

Allegory of History

by François Chauveau (Paris, 1613–1676),
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THE ALLEGORICAL SEXUAL CONTRACT

(or The Sexual Spectacle of the Social Contract)

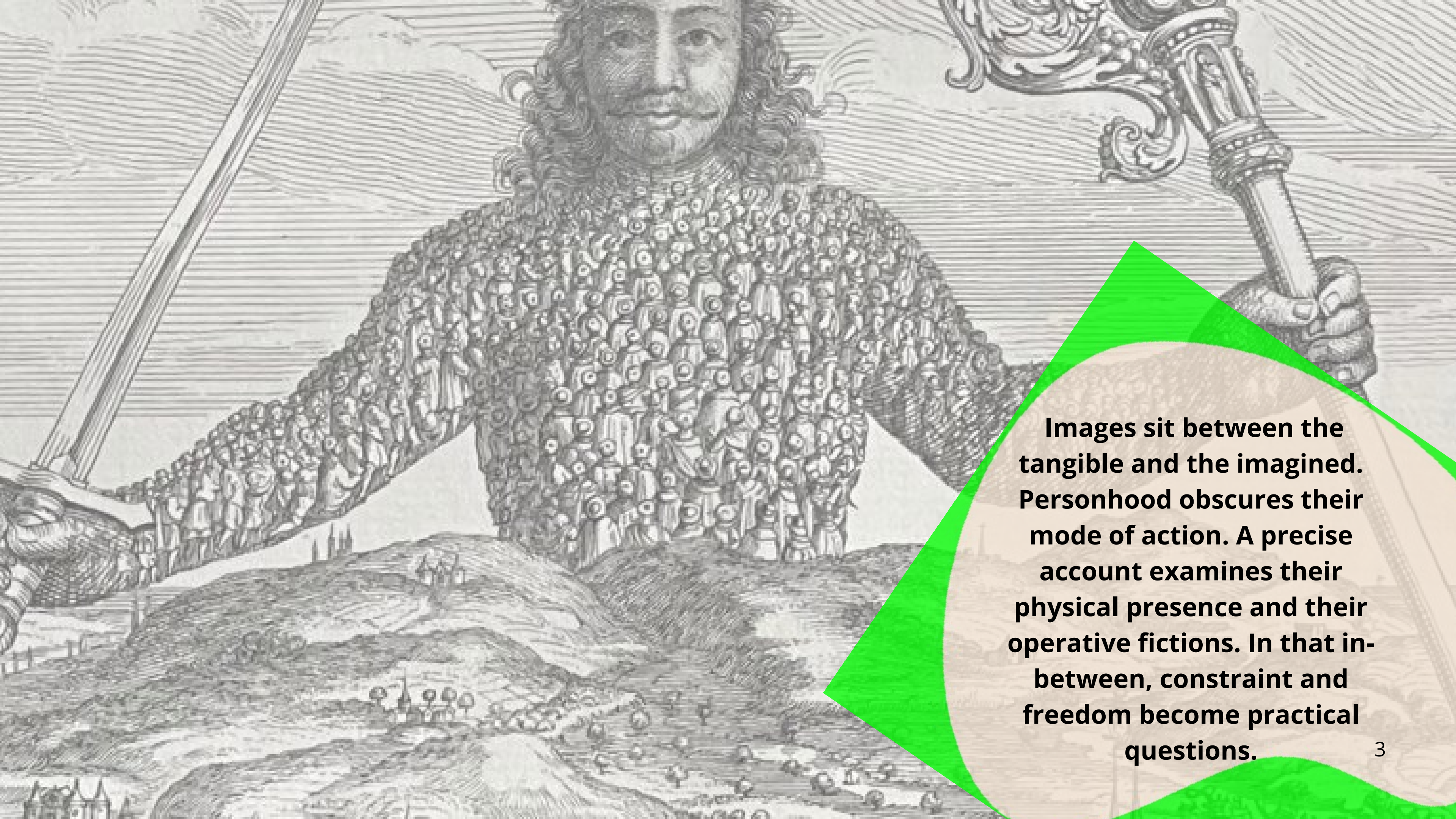
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Map of national allegories and personifications of Europe

The expression allegorical sexual contract designates a specific analytic object: the imagistic armature through which modern polities stabilize narratives by installing a **feminine** civic persona at the center of official visibility.





Images sit between the tangible and the imagined. Personhood obscures their mode of action. A precise account examines their physical presence and their operative fictions. In that in-between, constraint and freedom become practical questions.

Allegory

Ambivalence, temporality, and unstable meaning.

Opposed to the classical idea of the symbol: harmonic, stable, *and timeless*.

[The Origin of German Tragic Drama](#) by Walter Benjamin.

"Allegories only gesture towards meaning. In doing so, they trigger a diversity of interpretative responses to the image."

HAYAERT, Valérie. The Paradoxes of Lady Justice's Blindfold. In: HUYGEBART, Stefan; MARTYN, Georges; PAUMEN, Vanessa; BOUSMAR, Eric; ROUSSEAU, Xavier (eds.). *The Art of Law*. Cham: Springer, 2018. (Ius Gentium: Comparative Perspectives on Law and Justice, v. 66). p. 203.

KEY TERMS!

Iconocracy

Marie-José Mondzain:

"organization of the visible that provokes an adherence that could be called a submission to the gaze"

MONDZAIN, Marie-José. *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 152.

Peter Goodrich:

Visiocracy; Governance through Images.

The Allegorical Sexual Contract

(working hypothesis)

Pateman showed that the classic contract story hides a prior, sexual pact. But modern patriarchy does not vanish with the contract, it adapted itself. *Let's extend this concept: If the hidden pact is textual, it is also spectacular.* Allegories of women, like Justice, Liberty, the Republic, can serve as the friendly face of the fraternal pact. In the Western iconographic tradition, virtues were already conventionally personified as women (Iustitia, Libertas, Fortitudo, Temperantia) so abstraction is already there. So, across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many such figures received proper names and civic biographies: Marianne in France, Britannia in Britain, Germania in the German lands, Columbia/Liberty in the United States, Helvetia in Switzerland, República in Brazil, amongst others.

PANOFSKY'S METHOD

Pre-iconographic: form/scene. **Iconographic:** theme/attributes. **Iconological:** function/address.

+ MARKERS OF A VISUAL SEXUAL CONTRACT

1. **Civic personalization:** generic effigy/nameable character.

2. **Visibility:** reach of the medium and circulation.

3. **Symbolic repertoire:** the density of classical attributes, ***our visual vocabulary.***

4. **Public affect/effect:** evidence of reception.

***Iconocratic gap:** time-frame between the first visual (institutional) peak and legal milestones on women's rights.*

Liberty Leading the
People
Eugène Delacroix
1830

"My bad mood is vanishing thanks to hard work. I've embarked on a modern subject—a barricade. **And if I haven't fought for my country at least *I'll paint for her.***"

Delacroix, in a letter to his brother, October 21, 1830.

İnkılap Yolunda
(1933)
by Zeki Faik İzer

Meant to symbolize the Turkish Revolution on the tenth year of the Republic, in an inspiration by Eugène Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People. But! It was criticized among the art community for being an "imitation".

Comparative analysis - early-
Marianne

"Prototype"
Marianne
(1775)

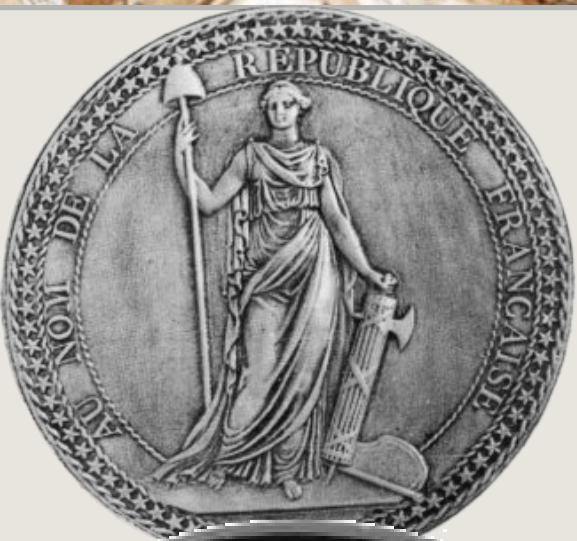
Illustration by Jean-Michel Moreau in a 1775 edition of Voltaire’s La Henriade, showing the goddess Feronia, tutelary of freedmen, wearing a **Phrygian cap**.



Archives of
the French
Republic
(1792)

*Decree of 25 September 1792 substituting royal seals and prescribing France as a woman in **antique dress**, holding a **pike topped with the Phrygian cap**, left hand on a bundle of arms, a **rudder** at her feet, legend “Archives de la République française.”*

“(…) la France sous les traits d’une femme vêtue à l’antique, debout, tenant de la main droite une pique surmontée du bonnet phrygien ou bonnet de la liberté, la gauche appuyée sur un faisceau d’armes ; à ses pieds un gouvernail (…).



Great Seal
of France
(1848)

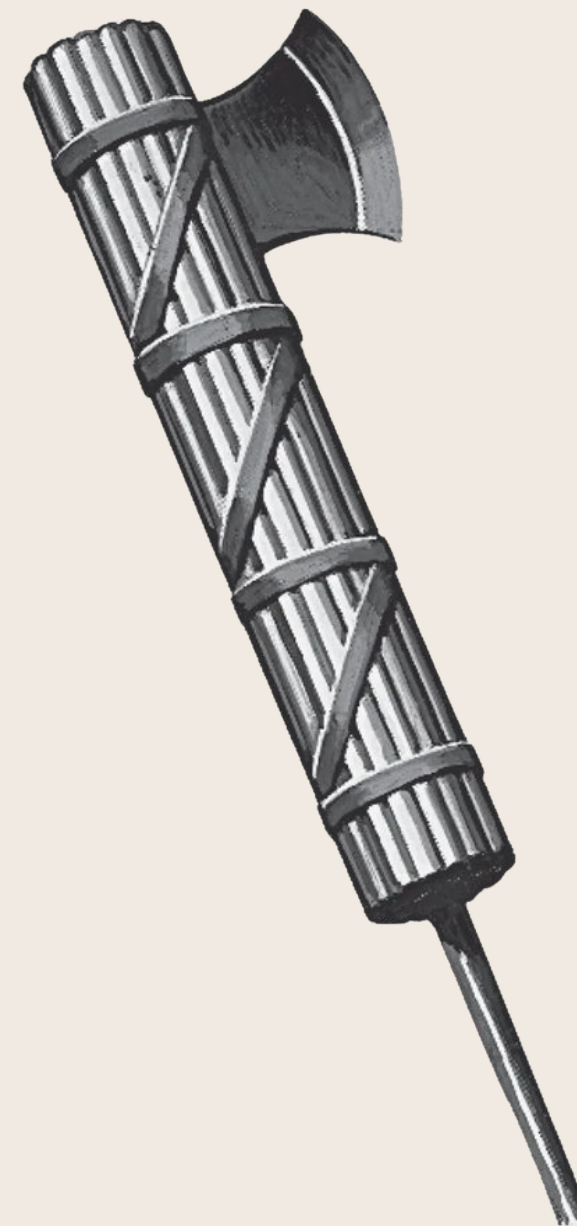
*Liberty seated, antique dress, with **fasces** and a **rudder**, bearing the **Gallic rooster**.*



	Score	Symbol	
175	Students' remarks in a class discussion were often harsh and judgmental.	Perceived lack of freedom of expression, classism as social code	Conceptual and identity and class presentation

Markers of a visual

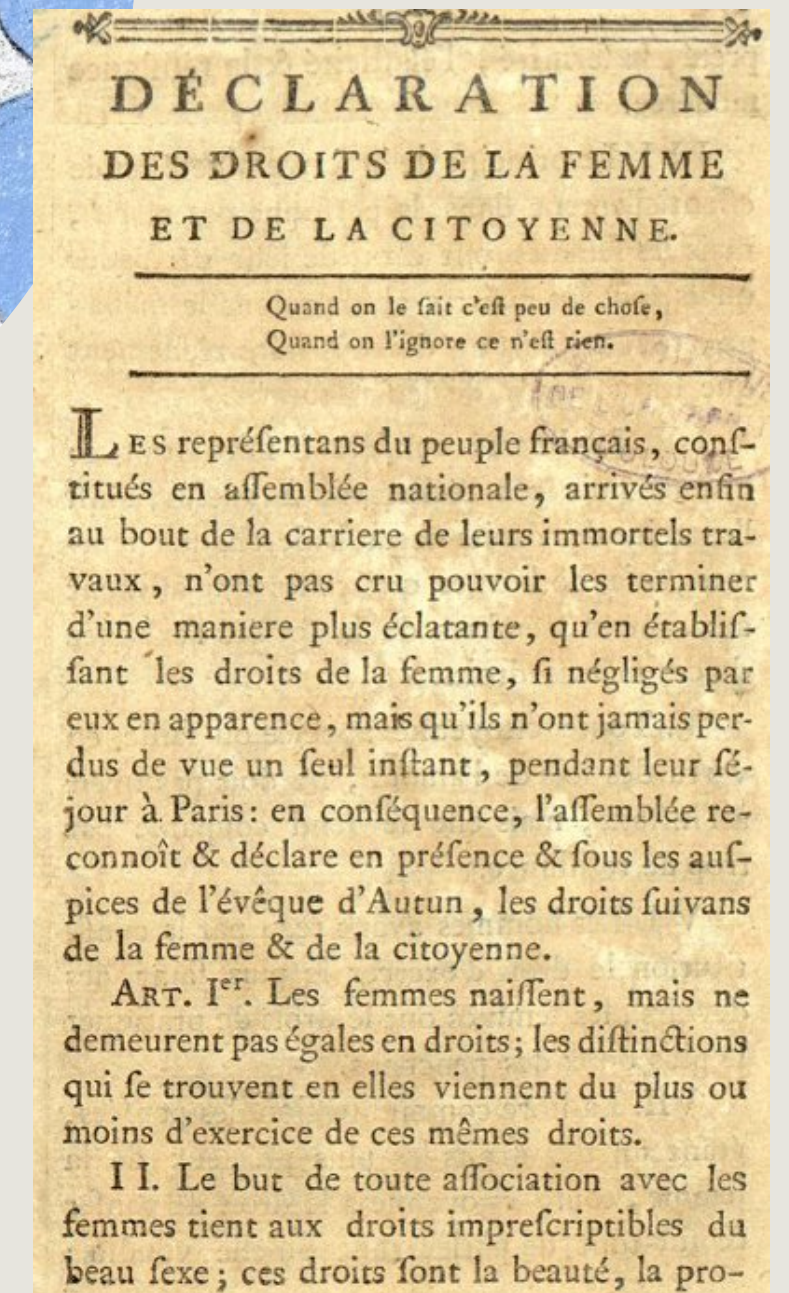
- 1. Civic personification:** Generic deity acquired name and a civic biography.
- 2. Visibility:** elite print culture, more public visibility due to revolutionary culture, until it is made official.
- 3. Symbolic repertoire:** Phrygian cap, France flag, fasces and rudder, gallic rooster and bare breast.
- 4. Public affect and effect:** revolutionary use first, institutionalization later (!).

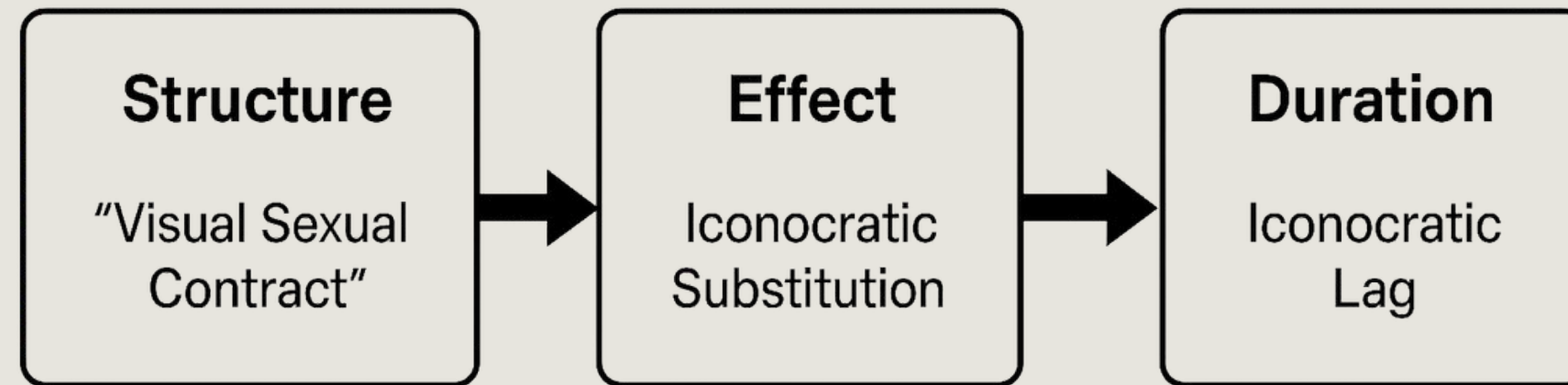


THE HEROIC
FEMALE LEADER
ON THE CANVAS
DOES NOT
TRANSLATE TO
REAL-WORLD
EMPOWERMENT
FOR WOMEN.



Olympe de Gouges and the
*Déclaration des droits de la femme
et de la citoyenne* (1791)





Structure:

The “Visual Sexual Contract” is the foundational arrangement. It installs a feminine figure to legitimize a fraternal pact.

Effect:

“Iconocratic Substitution” is the operational move within that structure, a symbolic swap that maintains the pact’s legitimacy.

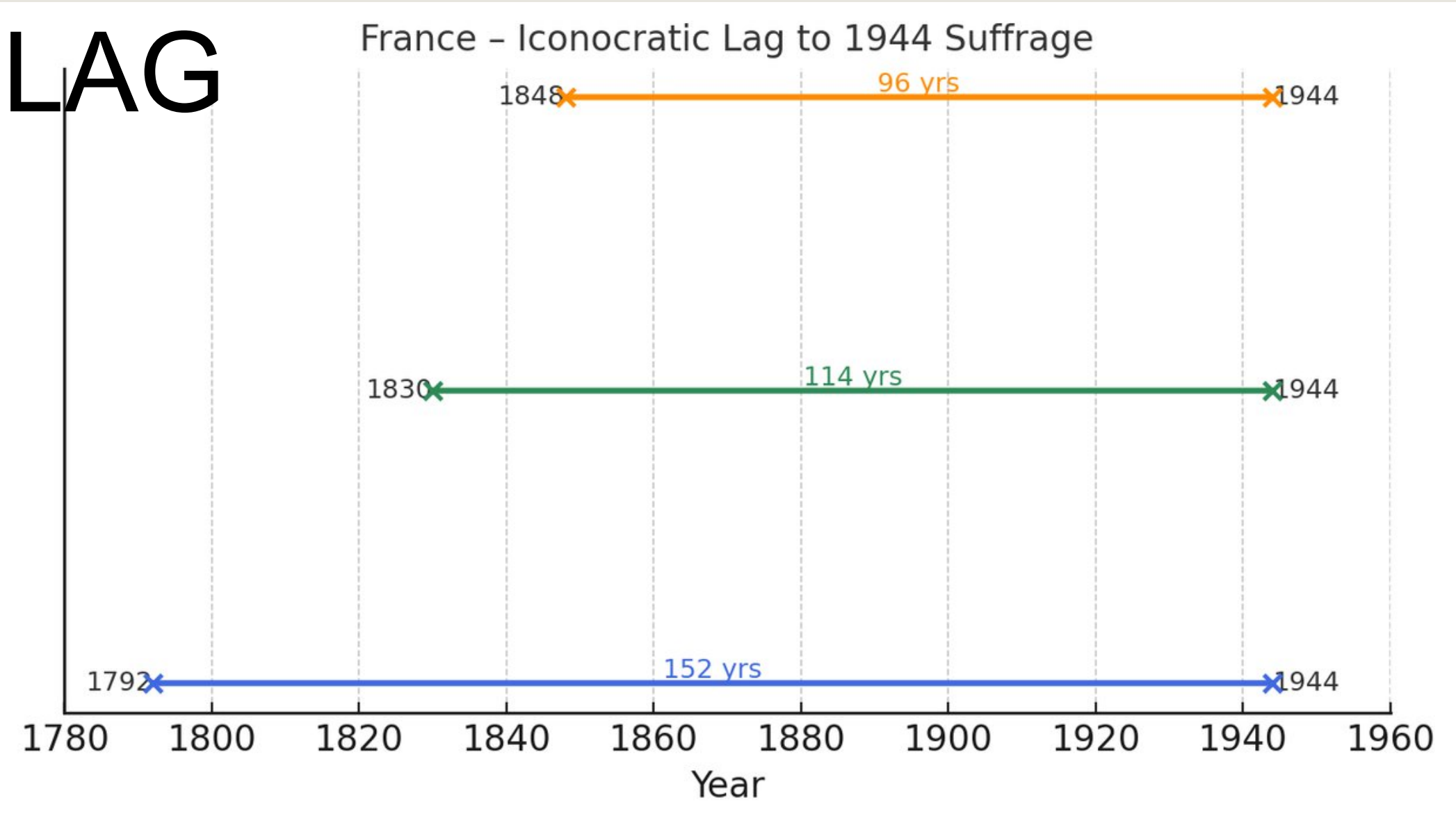
Duration:

“Iconocratic Lag” measures how long that substitution precedes actual inclusion, a delay between symbolic representation and real participation.

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If the visual sexual contract means that female figures embody “the people” while women are excluded as citizens, then

ICONOCRATIC is a measurable gap between symbolic inclusion and juridical recognition.



Peak = institutional visual
Milestone = women's suffrage

The question of nudity: bare-breasted or clothed Marianne.



“Marianne has a naked breast because she is feeding the people! She is not veiled, because she is free! That is the Republic!”

Manuel Valls, France's Prime Minister in 2016
in a response to the controversial banning of the
burkini on the nation's beaches



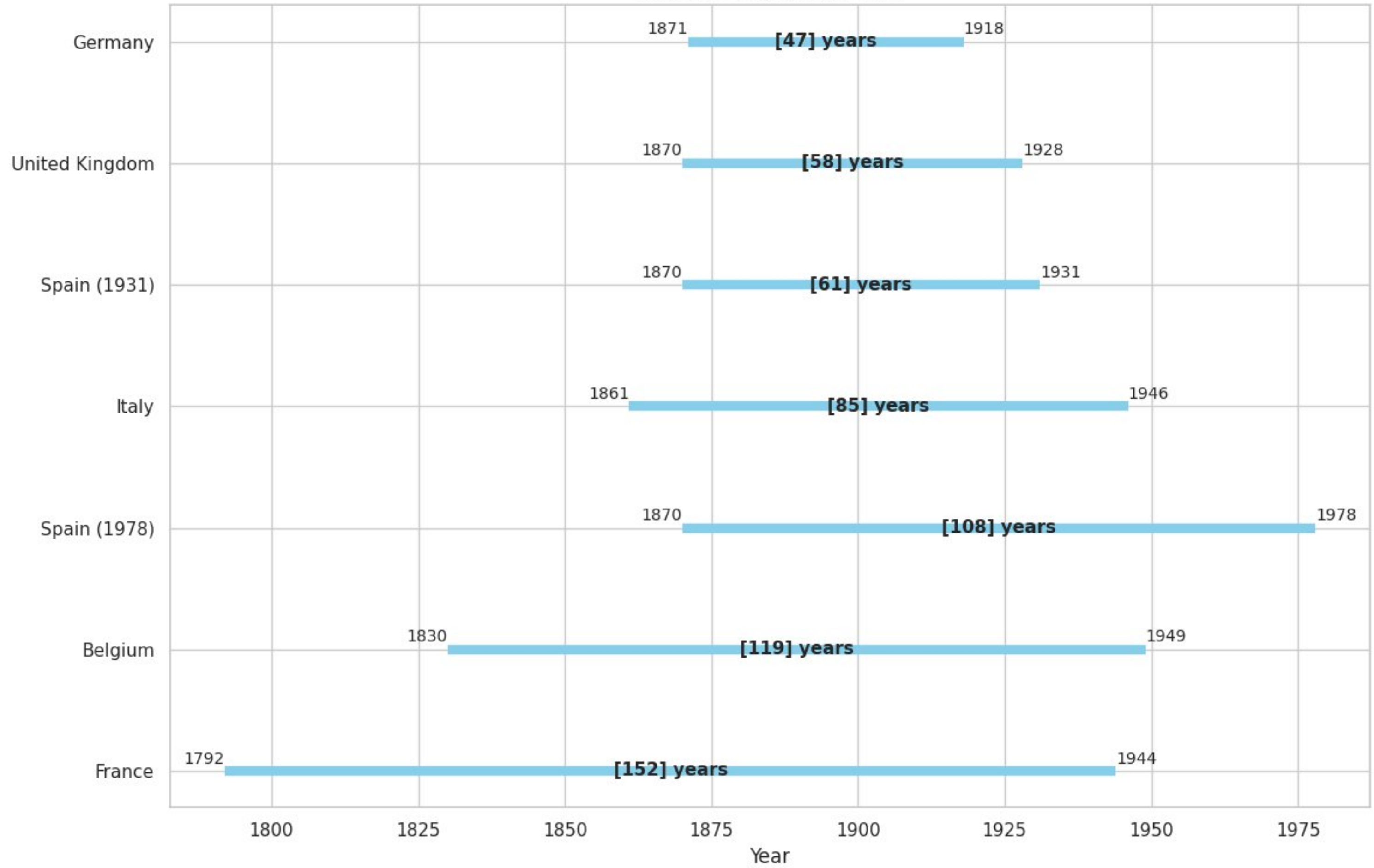
ICONOCRATIC LAG

Institutional visual peaks:

France, 1792: Archives seal (female Liberty; Phrygian cap, arms bundle, rudder).
United Kingdom, 1870: Britannia on penny coinage (Royal Mint, legal tender).
Germany, 1871: Germania in official imperial imagery.
Belgium, 1850-59: Congress Column, four liberties.
Italy, 1861: Italia Turrita in Risorgimento/state imagery (arms, stamps; later coins).
Spain, 1870: Hispania on peseta coinage (legal tender).

Legal milestones

France, 1944: women's suffrage.
United Kingdom, 1928: equal suffrage.
Germany, 1918: women's suffrage.
Belgium, 1949: women's suffrage.
Italy, 1946: women's suffrage.
Spain, 1931 (opt. A): women's suffrage and 1978 (opt. B): constitutional restoration.





"Forget me not, Help save the Belgian babies"
wartime poster, 1917, by Josef Pierre Nuyttens (Belgian-American artist)

WW 1 propaganda personifying Belgium as a vulnerable female.
Issued by the Publicity Department of the Belgian Military Mission in Washington, D.C.

Rape of Belgium is how the period of German occupation became known.
[PS: German soldiers did rape Belgian women, amongst other war crimes (!)]

Margaret Thatcher
depicted as Britannia -
Cover of *The Sun*, June 9th, 1983 - election day



Brigitte Bardot as Marianne,
1968, by
sculptor Alain Aslan

Legal-political ideals can be tagged via a female personification for mass readership.



La Belgique: 1914. Allegory Of Belgium After Defeat By the Germans In 1914. After A Drawing By Bernard Partridge. From King Albert's Book, Published in 1915.



Unconquerable. An Heroic Woman Carries Forward The Tattered Flag Of Belgium After Invasion By The Germans In 1914, also from King Albert's book.

ANY QUESTIONS?



*Allegory of the Truth revealing the essence of things
and shaming the fraud and treason*
Giulio Ballino (c.1820-1826)



**Allegory of
Hope**
Johann Wilhelm Baur
(1670)

THANK YOU!

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DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

**When Trump came for the Mexicans,
I did not speak out – as I was not a
Mexican. When he came for the Muslims,
I did not speak out – as I was not a
Muslim. Then he came for me ...**



December 7, 2015 - cartoon of presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, in response to Trump's announced policy of denying Muslim immigration to the U.S.

Lady Liberty, the beloved symbol of American values, is beheaded.



"The Tammany Tiger on the Loose – What are you going to do about it?" by Thomas Nast, the father of American political cartoon, 11 November 1871, The Ohio State University.

A tiger is attacking Columbia, the first personification of the United States. The tiger was the symbol for the Tammany Society, a powerful social organization that evolved into the political machine of the Democratic Party in New York City. Nast assembled the tiger as a sign of unchecked political power.

When journals or editors select allegorical symbols for covers or commentary, they often do so to invoke the rationale behind those symbols





Revista Veja, July, 2025,
"It's going to hurt. A LOT."
- referencing Trump's tariffs.



Revista Veja, August 2021
"A civilization's decay" - referencing the Taliban's
return to power & Biden pulling US troops from
Afghanistan, ending the war (2001-2021).

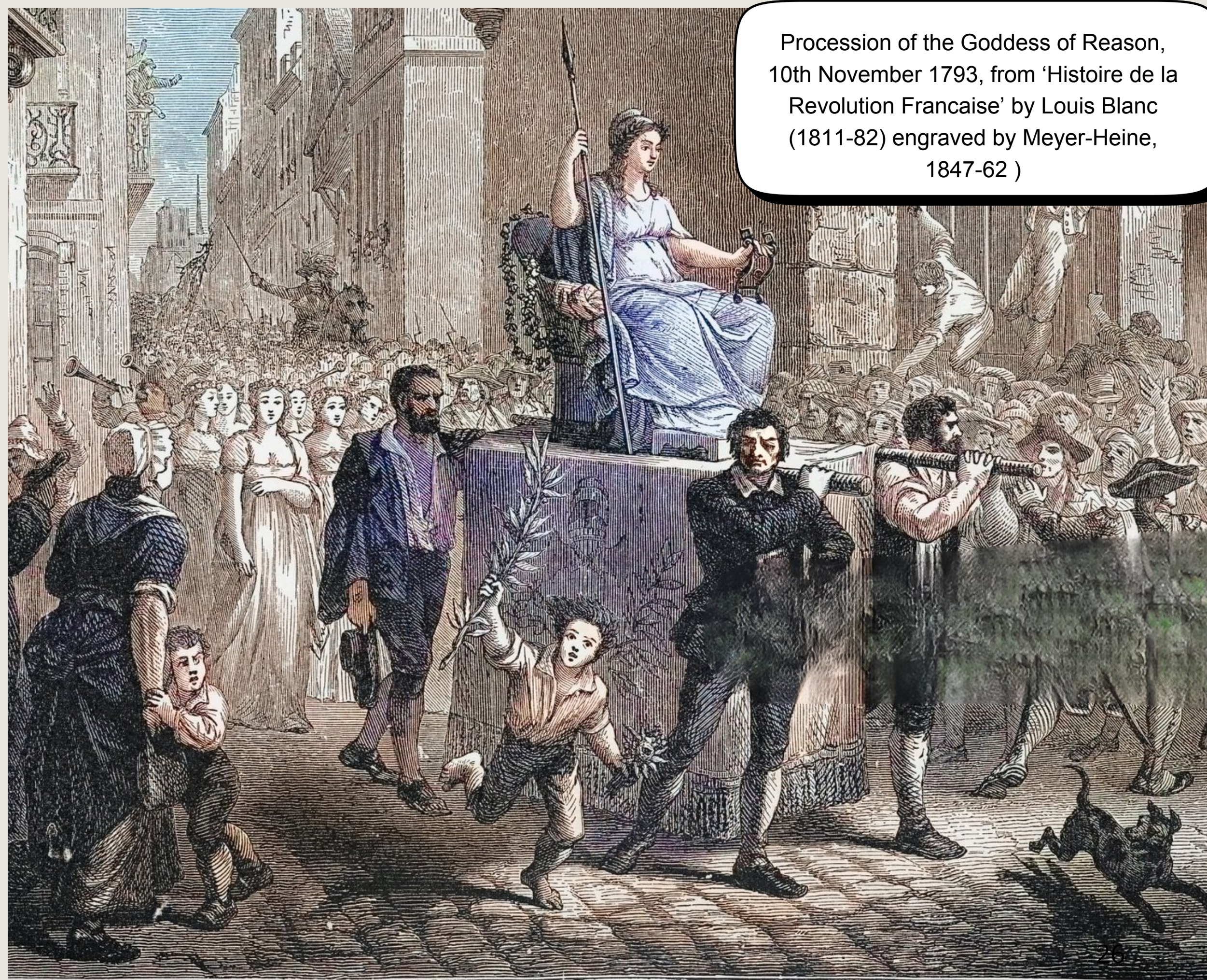
Legal academia must wrestle with how
and whether to present images, given
law's traditional fixation on words.

During the French Revolution, particularly during the period of dechristianization and the Reign of Terror, revolutionaries established the Cult of Reason, an atheistic belief system intended to replace traditional religion. As part of this, the concept of a "Goddess of Reason" was introduced and celebrated in elaborate ceremonies. The Cult of the Supreme Being was a deistic cult established by [Maximilien Robespierre](#) (1758-1794) during the [French Revolution](#) (1789-1799).

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In essence, the Goddess of Reason of the French Revolution symbolized the radical shift towards secularism and the elevation of rational thought during this turbulent period.

Procession of the Goddess of Reason, 10th November 1793, from 'Histoire de la Revolution Francaise' by Louis Blanc (1811-82) engraved by Meyer-Heine, 1847-62)



THE GODDESS OF REASON CARRIED THROUGH THE STREETS OF PARIS.

"It is well known that cultural assimilation is a defining characteristic of Frenchness. The goal of representing France as a homogeneous nation is an old one. [...] Certainly, Republicans are appealing to a long-standing idea of homogeneous Frenchness and to a vision of laïcité in which religion is privatized, a matter of individual conscience not to be publicly displayed. From this perspective, perhaps, Muslim women's dress is seen to more visibly mark their religious affiliation than the clothing of Muslim men. Republicans are also drawing on the remainders of the colonial "civilizing mission" which touted the superior treatment of French women (well before they voted or were free of the restrictions of the Napoleonic Code) to that of "native" women, whose veils then were taken as a sign of erotic enticement, not (as today) of sexual repression. **And, too, there is the uncovered Marianne, an idealized symbol of the nation; breast bared she is Delacroix's *Liberty leading the people*, or the icon who sits in the *hôtels de ville* of many municipalities. In the current polemic, the uncovered Marianne is the embodiment of emancipated French women in contrast to the veiled woman said to be subordinated by Islam.** [...] The hysteria we are witnessing stems from an unacknowledged but persistent contradiction within French republicanism between political equality and sexual difference. **The contradiction has been evident since 1789 and did not disappear when women won the vote in 1944. Citizenship in France is based on abstract individualism. "**

SOCIAL SCIENCE

The Veil and the Political Unconscious of French Republicanism

Why have women become the object of so much concern?

Joan Wallach Scott • Published 2016

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Contractual legibility: every political contract depends on visibility.

Feminine allegories can enact the collective, promise protection, and inspire civic duty.

Civic personalization: when the allegory achieves a recognizable prosopography (e.g., Marianne), its capacity to reenact the pact in rites and protests increases. When it remains generic (the effigy of the Brazilian Republic), there's a different appeal to the public.

Rite and circulation: Institutional repetition precedes and conditions popular replication (such as postcards, posters, cartoons, and protests).

The established, reproduced, and reabsorbed circuit consolidates what we refer to as the visual contract.

Contractual repertoire: the density and repetition of attributes (such as scales, fasces, swords, Phrygian caps, crowns, torches, lions, laurels, globes, tridents) stabilize the interpretation because they create variables that can be compared.

Iconocratic lag: time gaps between iconographic peaks and normative milestones could be measured to identify a visual contract in action.



c'est fini