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Symbols of the French Revolution: Colors of Cockades, Fabric and Their Importance in Politics of 1789

Constance Wallace

In any culture, fabric and color are very important in representing the identity of an individual or group. Examples of this can be seen in the woven material of the Scottish clans and their tartans, or in the case of those who participated in the Revolution of 1789 in France, the cockades and colors of white, blue, and red. But where did the cultural obsession first arise in relation to fabric and color? Each culture finds something tangible in material artifacts for emphasizing individual taste or affiliation with a particular class. In the case of those who participated in the French Revolution, a choice of color was imbued with political symbolism. How did fabric and color become so important to the politics of people, or a country? Why did the small pieces of the tri-colored cockade carry so much importance to the identity of the French people during the Revolution? By analyzing the emergence of the cockade in fashion, this essay shall examine the importance of these emblems in the French Revolution of 1789 and reasons why these everyday things became so vital by analyzing the styles, textures, and use of color in fabric before, during, and after the Revolution.

The transformation of these materials is understood in the confines of how fabric and color are used within

society. Designed, textured and dyed, fabric in its woven form can be either coarse or delicate. Fabric itself signifies class separation and even political distinction by the method of its manufacturing or construction, and by its value and refinement. In the golden years at Versailles during the reign of King Louis XIV and King Louis XV, the clothing worn by the royal family, and those nobles who were privileged enough to be housed at the great palace, embodied the decadence with which they enveloped themselves in. Beautiful silks, elaborate laces and ribbons, colorful feathers, and bows were all used by those of privilege. It was not until the eve of the Revolution in 1789 that the superb fashion of the courtiers under King Louis XIV and XV faded away and was replaced with something simpler: a style of clothing which tied itself to the values of what the Revolution upheld. The fabric of clothing then transformed and became more of a symbolic statement than a fashion statement.

The people of France needed to step away from the old relics of the monarchy and, along with the discarded government principles of the absolute monarchy, redefine themselves. The extravagant styles of the King and his nobles were also discredited, as the citizens of France viewed fashion as an outlet for the monarchy to institute repression. Why was this change so important to them? Perhaps the answer can best be explained in the words of author and historian, Leora Auslander: "Clothing and furniture are commodities with great symbolic potential; both were, in fact, used by the

crown and court in the *ancien régime* to augment their power.”¹ Changing the fashion of the country alongside the politics was a way for the revolutionaries to completely reinvent the French people. It was also a way for them to dissolve the visual emblems of the *ancien régime*, so that they may reinvent themselves with styles that enhanced their principles and beliefs. In this case, fabric was utilized to do this.

In order to understand this transition, one must first recognize the importance of clothing to the French people. It was always understood that fashion was directly linked to the status and importance of individuals within the division of the three estates. Auslander points out that clothing style from the medieval to the early modern period was in great length used to indicate the wearer’s social and political affiliation.² Not only was fabric used as a weapon of power, the distinct dress of the three estates was strictly adhered to because it also allowed the nobles and the clergy a way of identifying those who did not belong to their Estate.

Attempting to restrict the Third Estate within their class, those of the first two Estates hoped to limit them from dressing in certain fabrics and accessories enjoyed by the wealthy. According to Colin Jones in *Paris: The Biography of a City*, there was already a fashion revolution occurring within the three Estates before the Revolution, as typical clothing worn by each Estate was now being picked up in second hand clothing stores. Nobility wore the garb of the

1 Leora Auslander, “Regeneration through the Everyday? Clothing, Architecture and Furniture in Revolutionary Paris,” *Art History* 28 (2005), 229.

2 *Ibid.*, 231.

peasant and chambermaids adopted the forms of dress which included “silk stockings, light colourful dresses, jewels and trinkets.”³ Disconcerting to many nobles, this interchange of fashion before the revolution perhaps played a hand in the decision to incorporate a distinct separation impressed upon the three estates during their first initial meeting at the eve of the Revolution. The “deputies of Third Estate, the peasant classes, were to wear somber black, while the nobles wore gold braiding, white hose, lace cravats, and gracious white plumes in their hats.”⁴ This dictation in dress offended those in the Third Estate, as they saw this restriction of the nobles a symbolic way of making sure they were continually repressed, and denied even the pleasure to dress up. It was unfair to them, and it was at this time that fashion took a detour.

Pictures and portraits as primary sources can be a way to visually see how fabric in clothing was used as a separating instrument of the classes. According to Peter Burke in his book *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, visual sources are important as non-verbal traces of the past; the images “record acts of eyewitnessing.”⁵ Burke further reflects upon the use of images as primary resources by asserting that these images reveal the material culture which incorporates details that the contemporaries “would have

3 Colin Jones, Paris: *The Biography of a City* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 194-95.

4 Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 75.

5 Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 95.

taken for the granted and ... failed to mention in the texts.”⁶ Many portraits of those at Versailles before 1789 display the over use of expense fabrics, adorned with layers and layers of lace and bows and topped with colorful feathers or jewels. When analyzing the images of the Revolution and those afterwards, there existed within these primary sources a noticeable change. Elaborate gowns were now gone and replaced with simple styles, fabric colors were muted in tone, made of cottons and linens, and most new fashions did not include the lace, jewels, metals or fancy feathers which adorned the gowns and dress of the elite prior to 1789.⁷

Embodying ideas of the Revolution itself, the clothing of the French people became “invested with political significance,” and was recreated and stripped of the symbols of the oppressive nature of the noble dress.⁸ What now transpired was a simpler form of attire that was considered a sign of patriotism. Dressing in the rich fabrics and precious metals created labels of counter-revolutionary to be attached to anyone who wore something of the nobles’ elaborate styles. “Graceful white muslin vied with brocaded silks, natural hair and straw hats” appeared on women.⁹ Political men were dressing down, and their outfits may only have had a tricolor scarf or cockade to embellish them. Even with the simplest of things, a policy of excess was viewed with contempt. A

6 Ibid., 99-100.

7 Please see “Portrait of Madame Tallien” (1806) painted by Jean-Bernaard Duvivier at the Brooklyn Museum’s web page. <http://archive.org/details/brooklynmuseum-o4885-portrait-of-madame-tallien>.

8 Hunt, 75.

9 Jennifer M. Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime France,” in *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1994), 945-46.

clear example of this would be the cockades, the new badge of the Revolution, which were to be made of wool and not of silk, most hand-woven, knitted or simply sewn. The more expensive fabric cockade, which could distinguish the wearer with social hierarchy instead of equality because it showed off wealth and prestige, would be considered out of taste.¹⁰ Simplicity was now the fashion *la mode*, and all clothing was to be adjusted to remove any material means, which would stimulate a fear of inequality.

What took place within this fashion revolution was that the dress of the common man was brought forward as a reference point for all classes. No longer did individuals look to the court of Versailles as a focal point for what was in style. Magazines of that time stated that fashion was *pour toutes les classes* and clothing switched from being a tool for class distinction to a symbolic force of the Revolution.¹¹ This symbol was seen in the dress of the *Sans-Culotte*.¹² Many men eventually adopted the attire of *le bon sans Culotte*, especially after 1792. Seen as a form of dress which could exhibit a social equality, politicians also began to wear “the short jacket, long trousers, and even the clogs of the *sans-culottes*.”¹³ While simple clothing was adopted as the new badge of good revolutionary comrades, there were

¹⁰ Hunt, 75.

¹¹ Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau,” 951.

¹² Please see the etching entitled “The Good Sans-Cullote,” which is part of the primary sources on the “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution” web site of George Mason University. “Male and Female *sans-culottes* were supposed to embody frugality, thrift, hard work, and above all, honest devotion - whether to pets, the nation, or fellow comrades.” Source: mfr 88.180. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/73/>

¹³ Hunt, 75.

individuals who were against the unadorned fashion of the peasantry. David, a famous painter of the time, believed that the clothing of such militant factions would not do the Revolution any good, and instead of dressing down to the worn-out, threadbare *le bon sans Culotte*, a “suitable high-minded fashion” was more appropriate.¹⁴ His approach concentrated on the bourgeois element of his upbringing and the need to uphold a small division of classes.

Hoping to inspire his countrymen, David took such great pains to illustrate an appropriate replacement for the simple dress of the *sans-culotte* which was held in such high regard by the revolutionaries. David drew upon his desire to see a more civil costume for those in the new government. Not wanting to completely throw out the search for suitable clothing to depict the ideas of the Revolution, David believed that there should “appropriate revolutionary costume” which incorporates “all the ambiguities of revolutionary politics.”¹⁵ What he envisioned was a style of clothing for the officials, which would mark them from the other individuals of society.¹⁶

David’s dream for a civil dress died with the death of Robespierre and the collapse of the Terror. Legislation was already put in place concerning the wearing of the tricolored cockade on the clothing of citizens, and more recommendations were in the midst of the politicians to

¹⁴ Ibid, 76.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Please see the etching “Study for the Costume of a Civil Official,” which is David’s rendering of a government worker, rather than an aristocrat, Minneapolis Institute of Art web site, Accession #65.43.1. <http://artsmia.org/viewer/detail.php?v=12&id=9326>.

adopt ways to “demonstrate one’s adherence to the nation through one’s clothing.”¹⁷ In 1795, abbé Grégoire, the first priest to take the oath under the new Civil Constitution of the Clergy, suggested that wearing uniforms for civil office would only enhance the dignity of the office itself and remind those who held the office of their duty.¹⁸ As the Convention came to an end in October, it passed a law concerning the clothing for these officials. Even in this particular act, the style of simplicity was adopted and most all officials were to wear the same type of clothing: “a ‘French’ coat of ‘national blue,’ a tricolor belt, a scarlet cloak *a la grecque*, and velvet hat with tricolor aigrette.”¹⁹ Fashion was now established for those holding political office and by making the officials wear almost the same outfit, with the same type of fabric, the Revolution was laying a foundation for a different identity than that of the three estates, as the civil costumes were undemanding and conforming.

Men were not left alone in searching for a fashion identity during the Revolution either. Simplicity and restraint played a major role in establishing a new underpinning for the revolutionary female. Once again, clothing took inspiration from the peasant class.²⁰ According to the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* and *Journal de la mode*, magazines published in France during this period, the Revolution and

¹⁷ Auslander, 230.

¹⁸ Ibid, 231.

¹⁹ Hunt, 79.

²⁰ Please see the etching “Madame Sans-Culotte,” part of the primary sources on the “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution” web site of George Mason University. Source: Museum of the French Revolution 88.17. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/73/>

women were linked, as both were “in a state of continual flux,” and, as the writers of the magazines pointed out, women found their ideal environment in the chaos of the Revolution.²¹ Just as the revolutionary government changed ever so frequently, so too did the fashion of the women and the use of fabric and color. Yet, the fashion *a la mode* of the Revolution was not the exquisite fabric of taffeta or silk, heavily burdened with lace, jewels and feathers, instead the simplicity of *Madam sans Culotte* was used as a starting point for reinventing a revolutionary dress for women.

The simple cotton straight lines, the petite bonnet and little use of color were deemed a respectable attribute to clothing styles. Although the “colors, the form of clothing, bonnets, and hats” changed, most modifications contained this new identity of plainness and unpretentiousness, and were a symbol of being a true revolutionary.²² The sans-culotte appeared to embody the true nature of hard work and dedication, whether male or female, and this symbolic viewpoint is what the fabric of the Revolution tried to capture.

In analyzing text from Karin Baumgartner’s article “Through the Eyes of Fashion” as she talks about Caroline de la Motte Fouqué’s publication, *Geschichte der Moden, vom Jahre 1785 bis 1829: als Beytrag zur Geschichte der Zeit*, there is one sentence which could sum precisely why and how fabric and color changed so dramatically during the French Revolution.

21 Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau,” 961.

22 Ibid.

Under the *ancien régime*, clothes did not symbolize individual identity, but rather affiliation with a certain group or rank. It was the possession of courtly attire, not individual character, that made the aristocrat.²³

The French Revolution was about systemically removing everything that was a symbol of the monarchy. Changing the fashion of the time was the best way the French people could embody their desires to reinvent themselves and they did this through the use of fabric and color.

In the folds of small bit of colorful ribbon, the revolutionaries sought to bring together a new culture and a political platform. Cockades, which before 1789 were the sole emblems and badges of the military, became the binding element of the revolutionary movement. After the storming of the Bastille, these colorful emblems became a powerful tool in mobilizing the peoples of France towards political change. Cockades developed into a badge which gave its wearer a sense of belonging, and clout, allowing its owner to feel like a part of revolutionary uniformity, when before there was only a system in which inequality and separation were the norm. These pieces of fabric were a symbol chosen because the material showed no distinction to class, or dress, it was the same to all. *La cocarde nationale* became the sole ingredient which brought the French people together, both sexes, all classes, making each wearer equal to the other, replacing the distinct costumes and dress of the three estates, and

23 Karin Baumgartner, "Through the Eyes of Fashion: Political Aspects of Fashion in Caroline de la Motte Fouque's *Geschichte der Moden, vom Jahre 1785 bis 1829: als Beytrag zur Geschichte der Zeit*," in *The Germanic Review* (2001), 219.

converting the revolutionaries under its color to a new sense of political autonomy.

Scholars such as Pierre Nora in his works *Les Lieux de Mémoire* and Leora Auslander in her book *Taste and Power* emphasize the significance of material items in French culture for establishing their identity. Auslander states in her introduction: “The everyday is sensual, bodily, emotional, and intellectual. There is no escape from the everyday, no position outside of it, for either the subjects of history or its writers.”²⁴ A simple piece of fabric, used in everyday life, was transformed by creative hands into a cockade. Before the Revolution, this emblem was only an ordinary clothing accessory for the military, and did not hold any meaning except that of adornment or status within the ranks of the soldiers. Yet once it was captured by the everyday citizen as a means of identifying an allegiance to a cause, the cockade transformed, becoming equivalent to voice and an intellectual body of presence. It held an emotional link to a platform and stance of change and no one escaped its touch.

From the beginning, these cockades stood apart as a badge that represented the formation of a new system of collective belonging. They were symbols chosen by the people to mark their preference towards their political choices, and are a perfect example of reinvention, as their use in dress and clothing became vital to revolutionaries. The citizens of France utilized the small pieces of fabric as they strove to bond

²⁴ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 3.

themselves under a new government. After effectively taking apart the *ancien régime* and its emblems, they wanted to do away with the old system of the monarchy and the cockades were a new symbol which afforded them a characteristic feature uniquely their own.

During the Revolution, four distinct colors of cockades surfaced; the green, the tri-color, the black and the white. What did these colors mean to those involved? Why were they chosen? Exploring the use of the cockades opens a new window into the diverging flow of the Revolution, as those who wanted to be out from under the constraints of the required dress of the Estates General and class division, turned to forcing these new emblems and colors upon those partaking in the movement, mimicking the "*ancien régime*" and their laws for costumes. More than ever, during this period, a war began in which wearing certain colors was considered anti-Revolutionary, and seeing a particular color could incite a crowd into instant disruption and chaos. Was the Revolution really one about equality and freedom, or was this Revolution entirely different? For the politics of the cockade, wearing a particular color of cockade became law during the Revolution, forcing its wearer to its will. This was seemingly a paradox for those who initiated this law, as they were the same revolutionaries seeking to distant themselves from required conformity.

The Revolution began its reinvention with the ousting of the distinctive three Estates and the costumes associated

with each. Rejecting the dress of the third Estate, because the function of its costumes was to fix people's identity, the revolutionaries wanted to do away with the subjection to the authority of the monarchy by way of fabric and clothing.²⁵ Recognizing that a new era was approaching; the Revolution itself paved way for the French people to abolish the apparatus of the "*ancien régime*," the extravagant dress of the court and the clergy, and to claim "a new generation of signs, badges and costumes" of their own.²⁶

The era of cockades was introduced by an episode which took place after the storming of the Bastille, concerning the death of Flesselles, a provost who worked under the governor de Launay. Flesselles was shot by an unknown person from the mob of civilians which gathered there. His death was the result of a rumor that he wrote a letter to de Launay, the Governor in charge of the Bastille, in which he stated: "Hold out, while I amuse the Parisians with cockades."²⁷ It would be an understatement to say that this particular phrase is not a summation of the chaotic events what transpired afterwards concerning the adoption of the cockade as an important new symbol of the new French government. The events at the Bastille in July 1789 were a momentous and symbolic political act, as the prison itself represented an oppressive and dark place to the people of France. Its downfall predictably affected the masses and

25 Richard Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearances* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 59.

26 Ibid.

27 M.A. Thiers, *The History of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1848), 69-70.

also impacted the fashion of the people of Paris.²⁸ Flesselles' remark to de Launay somehow foretold the course the cockade would take, as its importance took a darker turn, in which the colors of cockades determined if you lived or died, a non-amusing theatrical production which lasted many years.

When Camille Desmoulins introduced the first color of the Revolution, as he rallied those to a call to arms at the storming of the Bastille, the civilians who gathered around him followed his example of putting a green leaf in their caps and calling it a cockade as they marched forward in their attack.²⁹ Ribbon cockades, up to the time of the French Revolution, were associated with military headdresses, and the ornaments themselves held connotations of choosing sides or displaying allegiance to one group or another.³⁰ Desmoulins chose the leaf because it was a ready symbol that allowed individuals to declare themselves "a soldier for the *patrie*."³¹ Those who participated in this occasion did not know that they put in place, upon their hats, an emblem that would create a great political and social conflict.³²

Various tales surround the color green as associated with the leaf used by those at the Bastille. Why was this color chosen? Camille Desmoulins, in a letter to his father dated 16 July 1789, describing the charge on the Bastille, said, « *Prenons*

28 Nicola J. Shilliam, "'Cocardes Nationales and Bonnets Rouges': Symbolic Headdresses of the French Revolution," in *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts* 5 (1993), 109-113.

29 Camille Desmoulins, *Oeuvres de Camille Desmoulins: Député à la Convention National* (New York, AMS Press, 1972), Volume 2, 22. Reprinted from the edition of 1838, Paris.

30 Shilliam, 110.

31 Wrigley, 98-104.

32 Hunt, 58.

tous des cocardes vertes, couleur de l'espérance »; “let us all take up green cockades, the color of hope.”³³ Further accounts and retelling of the event, such as reported in the *Revolutions de Paris*, indicate that the “adoption of green cockades” was “a sign of solidarity and popular mobilization.”³⁴ Whether it was a symbol for hope or solidarity, the people, hearing Desmoulins’ great speech at the Bastille, saw the color and emblem presented to them in the form of a green leaf mesmerizing. Here was a new national identity that all of them could rally under, and as one great body, attack the grotesque symbol of the monarchy, the Bastille, which stood for suppression and limitation.

Green cockades did not last though, as reinvention took hold once again. Pierre-Nicolas Chantreau, a French historian of that time, explained to others why green needed to be abandoned. He said it caused “political conflict,” as the color echoed submission, as green was tied to the uniforms of the Prince de Lambesc’s troops who attacked a group of civilians in the Tuileries gardens.³⁵ It was also argued that because green was the color of the livery of the Count Artois, the King’s younger brother, the people would not wear something so closely associated with the monarchy. According to the Duke of Dorset, the red and white were substituted for the green.³⁶ While the Duke contends that red and white were chosen because they were of the colors of the

33 Desmoulins, 22.

34 Wrigley, 98.

35 Ibid, 100.

36 Hunt, 57.

Duke of Orleans, most historical texts point to the fact that red and blue were chosen because they were the colors of Paris.³⁷ In Camille Desmoulins' letter to his father, he describes the march of the National Assembly towards the *Hôtel de Ville* and stated that they marched under the color of the flag, red and blue, red for the blood willingly spilled and blue for the constitution, and each deputy sported a cockade of the same colors. «*Ils marchèrent sous les drapeaux des gardes-françaises, ... les drapeaux de la nation, de la liberté.... Le rouge, pour montrer qu'on était prêt à verser son sang ; et le bleu, pour une constitution céleste. Les députés avoient aussi la cocarde.*»³⁸

The narration of the cockade goes further as it transformed into the full fledged national symbol, when Jean Sylvain Bailly, the mayor of Paris, presented the king with a tri-color cockade of blue, red and white, at the *Hôtel de Ville* 17 July 1789, upon Louis XVI's entry into the city.³⁹ The merging of the red and blue, the new colors associated with the Revolution, with the colors of the House of Bourbon, white, was an attempt at making a symbolic treaty for the sake of the French people and the monarchy. Lafayette wanted the merging of the red, blue and white to signify that an "accord" was reached with the King and all was well, and he supported the reforms.⁴⁰ The king's life rested upon his acceptance of the cockade from the mayor, as the crowds looked on in anticipation. The gracious act of taking the new colors and

37 Shilliam, 110.

38 Desmoulins, 27.

39 Wrigley, 99.

40 Shilliam, 111.

placing them upon his hat meant that the king accepted also the request for reforms for his people.

The *cocarde nationale*, or *cocarde tricolore*, was life giving from that point forward. Its simple form created joy in the people as they viewed it as a sign of change. The red, blue, and white, bound together, unified them with a new national sense of belonging. Citizens became extremely patriotic, obsessively. Any other color cockade was deemed anti-revolutionary, and those who were a part of the Revolution wanted to make sure the *corcarde nationale* was an everyday accessory, put on as part of everyday clothing, with as much fever and zeal as could be mustered.

Yet, there were those who viewed this new symbol with distaste. They refused to be seen with it on. Opposed to the upheaval the *cocarde nationale* embodied, they took to wearing black as a symbol of mourning.⁴¹ Black became a color of the anti-revolutionaries. It indicated political allegiance opposite the red, blue, and white. Those wearing the black cockade were often taunted, beaten, or even killed. Seen as an emblem and color which was pro-monarchy, those who wore black cockades became thought of as a force which would make the *corcarde nationale* irrelevant. Even as the *émigrés* returned under assumed names, they identified themselves by the wearing of a black velvet cape.

The extent of dispute over the colored cockades can be understood more clearly by events which happened during the march of the women on Versailles October 5, 1789. As

⁴¹ Auslander, 229.

these patriotic women were in route to the king and queen, they grew very suspicious of anyone wearing a black cockade, because they did not want to be blocked from their objective by those who anti-revolutionary. One witness, after he was forcibly made to march with them, reported to the authorities:

Past Viroflay they met a number of individuals on horseback who appeared to be bourgeois and wore black cockades in their hats. The women stopped them and made as if to commit violence against them, saying that they must die as punishment for having insulted, and for insulting, the national cockade; one they struck and pulled off his horse, tearing off his black cockade, which one of the women handed to him [the witness].⁴²

This episode conveys the fierceness in which the citizens felt towards their new symbol, and in protecting it, opened the doors for further violence, as the simple everyday cockade stirred the flames of civil war.

There is not a doubt that the women believed they were defending the revolutionary movement itself by protecting the tri-color cockade. While their march to Versailles intertwined itself with the concern on the lack of food and bread for their families, they were also mobilized because of a rumor, and the supposed insult paid to the *corcarde nationale*. In his history of the French Revolution, Thomas Carlyle described the occasion which ignited the women. He gives details of a great party held at Versailles days before the march on October 5, 1789. As the queen entered the room “her looks full of sorrow, yet of gratitude

⁴² Shilliam, 112.

and daring, with the hope of France upon her mother-bosom," a song was struck up by the band, the words "O Richard, O mon Roi, l'univers l'abandonne," instilling a sense of "loyal valor" and as "white Bourbon Cockades, handed them from fair fingers," are given to the young men in attendance, they pledge to the health of the queen and trample underfoot the *cocarde nationale*.⁴³ This story reaches those in Paris, and those women who found their cupboards bare were not tolerant of the monarchy's display of extravagance, or the fact that their beloved revolutionary symbol was treated with so much disrespect. The march to Versailles was to demand answers for both the lack of food and the insult to the tri-color cockade. On their way there, any cockade which was not the tri-color was "ruthlessly plucked off" and thrown away.⁴⁴ No exception was made. Many within the movement itself saw the trouble the colorful cockades instigated. In fact an article appeared in *Moniteur* regarding the march on Versailles by the women, and a warning to the public concerning the influence the colorful badges created, and what terrible implications would arise from its use. "Cockades of a single colour will be the signal for a civil war if they are allowed to multiply," it warned.⁴⁵ No one paid heed to this dire message and war of the *corcarde nationale* drew its second act.

During 1790 friction developed as other colors of the cockade were attacked. Suggestion was made that even

43 Thomas Carlyle Rhys, *History of the French Revolution* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD., 1944), 198-200.

44 Ibid.

45 Wrigley, 101.

French military cockades, such as the *cocarde rouge*, awarded after twenty years of service, be replaced with the tri-color. Men of the military reacted unfavorably, stressing that the *cocarde nationale* “was nothing more than a ‘standard of revolt in the name of liberty,’” and refused to adhere to the request.⁴⁶ Other colors of cockades were worn within the city limits, those of neighboring countries. These colors were also looked upon unfavorably.

Disputes continued to escalate, especially with the women of Paris. There were many reports of women who on occasions battled in the streets because they found other women not wearing the colorful symbol. The new emblem, from the viewpoint of the upper class women, was seen as a badge which only prostitutes wore, and unless the Convention decreed for them to wear it, would not add the ribbon accessory to their clothes or hat.⁴⁷ Further violence over the inclusion of the *cocarde nationale* erupted after some insinuated that anti-revolutionary agents, who were supposedly ordered to create anarchy, perpetuated this female discord.

As the Revolution progressed, the French became uniquely pre-occupied with their new symbol and colors. The *cocarde nationale* replaced all other forms of patriotism, and its use in everyday life grew to such political importance that laws were considered for its compulsory wearing by men. Ringing similar to a time when those of the three

⁴⁶ Ibid, 102.

⁴⁷ Shilliam, 112.

estates required certain dress, the cockade took a new form of denotation. Any other color cockade was deemed to endorse “signs of rebellion” and citizens caught with anything other than the *cocarde nationale* were to be arrested and given a command to denounce their colors, or be punished with death.⁴⁸ The rally around the tri-color cockade influenced politics further, by creating a backlash among the female citizens, and the predicted civil war ensued.

In April, 1793, the Convention mandated that the tri-color cockade be worn by all men and women were, of course, excluded from this declaration. While it was not law for the female citizens, there were some militant women who believed it should be mandatory for them also, and when confronted by other women who did not wear the *cocarde nationale*, insults and accusations flew. Violence erupted between the two bickering factions, as to whether or not it was proper for females to wear the colors of the Revolution, or, as insinuated by many women, the cockade should be left out of their attire all together because modest women did not attach it to their wardrobe.

The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women petitioned the National Convention at the beginning of September 1793, urging them to “pass a decree punishing ‘the shrews who mistreated female citizens’” who wore the national cockade.⁴⁹ The society, acting on the fears of civil war, thought it best to force all women to wear the tri-

⁴⁸ Wrigley, 104.

⁴⁹ Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 159-160.

color symbol, so that all women would be adored with the “sign of liberty.”⁵⁰ This petition was backed by episodes of altercations in the streets between loyal female citizens and those not wearing the cockade. Clashing on September 13 with “fishwives,” who refused to participate in the wearing of the amusing cockade, caused the street brawling to be multiplied. The women of the fish market were hostile to the accessory, saying “only whores and female Jacobins wear cockades” and women “should be concerned only with their households and not with current events.”⁵¹ The police backed the society’s proposal in hopes that this would eliminate the tussling in the streets. Finally on September 21, 1793, an order was directed to all women that the *cocarde nationale* was to be worn with their clothing. If they were found without it, severe punishments would be administered, and for those who persisted in the displays of violence towards other women, the offender could receive ten years of imprisonment.

Seen as a political win for the women who wished to be acknowledged as equals to men in the political sphere of cockades, the law itself seemed to create a reverse effect and only caused more bickering.⁵² Although the regulation directed everyone to wear it, it did not specify how it should

50 Ibid, 159.

51 Ibid, 160.

52 Shilliam, 113.

be worn, and women's focus went from inclusion to clothing, to where it should be placed or how fancy it should be, a small detail it would seem, but gave rise to fuel already heightened emotions. Flesselles' words certainly echoed true in the streets of Paris, as the public was further entertained with women and their war of the cockades.

The cockade does not find its conclusion here. Its legacy is felt through the many years after the National Convention and into the history of France, evolving into an artifact that represented the people's identity, even through the First World War. The Revolutionaries, while trying to eliminate the restrictive fashion of the three Estates, created for themselves their own restriction with an austere piece of fabric, the cockade. A simple yet profound piece of woven material, which collected to its colors the fierce revolutionary people of 1789, was the greatest artifact of the French Revolution, for not only did it assist its wearer in establishing a new sense of political freedom, but it also did not adhere to any elements of the old regime.