



# Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France

*Annie Smart*

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Did women have a civic identity in eighteenth-century France? In *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France*, Annie Smart contends that they did. While previous scholarship has emphasized the ideal of domestic motherhood or the image of the republican mother, Smart argues persuasively that many pre-revolutionary and revolutionary texts created another ideal for women – the ideal of civic motherhood. Smart asserts that women were portrayed as possessing civic virtue, and as promoting the values and ideals of the public sphere.

Contemporary critics have theorized that the eighteenth-century ideal of the Republic intentionally excluded women from the public sphere. According to this perspective, a discourse of “Rousseauian” domestic motherhood stripped women of an active civic identity, and limited their role to breastfeeding and childcare. Eighteenth-century France marked thus the division between a male public sphere of political action and a female private sphere of the home.

*Citoyennes* challenges this position and offers an alternative model of female identity. This interdisciplinary study brings together a variety of genres to demonstrate convincingly that women were portrayed as civic individuals. Using foundational texts such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile, or on Education* (1762), revolutionary gouaches of Lesueur, and vaudeville plays of Year II of the Republic (1793/1794), this study brilliantly shows that in text and image, women were represented as devoted to both the public good and their families.

In addition, *Citoyennes* offers an innovative interpretation of the home. Through re-examining sphere theory, this study challenges the tendency to equate the home with private concerns, and shows that the home can function as a site for both private life and civic identity.

*Citoyennes* breaks new ground, for it both rectifies the ideal of domestic Rousseauian motherhood, and brings a fuller understanding to how female civic identity operated in important French texts and images.

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