Consumption was politicised to a great extent in France between 1789 and 1795, especially in urban areas. This question is geographically ambiguous, and although it provides an opportunity to consider issues in Saint-Domingue, adding points about this revolution suggests that it supplemented the French Revolution, superficializing it significantly. Therefore, despite the imperial connections between these countries, this essay will focus solely on French consumption to actively help decolonise the Haitian Revolution.[1] Furthermore, consumption is a broad term. This essay will define it as physical objects to ingest, and as material, cultural objects to interact with and observe. As a result, we can identify physical and cultural aspects of revolution in this period. It will define politicised by how these objects spread political ideas through the consumption of them, and use how widespread these objects were to measure how far their consumption became politicised. By exploring art, fashion, drinking, eating, material culture, song, and print, this essay will demonstrate that consumer objects or actions themselves developed significantly political messages in this period.

The historiographical debate within this topic provides a useful starting point. Twentieth century historians stuck to the traditional notion that eighteenth century France was sluggish in its economic and commercial vitality, leading them to argue that they did not experience a surge in consumption in this period.[2] However, since the 1990s, historians have 'begun to recognise the increasingly [...] consumerist aspects of eighteenth century French urban society.'[3] Recently, two streams of historiography

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[1] Sujana Dhanvantari, 'French Revolutionary Song in the Haitian Revolution 1789-1804,'in Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch (eds.) *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination* (Boston 2004), p.101.

[2] This argument creates a dichotomy between England and France. Michael Kwass, 'Consumption and the World of Ideas: Consumer Revolution and the Moral Economy of the Marquis de Mirabeau,' *Eighteenth-century Studies* 37(2) (2004), p.187.

[3] John Shovlin, 'The Cultural Politics of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France,' *French Historical Studies* 23(4) (2000), pp.584-585.

have emerged from this revisionist approach. By radically changing how people viewed individual and national identity, the French Revolution politicalised consumption and allowed people to 'make themselves anew.'[4] Alternatively, more rooted in Habermas' tradition, this politicisation of consumption was an eighteenth-century phenomenon, rooted in the public sphere.[5] Brennan makes a confused argument amalgamating these two ideas, arguing in his chapter on public politics in the French Revolution that little changed during the eighteenth century, creating a rather static image of consumption.[6] This essay will consider both streams of thought and will argue that consumption became more politicised during the French Revolution, but will consider that this type of consumption did have some root in eighteenth century culture.

To some extent, painted art consumption became more politicised between 1789 and 1795. Painted in 1794, *La Mort de joseph Bara* depicts the thirteen-year-old Republican drummer boy killed during a battle between Royalists and Republicans in 1793 (Fig. 1).[7] Clearly, the art itself had a political message, contrasting the vulnerability of youth with the terrors of war to underline its injustice, demonstrating contemporaries who viewed this art were consuming an object with political undertones. Indeed, this painting fits into what Dowd describes as a form of art the state used 'to mobilise public sentiment in favour of the new France.'[8] In other words, art developed into propaganda for the new

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[4] Richard Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (Pennsylvania 2013), p.97.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (trans. Thomas Burger) (2nd ed. 2003), pp.34-5, 92; Michael Kwass, 'Economies of Consumption: Political Economy and Noble display in eighteenth-century France' in Jay M. Smith (ed.), *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: Reassessments and New Approaches* (Pennsylvania 2006), pp.21-37.

[6] He does, however, critique Habermas by suggesting the influence of taverns on lower classes. Thomas Brennan, 'Taverns and the Public Sphere in the French Revolution,' in Mark P. Holt (ed.) *Alcohol: A social and cultural history* (Oxford 2006), pp.107, 114, 116.

[7] Alyce Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde* (Oxford 2020), p.74.

[8] David L. Dowd, 'Art as National Propaganda in the French Revolution,' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 15(3) (1951), p.532.

Republic, making the consumption of these luxury paintings political as a result. However, it is important not to overstate the significance of such pieces. Most people, especially non-elites and non-Parisians, did not have access to these artworks, demonstrating that they could not spread a political message across France as Dowd suggests. Therefore, the consumption of paintings was only politicised to some extent. Although they became propagandised, causing any consumption of them to become political, their lack of outreach meant they could not impact general consumption trends.

Furthermore, although still limited, fashion consumption became politicised in this period to a greater extent. In patriot circles in 1790s France, most men started to wear darker colours and short, unpowdered wigs, in essence denouncing 'pomp to constitute political authority and social rank.'[9] Fashion consumption amongst elite men, then, symbolised a shift from the Old Regime to a new one, politicising it by giving it a Republican message. Importantly, due to the lack of separation between this elite class and others in Paris, and the scrutiny that this ruling class experienced, their changed appearance had wider ramifications.[10] It demonstrated their humility to viewers, pushing this consumption outside of the privileged sphere and into wider, public politics. Nevertheless, the evidence only shows the impact in Paris, limiting how far we can argue that this political change impacted France more generally. On the other hand, elite members of society lived across the country, and they most likely became involved in this change, indicating that fashion consumption became politicised to a notable extent in France. Mainly in the capital, the elite move from pomp to restrictive clothing

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[9] Shovlin, 'Cultural Politics of Luxury,' pp.603, 605.

[10] Mette Harder and Marisa Linton, '"Come and Dine"" The Dangers of Conspicuous Consumption in French Revolutionary politics, 1789-1795,' *European History Quarterly* 45(4) (2015), p.616.

symbolised changing ideas in France and affected non-elites surrounding them, making the impact more widespread.

Food consumption became politicised to a similar extent. In July 1789, a hungry public lynch Parisian official Foulon de Doué for humorously exclaiming that they should eat hay if they cannot access bread.[11] Clearly, food shortages caused by detrimental crop failures both illustrated and widened the economic divide between elites and non-elites in Paris, forcing any actual or discussion of food consumption to become politicised, as highlighted by this violent act.[12] Indeed, due to the lack of social separation in Paris, many spotted politicians eating in expensive cafés and restaurants, exacerbating this economic divide.[13] Again, this situation appears unique to Paris and the early parts of the French Revolution, limiting its significance somewhat, and showing that this political phenomenon mainly developed in urban areas. Nonetheless, to a notable extent, food consumption became politicised. Expensive food symbolised the luxurious lifestyles of the few in exchange for the poverty of others, especially in Paris, contributing to tension that developed at the start of this new regime and radicalising the financially unstable against the richer people around them.

Simultaneously, and to a wider impact, alcohol consumption became politicised by the new Republic. Béricourt's 1791 painting *promenade aux Champs-Elysées, le jour de l'emtree libres des barrieres* illustrates a merry scene of public drinking (Fig. 2). The presence of three French flags creates a distinct link between this party and the nation, politicising public drunkenness. The new Republic had facilitated extensive liberty and

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[11] *Ibid.*, p.617.

[12] John Markoff, 'Allies and Opponents: Nobility and the Third Estate in the Spring of 1789,' *American Sociological Review* 53(4) (1988), p.483.

[13] Harder and Linton, '"Come and Dine,"' pp.618-619.

freedom in French society according to this painting, spreading a positive, political message. Of course, this painted representation is exaggerated for a purpose, and although it valuably expresses the political use of alcohol consumption in art, it does not show the actual situation of community or neighbourly drinking. Nonetheless, examples do illustrate equally political moments of drinking in French society. In a working-class district of Paris in 1794, neighbours toasted to the Convention and stated 'death to the tyrants! Long live Liberty and Equality!'[14] Messages of freedom present in the painting are translated in this toast, illustrating that people did associate drinking to new, Republican ideas. Importantly, public drinking became increasingly associated with politics during the eighteenth century; hence, this association is not new, but instead follows a trend, suggesting that we should not view the Revolutionary period in isolation from the rest of the century.[15] Although, the nationalised use of drinking was rather novel, demonstrating that, to a great extent, alcohol consumption became politicised. Across France, the newfound accessibility of drink and liberal culture surrounding it symbolised emancipation from the Old Regime.

More expansively, material culture pieces, and therefore the consumption of them, became politicised in this revolutionary period. From late 1790, the revolutionary government gave Bastille replicas carved from stones taken from the former prison to each department of France, who then displayed these for public consumption (Fig. 3).[16] In concept and material, this piece carried an overtly political, revolutionary message, illustrating a shift that the events of 1789 helped create and indicating that this period specifically saw a rise in the politicisation of everyday resources. In theory, everyone in

[14] Rod Phillips, *French Wine: A History* (Berkeley 2016), p.128.
[15] Brennan, 'Taverns in the French Revolution,' p.107.
[16] Taws, 'The Politics of the Provisional,' p.99.

France could view one of these objects, making the impact widespread, and demonstrating the significance of material items in politicising general consumption. Indeed, a household plate visualising the execution of Louis XIV reinforced this point (Fig. 4). It demonstrates that events from the revolution penetrated the home, suggesting that everyday consumption became more political in this period. Hence, the consumption of material culture became politicised to a great extent. Object pieces impacted people across France on a personal and social level, allowing the revolutionary message to spread.

Likewise, music consumption became politicised to a significant extent between 1789 and 1795. Previously, song lyrics about political events tended to give voice to the elite only, implying, of course, that the average person was no more than a passive bystander.[17] In this sense, songs were unrelatable and unattainable by the public. Yet the revolution changed this narrative. The May 1790 edition of *Chronique de Paris* stated that songs reached the people and made the revolutionary spirit 'current in the streets.'[18] The timing of this change demonstrates that music consumption as part of public politics was a revolutionary phenomenon, justifying the focus on this period. Lyrically, as well, songs began to focus on this public. 'Allons enfants de la patrie/ le jour de gloire est arrivé' declared the song of war for the army of the Rhine, linking the children of Paris to the glory day makes important figures out of them.[19] Of course, song can spread easily through communities due to its accessibility, implying that political singing was expansive. Therefore, music consumption was politicised to a significant

[17] Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and politics 1787-1799* (Ithaca, NY 1996), p.37.
[18] 'Chronique de Paris' (Paris 1790), quoted in Cornwell B. Rogers, 'Songs – colourful propaganda of the French Revolution,' *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 11(3) (1947), p.438.
[19] Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, *Chant de guerre pour l'armée du Rhin/La Marseillaise* (Paris 1792).

extent. In the revolutionary period, its focus shifted from the elite to the public, spreading a message of French social power across the country.

Print consumption became politicised in the period 1789 to 1795 to the greatest extent. Most significant was the viewing of images through print, as pamphlets allowed people across France who did not hear about the event through rumour or saw it themselves to keep up with political turmoil more generally. An engraving, showing the death of Robespierre, illustrates explicitly how he died in 1794 (Fig. 5). Imagery makes information accessible to illiterate people, and even if they do not understand the context of Robespierre's death, this image is clearly administrative in its actions, demonstrating that print consumption for all had political undertones. Indeed, pamphlets illustrating Louis XIV's death used similar imagery, indicating that images of the guillotine in print were common and easily recognised, and therefore associated with governmental actions (Fig. 6). The text mentions the 'thousands of innocent victims' Robespierre condemned, giving agency back to the public, contributing to public politics, and thus showing that print consumption, through its range of influences, became politicised to the greatest extent.

Most interesting is the use of recognisable characters to make print consumption political in this period. Marianne appeared as a symbol of 'La République' in Ancient Roman dress in printed works (Fig. 7). Her maternal image, shown usually with weapon and helmet in a natural setting, suggests that the Republic is a caretaker that will fight for its people (Fig. 8). The ancient Roman dress forms an image of imperial strength, representing this new era in French history as prosperous. Notably, in the eighteenth century, Marianne was a very common name in France, regardless of status or location, associating the Republic to a united public, and aiming to make everyone feel included

in this new ideology.[20] According to Agulhon, ‘she was all over the place: in Paris and in the provinces, in open public places and in private ones.’[21] This argument is convincing, as it demonstrates the outreach of printed symbols, and underlines that this type of consumption became politicised to the greatest extent. Through political imagery, its messages were accessible, and the nature of print allowed these messages to disseminate across France the most successfully.

Consumption became politicised in France between 1789 and 1795 to a great extent, especially in urban areas. This subclause mainly applies to consumable items with less outreach, which only became politicised to some extent as a result. For instance, the consumption of paintings was only politicised in this way; the work itself became propagandised, causing any consumption of them to become political, but their lack of outreach meant they could not impact general consumption trends. Furthermore, fashion consumption became politicised to a notable extent, with elites removing their splendour to represent the new Republic, the lack of separation in urban spaces allowed non-elites to see this change, making the impact more widespread. Likewise, food consumption became politicised because expensive food came to illustrate the luxurious lifestyles of the few in juxtaposition to the poverty of others, contributing to tension that developed at the start of this new regime. Moreover, to a great extent, alcohol consumption became politicised, as its increased accessibility symbolised emancipation from the Old Regime. Similarly, the consumption of material culture became politicised, as cultural objects impacted people across France on a personal and social level, the politicising of them allowed the revolutionary message to spread. More significantly,

[20] Kristina Molin Cherneski, ‘Gender, the Secular, and the Image of the Marianne in the French Revolution,’ (2019), p.48.

[21] Maurice Agulhon, Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880 (Cambridge 1981), p.22.

music consumption was politicised in the revolutionary period, with its focus shifting from the elite to the public, spreading a message of French social power across the country. Print consumption became politicised to the greatest degree, especially political imagery which made these events and ideas accessible, plus the ability to mass print disseminated the same messages across France easily. However, Paris experienced this phenomenon the most because the events and ideas started from here, underlining that consumption became politicised to a great extent, especially in urban areas.

Appendix

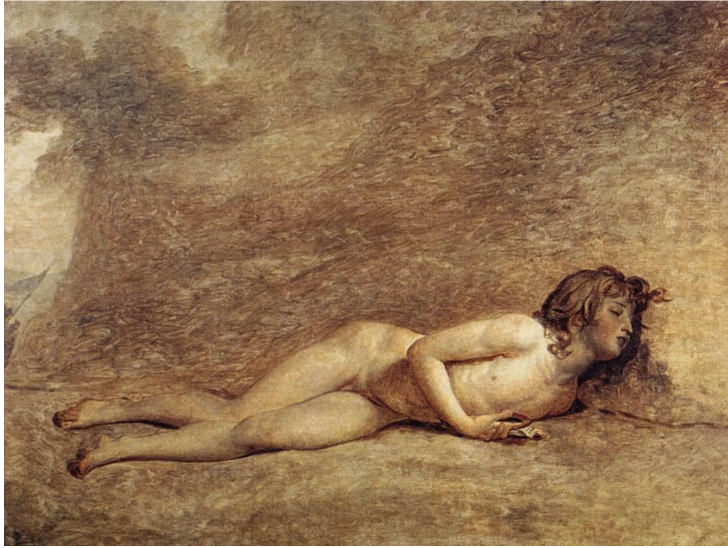

Figure 1: Jacques-Louis David, ‘Le Mort de Joseph Bara,’ 1794, Oil on Canvas, Musée Calvet, Avignon, in Alyce Mahon, *The Marquis de Sade and the Avant-Garde* (Oxford 2020), p.74.

Figure 2: Étienne Béricourt, ‘Promenade aux Champs-Elysées, le jour de l'entree libre des barriers,’ c. 1791, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8411352d.item accessed 27 November 2022.

Figure 3: Workshop of Pierre-François Palloy, ‘Modèle de la Bastille,’ 1790. Musée Départemental des Antiquités de la Seine-Maritime, Rouen, in Richard Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (Pennsylvania 2013), p.98.

Figure 4: “Commemorating the Revolution on Chinaware,” *LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY: EXPLORING THE FRENCH REVOUTION*, accessed 27 November 2022, https://revolution.chnm.org/d/649.

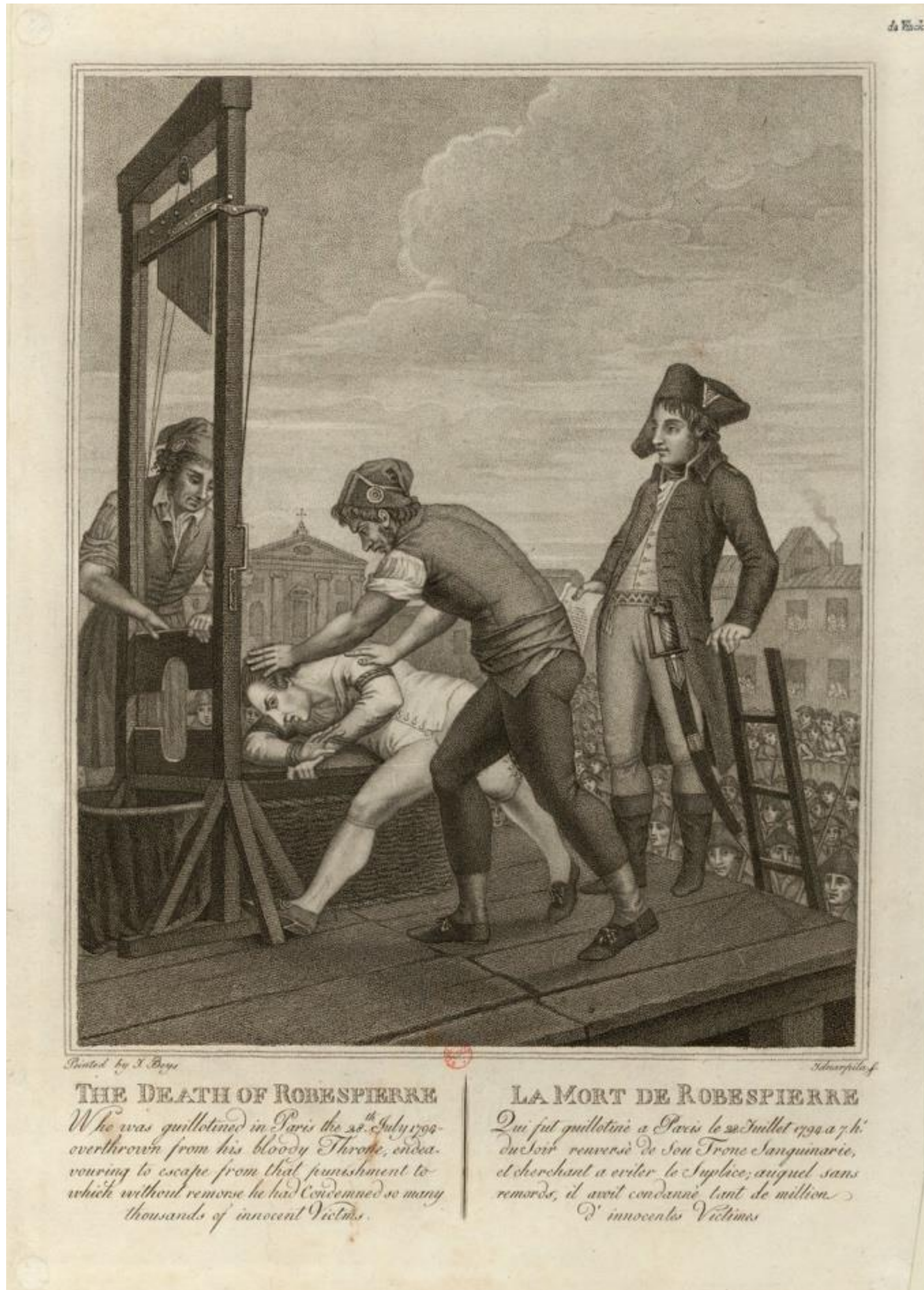

Figure 5: Giacomo Aliprandi (engraver) and Giacomo Beys (illustrator), "The Death of Robespierre," *LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY: EXPLORING THE FRENCH REVOUTION*, accessed 28 November 2022, https://revolution.chnm.org/d/11.

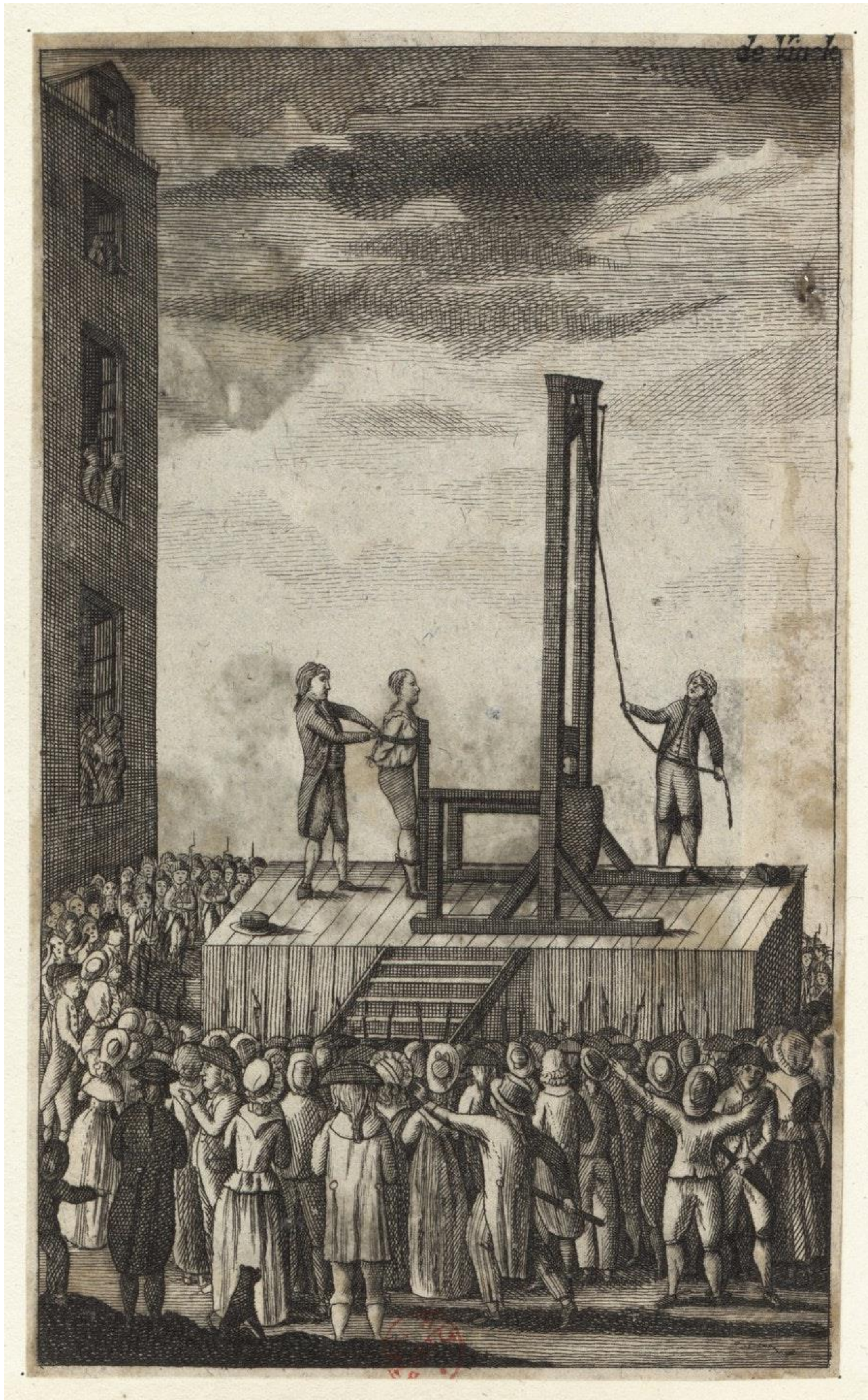

Figure 6: 'Execution of Louis XVI,' 1793, accessed 29 November 2022. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6949643k.

Figure 7: 'The Republic', 1793, *LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY: EXPLORING THE FRENCH REVOUTION*, accessed 9 November 2022, https://revolution.chnm.org/d/71.

Figure 8: Étienne Béricourt, 'Vive la Montagne; vive la République une et indivisible', dessin: watercolour and ink on paper, ca. 1793, Collection Michel Hennin, accessed 20 November 2022, https://purl.stanford.edu/vp826kj2130.

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