

H-France Salon

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“My IHRF”:
Thoughts from Across the Pond

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The Institut d’Histoire de la Révolution Française’s (IHRF) scholarly ambition and output as well as its generous efforts to reach out to scholars far beyond the borders of France has made it one of the great ambassadors for French history across the world. In this current and complex moment for the IHRF, H-France and members of the American community of French historians want to express not only their support for the IHRF, but also provide a somewhat personal account of how exactly the IHRF has influenced their work on the Revolution and beyond. The Institut has not only been a specific location with offices, meeting spaces, and a library within the Sorbonne, it has also enjoyed a distinct juridical and financial existence within the CNRS. Since the beginning of 2016, this status no longer exists as such. To be clear, the IHRF still exists in partnership with the Institut d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine, its walls and its personnel are still in place, but its status within the CNRS has changed. Exactly what this means for the future of the IHRF remains somewhat unclear. But as the former head of the IHRF, Pierre Serna, explained in an open letter to the AHMUF (Association des Historiens Modernistes de l’Université Française) dated January 1, 2016, the IHRF has existed in other forms since it was founded 78 years ago and will continue no matter what its particular status within the CNRS or some larger administrative structure. So this is by no means the end of studies of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne or the IHRF’s activities. But this did seem to be a moment when a show of support from across the pond appeared particularly appropriate.

We all have singular and personal stories about our work in France and on its history. In bringing together these testimonies, we have made no effort to be exhaustive of all the ways the IHRF has contributed to studies of the French Revolution. The expressions of concern raised by this recent change on H-France, in conferences, and in informal conversations throughout the French historical world suggest just how important the IHRF is for the French historical community as a whole. Though the scholars present here have been among some of the most prominent and engaged, the manifold ways the IHRF has affected American scholars of the Revolution spreads immeasurably beyond the accounts provided in this forum. Instead, our aim in inviting American scholars of the French Revolution has been to provide a small window into the importance of the Institut and to take this unfortunate opportunity to recount some of the ways it has shaped studies of the French Revolution on the other side of the Atlantic. As complex as the political struggles of the French university system are, these accounts reveal that the impact of the IHRF has been very

straightforward: the IHRF—and the colleagues associated with it—have provided an institutional and scientific cornerstone for the enduring interest in French history and specifically its Revolution. As the IHRF embarks on a new moment in its history, we hope that its role in shaping studies of the French Revolution will continue to be as profound as it has in the past.

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