FOREWORD

The eighteenth century—particularly in France—was one of the richest periods in the history of the western world. That our culture and institutions are so deeply rooted in its legacy may be a reason for the increasing number of scholarly studies devoted to this century.

One area, however, has not received the full attention it deserves: the contributions of eighteenth-century French women to the history and thought of their time. Documents of the century indicate, and subsequent studies confirm, that—with the possible exception of the present century—French women have never been so influential and prolific as they were in the Age of Enlightenment. Recently, a new generation of historians and literary scholars—women in particular—has greatly enhanced our understanding and appreciation of eighteenth-century French women. Most of these studies, however, are limited to a particular aspect of women's activities. The purpose of this anthology is to include in a single volume a comprehensive view of French women's political, social, cultural, literary, artistic, and scientific accomplishments. It is our hope that this initial effort will stimulate additional research culminating in an accurate, fair, and balanced history of eighteenth-century France, one in which the contributions of all her citizens—female and male—will be recognized.

The present volume would not have been possible without the dedication, support, suggestions, and faith of its contributors. For nearly five years, we shared our ideas and goals, our energy and lives. During the creation of the book, two children, Sarah Thomas Boss and Matthew James Prather, were born, and two friends were taken from us. In June 1980, Hélène Monod-Cassidy succumbed after a long illness, before her contribution to French Women and the Age of Enlightenment could be realized. A year and a half later, one of the strongest supporters of this project, Leonora Cohen Rosenfield, died before seeing the book come to life.

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of my questions, no matter how complicated. Bettye Campbell, Lula Jones, Kathy Kickliter, and Carolyn McCormick showed competence, care, understanding and infinite patience throughout the lengthy process of typing and correcting the manuscript.

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I would like to recognize the important role of the University of Illinois library in making possible the research for my own chapter on “Women and Education.” I was granted an extended loan of the rare and irreplaceable eighteenth-century works that were essential to my study. Throughout the years that the books were lent to me, I enjoyed the full cooperation and confidence of the library’s professional and considerate personnel.

Last but not least, I would like to express my affectionate gratitude to my husband, Bill, without whose total and uncompromising support this book could not have been brought to life.

Samia I. Spencer