

# Significance of Major Resistance Movements in Europe

By

Kymora C.

History 108

Fall 2019, York College

Prof. Remi Alapo



By definition, resistance movement is an organized effort by some portion of the civil population of a country to withstand the legally established government or an occupying power and to disrupt civil order and stability. Resistance movements throughout history shaped the world we live in today by forcing change to happen in the region where the movement occurred and in other regions where groups were inspired to start their own movements.

# Resistance in Europe

Most evidence of a resistance movement or network in Europe takes place around World War II because Europeans spent this time fighting Nazi rule. But there were points outside of World War II where there were waves of resistance such as the French Revolution, which was a revolutionary movement in France from 1787-1799 or the Women's Suffrage Movement that took place from 1918 to 1928. All together though, European resistance movements shaped their governments today because people fought oppressive leadership until they got just rights and rules

# The French Revolution

The French Revolution had many causes but it is fair to say that it was influenced by the American Revolution and by philosophers inspired the people with revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality. The French Revolution was the first great uprising of the people against the autocracy of the ruler and generated ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity which crossed the boundaries of France and influenced the entirety of Europe.



# The Storming of Bastille

France is notorious for having some of the biggest and most influential resistance movements. Parisians stormed the Bastille, a prison for political dissidents and freethinkers, to rise against the oppressive French nobility. The Storming of the Bastille set off a series of events that led to the overthrow of King Louis XVI and the French Revolution and the success of the revolutionaries gave commoners throughout France the courage to rise up and fight against the nobles who had ruled them for so long. July 14th, the date of the Storming of Bastille, is celebrated annually today as French National Day or “The National Celebration” which is the equivalent to the Fourth of July in America.



# Reign of Terror

Four years after the Storming of Bastille, France was being attacked by foreign countries on all sides and civil war was breaking out in many regions. Radicals led by Maximilien Robespierre took over the government and started the Reign of Terror. Its purpose was to purge France of enemies of the Revolution and protect the country from foreign invaders. The Reign of Terror instituted the conscripted (drafted) army, which saved France from invasion by other countries and in that sense preserved the Revolution.



# The Women's Suffrage Movement



The United States Women's Suffrage Movement seized when 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution granted American women the right to vote in 1920 ending a rough 80 years of protest. British Women did not win their right to vote “with just polite rhetoric and cartoon waterfowl.” According to Cracked, the movement was downright militant and engaged in active acts of terrorism from smashing windows, arson, detonating pipe bombs, sabotaging communication lines, to plotting the kidnapping of members of Parliament. But the result was the same, in 1918 the Parliament Act allowed women to be voted into Parliament and in the Representation of the People Act of 1928 women were granted the same voted rights as men.

# World War II

In World War II Europe Resistance to German occupation was widespread throughout Europe. There were groups, filled by civilians and armed bands of partisans or guerrilla fighters, whose main purpose was to oppose Nazi rule. These groups published clandestine newspapers and assisted the escape of Jews and Allied airmen shot down over enemy territory to committing acts of **sabotage**, ambushing German patrols, and conveying intelligence information to the Allies. These movements were extra significant in places like Belgium where, according to Britannica, the Germans' dismissal of the legal **Danish** government in 1943 gave rise to a unified council of resistance groups that was able to mount considerable interference with the retreat of German divisions from **Norway** the following winter.



# World War II Cont'd: Greek Resistance

Like the rest of Europe, the rise of **resistance movements in Greece** were triggered by the **invasion** and **occupation of Greece** by **Nazi Germany** from 1941–44. Germany was aiding their ally Italy in the conquest for Greece. They succeeded in April of 1941 with the 24 day Battle of Greece with the Allied Greeks on one side and Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany on the other. The Axis won and proceeded to occupy Greece for the next 3 years. Their government that already lacked legitimacy and support amongst the people had to deal with the large force of resistance coming from the cities, the islands, and the mountains. These resistance groups had “acquired a firm and wide-ranging organization, parallel and more effective than that of the official state.”

# “World War II Cont’d Greek Resistance” Cont’d

The first act of resistance in this time was some students secretly climbed the northwest face of the **Acropolis** and tore down the **swastika banner** which had been placed there by the occupation authorities. Then in Northern Greece the **Bulgarians** had **annexed Greek territories**. These 2 events set off a snowball of resistance acts in Greece. Resistance Acts in Europe at this time was already common at this time as fighting Nazi rule was the center of attention. “The lack of a legitimate government and the inactivity of the established political class created a power vacuum and meant an absence of a rallying point for the **Greek people**.”



# World War II French Resistance

In the 1940s, France like the rest of Europe had their own Nazi problem. These Nazi interlopers “began to employ increasingly brutal and intimidating tactics to ensure the submission of the French population.” And of course they were met with resistance. Small resistance networks formed in France, some passive and some active. After Italy surrendered from the war in 1943, the [Corsican](#) Resistance joined forces with the [Free French](#) to liberate the island and in the wake of the D-Day landings France Forces of the Interior and communist fighting groups joined the Allies in fighting and contributed to the liberation of France

# Influence on World Societies

Biographer Clare Mulley, said resistance movements is a source for change.

The French Revolution, for one, became the model for revolution in the modern world. It was the world's first experience with the true power and force of nationalism.

Without the European resistance movements and networks during World War II, Europe could have remained a Nazi Germany communist land to this day which would have of course had an affect on the rest of the world and nation relationships the United States and other countries.

# Work Cited

“French Revolution.” *Ducksters Educational Site*, [https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/storming\\_of\\_the\\_bastille.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/storming_of_the_bastille.php).

Mournblade. “5 Iconic Resistance Movements You're Picturing Exactly Wrong.” *Cracked.com*, Cracked.com, 6 Feb. 2017,

[https://www.cracked.com/article\\_24488\\_5-historical-revolutions-youre-imagining-totally-wrong.html](https://www.cracked.com/article_24488_5-historical-revolutions-youre-imagining-totally-wrong.html).

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Reign of Terror.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 7 Nov. 2019,

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Reign-of-Terror>.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Resistance.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 Mar. 2019,

<https://www.britannica.com/event/resistance-European-history>.

“What Is Civil Resistance?” *ICNC*, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/about/civil-resistance/>.

“Resistance Movements: A Source for Change.” *History Today*, [https://www.historytoday.com/archive/resistance-movements-source-](https://www.historytoday.com/archive/resistance-movements-source-change)

change.