Conclusion

No single factor can adequately explain the federalist revolt in 1793. The proscription of twenty-nine Girondin deputies triggered resistance in many departments, but the underlying reasons for the pattern of revolt run much deeper than the political affiliations between proscribed deputies and their constituencies. These ties were not unimportant, but the correlation between federalist departments and proscribed deputies is a weak one. Only twelve of the twenty-nine came from departments that engaged in prolonged resistance to the Montagnard Convention, and five of these came from one department, the Gironde. Six of the thirteen departments that actively revolted against the Montagnard Convention were not represented by a single proscribed deputy, while several departments represented by proscribed deputies made little or no protest. Among the deputies excluded on June 2 were two representatives each from the Meurthe and the Orne, departments that protested the May 31 revolution only by letter. Another two deputies, A. B. Chambon and B. F. Lidon, came from the Corrèze, a department that firmly rejected all entreaties to join in resistance. The Eure-et-Loir also supported the Montagnard victory, despite the fact that Brissot, Lesage, and Pétion all represented that department in the Convention.¹

¹ The proscribed deputies and their departments are as follows: Barbaroux (Bouches-du-Rhône); Bergoeing (Gironde); Bertrand L'Hodiesnière (Orne); Birotteau (Pyrénées-Orientales); Boilleau (Yonne); Brissot (Eure-et-Loir); Buzot (Eure); Chambon (Corrèze); Dufrière-Valazé
Although the provincial revolt in June, 1793, cannot be understood as a simple reaction to the proscription of the Girondin deputies, it must be understood as integrally related to the political struggle in Paris that finally produced the May 31 revolution. At the heart of the Girondin/Montagnard split was a debate between two opposing visions of democracy, the liberal representative democracy favored by the Girondins and the more popular participatory democracy championed by the Montagnards and the Parisian sans-culottes. Albert Soboul has labeled this opposition a conflict between “representative democracy” and “agent democracy.”

This conflict over what form the new French republic would take was hardly confined to the national political arena. The debate that raged in the streets, clubs, and assembly halls of Paris in the spring of 1793 had been waged and resolved in the provinces during the previous months and years. Clearly, this was the case in both Caen and Limoges, where the character of local politics had already been determined by the summer of 1792. This is not to say that the shape of local politics had anywhere been cast in stone by 1792. The turbulent years that followed brought changes in political structures and practices in many of the departments of France. But the political forms that prevailed in the departments in June, 1793, did play a major role in determining provincial response to the May 31 revolution. And the inability of the federalist departments to overturn the victory of the Montagnards may have been a crucial blow to the immediate prospects for liberal democracy in France. Certainly, the years following 9 Thermidor, when moderates who had supported the Girondins returned to power in Paris and the departments, were an exercise in failure for liberal representative democracy, a failure caused in large part by the divisions and bitterness sown in 1793 and the year II.

The federalist revolt is important to our understanding of the Revolution not only because it was a crucial turning point but because it demonstrates the links between national and local politics in this period. The two inter-
acted continually, and while historians have long belabored the predominant influence of Paris on French national culture and politics, it is important to remember that the provinces, or departments, also influenced the national drama unfolding in Paris. The deputies who voted on the fate of the king, and who later voted to proscribe twenty-nine of their colleagues, were products of local politics. The overwhelming majority had experience as municipal, district, or departmental administrators.⁴

To take but two examples, let us consider the cases of Gustave Doulcet de Pontécoulant and Léonard Gay-Vernon. Doulcet had been president of the Calvados departmental administration in the 1791–1792 term, during the turbulent affair of the Criminal Tribunal. In the midst of that affair, Doulcet denounced the Caen Jacobin club for its unruly intervention in public affairs. He insisted on the need for orderly and informed deliberation by the elected representatives of the people. Doulcet carried that attitude to the National Convention, where he joined the Girondin deputies in their support for representative democracy. In this, he epitomized the general character of Caen and Calvados politics.

Léonard Gay-Vernon went from the municipal council of la Cité, subsequently absorbed by Limoges, to the Legislative Assembly and then to the National Convention. He participated in the founding of the Limoges Jacobin club and maintained an active affiliation with the club after his departure to Paris. Gay-Vernon encouraged the club in its political activism, both in local and national affairs. He had an extreme disregard for individuals and insisted on the accountability of elected deputies, not only to the people who elected them but to all the people. In the Convention, Gay-Vernon sat with the Montagnards and supported their vision of participatory democracy. Although he may not have expressed the views of most Haute-Vienne administrators, he did represent the broad, popular character of Limoges municipal politics.

Doulcet and Gay-Vernon not only illustrate one way in which local politics affected national politics but also point out the difficulty encountered by historians seeking a social basis for the political division between Girondins and Montagnards. Both Doulcet and Gay-Vernon came from noble families. True, Gay-Vernon belonged to a petty noble family, while Doulcet came from a prominent family with a centuries-long lineage. But in a statistical study of the deputies in the National Convention, both would be entered in

⁴ See Patrick, *The Men of the First French Republic.*
the category labeled "nobility." Overall, one finds very little social distinction between the Girondin deputies and their Montagnard opponents—both came essentially from the upper ranks of the third estate and the liberal nobility. 5

For this reason, one cannot seek an explanation for the political divisions in Paris solely in the social backgrounds of elected deputies. More important to consider is the social fabric of the regions they represented. This is not a deterministic argument that Calvados produced Girondins while the Haute-Vienne produced Montagnards—that is clearly not the case. But while other deputies than Doulcet and Gay-Vernon might have been chosen as examples above, the noble Montagnard Bonnet de Meautry from Calvados and the Girondin lawyer Lesterpt-Beauvais from the Haute-Vienne were neither the most influential nor the most representative deputies of their departments. Thus, it is crucial to consider national politics and local politics together, to find the links and continuities between the two.

That those links and continuities existed, particularly in the spring of 1793, is relatively clear. The political issues then confronting the nation had confronted local officials in 1791 and 1792, at least in Caen and Limoges. Most of the deputies in Paris in 1793 had moved up through the ranks of local administration. Local clubs and administrative councils inundated the National Convention with letters and petitions throughout the winter and spring of 1793 calling for a constitution and an end to factionalism. Returning the favor, national deputies often lent support by way of letter to their allies on the local scene.

This study has shed light on each of these areas of interaction between local and national politics. It has also established and explored the political contrasts between Caen and Limoges and their relationship to national issues. More difficult is establishing the underlying social and economic forces that produced those political contrasts and divisions. And more difficult still is constructing a logical and consistent interpretive framework that will make those underlying forces coherent. The conceptual model proposed by Edward Fox, positing a political dichotomy between the agricultural hinterland and the commercial periphery, does provide such a framework.

The contrasting economies of Caen and Limoges correspond well to the typology of French towns proposed by Fox. Fox disputes the notion that the growth of commercial towns and the rise of the monarchy were part

of the same process. Instead, he marks a distinction between commercial towns and trade towns (which also served as administrative centers), arguing that the monarchy was built on the latter, with commercial towns never fully integrated into the bureaucratic state. 6

Caen and Limoges clearly do not constitute the "ideal type" of either variety of town, but it would be fair to classify Caen as commercial and Limoges as a trade, or administrative, town. Although Caen lay in a rich agricultural plain (Fox contrasts the commercial economy with the agricultural economy of administrative towns), commerce spurred the town's growth in the eighteenth century, and the commercial elite of Caen dominated local affairs on the eve of the Revolution. Moreover, the agriculture of Calvados was largely commercial, not subsistence, in character. The Limousin, by contrast, was predominantly a region of subsistence agriculture, and Limoges fits the mold of an administrative town very well. Representatives of the monarchy dominated Limoges politics and provided the impetus for local development. Limoges did engage in trade, some of it at long distance, but wholesale commerce did not play the important role that it did in Caen.

This classification of the two towns corresponds with their political orientation at the end of the Old Regime and during the Revolution. Caen, the commercial town, resisted the encroachments of the state bureaucracy and looked toward other commercial communities and its own agricultural hinterland as the sources of its prosperity. The Caen municipal council quarreled with the royal intendants in the 1780s, and during the 1792-1793 term, the Calvados administration berated the National Convention for neglecting to provide for the defense of its coast, so vital to both the safety and the economy of the department. Limoges, the administrative town, named its grand boulevards for the royal intendants who built them. The Limousin depended on the monarchy for help in maintaining its roads and for grain to feed its people. After 1789, the Haute-Vienne again looked to Paris for funds to rebuild the fire-ravaged Manigne quarter in Limoges and to purchase the grain that local harvests had failed to produce. The Haute-Vienne sent two thousand volunteers to assist the Republic in its battle against the Vendéan rebels, who in 1793 threatened areas that supplied the department with the grain it so badly needed.

Fox's argument holds that the economic role, or function, of a town under the Old Regime determined its political posture, at least vis-à-vis the state.

6. Fox, History in Geographic Perspective, 33-54.
His discussion of political life in the two types of towns is explicit. Commercial oligarchies governed the former, generally through compromise and negotiation; hierarchy characterized the administrative towns, with an agent of the crown in the dominant position.

This analysis is reasonably compatible with the situation in both Caen and Limoges under the Old Regime. The local elite in Caen resented the interference of royal officials, while in Limoges the intendant assumed the role of the dominant, and generally accepted, political and administrative figure. After 1789, however, it is Limoges that appears to have been more politically democratic than Caen. In Calvados, the duly elected administrative bodies, particularly the departmental administration, dominated local politics. In the Haute-Vienne, on the other hand, the Limoges municipal council, and more significantly the Limoges Jacobin club, acted as restraints on the moderate (even federalist) inclinations of departmental officials and managed to maintain an active political forum.

Does this constitute a flaw in Fox's thesis? Superficially, it would seem to, but the argument needs only to be refined, not discarded. Fox himself cautions against equating negotiation-minded commercial communities with "democratic" government. Narrow oligarchies ruled these towns. Indeed, the hierarchical, administrative towns often possessed a broader "democratic" base, because agents of the crown frequently favored the lower classes in their efforts to weaken the influence of the local nobility.

Alexis de Tocqueville, too, addresses the relationship between administrative centralism and democratic government at the local level. He argues that throughout France, municipal government had "degenerated into a petty oligarchy" by the end of the Old Regime. In some towns, the monarchy had allowed the democratic forms of a bygone era to survive (in the election of town councils or the periodic convocation of public assemblies, for example), though it seldom invested those forms with any real power or authority. Although Tocqueville may be overestimating the extent of royal power, particularly at the periphery of the kingdom, his argument does help to amplify Fox's thesis. As the power of the monarchy waned after 1789, the democratic forms that it had fostered quickly took on substance, particu-

7. Ibid., 55, 56.
8. Ibid., 38, 66–68.
larly in a town like Limoges where no homogeneous elite existed that could capture power for itself. In Caen, on the other hand, the commercial oligarchy (whether petty or not) did succeed in capturing power and in stifling a modest movement toward participatory democracy. As Tocqueville so aptly observed, “what perhaps strikes us most in the mentality and behavior of our eighteenth-century bourgeois is their obvious fear of being assimilated to the mass of the people, from whose control they strained every effort to escape.” The Caen elite succeeded in this effort, while that of Limoges did not, and as I argued in the previous chapter, the key to that difference lies in the social and economic structures of the two towns and regions.

If the Fox/Tocqueville schema fits Caen and Limoges nicely, how well does it work in explaining the federalist revolt more generally? Many of the factors that led Caen toward revolt in June, 1793, hold true for the other federalist centers as well. Bordeaux, Lyon, and Marseille were all commercial cities. All four cities had a proud history of regional independence and resistance to royal encroachment. At the most superficial level, then, the federalist revolt conforms to Fox’s thesis that the political crisis in 1793 represented a conflict between state centralization and commercial development. A closer look at the federalist centers should amplify the character of that opposition.

In each federalist city, departmental administrators took the lead in calling for resistance to the Montagnard Convention. Nowhere did the movement enjoy much popular support, although in Lyon the population did rally behind federalist administrators after republican armies laid siege to the city. The federalist leaders in Lyon, however, never succeeded in mobilizing support for a march on Paris. In Marseille, too, administrators had difficulty enlisting volunteers for the departmental force, and the movement quickly collapsed when republican troops arrived on the scene. Rebel leaders in Bordeaux managed to create an armed force only after offering a cash bonus to “volunteers,” and that force never stepped beyond the departmental boundaries of the Gironde.

How were local administrators able to maintain a posture of resistance to Paris without the backing of their constituents? We have seen that this was

10. Ibid., 93.
11. See Edmonds, “‘Federalism’ and Urban Revolt in France in 1793,” 22–53; and Crook, “Federalism and the French Revolution,” 383–97. See also Scott, Terror and Repression in Revolutionary Marseille; and Brace, Bordeaux and the Gironde, 1789–1794.
achieved in Caen in two ways. First, departmental administrators largely
controlled the sources of information from Paris, and they carefully censored
declarations from the Montagnard Convention and the Paris Jacobins. Officials
in the other federalist cities took similar actions. Second, there existed
in Caen no organized, popular opposition to the departmental administra-
tion. This was true of Bordeaux, as well, but not of Lyon and Marseille.

In Bordeaux, the Jacobin club had shifted its support to the Girondins
sometime after the split between Jacobins and Feuillants in Paris. This is
hardly surprising, since the Bordeaux Jacobin club numbered among its
founders men such as Vergniaud and Guadet. There did exist in Bordeaux
another popular society, the Club National, which supported the Monta-
gnards. The Convention looked to this club in July and August for assistance
in undermining the Bordeaux federalists. But the Club National included
only a small minority of the city’s population and did not present a force
strong enough to actively oppose the revolt as it developed. The majority of
the people of Bordeaux remained politically passive. Alan Forrest describes
a situation in Bordeaux very similar to that in Caen: “Economically, the
long tradition of commercial dominance in the life of the city had had the
effect of instituting a very stable social structure in which the vast majority
of the inhabitants were dependent for their livelihood, directly or indirectly,
on the buoyancy of overseas trade. . . . The high immigrant population
from other areas, men whose aim in Bordeaux was to attain a decent stan-
dard of living rather than to win political privileges, probably also helped to
entrench this native conservatism. Apathy remained high and participation
low.”

Caen’s commercial tradition was not as long, or as illustrious, as
Bordeaux’s, but the town’s prosperity did depend on commerce, and the
large number of recent immigrants in Caen remained politically passive during
the Revolution. The social and economic structures of the two towns
seem strikingly similar.

Both Lyon and Marseille, despite their predominantly commercial role,
also possessed sizable work forces engaged in production. Silk workers and
printers in Lyon had frequently opposed the merchants who controlled their
industries. Marseille, too, contained a considerable number of workers em-
ployed in manufacture, generally living in neighborhoods apart from the
commercial population. In both of these cities, an active and organized

12. Forrest, Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux, 175.
radical movement opposed the moderate elements in control of local politics during the early years of the Revolution. By early 1793, the Jacobin clubs of Marseille and Lyon had indeed gained control of municipal politics, only to be defeated by moderates in the weeks before the federalist revolt. The limited success of the federalist movement depended on the neutralization of Jacobin power in both cities.

In Lyon, that neutralization came on the very eve of the May 31 revolution in Paris and was due, in part, to the overzealousness of Lyon Jacobins. In early April, 1793, following Dumouriez’s treason and the outbreak of the Vendée revolt, the Rhône-et-Loire formed a committee of public safety, dominated by Lyon Jacobins. The Jacobin club, led by Marie Joseph Chalier, controlled the Lyon municipal council and in late April and May pushed for the creation of a revolutionary army to apprehend hoarders and political suspects. The club achieved this goal, but the moderate departmental administration prevented the creation of a revolutionary tribunal, also advocated by the Jacobin club as a weapon against hoarders. By mid-May, opposition to these radical measures began to develop in the Lyon sectional assemblies, described by C. Riffaterre as poorly attended during this period and controlled by the wealthy bourgeoisie. The sectional assemblies looked to the departmental administration as an ally in their struggle against the Jacobin club. The administration maintained a cautious attitude; but on May 27, Chalier played into the moderates’ hands by calling for the execution of sectional leaders. The sections reported this outrage to the representatives on mission A. F. Gauthier and P. C. Nioche and demanded the suspension of the municipal council and the arrest of Chalier. Under intense pressure—in fact, taken prisoner by the sections—the representatives ordered Chalier’s arrest on May 30, along with the suspension of the municipal council, thereby neutralizing the Lyon Jacobin club. Sectional assemblies controlled municipal politics for the next four months.14

In Marseille, too, the struggle between moderates and radicals took the form of opposition between the sectional assemblies and the Jacobin club. Militant Jacobins (primarily professional men, not merchants) had gained ascendancy in Marseille politics by mid-March, 1793, and had succeeded in establishing a revolutionary tribunal. As in Lyon, the Jacobins alienated many property owners, urban and rural alike, by their advocacy of grain

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seizures and a forced loan. Moderate opposition to the Jacobin municipality soon coalesced in the Marseille sections.

William Scott suggests that many in Marseille blamed the Jacobins (both the local variety and those in Paris) for the lagging economy in 1793. Trade and local industry were in decline. The deputy Barbaroux, unpopular with Marseille Jacobins, blamed the Convention for failing to take measures to protect trade. Barbaroux had long championed free trade and the commercial interests of Marseille and maintained close ties with many of his constituents. Complaints also circulated in Marseille that the Jacobins had discouraged commercial ventures with their threats of a forced loan, driving the rich merchants into exile.

The Jacobin club itself realized that its extreme program had alienated many people, and it purged some of its radical members in May. The sections, however (as in Lyon, dominated by the wealthy bourgeoisie), obtained the arrest of a number of club leaders on May 18, and by the end of the month, they had secured further limitations on the club’s autonomy. Moderates argued that all citizens could adequately express their opinions in open, sectional assemblies and condemned the club for manipulating the municipal administration. The arrest of the Jacobin leaders effectively stymied the Marseille club. Its final defeat came on June 3, when sectional deputies closed its meeting hall.15

In all four of the federalist centers, then, the launching of resistance to Paris depended on the effective muzzling of popular opposition within the local population. In Caen and Bordeaux, this proved to be a simple matter, since no organized popular movement had developed in those towns during 1792 and 1793. Moderate elements maintained a firm control over departmental and municipal politics. In Marseille and Lyon, however, the Jacobin clubs challenged the hold of more moderate local administrators, who emerged victorious on the very eve of the May 31 revolution. Those administrators, and their bourgeois supporters, naturally viewed the victory of the Montagnards in Paris as a manifestation at the national level of the Jacobin menace, which they had only just succeeded in quelling at home.

The federalist movement represented in part, then, a continued reaction against popular politics, particularly the agent democracy championed by the Parisian sans-culottes. In all four cities, administrators had succeeded,

with varying degrees of difficulty, in defeating Jacobin efforts to control the local administrations. Those administrators viewed the revolution of May 31 as a violation of national sovereignty by the Parisian crowd, a dangerous attack on the representative democracy that they espoused.

More than the defense of a political ideology, though, the federalist revolts constituted a defense of regional interests, both political and economic. The declaration of grievances and demands issued by the federalists gathered in Caen expressed the general motivations of the movement as a whole. Their demands, though couched in terms that emphasized national unity, clearly implied a desire for increased departmental independence. The Norman and Breton federalists denounced the activities of the Parisian comités révolutionnaires and demanded the curtailment of section meetings in the capital. They further demanded the abolition of the Jacobin and Cordelier clubs of Paris.

While the federalist rebels decried the undue influence of Paris on national politics, they also called for a restriction of the National Convention’s responsibilities. Officials in all of the federalist centers particularly resented the interference of representatives on mission in local affairs. Administrators in Caen, Lyon, and Marseille complained of the inadequate provisions made by the Convention for the defense of their departments and clashed with representatives on mission over the disposition of military forces. Each of these four cities had quarreled with the royal intendants of the Old Regime. They scarcely wished to see them now replaced by representatives on mission.

The economic demands of the federalists in Caen are also illuminating. Conscious of the need to maintain among the people at least passivity, if not support, federalist leaders issued no demands for repeal of the maximum, although it was clearly not popular with the commercial classes. They did, however, call for an investigation of the huge individual fortunes that had grown since August 10, insisted on the financial accountability of the municipality of Paris, and called for a reduction in the number of assignats, the circulation of which was widely believed to have fueled inflation and seriously damaged commerce.

The sum of these demands, characteristic of those issued by the other federalist centers, illustrates the very opposition within France that Edward Fox has suggested: a conflict between the centralizing state and the commercial cities of the periphery. The federalists denounced not only the excesses of the
Paris crowd but also the growing power of the National Convention, particularly the Committee of Public Safety. In 1793, certainly in April and May, it appeared that the authority of the Convention would be dependent on the active, and unruly, intervention of the Parisian popular classes, a situation that officials in the federalist centers viewed as extremely threatening. Moreover, the Jacobin regime and the requisites of the war effort promised economic controls that the commercial elite of the federalist cities did not welcome and, indeed, felt compelled to resist.

Clearly, more work must be done before we can conclusively characterize the federalist movement, and the accompanying Girondin/Montagnard conflict, as an opposition between the commercial periphery of France and the administrative hinterland. The case of Rouen stands as a prime example of a nonfederalist but commercial city that requires further research. Rouen’s sizable population of wage laborers and the city’s important administrative role under the Old Regime may well prove to be key factors in explaining its political posture. More work must also be done on the complicated situations in Lyon and Marseille, and the case of Toulon must be carefully scrutinized before that city is placed either in or out of the federalist camp.

The geography of the federalist revolt, however, does correspond to the geographical distribution of Girondin strength, and the evidence from Caen and the other federalist centers does point to the primacy of the commercial elite in those cities. The federalist revolt should not necessarily be understood as a movement of the commercial bourgeoisie defending its economic interests, to be sure. But this study does suggest that the social fabric and economic structures of a town and region are crucial factors in molding the shape of the local political arena. I am not arguing that economic interests determine political values but rather that social and economic factors explain both the ability of the Limoges popular classes to intervene politically in 1793 and the failure of the Caen popular classes to do likewise. And the manner in which local politics played themselves out in the summer of 1793 had a profound impact on the resolution of the key national political question pointed to by both Tocqueville and Soboul: Who was to participate in the new political system?

In the end, ironically, the success of the Calvados elite in controlling local politics and instituting representative democracy contributed to this group’s defeat and loss of power in the summer of 1793. The success of the federalist
revolt depended on the support of those people whom the elite had excluded from the political arena. The immediate result was a victory for the agent democracy that the federalists had so long resisted, although that soon degenerated into a virtual Jacobin dictatorship. By 1799, both forms of democracy had proven unmanageable, and it would be another seventy-five years before a democratic republic could again take firm root in France.