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## The War Against Paris 1871

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competing ideologies are especially important.

The twelve appendixes prepared by Kimbriel Mitchell and staff add an encyclopedic dimension to the work and by themselves resemble a short reference book. The many statistics presented in the appendixes, apart from the tables, are not footnoted, but selected bibliographies are provided for each appendix.

*The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey* is an important compendium of information on the Gulf that will be of interest to anyone attempting to understand the factors and forces at play in this volatile area.

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Tombs, Robert. *The War Against Paris 1871*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981. 256pp. \$44.50, paper \$14.95

The suppression of the Paris commune, the final act of the Franco-Prussian war, marked the birth of the revolutionary myth that, to protect their narrow class interests, the French bourgeoisie crushed the democratic proletariat. Class warfare coupled with the traditional rivalry between Paris and the provinces led to open warfare and violent repression in the spring of 1871.

Robert Tombs has examined the war against Paris and indicates that the issues were in fact far more complex than those described by adherents of both the left and right.

Tombs demonstrates that the Versailles Army was not simply a reactionary force composed of remnants of the defeated Imperial Army. Rather, it was a fragile amalgamation of units raised by the Provisional Government of National Defense, volunteers, and returned prisoners of war. Moreover, the commune's forces were no revolutionary vanguard, while the Parisian Army was in fact much weaker than its numbers would indicate. Relatively few

battalions were willing to resist the Versailles regime.

Troops of the national government were not in fact anxious to fight the commune. One reason that Thiers and his generals laid siege to Paris instead of launching an immediate attack was the fear that the soldiers would refuse to do battle with fellow Frenchmen.

The conquest of Paris was relatively inexpensive. The vast majority of the casualties were caused by the repression after the campaign. Tombs explains this by pointing to the facts that a number of reactionary generals sought to destroy Parisian radicalism and the government was willing to permit them almost unlimited freedom of action. The Versailles Army, though not enthusiastic, was a disciplined force willing to follow the lead of its commanders. Vindictiveness of the few, not the willingness of the majority, led to the final massacres.

The results of the repression were at best ironic. Reactionaries were discredited for their mindless brutality. Moderates lost credit for their failure to control their forces, and the left gained a myth that had little to do with reality.

Tombs does not explore the wider ramifications of the Civil War. Was the commune the last gasp of the Jacobin left? Was it the start of the proletarian revolutionary myth? These and other questions remain unanswered. On the other hand the author does provide an excellent study of the problems involved in restoring the authority of the new regime in exceptionally difficult circumstances. Having been defeated in a foreign war and with German armies still on French soil, the unstable new regime had to restore internal order. The price was high, but the result was the ultimate creation of a republic that was to be the most enduring French regime since the end of the Napoleonic wars.

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