Human Rights in the Making:
The French and Haitian Revolutions

PREVIEW COPY
INCLUDING THE COMPLETE FIRST LESSON

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introduction

I. APPROACH AND RATIONALE

Human Rights In The Making: The French And Haitian Revolutions is one of a collection of over seventy units that The National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) has developed for teaching with primary sources. They represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning point in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions for tomorrow’s history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation, and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

This unit provides: Teacher Materials, including a Unit Overview and Unit Context, the Correlation to the National Standards for United States History, Unit Objectives, and Lesson Plans with primary sources. This unit should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for grades 9–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Historical Background sections should provide you with a good overview for the lesson. It is assigned to students as reading; however, if your students are not of sufficient grade level to understand the materials on their own, you may consult it for your own use in class lectures.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources
which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source docu-
ments, handouts and student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can
teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones
that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive
or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for
in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting
and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see
history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure
of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.
Teacher Background

I. Unit Overview

This unit addresses three interrelated topics:

» The claims for human rights put forward by different segments of French society and French colonial Haiti.

» How these claims, and the responses to them, were related to the events of French and Haitian revolutions.

» How disputes and decisions about human rights during these two revolutions related to historical changes in thinking about rights.

The unit is adaptable to different teaching time frames and student ability levels, depending on which discussion questions and activities are used. Lessons One, Three, and Four can stand alone. So can Lesson Two, if it draws on the Background Lesson that precedes Lesson One.

II. Unit Context

The French and Haitian revolutions ended privilege was, abolished inherited rights, and overthrew the traditional political and social order. The powers and rights of individuals relative to each other and to the sovereign were redefined. The ideal of popular sovereignty, expressed in the right of individuals to participate in government, was given form and substance. Revolutionaries made and achieved claims for the right to political self-determination.

Documents recording the passionate debates about rights, freedom, and equality that took place during the French Revolution became a major source of later revolutionary ideologies in world history. Virtually all peoples who have sought political and social change have continued to draw on those foundational documents. Those seeking to resist social and political change have also been forced to deal with those documents in order to counter the ideas found in them.

Haiti, or Saint Domingue, which occupies the western third of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, was the first country in the Atlantic world after the United States to overthrow its colonial masters. It also put an end to its slavery-based economic and social system and became the first country with a population of largely African origin to emerge out of the European empires of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries. It was the first state to proclaim equality between those who had been black slaves with those who had been white masters. Independent Haiti defined all citizens as legally equal and as “black,” no matter their ancestry. Haiti served for a long time both as a model for others in the Americas seeking independence and equality and as a challenge to white complacency in America and Europe.
The French and Haitian revolutions, with their emphasis on rights, freedom, and equality, led to basic changes in the ways individuals and groups around the globe thought about who they were, their place in the world, and what they could achieve.

III. CORRELATION TO THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR WORLD HISTORY

Human Rights in the Making: The French And Haitian Revolutions offers teachers opportunities to connect with standards in world history as delineated in National Standards for History, Basic Edition (Los Angeles, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), particularly Standard 1A (how the French Revolution contributed to transformations in Europe and the world) and Standard 1B (how Latin American countries achieved independence) of World History Era 7, “An Age of Revolutions, 1750–1914.” Also relevant is Standard 2C (how liberal democracy, market economies, and human rights movements have reshaped political and social life) of World History Era 9, “The 20th Century since 1945.” Some of the readings, activities, and insights in this unit may also be used in teaching about other historical eras in which relationships between rulers and ruled, as well as human rights, were at issue.

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

♦ Relate the debates and actions concerning rights during the French and Haitian revolutions to the historical contexts of the time.

♦ Compare and contrast attitudes to rights of different groups and at different times during the French and Haitian revolutions.

♦ Trace changes and continuities in what people considered to be the most important rights, as reflected in key documents from the English Magna Carta of 1215 to the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

♦ Evaluate the relative importance of various rights, and recognize that such evaluations are influenced by cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes.

♦ Apply insights gained from study of the history of human rights to contemporary situations.

V. LESSON PLANS

Background Lesson: What are Rights and Who Should Have Them?

Lesson One: Power to the People: How did the Rights of Citizens Replace the Rights of Kings in France?

Lesson Two: Prejudice Dealt a Partial Blow: Jews but not Women Gain Rights in the French Revolution

Lesson Three: From No Rights to Full Rights: Slaves Gain Freedom and Independence from France in Haiti

Lesson Four: From Limiting Kings’ Rights to Protecting Childrens’ Rights: Shifts in the Western Tradition of Rights
BACKGROUND LESSON
What are Rights and Who Should Have Them?

A. OBJECTIVES
♦ Be able to define ‘rights.’
♦ Understand the general historical background of the codification of rights.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

Activity One
Using the following questions, conduct a class discussion. Alternatively, have students work on the questions in small groups and then share their conclusions with the whole class.

1. What does it mean to have a “right?”
   The following examples may help in considering this question:
   a) Suppose you complained about your grade, and your teacher was willing to listen to you and to talk about it. What difference would it make whether or not you had the right to complain?
   b) Suppose you complained about your grade, and your teacher refused to listen or to talk to you about it. What difference would it make whether or not you had the right to complain?
   c) What other difference, if any, would your having, or not having, the right to complain make in this situation? What other rights, and whose, might be at stake in this situation?

2. What is the use of having a right?

3. Does having a right to something guarantee that you will be certain to get it? Why, or why not? If yes, who would guarantee the right and how? If no, why bother with the right in the first place?

4. Do rights carry responsibilities? Give examples to support your view.

5. If responsibilities go with rights, what actions might ensure that the responsibilities be shouldered?

6. What are the sources of authority that can be appealed to when claiming a right? Whose say-so, what backing, or what justification makes a right a right?

7. What are allowable actions people can take to gain rights that they do not have? Where makes them allowable? What limits the actions?

8. What historical examples can you give where rights have been a major issue? What, when, where, and whose rights?

Activity Two
Use the following Historical Background as a student handout, or share as much of it in a lecture as is appropriate for your class.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Today, rights are a high-profile issue. Charges of civil rights violations result in publicity and prosecutions. Government officials, non-governmental organizations, politicians, talk-show hosts, and news commentators talk and write passionately about rights. Activists work to refine, defend, and even extend rights, both to new areas, such as air quality and domestic abuse, and to new constituencies, such as children. The human rights records of governments also influence foreign policy.

The human rights of today have a long history. But scholars generally agree that our contemporary ideas about human rights were largely hammered out during the American, French and Haitian revolutions of the late eighteenth century.

The concept of a natural law that governs peoples’ relations with one another goes at least as far back in the western tradition as the Roman Empire. This natural law was thought to be something other than either a country’s traditions and customs or the laws decreed by rulers. Reason could distinguish human-made laws from natural law whenever the former were unjust, inequitable, or wrong. Natural laws, that is, justice and fairness, were universal. They guaranteed to everyone rights that were natural, not human-made, and therefore could not be taken away by human action.

Restricted in premodern times mostly to a small educated minority, these ideas became much more widespread and influential from the seventeenth century on. This happened for several reasons:

- Influenced by the scientific revolution’s establishment of laws governing the physical universe, people became more interested in finding laws that governed all human societies.

- Thinkers increasingly questioned the right of monarchs, backed by religious authorities, to impose their arbitrary will as law and to regard the rights of subjects as only limited privileges given by royal favor. Such rights as ordinary people had varied from group to group. Religious minorities, women, and slaves had few to none.

- Enlightenment philosophes (political and social philosophers) popularized the idea that improving society by making it conform to natural law would lead to more rational and happier humans.

- The translated and much-discussed works of John Locke were influential. He wrote in England at a time when the Glorious Revolution of 1688 severely restricted the rights of the monarch. He claimed that the right to life, liberty, property, and resistance to oppression belonged by nature to every individual.

Starting in the eighteenth century, these ideas reached more and more people. The reading public was growing: in France literacy almost doubled during that century. Censorship, while active, was intermittent. Unauthorized publications multiplied. There were new places where people could meet, mingle, and talk, from coffeehouses and clubs to salons and literary societies. Discontent grew in regard to the traditional relationship between rulers and ruled based on the right
of people of royal or noble birth to hold power. Discontent also flared over the unequal, hierarchical ordering of society, and this dissatisfaction spread to more and groups—to farmers, artisans, and professionals within the non-noble Third Estate (everyone except the aristocracy and the high clergy), to women, to religious minorities, and to colonial subjects, whether white or black.

In 1789, Louis XIV, the French king was forced to call the first Estates General, a council of influential subjects organized to advise the monarch, in almost two centuries. He did it because of a financial crisis brought on partly by the nobility’s refusal to pay taxes. In preparation for this assembly, each of the three Estates (the First was the high clergy, the Second was the aristocracy, the Third was everyone else) held meetings to list their grievances and requests for reforms. Women were not invited to take part, but some of them nevertheless sent petitions to the king asking for changes. The widespread rehashing of complaints that took place in these meetings intensified people’ sense of unfairness and injustice for their own Estate.

The most serious complaints of the Third Estate were against privilege, that is, the special rights reserved for only certain groups. Members of the Third Estate resented:

- the exclusive benefits enjoyed by the clergy and the nobility.
- the honors and offices restricted to them.
- their freedom from taxes and fees.
- the social deference they demanded.
- their contempt for commoners.

The nobility’s complaints were mostly about whatever threatened their rights and privileges, and about ways in which the king’s power limited theirs. The clergy was the Estate most likely to put forward humanitarian and educational concerns.

When the Estates General convened in 1789, King Louis failed to introduce any reforms and insisted that the Estates follow the tradition of meeting separately to discuss issues and to vote as a block, that is, each Estate having one vote. This meant the Third Estate would always be outvoted by the clergy and nobility, who had interests in common opposed to those of commoners. Delegates of the Third Estate boycotted the proceedings and invited delegates from the other two Estates to join them in a joint assembly that would together consider and vote on reforms. This group declared itself to be the National Assembly of France. It swore not to disband until it had hammered out a constitution. Starting with a few liberal nobles and members of the lower clergy, delegates from the First and Second Estate began to join this body.

Meanwhile, the king dithered. But as more and more delegates came over to the Third Estate, he ordered all the rest to do so too and thereby legitimized the National Assembly. Among its earliest actions, it abolished feudalism and with it the privileges of nobles and the servitude of serfs. It also issued that proclaimed Declaration that claimed equal rights for all.

Two years later, the National Assembly produced a constitution. It proclaimed political rights, but not political equality. Of about six million adult men in France 25 years or older, half met the financial qualification required for having the right to vote. But even those men with the franchise could only vote for electors, whose money qualifications were even higher. The electors in turn
chose from among the 70,000 or so people who qualified financially to serve as deputies to the Legislative Assembly, which became the national governing body. The king had the right to a delaying veto, but that was the only power he retained.

In June 1791, Louis, unwilling to remain a token ruler, fled in disguise with his family. He planned to get troops from his father-in-law, the Austrian emperor, then return to abolish the Assembly and revive royal absolutism. However, revolutionary forces caught him near the border. After his arrest, he was kept under guard. In response, Austria threatened an invasion to regain for the king all his ancient rights. Such meddling by foreigners in the internal affairs of France seemed outrageous to many, and so war fever rose. In the spring of 1792, the Assembly declared war on Austria.

For six months, one defeat for France followed another. The Austrians and their allies crossed the frontier and ordered Paris to submit immediately to the king or suffer fearful punishment after it was conquered. At this point, the common people of Paris took things into their own hands and revolted. They attacked and captured the king’s palace and imprisoned him. They put an end to the Legislative Assembly. They called for a new government to be elected by universal manhood suffrage and for the end of the monarchy. They got both.

Though only 10 percent of those eligible to do so voted, the resulting National Convention ruled for some three years. It immediately declared France to be a republic, and in January 1793, it executed the king. The National Convention managed to deal with many issues—war, inflation, shortages, real and suspected aristocratic and royalist conspiracies, armed rebellion by discontents in the provinces, and pressure from militant extremists. However, it also suspended the constitution, ignored the rights outlined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and imposed wage and price controls. Furthermore, it put in place the policy for repressing dissent known for good reason as the Terror. While the Convention abolished slavery in the French colonies, it also outlawed all women’s political societies and forbade public roles for women as contrary to nature.

After a decade of violence, explosive changes, and uncertainty, most French citizens found the idea of firm and stable rule appealing. In 1799 the war hero Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the government that had followed after the Convention, but his rule was autocratic and the parliamentary government he set up a sham. Even so, he preserved at home and spread to other countries by conquest several major gains of the revolution, including legal equality for all males, whatever their birth or religion. In the French colonies, however, he re-imposed slavery.
Dramatic Moment

Sweeping political and social change seemed inevitable in the late summer of 1789, when the newly formed French National Assembly, meeting in Paris, drew up a revolutionary document that proclaimed principles of civil equality, national sovereignty, representation, and the rule of law. Despite much debate and disagreement, the assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen on August 4.

The representatives of the French people, constituted as a National Assembly . . . [here] spell out in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man. . . .

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may only be based on the common good.

2. The aim of all political association is to preserve the natural and inalienable rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

3. All sovereignty belongs to the nation. No group nor individual may exercise any authority which they have not been given by the nation.

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

5. Law can only forbid such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented that is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not required by law.

6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has the right to take part personally or through his representative in its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally admissible to all honors and 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 those cases, and according to the forms, ordered by law. Any one asking for, passing on, carrying out, or causing to be carried out any arbitrary order shall be punished. But any citizen legally summoned or arrested should obey at once, as resistance is an offence.

8. The only legal punishments are those that are strictly and obviously necessary. No one shall be punished unless it is done legally, by virtue of a law passed and made public before the offence was committed.

9. As all persons are held innocent until they are declared guilty, if an arrest has to be made the law will punish severely any harshness not essential to securing the prisoner.

10. No one shall be troubled because of his opinions, including his religious views, as long as their expression 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. Therefore every citizen may speak, write and print freely, but shall be responsible for any abuses of this freedom as legally defined.

12. The security of the rights of man and the citizen needs public military force. Therefore these forces are established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they are entrusted.

13. For the upkeep of the public forces, and the costs of administration, a common contribution is essential. This should be equitably divided among all the citizens, according to their ability to pay.

14. All the citizens have the right to decide, either personally or through their representatives, whether a public contribution is needed; to agree to it freely; to know what it will be used for; and to fix the proportion, the method of assessment, collection, and duration of the taxes.

15. Society has the right to demand of every public official an account of his administration.

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 have it taken from them except when public need, legally established, clearly demands it, and then only if the owner has been fairly paid in advance.

Source: James Harvey Robinson, Readings in Modern European History: A Collection of Extracts from the Sources Chosen with the Purpose of Illustrating Some of the Chief Phases of Development of Europe During the Last Two Hundred Years, vol. 2 (Boston: Ginn, 1906). [Anne Chapman has moderately simplified the language.]
CHRONOLOGY

1215 Magna Carta agreed to by King John of England.
1689 English Bill of Rights declares “the rights and liberties of the subjects.”
1770s Legal decisions in England and Scotland imply that slavery is no longer legal in Britain.
1787 Edict of Toleration gives French Calvinists civil rights including freedom of worship, but not political rights.

1789

Feb.–June Elections to Estates General, local assemblies draw up lists of grievances.
June Third Estate declare themselves the National Assembly, soon approved by king.

1791 U.S. Bill of Rights ratified.
May 15 National Assembly grants political rights to all free French colonial blacks born of free parents.
Aug. 22 Slave uprisings begin in Saint Domingue (Haiti).
Sept. 24 Recently gained rights of free blacks revoked.
Sept. 27 Jews gain full citizenship rights in France.
Sept De Gouges’ unofficial Declaration of the Rights of Woman.
Oct. 1 Legislative Assembly starts to meet.

1792

Mar. 28 Rights of free blacks restored.
Apr. 20 France declares war on Austria.
Aug. 10 Paris workers seize the king, abolish the constitution, force election by universal male suffrage of a new government.
Sept. 21 The new government, the National Convention, begins to meet, and declares France to be a republic.

1793

Jan. Louis XVI executed.
Mar. Uprisings against the National Convention begin.
Autumn Women’s clubs and societies formally outlawed, their political activity condemned by National Convention.

1794 National Convention abolishes slavery in all French colonies.

1797 Toussaint L’Ouverture leads four-year fight against British, Spanish and French invaders.

1801 Napoleon tries and fails to re-impose slavery in St. Domingue (Haiti) with 10,000, then 44,000 troops.

1804 Toussaint’s lieutenant Dessalines succeeds him as Governor, and declares Haiti’s independence from France, later names himself emperor.

1818 France abolishes slave trade.

1838 France recognizes Haitian independence.

1848 France abolishes slavery.
LESSON ONE
Power to the People:
How Did the Rights of Citizens Replace the Rights of Kings in France?

A. OBJECTIVES

♦ Relate the growing interest in human rights in France to intellectual, social, and political conditions during the period leading to the revolution.

♦ Explain who had rights in France before and after the revolution, what kinds of rights, and on what basis rights were claimed on one hand and disregarded on the other.

♦ Identify the conditions that led in succession from attempts to limit the king’s rights, to achievement of full rights for much of the population, to disregard of some basic rights during the last decade or so of the eighteenth century.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Before the students read the documents in this lesson, tell them as they work with the documents they should consider whose rights are questioned, whose are limited, whose are ignored, and whose are affirmed in each of the documents.

2. Distribute the “Dramatic Moment” (pages 9–10). Divide the class into groups, each to represent the interests of one of the following:
   » clergy
   » nobles
   » urban Third Estate (merchants, professional people, shopkeepers, craftsmen, clerical, and laborers)
   » rural Third Estate (peasants)

Each group is to discuss and report to the class on the following:

a) Which provisions in the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” would have been most important to the group you represent (choose three to five of the provisions)? Explain your reasoning.

b) Which of the three to five provisions you chose were of greatest overall importance? Which would be most important to Americans today? Why?

c) If your group had to choose one right as most important, what would it be? Why?

d) Are there other rights, not mentioned in the Declaration, that today would be very important? What ones? Why?

e) What twentieth-century examples can you give of a state’s law being broken based on the claim that this law was unjust because it failed to give people their natural rights?
3. Distribute **Documents 1–A through 1–E** and **Student Handout One**. Students should read the discussion questions first and then read the documents. Assign the activity as an individual effort with written questions or as small group discussions.

4. Construct a graph showing the rise and fall in people’s rights from royal absolutism to various republican governments to Napoleon’s autocratic rule. Label the key events or causes wherever the line on your graph changes direction. This activity may serve as an assessment.

5. In small groups, construct a “Declaration of Rights for People Under Age Eighteen.” Compare the groups’ documents. How might you explain differences among them? How might you explain differences between the class documents and the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” (**Dramatic Moment**).

6. Ask students to look first at the following pairs of documents in sequence:
   - 1–A and 1–D
   - 1–B and 1–C
   - 1–E and **Dramatic Moment**

   Based on this reading, ask students the following questions: What do the two documents in each group have in common with each other? What are the main differences between the first and the second group, and between the second and the third group? Consider subject matter, tone, and attitude to rights, freedom, and authority.

7. Once students list the similarities and differences, have them construct a hypothesis to explain the changes from the first to the second and from the second to the third group of documents. Consider historical events and contexts both at the time and between the times the documents were written. What evidence would support their hypothesis? This activity may serve as an assessment.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Documents 1–A through 1–E

Document 1–A

1) Did the French king have the right to give the ruling he did in his speech to the Estates General on June 23, 1789? Why or why not?

2) On what basis could he justify his right?

3) On what basis could his opponents claim that he did not have the right?

4) On what basis were rights claimed by nobles? By the Third Estate?

Documents 1–B and 1–C

1) Is a disregard or violation of rights justified in order to:
   » protect the laws from those actively working to overturn them?
   » protect a legally formed government against overthrow?
   » protect people from possible future terrorist acts?
   Why or why not?

2) Which is more important, the right to freedom or the right to safety? Why?

3) How should a decision be made when enforcing one right necessitates disregarding another?

4) In what ways do these questions apply in the recent history of the U.S.?

5) Does a foreign ruler have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country in order to restore a ruler who has been overthrown? To restore people’s rights that are being disregarded by their government? What would give or deny this foreign rule the right to take action?

6) If citizens have the right to speak out in opposition to their government’s policies, what circumstances might there be when such opposition would be treason? Explain your reasoning.

7) Do citizens have the right to hold opinions considered subversive (threatening, rebellious) by the government? Why or why not?

8) Under what circumstances is it the government’s right to take action against people who hold subversive opinions? What action?
Documents 1–A, 1–B, 1–C, 1–D, and 1–E

1) What arguments might support and what arguments might oppose the claim that not only those who betray the government but also those who do not actively support it should be punished? What about the claim that not only those students who disrupt a class but those who do not actively participate in it should be punished? In what ways are the two situations similar, in what ways different?

2) Under what circumstances might it be justifiable for the government to override the right to free speech in order to suppress dissent? Explain your reasoning. Was the National Convention justified in doing so? Why or why not?

3) In what sense could it be argued that the National Convention expressed the people’s will? Can any other than an elected government be said to express the people’s will? Explain. Suppose only a low percentage of those qualified to vote cast their ballots in an election. Does the government still express the people’s will? Why or why not? How low can the percentage of people voting fall before and still elect a government that expresses the people’s will? Does it matter whether the government expresses the people’s will? Why or why not? Find out what percentage of Americans have voted in national elections in the last couple of decades.
After the Third Estate declared they were the National Assembly, the French king finally made some concessions, but too little and too late. The beginning and ending of Louis’ speech, no matter the concessions in between, infuriated the Third Estate. Three weeks after this speech a huge crowd stormed the Bastille and royal authority began to collapse.

The king wishes the ancient distinction between the three orders [Estates] of the state to stay unchanged in any way.

The following will be absolutely excluded from the matters which may be discussed in common: matters to do with the ancient and constitutional rights of the three orders, . . . feudal . . . properties, and the profitable rights and honorific privileges of the first two orders. . . .

[He ended by saying:] Reflect once more, gentlemen, that none of your projects, none of your arrangements can have the force of law without my explicit approval; thus I am the guarantor of your respective rights and all the orders of the state can rely on my equity and impartiality; any mistrust on your part would be a great injustice.

FREEDOM IS NOT FOR EVERYONE, ACCORDING TO MARAT, A FRENCH RADICAL
November 1792

Jean Marat started out as a physician and scientist but soon developed wider interests. He lived in England for ten years, and he wrote books on slavery and criminal legislation, as well as on optics and electricity. After he returned to France, he became a passionate supporter of the Revolution. The newspaper he founded, called The Friend of the People, published fiery rhetoric favoring “revolutionary ideas.” Elected a deputy to the Legislative Assembly in 1792, he made many enemies on both right and left. He was assassinated in 1793. He wrote the following a few weeks after the revolt of the Parisian working classes forced the Legislative Assembly out of power and opened the way for the election of the National Convention. Many nobles had fled from France to the court of the Austrian emperor, who was Queen Marie Antoinette’s father.

If we follow the moderates’ way of thinking, public welfare will be sacrificed to a mistaken love of humanity. They use the excuse of not limiting freedom of thought to leave enemies of the Revolution the means to provoke conflict. They use the excuse of not cramping individual freedom to leave them free to disrupt the State. They use the excuse of avoiding harm to the freedom of travel, to leave them the freedom to go and conspire abroad.

“The Constitution Cannot Be Fulfilled”
St. Just, a Radical Deputy
October 1793

St. Just, elected to the National Convention, played a major role in condemning
the king to death. An extremist, he was known as the theoretician of the terror.
Four months before he wrote the words that follow, radicals in Paris had forced a
purge of the National Convention, some of whose members were imprisoned or
fled. The war was going badly, peasants revolted against the draft, and local agitators
claimed parliamentary methods to be useless. Semi-military bands roamed the
countryside, confiscated food, and denounced suspects. After St. Just made this
speech, the Convention enacted a decree that in essence suspended the rule of
law for the duration of the war. This marked the beginning of the Terror.

. . . You have to punish not only the traitors but
even those who are neutral. You have to punish
whoever is inactive in the republic and does
nothing for it. Since the French people has
declared its will, everyone who is opposed to it is
outside the sovereign body. And everyone who is
outside the sovereign body is an enemy.

If conspiracies had not troubled this empire, if the
fatherland had not been a thousand times the
victim of easygoing laws, it would be sweet to rule
by the principles of peace and natural justice.
These principles are good among the friends of
liberty. But between the people and its enemies,
there is nothing in common except the sword.
Those who cannot be governed by justice must
be ruled with a rod of iron. . . .

In the circumstances in which the republic is
placed, the constitution cannot be fulfilled. People
would use it to destroy it. It would protect attempts
against liberty, because it would lack the force
necessary to repress them. . . .

BISHOP BOSSUET PREACHES THE SACREDNESS OF ROYAL POWER

Jacques Bossuet was a Frenchman writing in the second half of the 1600s. After becoming a priest, he was appointed tutor to the royal heir, for whose instruction he wrote books on universal history and on politics derived from holy scripture. He was a successful preacher, an eloquent defender of royal absolutism, and an opponent of protestants. The ideas he preached spread widely in Europe and continued to be popular in France in the 1780s.

Royal power is sacred, and nothing is more firmly grounded in the Word of God than the obedience due, as a matter of faith and conscience, to lawful authority. The violence of a prince can be met by his subjects only with respectful petitions, without rebellious murmuring, and by prayers for his change of heart.

. . . Only that which it pleases the prince to . . . command or to forbid has the force of law. . . . This power of making and unmaking law . . . includes all the other rights of sovereignty: . . . making peace and war, hearing appeals from the sentences of courts, appointing and dismissing the great officers of state, taxing or granting privileges of exemption, [and] the making of war and peace. . . . The prince [is] one to whom obedience [is] due without exception.

Sources:
Alfred A. Andrea and James H. Overfield, *The Human Record: Sources of Global History*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton
The first four of the demands below appeared in almost all the grievance lists; the fifth, in almost all the those of the Third Estate. The rest are a sampling that gives some idea of the variety of concerns among the French population on the eve of the revolution.

[We ask that]

» No tax may be established nor continued . . . without the consent of the Estates General.

» No general law be introduced except in the Estates General, and by mutual cooperation between the king’s authority and the consent of the nation.

» A law [be put in place] preventing the future use of lettres de cachet [secret, sealed orders by which the king, or those he authorized, sentenced a subject without trial or opportunity of defense], and preventing any person with public authority from having a citizen arrested without bringing him before a judge within 24 hours.

» Ministers shall not on any pretext be able to . . . violate personal liberty or property by any arbitrary order, even if signed by the king.

» All privileges whatsoever be totally suppressed.

» Judgeships no longer be sold.

» Titles of nobility should only be given [by the king] for some great service to the country.

» Nuns, . . . supervised by parish priests, should be obliged to open free public schools for girls.

» An interest [be taken] in bettering the condition of negroes in the colonies.

» The number of holidays be reduced. The enormity of the taxes and the misery of the people seems to require doing so, in order for them to have the working time needed for survival.

» A lower price and better quality for bread be fixed.

» All rabbits be totally destroyed.

» The export of grain be absolutely forbidden.

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