

CHAPTER
23

Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE *from* A Declaration of the Rights
of Man and of the Citizen

On August 27, 1789, the National Assembly of France adopted a revolutionary document, A Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. As you read this portion of the document, consider the rights it guaranteed to French citizens.

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. . . . Therefore the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen:

Article 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

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. . . .

4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. . . .

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. . . .

7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. . . . But any citizen summoned or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense.

8. The law shall provide for such punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer punishment except it be legally inflicted in virtue of a law passed and promulgated before the commission of the offense.

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.

10. No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established 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, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law. . . .

13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all citizens in proportion to their means. . . .

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.

from Milton Viorst, The Great Documents of Western Civilization (New York: Bantam, 1965), 185-188.

Research Options

1. **Clarifying** Use the Internet or another source to find out more about the declaration. Who wrote it? What American document was a model for the French declaration?
2. **Comparing** Read the English Bill of Rights and the American Declaration of Independence. Then make a chart listing similarities to the French declaration. Share your chart with the class.
3. **Drawing Conclusions** What provisions of the declaration forbid conditions that existed under the Old Regime? Consider especially the tax system and the division of society.