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Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution

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To
J., S., and P.

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Symbolic Forms of Political Practice

THE FALL of the Bastille, the flight to Varennes, the massacre at the Champ de Mars, the attack on the Tuileries, the fall of the monarchy, the fall of the Girondins, the fall of Robespierre, the purge of the royalists, the purge of the Jacobins, the rise of Napoleon—the succession of revolutionary turning points, the rising and falling of factions, were vertiginous. Each in turn required proclamations, addresses, reports, and eventually festivals and revisions of festivals. Many different kinds of accounts are to be found in these endless productions of words. An instructive local example can be found in a typical proclamation from 1797. In this document, the government's agent (the commissioner of the Executive Directory attached to the departmental administration) in the Isère department published his official commentary on the local reactions to the recent purge of the national legislature. Many deputies had been arrested as supposed royalists, and the elections of scores of others were annulled.

> On learning of *the triumph of the Republic and the Constitution of the Year III* over the *ROYALIST CONSPIRATORS* and of their *escape from the rage of those who wished to destroy them*, it is obviously permitted to every good citizen to show his joy. But why on this occasion were there menaces and provocations between citizens because of dress or different opinions? It is a contravention of the constitutional charter . . . to insult, provoke, or threaten citizens because of their choice of clothing. Let taste and propriety preside over your dress; never turn away from agreeable simplicity. . . . RENOUNCE THESE SIGNS OF RALLYING, THESE COSTUMES OF REVOLT, WHICH ARE THE UNIFORMS OF AN ENEMY ARMY.[1]

[1] A. N., F^{1c} III Isère 9, Correspondance, 1791–1853, "Adresse du Commissaire du

In Grenoble the association of dress with politics had become explosive in 1797. The government's agent wanted to warn against taking dress too seriously, but at the same time he could not help recognizing the power of dress himself. So he concluded with his own warning to those who had taken to wearing the frills and colors associated with the revival of royalism.

The problem of costume was neither new nor limited to Grenoble. Politics were not confined to verbal expression, to the selection of deputies, or to the public debate in clubs, newspapers, and assemblies. Political meaning was closely woven into a variety of symbolic expressions, in which words were only the "foremost instrument," as La Harpe claimed. Different costumes indicated different politics, and a color, the wearing of a certain length of trousers, certain shoe styles, or the wrong hat might touch off a quarrel, a fistfight, or a general street brawl. During the Revolution, even the most ordinary objects and customs became political emblems and potential sources of political and social conflict. Colors, adornments, clothing, plateware, money, calendars, and playing cards became "signs of rallying" to one side or another.[2] Such symbols did not simply express political positions; they were the means by which people became aware of their positions. By making a political position manifest, they made adherence, opposition, and indifference possible. In this way they constituted a field of political struggle.

In revolutionary rhetoric, power came from the Nation (or the people), yet it was never clear how the Nation's will was to be recognized in practice. As Benjamin Constant declared in 1796, "Revolutions efface nuances . . . a torrent levels everything."[3] In the rushing forward of revolutionary events, it was difficult to locate the legitimacy of any government. To "have" power in this situation meant to have some kind of control, however brief, over the articulation and deployment of outward manifestations of the new nation. Speakers in clubs and assemblies tried to claim the right to speak for the nation, but individual voices were often easily

pouvoir exécutif près l'administration centrale du département de l'Isère," 2e jour complémentaire an V.

[2] For an overview of the politicization of everyday objects, see Serge Bianchi, *La Révolution culturelle de l'an II: Elites et peuple (1789–1799)* (Paris, 1982).

[3] *De la force du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier* (1796), p. 10.

overwhelmed. More enduring, because more collective and reproducible, were the symbols and rituals of revolution: liberty trees and liberty caps, female figures of liberty and the Republic, and ritual occasions as diverse as festivals, school contests, elections, and club meetings. The ritual forms were as important as the specific political content. Political symbols and rituals were not metaphors of power; they were the means and ends of power itself.

The exercise of power always requires symbolic practices. There is no government without rituals and without symbols, however demystified or unmagical government may seem.[4] Governing cannot take place without stories, signs, and symbols that convey and reaffirm the legitimacy of governing in thousands of unspoken ways. In a sense, legitimacy is the general agreement on signs and symbols. When a revolutionary movement challenges the legitimacy of traditional government, it must necessarily challenge the traditional trappings of rule as well. Then it must go about inventing political symbols that will express accurately the ideals and principles of the new order.

The French Revolution brought the process of symbol making into particularly sharp relief, because revolutionaries found themselves in the midst of revolution before they had the opportunity to reflect on their situation. The French did not start out with an organized party or coherent movement; they had no banners and only a few simple slogans. They invented their symbols and rituals as they went along. From the *philosophes*, the revolutionaries had learned that other societies had different kinds of symbols and rituals. But no previous society seemed entirely worthy of emulation. As Robespierre proclaimed, "The theory of revolutionary government is as new as the revolution which brought it into being. It is not necessary to search for it in the books of political writers, who did not foresee this revolution, or in the laws of tyrants, who, content to abuse their power, occupied themselves little with establishing its legitimacy."[5] The past, with its absurd practices, could offer few guidelines.

[4] Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark, eds., *Culture and Its Creators: Essays in Honor of Edward Shils* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 150–71. These "reflections" are more fully developed (though in ways less relevant to Europe) in Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980).

[5] From his "Rapport sur les principes du gouvernement révolutionnaire," 25 December 1793, in *Oeuvres de Maximilien Robespierre* 10 (Discours: 27 juillet 1793–27 juillet 1794) (Paris, 1967): 274.

Nevertheless, the French monarchy had demonstrated the power of symbols. The Bourbons had not only drastically circumscribed the political reponsibilities of French subjects, as Tocqueville argued; they had also succeeded in making power virtually coterminous with the symbolic apparatus of monarchy, especially the monarch's person. Power was measured by proximity to the body of the king. To regain their own political responsibilities as citizens, to take power for themselves, the French had to eliminate all of those symbolic connections to monarchy and the king's body. Eventually this took the form of putting the king on trial and executing him in public. Because the Bourbons had emphasized the symbolic trappings of rule, revolutionaries were particularly sensitive to their significance.

The rhetorical matrix of revolutionary politics also enhanced the import of symbolic forms. In the face of ambivalence toward organized politics, especially in the form of parties or factions, new symbols and ceremonies became the most acceptable medium for working out political attitudes. It was not "factional" to plant a liberty tree or wear the colors of the new nation. In the symbolic arena, political conflicts could be engaged without invoking parties or politicians by name. Thus the revolutionaries' passion for the allegorical, the theatrical, and the stylized was not simply a bizarre aberration, but rather an essential element in their effort to mold free men. In the long run, moreover, symbolic forms lent the revolutionary experience psycho-political continuity. Its symbols and rituals gave the Revolution a *longue durée*; they were the tangible reminders of the secular tradition of republicanism and revolution.

In some respects, however, revolutionaries simply expanded on the political practices of the Old Regime. Tocqueville observed long ago that the revolutionaries did not so much smash the monarchical state as they improved on its bureaucracy and administrative powers. The modernizing dreams of the monarchy became reality under the Republic.[6] On the local level as in the national ministries, moreover, there was much continuity between old regime and new; city officials, for example, though elected by a larger por-

[6] See, most recently, the lucid book by Clive H. Church, *Revolution and Red Tape: The French Ministerial Bureaucracy, 1770–1850* (Oxford, 1981).

tion of the citizenry than before, still had to take minutes, hold debates, choose committees, pass ordinances, and generally police local life.[7] The minutes of any revolutionary city council have the same tone of dutiful concern as the proceedings of their Old Regime counterparts.

Outside the realm of administration, political activities proliferated despite the revolutionary distaste for politicians and political maneuvering. Clubs, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, songs, dances (all the usual manifestations of political interest "out of doors") developed rapidly between 1789 and 1794. Yet, the large number of newspapers and clubs, however dramatic the contrast with prerevolutionary times, did not make the politics of the Revolution revolutionary; the multiplication of politics outside the halls of government only made France seem more like England or the new United States. What made the French different, what made them seem to themselves and to observers alike "this new race," was their profound conviction that they were establishing a new human community in a present that had no precedent or parallel.

Because revolutionary rhetoric insisted on a complete break with the past, it called into question all customs, traditions, and ways of life. National regeneration required nothing less than a new man and new habits; the people had to be re-formed in the republican mold. Every nook and cranny of everyday life therefore had to be examined for the corruption of the Old Regime and swept out in preparation for the new one. The other side of the coin of the rhetorical refusal of politics was the impulse to invest politics everywhere.[8] Because politics did not take place in a defined sphere, it tended to invade everyday life instead. This politicization of the everyday was as much a consequence of revolutionary rhetoric as the more self-conscious rejection of organized politics. By politicizing the everyday, the Revolution enormously increased the points from which power could be exercised and multiplied the tactics and strategies for wielding that power.[9] By refusing the specifically

[7] An excellent study of municipal government during the Revolution can be found in Christiane Derobert-Ratel, *Institutions et vie municipale à Aix-en-Provence sous la Révolution, 1789–an VIII* (Aix-en-Provence, 1981).

[8] This impulse has been suggestively described by François Furet: "La Révolution française est cet ensemble de pratiques nouvelles qui surinvestit le politique de significations symboliques" (*Penser la Révolution française* [Paris, 1978], p. 73). However, Furet offers little analysis of those "pratiques nouvelles" themselves.

[9] Michel Foucault's analysis of power is potentially more fruitful than Tocqueville's in this context, but Foucault never analyzes power in a political arena. This chapter develops what might be termed a Foucaultian analysis of politics as the creation of new strategies and tactics for wielding power. The French Revolution, in my view, is a particularly privileged example of this process. For Foucault's definition of power, see his *The History of Sexuality*, 1: *An Introduction* (New York, 1978), esp. pp. 94–95.

political, revolutionaries opened up undreamt-of fields for the play of power.

Politics did not invade the everyday all at once, but from the beginning participants and observers alike perceived that something untoward was happening in France, and they experienced and explained those happenings via symbols. In his letter of 16 July 1789 to the English government in London, the Duke of Dorset referred to "the greatest Revolution that we know anything of," and he illustrated this observation by describing the appearance of the cockade in everyone's hat.[10] On 22 July he reported that "the Revolution in the French Constitution and Government may now I think be looked upon as compleated," because the king had recently been forced to visit Paris. In a symbolic procession of acquiescence to the July revolution, "He was actually led in triumph like a tame bear by the Deputies and the City Militia."[11] Symbolic acts such as the donning of the patriotic cockade and the "humiliating" entry of the king into Paris were the clearest signposts of revolutionary change; they were also the first hesitant steps in the making of revolutionary politics.

The potential for political and social conflict became apparent as soon as the first symbols were invented. The cockade is a good example. According to the Duke of Dorset, the first cockades were made of green ribbons, but these were rejected because green was the color of the livery of the Count Artois, the king's much-maligned younger brother.[12] They were soon replaced by a combination of red, white, and blue. Once the tricolor cockade became

[10] PRO, FO 27, France, 32, May–August 1789, letter no. 39.

[11] Ibid., letter no. 42.

[12] Ibid., letter no. 39 (16 July 1789). Dorset claimed that red and white were substituted for green because they were the colors of the Duke of Orleans. Most people assumed, however, that the tricolor cockade or rosette combined the colors of monarchy and those of Paris. See, for example, Albert Mathiez, *Les Origines des cultes révolutionnaires, 1789–1792* (Paris, 1904), p. 30. Whatever the reason for the tricolor combination, the cockade is a good example of the invention of revolutionary symbolism, which Mathiez describes in these terms: "Le symbolisme révolutionnaire, qui s'est formé comme au hasard, sans idées préconçues et sans plan d'ensemble, avec une spontanéité remarquable, au cours des années 1789, 1790 et 1791, fut l'oeuvre commune de la bourgeoisie et du peuple" (p. 29).

4. ENGRAVING ENTITLED "ORGY OF THE GARDES DU CORPS AT VERSAILLES, OCTOBER 1789"
From Révolutions de Paris, *no. 13. The soldiers are trampling the tricolor cockade and saluting white and black ones, according to the accompanying text*
(Photo by Library Photographic Services, University of California, Berkeley)

widely accepted, it took on enormous political significance. Louis' life quite literally depended on donning it, and rumored "outrages" against it precipitated the fateful march of women to Versailles in October 1789. No doubt the women knew they were defending the Revolution when they marched to Versailles, but no speech about "the Revolution" could have mobilized them the way the cockade did. They marched when they heard that the soldiers at Versailles had trampled the tricolor cockade and worn in its place the white of the Bourbons or the black of the aristocratic counterrevolution. Plate 4 shows the offending scene as it was pictured by an anonymous engraver. The inclusion of the print in a newspaper account of the "October days" demonstrates the emotional importance of the symbol. When "the sacred sign of French liberty" was trampled underfoot, the Nation itself was insulted.[13] Even in these

[13]Quote from the article, "Details du 3 au 10 octobre 1789: Conjuration formée par les aristocrates contre notre liberté: Preuves et suite de cette conjuration." *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 13 (article accompanied the engraving, plate 4), vol. 1.

first months of the Revolution, opposing sides in the struggle were given clarity, if they were not actually called into being, by symbols.

Like the cockade, the liberty cap, the patriotic altar, and the liberty tree all appeared in the first months of the Revolution. Each symbol had a different genealogy, but all of them came to be widely accepted. Once invented and broadly diffused, they did not cease to engender contests and confrontations of various sorts. Opponents of the Revolution tore out liberty trees or vandalized them, for instance, and local governments replanted them. The symbols of power were caught up not only in the political struggles of the moment, but also in the more subterranean tensions between officialdom and popular enthusiasms. Officials sometimes tried to get hold of popular symbols by tracing their origins back to the individual who presumably invented the usage. In the Year II, for example, Grégoire wrote an "Historical and Patriotic Essay on the Trees of Liberty" in which he asserted that the first one had been planted in May 1790 by a parish priest in rural Poitou. Historians have now shown, however, that the first "trees" were the maypoles planted by the peasants of the Périgord during their insurrection against local lords in the winter of 1790. The insurrectionary poles often looked like gallows and frequently were hung with menacing slogans. Priests, notables, and national commissioners sent to inquire considered these maypoles "insulting witnesses," "symbols of revolt," and "monuments of insurrection."[14] Before long, nevertheless, the liberty tree became a general symbol of adherence to the Revolution, and, by May 1792, 60,000 liberty trees had been planted all over France.[15]

Once symbols proved their popularity by wide diffusion, they were taken up in more official fashion. All men were *required* to wear the tricolor cockade after 5 July 1792. A few days earlier, the Legislative Assembly had asked every commune to set up a patriotic altar for the reception of newborns. Jacobin clubs and local governments took over the planting of liberty trees and made it into their own kind of ceremony. Ordinances were passed forbidding excessive displays; in Beauvais, for example, officials were dis-

[14]Mona Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799* (Paris, 1976), pp. 280–90.

[15]On the spread of revolutionary symbolism generally, see Maurice Dommanget, "Le Symbolisme et le prosélytisme révolutionnaire à Beauvais et dans l'Oise," *AHRF* 2 (1925): 131–50; 3 (1926): 47–58, 345–62; 4 (1927): 127–34; 5 (1928): 46–57, 442–56; 6 (1929): 372–91; 7 (1930): 41–53, 411–42.

tressed by the practice of dragging opponents to the newly planted tree and forcing them to pay homage.[16] Fences were erected to mark off the sacred ground and regulate its access. The fences, the decrees, and the incorporation of such symbols into official ceremonies and festivals all marked the disciplining of new forms of popular power.

The most telling example of this process of discipline was the systematization of festivals, described so brilliantly by Mona Ozouf.[17] Born in the days of fear, panic, and joy of late 1789 and early 1790, the first "savage" festivals were simple, extemporaneous acts of union either against imagined plots or for the imposition of the new revolutionary symbolism, for example, to plant a liberty tree, to force the wearing of the cockade, or to take an oath of loyalty to the Revolution. The festivals of Federation in 1790 marked the first step in regularization, and, significantly, men in uniform were at the heart of the ceremony. All over France at noon, soldiers, national guards, and officials were to take the oath, which included promises to protect people and property, and to assure the free circulation of grain and the collection of taxes.[18] The popular classes gathered around the edges of the ceremonial space to watch as the tricolor cockade, the patriotic altar, and the other signs of liberty were sanctified by their use in the new state ritual. (See plate 2.) The people's enthusiasm had invested those symbols with meaning in the first place; now official ceremonies regularized them. In this fashion, the popular contribution was at once recognized and partially defused.

As the festivals became more elaborate, a host of increasingly obscure symbols were incorporated into them—some Biblical or Catholic in inspiration, but more often antique or Masonic, and thus inherently less "popular" in resonance. The Masonic level became the symbol of equality, the Roman fasces the symbol of union, the Roman and Gallic laurel the sign of civic virtue, the Egyptian eye the emblem of vigilance, and a host of female goddesses represented not only liberty but also reason, nature, victory,

[16] Ibid., 3 (1926).

[17] *La Fête révolutionnaire*. See also Michel Vovelle, *Les Métamorphoses de la fête en Provence de 1750 à 1820* (Paris, 1976).

[18] Anon., *Description de la Fête du Pacte fédératif, du 14 juillet, fixée par la ville, avec le reglement de la police* (Paris, n.d.).

5. SEAL OF THE REPUBLIC, 1792
(Photo courtesy of the Archives nationales)

sensibility, pity, charity, and the like.[19] Long processions carried didactic banners and visited edifying, allegorical "stations." Replacing the saints of Catholicism were the new representations of revolution; replacing the priests and vicars of the church were the officials and pageant-masters of the new regime.[20]

Just as the Counter-Reformation church of the late seventeenth century had tried to discipline popular religious festivity, so too the officials of the revolutionary regime tried to discipline popular political festivity. Officials incorporated popular symbols into organized festivals and ceremonies, and they devised their own symbols for popular consumption. The goddess of Liberty is the best known example, also the most successful. When Liberty was chosen for the seal of the Republic in 1792 (see plate 5; this choice is discussed in more detail in chap. 3), she was not an unknown fig-

[19] Revolutionary iconography is most fully deciphered in Jules Renouvier, *Histoire de l'art pendant la Révolution considéré principalement dans les estampes* (Paris, 1863). See also Dommanget, "Le Symbolisme."

[20] David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln, Neb., 1948).

ure in French iconography. In 1775 Moreau painted her as a young woman dressed in Roman style with a liberty cap on top of her pike.[21] Liberty evidently appeared first during the Revolution on a medal commemorating the establishment of a new municipal government in Paris in July 1789. Until her elevation in September 1792, she was overshadowed by such figures as the "génie" of France, which appeared on the reverse of the new royal coins released in 1791, Mercury, Minerva, and female figures representing the city of Paris.[22] By the end of the decade, however, Liberty was indelibly associated with the memory of the Republic she had represented. In collective memory, *La République* was "Marianne." The name first given Liberty—the Republic—in derision by opponents of the Revolution soon became a familiar nickname of affection, and her image reappeared in every subsequent republic.[23]

Liberty's poised demeanor on the seal of 1792 evoked little of the frantic violence of the various revolutionary "days" of popular mobilization. Like a Counter-Reformation saint, she represented the virtues so desired by the new order: the transcendence of localism, superstition, and particularity in the name of a more disciplined and universalistic worship. Liberty was an abstract quality based on reason. She belonged to no group, to no particular place. She was the antithesis of those "ridiculous usages, gothic formulas, absurd and puerile etiquette, and the right usurped by the clergy," which radicals had already denounced in 1790.[24] Once Liberty had received official recognition and widespread diffusion, however, she also became more accessible to popular uses. The movement of revolutionary political practice, like that of Counter-Reformation religion, was not one-directional toward discipline.[25]

The most striking example of the malleability of symbols, and of Liberty in particular, was the notorious "Festival of Reason." By

[21] Renouvier, *Histoire de l'art*, p. 401.

[22] Michel Hennin, *Histoire numismatique de la Révolution française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1826) 1: 32–33.

[23] Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris, 1979).

[24] These were the words used to describe "cette fête bisarre [*sic*] instituée à l'avènement au trône," i.e., the coronation ceremony, by an observer of the Festival of Federation in 1790 (Anon., *Description fidèle de tout ce qui a précédé, accompagné et suivi la cérémonie de la Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790* [Paris, n.d.]).

[25] My parallels to Counter-Reformation religion are based on Keith Phillip Luria, "Territories of Grace: Seventeenth-Century Religious Change in the Diocese of Grenoble," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1982.

decision of the radical Paris city government, the festival in honor of Liberty planned for 10 November 1793 was transformed instead into a "Triumph of Reason." Scheduled originally for the former Palais Royal, the event was moved to Notre Dame to make the attack on Catholicism more explicit. The festivities themselves incorporated a strange mixture of elite and popular themes, which might be expected since the Paris *commune* or city government fancied itself as a kind of mediator between the rationalist vision of the deputies in the Convention and the more down-to-earth concerns of the Parisian lower classes.[26] In the center of the former cathedral sat a mountain, symbol of the left in the Convention. Gracing the mountain was a small temple, engraved with *À la philosophie*. Lining the entry of the temple were busts of the *philosophes*. As one of the organizers noted:

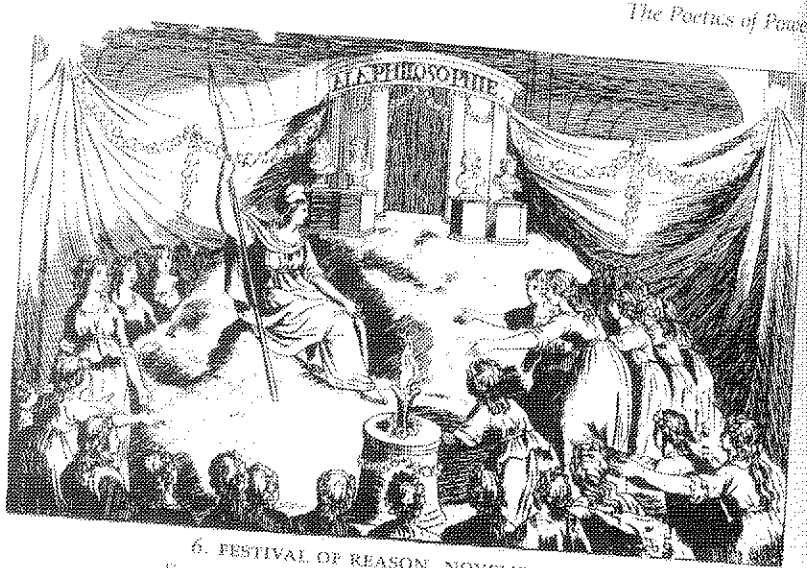
> This ceremony had nothing that resembled Greek and Latin mummery; it went directly to the soul. The instruments did not howl like the snakes of churches. A Republican musical ensemble, placed at the foot of the mountain, played in common language [*en langue vulgaire*], the hymn that the people understood all the better because it expressed natural truths and not mystical and chimerical adulations.[27]

Two rows of young girls dressed in white and crowned with laurel wreaths descended the mountain with torches in their hands and then made their way back up again. At that moment, Liberty, "represented by a beautiful woman," came out of the temple and sat on a throne of greenery to receive the homage of republicans present (see plate 6).

The astounding innovation of the festival and the most unexpected was the appearance of a living woman as Liberty. Three days before, when the city government voted to change the location of the event, it still had in mind the usual presentation of a statue: "the statue of Liberty will be erected in place of that of the

[26] See the analysis in F.-A. Aulard, *Le Culte de la Raison et le culte de l'Etre Suprême (1793–1794)* (Paris, 1892). See also M. J. Guillaume, ed., *Procès-verbaux du Comité d'Instruction publique de la Convention Nationale* 2 (3 juillet 1793–30 brumaire an II [20 novembre 1793]) (Paris, 1894): 803–6.

[27] According to Guillaume (n. 26), the only good description of the festival was that of the *Révolutions de Paris* attributed to Momoro, a departmental administrator and one of the organizers of the festival. Quote from *Procès-verbaux du Comité d'instruction publique* 2: 805.



6. FESTIVAL OF REASON, NOVEMBER 1793
Engraving from Révolutions de Paris, *no. 215*
(Photo by Library Photographic Services, University of California, Berkeley)

'former Holy Virgin.'"[28] We do not know how this change came about, but it was mimicked in many provincial towns.[29] Behind the appearance of a living vignette of Liberty (or Reason, or Nature, or Victory—in many places, even in Paris, the distinctions were not always clear to the participants or to the organizers)[30] was the desire for a transparent representation, one that would be so close to nature that it would evoke none of the old fanatical strivings after false images. As one newspaper commented:

> One wanted from the first moment to break the habit of every species of idolatry; we avoided putting in the place of a holy sacrament an inanimate image of liberty because vulgar minds might have mis-

[28] The decision of the Commune was reported in the *Feuille du salut public*, quoted in ibid., pp. 803–4.

[29] The festivals of reason in the provinces were the highwater mark of the dechristianization campaign. They were often accompanied by the renunciation of priestly functions, marriages of priests, burning of religious books and artifacts, in short, by a conscious assault on Catholicism as well as by the effort to establish a new civic cult. They are described in detail by Aulard, *Le Culte de la Raison*, pp. 112–94.

[30] Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire*, pp. 116–17.

> understood and substituted in place of the god of bread a god of stone . . . and this living woman, despite all the charms that embellished her, could not be deified by the ignorant, as would a statue of stone.
>
> Something which we must never tire of saying to the people is that liberty, reason, truth are only abstract beings. These are not gods, for properly speaking, they are parts of ourselves.[31]

Liberty was to look like an ordinary woman, not like a superstitious icon. Almost everywhere, however, the Liberty chosen was much like a Carnival queen—the most beautiful woman of the village or the neighborhood. The people had made her their own queen for a day. In this way, the radical didactic impulse to repress all idols was appropriated and inverted by popular rituals of festivity. The Convention had had no part in this, at least not officially, and so, once the festival had been presented, the participants marched off to the Convention to invite the deputies to a repeat performance. The people, guided by their local government in Paris, had put on their own play.

The Festival of Reason, as it soon came to be called, showed the complexities at work in the field of symbolic power. The Convention, the Paris city government, local militants, and the general Parisian population all had their own interests and aspirations. The Convention had introduced the Roman goddess of Liberty as an appropriate French replacement for the king as the central symbol of the government and its legitimacy. The deputies wanted an abstract symbol that had little or no resonance with the French monarchical past. At the time of the Festival, the Paris city government was looking for ways to challenge the hold of Catholicism; Liberty was secular, easily associated with reason (both were represented iconographically as female figures), and opposable to the central female figure of Catholicism, the Virgin Mary. The people present were able to convert the abstract, secular goddess into a living Carnival queen, who called to mind the queens of traditional, popular religious rituals. Yet the people only got their living goddess in a decor provided by the Opera, with the participation of the members of the Opera ballet and music from the Opera repertory.[32] The

[31] *Les Révolutions de Paris*, no. 215 (23–30 brumaire an II), vol. 17.

[32] Judith Schlanger, "La Représentation du bien," reprinted in Schlanger, *L'Enjeu et le début* (Paris, 1979), esp. pp. 123–27.

people made Liberty their own only to discover that she was an actress, playing a role for their edification.

The use of symbols to fight political struggles and develop political positions was by no means limited to supporters of the Revolution. In May 1799 the city administration of Toulouse wrote to the Minister of Police in Paris to complain about local demonstrations inspired by a statue of the Black Virgin. The black wooden statue of Notre-Dame-la-Noire had played a prominent part in local religious ceremonies for centuries, and as late as 1785 she had been escorted by the city council in a public procession organized to pray for rain. In 1799 the statue was brought out of hiding and shown again in a local church: "The collections produced immense sums, and all the ridiculous benedictions used by the priests were renewed; everyone wanted a handkerchief, a ring, or a book that had touched the Madonna." The administrators were outraged that "at the end of an enlightened century, we have seen reproduced in our commune those miserable means of fanaticism which only owed their deadly success to the times of ignorance and superstition." The statue was burned a few days later.[33]

In addition to the revival of traditional religious symbols, opponents of revolutionary innovations also revitalized popular Carnival practices. Just before Lent local communities had organized parades, processions, and dances that frequently spilled over into boisterous, even riotous challenges to local authorities. It was common in these festivities to wear masks and dress up in women's clothing. After 1794 members of "anti-terrorist" squads frequently used such means to hide their identities from the authorities. In January 1797 the departmental administration of the Gironde at Bordeaux passed a decree forbidding the use of disguises or masks and in particular outlawed the wearing of "clothes of another sex than one's own." The commissioner of the Executive Directory explained the need for this decree:

> It is under the mask that vengeance audaciously directs its daggers; it is under the mask that vicious people insult and mistreat with impunity those they regard as their enemies; it is under the mask that the thief and crook find it easy to despoil those whose fortune they envy; it is under the mask that one gives oneself over to the last degree of imprudence in those unrestrained games that bring ruin and desolation to families.[34]

[33] A.M., Toulouse, 2D4, "Correspondance de l'administration municipale," letter of 7 prairial an VII. For the history of the statue, see Abbé Degert, "Origine de la Vierge noire de la Daurade," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique du Midi de la France*, no. 31 (1903): 335–58.

In the official view, masks and disguises facilitated, if they did not actually bring about, virtually every political and moral evil known to man.

These kinds of symbolic resistance to the Revolution were rooted in traditional popular culture. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, local populations used Carnival masks and local saints to defend their collective identities against the incursions of reforming bishops and aspiring local notables. At the end of the Old Regime, such battles lost their bitter edge, but the Revolution revived them with an infusion of new political content. In the eyes of some disgruntled locals, revolutionary ideologues and republican notables had simply taken over from the bishops and landowners of the Old Regime. To convinced republicans, in contrast, Carnival masks and Black Virgins represented everything the Revolution was trying to overcome: royalism, fanaticism, ignorance, superstition, in short, everything reprehensible about the French past. Black Virgins insulted the goddess of Liberty; Carnival masks flew in the face of the transparent citizen.

Republicans knew that these symbolic battles were far from "merely" symbolic, and they frequently took up their symbolic cudgels with a rationalistic vengeance. In 1796 the resolutely republican city administration of Toulouse requested permission to buy a chapel for use as a grain storage facility; later in the same year they tried to turn the former Carmelite convent into a botanical museum; and in 1798 they asked to convert the convent into a grain market.[35] It is not hard to imagine that some people ostentatiously patronized the local Black Virgin in order to demonstrate their rejection of such de-Christianizing measures. Republicans were often mystified by the depth of antagonism these symbolic conflicts aroused. When accused of being a "terrorist," for example, one Toulousain administrator explained, "I have always demonstrated opinions

[34] A.N., F^{7} 3677, Police générale, Gironde, "Arrête de l'administration centrale du département de la Gironde, qui prohibe les Masques et les Travestissements: Séance du 21 nivôse an V de la République française, une et indivisible."

[35] A.N., C 400 (no. 290), 402 (no. 327), 432 (no. 175).

based on the most mellow philanthropy"; and he cited Rousseau, Voltaire, and Helvétius as the source of his "moral principles."[36] Such principles led ineluctably to battles with the Catholic church and Old Regime symbols.

Revolutionaries could only hope to win their "symbolic" battles if they succeeded in educating their public. An intense course in political education was necessary to teach the people to distinguish between the Liberty of their republican present and the Black Virgin of their royalist past. As a consequence, the political practice of republicans was fundamentally didactic; republicans had to teach the people how to read the new symbolic text of revolution. Teaching began most obviously with the nation's children. A new generation of true republicans could only be created through a system of organized, national, lay public instruction. As Romme maintained in his report of 1793, "the constitution will give to the nation a political and social existence; public instruction will give it a moral and intellectual existence."[37]

Accordingly, the various assemblies of the Revolution developed ambitious projects for the restructuring of all levels of education. The Catholic Church's control over education was broken, and primary education was opened to all children, regardless of social background. The school "master" was replaced by a secular, state-paid instructor (*instituteur*, literally, the one who would found new values).[38] Although most of these plans were left hanging due to lack of time and money, and the more radical notions of equality and free schooling were abandoned after 1795, scores of instructional manuals and "republican catechisms" were published and distributed to the new schoolteachers.[39] In theory, schoolchildren

[36] A letter from Jacques Vaysse to the local right-wing paper, *L'Anti-Terroriste*, 2 *messidor an III* (20 June 1795).

[37] *Rapport sur l'instruction publique considérée dans son ensemble, suivi d'un projet de décret . . . présentés à la Convention Nationale, au nom du comité d'instruction publique, par G. Romme* (Paris, 1793).

[38] The best summary of the legislation on primary education can be found in Maurice Gontard, *L'Enseignement primaire en France de la Révolution à la loi Guizot (1789–1833)* (Lyon, 1959), pp. 79–188.

[39] For a general discussion of catechisms, see Jean-François Chassaing, "Les Manuels de l'enseignement primaire de la Révolution et les idées révolutionnaires," in Jean Morange and Jean-François Chassaing, *Le Mouvement de réforme de l'enseignement en France, 1760–1798* (Paris, 1974), pp. 97–184. See also Emmet Kennedy, "The French Revolutionary Catechisms: Ruptures and Continuities with Classical, Christian, and Enlightenment Moralities," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 199 (1981): 353–62.

were supposed to learn the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the territorial divisions of the Republic, republican poems and hymns, and the principles of republican government in addition to French grammar, reading, and writing, a little natural history, and the examples provided by previous republics. The local administrators who were charged with supervising education often found, however, that teachers were lacking in numbers and preparation and all too often lacking in enthusiasm for the new order as well.[40]

In any case, republicans could not afford to wait for the formation of a new generation, so they put most of their efforts into the re-formation of adults. One of the most important "Jacobin schools" was the army of 1792–94.[41] Deputies were sent on mission from the Convention to each of the armies in the field to supervise the republican discipline of the soldiers and their officers. They arrested presumed traitors, set up revolutionary tribunals, and distributed bulletins, addresses, proclamations, instructions, and even newspapers. The government subsidized five thousand subscriptions to the Jacobin paper, *Journal des hommes libres*, and over nine months sent as many as one million copies of the *Père Duchesne* directly to the army. At the zenith of its propaganda efforts, the Convention sent the army 30 thousand newspapers a day.[42] In addition, there were victory festivals planned especially for the army's benefit, and many civic festivals included the military in great numbers. The assessment behind these efforts was made clear by a lieutenant who wrote to an official in the War ministry asking for yet more newspapers: "The soldier is good-hearted, but he needs to be enlightened."[43]

[40] On the realities of education, see G. Chianea, "L'Enseignement primaire à Grenoble sous la Révolution," *Cahiers d'histoire* 17 (1972): 123–60. A more positive view of the Revolution's accomplishments can be found in Emmet Kennedy and Marie-Laurence Netter, "Les Ecoles primaires sous le Directoire," *AHRF* 53 (1981): 3–38.

[41] Jean-Paul Bertaud, *La Révolution armée: Les Soldats-Citoyens et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1979), pp. 194–229.

[42] Marc Martin, *Les Origines de la presse militaire en France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et sous la Révolution (1770–1799)* (Paris, 1975), pp. 149–227.

[43] The lieutenant requested in particular the *Père Duchesne* and *L'Ombre de Marat* (Arthur Chuquet, *Lettres de 1793* [Paris, 1911], pp. 162–63).

Even revolutionary officials had to be educated for their new roles. To this purpose, the national government poured out an unending stream of bulletins of information and detailed explanations of bureaucratic duties and rationales. The national government demanded regular accounts of its agents in the departments, who in turn demanded reports from their agents in the municipalities. The regular, uniform collection of information insured that the government would keep in touch with public opinion and, at the same time, keep its agents and the lower levels of the bureaucracy reminded of its loyalties. A letter from the Directory's commissioner in the Vendée department captures the spirit of this enterprise. He wrote to the commissioners attached to the municipal administrations of the department reminding them that they were to send in "an analytical account" of the situation in their area every *décade* (every ten days according to the new revolutionary calendar). He complained of the lack of zeal shown by many and insisted, "I have the right to expect a methodical precision from you, reasoned results, a few new views, and especially, exactness." To encourage them, he sent along printed forms divided into columns with spaces for each query. As he concluded, the zeal (a word he used several times in the letter) of officials was essential to the "perfectioning of the political machine." [6]

National education, propagandizing in the army, and the enforcement of bureaucratic routine were strategies for the extension of power. They contributed to the "perfectioning of the political machine" by incorporating officials and ordinary citizens alike into the republican state. Never before had such an ambitious program of political discipline been undertaken. After the declaration of the Republic in September 1792, republican officials saw the potential for struggle between the forces of regeneration and the forces of counterrevolutionary conspiracy almost everywhere. Newspapers, army uniforms, bureaucratic forms, and schoolbooks were political symbols as much as cockades and liberty trees. But now even the measures of space, time, and weight came into question. Everyone should speak the same language, use the same weights and measures, and turn in the old coinage. A commission worked on establishing the metric system, and the Convention instituted a new cal-

[6] A. N., F[7] III Vendée 7, Correspondance et divers, 1789–1813, letter dated 28 prairial an VI.

endar. In place of the seven-day week, there would be a ten-day "decade," with no variation from month to month. In place of the names of the "vulgar epoch," the names of months and days would reflect nature and reason. Germinal, Floréal, and Prairial (late March–late June), for instance, called to mind the buds and flowers of springtime, while primidi, duodi, etc. ordered the days rationally without the help of saints' names.[8] In Toulouse, city officials went so far as to contract with a clockmaker to "decimalize" the clock on city hall.[9] Even clocks could offer witness to the Revolution.

The government of the Revolution had an hierarchical arrangement that was accentuated when the radicals took over after 1792. The assembly (in 1792–95, the National Convention) in Paris organized the central government, and it expected authority to flow down from it to the departments and ultimately to the municipalities. Yet, even though the Convention passed the laws and decrees restructuring education, the army, and the bureaucracy, the strategies and tactics of power did not simply trickle down and outward from Paris. Just as some revolutionary symbols came out of popular practices, so too some of the tactics of political reeducation originated locally. In 1789, local governments developed bureaucratic procedures on their own before the deputies in Paris had even considered reorganizing the bureaucracy.[10] In some departments, local administrations tried to reorganize public education before the Convention agreed on a plan.[11] Moreover, the success of government activities in these areas depended in large measure on the "zeal" of locals.

During most of the Revolution, but especially in 1792 and 1793, political mobilization took place primarily outside of regular, offi-

[8] For a brief account, see Bianchi, *La Révolution culturelle de l'an II*, pp. 198–203. The revolutionary years began on 22 September (23 September in Year VIII and IX). The names of the months (from September) were Vendémiaire, Brumaire, Frimaire, Nivôse, Pluviôse, Ventôse, Germinal, Floréal, Prairial, Messidor, Thermidor, and Fructidor. The five extra days (each month had 30 days) were called *jours complémentaires*. In the Year II they were celebrated as *sans-culottides*.

[9] M. J. de Rey-Pailhade, "Etude historique sur l'emploi du calendrier républicain et sur le temps décimal à Toulouse pendant la Révolution," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Toulouse* 27 (1908): 429–57.

[10] Lynn Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics in Provincial France: Troyes and Reims, 1786–1790* (Stanford, 1978), pp. 81–82.

[11] The department of the Gers, for example, passed a detailed decree in November 1793 setting the course of instruction in primary schools (G. Brégail, *L'Instruction publique dans le Gers pendant la période révolutionnaire* [Auch, 1899], pp. 3–6).

cial government channels. The clubs, the popular societies, and the newspapers took on themselves the responsibility for converting local populations, including local army garrisons, to the republican cause. Women's clubs and societies of artisans and shopkeepers explicitly devoted themselves to republican self-improvement. A "patriotic society" of artisans and shopkeepers was formed in Bordeaux in 1790, for example, because "since every man is a member of the state, the new order of things can call anyone to the public administration." The purpose of the society was to educate every man to those potential responsibilities by discussing the decrees of the national assembly and reading newspapers and periodicals.[87]

In short, the power of the revolutionary state did not expand because its leaders manipulated the ideology of democracy and the practices of bureaucracy to their benefit; power expanded at every level as people of various stations invented and learned new political "microtechniques."[88] Taking minutes, sitting in a club meeting, reading a republican poem, wearing a cockade, sewing a banner, singing a song, filling out a form, making a patriotic donation, electing an official—all these actions converged to produce a republican citizenry and a legitimate government. In the context of revolution, these ordinary activities became invested with extraordinary significance. Power, consequently, was not a finite quantity possessed by one faction or another; it was rather a complex set of activities and relationships that created previously unsuspected resources. The surprising victories of the revolutionary armies were only the most dazzling consequence of this discovery of new social and political energy.

Although revolutionary political practice multiplied the strategies and tactics of power, it also incorporated the same tensions that beset revolutionary rhetoric. Most important was the tension between the belief in the possibility of transparency and the need

[87] Pierre Bécamps, "La Société patriotique de Bordeaux (1790–1792)," *Actes du XIIe Congrès-National des sociétés savantes, Bordeaux, 1957* (Paris, 1958), pp. 255–83, esp. p. 257.

[88] See the analysis of Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), esp. pp. 135–94. The microtechniques of political power can be compared to Foucault's "hundreds of tiny theatres of punishment" (p. 113) except that, in the French Revolution, these techniques were as potentially liberating as they were incarcerating.

for didacticism. If the truth and justice of the people's will were self-evident, that is, engraved in all men's hearts, then the people's will had only to be voiced in order for virtue to reign supreme. Political mechanisms were therefore secondary, if not irrelevant, at least in theory. As Robespierre claimed, "Virtues are simple, modest, poor, often ignorant, sometimes coarse; they are the attribute of the unfortunate, and the patrimony of the people."[89] If every heart was transparent, then virtue would shine. And if men were virtuous, then a republic of virtue followed almost automatically. Politics were only necessary in corrupt societies; indeed, the very existence of politics was a sign that society was corrupt. The practice of revolution could only consist, then, in freeing the people's will from the fetters of past oppression.

Yet the experience of the Revolution showed that ignorance and superstition were not so easily overcome. Robespierre himself recognized this problem when he confessed, "We have raised the temple of liberty with hands still withered by the irons of despotism."[90] At the end of the decade, Madame de Staël concluded that "the Republic arrived in France before the enlightenment which should have prepared the way for the Republic."[91] As a consequence, revolutionaries had to place great faith in their ability to reshape society and the individual in a very short time. To this end, they mobilized enormous pedagogical energies and politicized every possible aspect of daily life. Transparency could only work if didacticism prepared the way.

The tension between transparency and didacticism can be seen in the elaboration of symbols of power. Popularly "invented" symbols, such as the cockade and the liberty tree, had to be incorporated into the symbolic repertoire because they seemed to represent the voice of the people. But at the same time officials worked to discipline these popular forms and to impose their own (such as Liberty, the female representation of the Republic) in order to further the education of the people in their rights and duties. Governmental discipline was only legitimate, however, if it promised to re-

[89] *Oeuvres* 10: 278.

[90] As quoted in Alfred Cobban, "The Political Ideas of Robespierre, 1792–5," *Aspects of the French Revolution* (New York, 1968), p. 192.

[91] *Des Circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la République en France*, ed. by John Viénot (Paris, 1906), p. 33.

store the voice of the people and the values dictated by nature and reason. Didacticism was justified by the belief in transparency.

At times the tension between transparency and didacticism was expressed as a contrast between words and images, between verbal and visual representations. Republican leaders attached extraordinary significance to words, especially in extended prose form. A peasant might hang his maypole with a menacing slogan, and poor journeymen and dayworkers in the city were able to understand rough placards that threatened grain merchants. Republican leaders expected much more from words; they were the sign and the guarantee of liberty, but they were also a means of discipline through interpretation. Spontaneous popular festivities required no proclamations, but every one of the organized Parisian festivals was accompanied by printed programs, banners of identification, and images engraved with words. Judith Schlanger calls this the "discursive foundation of political didacticism": "the inscriptions manifest the belief in the superiority of the clarifying function [*l'explicitation*] of saying over the pregnancy of showing."[54]

Verbal explanation was essential because the symbolic framework of the Revolution required constant clarification. Revolutionary political culture was by nature continually in flux; the mythic present was always being updated. New symbols and images appeared every few months, and "old" images went through frequent modifications. In the fluid political situation of the Revolution, the "normal" uncertainty involved in reading images and symbols was exacerbated, and as a consequence verbal texts seemed all the more necessary as supplements. The speeches, the banners, and the inscriptions directed the attention of participants and spectators; they repressed unwanted readings and elicited "correct" ones.[55] In addition the speeches and the texts ensured the continuity of revolutionary experience. Although offices changed hands repeatedly (see chapters 5 and 6), and many symbols were altered, the principles of interpretation remained much the same.

No other issue demonstrates the tension between transparency and didacticism more dramatically than the question of revolution-

[54] "Le Peuple au front grave," in *L'Enjeu et le début*, pp. 163–64.

[55] On the relationship between words and images, see Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in his *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), pp. 32–51.

ary dress. From the beginning of the Revolution, clothing was invested with political significance. When the Estates General opened with a ceremonial procession on 4 May 1789, for example, many observers were struck by the court's insistence on different costumes for the different orders: the deputies of the Third Estate were to wear somber black, while the nobles wore gold braiding, white hose, lace cravats, and gracious white plumes in their hats.[56] As the visitor John Moore remarked, the distinction in dress not only caused offense but also precipitated a revolution of sorts in political apparel: "So that in a short time a little black cloak on a brown thread-bare coat became respectable; and afterwards, when the cloaks were laid aside . . . a great plainness or rather shabbiness of dress was . . . considered as a presumption of patriotism."[57]

In the early years after 1789 revolutionaries emphasized the elimination of odious distinctions of dress. Religious costumes were abolished, and the only distinction allowed municipal officers, for example, was a tricolor scarf.[58] At the same time, certain aspects of personal decoration might signal adherence or antipathy to the Revolution; the color of one's cockade and even the material of the cockade (wool was less pretentious than silk) were significant. After 1792, social equality became an increasingly important consideration in dress. Some aspiring politicians began to wear the short jacket, long trousers, and even the clogs of the sans-culottes, the urban popular classes.[59] Militants of the sections in Paris frequently wore the red Phrygian bonnet or liberty cap (in wool, of course), though most bourgeois leaders disdained such displays and continued to wear breeches and ruffled shirts.

In May 1794 the concern with dress culminated in a request to the artist-deputy David; the Committee on Public Safety asked him to present his views on improving national costume and on ways

[56] *Costume de Cérémonie de Messieurs les Députés des trois Ordres aux Etats généraux* (Paris, 1789).

[57] *A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (London, 1795) 1: 150.

[58] Religious costume was addressed in October and November 1790, March 1791, and August 1792. The scarf for municipal officials was decreed 20 March 1790. See Yves-Claude Jourdain, *Table générale alphabétique des matières contenues dans les décrets rendus par les assemblées nationales de France, depuis 1789, jusqu'au 18 brumaire an 8* (Paris, an X).

[59] Jennifer Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans, 1789–1794," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (1981): 283–312.

to make it more appropriate to republican and revolutionary character. The most rational way to ensure the appearance of equality and to eliminate the expression of political differences through dress was to invent a national civil uniform.[80] The committee liked his designs well enough to order 20,000 copies of the engravings for distribution to public officials all over the country. In a recent study of revolutionary dress, Jennifer Harris concluded that David drew from historical, theatrical, and contemporary sources for his civil costume. The short, open tunic worn with close-fitting hose seemed to recall Renaissance fashion; the cloaks were reminiscent of classical drapery.[81]

Even more striking than the eclecticism and classicism of David's design is his obvious avoidance of the dress of the sans-culottes. If all men were to look alike, they were to do so in a suitably high-minded fashion. The leveling, if it was to take place, was to take place upward and not downward. Rather than representing a radical impulse toward equality, David's designs expressed a bourgeois fantasy of playing out the classics. In practice, it was obvious that only a bourgeois elite could afford to take on the role, and David's costumes were never manufactured. Nevertheless, the committee's request and David's response to it have more than anecdotal interest. They were part of an ongoing quest for the look of the republican. Dress, the mode of appearance, was an important aspect of the definition of revolutionary practice.

The search for an appropriate revolutionary costume incorporated all the ambiguities of revolutionary politics. Not only was David's project for civilian costume very different from the dress of the sans-culottes, but it was also only one part of a larger endeavor to provide distinctive costumes for military, legislative, judicial, and administrative functions as well. Six thousand copies of each of the engravings of these official costumes were ordered at the same time.[82] Although official costume was designed by David to look much like civilian costume, it was nonetheless distinct. Judges and legislators, for example, were to wear ankle-length cloaks.[83]

[80] Ibid., p. 299. A.N., AF II 66, Comite de Salut Public, Esprit public, Dossier 489: "Arts, Caricatures, Costume national, 1793-an III," piece no. 15, signed by Barère, Collot d'Herbois, Prieur, Carnot, Billaud-Varenne, and Robespierre.

[81] "The Red Cap," p. 307. [82] A.N., AF II 66, piece no. 19.

[83] Harris, "The Red Cap," p. 307.

The people were supposed to be able to recognize their representatives. Dress seemed to inevitably entail difference and differentiation. Two contradictory impulses were involved in David's project. On the one hand, the deputies or representatives of the people were supposed to be simply a transparent reflection of the people, that is, just like them, because part of them. For this reason, everyone was supposed to wear a new national uniform that would efface differences. On the other hand, the representatives were obviously other, different, not like the people exactly because they were the teachers, the governors, the guides of the people. Accordingly, the uniforms of officials were to be just distinct enough to permit recognition.

After the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Terror, the idea of civilian costume faded away. But official costume continued to preoccupy legislators. In October 1794 the reconstituted Committee of Public Safety agreed to pay the engraver Denon for his reproductions of David's designs; he was paid almost 20,000 francs for a total of nearly 30 thousand prints.[84] One of the last acts of the Convention was to pass a law prescribing official costume for the new Directory government: costumes were to be designed for the members of the two Councils, the Executive Directory, the ministers, state messengers, bailiffs, the judiciary, justices of the peace, and departmental and municipal administrations (25 October 1795).[85]

The law on official costume adopted in 1795 was based primarily on Grégoire's report of 14 September 1795. He provided the clearest rationale for official dress: "The language of signs has an eloquence of its own; distinctive costumes are part of this idiom for they arouse ideas and sentiments analogous to their object, especially when they take hold of the imagination with their vivid-

[84] A.N., AF II 66, pieces nos. 40–50.

[85] The deputy Boissier opened the session with a new presentation by the Committee on Public Instruction on costumes, but his project was denounced on the floor as resembling the dress of a Jacobin. Chénier declared that current dress would not do: "Les tableaux ou les statues ne supporteront jamais la mesquinerie de notre habit actuel, et le retreci de nos draperies. C'est cette forme de nos habits qui a rendu presque inéxécutable le beau tableau du Serment du jeu de Paume." Chénier's view reveals much of the thinking behind costumes; the deputies felt it necessary to dress the part of great men and this was only possible in the costume of ancient times. Hearing this, the Convention voted to adopt Grégoire's project instead. *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur* 26: 165 (12 brumaire an IV [3 November 1795]).

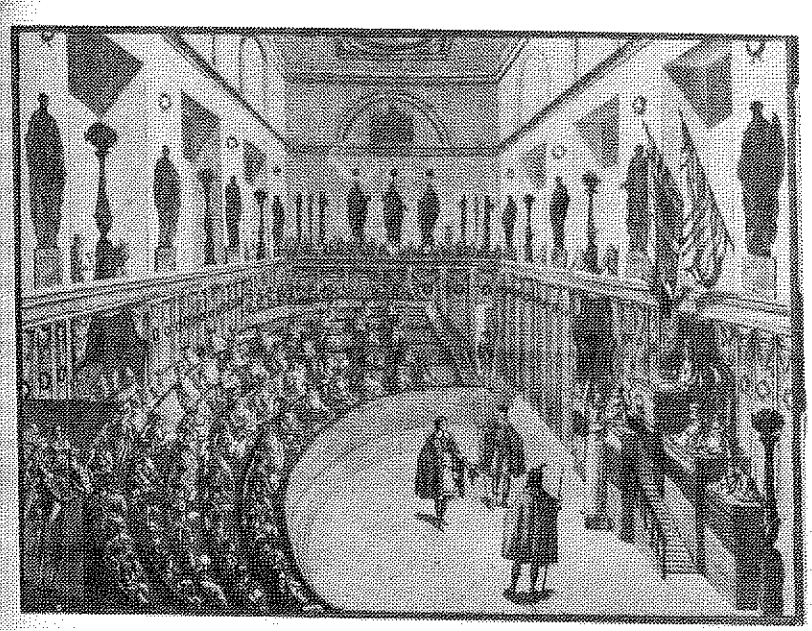
ness."[66] Costumes were not disguises or masks, but rather a means of enhancing the perception of natural truths. "The costume of the public official says to the citizens: Here is the man of the law. . . . A free people does not want an idol, but in everything it wants order, good customs, justice; a free people honors itself, respects itself, when honoring, respecting its legislators, its magistrates, in other words, its own work [*ouvrage*]."[67] Costumes for public officials would serve two related purposes: they would help delineate a specific political sphere by marking off public officials from the rest of the population, and in the process they would serve to establish greater political discipline, or what Grégoire called respect for legislators. The people would know they were represented and would be encouraged to honor and respect that representation as both distinct from themselves and emanating from their will.

When Grégoire spoke in 1795, he was concerned to avoid the democratic "excesses" associated with the reign of Terror:

> The costume will have not only the advantage of distinguishing in a certain manner the legislators, but also without doubt that of fixing a little French vivacity: from now on, the site of sessions will no longer be an unstable scene whose corridors are blocked without cease by those who are going in and out; the sessions will be perhaps less frequent or less long. . . . And this whirlwind of events and passions that in the space of three years has given birth to fifteen thousand decrees will be dissipated. Then we will save more time, which is the most precious thing after truth and virtue. All the sessions will be full of things, and the legislature, by the gravity of its bearing and the dignity of its costume, will recall the majesty of the nation.[68]

In this passage, Grégoire reveals how much the deputies expected from something as seemingly trivial as a toga [see plate 7]. By fixing the identity of the legislator, the costume would sharply differentiate between representer and represented, between the representatives of the nation and the people. Sessions would no longer be disturbed by those in the gallery who imagined themselves to have equal voice and who in the past were dressed much like those on

[66] *Du Costume des fonctionnaires publics. Rapport fait par Grégoire (Séance du 28 fructidor an III).*
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.



7. SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF ANCIENTS, 1798–99
(Photo from Cabinet des Estampes, courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale)

the floor. In other words, political differentiation and political order were to be produced by official costume. While debating about cloaks and hats, the deputies were developing their notions about politics, representation, and hierarchy.

Official costume continued to occupy the deputies for several years. Grégoire's report called for long robes of different colors and velvet hats [see plate 8]. Red, white, and blue were not surprisingly the dominant colors, and all the cloth was supposed to come from France. In November 1797 the Councils recognized that Grégoire's project was too difficult to complete, so they simplified the task by making the costumes of all deputies the same: a "French" coat of "national blue," a tricolor belt, a scarlet cloak *à la grecque*, and a velvet hat with tricolor aigrette.[69] Despite some difficulties with deliveries, the deputies were able to begin wearing their costumes in

[69] A.N., C 519 (no. 194). "Extrait du procès-verbal des séances du Conseil des Cinq-Cents," 29 brumaire an VI.

8. OFFICIAL COSTUMES, 1798–99
(Photo from Cabinet des Estampes, courtesy of the Bibliotheque nationale)

February of the following year.[70] The public reception was not as enthusiastic as Grégoire had hoped. The *Moniteur* observed that "this great quantity of red clothing fatigues the eyes extremely; yet it must be admitted that this costume has in it something beautiful, imposing and truly senatorial." Nevertheless, the editor warned, only regular and consistent wearing of the outfit would stifle possible sarcasm.[71] One foreign visitor to Paris found the legislative costume "quite noble and picturesque; but, as it is too far removed from ordinary dress, it has a theatrical air . . . and this defect keeps it from being, at least for now, seriously dignified and truly imposing."[72]

Under the Directory regime (1795–99), the concern with civilian

[70] The cloaks were mistakenly confiscated in Lyon as English contraband! (A.N., C 521 [no. 225], "Résolutions du Conseil des Cinq-Cents approuvées par le Conseil des Anciens," 27 nivôse an VI).

[71] *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur* 29: 158 (3 ventôse an VI [21 February 1798]).

[72] Henri Meister, *Souvenirs de mon dernier voyage à Paris (1795)* (Paris, 1910), p. 106.

dress did not disappear, even though the legislature had given up on the notion of a civilian uniform. Dress had never ceased being a personal freedom (it was declared a right by the Convention on 29 October 1793), yet as late as December 1798 the Council of Five Hundred discussed the possibility of punishing those who did not wear the national cockade and forbidding foreigners to wear it at all.[73] Outside the halls of the legislature, the "signs of rallying" continued to be as potentially divisive as ever. In 1798 an illustrated brochure entitled *Caricatures politiques* described the five "classes" of men who could be found among republicans.[74] The classes were distinguishable by their principles, their banners, and their mottos, that is, their politics. But they were even more readily recognizable by their everyday dress or costume and by their "genres," or demeanor in the world.

The "independents" were clearly the true republicans; they were "well-educated and capable of great things." In appearance, they had a proud and noble look, an assured demeanor, clean clothes, white linen; and they usually wore close-fitting pants of fine cloth, ankle boots, morning coats, and round hats (plate 9). In contrast, the "exclusives" were of a brusque, "suspecting," and restless humor (plate 10). Their eyes did not accommodate well to the daylight; they felt more at home in darkness (a none-too-subtle reference to their less-than-civilized nature). Their hair was ordinarily neglected; their clothing sometimes dirty. They wore short jackets, pants of common wool, and shoes tied with leather straps. They donned outlandish hats and most of the time could be found smoking short clay pipes, which gave them horribly bad breath. The "exclusives" were the militant leaders of the sans-culottes.

You could tell a good republican by how he dressed. The right dress was a sign of virtue, and dress in general made manifest the political character of the person. The costume of a true republican was predictable, whereas the "sell-outs" (*les achetés*) never had their own look, the "systematics" changed every two weeks, and the "fat cats" (*les enrichis*) wore whatever pleased them as long as it was glittering and luxurious. This refinement of categorization based on dress was most typical of political concerns under the Di-

[73] Reported in the *Moniteur* on 15 frimaire an VII (5 December 1798) and 7 nivôse an VII (27 December 1798).

[74] Signed Beauvert, an VI

9. "THE INDEPENDENT"
(Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale)

rectory. After the fall of Robespierre, political distinctions became more and more complicated, and as a result ascertaining the look of a republican became an increasingly delicate and subtle operation. Even among republicans, there were five classes of men.

Civilian and official costume became such a focus of concern because dress was a political sign. Under the Old Regime, the different orders and many professions and trades had been identified by their clothing: nobles, clergymen, judges, and even masons were known by what they wore. Revolutionaries wanted to break with the system of invidious social distinctions, but they continued to believe that dress revealed something about the person. Dress was, as it were, politically transparent: you could tell a person's political character from the way he or she dressed. At its most extreme, this conviction led to the search for an appropriate civilian uniform. If virtue was to be found equally in every class or group,

10. "THE EXCLUSIVE"
(Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale)

then there was no justification for social or political distinctions of dress. All true republicans should look alike.

On the other hand, republicans recognized the distance their new nation had to travel before becoming truly free. The people had to be recast first in the republican mold. Dress in this perspective was not a reflection of character; it was a way of remaking character. Wearing a national civil uniform would make citizens more national, more uniformly republican, just as speaking French rather than dialect would make them more nationally minded and civic spirited. Wearing red togas would make legislators more serious in their bearing and consequently make the political process itself more successfully republican. Dress was not so much the measure as the maker of the man.

The uncertainties about the political meaning of dress were made even more acute by the republican confusions about equality.

The Directory politicians knew they had to confront this issue head-on because they wanted to avoid what they considered the excesses of the previous regime. Hence the author of the *Caricatures politiques* explicitly distanced the good republicans ("the independents") from the sincere, but brutish, sans-culottes ("the exclusives"). The bourgeois social element in this distinction was not hard to detect; good republicans dressed like good bourgeois, without the pretensions associated with the aristocracy of the Old Regime. Even in the midst of the Terror, the deputies in the Convention had worried about the deterioration of standards of dress and personal behavior. Grégoire spoke for the Jacobin government when he denounced "this practice of foul talk whose contagion has even overtaken many women. . . . This degradation of the language, of taste and of morality is truly counterrevolutionary. . . . A decent, careful [*soigné*] language is alone worthy of the exquisite feelings [*sentiments exquis*] of a republican."[75] He might as well have substituted dress for speech in this passage. If there was hope for the lower classes, it was the hope that they would learn to emulate their betters; their betters did not wish to degrade themselves.

The chief confusion about equality was not social, however, but political. Few if any of the Jacobin leaders believed that everyone should be or could be socially equal; few of them wanted to look like sans-culottes. Like Rousseau, the Jacobins believed that extremes of inequality were dangerous, but they did not imagine that the government could do other than ameliorate gross inequities. The more pressing problem was posed by democracy and in particular by the relation between the people and its representatives. Even the Directorials believed that the people should participate in government through frequent elections; the representatives should be, as Grégoire said, their *ouvrage*. But what were the limits on this relationship? As the Revolution moved forward, there seemed to be none. A constant stream of petitions, letters, and addresses brought the people's demands to the attention of the deputies. When the Assembly moved to Paris in October 1789, the legislators found themselves face to face with the people of Paris, who were not reluctant to vocalize their likes and dislikes within the precincts of the legislature. In mid-May 1793 the Convention moved to new

[75] *Rapport sur les inscriptions des monuments publics, par le citoyen Grégoire (séance du 22 nivôse an 2).*

quarters in the *Salle de Spectacle* of the Tuileries, making audience participation all the more possible. Even then, Robespierre was not satisfied; he suggested that the Convention build a meeting place large enough to hold 12 thousand spectators, for only then would the general will, the voice of reason, and the public interest be heard.[76] Popular participation was to be taken quite literally.

After the experience of extended democracy in 1793–94, one of the primary concerns of the writers of the new Constitution of the Year III (1795) was to limit the number and role of spectators.[77] Robespierre's successors believed that the lines between the people and their representatives had to be more clearly drawn. The political arena had to be more sharply delineated if political life was to have any prospect of stability. As Grégoire claimed, official costumes would distinguish the legislators "in a certain manner" and eliminate the "unstable scene" that disturbed the working of legislative sessions. Official costume was not justified because it would reestablish social hierarchy but because it would encourage proper republican (political) respect. Legislators, judges, administrators, and military officers were not necessarily socially better, at least not in theory, but they were politically different. The deputies hoped that official costumes would stabilize the system of political signs and eliminate the constant uncertainties in political interpretation. Official dress would identify the voice of the nation.

The costumes did not instill new political habits as quickly as the deputies hoped, and the bright red togas did not prevent the rise of Napoleon. Among those in scarlet robes were the men who brought Bonaparte into the corridors of power. Republicanism was indeed a state of mind more than a fashion. Yet, for all the outlandishness and bombast of these efforts, republicans had learned an important and enduring set of truths. The apprenticeship of republicanism did require new habits and new customs, if not new costumes. The Republic could not survive without a circumscribed political arena, respect for legislators, and a politically educated populace. The survival of republicanism after the fall of the Re-

[76] Joseph Butwin, "The French Revolution as *Theatrum Mundi*," *Research Studies* 43 (1975): 141–52, esp. pp. 144–45.

[77] Although the sessions of the Councils were open to the public, the number of spectators was limited to half the number of deputies (*Projet de Constitution pour la République française et discours préliminaire prononcé par Boissy-D'Anglas, au nom de la Commission des Onze, dans la séance du 5 Messidor an III* [Niort, n.d.], pp. 93–94).

public and the remarkable similarities between political practice under the Directory and politics under the long-lived Third Republic show that the republicans of the 1790s were not utopian dreamers. Their red togas did not catch on, and many Black Virgins survived. But Marianne, political banquets, red caps, the tricolor flag, and "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" all became part of a standard repertoire of opposition and contestation. At the time, who could have predicted which would last and which would fade? It was only in the strife of the moment, the helter-skelter of republican politics, that the symbols and rituals of republicanism were tried, tested, and ultimately chosen. Without them, there would have been no collective memory of republicanism and no tradition of revolution.

3

The Imagery of Radicalism

All political authority requires what Clifford Geertz calls a "cultural frame" or "master fiction" in which to define itself and make its claims. The legitimacy of political authority depends on its resonance with more global, even cosmic cultural presuppositions, for political life is "enfolded" in general conceptions of how reality is put together.[1] Many anthropologists and sociologists insist, in addition, that every cultural frame has a "center," which has sacred status.[2] The sacred center makes possible a kind of social and political mapping; it gives the members of a society their sense of place. It is the heart of things, the place where culture, society, and politics come together.

French political authority under the Old Regime fits this model well; under the monarchy, the king was the sacred center, and the cultural frame of his authority was firmly fixed in long-standing notions of a Catholic, hierarchical order.[3] Kings stood between mere mortals and the Christian God in the great chain of being, and kingship was therefore mystical and quasi-divine. As late as January 1792, a conservative newspaper gave this explanation: "Just as the Eternal attaches from his all-powerful hand, to the foot itself of his Throne, the first link in the great chain, which ties all

[1] Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark, eds., *Culture and its Creators: Essays in Honor of Edward Shils* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 150–71.

[2] Ibid., and Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago, 1975).

[3] I do not mean to imply that the Old Regime cultural frame was static, because it too went through a long process of development. See, for example, Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957). Kantorowicz shows how central the king's body was to the monarchical cultural frame; it was the focus of most "political" discussion.