Women of the popular classes in Paris made a major contribution to what is most significant, even unique, about the Revolution: its achievement of the most democratically based popular sovereignty in the eighteenth-century western world. Feminist claims for civil and political rights growing out of Enlightenment liberalism never became central to the Revolutionary power struggles and were denied by the Napoleonic Code, but the political activities of nonelite women were at the heart of Revolutionary politics. Traditionally and typically, revolutionary democracy has been studied principally as it affected male populations; yet male leaders of the Revolution themselves remarked upon, exploited, and often attempted to rein in the activism of female revolutionaries. Their observations of women’s mass interventions in Revolutionary politics indicate the limits of the first experiences of democracy in France.¹

Over a century and a half, the processes of monarchical centralization, in combination with economic, demographic, intellectual, political, and administrative change affecting government and people, contributed to the transformation of issues that once had been regional and local into issues with a national focus and impact. Issues traditionally adjudicated in household and parish now were nationally aired and not infrequently resolved centrally. Governors and governed were brought into more frequent contact over matters of general concern, such as tax collecting, the administration of justice, and the regulation of food supplies.²

The Enlightenment was one expression of this larger transformative process of nationalization. Enlightenment cultural concerns for legal reform, a national system of education, public health, and better systems of transportation and communication all affected women as well as men, sometimes the same way, sometimes differently. Some
Enlightenment writers urged the extension of monarchical administrative organization to carry out these reforms in areas of education and law where women would be positively affected. Others joined an Enlightenment protest against the consequences of centralization and stressed, instead, the protection of the individual against government expansion. Women writers opposed any government extensions that would threaten the individual's rights to full and free self-expression. Those who spoke from this standpoint often ended up formulating some of the most explicitly feminist demands of the Enlightenment, advocating political and legal equality for women.

The processes of centralization and nationalization had considerable impact in the economic sphere, where the government—vacillating between policies of intervention and traditional regulation, on the one hand, and economic liberty, on the other hand—generated in both the urban and rural populace concerns, anxieties, and uncertainties that affected and eventually transformed their attitudes towards governing authorities. During frequent disturbances growing out of these shifts by the government in its economic policies, women of the people communicated their economic grievances to royal officials. Thus, the tradition of women being centrally involved in subsistence crises and putting pressure on municipal authorities at the Hôtel de Ville developed after the 1760s into a politics of protest against royal ministers and national government and was one attack on the legitimacy of the monarchy.

All these intellectual, social, political, and economic trends had increased the number of people, both men and women, who were aware of the implication of politics for their personal lives. But it was the circumstances of the Revolution itself that allowed Parisian women to stake out the field of their participation, progressively enlarge its scope, and intensify its impact.

These revolutionary circumstances were unique to Paris. Women in the provinces who enjoyed a degree of economic security met in groups during the Revolution, knitted stockings for soldiers, formed clubs to study revolutionary principles, or held ceremonies and gave prizes to children who learned revolutionary slogans and songs. Poor provincial women became, perhaps, the most pathetic victims of the Revolution. For them, a conscript army, a dechristianized republic, a beheaded monarch, and Jacobin rule meant nothing but loss. For these women, unlike the women of Paris, the Revolution did not create institutional networks of local groups in government with direct and visible ties to national institutions offering opportunities for the creation of collective, female political influence.  

Paris became the Revolutionary capital, the headquarters of the national legislatures and the central Jacobin Society. Government was no longer centered in the nobility at Versailles but in Paris, in the
national legislature, the Commune, and the section assemblies—all of which had galleries open to the public. With such institutions literally in their midst, government could become an immediate daily experience of the women in Paris and, indeed, of the common men as well.

After January 1789, as the hope of regeneration took hold of an entire nation with the electoral process for the Estates General, women in groups joined men in submitting grievance lists, called cahiers de doléances, for the deputies to carry to the king at Versailles. These were petitions demanding specific occupational rights for women who were formerly members of guilds; other times, they were general requests for midwifery training, education for women, and other public policies to benefit women.4

Olympe de Gouges was a butcher’s daughter from Montauban who wrote several plays and pamphlets on the coming Estates General. In her Les Droits de la femme, she boldly stated that the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” was not being applied to women. She appeared to be demanding the vote for women and a national assembly of women, stressed that men must yield rights to women, and made a strong plea for women’s education.5

Etta Palm d’Aelders, a Dutch woman who had been in Paris since 1774, made several demands upon radical clubs and the national legislatures. In February 1791, she introduced an ambitious plan to form women’s patriotic societies in each section of Paris and in each of the eighty-three departments. She tried unsuccessfully to found a woman’s society and later became an ardent advocate of an armed female battalion. In a plea she made to the Legislative Assembly in April, 1792, d’Aelders asked that women be admitted to civilian and military positions, that the education of girls be set up on the same foundations as that of men, that the age of female majority be twenty-one, that there be political liberty and equality of rights for both sexes, and that there be a decree permitting divorce.6

These frankly feminist demands, including Condorcet’s recommenda-
dation of suffrage for women of property, were never debated or seriously discussed by those drawing up Revolutionary legislation.7 Successive governments after 1795, the Directory and the Napoleonic regime, eroded even those legal and civic gains that women had made in the first six years of the Revolution. The Napoleonic Code did not perpetuate most of the Revolutionary advances in women’s legal equality, although it did keep equal inheritance and permit divorce until the Restoration. In general, married women were considered legal minors, were denied legal ownership of property, and were forbidden to make contracts without the consent of fathers or husbands. The double standard of morality was incorporated in private law dealing with divorce, child custody, and alimony.
The most significant dimension of women’s Revolutionary achievement was the direct participation in public affairs by women of the popular classes. These women were active not because they translated “feminist” demands into revolutionary petitions, riots, and other popular manifestations but because they claimed that the sovereign people, male and female, had rights to act on that sovereignty on a daily basis where government touched their lives.

On September 22, 1789, a Paris newspaper, Le Petit Gautier, published the following anecdote. The morning after the taking of the Bastille, the editor had seen a mother with her children pulling down a small wooden toll station on the bridge behind the Arsenal gardens in Paris. When the editor asked why she was knocking it down, she replied: “Haven’t you ever paid your toll on this bridge? I demolish abuses, and I am going to make my pot boil with the wood of despotism.”

Materially and symbolically, this nameless woman was converting the supports of monarchy into fuel against it. She can stand for thousands of women of the popular classes who used the corporate and institutional supports of the paternalistic Old Regime to boil up a revolutionary doctrine of popular sovereignty and to create a participatory democracy in which they, along with men of humble rank, acquired de facto citizenship.

The popular classes’ claims to the rights of active citizens were put before lawmakers right from the beginning of the Revolution, after a century-long shift in attitudes towards the poor. The philosophes especially had seen the strength of the masses as a double-edged sword. Unsheathed, it was potentially threatening to public order, but it also could be wielded in combat against despotism.

This view of the people as simultaneously dangerous and useful produced two radically different interpretations of citizenship in the first six months of the Revolution. Proponents of a constitutional monarchy stressed national unity as the cure for despotism, and this unity became the basis of sovereignty in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Article III of the Declaration read: “The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation; no group, no individual may exercise authority not emanating expressly therefrom.”

This concept of perfect unity was quickly abandoned when the deputies writing the Constitution responded to the tasks of delineating the rights of citizens by narrowing the male electorate and instituting indirect elections.

As this progressive and protective narrowing of citizenship and sovereignty was being codified, the politicized masses, who in part were provoking the process, were seeing themselves as the sovereign nation and acting accordingly. Most significant is that women, both demographically and politically, were a principal force among that
populace. Their tactics included frequent meetings in clubs, popular societies, and section assemblies; surveillance; boycotts; *taxation populaire*; petitions; strikes; denunciations; attendance in the galleries of the Constituent Assembly; popular veto; exercise of the right of recall; open and public deliberations; and democratization of membership in the National Guard.

Thus, two fundamentally different and incompatible concepts of citizenship were being worked out simultaneously: within the committees and sessions of the National Assembly; and outside the legislature in the cafés and arcades of the Palais-Royal, in local clubs and assemblies, and in the streets. On the one hand, constitutional legislation legitimized an abstract nation of passive citizens, who embodied a sovereignty that it in no way acted upon; and on the other hand, singularly aware and active Parisians, men and women, were claiming sovereignty by practicing an almost daily intervention in public affairs.

Rousseau conceptualized an Enlightenment theory of popular sovereignty; the radical journalists shaped its tactics and formulas. Popular sovereignty also can be considered a logical development from the long tradition of collective identity and activities shared by the Parisian *menu popule*: common interests in security and subsistence; communal daily labor among laundresses or *poissardes* or market women; collective identity fostered by *corps* and *métiers*: parish-based church and charitable activities; and finally participation in festivals, religious processions, and demonstrations.

Women were inextricably bound up in networks of collective experiences common to the nonelites of Paris. It was unthinkable and impossible for authorities and radical men alike to separate them. Modern historians—George Rudé and Richard Cobb, for example—have seen women's activism as part of an insurrectionary tradition in times of dearth and as an indication that women became politically and publicly active only during subsistence crises.11 But women's activism was much more regular and frequent, and, above all, was based on a broader range of principles, objectives, and tactics than had previously been acknowledged.

Women of the people played central roles in the public space of Paris and Versailles under the Old Regime. Women monopolized certain trades. The *dames de la Halle* ran the stalls of the central markets and the fishwives sold their husbands' catch. Some guilds exclusively for women survived *de facto* after Turgot's official abolition; guild women submitted demands for protections to the Estates General in the spring of 1789. Women participated in religious and seasonal festivals and processions; they instigated insurrectionary protests, like *taxation populaire*. Finally, and most significantly, women had established roles...
for themselves in key events that legitimized the monarchy. Poissardes verified the birth of a royal male heir, corporations of women were part of the celebration of royal birthdays and marriages, and deputations were sent to the king in times of drought and dearth. It was on the base of these traditions that women of the people built their Revolutionary expectations and, in company with male radicals, eventually claimed full sovereignty.

In August and September 1789, Paris was in turmoil over the high cost and scarcity of bread; in Versailles, the National Assembly was struggling to define the fundamental rights of citizens and to place limits on monarchical authority. During these weeks, popular agitation in which women were involved and thirty-four marches of thanksgiving and supplication where they were the principal participants seemed to many contemporary observers ominous portents of social unrest and political upheaval. What is strikingly new is male observers' linkage of traditional festivals with Revolutionary political and military institutions: an elected city government headed by Mayor Bailly and a bourgeois National Guard commanded by Lafayette. Bailly and Lafayette were at the center of a network of political power. As leaders of a municipal revolution, they conspicuously displayed the political strength behind their positions to the deputies and the king at Versailles, but they also were struggling to limit and restrain the passions of an aroused city—hungry, seething with rumor and tension, and heady with doctrines of popular sovereignty discussed in every café and on every corner.\(^{12}\)

On August 7, a deputation of dames de la halle went to Versailles to congratulate the king and queen on the beginnings of the constitution. The traditional connection between royal legitimacy and women's perennial concerns over subsistence takes on a new significance when we reflect that the market women were congratulating the king for acquiescing to a constitution that would limit his powers. They addressed him as "our dear man, our good friend and our father," in that order; they asked the queen to "open your heart to us, as we have opened ours to you." These are hardly phrases of subservient loyalty; they emphasize bonds of affection but, simultaneously, connections of power.\(^{13}\)

In Paris, the line of march of the thanksgiving processions symbolically linked the protection of Paris by its patron saint (the Église Sainte Geneviève), by the national church (Notre Dame), by its new representative government (the Hôtel de Ville), and by its military force (the National Guard).

Bailly, the mayor, was trying to oversee the policing of these women's processions and deputations, but he was also quite willing to exploit them to demonstrate the political might of Paris to the royal
ministers at Versailles. On August 20, he received a reply to his request that the women from the St. Martin market be granted an audience with the king. The minister replied that he had been willing to admit the women from la halle but no more. "I ask you to forbid others to come from Paris. You can easily see that such a claim would soon arise in all the markets in Paris, which would create a mob and perhaps generate unrest among the people."  

Bailly was trying to control and legalize deputations sent to Versailles while at the same time reaffirming (through conspicuous displays) the roles of the market women and popular classes as the principal supports of royal legitimacy and controls on royal authority. The minister, on the other hand, was apprehensive about an organized group of Parisian market women precisely because their encounters with the king could be exploited to expand popular mobilization.

A sense of uneasiness increased among active citizens as the month of September wore on and the women's processions continued. The bookseller Hardy, who initially had dismissed critics of the Parisian processions, was palpably disturbed by a march he described at considerable length on September 14. Hardy reported that there were between one thousand and twelve hundred marchers, a "good portion" of the men and women from the Faubourg Saint Antoine: six or seven hundred girls and women, marching four by four; National Guardsmen; trumpeters and drummers; vainqueurs de la Bastille, carrying weapons they had used along with a wooden model of the Bastille; and eleven debtors, whose debts the marchers had paid to secure their release from jail. Hardy found this march both ridiculous and frightening:

Many people found there was something terrifying in [the procession's] arrangement, composition, and immensity. Sensible people found these public acts which could not be interrupted and of which piety was unfortunately not the full motive, ridiculous. They thought it would have been infinitely wiser for each citizen and each citoyenne to thank the Almighty individually . . . rather than collectively . . .

The radical journalist Prudhomme was not so apprehensive about the procession of September 14. In fact, he remarked, "if we lack bread and laws, at least we have pageantry and devotions to console us." The march to him was a clear celebration of the conquest of despotism by "the courage and the power of liberty."

Both observers differed radically in their evaluation of the implications of this march but agreed that it signaled the potency of an organized populace. The women marchers were noticed and described, but their presence was not remarked as unusual or especially significant. It was rather the orchestration of different groupings that struck them: girls and women going to pray to the Virgin, the Bastille
conquerors, workers from the Faubourg, released debtors, and the armed National Guard—all bearing symbols of hunger and harvest, fallen despotism, and the armed might of a free citizenry.

These two months of ceremony, agitation, and uneasiness set the stage for the second of the great revolutionary journées. The October days gave the king further notice of his impotence, reminded the constitution makers in the National Assembly of the debt they owed to popular protest, and taught the nation that its destiny was increasingly in the hands of the people of Paris.

Women’s behavior inside the meeting hall of the National Assembly on October 5 was a demonstration of female political power that was of immense significance for the development of popular sovereignty during the Revolution.17 When the women from Paris swarmed into the meeting hall of the Assembly—not restricting themselves to the galleries but milling about the floor, sitting in deputies’ chairs, and, later, in Mounier’s absence, even sitting in the president’s chair—they were appropriating the tradition of abbeys of misrule, using dramaturgy and farce to ridicule the rule of governing authorities. They shouted, chanted, interrupted debate, and demanded that the deputies discuss subsistence problems in Paris. The Journal de Paris noted their odd dress; some wore elegant clothing, but hunting knives or half-swords hung from their skirts. “M. le comte de Mirabeau requested an order from the President to restore liberty and dignity to the National Assembly; but orders are more difficult to execute against women because it is almost impossible to apply force against weakness.”18 When Mounier returned from his audience with the king, the women willingly enough gave back his chair as presiding officer; but they chided him for his support of “this miserable Mister Veto,” a reference to the controversy over the royal veto. Mounier, as we might expect, interpreted that as evidence of their stupidity and ignorance; but we can also see these remarks as impromptu farce, festival personification of what was to be ridiculed.19 Mounier’s report coupled the women marchers with the vile low men, both making up a mob of outrageous and menacing bas peuple whom he did not know how to handle, except by feeding them like animals: his response to their demands and threats was to order that dinner be brought for them. These riffraff, literally substituting themselves for the nation’s rightful representatives by sitting in the president’s chair and voting on motions, were for Mounier the ultimate dramatization of Rousseauist doctrine; they administered the shock that propelled him right out of the National Assembly and back to Dauphiné.20

The women’s goals—a combination of subsistence and new constitutional objectives—seemed clear enough to a trenchant observer like Hardy, although they were obscured by police investigators and, we
might add, by modern historians. The women wanted bread, plenty of it at an affordable price, and regular policing of grain transports to assure continued price availability. Hardy also reported their announced intention of bringing the king and Assembly to Paris and obtaining the king’s consent to the constitution. Prudhomme added their intention to protest and punish the Flanders Royal Regiment’s insult to the Revolutionary cockade at a banquet some days earlier.

The reactions of radical journalists and polemists were ambivalent. They were eager to celebrate another triumph of the Parisians over reactionary and conservative elements, yet uneasy that the sovereign people were bursting out of control. The writers resolved their ambivalence by representing the women as heroines, larger-than-life figures to serve as inspirational symbols, rather than as people with a dangerously loud political voice. The unknown author of a polemic, *Les Héroïnes de Paris*, ascribed to the marchers a sophisticated political objective: to return the king to Paris where he would live under a permanent people’s surveillance. He credited them with nerve and energy that had to be reined in: “They must not embark upon any more expeditions which could degrade them.” They must become disciplined; they must not drink in excess; and they must not model themselves after charlatans, such as street players, jugglers, magicians, and uncontrollable popular entertainers. Their political roles should be limited to maintaining surveillance over guards at tollgates to prevent rotten fruit and spoiled grain from being imported into Paris. In short, this nervous sympathizer was calling for the women’s metamorphosis into *bonnes bourgeoises*.

Radical revolutionaries observing the complex confrontations among the women of Paris, their allies in the National Guard, the monarch, his defenders, and the National Assembly were, in fact, reporting collisions and uneasy collaborations between practitioners of popular sovereignty and defenders of constitutional monarchy. They have taught us to read the evidence from October 1789 from the bottom up, seeing popular politics as a developing phenomenon with roots in traditional popular culture and connections to revolutionary institutional innovations. In the October Days, women were at a transitional moment. There were elements of ritual drama in their actions—playing leader, judging judges, punishing those who escape punishment the rest of the year. But they were not parading through the town square on a holiday; they were invading the palace and the National Assembly on a rainy weekday. They were oddly costumed, and some were even elegantly dressed; but they were armed. Prudhomme, for one, strained to read this behavior as a manifestation of love between the people and their king; he dismissed aristocrats who tried to seduce the women by telling them they would have bread if the king had his full authority.
But Hardy, Prudhomme, most deputies, and probably the whole politically conscious nation knew better. The people of Paris, women prominently in the forefront, had invaded the hall of their representatives, captured their king and queen, and placed them under their permanent and constant surveillance.

The next morning, the royal family was conducted to Paris almost as captives in their carriage. They were surrounded by women with pikes bearing the heads of murdered guards and chanting that they were bringing back "the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's apprentice," hardly traditional expressions of respect and loyalty to a fatherly monarch. Less than four days later, the king and queen appeared before people gathered in the Tuileries garden in Paris. Hardy's descriptions documented the erosion of royal legitimacy. Many in the crowd refused to bare their heads; no one cried "vive le roi"; and there were inarticulate murmurs of gross epithets, which, Hardy added, "signified absolutely nothing." The point is that they signified everything, the shattered trust in the king that would undermine the constitutional monarchy before it was even off the drawing boards.

Within the next weeks, the National Assembly took up residence in Paris and, at the request of the Paris municipality, decreed martial law, which was to be enforced by the National Guard. The precipitating incident was the lynching of a baker by a crowd led by women. The decree stated that, after martial law had been announced, "all assemblages, armed or not, are declared criminal acts, to be dispersed by force." Before dispersing, however, the demonstrators could present a petition containing their grievance in a delegation of six. The people, men and women, had to reduce their very powerful collective demonstrations to six-person delegations or face the guns of the authorities.

In the year and a half that followed, the National Assembly completed its blueprint for a constitutional monarchy and passed a number of laws limiting the rights of citizens: the suffrage decrees, prohibition of collective petitions, and a law prohibiting strikes. What underlay these regulations were particular interpretations of sovereignty, the individual, and the state—interpretations that placed women once again at the center of the debate.

On May 9, 1791, the Assembly took up the issue of collective petitions, which were petitions submitted on behalf of an organization or a group that did not bear individual signatures. Clearly underlying the discussion was the sense that Revolutionary organizations and popular societies had their roots in the corporate underpinnings of unlimited monarchy, rather than in the Enlightenment notion of individualism. The deputy Le Chapelier declared: "in a free government there are but two kinds of rights, those of citizens [and] those of the nation." If popular societies were allowed to punish the results of their deliberations and circulate petitions for signatures, they would
become influential and powerful and might undermine the whole authority of representative government. Individual rights would be lost to corporate bodies. The people must speak only through the voices of their representatives.27

This view did not go unchallenged. On the second day of debate, the deputy Fréteau stated that the debate so far had omitted “a very worthwhile portion of society—women. I ask whether a widow could be prohibited from presenting a petition to the National Assembly.” His remarks were applauded. The wording finally adopted in the law, which allowed only petitions individually signed, was “The right of petition belongs to any individual.” One particularly disgruntled deputy, Toulongeon, responded, “You have just extended the right of petition to any citizen, to women, to children, to minors, to foreigners.”28

We turn to the radical phase of the Revolution, the period of Jacobin ascendancy (beginning in the summer of 1793), and to the activity of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, an exclusively female society first officially registered with municipal authorities early in May 1793. The response of Pierre-Joseph-Alexis Roussel and his English guest, Lord Bedford, to a meeting of the society they attended in the fall of 1793 is particularly instructive. Having pictured the Revolutionary Republicans as organized women with a self-conscious awareness of women’s proven abilities in military affairs, politics, and administration, Roussel and his English visitor wanted to dismiss, as delusions of “overheated brains,” women’s plans for expanding the organizational bases of their influence. Yet they had to acknowledge that the society’s propositions were dangerous precisely because women already enjoyed in the private sphere a “universal and consequently dangerous ascendancy.” Giving women “credit in government” would cause “new discord.” In the end, Roussel admitted indirectly that denying women their political rights, including “credit in government,” was a last desperate stratagem for preventing their “ascendancy” from overflowing the boundary between the public and the private spheres to find its most effective organized expression in the political arena.29

In late October, a brawl involving the Revolutionary Republicans and the market women provided the Jacobins in the Convention with their excuse for a full-blown investigation of the society and a clampdown. This repression came at a point of rupture in relationships between the Parisian working poor, including women of the popular classes, and the Montagnard government. The Montagnards were reluctant to enforce laws decreeing political terror and stringent price controls. They were threatened by radically independent, grass roots politics that the Revolutionary Republicans practiced daily, along with a larger sans-culotte population.
Reporting to the Convention for the Committee of General Security on October 30, the deputy Amar recommended outright suppression of all women's clubs and associations. He based this recommendation on openly sexist argumentation. "Should women exercise political rights and meddle in affairs of government?" Lacking in knowledge, attention span, devotion, steadfastness, self-abnegation, self-direction, rhetorical skills, and powers of resistance to oppression—all sine qua non conditions for fulfilling public functions—women were constitutionally incapable of governing. "Should women meet in political associations?" The purpose of these associations—unveiling enemy maneuvers, education, and surveillance—were declared incompatible with women's natural roles, "the cares to which nature calls them" and which, interestingly enough, conformed to "the general order of society." Acting on Amar's combined claims that the Revolutionary Republican Women were politically dangerous, and even more fundamentally, were inappropriately and unnaturally political in the first place, the Convention voted to prohibit all women's societies.30

Commenting on this decision, Prudhomme wrote in his Révolutions de Paris, exhorting the newly silenced women:

Citoyennes, be honest and diligent girls, tender and modest wives, wise mothers, and you will be good patriots. True patriotism consists of fulfilling one's duties and valuing only rights appropriate to each according to sex and age, and not wearing the [liberty] cap and pantaloons and not carrying pike and pistol. Leave those to men who are born to protect you and make you happy. Wear clothing suitable to your morals and occupations; and always punish courageously, as you have just done, any crime which tends to disorganize society by changing sexes or indecently confusing them with anti-civic and perfidious intentions.31

On 27 Brumaire, when a deputation of women wearing red caps appeared at an assembly of the Paris Commune, Chaumette, speaking for the municipal legislators, condemned women dressed in this way as "denatured women" and "viragos." They abandoned household chores and the cribs of their children; more fundamentally, they dared transgress the barrier between the public and domestic spaces; and, finally, they were "impudent women who want to become men." Chaumette demanded and secured a vote from the Commune to refuse hearings to deputations of women except by special decree, while permitting them for citoyennes as individuals.32

From the outset of the Revolution, women of the popular classes were grouped by male authorities with the passive male citizens. They participated as equals in Revolutionary politics, sometimes along with men and sometimes in gender-specific groups, such as the dames de la fâche of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. When men
were subject to martial law, limits on petitions, and restrictions on organizations, so were women. It proved impossible to draw a sharp line between the public and domestic spheres and to confine women on the domestic side of that line. Furthermore, the authorities did not try very hard to confine women, since they were accustomed to women's public activities taking place in the public spaces and at times of political manifestations and ceremonies. Women could not hold processions in the rooms where they did their spinning, nor could they verify the dauphin's birth and bear petitions as members of women's guilds without leaving their hearths. Women functioning traditionally within public spaces made it categorically impossible to stop them from remaining there during the Revolution and to stop them from institutionalizing their activities in newly created Revolutionary organizations like popular societies and section assemblies.

The attitudes of the police agents in the fall of 1793 show that there was a current of opinion just waiting to be tapped, a current reinforced by the ambivalences about women's moral and intellectual suitability for public affairs and powerful enough to drown the women's political movement. The charges against the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women were compounded of claims that they were counter-revolutionaries and that they had no business in public forums in the first place, since their natural place and their moral duties were in the home. Chaumette and the Jacobins accomplished in the fall of 1793 what Bailly and Mounier and Le Chapelier and many others before them had been trying to do since the late summer of 1789. They outlawed the collective expression of demands by passive citizens, male and female, for public roles as the sovereign people, as self-determining citizens. They harnessed a power that had been gathering force during four Revolutionary years, that had roots in the organic and communal politics of the Old Regime, and that had gathered a rich variety of new institutional connections in the Revolutionary press, clubs, and sections.

The Jacobins' success against the Revolutionary Republicans meant the triumph of the bourgeois revolution over the popular revolution and, above all, the end of women's serious involvement in political, public life.

Scorned or seduced, maligned or mythologized, condemned or congratulated, women in Revolutionary Paris were seldom understood by historians for what they really were—the sovereign people, inventing with their feet every bit as much as writers with their pens the meaning and function of a new doctrine of legitimacy. There were two political nations in this France, which in 1789 appeared to have embraced the concept of popular sovereignty. The first, which ultimately triumphed, reserved active political influence for a new
elite of merit, money, and talent and restricted the passive citizens to an undifferentiated, supported, silent emanation of abstractions. The second was a nation of sovereign people that incorporated female passive citizens along with male, whether by spontaneous engagement, exhortation, or passive tolerance. It is this merging of men and women of the popular classes that differentiates the situation of women in Paris from their situation anywhere else in the age of the democratic revolutions. This pattern of alliances with women by radical men occurred whenever and wherever there was overlap in ideologies and interests. When the Jacobins won full control of the Revolutionary political machinery, these ideologies and interests became contradictory. Then, women were legislated out of the political nation, with sex-based arguments thrown in to rationalize the application of a brutal power politics.

NOTES

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5. Olympe de Gouges, Les Droits de la femme (Paris, 1791), as reprinted
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6. Etta Palm d'Aelders, Adresse des citoyennes françaises à l'Assemblée Nationale
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University Press, 1959); idem, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in
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13. Prudhomme, no. 4, August 7, 1789, p. 39.
14. Jennifer Dunn Westfall, "The Participation of Non-Elite Women in
the Parisian Crowd Movements of the Opening Year of the French Revolution,"
0500, fol. 440.
15. Siméon-Prospér Hardy, Mes Loisirs ou journal d'événements tels qu'ils parviennent
à ma connaissance, Paris, 1764-1789, vol. 8, (September 14, 1789), fol. 475 in
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17. See the fuller discussion and analysis in Levy and Applewhite, pp. 14-16;
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19. Jean-Joseph Mounier, Exposé de la conduite de M. Mounier dans l'Assemblée
Nationale, et des motifs de son retour en Dauphiné (Grenoble, 1789), p. 75; Natalie
Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in
an alleged conversation among habitués of the Palais-Royal debating various
meanings and personifications of Veto, implying that the common man did not
fully comprehend the term but nonetheless grasped its political significance.
Journal Général, no 16, October 4, 1789, 126-127.
20. Mounier, pp. 68-70. For another account, see testimony of one of the
twelve women who accompanied Mounier, François Rolin, in Procédure
criminelle, instruite au Châtelet de Paris, sur la dénonciation des faits arrivés à Versailles dans
187.
22. Prudhomme, no. 8, October 3-10, 1789, p. 5.
23. Anonymous, Les Héroïnes de Paris ou l'entière liberté de la France, par les femmes
... polices qu'elles doivent exercer de leur propre autorité. Expulsion des charlatans & c. & c., le
5 octobre 1789 (n.p., n.d.).
24. Prudhomme, no. 8, October 3-10, 1789, p. 15.
28. Ibid., May 10, 1791, pp. 692-693.