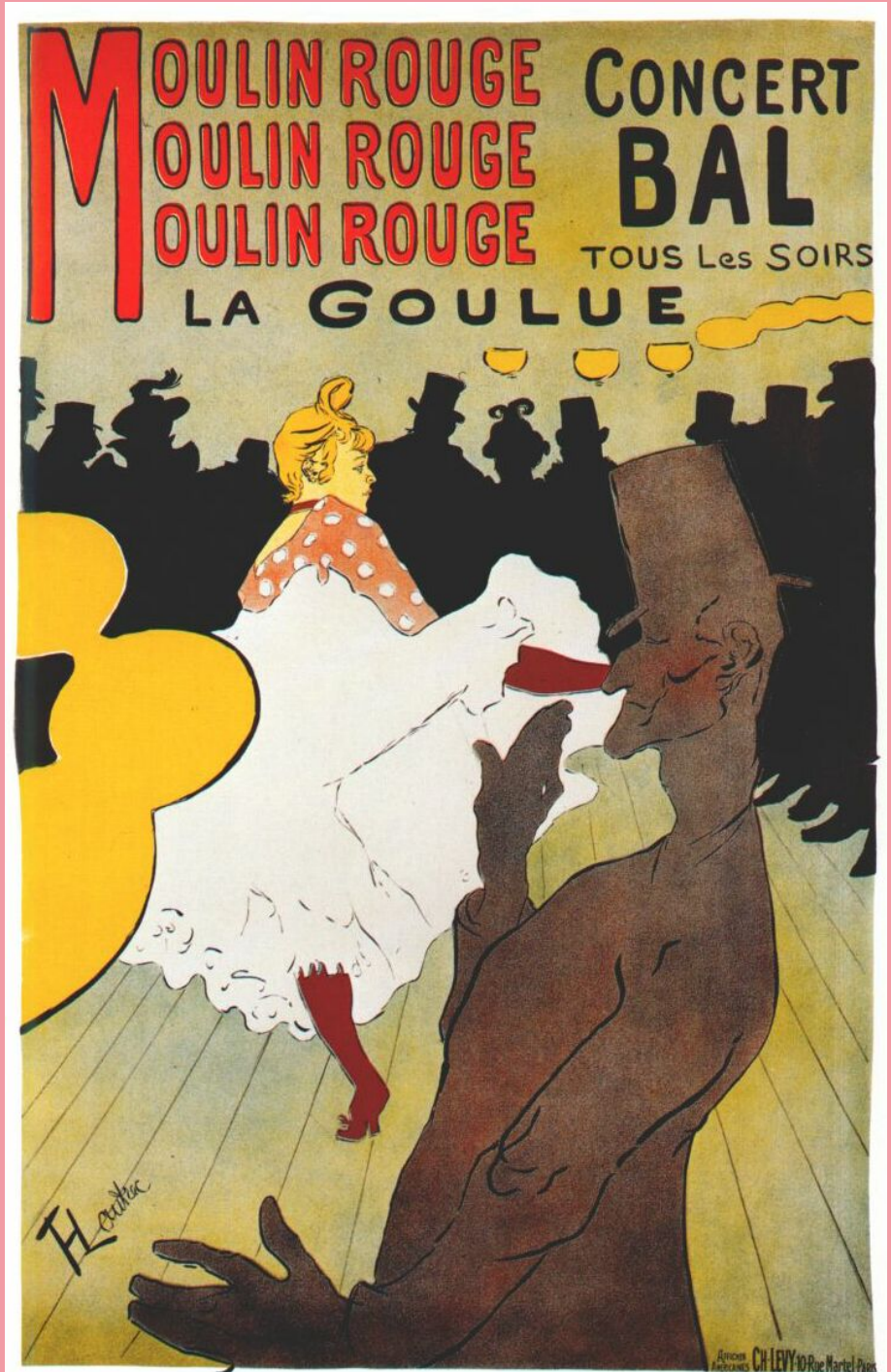


- Claude Monet

- Ruemontorgueil
- parisfestival



Toulouse Lautrec



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