

DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN AND OF THE FEMALE CITIZEN

OLYMPE DE GOUGES (FRANCE), 1791

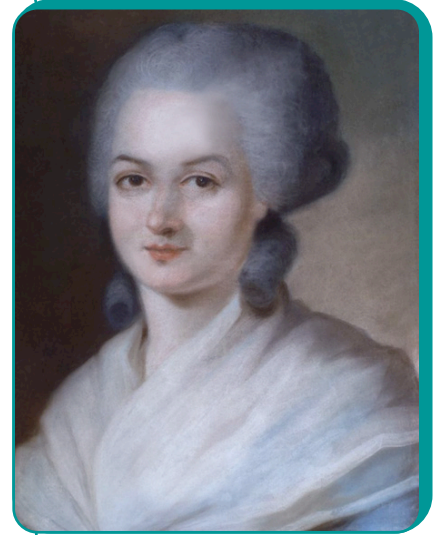
SUMMARY

Olympe de Gouges, a female French political activist and playwright, wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen in 1791 in direct response to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The document sheds light on the failure of the French Revolution to extend its ideals beyond men and demands political and legal equality for women.

De Gouges was an outspoken critic of the government during the revolution's "Reign of Terror" from 1793 to 1794. As a result, she was the only female to be executed for her political writings during this period.

SOURCE

"Olympe de Gouges, The Declaration of the Rights of Woman (September 1791)," *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <https://revolution.chnm.org/d/293>.



Portrait of Olympe de Gouges (Alexander Kucharsky/Wikimedia Commons)

DOCUMENT TEXT

For the National Assembly to decree in its last sessions, or in those of the next legislature:

Preamble

Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly. Believing that ignorance, omission, or scorn for the rights of woman are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, [the women] have resolved to set forth a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of woman in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all members of the society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties; in order that the authoritative acts of women and the authoritative acts of men may be at any moment compared with and respectful of the purpose of all political institutions; and in order that citizens' demands, henceforth based on simple and incontestable principles, will always support the constitution, good morals, and the happiness of all.

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

Article 1

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

Article 2

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

Article 3

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

Article 4

Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natu-

ral rights of woman are perpetual male tyranny; these limits are to be reformed by the laws of nature and reason.

Article 5

Laws of nature and reason proscribe all acts harmful to society; everything which is not prohibited by these wise and divine laws cannot be prevented, and no one can be constrained to do what they do not command.

Article 6

The law must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation; it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents.

Article 7

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

Article 8

The law must establish only those penalties that are strictly and obviously necessary...

Article 9

Once any woman is declared guilty, complete rigor is exercised by law.

Article 10

No one is to be disquieted for his very basic opinions; woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order.

Article 11

The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of woman, since that liberty assures recognition of children by their fathers. Any female citizen thus may say freely, I am the mother of a child which belongs to you, without being forced by a barbarous prejudice to hide the truth; (an exception may be made) to respond to the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by law.

Article 12

The guarantee of the rights of woman and the female citizen implies a major benefit; this guarantee must be instituted for the advantage of all, and not for the particular benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.

Article 13

For the support of the public force and the expenses of administration, the contributions of woman and man are equal; she shares all the duties and all the painful tasks; therefore, she must have the same share in the distribution of positions, employment, offices, honors, and jobs.

Article 14

Female and male citizens have the right to verify, either by themselves or through their representatives, the necessity of the public contribution. This can only apply to women if they are granted an equal share, not only of wealth, but also of public administration, and in the determination of the proportion, the base, the collection, and the duration of the tax.

Article 15

The collectivity of women, joined for tax purposes to the aggregate of men, has the right to demand an accounting of his administration from any public agent.

Article 16

No society has a constitution without the guarantee of rights and the separation of powers; the constitution is

null if the majority of individuals comprising the nation have not cooperated in drafting it.

Article 17

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

Postscript

Woman, wake up; the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation. Enslaved man has multiplied his strength and needs recourse to yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust to his companion. Oh, women, women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution? A more pronounced scorn, a more marked disdain. In the centuries of corruption you ruled only over the weakness of men. The reclamation of your patrimony, based on the wise decrees of nature-what have you to dread from such a fine undertaking?