

Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS of the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, was adopted in August 1789 by the National Assembly.

“The representatives of the French people, organized as a national assembly, considering that ignorance, neglect, and scorn of the rights of man are the sole causes of public misfortunes and of corruption of governments, have resolved to display in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man, so that this declaration, constantly in the presence of all members of society, will continually remind them of their rights and their duties . . . Consequently, the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and citizen:

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights; social distinctions can be established only for the common benefit.
2. The aim of every political association is the conservation of the natural . . . rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. . . .
4. Liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm another person. . . .
6. The law is the expression of the general will; all citizens have the right to concur personally or through their representatives in its formation; it must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes.
7. No man can be accused, arrested, or detained except in cases determined by the law, and according to the forms which it has prescribed. . . .
10. No one may be disturbed because of his opinions, even religious, provided that their public demonstration does not disturb the public order established by law.



Painting of the declaration

11. The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: every citizen can therefore freely speak, write, and print . . .
16. Any society in which guarantees of rights are not assured nor the separation of powers determined has no constitution.”

—Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen

Analyzing Primary Sources

1. According to this document, what are the natural, inalienable rights of man?
2. According to this document, can a person be arrested or otherwise “disturbed” because of his religious beliefs?
3. How do the rights listed in number 2 of the document compare to the rights listed in the U.S. Bill of Rights?

