

**Conclusions:
Jack Censer and Lynn Hunt**

As the briefest of readings will verify, the essays presented here overlap with each other but do not necessarily move in the same directions. The authors chose different images for their foci, and even when they analyze the same image, they develop somewhat different, if rarely contradictory, arguments. Is it possible, given this variety, to come to any general conclusions? We think that it is.

Vivian Cameron aptly captures one of those general conclusions when she affirms that the images of the French Revolution offer “a different perspective on ‘historical knowledge.’” The engravings cannot be viewed as documents presenting straightforward and unfailingly accurate information about events, but that is precisely their interest. They offer personal and political interpretations of crowd violence that are crucial to understanding the French Revolution. Cameron emphasizes the symbolic value of images as souvenirs or “memory triggers.” In our essay we focused on the difficulties artists and engravers faced in coming to terms with the phenomenon of popular violence, rarely endorsing it, but having to confront it in some fashion nonetheless. Joan Landes shows how printmakers could use depictions of women in the crowd to express their most deeply held prejudices; the frantically grimacing female figure signaled irrational violence. This kind of portrayal was not necessarily an accurate statement about women’s role, but it did express important beliefs and feelings, ones that are essential to comprehending the unfolding of events.

Depictions of women were central to the carnival theme of the “world turned upside down” highlighted by Barbara Day-Hickman. Although carnivalesque inversion of the social order could animate songs, pamphlets, and popular newspapers as well, prints and engravings proved an especially apt medium for expressing this key metaphor of revolution; a woman out of

place could suggest the theme of gender transgression, role reversal, and thus social upheaval in just a few strokes of a pen. And everyone would get the point without lengthy explanation—or being able to read pamphlets or newspapers. The Jean-Louis Prieur images analyzed by Warren Roberts also seize upon this central notion of upending the established social order, but they do so in any but a metaphorical fashion. Prieur applauded the attack on the old order, but his ability to capture the cruelly festive popular anger and vengeance could be used by those who hated the violence as much as by those who approved it.

All of the authors here emphasize the ambiguity, ambivalence and just general slipperiness of revolutionary imagery. For this reason, captions proved essential in explicating the meaning of an image. But even the caption or legend could open the door to uncertainty. Wayne Hanley describes the trouble caused for Bertrand Andrieu by his legend on a medal commemorating the October Days of 1789 when a crowd, first of women, then of men, marched to Versailles and forced the king and his family back to Paris. Andrieu first used the legend “The Nation has Conquered Its King.” He used it in reference to very positive remarks made by mayor Jean-Sylvain Bailly to the king when Louis XVI voluntarily came to Paris on July 17, 1789 to signal his acceptance of the events surrounding the fall of the Bastille. Times had quickly changed, however, and after October 1789 the legend had a much more ominous ring. So he changed it to the blander and less provocative “Arrival of the King in Paris,” as if the medal had no position on the event itself.

Our authors repeatedly remind us, however, that even when artists, engravers, or medalmakers tried to shape the response to their work, they did not necessarily succeed in determining the audience’s reactions. Each viewer brought his or her own expectations to the image, and they were often at variance with the intentions, values, or aesthetic contexts

informing the artist's work. This same profusion of meanings should emerge in our readers' responses. No one of us claims to have completely nailed down the significance of any image or group of images. There were good crowds and bad crowds, depending on the perspective of the imagemakers and the viewers.

No one can see these images and read these essays and be satisfied with a view of the crowd as composed mainly of hardworking, family men interested primarily in economic fairness and enhanced political participation. The crowd was not an undifferentiated mass, but it was also not just the aggregate of those composing it. It was not always dominated by men or always acting in its rational interests. The images show us that the crowd could not be ignored and that large gatherings acting violently on strong emotions struck fear not just in the hearts of the political elites but more generally. We do not want to endorse a view of the crowd as just a raging mob sparked into action by female harpies. Our authors show that crowd violence is not a monolith; it and its representations require fine-grained analysis in order to understand the whirlwind of its meanings. Our readers' own interests, values, and aesthetic contexts will enable them to see things in these images that we have missed. Our hope is that we have given you some guidance in your own efforts to make sense of the visual imagery of the French Revolution.