



PRIMARY SOURCE READING I I

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

Although the French Revolution later turned to violence and terror, the first bold public statement of the revolutionary National Assembly echoes the high ideals of John Locke, the Enlightenment, and the American Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was issued in August 1789.

Guided Reading *In this selection, read to learn what problems and rights the Declaration addresses.*

The representatives of the French people, constituted in National Assembly, considering that ignorance, forgetfulness, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole causes of public misfortunes and the corruption of governments, have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man so that this declaration, being constantly before all members of the social body, may unceasingly recall to them their rights and their duties; so that the acts of the legislative power and those of the executive power may always be compared with the true aim of political organization and thus may be more respected; and so that the demands of the citizens, founded henceforth upon simple and incontestable principles, may always be aimed at maintaining the constitution and the happiness of all.

In consequence, the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and citizen.

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be based only upon the common good.
2. The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. The source of all sovereignty is essentially in the nation [that is, the people]; no body, no individual can exercise authority that does not emanate from it expressly.
4. Liberty consists in the power to do anything that does not injure others; accordingly, the exercise of the natural rights of each man

has no limits except those that assure to the other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights. These limits can be determined only by law.

5. The law can forbid only such actions as are injurious to society. Nothing can be forbidden that is not forbidden by the law, and no one can be constrained to do that which it does not decree.
6. Law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to take part personally, or by their representatives, in its enactment. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens being equal in its eyes, are equally eligible to all public dignities, places, and employments, according to their capacities, and without other distinction than that of their merits and their talents.
7. No man can be accused, arrested, or detained, except in the cases determined by the law and according to the forms which it has prescribed. Those who call for, expedite, execute, or cause to be executed arbitrary orders should be punished; but every citizen summoned or seized by virtue of the law ought to obey instantly; he makes himself culpable by resistance.
8. The law ought to establish only punishments that are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one should be punished except by virtue of a law established and promulgated prior to the offence and legally applied.
9. Every man being presumed innocent until he has been declared guilty, if it is judged indispensable to arrest him, all severity that



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may not be necessary to secure his person ought to be severely suppressed by law.

- 10. No one should be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious, provided their manifestation does not trouble the public order as established by law.
- 11. The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man; every citizen can then speak, write, and print freely, save for the responsibility for the abuse of this liberty in the cases determined by law.
- 12. The guarantee of the rights of man and citizen necessitates a public force [that is, law-enforcement officers]; this force is then instituted for the advantage of all and not for the particular use of those to whom it is entrusted.
- 13. For the maintenance of the public force and for the expenses of administration a general

tax is indispensable; it should be equally apportioned among all the citizens according to their means.

- 14. All citizens have the right to ascertain, by themselves or through their representatives, the necessary amount of public taxation, to consent to it freely, to follow the use of it, and to determine the quota, the assessment, the collection, and the duration of it.
- 15. Society has the right to call for an account by every public agent of his administration.
- 16. Any society in which the guarantee of the rights is not assured, or the separation of powers not determined, has no constitution.
- 17. Property being a sacred and inviolable right, no one can be deprived of it, unless a legally established public necessity evidently requires it, under the condition of a just and prior indemnity.

INTERPRETING THE READING

Directions Use information from the reading to answer the following questions. If necessary, use a separate sheet of paper.

- 1. What does the Declaration blame for the social problems and government corruption in France?

- 2. According to the Declaration, what natural rights do people possess? How is this list different from that in the American Declaration of Independence?

- 3. If the Declaration had been put into effect, who would have been able to vote?

Critical Thinking

- 4. **Making Inferences** In what ways does the Declaration reflect France's specific problems and crises?
