

The Second Phase of the French Revolution

The Declaration of the Rights of Man

The representatives of the French people, organized as a National Assembly, believing that the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments, have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the members of the Social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power, as well as those of the executive power, may be compared at any moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, based hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to the maintenance of the constitution and redound to the happiness of all. Therefore the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims the following rights of man and of the citizen:

Articles:

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.
2. The aim of all 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 principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body or individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.
6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.
7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed, any arbitrary order shall be punished.
9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.
11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom.
16. A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.
17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

1. What was the purpose of the Declaration of the Rights of Man?
2. Based on this document, which articles are the most important and why?

The 1791 Constitution

In order to make the new French democracy a more powerful entity, a constitution was produced. The constitution reaffirmed all of the rights that free citizens were allowed. It was adopted and went into effect in September 1791 but, due to a series of constitutional crises, had effectively ceased to function as a national constitution by August 1792.

The constitution attempted to establish liberal constitutional monarchy, under which the Legislative Assembly would pass legislation but the king of France Louis XVI -- would retain a veto. With war beginning and with increasingly radical forces coming to the fore in the Assembly, this proved entirely unworkable. The constitution dissolved due to a series of fanatical ideas which led to another dangerous period in French history.

1. What is the purpose of a constitution? And why was this one unsuccessful?

The Reign of Terror

During the summer of 1792, the leaders of the mobs on the streets had more real power than any government assembly. Although the mobs were made up of the poor, their leaders came from the bourgeoisie. Both men and women of the middle class joined political clubs. The most radical club in 1792 was the Jacobin Club. The Jacobins wanted to remove the king and create a republic.

In 1793, the Jacobins tried King Louis XVI for treason and found him guilty. By a very close vote they sentenced him to death. On January 21, 1793, the ex-king walked with calm dignity up to the steps to the scaffold to be beheaded by a machine called the guillotine. As Louis walked up to the guillotine he looked upon his people and said, "*I die innocent of all the crimes laid to my charge; I Pardon those who have occasioned my death; and I pray to God that the blood you are going to shed may never be visited on France.*" With his death a new period in France had begun.

As dozens of leaders struggle for power, Maximilien Robespierre slowly gained control. Robespierre and his supporters set out to build a republic. They tried to wipe out every trace of France's past monarchy and nobility. Many families named Leroy ("king"), for instance, changed their names. Robespierre even removed the kings, queens and jacks from playing cards and replaced them with more revolutionary images.

From July 1793 to July 1794, Robespierre governed France. This period became known as the Reign of Terror. The first victim was Marie Antoinette. They took her son Louis Charles from her and he disappeared under suspicious circumstances. Then she led off a parade of prominent and not-so-prominent citizens to their deaths. The guillotine, the new instrument of justice, was put to work. Public executions were considered educational. The Revolutionary Tribunal ordered the execution of 2,400 people in Paris by July 1794. Across France 30,000 people lost their lives. Terror was the order of the day. In the words of Maximilien Robespierre, "Softness to traitors will destroy us all."

Georges Danton was the head of the Committee of Public Safety, which was responsible to fight the enemies of the revolution, to prevent counter-revolution from gaining ground. Most of the people rounded up were not aristocrats, but ordinary people. A man (and his family) might go to the guillotine for saying something critical of the revolutionary government. Eventually the Reign of Terror became too violent and even Danton spoke against it, which led to his execution.

When Robespierre called for a new purge in 1794, he seemed to threaten the other members of the Committee of Public Safety. The Jacobins had had enough. One man alone is paralyzing the will of the Convention. *And that man is Robespierre.*" Others quickly rallied to his support. Robespierre was arrested and sent to the guillotine the next day, the last victim of the Reign of Terror.

1. Who was Robespierre?
2. What was the Reign of Terror?
3. What was its purpose?

The questions arose during the French Revolution whether “all citizens” included women. Many deputies said it did, as long as women stayed out of politics. Olympe de Gouges would not accept this exclusion of women from political rights, such as the vote. She wrote a **Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen**. The National Assembly ignored her plea.

Preamble:

Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly. Believing that ignorance, omission, or scorn for the rights of woman are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, [the women] have resolved to set forth a declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of woman in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all members of the society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties;

Consequently, the sex that is as superior in beauty as it is in courage during the sufferings of maternity recognizes and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Rights of Woman and of Female Citizens.

Article I

Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.

Article II

The purpose of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man; these rights are liberty property, security, and especially resistance to oppression.

Article III

The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially with the nation, which is nothing but the union of woman and man; no body and no individual can exercise any authority which does not come expressly from it (the nation).

Article IV

Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of woman are perpetual male tyranny; these limits are to be reformed by the laws of nature and reason.

Article VII

No woman is an exception; she is accused, arrested, and detained in cases determined by law. Women, like men, obey this rigorous law.

Article XVII

Property belongs to both sexes whether united or separate; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right' no one can be deprived of it, since it is the true patrimony of nature, unless the legally determined public need obviously dictates it, and then only with a just and prior indemnity.

1. What does Olympe de Gouges attempt to do in this document?
2. Why do you think her plea was ignored?
3. Why is this document an important step for women in the eighteenth century?