MASSACRE AT THE CHAMP DE MARS

POPULAR DISSENT AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

David Andress

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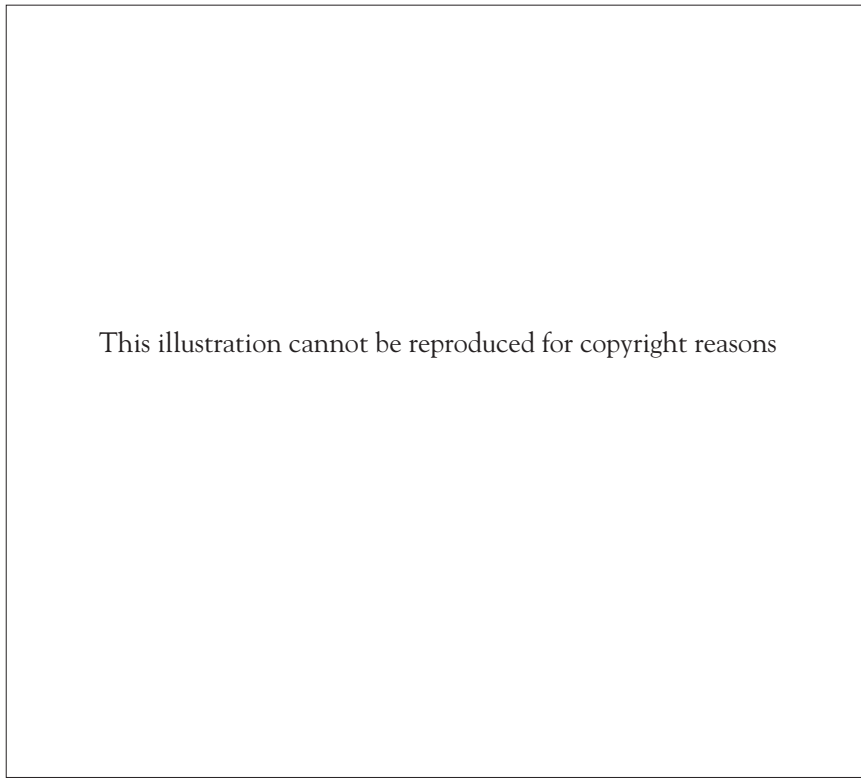

'Massacre des patriotes au Champ de Mars', by Louis Lafitte (Musée Carnavalet). Reproduced by courtesy of the Photothèque des Musées de Paris, Paris.

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More recently, Jill Maciak has earned my great gratitude, in lending me her wit and penetration, and in finding a thousand ways to improve a text to which I, as author, was too close to see the many flaws. Christine Linehan, executive editor for the Royal Historical Society, has been both punctilious and understanding, a fine combination in an editor.

Finally, this book is dedicated to the woman without whom I cannot imagine the course of the last decade, or that of those to come. My wife, Jessica.

David Andress

Abbreviations

APP	Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris
BL	British Library, London
BN	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
Lacroix, *Actes*	Sigismond Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris*, 2nd ser. ii–viii, Paris 1902–11

Note on Sources

All quotations from primary sources are the author's translations. At points where a word was illegible, this is noted in square brackets. Some original terms are also noted in square brackets, where the particular vocabulary is pertinent.

Manuscripts from the Archives de la Préfecture de Police are identified by their series followed by two numbers, which indicate for series AA the carton and folio, and for series AB the register and case number; for example, APP, AA85:123 or AB323:1234. See the bibliography for further details.

Where a quotation from a journal of the era has been identified in the text by author or title and date, the reference has not been footnoted, other than to supply supplementary information. Similarly, the year of publications and events is only noted when it falls outside 1791.

Introduction

On 12 November 1793, a day of wet, numbing cold, a grim and unique ceremony took place on the Champ de Mars, the open space in south-western Paris where the Festival of Federation had been celebrated in 1790, and where today stands the Eiffel Tower. In 1793, for that one day alone, the centre of this vast space was occupied by the guillotine. A single victim journeyed there in the executioner's cart from prison in central Paris, reviled along the route by screaming crowds that twice attempted to break through the cordon of guards and seize him. Jean-Sylvain Bailly, astronomer, academician, doyen of the Third Estate in the Estates-General of 1789 and mayor of Paris from July of that year until November 1791, perished on that dank day for the crimes that the Republic laid against him, crimes that occurred in the summer of 1791.[1]

Bailly was accused of orchestrating, with Queen Marie-Antoinette, executed a scant four weeks earlier, the attempted escape of the royal family in the 'Flight to Varennes' of 21 June 1791. Further, and decisively, he was charged with plotting the massacre of 'patriots' which ensued on 17 July 1791, as they attempted to meet on the Champ de Mars to protest against the National Assembly's decision to reinstate the recaptured monarch. Hence the site of his execution. The tribunal's verdict on his guilt had noted that Bailly had 'thirst[ed] for the blood of the people'. Witnesses at the trial denounced the actions of Bailly's henchmen in the National Guard, who had 'pushed the people aside and showed no compassion for their appeals'. He was labelled as a representative of the upper bourgeoisie, working for a self-interested elite against the people.[2] The rhetoric of the Jacobin Republic here echoes some of the words of those who had themselves been caught up in the massacre and its aftermath.

17 July 1791 had been a day of turmoil in Paris. On the Champ de Mars, thousands of people gathered through the morning to oppose the will of the National Assembly. By evening, popular anger spilled onto the streets, reacting to the violent suppression of that meeting by the National Guard, the revolutionary citizens' militia. One telling incident occurred at around 10 p.m. in the rue Tirechappe, in the central Parisian Section de l'Oratoire. Here a group of journeymen shoemakers was drinking in a doorway when two

1 G. A. Kelly, *Victims, authority and terror: the parallel deaths of d'Orléans, Custine, Bailly and Malesherbes*, Chapel Hill 1982, 201.

2 Ibid. 200. Kelly's overall interpretation of Bailly's demise has several strands, including the hostility of Jacobins to the academic world that he represented. It also includes some rather loose usage of 'class' languages, which will be critiqued in a general sense below.

members of the National Guard passed by. The drinkers immediately launched into a tirade of insults,

> claiming that they [the Guardsmen] came from the Champ de Mars, where they had committed horrors, that all the National Guard had assassinated people, that they were beggars, villains, that their uniforms must be torn off them and not one left alive. . . . [The Guard say] that it was outsiders [étrangers[3]] spread through Paris who do ill, while it was the National Guard itself that did it, and was paid to do it.[4]

They followed this up, in the absence of further Guards to insult, with a murderous discussion about whether it would be better to stone local Guards with cobbles, or lie in wait and gut them as they left their homes. A group of local women, mostly artisans' wives, argued with them, and received a shower of sexual insults in return. One reported the claim of one journeyman that 'if he had what he had had two years ago, he'd kill several of them at once, that we had been to look for arms [then], that we had returned them, and that today [the arms] were being used against us'. The witness remarked that this was probably a reference to a pistol which the suspect had found during the events of July 1789, though she observed that he had, in fact, sold it.

Here, in the mouths of a group of Parisian 'wage-earners', we find a visceral, albeit alcohol-induced, hostility to the bourgeois of the Parisian National Guard, who had indeed committed a 'massacre' of radical petitioners on the Champ de Mars, killing perhaps as many as fifty.[5] At first glance, this is old-fashioned class-based social conflict with a vengeance, so much so that this view echoed in the normally universalistic language of the Jacobins of 1793 as they condemned Bailly. Moreover, such an interpretation has continued to dominate the historiography of the event, despite the general decline of such views of the French Revolution in recent decades. However, as this book will argue, examination of the hostilities which spilled over into violence on 17 July reveals a far more complex picture of social and political relations amongst the many groups who contested possession of the political arena in Paris in 1791.

The past generation has seen a fundamental shift in the direction and focus of the historiography of the French Revolution. The question of the social identity of actors in the Revolution, both individual and collective, has

3 The French *étranger* can equally well mean 'foreigner' and 'stranger', and in the eighteenth century a 'foreigner' could be someone from the next town. In Parisian usage it probably often did imply actual non-nationals, but since the city had an enormous immigrant population, this is of little help in specifying its target. The word 'outsider' will be used throughout to suggest the general 'alien-ness' that is implied.

4 APP, AA153:9–15, case of Louis Oré, 'nicknamed Normand', the only culprit detained from the group.

5 Although one of the oldest critical accounts of this event, the work of Albert Mathiez remains the most detailed: *Le Club des Cordeliers pendant la crise de Varennes et le massacre du Champ de Mars*, Paris 1910, repr. Geneva 1975.

been largely pushed off-stage, driven by impulses both evidential and methodological, and replaced by a concern with such actors' discursive identity. In carrying out this substitution, which is far from being without merit, historians have none the less tended to redirect their attention from those who performed social action towards those who generated discourse, and specifically written discourse as it survives in the archive. Thus the story of the Revolution has 'returned' to politics, and to the educated political elite, putting aside the concern with issues of social identity and interaction that marked the work of historians such as Mathiez, Lefebvre and Soboul.[6]

However, a broader view of this process should see it not as closing off the avenue of social exploration, but rather as opening it to examination from new directions. For, ironically, we now have a much more nuanced appreciation of social existence in the eighteenth century, especially within the great city of Paris, than was deployed by those earlier historians. Moreover, this new awareness has derived from work which consciously untangles the issues of 'social' and 'discursive' existence, in order to present such approaches not as exclusive choices, but as necessary complements to each other in pursuit of an understanding of urban life in this period.

What follows is an examination of the events in Paris that began with the clergy's large-scale refusal to swear allegiance to their new Civil Constitution in January 1791, and ended with the revolutionary National Guard's willingness to shoot and bayonet radical popular protestors on the Champ de Mars six months later. This study will reveal something of the massive disjuncture between the French Revolution's stated beliefs in liberty, equality and social inclusion, and the treatment of those who had most to gain from such beliefs, when they actively attempted to claim what had seemed after 1789 to be rightfully theirs.

The period between January and July 1791 was critical to the course of the French Revolution for a number of reasons. Not least was the growing popular and political realisation that throne and altar were still decisively linked, and by July firmly linked in opposition to the Revolution.[7] At the level of national politics, there can be little doubt but that this was the deci-

6 To select a few of the many works that might be noted here, the 'empirical' breakdown of the Marxist interpretation is documented in W. Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1988. G. Lewis, *The French Revolution: rethinking the debate*, London 1993, gives a pithy summary of the issues, as does T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolution: class war or culture clash?*, London 1998. G. Kates (ed.), *The French Revolution: recent debates and new controversies*, London 1998, presents various key texts, and also suggests that authors such as T. Tackett, W. H. Sewell, Jr, J. Markoff and C. Jones are beginning to sketch out a new 'middle way'. For a further survey of pre-1789 perspectives see V. R. Gruder, 'Whither revisionism?: political perspectives on the *ancien régime*', *French Historical Studies* xx (1997), 245–85.

7 For a detailed exposition of why this link might not have been so clear see D. van Kley, *The religious origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791*, New Haven 1996.

sive revelation of this year, and that the position in which Louis XVI had been placed by September, accepting a Constitution he had attempted to flee from three months earlier, marked a clear stage in the disintegration of hopes for a 'peaceful' Revolution. The spring and summer of 1791 also marked, however, a critical stage in the evolution of Parisian politics, which had their own convoluted dynamics. The king, as well as feeling himself compromised in his religious duties, also believed himself a prisoner of Paris, and it was from that fate in particular that he fled on the night of 20/21 June 1791, leaving behind an explosive denunciation of the Revolution's works in his own hand.[8]

The king's beliefs about the city, however, were an oversimplification. Parisian politics were sharply divided among a number of groups, whose attitudes to each other and to the capital's population were as antagonistic as any in France at that moment. The events that followed the Flight to Varennes were the climax of a long evolution of political suspicion and social fear, and pitched the city into turbulent uncertainty. On 25 June Louis XVI and his family had returned to Paris under armed guard, their coach watched by perhaps half the city's population as it made its way in sombre silence back to the Tuileries palace. In response to this flight, the standard-bearers of popular radicalism, most notably the Cordeliers Club, had already declared for a republic, and the Parisians seemed to have endorsed this, striking out the royal insignia everywhere from public buildings to coat-buttons. And yet the king was being manoeuvred carefully back onto the throne. From the morning of the flight's discovery, the word had gone out from the municipal and national authorities that the monarch had been kidnapped. Once he was safely back in Paris, a delicate series of interviews between National Assembly representatives and the king and queen negotiated an agreed line, even as others cried out for them to be tried as traitors. The Assembly began to debate the outcome of this process on 13 July, decreeing on the 15th and 16th that Louis was personally inviolable, had been kidnapped, and would resume his full functions upon his acceptance of the nearly-completed Constitution.

The response to this was a wave of radical unrest, expressed by some in violent crowd scenes outside the Assembly, and in more organised fashion by the proposal of a petition for a national consultation on the king's fate. Various texts were put forward, and the movement fell into the hands of those who had already declared for a Republic, the less forthright Jacobin Club withdrawing its support after the National Assembly had definitively voted on the matter. Activists from the Cordeliers Club and the other popular societies that had emerged in its wake since late 1790 gathered crowds on the Champ de Mars over that summer weekend. On the Altar of

8 This manifesto is reproduced at length in J. Hardman, *The French Revolution sourcebook*, London 1999, 128–36. The events summarised in the following paragraphs will be considered in more detail in later chapters.

the Fatherland, site of the ceremonies of national unity a year earlier, they now invoked the sovereignty of the people to save them from the rule of a traitor monarch. That was the subtext; it was, however, only a petition, and only to make appeal to the wider nation for a decision. Yet the politics of the city did not permit of such an innocent interpretation.

Since the disorders over the Assembly debate began, both the deputies themselves and the Paris municipality had been determined to press on in the face of such resistance. It was to them mere sedition, the product of faction playing on the gullible populace. Others amongst the political class were not so sanguine. Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, who would later serve as secretary to the Convention as it voted on the death of the king (and perish himself as a Federalist rebel), was then a journalist with considerable sympathy for the radical movement. Early in the evening of 17 July he was composing his next day's edition of the *Courrier de Paris dans les LXXXIII Départements*, and reflected on the troubles of the city: 'It is possible that in a few days we shall see the people armed against the National Guard, with which the legislative body surrounds itself, when it ought to surround itself only with [public] confidence.'[9] Gorsas thus envisaged the current crisis as a more radical division between the city and its authorities, and placed virtue on the former side, though he noted that all sides were 'led astray by perfidious suggestions'.

Gorsas went on to note that, 'At this moment, seven in the evening, the general alarm is being sounded from several directions. May the fears that we have expressed not be realised!' Alas, it would seem that they had, and for reasons, at least superficially, that Gorsas had already explored. Around midday, two men had been found in the space beneath the wooden stage that held the Altar of the Fatherland, apparently making holes in the planking. As a crowd of both men and women occupied the stage, it is now commonly supposed that they were little more than peeping-toms seizing an unusual opportunity to spy on female legs. However, such a simple explanation was not in favour in 1791. After being discovered and hauled out, the two men were dragged by an irate crowd to the police authorities of the local Section, where after an interrogation the crowd was assured that justice would be done. The crowd, however, was convinced that the men were plotting to explode a bomb beneath the petitioners. Seized again from the hands of the authorities, they were hanged and then beheaded, victims of the summary justice that had been a feature of revolutionary life since the *Prévot des Marchands* first antagonised a crowd before the fall of the Bastille. This violence was the trigger for an investigation by two *commissaires* from the municipality, who found the situation restored to calm, but learnt on returning to the Hôtel de Ville that the alarmed National Assembly had pressured Bailly into declaring martial law after the first reports of the deaths.[10]

9 *Le Courrier de Paris dans les LXXXIII Départements* (hereinafter cited as *Courrier*], 18 July 1791. Hereinafter dates should be assumed to fall in 1791 unless stated otherwise.

10 For accounts of this process see Kelly, *Victims*, 189–92, and Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*,

Gorsas clearly knew of the lynching as he wrote, and indeed was able to elaborate on the character of one of the victims: a military pensioner, his sources said, living in the nearby Invalides, and 'for a long time very suspect, even to his comrades'. Several of these latter were said to have observed him with large sums of money, and to have noted 'that he passed for being paid by the aristocrats [l'aristocratie]'. Moreover, the tale went on, 'he has often been seen in the groups where inflammatory speeches [motions incendiaires] are made'. This convolution of suspicion was entirely characteristic of the politics of 1791.

Upon the declaration of martial law, the National Guard was rallied to the colours, and marched in considerable force to surround the crowd on the Champ de Mars, which was in the region of 20,000 strong. It was here that, as Gorsas was noting the sound of the *générale*, the massacre took place. Two hours later Gorsas was able to record the first news he had of the affair: 'The first shots which are destined to divide the National Guard and the people have been fired on the Champ de Mars. Several citizens are killed or wounded. Paris is in the ferment which must foretell the unforeseen and truly incredible coalition of the two parties of the National Assembly.'[11] Turbulence went on into the night, though Gorsas found time for one last note before going to press: 'Midnight. Paris is fairly calm at the moment; all the streets are illuminated.'

We have already here an array of political judgements sufficient to warrant unpicking. Gorsas clearly believed that there was strong evidence of nefarious intent on the part of the men who died at the hands of the crowd, and that such intent was fomented by *aristocratie*. That necessarily counter-revolutionary force was one of the two *partis* that he saw reconciling themselves in the Assembly, for the king and against Paris. The National Guard, in his view, was also setting itself against the city, in some ways an extraordinary judgement, as some 80 per cent of its rank and file were volunteer part-time troopers from the better-off Parisian classes. The 'people' they confronted, and whom earlier in the evening Gorsas had predicted would arm themselves against the Guard, were of course the 'revolutionary people', whose identity might also be conveyed in the phrase 'all the good citizens', like the several reported killed or wounded above. Gorsas is suggesting a deep and complex rift in the revolutionary body politic, even as he piously hopes that his fears of this are ill-founded.

When we counterpose these views with the statement of the *Révolutions de Paris*, made some days later, about the lynching that precipitated the massacre, we find a further, more troubling, dimension of alarm: 'The true

132. G. Rudé, *The crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford 1959, 89, is content to give the 'peeping-tom' account without mentioning the interplay with the authorities.

11 There is, of course, something 'writerly' about this hour-by-hour account of fears and alarms, but it is wholly untypical of the *Courrier*'s usual style, and seems more likely to be an extraordinary response to an extraordinary situation.

people were those who wished to place the presumed guilty men [our two unfortunate voyeurs] under the blade of the law; brigands alone assassinated them.'[12] The *Révolutions*, which in general was more overtly radical than Gorsas, appeared weekly, and its views had been coloured by the reaction to the Champ de Mars events that had swept across the city, and more particularly across its press, from the 18th onwards.

The effect of that reaction on Gorsas's views was to be dramatic. After the breathless prose of the 17th, he was able the next day to compose a more studied account of that day's events, from which a fundamentally different interpretation emerges:

> The popular execution which took place in the morning, had pierced the good citizens with horror and disquiet. They saw with pain that the thousands of brigands that the aristocracy suborns in the heart of the capital, and who have for their lairs, not lodging-houses [hôtels garnis], but the town-houses [hôtels] of our emigrants, had mixed themselves with the multitude, whose sole object was to sign a petition, and they led them astray with inflammatory and fatal speeches.[13]

It was an 'infinity' of such brigands which had penetrated the crowd, and which posed resistance to the National Guard. They cried out 'that [they] must burn the Tuileries, storm the National Assembly, cut off some heads, slaughter the Bluecoats [the National Guards], and a thousand other horrors found on every page of Marat'. The Guards had endured a 'hail of stones' from such agitators before finally opening fire. In the aftermath, various events reinforced the element of deliberate agitation: 'a troop of vagabonds [gens sans aveu]' had carried a body through the city to provoke alarm, crying that fifteen hundred were dead; six workers were arrested wearing white cockades, symbols of Bourbon counter-revolution. Overall, Gorsas wrote, the events had been a plot conceived by 'enemies of the public good', intent on a restoration of despotism by means of unleashing anarchy. Gorsas saluted the Guard he had been so fearful of the previous day: 'Parisian National Guard, of which I congratulate myself for my membership, I should have accused you if you had been guilty. I must vindicate you when you have done nothing but your duty.'

With one stroke, as it were, the suborned aristocratic brigands that Gorsas feared had moved from plotting to blow up the petitioners to being an integral part of the crowd, albeit that many innocents remained within that crowd. The Guard, however, had undergone a decisive metamorphosis, from villain to hero. The *Révolutions de Paris* was less happy about the role of the Guard. In the same passage where it observed that the lynching had itself

12 *Révolutions de Paris*, 16–23 July. This account is attributed to Chaumette, Cordeliers Club member and future Hébertist *procureur de la commune*: Kelly, *Victims*, 193.
13 *Courrier*, 19 July.

been the work of brigands, it placed such men at the centre of the plot in provoking the wider violence. It observed none the less that

> if force had been provoked by brigands, it is against the brigands that it needed to be used. But no, they knew them, the brigands, and had them left alone, and the blind fury of the National Guard was directed against the authors and subscribers of a petition which was going to have its effect, and which is a crime that the committees of the National Assembly find it impossible to pardon.

The following issue of the *Révolutions*, which would emerge after the repression had been going on for almost two weeks, devoted page after page to pursuing this theme, and noted that 'the National Guards applaud their transformation into Janissaries'.[14]

This account retains ambiguities: for example, that the Guard's actions emerged from a 'blind fury [fureur aveugle]', directed by others onto an innocent crowd. The ultra-radical Marat's account in his journal, the *Ami du Peuple*, was more direct. In his view the crowd had been 'set up' by the authorities and the Guard themselves. Brigands lurked amongst the crowd, and a few stones and blank pistol-shots when the Guard arrived was enough to make the crowd 'appear to be so many mutineers, seditious rebels, assassins'. The brigands themselves were 'in the pay of Mottié', that is, the marquis de Lafayette, the general commanding the Parisian National Guard.[15] Ironically, of course, Marat has already been mentioned as providing fuel for the confrontation itself. A more conservative publication, the *Feuille du Jour*, felt no need to be ambiguous in its reporting. The entire episode was an offence against law and order, and it reported at length the deaths of two guards in the confrontation before noting laconically: 'On the side of the seditious are counted nine persons killed and about as many wounded. Twelve have been taken prisoner.' It concluded bluntly: 'Factious men! The end of your successes approaches; they have lasted too long; but tremble!'[16]

With this we come close to the unambiguous view of the authorities themselves, which will be explored in more depth later. All that we have reviewed so far is, of course, journalistic commentary, and it is possible, through the records of investigations at the time and in the following weeks, to get much closer to what actual participants told of what they saw and thought. Amongst the first to do so was Philippe Chapelle, aged thirty-three, maker of felt cockades, arrested in the early evening of the 17th near the Pont-Neuf by

14 *Révolutions de Paris*, 23–30 July. The story of the two men killed was capable of further involutions. A sixty-six-year-old neighbour of the Cordelier Legendre testified to the later investigation that he had heard Legendre claim on the 18th that Lafayette had put the men under the *Autel*, and had also arranged for their killing 'to stir up people's feelings [pour échauffer les esprits]': Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 233–4, statement of Pierre Allemand, 25 July.

15 *Ami du Peuple*, no. 524, 20 July.

16 *Feuille du Jour*, 18 July.

a Guard sergeant and a cavalryman of the National Gendarmerie, and accused initially of having cried 'down with the National Guard'. Being 'dressed in the coat of a National Guard with a sergeant's epaulettes' compounded the offence. Two witnesses, a fifteen-year-old apprentice tailor and a twenty-four-year-old journeyman printer, elaborated on the incident. The apprentice had himself been coming from the Champ de Mars when, 'he saw [Chapelle] run from the Pont Royal as far as the Pont Neuf, shouting "down with the uniform of the National Guard, all in[to] bourgeois clothes", and also heard that he said to the public that there had been three thousand men killed on the Champ de Mars, and that his comrade had been killed'. The printer had a different version – Chapelle had said 'that all those who had no uniform were dying; come along and he would have them given arms'.

Chapelle denied any specific words, but said that he 'fled in the fear of being struck'. He had held a sergeant's post in the St-Eustache Battalion, but 'he no longer served at present because his situation no longer allowed him to serve'. He continued to wear the coat 'as having been given to him by the Nation, being a Conqueror of the Bastille [Vainqueur de la Bastille]'. None the less, he was sent to the neighbouring Conciergerie prison.[17] This (ex-) Guardsman at least seems to have had some doubts about the virtue of his colleagues, and similar sentiments were expressed elsewhere.[18]

At around 10 p.m. a Guard patrol coming down the rue St-Honoré, 'after having dispersed by gentle means a great number of gatherings it had met with successively along the said road', was nearing the Palais-Royal when it met a large group coming the other way. One man was in the lead, and he 'gave out great groans, in a very tearful tone, holding in his hand a handkerchief and rubbing his eyes, sobbing as if he were really crying'. The captain of the patrol heard him say 'our brothers, our friends are slaughtered [égorgés], we are all lost', amongst his wailings. Fearing that this would be 'a fatal example' and create 'general alarm' amongst 'the citizens of all ages and sexes' who filled the road, they detained this man, and another who was close behind, carrying a Guard coat beneath his arm, who would turn out to be another *Vainqueur de la Bastille*.

At this point a Guard *chasseur* accused the first man of having said about him, before the patrol arrived, 'he's a National Guard, we have to do away with him'. The *chasseur* now relieved his feelings by punching the prisoner in the face, 'while he was in the hands of the Grenadiers'. So much for 'gentle means'. When the *chasseur* testified to the *commissaire* this punch was not mentioned, and he said that the man had taken him by the lapels and said 'down with the blue coat, we should burn the blue coats'.

The detainee turned out to be Jean François Marie Michel Le Gueulx,

17 APP, AA215:460.

18 Most radical leaders were, of course, National Guards, and one at least, Momoro, was present on the *Autel de la Patrie* in uniform: Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 236–7, statement of Charlemagne Wassal, 25 July.

aged thirty, master innkeeper and a sergeant in the Guard, whose service went back to 14 July 1789. It was on the strength of this that he denied the *chasseur's* allegation – 'he was incapable of saying such a thing'. He had been overwrought, however, due to the sight of 'a dead man, that he had seen carried by four urchins [polissons] on tree-branches going beside the Palais-Royal'. He admitted crying out loud, but 'everyone said it loudly like him'. He denied the phrases the patrol had listed, claiming to have said, again along with everyone, 'that some of our brothers were dead'. After his arrest, his cries continued because of 'ill-treatment', notably the punch in the face.[19]

Whether one takes as more reliable the witnesses' or the detainees' statements in these two incidents, it is immediately evident that there was no simple division between Guard and people, or anyone else, at work on this day. Similarly, exactly where virtue lay is hard to determine. Alexandre Caguy, aged twenty-five, journeyman wigmaker, was chased down and 'battered with blows', according to a witness, by various persons on the Boulevard St-Honoré around 10 p.m. He had merited this by saying in the Place Louis XV 'that the National Guard had acted very badly, that M. de Lafayette was happy to see what happened on the Champ de Mars and that if he had been at Gros Caillou he would have done like the others and thrown stones'. Furthermore, 'all the National Guard were rogues [coquins] and he did himself honour for not having served the nation after such an affair'.[20] While Caguy was being beaten up for this, across the city in the rue de Sèvres most of the violence was on the other side. A Guard cavalryman was pulled from his horse and beaten by a crowd wielding sticks, 'to which he would have inevitably succumbed without the aid of the National Guard'. A patrol rescued him, but only after the mob had made off with his carbine, pistols and scabbard, and had tried to steal his horse. One man had been seized by the patrol, and the horseman confirmed that 'this individual had himself struck him with a stick'. Jean Maurel, aged twenty-six, a journeyman joiner, claimed on the other hand to have been on the scene with three fellows, returning from an inn at Vaugirard, and rather improbably asserted that he had been making 'some observations to defend the cause of the horseman' when the Guard arrived and seized him. It was simply 'not possible' that he should have been recognised as an assailant. None the less, he went into La Force prison.[21]

In all of these incidents, we seem rather closer to Gorsas's vision of a divided city than to his later tale of brigandage, and the incident we began with from the rue Tirechappe can only reinforce this impression. From the mouths of this abusive drunken group had come further ramifications of political suspicion. The brigands, 'the outsiders spread through Paris', who are blamed for disorder are in fact a cover for the misdeeds of the Guard itself.

19 APP, AA85:85.
20 APP, AA206:373–4.
21 APP, AA166:16–17.

The defenders of 1789 are now betrayed. And clearly the level of hostility was sufficiently high for talk, albeit wild talk, of systematic murder. From the very same street, two other incidents further compound the situation. Jean Louis Mirbault, ladies' shoemaker and volunteer National Guard *chasseur*, reported on 18 July that the previous evening he had been dining by his open window at around 11.30 when 'he heard various remarks against the National Guard in general and against M. Lafayette concerning what had just happened on the Champ de Mars'. He recognised the speaker as 'Madame Garpant', his downstairs neighbour, and sought to intervene in the Guard's favour out of his window: 'Garpant replied that if he wasn't paid to support the National Guard and its chiefs he wouldn't take their side, adding that if he had as much trouble as others in getting the bread he ate he wouldn't support them.'

Mirbault was particularly protesting against this allegation of corruption, he noted, though doubtless being told 'he would kiss the arse of M. Lafayette and of his horse' did not salve his dignity either.[22] Having made his declaration and left, he returned only an hour later to record another denunciation of a neighbour in his house, one Londot, 'who calls himself a National Guard volunteer', and who 'had told him several times over several weeks that it was unfortunate that MM. Bailly, Lafayette and Montmorin hadn't been killed; that if they gave them to him he would rip out their hearts with his teeth; that they were traitors and their heads should have been paraded on pikes on 21 June'. Meanwhile, on the 17th, Londot had 'tried to lead off' Mirbault's workers to the Champ de Mars to swear an oath against royalty, and on hearing the call to arms that afternoon, had shed his Guard coat for civilian dress. He was a 'seditionary' who had 'all the vices of a bad citizen'.[23]

If we now pass these various elements and narratives in review, the number of competing versions of events portrays a situation that can best be summed up as political and social turmoil: a crowd which lynches two suspected brigands; news that the crowd itself is composed of brigands; a National Guard force which turns on the people; brigands who turn the people against the Guards; brigands who turn the Guards against the people; Guards who rightly fire on brigands; individuals who are arrested (and beaten up) for accusing the Guards of massacre; individuals who attack the Guards; individuals who threaten the Guards, accuse them of being brigands, and threaten to attack them; and individuals who condemn the Guards, the municipality and the ministry for starving them and conspiring with the king. Such a multitude of attitudes and accusations will clearly require careful unpicking.

22 APP, AA153:7. The verb in question is, of course, 'baiser', which has an even less polite possible translation.

23 APP, AA153:6, clearly timed, however, an hour after piece 7. Similar denunciations of dangerous figures, notably one Felix, promising death to Lafayette and/or Bailly, are noted by Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 262, 264–6, 268–9.

However, before beginning to explore more closely some of the ambiguities and contradictions that surrounded popular activity, something must be said about the nature and treatment of sources for this period. Like many other histories of the eighteenth-century French, this one relies extensively on the records of the police. It should be noted here that 'police' covers a multitude of archival possibilities, and for this period in particular, we are far from the hackneyed words of paid informers scribbling their prejudices in secret.[24] The primary 'police' documents that concern us are in effect more like judicial records, produced by the offices of the police *commissaires* of the Parisian Sections, who inherited their role from the *commissaires du Châtelet* of the Old Regime. This inheritance will be explored through its historiography in the following chapter, but we may note here that it was a role less of 'policeman' than of local magistrate and arbitrator. The documents as they survive are polyvocal, and take two main forms.[25] The first, and more straightforward, is the declaration. Here a citizen makes a notarised statement before the *commissaire*, perhaps to denounce a crime, or occasionally a political offence, equally often to put on record some minor neighbourhood dispute or odd event that they feel the authorities should be aware of. The declarant will sign the copy of the statement, and it will be deposited in the records of the local Section. More complex in form are the records which result when the police actually have an offender in hand. These commence with the words of the arresting officer, a National Guard, most usually a sergeant or corporal, who may have arrived on the scene only after the fact, but is none the less formally in charge of bringing the offender before the magistrate. Such accounts are usually cursory, and may not indeed indicate the actual essence of the matter. Far more circumstantial, and also frequently far more to the point, are the accounts of witnesses that are recorded next: one, two, perhaps as many as a dozen people of all conditions depose concerning whatever event or incident is in question.

The words of the police do not intrude into these accounts as they appear, and we may speculate as to whether or not they were 'prompted', but they certainly appear to represent what the witnesses desire to say, if we may judge by the marginal additions, deletions and substitutions which take place prior to the signature by each witness. The interrogation of the suspect which follows is definitely in the form of question and answer, however, often revealing in the wording of the questions the interplay between the witnesses' accounts and the police's social prejudices in describing a suspect's actions and motives. But the words of the detainee are given weight, and recorded, even when they dispute the police's interpretations openly, defame

24 The strictures of Richard Cobb about the prejudices of the Parisian police have tended to colour assumptions about the value of 'police evidence' in this period: *The police and the people: French popular protest, 1789–1820*, Oxford 1970, 3–48.

25 All these documents now form series AA of the Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

the witnesses and describe a wholly different set of events to that apparently seen by onlookers. The detainee, too, is invited to sign, and if they can, they usually do. The voice of the *commissaire* intrudes again in closing the document, sometimes with a simple decision on detention or release, sometimes with a paragraph of social and political vented spleen.

Do any of these voices tell the 'truth', in some grand sense? Of course not, but there seems no reason to doubt that they reflect what the various parties wanted to say, or felt they should say, in this particular situation, and what is certainly remarkable is the frequency with which self-expression takes a caustic form. Grovelling to authority on the part of detainees is a common strategy, but so is contesting the substance of the accusation, and even occasionally appealing to revolutionary principles. That all parties were busily interpreting events according to their own lights is a given, but that is precisely the interest of these documents, where so many voices are heard, giving so many individual views, and yet building up into identifiable patterns.

Something similar may be said of the discourses of the press in this period, from which our other main body of information is derived. Hugh Gough has noted that 'it is difficult to isolate the influence of the press from that of other forces at work in the revolution'. He goes on to conclude that the press 'reflected the diverse strands of public opinion and, at the same time, helped to form them'.[26] Jeremy Popkin is ultimately more assertive about the role of the press: '[it] served as the Revolution's real "public space" . . . made sense of the great crises of the Revolution . . . represented the diverse groups that were mobilized in the struggle for political power . . . [and] was vital to the functioning of all the other institutions of revolutionary culture'.[27] As Popkin's is the later, and more assertive, interpretation of the press, and as the words of the press will form a substantial part of the evidence deployed here, his statements merit further consideration. This is particularly the case, as they conceal a central problem in the history of the revolutionary press – its relation to its readership. To claim that the press was the Revolution's 'real public space' is thereby to assert that there was no other such space. To say that it 'made sense' of the Revolution's crises suggests that there were no other means of making such sense. And to claim that the press 'represented' mobilised groups implies that they were incapable of self-representation. Popkin is clear on this in his introduction: 'The political press was an indispensable symbol of the public opinion of a people that lacked the means to speak for itself.' It was also, however, 'a babble of voices' that continually disputed its own legitimacy of comment, and continually undermined all leaders' claims to represent 'the people', even as, Popkin asserts, the press was the prime organ of making such claims.[28]

26 H. Gough, *The newspaper press in the French Revolution*, London 1988, 233, 235.
27 J. D. Popkin, *Revolutionary news: the press in France, 1789–1799*, London 1990, 180.
28 Ibid. 4–5.

This study will attempt to use the words of the press in a fashion rather more integrated with other potential modes of representation. Paris was the site, nascently in the Old Regime, and explosively in the Revolution, of an intense face-to-face political culture, evident at a variety of levels. In ascending order of concrete organisation, we might cite the street corner, the shop doorway, the pleasure-garden crowd, the café, the political club and the Section assembly as routine sites of politicised sociability, even leaving aside the occasional possibilities for the church congregation or the marketplace to produce such discussions. The press and its output was part of this world, but only part of it. Insofar as we are interested in the people who took part in such sites of politics, then the press can be seen to comment on, and to attempt to comment to, these people. Whether it can be said exclusively to inform them, to give them conceptual tools they would not have otherwise acquired, and to instruct them in the 'right' way to use them, is an impenetrable question, but one towards which our evidence would have to prompt scepticism.

Whether journalists were one-man operators or the mouthpieces of slick commercial enterprises (and we shall meet rather more of the former than the latter), they all projected voices into the wide field of public debate. One of the central points that will interest our study is the extent to which there remains, even after all the journalists' efforts to report and interpret politics, an irretrievable gap between much of what was expressed on the streets and the press's ability to integrate such expression, and the people who undertook it, with their general view of the Revolution. Although journalists did clearly occupy every spot on the contemporary political spectrum, we shall have to examine what notions their writings suggest that they held in common, and seemed unable to overcome, in their relation to the population of the capital and its often violent expression of politics.

Throughout this book, then, the words of police, witnesses, protestors, press, administrators and politicians will be extensively cited. They are all mere words, the babble of voices Popkin observes within the press becoming a deafening cacophony as one tries to encompass the city at large. We shall take individual statements, from whatever source, as we find them, elaborating on the underlying attitudes of some, leaving others for the reader's perusal. What matters in all of them is not generally whether or not a journalist was 'sincere' or 'manipulative', but in what directions that writing might move the ground of debate; not whether or not witnesses might exaggerate, but what view such speech, exaggerated or not, projected back into the public realm. It is this author's personal view that the Parisians who engaged with revolutionary politics were largely too caught up in the terrible importance of it all to make very good liars – they said what they said because at every turn they feared it might be a matter of life and death to figure out what was going on, and to alert others to nefarious possibilities. In the end, however, this book aims to disclose a general pattern of cultural and social beliefs, within which the question of individual veracity fades to insignifi-

cance. The documents give us the only picture we can have, and it is the historian's task to persuade the reader that the certain view of that picture put forward here is one worthy of consideration.

The view that we shall present here will be innovatory, not least because the events leading up to the Champ de Mars Massacre have rarely, if ever, been considered outside a fairly set, and limited, form. Early and mid-century accounts emphasised social conflict strongly, and Albert Mathiez concluded his account with the following observation: 'The *sans-culottes* had learnt what fondness the bourgeoisie, who had made the Revolution on their shoulders, nurtured for them, what respect it professed for legality, the word it had constantly at its lips, when its interests or its passions were at stake.'[29] Mathiez, in 1910, had offered a long account that focused on the organised socio-political conflict between the national and municipal authorities and the Cordeliers and other popular societies.[30] George Rudé's 1959 account approached the event from the direction of popular spontaneity, noting the importance of 'wage-earners' in the agitation of the previous days and months as part of a continuing evolution of a popular radical consciousness in the 'revolutionary crowd'.[31]

From these earlier accounts, later historians have retained the element of social conflict, even when modifying the focus of their work. George Kelly, in a narrative which takes mayor Bailly as its central character, has related how bellicose elements in the municipality and the National Assembly, acting to preserve the constitution against a democratic threat, pushed Bailly into deploying a National Guard 'hostile to the plebs', and allowing it to act decisively under martial law.[32] More general summary accounts tend to treat the conflict on the Champ de Mars as a simple, even self-evident, process.[33] Even that arch-revisionist text, the *Critical dictionary of the French Revolution*, sums up its impact with the statement that 'for the first time the bourgeois militia had fired on the people'.[34] One thing that is clear from the accounts of the

29 Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 149–50.
30 Ibid. 107–50.
31 Rudé, *Crowd*, 80–94.
32 Kelly, *Victims*, 182–97, citation at p. 188.
33 See, for example, W. Doyle, *The Oxford history of the French Revolution*, Oxford 1989, 153–5, which deals with the events, their antecedents and aftermath in three paragraphs. J. F. Bosher, *The French Revolution: a new interpretation*, London 1989, 156–7, deals with the turmoil in the capital between March and September 1791 in a similar three paragraphs. D. M. G. Sutherland, *France, 1789–1815: revolution and counterrevolution*, London 1985, 126–30, takes a little longer over the period, and at least recognises some confusion in the actual events of the massacre (at p. 129, largely thanks to a more attentive reading of Mathiez, one suspects), but in the end is pursuing a similar overall interpretation.
34 D. Richet, 'Revolutionary *journées*', in F. Furet and M. Ozouf (eds), *A critical dictionary of the French Revolution*, London 1989, 124–36, citation at p. 128. The events of the summer of 1791 here receive some twelve lines in total. One should add that the cited statement is true