The Declaration of the Rights of Man and its Impact on the Nation of Haiti

American citizens live in a world that continuously discusses the need for social justice and the humane treatment of all its inhabitants. We care about our families, neighbors, fellow-countrymen and the rest of the people of the world that live near and far. There are animal rights, protection for species on endangered list of being extinct, and a United Nations that support conversations among nations of the world. When the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was approved by the National Constituent Assembly of France on August 26, 1789, it became a document that would have an impact on a small, not very impressive, little country in another hemisphere with the majority of its population Black slaves.

The Haitian Revolution is the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the Western Hemisphere. Slaves initiated the rebellion and this revolution became the first time there was a declaration of a first black republic in the Americas (1804). The Haitian Revolution could be considered divine intervention for all the people to the world. Divine because miraculous events had to come together to get the support needed to become a new nation of freed slaves. The Haitian Revolution is an excellent example of how one event within this seemingly large world has a real significant role in another part of the world as well as the culture and government of an entire nation. The development of the Universal Declaration of the Right of Man and Citizen (1789) was knocking at the door for people to open and invite themselves to the table full of bounty available to all that
would open their hearts and minds to accept the knowledge that all human beings should be equal in the eyes of their nation’s laws and in the world of mankind.

Based on France and Haiti histories, the Haitian slaves were expected to serve the European settlers. There would be a class system that would be the motivator for the dedication to the military action. The slaves were the majority of the population on the island; this encouraged the development of a class system where the slaves had no economic or social status.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man is a charter of human liberties, containing the principles that were an inspiration born out of the deadly French Revolution. In this revolution the queen would be imprisoned, thousands would be killed and the government would changed to be more compassionate to its citizen and declare human rights through the 17 articles adopted. These articles from the France’s National Assembly would serve as the preamble to the Constitution of 1791. This Declaration would set the standards for human rights in France and play a major role in the freedom for slaves in Haiti.

When the revolutions of France and Haiti are compared, it is easy to see the similarities and the need for change. In France the royal family (Head of the country) had serious problems with the powerful, influential wealthy aristocrats and the poor. The monarch King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette could not manage the people because they were not addressing their needs. They were not prepared when the revolution started when commoners and soldiers attacked the Bastille, a well-known prison to get weapons and ammunition stored there. From 1793-1794 over 18,000
citizens were sent to the guillotine. The leader Robespierre would later die by the guillotine too.

On the French Colony of St. Domingue (Haiti), there were three distinct classes of people living on the island. There were the Whites, who were in control, the free Mulattoes that had a little freedom and there were slaves, who were the property of the public. The slaves came from the slave trade in Africa. The slave lived under harsh conditions and it was Toussaint that led one of the most successful insurgency in history. During the time of the revolt, 1791, there was no clear head of State, even though the Marquis Duchilleau was the Governor. It was through the inspiration of the French Revolution that provided the charge to get Toussaint to lead both slaves and Mulattoes to join his army of hundreds. This fighting would last twelve years.

In both revolutions there are rich and the poor, or the power and the powerless. The best thing going for St. Domingue was that it was under French law. The challenge was to get the law to apply to the colonists. The Declaration of the Rights of Man had passed on August 26, 1789. In Article II all of the following are covered: natural rights of liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression. Nothing could be so timely. According to the French law at this point, slaves should be free. A dialogue began where the slave owners felt that they had liberty, equality and fraternity being denied to them. It was even argued that the slave as a free person would be too unorganized.

The French Revolution and development of the Declaration of the Rights of Man represented the new concept of human rights, universal citizenship and participation in government. In order for any citizen of the world to have mental freedom these ideals
have to be real and available to him. The Articles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man is not based on religion, but based on natural law. In the first article, “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may only be founded upon the general good.” The Blacks and slaves of Haiti must have felt that the writers were reading their minds and understanding their hearts.

After the French Revolution that was a clear need for social justice activities and thoughts to established. It took courage and wisdom of the members of the assembly to create and develop the correct words to lead the people to an understanding of the importance of natural laws. Thomas Jefferson was Minister to France, 1785-89 to France that supported the Declaration of the Rights of Man and this document considers the individual rights of man like the writings of John Locke. Assuming a leadership role should be a part of everybody’s individual mission statement. Whether an individual is in the media, being a student, a parent, or at church we have a role to be a leader at all time. We can promote patient, tolerance and understanding when we realize the role we play in this world, no one know when they are influencing the next Toussaint.

The past revolutions in Haiti and France would be very different today. Our future leaders need education and awareness of their world. Global Leadership is essential to the promotion of fairness and equality to all the world’s citizens. It is not a surprise when information is communicated immediately throughout the world. Face book, Internet, email, cell phone and other electronic devices keeps us all in touch. It a speech is heard or a letter is written the world knows about the intent and the character of the writer. The best leaders today remain mindful of their awesome influence. A revolution today could last only a few minutes, based on atomic weapons, guns and bioterrorism.
If we are able to study the past we can promote a more just and humane society by not repeating the mistakes of the past. In order to promote a just society, we need to live by the Articles found in Declaration of the Rights of Man. Keep in mind that all men are born and remain free and equal in rights. A humane society would encourage the rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. Nations would protect its citizens, where the law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Any punishments would be appropriate.

In so many countries, democratic governments do not exist, so people are accused, arrested, or imprisoned without laws to protect them. A global approach to promoting justice and humane behavior is to keep the lines of communications opened, when we are always listening to others and understanding differences. At one time the people of Haiti might have felt that they would remain oppressed forever. Based on the changes that can happen in the world, we should continue to demonstrate how a democratic society works, by ensuring that everyone’s vote counts and that the rule of law applies to all people. All the governments of the world are under great scrutiny so leadership can come from the poor or from the rich.