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978-0-521-81062-3 - The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms
in French Republican Memory

Alan Forrest

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The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars

A major contribution to the study of collective identity and memory in France, this book examines a French republican myth: the belief that the nation can be adequately defended only by its own citizens, in the manner of the French revolutionaries of 1793. Alan Forrest examines the image of the citizen army reflected in political speeches, school textbooks, art and literature across the nineteenth century. He reveals that the image appealed to notions of equality and social justice, and with time it expanded to incorporate Napoleon's victorious legions, the partisans who repelled the German invader in 1814 and the people of Paris who rose in arms to defend the republic in 1870. More recently it has risked being marginalised by military technology and by the realities of colonial warfare, but its influence can still be seen in the propaganda of the Great War and of the French Resistance under Vichy.

ALAN FORREST is Professor of Modern History at the University of York. His previous books include *Paris, the Provinces and the French Revolution* (2004), *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (2002) and *The Revolution in Provincial France: Aquitaine, 1789–1799* (1996).

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Acknowledgements

My interest in the legacy of the Revolutionary armies began some years ago when I was principally concerned with the armies themselves and the young men who served in them. I was curious to know more about what motivated them and about the real as well as the rhetorical construct of citizenship; and I quickly became fascinated by the legend they created, a legend of commitment and enthusiasm as well as of republican equality that stretched into the nineteenth century and beyond to become a central strand of French republican identity. The idea of tracing that legend across the period from the eighteenth to the twentieth century took root in the years from 1997 to 1999 when I took part in a three-year research seminar at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, convened by Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron, which brought together historians from Europe, America and Australia to discuss the legacy of the French *levée en masse* throughout the modern world. This collection was published in 2003 by Cambridge University Press under the title *The People in Arms. Military Myth and Political Legitimacy since the French Revolution*. It was the experience of participating in that seminar which persuaded me to work on the myth in the context of France itself.

As a historian of the late eighteenth century I have leant heavily on approaches and insights of historians from later periods of French history and must acknowledge the debt which this book owes to others. I have enjoyed long and fruitful exchanges with a wide array of friends and colleagues, most notably Michael Broers, Charles Esdaile, Robert Gildea, Sudhir Hazareesingh, Holger Hoock, David Hopkin, John Horne, Annie Jourdan, Matthias Middell and Kevin Morgan, who all, in very different ways, have fed ideas and insight into the project. I have found inspiration in the work of French specialists on the Great War and in the rich historiography that has come out of the *Historial de la Grande Guerre* at Péronne. And since 2005 I have benefited enormously from working with an international research group on the experience and memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, based here in

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As always, my greatest debt lies closer to home, to Rosemary and Marianne, to whom this book is gratefully dedicated.

Alan Forrest
York, March 2008