

Causes of the reign of terror

[History](#), [French Revolution](#)



The reign of terror was a period of violence in which occurred from 1793-1794 after the strong onset of the French Revolution. It was a time of fierceness and anger, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people living in France at that period of time. The terror followed the trial and execution of King Louis XVI in 1793 and was incited by the conflict between the Girondins and Jacobins. Soon after, King Louis' wife, Marie Antoinette, was executed in the guillotine- the new form of constitutionalist justice.

Many of the people who were executed during this period of time were not aristocrats, but ordinary people who may have only stated a critical thought or judgment going against the revolutionary government. Many believe that once Robespierre became leader of the Committee of Public Safety, he overpowered France and dominated the public, leading to the terror. Some believe that the terror occurred to stop counter-revolutionaries, such as the War in Vendee, and happened because of the factions between the Jacobins and Girondins.

The Reign of Terror was the government's reaction to counter-revolutionary threats occurring particularly in the Vendee region of France in 1793. Here the public armed themselves in order to attempt to overthrow the Republic and restore the monarchy to the way it was. The counter-revolutionaries in this region were strongly against Robespierre and upset he had launched a movement to de-Christianize the nation and persecute the Church- massacring priests, destructing churches and destroying religious images.

During this time all of the people of Vendee loyally stood by the Church and the Catholic monarchy of France and could clearly be distinguished wearing Rosaries around their necks at all times and the symbol of the Sacred Heart

<https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-the-reign-of-terror/>

of Jesus sewn onto their hats. The people of Vendee fought hard against the French revolutionary government, many calling the War in Vendee the first modern 'genocide.' A French general of the time, Francois Joseph Westermann, stated " We are shooting them non-stop...

Mercy is not a revolutionary sentiment," exaggerating the intensity of the situation in Vendee and the success of the revolutionary government against the West region, supposedly leading to the 'Reign of Terror' in France. A number of people living in France, including nobles, priests and the bourgeoisie fled the country during the French Revolution, abandoning the struggle the country was going through. Emigrating, they formed armed groups and moved to neighboring countries, acquiring the name of emigres.

In 1791, legislation against the emigres was passed by the King stating that anyone caught emigrating would be punished with a death sentence, namely the guillotine. Due to the politics of the time period, France was inevitably drawn to War with Austria and its allies, including Prussia, declaring War against them on 20 April 1792. Robespierre opposed the occurrence of War due to the fact that it would strengthen the monarchy and the military as well as attract the anger of ordinary people in Austria and its neighbouring countries.

The Jacobins increased the size of the army, determined to have more soldiers who demonstrated their patriotism and trained ability effectively. The Republican Army of France dominated the battles and were able to overcome the Austrians, Prussians, British and Spanish- the countries against the revolutionary government, and the strong violence was a large part in why the Reign of Terror began. Factional disputes in the Convention caused

for the replacement of the Girondins with the Jacobins as they desired for a centralized government in France. This dispute could have been one of the main causes of the Reign of Terror breaking out.

They wanted to keep Paris as the national capital city and to have the temporary government of the time to take control of the economy as a whole. The Jacobins were able to utilize their power of the sans-culottes and gained much of the public's support opposed to the Girondins. On June 22, 1793, 80000 armed sans-culottes gathered and surrounded the National Convention halls and demanded the arrest of the Girondin party, resulting in the immediate arrest of 29 Girondin members. The Jacobins then had firm control of both the National Convention and France as a nation, left to deal with the violence and repression on the streets of France.

Robespierre became leader of the Committee of Public Safety in 1793, causing a shift in power from Georges Danton to Maximilien Robespierre, Danton being an implausible public speaker and having a stronger physical presence while Robespierre less passionate about the public in general and their needs. He encouraged violence in France during the political deterioration and the fact that the attempt to set up a workable constitutional monarchy under King Louis XVI's reign failed made him passionate about politics. He wished to create a temporary dictatorship in order to save the Republic from falling completely.

He believed that it was "One's duty to punish traitors, to help the needy, respect the weak, defend the oppressed, do good to one's neighbour and behave justly," meaning he wanted to punish those who were against the government in any way and act justly- not something that he achieved. He

believed that the “ Terror is nothing but quick and hard justice,” granting that he wanted the terror to be something which was handled quickly and only for those who acted against their choices in any way. Robespierre was a large influence in the Reign of Terror and wanted the people who acted out to be punished for their actions.

Many people believe that he was the reason why the Reign of Terror originally began. Many dispute that the Reign of Terror simply does not exist due to the fact that there was already violence occurring before this supposed period of time. The Storming of Bastille was a violent period in which happened on July 14, 1789 where a mob of people marched to the Bastille, a large structure in which was previously an eight-towered castle, in search for prisoners and gun powder that had been taken by the unpopular King, Louis XVI.

The building was being used as a prison at this period of time and only guarded by 30 Swiss guards, making it easy for the mob to get through in possession of canons and 3000 rifles under their belt. This shows that before the Reign of Terror strong violence was already occurring and was a large part of the nation. The Reign of Terror was not a significant change of violence to what was already occurring in France at the time, causing people to argue that the ‘ violent Reign of Terror’ never existed in reality; it was simply a continuation of the violence already taking place.

The Reign of Terror began in order to repress counter-revolutionary groups, which forced the Committee of Public Safety, led by Robespierre, to use the ‘ humane’ form of execution- the guillotine. This resulted in external enemies being executed and anyone living in France who was under suspicion or was

<https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-the-reign-of-terror/>

overheard stating a critical judgment against the government put under the guillotine. Through these executions the Revolutionary government gained momentum against their political enemies and had confidence with all of the power they were given. The mentality of violence had built up gradually from the very beginning of the revolution, not particularly when the Reign of Terror supposedly began in 1792; the strong violence and destruction progressively increasing and the death toll reaching to new heights in this time period. By 1794, the Jacobins' power was overbearing as they started to become unpopular with the public and media- those with accepted opinions.

Their bloodshed result of power and recognition in the nation caused the bourgeoisie and former Jacobins to prompt propaganda against them, aiming to destroy the monarchy. The Reign of Terror impacted the people of France and forced them to conform to what was accepted by the Committee and the Jacobins, allowing for them to have no say or judgment in the events of the time. There were many causes of the terror, some in which included strong violence, others strong leaders, yet they all marked the same thing- the end and beginning of France again.