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THE French Revolution and Human Rights
A Brief Documentary History

Edited, Translated, and with an Introduction by

Lynn Hunt
University of Pennsylvania

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**Chronology**

1751-80  Diderot and d'Alembert publish their Encyclopedia
1763  Voltaire, Treatise on Toleration
1770  Raynal, Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies
1781  Condorcet, Reflections on Negro Slavery
1787  Edict of Toleration for Calvinists
1788  Founding of the Society of the Friends of Blacks
1789
January  Sisícès, What Is the Third Estate?
February-June  Elections to the Estates General
June 17  Third Estate proclaims itself the National Assembly
July 14  Fall of the Bastille
August 26  Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen
1790
July  Condorcet, On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship
1791
May 15  National Assembly grants political rights to all free blacks in the colonies born of free mothers and fathers
June 20  King and his family attempt to flee in disguise
August 22  Slave uprising begins in Saint Domingue
September 24  Rights of free blacks rescinded
September 27  Rights granted to all Jews in France
September  Olympe de Gouges, Declaration of the Rights of Woman
October 1  Legislative Assembly begins meeting
1792
March 28  Rights of free blacks reinstated
April 20  France declares war on Austria

April 25  First use of guillotine
August 10  “Second revolution” deposes the king
September 21  National Convention convenes
September 22  Republic proclaimed
1793
January 21  Execution of Louis XVI
March 10  Creation of Revolutionary Tribunal
March 11  Civil war begins in west of France
July 27  Robespierre becomes one of leaders of government
August-October  Agents in Saint Domingue abolish slavery
September 5  National Convention agrees to govern by terror
October 30  Women’s clubs outlawed
November 10  Festival of Reason held in Paris
November 22  All Parisian churches closed in de-Christianization campaign
1794
February 4  National Convention abolishes slavery in all French colonies
July 27  Fall of Robespierre, end of Terror
1795
August 22  New constitution approved
October 26  End of National Convention
November 2  New government — the Directory — takes over
1799
November 9-10  Napoleon Bonaparte comes to power in a coup d'état
Defining Rights before 1789

NATURAL LAW AS DEFINED BY THE
ENCYCLOPEDIA, 1755

[DIDEROT]

"Natural Law"
1755

The writers of the French Enlightenment made much of the concept of natural law or natural right (the French word droit covers both meanings). As this selection from the Encyclopedia demonstrates, natural law provided the most basic foundation for all human society, that is, it defined what was naturally just for all humans, regardless of country or time period. Enlightenment writers focused on natural law as a way of criticizing particular French laws that they saw as incompatible with those more fundamental human rights. Our modern notion of human rights derives from this earlier notion of natural law or right, that sense of justice common to all peoples.

When they initiated the project of compiling a French Encyclopedia, Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert had various aims. They took on as collaborators all the well-known writers of the day, many of whom had been in trouble with the authorities in the past. Their proclaimed purpose was to present all the knowledge available to humankind in a form that

could be readily passed on to future generations. But they also intended to use that knowledge as a means of challenging and reshaping the status quo. They believed that knowledge would lead inevitably to “enlightenment,” that is, action based on reason rather than on superstition, bigotry, or religious fanaticism.

Diderot himself wrote this brief article, thereby underlining the importance of the concept. The article does not have the satirical bite of some of the others in the Encyclopedia, yet careful reading uncovers a frontal challenge to the French legal order of the mid-eighteenth century. When grounding universal justice and the good society, natural law or right requires no reference to kings, aristocracy, or deference to one’s social betters — indeed, to special privilege of any kind. The philosophy of natural law — and here its development into the eighteenth-century idea of the “general will” — implied legally equal individuals joining together in a society based only on universal human characteristics. Articles such as these immediately drew the attention of censors and police. The government and the Catholic Church both banned the Encyclopedia and persecuted its editors, but the commotion only attracted more readers to clandestine and pirated editions.

NATURAL LAW. The use of this term is so familiar that there is almost no one who would not be convinced inside himself that the thing is obviously known to him. This interior feeling is common both to the philosopher and to the man who has not reflected at all... [The article then advances a series of propositions.]

2. Our existence is impoverished, contentious, and anxious. We have passions and needs. We want to be happy; and every moment unjust and passion-driven man feels himself driven to do to another what he would not wish to have done to himself. It is a judgment that he pronounces at the bottom of his soul and from which he cannot escape. He sees his own meaness and he has to confess it to himself or accord to everyone else the same authority that he arrogates to himself... .

4. I see first of all one thing that seems to me to be acknowledged both by good and evil persons: that we must reason in everything because man is not simply an animal but an animal who reasons. There are consequently in the question at hand means for discovering the truth. Whoever refuses to look for the truth renounces human status and must be treated by the rest of his species like a ferocious beast; once the truth is discovered, whoever refuses to conform to it is either mad or bad in a moral sense. .

7. It is to the general will that the individual must address himself to learn how to be a man, citizen, subject, father, child, and when it is suitable to live or to die. It fixes the limits on all duties. You have the most sacred natural right to everything that is not disputed by the rest of the species. The general will enlightens you on the nature of your thoughts and your desires. Everything that you conceive, everything that you meditate upon will be good, grand, elevated, sublime, if it is in the general and common interest... Tell yourself often: I am a man, and I have no other true, inalienable natural rights than those of humanity.

8. But, you will say to me, where is this general will kept? Where can I consult it? In the principles of written law of all the organized nations; in the social actions of savage and barbarous peoples: in the tacit conventions held in common by the enemies of humankind; and even in indignation and resentment, those two passions that nature seems to have placed in all creatures including animals to make up for the shortcomings in social laws and in public vengeance.

9. If you meditate attentively therefore on everything said in the preceding, you will remain convinced 1) that the man who only listens to his private will is the enemy of the human race; 2) that in every individual the general will is a pure act of understanding that reasons in the silence of the passions about what man can demand of his fellow man and about what his fellow man has the right to demand of him; 3) that this attention to the general will of the species and to shared wants is the rule of conduct of one individual relative to another in the same society, of an individual toward the society of which he is a member, and of the society of which he is a member toward other societies; 4) that submission to the general will is the basis of all societies, without excepting those formed for crime. Indeed, virtue is so attractive that thieves respect its image even inside their dens! 5) that the laws should be made for everyone, and not for one person.
RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

2

VOLTAIRE

Treatise on Toleration

1763

Voltaire was the pen name of François Marie Arouet (1694-1778), perhaps the single best-known writer of the Enlightenment. As early as 1723, he made a name for himself as a proponent of religious toleration when he published a long poem about French King Henry IV and the sixteenth-century wars of religion between Catholics and Calvinists (La Henriade). Visits to England and the Dutch Republic in the 1720s impressed on him the political benefits that could be reaped from religious pluralism. His involvement in the Calas Affair in the 1760s turned it into a European scandal. He wrote his treatise on toleration to link the Calas case to more general issues of religious freedom. He did not argue for granting political rights to members of every religion, but he did insist on the virtues of the freedom to practice one’s chosen religion without persecution. He grounded this freedom on natural law. Even this was too much for French authorities, who promptly banned the work.

Short Account of the Death of Jean Calas

The murder of Calas, which was perpetrated with the sword of justice at Toulouse on March 9, 1762, is one of the most singular events that deserve the attention of our own and of later ages. We quickly forget the long list of the dead who have perished in our battles. It is the inevitable fate of war; those who die by the sword might themselves have inflicted death on their enemies, and did not die without the means of defending themselves. When the risk and the advantage are equal, astonishment ceases, and even pity is enfeebled. But when an innocent father is given into the hands of error, of passion, or of fanaticism; when the accused has no defence but his virtue; when those who dispose of his life run no risk but that of making a mistake; when they can slay with impunity by a legal decree — then the voice of the general public is heard, and each fears for himself. They see that no man’s life is safe before a court that has been set up to guard the welfare of citizens, and every voice is raised in a demand of vengeance. . . .

How Toleration May Be Admitted

I venture to think that some enlightened and magnanimous minister,* some humane and wise prelate, some prince who puts his interest in the number of his subjects and his glory in their welfare, may deign to glance at this inartistic and defective paper. . . .

We have Jews at Bordeaux and Metz and in Alsace; we have Lutherans, Molinists, and Jansenists; can we not suffer and control Calvinists on much the same terms as those on which Catholics are tolerated in London [who did not enjoy political rights but could practice their religion]? The more sects there are, the less danger in each. Multiplicity enfeebles them. They are all restrained by just laws which forbid disorderly meetings, insults, and sedition, and are ever enforced by the community.

We know that many fathers of families, who have made large fortunes in foreign lands, are ready to return to their country [the Calvinist refugees]. They ask only the protection of natural law, the validity of their marriages, security as to the condition of their children, the right to inherit from their fathers, and the enfranchisement of their persons. They ask not for public chapels, or the right to municipal offices and dignities. Catholics have not these things in England and other countries. It is not a question of giving immense privileges and secure positions to a faction, but of allowing a peaceful people to live, and of moderating the laws once, but no longer, necessary. It is not our place to tell the ministry what is to be done; we do but ask consideration for the unfortunate. . . .

The great means to reduce the number of fanatics, if any remain, is to submit that disease of the mind to the treatment of reason, which slowly, but infallibly, enlightens men. Reason is gentle and humane. It inspires liberality, suppresses discord, and strengthens virtue; it has more power to make obedience to the laws attractive than force has to compel. . . .

Whether Intolerance Is of Natural and Human Law

Natural law is that indicated to men by nature. . . . Human law must in every case be based on natural law. All over the earth the great principle

of both is: Do not unto others what you would that they do not unto you. Now, in virtue of this principle, one man cannot say to another: "Believe what I believe, and what thou canst not believe, or thou shah perish." Thus do men speak in Portugal, Spain, and Goa. In some other countries they are now content to say: "Believe, or I detest thee; believe, or I will do thee all the harm I can. Monster, thou sharpest not my religion, and therefore hast no religion; thou shalt be a thing of horror to thy neighbours, thy city, and thy province."

If it were a point of human law to behave thus, the Japanese should detest the Chinese, who should abhor the Siamese; the Siamese, in turn, should persecute the Tibetans, who should fall upon the Hindus. A Mogul should tear out the heart of the first Malabarian he met; the Malabarian should slay the Persian, who might massacre the Turk; and all of them should fling themselves against the Christians, who have so long devoured each other.

The supposed right of intolerance is absurd and barbaric. It is the right of the tiger; nay, it is far worse, for tigers do but tear in order to have food, while we rend each other for paragraphs.

3

Edict of Toleration

November 1787

Calvinists had a long and tumultuous history in France. They first gained the right to worship according to their creed in 1598 when King Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes to end the wars of religion between Catholics and Calvinists. Louis XIV revoked that edict in 1685 and initiated a massive campaign to forcibly convert all of the Calvinists in France. For more than a century, public worship by Calvinists remained illegal, although many worshiped in private and some became leading merchants or businessmen in their local communities. Finally, in 1787, Louis XVI's government proposed a new edict of toleration (the decision became official in January 1788). It granted Calvinists civil rights, including the right to practice their religion, but no political rights. Although the reference to non-Catholics might seem to promise a broader toleration including other groups as well, the edict applied only to Calvinists, for Jewish and Lutheran communities were covered by separate legislation. The preamble to the edict, with its evasive and tormented logic, shows the many pressures felt by the government as it tried to navigate between the demands of a powerful Catholic Church and a long-oppressed minority that had the support of many influential writers and jurists.

When Louis XIV solemnly prohibited in all of the lands and territories under his authority the public exercise of any religion other than the Catholic religion, the hope of bringing around his people to the desirable unity of the same worship, supported by the deceptive appearances of conversions, kept this great king from following the plan that he had formed in his councils for legally registering the births, deaths, and marriages of those of his subjects who could not be admitted to the sacraments of the church. Following the example of our august predecessors, we will always favor with all our power the means of instruction and persuasion that will tend to link all our subjects by the common profession of our kingdom's ancient faith [Catholicism], and we will proscribe, with the most severe attention, all those violent routes [of forced conversion] which are as contrary to the principles of reason and humanity as they are to the true spirit of Christianity.

But, while waiting for divine Providence to bless our efforts and effect this happy revolution [the conversion of all non-Catholics], justice and the interest of our kingdom do not permit us to exclude any longer from the rights of civil status those of our subjects or resident foreigners in our empire who do not profess the Catholic religion. A rather long experience has shown that harsh ordeals are insufficient to convert them: we should therefore no longer suffer that our laws punish them unnecessarily for the misfortune of their birth by depriving them of the rights that nature constantly claims for them.

We have considered that the Protestants, thus deprived of all legal existence, were faced with an impossible choice between profaning the sacraments by simulated conversions or compromising the status of their children by contracting marriages that were inherently null and void according to the legislation of our kingdom. The regulations have even assumed that there were only Catholics in our states; and this fiction, today inadmissible, has served as a motive for the silence of the law which would not have been able to legally recognize followers of another belief

in France without either banishing them from the lands of our authority or providing right away for their civil status. Principles so contrary to the prosperity and tranquility of our kingdom would have multiplied the emigrations and would have excited continual troubles within families, if we had not provisionally profited from the jurisprudence of our courts to thrust aside greedy relatives who contested the children’s rights to the inheritance of their fathers [relying on the laws against Calvinists]. Such a situation has for a long time demanded our intervention to put an end to these dangerous contradictions between the rights of nature and the dispositions of the law.

We wanted to proceed in this matter under consideration with all the maturity required by the importance of the decision. Our resolution had already been fixed in our councils, and we proposed to meditate for some time still about the legal form it should take; but the circumstances appeared to us propitious for multiplying the advantages that we hoped to gain from our new law, and we have determined to hasten the moment of publishing it. It may not be in our power to put a stop to the different sects in our states, but we will never suffer them to be a source of discord between our subjects. We have taken the most efficacious measures to prevent the formation of harmful organizations. The Catholic religion that we have the good fortune to profess will alone enjoy in our kingdom the rights and honors of public worship, while our other, non-Catholic subjects, deprived of all influence on the established order in our state, declared in advance and forever ineligible for forming a separate body within our kingdom, and subject to the ordinary police [and not their own clergy] for the observation of religious festival days, will only get from the law what natural right does not permit us to refuse them, to register their births, their marriages, and their deaths, in order to enjoy, like all our other subjects, the civil effects that result from this.

Article 1. The Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion will continue to enjoy alone, in our kingdom, the right to public worship, and the birth, marriage, and death of those of our subjects who profess it will only be registered, in all cases, according to the rites and practices of the said religion as authorized by our regulations.

We will permit nonetheless to those of our subjects who profess another religion than the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion, whether they are currently resident in our state or establish themselves there afterwards, to enjoy all the goods and rights that currently can or will in the future belong to them as a property title or title of successorship, and to pursue their commerce, arts, crafts, and professions without being troubled or disturbed on the pretext of their religion.

We except nevertheless from these professions all the offices of the judiciary, controlled either by the crown or the seigneurs [nobles controlling local judicial offices], municipalities having regular offices and judicial functions, and all those places that include public teaching.

Article 2. As a consequence those of our subjects or foreigners resident in our kingdom who are not of the Catholic religion will be able to contract marriages in the form hereafter prescribed; we wish these marriages and their children, in the case of those who contracted them according to the said form, to have the same effects in civil society as those contracted and celebrated in the ordinary way by our Catholic subjects.

Article 3. We do not intend nevertheless that those who will profess a religion other than the Catholic religion be able to consider themselves as forming in our kingdom any particular body, community or association, nor that they be able under such a designation to formulate any collective demands, make any representations, take any deliberations, make any acquisitions, or take any other such acts. We very expressly prohibit any judge, registrar, notary, lawyer, or other public official to respond, receive, or sign such demands, representations, deliberations or other acts on pain of suspension; and we forbid any of our subjects to claim themselves authorized by the said alleged communities or associations on pain of being considered instigators and protectors of illegal assemblies and associations and as such punishable according to the rigor of the regulations.

Article 4. Nor will those who consider themselves ministers or pastors of another religion than the Catholic religion be able to represent themselves as such in any act, wear in public any clothing different from that of others of the same religion, or appropriate for themselves any prerogative or distinction; we forbid them in particular from interfering in the issuance of certificates of marriage, birth or death, and we declare any such certificates to be from this moment null and void, without our judges or any others giving them consideration in any case whatsoever.

[Thirty-three other articles followed, most of them concerned with regulating the celebration of non-Catholic marriages.]
THOURET
Report on the Basis of Political Eligibility
September 29, 1789

Jacques Guillaume Thouret (1746-1794), a lawyer from Rouen, spoke for the Constitutional Committee of the National Assembly that included among others Sieyes and Rabaut Saint Etienne. His report formed the basis for the subsequent legislation on qualifications for voting and officeholding.

The number of individuals in France is about 26 million; but according to calculations that seem to be very definite, the number of active citizens, with deductions made for women, minors, and all those who are deprived of political rights for legitimate reasons, is reduced to one-sixth of the total population. One must only count therefore about 4,400,000 citizens qualifying to vote in the primary assemblies of their canton [local administrative unit].

The Committee proposes that the necessary qualifications for the title of active citizen in the primary assembly of the canton be: 1) to be French or to have become French; 2) to have reached one's majority [be a legal adult; the age was set at 25]; 3) to have resided in the canton for at least one year; 4) to pay direct taxes at a rate equal to the local value of three days of work, a value that will be assessed in monetary terms by the provincial assemblies; 5) to not be at the moment a servant, that is to say, in personal relationships that are all too incompatible with the independence necessary to the exercise of political rights.

To be eligible for office, either at the town or departmental level, one must have fulfilled all the conditions cited above with the sole difference that instead of paying a direct tax equal to the local value of three days of work, one must pay one equal to the value of ten days of work.


Speech of Robespierre Denouncing the New Conditions of Eligibility
October 22, 1789

Few deputies opposed the property requirements for voting and holding office. One of the few who did, Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), a lawyer from Arras in northern France, made a reputation for himself as a determined and devoted defender of "the people," that is, for the most democratic possible interpretation (still, however, excluding women) of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and of the constitution under deliberation. In the debate about the status of Jews, for instance, Robespierre insisted on their right to citizenship. In the debate about property requirements, Robespierre invoked the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as justification for his position.

All citizens, whoever they are, have the right to aspire to all levels of officeholding. Nothing is more in line with your declaration of rights, according to which all privileges, all distinctions, all exceptions must disappear. The Constitution establishes that sovereignty resides in the people, in all the individuals of the people. Each individual therefore has the right to participate in making the law which governs him and in the administration of the public good which is his own. If not, it is not true that all men are equal in rights, that every man is a citizen. If he who only pays a tax equivalent to a day of work has fewer rights than he who pays the equivalent to three days of work, and he who pays at the level of ten days has more rights than he whose tax only equals the value of three, then he who enjoys 100,000 livres [French pounds] of revenue has 100 times as many rights as he who only has 1,000 livres of revenue. It follows from all your decrees that every citizen has the right to participate in making the law and consequently that of being an elector or eligible for office without distinction of wealth.

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES AND QUESTIONABLE PROFESSIONS

The First Controversies

On December 21, 1789, a deputy raised the question of the status of non-Catholics under the new regime; his intervention started a long debate that quickly expanded to cover Jews, actors, and executioners, all of them excluded from various rights before 1789. Jews enjoyed certain rights within their own religious communities but were largely excluded from broader political and civil rights and in fact faced great restrictions on their choice of occupation, ability to own property, and the like. Actors and executioners both exercised professions that were considered "infamous"; actors took someone else’s role on the stage and were reputed to be immoral in their behavior, and executioners killed people, an act considered murder under other circumstances. As a consequence, neither actors nor executioners could vote or hold local offices before 1789, and they were often shunned. This first debate shows that declaring “the rights of man” raised as many questions as it answered.

Pierre Brunet de Latuque (1757–1824), a lawyer from the Bordeaux region where many Calvinists lived, raised the question of non-Catholics in regard to the organization of new municipal and regional elections. Protestants had exercised some influence on the local level in the past, but now their opponents argued that they could not hold office in the new regime because the National Assembly had not explicitly revoked any of the monarchy’s previous decrees denying Protestants the right to hold office.

Sirs, the epoch of the suppression of abuses has arrived; the rights of man and citizen have been pulled out from the heap of chains under which despotism had buried them. You have promulgated them; you have declared that all men are born and remain free and equal in rights. You have declared that no one can be disturbed for his religious opinions. You have decreed that all citizens, without distinction of rank or birth, would be eligible for offices and posts. You have decreed that all citizens who pay a tax equal to the value of ten days of work would be admissible to the municipal assemblies of the districts and departments [administrative units], and that those who pay a marc d’argent [an even higher level of taxes] would be admissible to legislative office, and you certainly have not wanted, Sirs, to have religious opinions be a reason for exclusion for some citizens and a means of admission for others.

If private interests were not constantly distorting the sovereign principles of justice, those who seek by such criminal grounds to exclude Protestants from public positions would better enter, Sirs, into the spirit and even the text of your decrees; they would take a look at the National Assembly, and seeing several Protestants sitting there in your midst, they would be ashamed of wanting to exclude from the secondary offices of the administration those whom they themselves have named to fill the offices of the supreme legislature . . . .

I have the honor of proposing to you, Sirs, a decree in the following form that requires no further interpretation:

The National Assembly decrees:

1. That non-Catholics who have fulfilled all the conditions laid down in preceding decrees in order to be electors and eligible for office can be elected to every level of the administration, without exception.
2. That non-Catholics are eligible for every civil and military post, like other citizens.
Nothing is known about the actors who banded together to petition the National Assembly. They had heard of the National Assembly’s discussion of their situation and hastened to claim their inclusion in the rights of citizenship. The actors adopted an almost servile tone toward the National Assembly, no doubt a sign of their long dependence on the good favor of the king and his court. Here they essentially offer their services to the new government.

Having heard that in some of the opinions pronounced in the National Assembly doubts about the legitimacy of their [the actors’] status have been raised, they beg you, My lord [president of the Assembly], to instruct them whether the Assembly has decreed something on this subject and whether it has declared their status incompatible with admission to posts and participation in the rights of citizenship. Honest men can stand up to a prejudice that the law disavows; but no one can defy a decree or even the silence of the National Assembly on their status. The French actors, whose homage and patriotic gift you have deigned to accept, reiterate to you, My lord, and the august Assembly, the most formal wish to never employ their talents except in a manner worthy of French citizens, and they would count themselves fortunate if the legislation, reforming the abuses that might have slipped into the theater, would deign to seize upon an instrument of influence on morals and on public opinion.

Source: See Document 18, p. 84.

Deputies from the eastern province of Alsace spoke about the special situation of Jews in their region, arguing that immediate emancipation would only stir up violent hatreds among the Christian inhabitants. Charles Louis Victor, Prince de Broglie (1756-1794), a nobleman and military officer from Colmar, in Alsace, spoke for this position, even while recognizing that the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen seemed to imply a generalization of rights to all religious groups. Everyone assumed that only adult men were at issue. At the conclusion of his speech, debate continued on all the points raised by previous speakers. Finally the National Assembly voted to table consideration of the status of Jews even while decreeing full rights to Protestants along the lines suggested by Brunet de Latuque. The Jewish question did not divide along very clear social or political lines; deputies from the nobility, the clergy, and the Third Estate could be found on both sides.

I am going to offer some details concerning the Jews of Alsace, and I will then take the liberty of presenting you, Sirs, the means that I consider appropriate to the circumstances and susceptible of reconciling what you owe to the principles that you have consecrated with what prudence seems to prescribe on this occasion. The Jews tolerated and established in Alsace total about the number of 26,000. They were only 9-10,000 in number in the census that was taken fifteen years ago. This enormous increase in population is remarkable: it results from several causes, but it suffices to examine its consequent effects in order to be convinced that the province is menaced with being, in a manner of speaking, invaded by this Jewish colony that multiplies itself every day. The similarity of language attracts them every day from Germany; and if, as there is no reason to doubt, they are freed from the protection taxes that they were paying, both to the government and to the seigneurs [noble landlords], to obtain permission to establish themselves and to live in the province, the emigration from Germany will be even more numerous by reason of this freedom, and the people of Alsace will be all the more chagrined. For it
must be agreed that the regulations themselves, by virtue of which the Jews are tolerated in Alsace, present them with no other means of making a living, no other industry than the commerce in money. Their present existence can be regarded as a great misfortune for this province and as one of the abuses which it is most pressing to remedy in efficacious fashion, as my grievance list charged. It follows from this first explanation that the Jews of Alsace, having by an accumulation of loans and interest ruined many landowners and farmers and remaining still at this moment creditors for enormous sums from a great number of citizens in Alsace, are unfortunately regarded by the people as natural enemies towards whom violence is permitted.

Their idleness, their lack of tact, a necessary result of the laws and humiliating conditions to which they are subjected in many places, all work towards rendering them odious. And I dare to assure the Assembly that if the Jews obtain the title and rights of citizen, without these advantages being made conditional on the accomplishment of some kind of public utility and without some at least momentary delay, it might well be feared that the people's hatred, excited by this decree, will push it to deadly excesses against a great number of these unfortunate Jews.

The interest that the debtors would have in acquitting themselves in this cruel manner only adds an unhappy verisimilitude to this opinion, in support of which I invoke the witness of all the Alsatian deputies.

I conclude therefore that it is in the interest even of the Jews of Alsace not to obtain the title and rights of citizen without some kind of preparation of popular opinion that time alone can bring.

The Jewish Question

23

Petition of the Jews of Paris, Alsace, and Lorraine to the National Assembly

January 28, 1790

When the Jews of Paris and the eastern provinces presented their case to the National Assembly, they leaned heavily on the precedent of granting full rights to the Protestants and on the language of human rights philosophy. They insisted that the Jews should be treated no differently from anyone else and refuted one by one all the customary prejudicial arguments used against the Jews, such as their reliance on making loans with interest (usury). Their petition shows the power of the language of rights; "all men of whatever religion... should all equally have the title and the rights of citizen." Despite their pleas, the National Assembly held off on granting full political rights to Jews until September 1791.

A great question is pending before the supreme tribunal of France. Will the Jews be citizens or not?

Already, this question has been debated in the National Assembly; and the orators, whose intentions were equally patriotic, did not agree at all on the result of their discussion. Some wanted Jews admitted to civil status. Others found this admission dangerous. A third opinion consisted of preparing the complete improvement of the lot of the Jews by gradual reforms.

In the midst of all these debates, the national assembly believed that it ought to adjourn the question... This adjournment was based on the necessity of further clarifying an important question; of seeking more positive information about what the Jews do and what they can be; of knowing more exactly what is in their favor and what is not; and finally, of preparing opinion by a thorough discussion for the decree, whatever it may be, that will definitively pronounce on their destiny.

sively embraces any region; a tribe whose religion, customs, and physical and moral regime essentially differ from that of all other people; a tribe finally whose eyes turn constantly toward the common fatherland that should one day reunite its dispersed members and which cannot consequently consecrate any solid attachment to the land that supports it. . . .

There are only in France a small number of provinces where Jews have been permitted to establish themselves. The rest of the kingdom has but little or no relationship to the individuals of this nation. Thus, the greater part of the deputies would not know how to judge the present question with sufficient knowledge of the issue. The decision, nonetheless, is of a kind that should not be left to the enthusiasm of the emotions or to the seduction of the mind [presumably by excessively humanitarian leanings]. . . .

There are also moral and local considerations that should, if not guide, then at least enlighten the legislation regarding the Jewish nation. The prejudices of the people against the Jews are only too well-known. From time to time, they explode into violence: recently in Alsace, some people committed the most criminal excesses against the Jews. A few months ago, similar misfortunes menaced them in Nancy [a city in Lorraine]. People wanted to pillage their houses, mistreat their persons, the animosity was extreme. Did they merit this malevolence because of criminal maneuvers, monopolies, or ventures contrary to the interests of the people? No, Sirs: the most serious reproach made to them was spreading out too much into the province, acquiring houses, lands, and privileges that the former laws did not give to them.

From this account it is easy to understand the habitual disposition of the people; it is a fire always ready to be lit. Any extension that a decree of the National Assembly would hasten to give to the civil existence of the Jews, before opinion has been prepared in advance and led by degrees to this change, could occasion great disasters. It is only prudent to foresee possible misfortunes; it is only wise to prevent them.

Admission of Jews to Rights of Citizenship
September 27, 1791

After several tumultuous discussions of the Jewish communities still excluded from political rights, the National Assembly finally voted to regularize the situation of all the different Jewish communities on September 27, 1791. Adrien Jean François Duport (1759-1798), a deputy from the nobility of Paris, proposed the motion. The deputies shouted down those who attempted to speak against it, and it quickly passed. A subsequent amendment indicated that swearing the civic oath implied a renunciation of previous Jewish privileges, that is, the right to an autonomous community ruled by its own members according to its own customs. The law required Jews to be individuals just like everyone else in France.

**DUPORT:** I have one very short observation to make to the Assembly, which appears to be of the highest importance and which demands all its attention. You have regulated by the Constitution, Sirs, the qualities deemed necessary to become a French citizen, and an active citizen: that sufficed, I believe, to regulate all the incidental questions that could have been raised in the Assembly relative to certain professions, to certain persons. But there is a decree of adjournment that seems to strike a blow at these general rights: I speak of the Jews. To decide the question that concerns them, it suffices to lift the decree of adjournment that you have rendered and which seems to suspend the question in their regard. Thus, if you had not rendered a decree of adjournment on the question of the Jews, it would not have been necessary to do anything; for, having declared by your Constitution how all peoples of the earth could become French citizens and how all French citizens could become active citizens, there would have been no difficulty on this subject.

I ask therefore that the decree of adjournment be revoked and that it be declared relative to the Jews that they will be able to become active citizens, like all the peoples of the world, by fulfilling the conditions prescribed by the Constitution. I believe that freedom of worship no longer permits any distinction to be made between the political rights of Jews.

Source: *Archives parlementaires* 31 (1888): 372. The law on the Jews was approved by Louis XVI on Nov. 13, 1791.
citizens on the basis of their beliefs and I believe equally that the Jews cannot be the only exceptions to the enjoyment of these rights, when pagans, Turks, Muslims, Chinese even, men of all the sects, in short, are admitted to these rights.

**Decree of the National Assembly of September 27, 1791**

The National Assembly, considering that the conditions necessary to be a French citizen and to become an active citizen are **fixed** by the Constitution, and that every man meeting the said conditions, who swears the civic oath, and engages himself to **fulfill** all the duties that the Constitution imposes, has the right to all of the advantages that the Constitution assures:

Revokes all adjournments, reservations, and exceptions inserted into the preceding decrees relative to Jewish individuals who will swear the civic oath which will be regarded as a renunciation of all the privileges and exceptions introduced previously in their favor.

**FREE BLACKS AND SLAVES**

The Abolition of Negro Slavery or Means for Ameliorating Their Lot

1789

The vote on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, explicitly cited in this pamphlet, did not go unnoticed by those who favored abolition of the slave trade and eventual emancipation of the slaves. Yet even the most determined adversaries of slavery worried about the consequences of immediate abolition, especially for the French economy. As a result, advocates of abolition put forward a variety of proposals for gradual emancipation and restructuring of the colonial economies. Their proposals gained

little support in the National Assembly, where the planters in the colonies had many allies.

At a time when a new light has come to enlighten minds in all Europe; when the French National Assembly has already destroyed the hydra of feudalism in the kingdom; when it has established the Rights of Man and recognized that God has created all men free; that this liberty should only be hampered by chains that they give themselves voluntarily, to prevent the strongest from making an attempt on the liberty, the life or the property of the weakest; then slavery should only continue to exist for criminals condemned according to the laws. In consequence liberty ought to be restored to that multitude of unfortunate beings, our brothers though of different color, whom European greed has kidnapped annually for nearly three centuries from the coasts of Africa and condemned to an eternal captivity, hard work, and harsh treatment.

The political interests and property rights that would be infringed if freedom was suddenly restored to the Negroes of our colonies are without doubt great obstacles to fulfilling the wishes that humanity has made in favor of these unfortunate Africans. If the French nation entirely prohibited the Negro slave trade, if it broke at the same time the chains of all those who live in our colonies, that would jolt commerce too violently; that would risk the loss of the plantations in the colonies and the immense shipping that they feed. . . . Moreover, if France alone undertook something similar, it would render itself a tributary of the other nations that possess sugar colonies and which would keep their slaves. . . .

I propose making Negro slavery like the condition of soldiers by providing an enlistment for a definite time at the end of which freedom would be restored to them. It cannot be concealed that the enlistment of a soldier is a veritable slavery, since from the moment that he contracts his engagement until its expiration, he cannot break it without being punished by death; during all this time he is neither master of his time nor of his actions; he is subject, on pain of punishment, to blindly obey the orders of his superiors; he is subjugated to fatigue, danger, to exposing himself often to an almost certain death. . . .

Being able to be kept similarly in slavery only for a limited time, the Negroes will be therefore no more slaves than a soldier: like him they will be obligated to obey during the duration of their enlistment; they will be subjugated to work of another type, it is true, but proportionate to their strength. . . .

To carry out this proposition, it would be necessary to promulgate a law that would decide: 1) That from such and such an epoch the blacks transported from Africa to our colonies could only be sold on the condition that the inhabitants who bought them would restore their freedom at the end of ten years and give at that time to each Negro a sum sufficient to pay his passage to return to his country. . . . 3) In regard to the Negroes currently enslaved in the colonies, one could divide them into ten classes for every dwelling. One would put into the first class the oldest tenth and the youngest, and the others in proportion to their age in the intermediate classes. At the end of a fixed year freedom would be restored to those of the first class and thus in the same manner as indicated above successively from year to year to those of the other classes. By this means at the end of ten years all the current slaves will have recovered their freedom, except for those who freely took up new enlistments as previously explained. . . .

Nevertheless, if according to the representation of the inhabitants of the colonies, whom it is suitable to consult before ruling on this subject, this sacrifice on their part is judged too great, could not the state accord them a compensation proportionate to the individual value of the blacks to whom freedom would be restored? There are more than 500,000 slaves in our colonies. If the compensation was set at 500 livres, French money, by head, this would amount to 250 million livres; that is to say, 25 million a year for ten years.

MOTION MADE BY VINCENT OGÉ THE YOUNGER TO THE ASSEMBLY OF COLONISTS

Vincent Ogé presented the views of his fellow mulatto property owners to a meeting of the white planter delegates who had come to Paris from Saint Domingue, the largest and wealthiest French colony. Ogé went to Paris to press mulatto claims for full civil and political rights. This document shows the complexity of the racial and hence political situation in the colonies; the mulattos wanted to align themselves with the white planters,
Decree of the National Convention of February 4, 1794, Abolishing Slavery in All the Colonies

News traveled slowly from the colonies back to France, and the first news of the emancipations in Saint Domingue aroused suspicion, if not outright hostility, in the National Convention. Many of the original members of the Society of the Friends of Blacks, such as Lafayette, Brisot, and Condorcet, had either fled the country or gone to their deaths at the guillotine as opponents of the faction now dominant in the Convention, led by Robespierre. Three delegates — a free black, a white, and a mulatto

Source: *Décret de la Convention Nationale, du 16 jour de Pluviôse, an second de la République française, une et indivisible* (Paris: De l’Imprimerie Nationale Exécutive du Louvre. Year II [1794]).
from Saint Domingue explained the situation to the Convention on February 4, 1794. Their report provoked spontaneous enthusiasm, and the deputies promptly voted to abolish slavery in all the colonies. Their decree helped win over the rebellious slaves to the side of the French against the British and Spanish.

The National Convention declares the abolition of Negro slavery in all the colonies; in consequence it decrees that all men, without distinction of color, residing in the colonies, are French citizens and will enjoy all the rights assured by the constitution.

It asks the Committee of Public Safety to make a report as soon as possible on the measures that should be taken to assure the execution of the present decree.

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Speech of Chaumette Celebrating the Abolition of Slavery
February 18, 1794

Pierre Gaspard Chaumette (1763-1794) exemplified the rise of obscure provincials to positions of revolutionary authority. Born in central France of a shoemaker father, Chaumette had not yet settled on a career when the Revolution broke out in 1789. In 1790 he became a journalist at a leading revolutionary newspaper, and after August 10, 1792, he entered Paris city government. A leader of the de-Christianization movement, Chaumette helped organize the Cult of Reason and successfully urged the city government to close all the churches in Paris (an action eventually overturned). These extreme maneuvers gained him the unfavorable attention of the national revolutionary leaders, especially Robespierre, who feared that the Paris government would alienate the mass of the population by their radicalism. On April 13, 1794, Chaumette went to the guillotine, falsely condemned for organizing a prison escape.


Figure 6. Titled "Frenchwomen Freed," this anonymous engraving illustrates the growing awareness of many French people that women were taking an increasingly active role in the Revolution.
If I needed to prove here that slavery is as opposed to civil law as it is to natural law, it would be very easy to demonstrate that the civil status of a man is only defined by the law and that not being at all in society a slave cannot be affected by any legal rule. But a people needs no proof when it puts at the head of all its decisions, as at the head of its legislation, the declaration of the rights of man.

Without speaking here of the danger and folly of slavery in democratic states, I could cite the history of all the peoples who have had slaves and depict the torments of the government whether it tries to keep them in a yoke that often quakes with their struggles and tries to diminish (Oh, what a crime!) their too great population; or whether it tries to restrain the cruelty of the masters. I would cite the laws that rapidly succeed one another, the regulations that follow upon regulations.

If we land in one of the Antilles [Caribbean colonies] what will we see? The Portuguese enervated by indolence, whose appearance reminds us of the bloody origin of slavery in these regions. In our mind’s eye we will see the butchers’ vises where they put the pieces of the remains of Mexicans to serve as fodder for the conquerors’ dogs, and it will make us quiver with horror. If we land in Guadeloupe [another French Caribbean colony] or in Saint Domingue, we will see a long series of slaves stooping from one day to the next over a burning soil, and under the whip of an inhuman flogger they silently invoke “either freedom or death.” Some of them, returning to the shade, talk among themselves (always very quietly) about the shores where they were born, sighing toward the heavens, and calling in vain for a liberator.

We have seen how [slavery] like a vast cancer covers the entire globe with its venomous ramifications, poisoning now one now another hemisphere, leaving a totally ravaged region only to bring desolation to another, then returning to the first after its repopulation. We have seen it spreading the shrouds of death through the classical world [of Greece and Rome] and the modern one, but today the alarm of eternal justice has sounded, the sacramental words have been pronounced by the organ of a powerful and good people: slavery is abolished.

1Here, as in much of his speech, Chaumette invokes the descriptions of the horrors of conquest and slavery made famous by Raynal (document 6 in this text). The conquerors in this sentence are the Spanish who conquered Mexico in the sixteenth century.

Condorcet took the question of political rights to all of its logical conclusions. He argued that if rights were indeed universal, as the doctrine of natural rights and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen both seemed to imply, then they must apply to all adults. Condorcet consequently argued in favor of granting political rights to Protestants and Jews and advocated the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself: He went further than any other leading revolutionary spokesman, however, when he insisted that women, too, should gain political rights. His newspaper article to that effect caused a sensation and stimulated those of like mind to publish articles of their own. But the campaign was relatively short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful; the prejudice against granting political rights to women would prove the most difficult to uproot.

Habit can familiarize men with the violation of their natural rights to the point that among those who have lost them no one dreams of reclaiming them or believes that he has suffered an injustice.

Some of these violations seven escaped the philosophers and legislators when with the greatest zeal they turned their attention to establishing the common rights of the individuals of the human race and to making those rights the sole foundation of political institutions. For example, have they not all violated the principle of equality of rights by quietly depriving half of mankind of the right to participate in the formation of the laws, by excluding women from the rights of citizenship? Is there a stronger proof of the power of habit even among enlightened men than seeing the
It is said that women have never been guided by what is called thinking of actors here] and at the same time forgetting those rights when it comes to twelve million women?

For this exclusion not to be an act of tyranny one would have to prove that the natural rights of women are not absolutely the same as those of men or show that they are not capable of exercising them. Now the rights of men follow only from the fact that they are feeling beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning about these ideas. Since women have the same qualities, they necessarily have equal rights. Either no individual in mankind has true rights, or all have the same ones; and whoever votes against the right of another, whatever be his religion, his color, or his sex, has from that moment abjured his own rights.

It would be difficult to prove that women are incapable of exercising the rights of citizenship. Why should beings exposed to pregnancies and to passing indispositions not be able to exercise rights that no one ever imagined taking away from people who have gout every winter or who easily catch colds? Even granting a superiority of mind in men that is not the necessary consequence of the difference in education (which is far from being proved and which ought to be if women are to be deprived of a natural right without injustice), this superiority can consist in only two points. It is said that no woman has made an important discovery in the sciences or given proof of genius in the arts, letters, etc. But certainly no one would presume to limit the rights of citizenship exclusively to men of genius. Some add that no woman has the same extent of knowledge or the same power of reasoning as certain men do; but what does this prove except that the class of very enlightened men is small? There is complete equality between women and the rest of men; if this little class of men were set aside, inferiority and superiority would be equally shared between the two sexes. Now since it would be completely absurd to limit the rights of citizenship and the eligibility for public offices to this superior class, why should women be excluded rather than those men who are inferior to a great number of women?

... It is said that women have never been guided by what is called reason despite much intelligence, wisdom, and a faculty for reasoning developed to the same degree as in subtle dialecticians. This observation is false: they have not conducted themselves, it is true, according to the reason of men but rather according to their own. Their interests not being the same due to the defects of the laws, the same things not having for them at all the same importance as for us, they can, without being unreasonable, determine their course of action according to other principles and work toward a different goal. It is as reasonable for a woman to occupy herself with the embellishment of her person as it was for Demosthenes [a Greek orator] to cultivate his voice and gestures.

It is said that women, though better than men in that they are gentler, more sensitive, and less subject to the vices that follow from egotism and hard hearts, do not really possess a sense of justice; that they obey their feelings rather than their consciences. This observation is truer but it proves nothing. It is not nature but rather education and social conditions that cause this difference. Neither the one nor the other has accustomed women to the idea of what is just, only to the idea of what is becoming or proper. Removed from public affairs, from everything that is decided according to the most rigorous idea of justice, or according to positive laws, they concern themselves with and act upon precisely those things which are regulated by natural propriety and by feeling. It is therefore unjust to advance as grounds for continuing to refuse women the enjoyment of their natural rights those reasons that only have some kind of reality because women do not enjoy these rights in the first place.

If one admits such arguments against women, it would also be necessary to take away the rights of citizenship from that portion of the people who, having to work without respite, can neither acquire enlightenment nor exercise its reason, and soon little by little the only men who would be permitted to be citizens would be those who had followed a course in public law.

... It is natural for a woman to nurse her children, to care for them in their infancy; attached to her home by these cares, weaker than a man, it is also natural that she lead a more retiring, more domestic life. Women would therefore be in the same class with men who are obliged by their station or profession to work several hours a day. This may be a reason for not preferring them in elections, but it cannot be the grounds for their legal exclusion.

... I demand now that these arguments be refuted by other means than pleasantries or ranting; above all that someone show me a natural difference between men and women that can legitimately found [women’s] exclusion from a right. ...
OLYMPE DE GOUGES

The Declaration of the Rights of Woman

September 1791

Marie Gouze (1748-1793) was a self-educated butcher’s daughter from the south of France who, under the name Olympe de Gouges, wrote pamphlets and plays on a variety of issues, including slavery, which she attacked as based on greed and blind prejudice. In this pamphlet she provides a declaration of the rights of women to parallel the one for men, thus criticizing the deputies for having forgotten women. She addressed the pamphlet to the queen, Marie Antoinette, although she also warned the queen that she must work for the Revolution or risk destroying the monarchy altogether. In her postscript she denounced the customary treatment of women as objects easily abandoned. She appended to the declaration a sample form for a marriage contract that called for communal sharing of property. De Gouges went to the guillotine in 1793, condemned as a counterrevolutionary and denounced as an “unnatural” woman.

To be decreed by the National Assembly in its last sessions or by the next legislature.

Preamble

Mothers, daughters, sisters, female representatives of the nation ask to be constituted as a national assembly. Considering that ignorance, neglect, or contempt for the rights of woman are the sole causes of public misfortunes and governmental corruption, they have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of woman: so that by being constantly present to all the members of the social body this declaration may always remind them of their rights and duties; so that by being liable at every moment to comparison with the aims of any and all political institutions the acts of women’s and men’s powers may be the more fully respected; and so that by being founded henceforward on simple and incontestable principles the demands of the citizenesses may always tend toward maintaining the constitution, good morals, and the general welfare.

In consequence, the sex that is superior in beauty as in courage, needed in maternal sufferings, recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of woman and the citizeness.

1. Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.

2. The purpose of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially in the nation, which is but the reuniting of woman and man. No body and no individual may exercise authority which does not emanate expressly from the nation.

4. Liberty and justice consist in restoring all that belongs to another; hence the exercise of the natural rights of woman has no other limits than those that the perpetual tyranny of man opposes to them; these limits must be reformed according to the laws of nature and reason.

5. The laws of nature and reason prohibit all actions which are injurious to society. No hindrance should be put in the way of anything not prohibited by these wise and divine laws, nor may anyone be forced to do what they do not require.

6. The law should be the expression of the general will. All citizenesses and citizens should take part, in person or by their representatives, in its formation. It must be the same for everyone. All citizenesses and citizens, being equal in its eyes, should be equally admissible to all public dignities, offices, and employments, according to their ability, and with no other distinction than that of their virtues and talents.

7. No woman is exempted; she is indicted, arrested, and detained in the cases determined by the law. Women like men obey this rigorous law.

8. Only strictly and obviously necessary punishments should be established by the law, and no one may be punished except by virtue of a law established and promulgated before the time of the offense, and legally applied to women.

9. Any woman being declared guilty, all rigor is exercised by the law.

10. No one should be disturbed for his fundamental opinions; woman has the right to mount the scaffold, so she should have the right equally to mount the tribune, provided that these manifestations do not trouble public order as established by law.

11. The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of woman, since this liberty assures the recognition of children by their fathers. Every citizeness may therefore say freely, I am the mother of your child; a barbarous prejudice [against unmarried women having children] should not force her to hide the truth, so long as responsibility is accepted for any abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law [women are not allowed to lie about the paternity of their children].

12. The safeguard of the rights of woman and citizeness requires public powers. These powers are instituted for the advantage of all and not for the private benefit of those to whom they are entrusted.

13. For maintenance of public authority and for expenses of administration, taxation of women and men is equal; she takes part in all forced labor service, in all painful tasks; she must therefore have the same proportion in the distribution of places, employments, offices, dignities, and in industry.

14. The citizenesses and citizens have the right, by themselves or through their representatives, to have demonstrated to them the necessity of public taxes. The citizenesses can only agree to them upon admission of an equal division, not only in wealth, but also in the public administration, and to determine the means of apportionment, assessment, and collection, and the duration of the taxes.

15. The mass of women, joining with men in paying taxes, have the right to hold accountable every public agent of the administration.

16. Any society in which the guarantee of rights is not assured or the separation of powers not settled has no constitution. The constitution is null and void if the majority of individuals composing the nation has not cooperated in its drafting.

17. Property belongs to both sexes whether united or separated; it is for each of them an inviolable and sacred right, and no one may be deprived of it as a true patrimony of nature, except when public necessity, certified by law, obviously requires it, and then on condition of a just compensation in advance.

Postscript

Women, wake up; the tocsin of reason sounds throughout the universe; recognize your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The torch of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation. Enslaved man has multiplied his force and needs yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust toward his companion. Oh women! Women, when will you cease to be blind? What advantages have you gathered in the revolution? A scorn more marked, a disdain more conspicuous. During the centuries of corruption you only reigned over the weakness of men. Your empire is destroyed; what is left to you then? Firm belief in the injustices of men. The reclaiming of your patrimony founded on the wise decrees of nature; why should you fear such a beautiful enterprise? Whatever the barriers set up against you, it is in your power to overcome them; you only have to want it. Let us pass now to the appalling account of what you have been in society; and since national education is an issue at this moment, let us see if our wise legislators will think sanely about the education of women.

Women have done more harm than good. Constraint and dissimulation have been their lot. What force has taken from them, ruse returned to them; they have had recourse to all the resources of their charms, and the most irreproachable man has not resisted them. Poison, the sword, women controlled everything; they ordered up crimes as much as virtues. For centuries, the French government, especially, depended on the nocturnal administration of women; officials kept no secrets from their indiscretion; ambassadorial posts, military commands, the ministry, the presidency [of a court], the papacy, the college of cardinals, in short everything that characterizes the folly of men, profane and sacred, has been submitted to the cupidity and ambition of this sex formerly considered despicable and respected, and since the revolution, respectable and despised . . .

Under the former regime, everyone was vicious, everyone guilty. . . . A woman only had to be beautiful and amiable; when she possessed these two advantages, she saw a hundred fortunes at her feet. . . . The most indecent woman could make herself respectable with gold; the commerce in women was a kind of industry amongst the highest classes, which henceforth will enjoy no more credit. If it still did, the revolution would be lost, and in the new situation we would still be corrupted. Can reason hide the fact that every other road to fortune is closed to a woman bought by a man, bought like a slave from the coasts of Africa? The difference between them is great; this is known. The slave [that is, the woman] commands her master, but if the master gives her her freedom without compensation and at an age when the slave has lost all her charms, what does this unfortunate woman become? The plaything of disdain; even the doors of charity are closed to her; she is poor and old, they say; why did she not know how to make her fortune?
Other examples even more touching can be provided to reason. A young woman without experience, seduced by the man she loves, abandons her parents to follow him; the ingratitude leaves her after a few years and the older she will have grown with him, the more his inconstancy will be inhuman. If she has children, he will still abandon her. If he is rich, he will believe himself excused from sharing his fortune with his noble victims. If some engagement ties him to his duties, he will violate it while counting on support from the law. If he is married, every other obligation loses its force. What laws then remain to be passed that would eradicate vice down to its roots? That of equally dividing [family] fortunes between men and women and of public administration of their goods. It is easy to imagine that a woman born of a rich family would gain much from the equal division of property [between children]. But what about the woman born in a poor family with merit and virtues; what is her lot? Poverty and opprobrium. If she does not excel in music or painting, she cannot be admitted to any public function, even if she is fully qualified. . . .

Marriage is the tomb of confidence and love. A married woman can give bastards to her husband with impunity, and even the family fortune which does not belong to them. An unmarried woman has only a feeble right: ancient and inhuman laws refuse her the right to the name and goods of her children's father; no new laws have been made in this matter. If giving my sex an honorable and just consistency is considered to be at this time paradoxical on my part and an attempt at the impossible, I leave to future men the glory of dealing with this matter; but while waiting, we can prepare the way with national education, with the restoration of morals and with conjugal agreements.

FORM FOR A SOCIAL CONTRACT BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN

We,______, moved by our own will, unite for the length of our lives and for the duration of our mutual inclinations under the following conditions: We intend and wish to make our wealth communal property, while reserving the right to divide it in favor of our children and of those for whom we might have a special inclination, mutually recognizing that our goods belong directly to our children, from whatever bed they come [legitimate or not], and that all of them without distinction have the right to bear the name of the fathers and mothers who have acknowledged them, and we impose on ourselves the obligation of subscribing to the law that punishes any rejection of one's own blood [refusing to acknowledge an illegitimate child]. We likewise obligate ourselves, in the case of a separation, to divide our fortune equally and to set aside the portion the law designates for our children. In the case of a perfect union, the one who dies first will give up half his property in favor of the children; and if there are no children, the survivor will inherit by right, unless the dying person has disposed of his half of the common property in favor of someone he judges appropriate. [She then goes on to defend her contract against the inevitable objections of "hypocrites, prudes, the clergy, and all the hellish gang."]

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PRUDHOMME

"On the Influence of the Revolution on Women"

February 12, 1791

Having made his living as a bookseller and publisher of underground pamphlets before the Revolution, Louis Marie Prudhomme (1752-1832) founded Révolutions of Paris, one of the best-known radical newspapers of the French Revolution. In this article he responds to women's criticisms of the Revolution by attacking the role of queens and courtiers under the Old Regime and outlining a theory of women's "natural" domesticity for the new regime. Nevertheless, he calls on women to arm themselves to fight the counterrevolution, apparently seeing in the present crisis a powerful reason for quitting at least for the moment women's traditional peacetime roles. Disturbed by the increasing number of arrests and executions in 1793, he interrupted and then stopped publication of the paper in 1794.

Many women have complained to us about the Revolution. In numerous letters they report to us that for two years now it seems there is but one sex in France. In the primary assemblies [for voting], in the sections, in the clubs, etc. there is no longer any discussion about women, as if they no longer existed. They are accorded, as if by grace, a few benches for listening to the sessions of the National Assembly. Two or three women have appeared at the bar [spoken to the Assembly], but the audience was short, and the Assembly quickly passed on to the order of the day. Can

Source: Révolutions de Paris (Feb. 7-12, 1791), 83:226-35. Notes are by Prudhomme, unless otherwise indicated.
the French people, some ask, not become free without ceasing to be gallant? Long ago, in the time of the Gauls, our good ancestors, women had a deliberative vote in the Estates of the nation; they voted just like men, and things did not go so sadly. . . .

The reign of the courtesans precipitated the ruin of the nation; the empire of queens consummated it. We saw a prince [Louis XV], too quickly loved by the people, degrade his character in the arms of several women [his mistresses] without modesty, and become, following the example of Nebuchadnezzar, a brute who wallowed with a disgusting cynicism in the filth of the dirtiest pleasures. We saw his successor [Louis XVI] share with the public his infatuation with a young, lively, and frivolous princess [Marie Antoinette], who began by shaking off the yoke of etiquette as if practicing for one day shattering that of the laws. Soon following the lessons of her mother [Maria Theresa, empress of Austria], she profited from her ascendancy over little things to interfere in great ones and to influence the destiny of an entire people. . . .

Solemn publicists have seriously proposed taking the road of conciliation; they have maintained that women enjoy the rights of citizenship like men and should have entry to all public assemblies, even to those that constitute or legislate for the nation. They have claimed that women have the right to speak as much as men.

No doubt, and this power has never been denied them. But nature, from which society should not depart except in spite of itself, has prescribed to each sex its respective functions; a household should never remain deserted for a single instant. When the father of a family leaves to defend or lay claim to the rights of property, security, equality, or liberty in a public assembly, the mother of the family, focused on her domestic duties, must make order and cleanliness, ease and peace reign at home.

Women have never shown this sustained and strongly pronounced taste for civil and political independence, this ardor to which everything cedes, which inspires in men so many great deeds, so many heroic actions. This is because civil and political liberty is in a manner of speaking useless to women and in consequence must be foreign to them. Destined to pass all their lives confined under the paternal roof or in the house of their marriage; born to a perpetual dependence from the first moment of their existence until that of their decease, they have only been endowed with private virtues. The tumult of camps, the storms of public places, the agitations of the tribunals are not at all suitable for the second sex. To keep her mother company, soften the worries of a spouse, nourish and care for her children, these are the only occupations and true duties of a woman. A woman is only comfortable, is only in her place in her family or in her household. She need only know what her parents or her husband judge appropriate to teach her about everything that takes place outside her home.

Women, . . . The liberty of a people has for its basis good morals and education, and you are its guardians and first dispensers. . . . Appear in the midst of our national festivals with all the brilliance of your virtues and your charms! When the voice of the public acclaims the heroism and wisdom of a young citizen, then a mother rises and leads her young, beautiful, and modest daughter to the tribunal where crowns are distributed; the young virgin seizes one of them and goes herself to set it on the forehead of the acclaimed citizen. . . .

Citizensesses of all ages and all stations! Leave your homes all at the same time; rally from door to door and march toward city hall. . . . Armed with burning torches, present yourselves at the gates of the palace of your tyrants and demand reparation. . . . If the enemy, victorious thanks to disagreements between patriots, insists upon putting his plan of counterrevolution into action . . . you must avail yourself of every means, bravery and ruses, arms and poison; contaminate the fountains, the foodstuffs; let the atmosphere be charged with the seeds of death. . . . Once the country is purged of all these hired brigands, citizenesses! We will see you return to your dwellings to take up once again the accustomed yoke of domestic duties.

1 Madame du Barry among others.
2 Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylonia 605-562 B.C. —Ed.
3 M. Condorcet, among others, in a number of the journal of the club of 1789.