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Introduction

I. APPROACH AND RATIONALE

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

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

II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

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

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

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources

which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, handouts and student background materials, and a bibliography.

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

Teacher Background

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit addresses three interrelated topics:

- ✦ The claims for human rights put forward by different segments of French society and French colonial Haiti.
- ✦ How these claims, and the responses to them, were related to the events of French and Haitian revolutions.
- ✦ How disputes and decisions about human rights during these two revolutions related to historical changes in thinking about rights.

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

II. UNIT CONTEXT

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

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

Haiti, or Saint Domingue, which occupies the western third of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, was the first country in the Atlantic world after the United States to overthrow its colonial masters. It also put an end to its slavery-based economic and social system and became the first country with a population of largely African origin to emerge out of the European empires of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries. It was the first state to proclaim equality between those who had been black slaves with those who had been white masters. Independent Haiti defined all citizens as legally equal and as “black,” no matter their ancestry. Haiti served for a long time both as a model for others in the Americas seeking independence and equality and as a challenge to white complacency in America and Europe.

The French and Haitian revolutions, with their emphasis on rights, freedom, and equality, led to basic changes in the ways individuals and groups around the globe thought about who they were, their place in the world, and what they could achieve.

III. CORRELATION TO THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR WORLD HISTORY

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

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Relate the debates and actions concerning rights during the French and Haitian revolutions to the historical contexts of the time.
- ◆ Compare and contrast attitudes to rights of different groups and at different times during the French and Haitian revolutions.
- ◆ Trace changes and continuities in what people considered to be the most important rights, as reflected in key documents from the English *Magna Carta* of 1215 to the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948.
- ◆ Evaluate the relative importance of various rights, and recognize that such evaluations are influenced by cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes.
- ◆ Apply insights gained from study of the history of human rights to contemporary situations.

V. LESSON PLANS

Background Lesson:

What are Rights and Who Should Have Them?

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

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

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

Lesson Four: *From Limiting Kings’ Rights to Protecting Childrens’ Rights: Shifts in the Western Tradition of Rights*

BACKGROUND LESSON

What are Rights and Who Should Have Them?

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Be able to define ‘rights.’
- ◆ Understand the general historical background of the codification of rights.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

Activity One

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

1. What does it mean to have a “right?”
The following examples may help in considering this question:
 - a) Suppose you complained about your grade, and your teacher was willing to listen to you and to talk about it. What difference would it make whether or not you had the right to complain?
 - b) Suppose you complained about your grade, and your teacher refused to listen or to talk to you about it. What difference would it make whether or not you had the right to complain?
 - c) What other difference, if any, would your having, or not having, the right to complain make in this situation? What other rights, and whose, might be at stake in this situation?
2. What is the use of having a right?
3. Does having a right to something guarantee that you will be certain to get it? Why, or why not? If yes, who would guarantee the right and how? If no, why bother with the right in the first place?
4. Do rights carry responsibilities? Give examples to support your view.
5. If responsibilities go with rights, what actions might ensure that the responsibilities be shouldered?
6. What are the sources of authority that can be appealed to when claiming a right? Whose say-so, what backing, or what justification makes a right a right?
7. What are allowable actions people can take to gain rights that they do not have? Where makes them allowable? What limits the actions?
8. What historical examples can you give where rights have been a major issue? What, when, where, and whose rights?

Activity Two

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