**Olympe de Gouges’ *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman***

Women in the French Revolution

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**Guiding Question:**What does The Declaration of the Rights of Woman demonstrate about the French Revolution?

**Overview of Lesson:**

1. Read excerpts (or the full text of) *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*.
2. Begin by reading the brief biography of Olympe de Gouges. Think about the following questions. What sort of woman de Gouges was. What were her goals? What actions did she take? What made her an “unnatural” woman, and why was this a capital offense?
3. Work through the text following the text dependent questions. Answers should be written in your notebook in complete sentences, including references to the text where they seem warranted.

**Declaration of Rights of Man**

**Article I** – Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be founded only on the common good.

**Article II** – The goal of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression.

**Article III** – The principle of any sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exert authority which does not emanate expressly from it.

**Article IV** – Liberty consists of doing anything which does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of each man has only those borders which assure other members of the society the enjoyment of these same rights. These borders can be determined only by the law.

**Article V** – The law has the right to forbid only actions harmful to society. Anything which is not forbidden by the law cannot be impeded, and no one can be constrained to do what it does not order.

**Article VI** – The law is the expression of the general will. All the citizens have the right of contributing personally or through their representatives to its formation. It must be the same for all, either that it protects, or that it punishes. All the citizens, being equal in its eyes, are equally admissible to all public dignities, places, and employments, according to their capacity and without distinction other than that of their virtues and of their talents.

**Article VII** – No man can be accused, arrested nor detained but in the cases determined by the law, and according to the forms which it has prescribed. Those who solicit, dispatch, carry out or cause to be carried out arbitrary orders, must be punished; but any citizen called or seized under the terms of the law must obey at once; he renders himself culpable by resistance.

**Article VIII** – The law should establish only penalties that are strictly and evidently necessary, and no one can be punished but under a law established and promulgated before the offense and legally applied.

**Article IX** – Any man being presumed innocent until he is declared culpable if it is judged indispensable to arrest him, any rigor which would not be necessary for the securing of his person must be severely reprimanded by the law.

**Article X** – No one may be disturbed for his opinions, even religious ones, provided that their manifestation does not trouble the public order established by the law.

**Article XI** – The free communication of thoughts and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: any citizen thus may speak, write, print freely, except to respond to the abuse of this liberty, in the cases determined by the law.

**Article XII** – The guarantee of the rights of man and of the citizen necessitates a public force: this force is thus instituted for the advantage of all and not for the particular utility of those in whom it is trusted.

**Article XIII** – For the maintenance of the public force and for the expenditures of administration, a common contribution is indispensable; it must be equally distributed to all the citizens, according to their ability to pay.

**Article XIV** – Each citizen has the right to ascertain, by himself or through his representatives, the need for a public tax, to consent to it freely, to know the uses to which it is put, and of determining the proportion, basis, collection, and duration.

**Article XV** – The society has the right of requesting an account from any public agent of its administration.

**Article XVI** – Any society in which the guarantee of rights is not assured, nor the separation of powers determined, has no Constitution.

**Article XVII** – Property being an inviolable and sacred right, no one can be deprived of private usage, if it is not when the public necessity, legally noted, evidently requires it, and under the condition of a just and prior indemnity.

**Olympe de Gouges, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman***

**(September 1791)**

Marie Gouze (1748–93) 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 being founded 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, though 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. (Source and description found at *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/293/> accessed June 12, 2013.)

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| Questions | Text | Glossary |
| Does the title of the text remind you of other political documents from this time? If so, what?  To whom is the text addressed? Why is this significant?  What does De Gouges argue are the causes of government problems?  How will this declaration solve these problems?  How does she argue men and women are equal?  What are defined as “natural rights”?  Why did she argue that resistance to oppression is particularly relevant?  Who should make the law?  Why does De Gouges refer to “citizennesses and citizens”?  What government positions should be open to women and men?  How did she argue that these positions should be filled? How were government positions filled in pre-Revolutionary France? How was what De Gouges proposed radical?  How did she propose women and men are equal under the law?  Given what De Gouges argues about women being subject to punishment, what can you infer is the meaning of “rostrum?”  How did De Gouges define both men and women’s responsibilities as citizens?  How did she use this to justify women’s rights?  How did she argue that women should be granted equal rights under the new constitution? | 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; … 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, … 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.  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.  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 rostrum, provided that these manifestations do not trouble public order as established by law.  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.  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. | sole-only  incontestable-something that is no natural or obvious it cannot be argued against  common utility—useful for the public  dignities-recognition of high stature or power  indicted-charged with a crime  scaffold—she is referring to the fact that women can be hanged  null and void-a law should have no legal effect or standing |