

# The downfall of maximilien robespierre assignment

[History](#)



. Did Robespierre’s Love of the Revolution Cause His Immense Paranoia, Corrupt His Belief System and Eventually Lead to His Execution? Extended

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3483 Abstract Maximilien Robespierre was well known as the protector of the French Revolution. He would stop at nothing in order to keep it alive. As he continuously gained power, and influence over the people of France, he became increasingly paranoid.

In fear of danger to the Revolution, Robespierre used extreme scare tactics, and called for the executions of many people, including some of his friends and colleagues, many citizens began to worry if they might be the next victim of Robespierre’s executions. This brings about the question, was the execution of Robespierre caused by his paranoia? The severe paranoia which Robespierre developed seemed to have been brought about by his original passion for the Revolution. This led to an obsession with maintaining power in order to protect it. To decide this, n analysis of his speeches such as The Philosophy of Terror, and his address to the Constituent Assembly in regards to the death penalty have been conducted. In addition, an assessment of the events such as the creation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the execution of Danton, the Festival of the Supreme Being, and the last time he addressed the National Convention, has also been conducted. In reviewing a numerous sources, it must be concluded that the severe paranoia caused by

his great love for the Revolution, drove him mad, and, led to his execution by his peers.

Robespierre's peers felt that his death, was necessary to end the Reign of Terror, which he had instilled on the people of France, during the French Revolution. They felt this way because they felt threatened by Robespierre's lists of alleged conspirators. Robespierre become overcome with paranoia, and was not fit to be running a country. The only way possible to remove him from power, was to execute him. Introduction The French Revolution had many important figures, one of which was Maximilien Robespierre, the creator of the Reign of Terror.

Robespierre came to power through his radical ideas, his eloquent speaking and his political views. He gave the lower classes of France hope for a future without Feudalism. As time progressed, Robespierre gained more power, and began to develop an immense paranoia. This paranoia was expressed through his increasingly radical speeches, and extreme actions. In the assessment of the speeches by Robespierre, opinions of his peers, and the events of the Reign of Terror, the question of examination arises, ' Did Robespierre's love of the Revolution cause his immense paranoia, corrupt his belief system and eventually lead to his execution? Rise to Power

Robespierre was a lawyer who was born in Arras. Though, having come from a poor family, he was able to study law through a scholarship. After law school Robespierre returned to Arras, where he became well respected by the lower class, and a well known representative of the less fortunate in court. This gained Robespierre a reputation as the " upholder and the wretched avenger of innocence" (Furet). Robespierre acquired many of his  
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ideals and theories from the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract.

Robespierre's rise to power began with two main things, his election to the Estates General as part of the Third Estate and his rising influence in the Jacobins, a radical political club, who believed in left winged politics.

Between the years 1793 and 1794, France endured the most extreme stage of the revolution; the Reign of Terror. During the Reign of Terror, thousands of executions occurred, many of which were supported by Robespierre.

Although he became known as "The Incorruptible" during this time, the truth of this statement is questionable.

Robespierre's continuous gain of power resulted in his desire for more.

Eventually, this seemed to influence his values to change. Robespierre had a change of heart on several important topics early on in the Reign of Terror, such as the death penalty, human rights, and friends and foes of the revolution. Original Ideas The National Assembly was formed on June 17th, 1789 after King Louis XVI disallowed the meetings of the Estates General. Many of the Members who were part of the National Assembly were former members of the Estates General, including Maximilien Robespierre.

The Assembly released a charter called The Declaration of the Rights of Man on August 26, 1789. This was a declaration of the equality of all men abolishing classes, bringing freedom of the press, and justice only under law.

(See translated version of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in Appendix)

Robespierre felt very strongly about it and said that the declaration was

necessary because “ The ignorance, neglect or contempt of the rights of man are the sole causes of public calamities and corruption... ” (Murphy).

Robespierre, becoming the heart of the new government stood for liberty, equality and fraternity, and was demanding change Robespierre frequently spoke against the death penalty. This is seen in one of his speeches to the Assembly on June 22, 1791, in which he says; “ I want to prove to them: 1- that the death penalty is essentially unjust and, 2- that it isn't the most repressive of penalties and that it multiplies crimes more than it prevents them. ” (Robespierre 2) Then later on follows up with this by saying; Thus, in the eyes of truth and justice these scenes of death that it orders with so much ceremony, are nothing but cowardly assassinations, nothing but solemn crimes committed not by individuals but by entire nations using legal forms. However cruel, however extravagant the laws, do not be surprised: they are the work of a few tyrants, they are the chains with which they weigh down the human race, they are the arms with which they subjugate it, they were written in blood. “

Although this is an English translation on Robespierre's speech, which was originally written in French, the main ideas he conveys are obvious. Throughout the speech, he builds a strong opposition to the death penalty using truth and justice to justify his argument against “ nothing but cowardly assassinations”(Robespierre 2) Although Robespierre was becoming increasingly influential, more support was gained for the idea of all being equal in death, rather than for abolishing the death penalty altogether. This idea was introduced and made possible with the invention of the guillotine.

The guillotine made it possible for executions to be virtually painless and brought about for the first time a form of execution that would be used for all social classes. But Robespierre still strongly opposed the death penalty altogether though many other revolutionaries of his time did not. Changed Ideas Throughout the Reign of Terror, many people who originally had been quite fond of Robespierre, began to question his actions and motives. Sceptical analysis of Robespierre's actions was even seen prior to the Reign of Terror.

An example of this was in an article in the newspaper the French Patriot, printed in Paris on 6 December 1792, in which a journalist wrote; " It is true that I despise Mirabeau," replied Robespierre, " but the Sections [of Paris] have asked that he have this honour and I have to be the instrument of the people. " This accurately describes Robespierre and the flexibility of his " popular conscience"... This is how demagogues pay homage to popular idols in order to please their constituents, and then shatter those same idols in order to take their places.

In any case, Robespierre could evict Mirabeau from the Pantheon without worrying, for no one will ever retaliate against him..."(French Patriot) This abstract, from the French Patriot, showed a negative outlook of Robespierre's ways when it stated " This is how demagogues pay homage to popular idols in order to please their constituents, and then shatter those same idols in order to take their places. " The journalist here revealed that Robespierre easily said one thing and did the complete opposite.

This leads to the question of whether this dishonesty was acceptable for a leader who frequently justified his arguments with truth and virtue. It also showed that Robespierre was feared by the people in the last line of the abstract, " In any case, Robespierre could evict Mirabeau from the Pantheon without worrying, for no one will ever retaliate against him..." The journalist is making the point that Robespierre's power would not be challenged by anyone, even early in his career, because he was so unpredictable.

This is important to examine because Robespierre's peers growing fear of him, and his personal quest for power, were the main components that led to his execution. Once France declared war on Austria, Robespierre, who did not support the decision, was again outnumbered by those who did.

Robespierre held this opinion because he felt that the country was not strong enough at that time and that they would lose, the revolution would be lost and King Louis would regain power.

During the war and the rising tension throughout France, King Louis XVI fled to the National Assembly for safety, where he was held. Robespierre announced his new support for the death penalty jointly with his belief that the Revolution, and the King, could not co-exist. At this point, Robespierre had decided that the Revolution could not be left in the hands of the people and that he would have to take charge. Robespierre, who had once been content with a constitutional monarchy, now felt that there was no room for the king.

Along with his supporters, he decided that King Louis XVI, the King of France, must be put on trial. Robespierre stated " You must kill the King so the

Revolution can live" (Schultz) in his address to the people explaining the reason why it was necessary for the King's death. Robespierre felt that with the survival of their monarch the revolution could not flourish and that France was constantly in danger of falling back into a feudalistic monarchy. After this, Robespierre gained much support and the King was condemned to death by the Assembly on January 20, 1793.

Robespierre's call for the execution of the king marked his change of view on the death penalty. This was a very important time during the beginning of the Reign of Terror. Robespierre's change of heart was the first great discrepancy found in his set of values. Because many citizens were so avid about getting rid of the King, many did not at first notice this great change in Robespierre's views and were quick to support him. In April 1793, a decree by the National Convention was made on creating the Committee of Public Safety (Doyle 437).

This decree stated that " The Committee shall talk in secret; it shall be responsible for watching over the work of the government ...under critical circumstances it is authorized to take measures to defend the revolution against internal and external enemies. "(Lavelle). Robespierre soon rose to be the leader of the Committee, again going against many of his original ideals. Very different opinions within what was now renamed the National Convention began to surface, as one member stated, " The revolution is like Saturn, devouring its own children. , Georges Jacques Danton expressed a very different view by saying " The revolution, my friend, cannot be made with rose water. "(Schultz) This was the beginning of severe tension between the members of the National Convention. The first quotation from an <https://assignbuster.com/the-downfall-of-maximilien-robespierre-assignment/>



unknown member of the Convention, was one of the first acknowledgements of what the Revolution was to become. Even Danton, who supported it, fell victim. Despite the growing disagreements, Robespierre's strong views and charismatic speaking abilities brought him to be the leader of the Public Safety Committee.

One of the first decisions made was the suspension of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. This was another important event in the revolution as a turning point in Robespierre's beliefs. Suspending the Declaration of Rights is what made the beginning of the Reign of Terror possible, and completely contradicted everything Robespierre had stood for and what he helped create. As Robespierre called for more, and more blood, an increasing number of people questioned his change of heart, he never chose to really respond to these questions with anything other than the simple line " Times have changed. (Schultz) Increasing Paranoia On the eighth of July, 1794, while addressing the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre's accumulation of power was addressed when he was interrupted by a fellow member, Javogues; " We are neither factious individuals nor conspirators, but we do not want the Jacobins to be dominated by one man. " Robespierre responded by saying " For that, I thank you??? for revealing yourself in such a pronounced manner and for permitting me to better know my enemies and those of the fatherland. (Bienvenu) These two quotations show two very important ideas, one of which was that a group of Robespierre's peers were not pleased with his rise to power, and how his power seemed to be constantly growing. This is shown when Javogues interrupts him and states that they are not traitors of any sort and that they were just unhappy, that

one man, being Robespierre, had so much power over the Jacobins. The second quotation, which came from Robespierre, showed the early stages of his paranoia when he refers to Javogues, and the other members, who felt that Robespierre was becoming too powerful were his enemies.

In early 1794, Maximilien Robespierre was accused of leading a despotic government. In response to this, in an excerpt from one of his many writings, Robespierre stated “ ‘ Indulgence for the royalists,’ cry certain men, ‘ Mercy for the villains! ‘ No, mercy for the innocent, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity. ” (Conolly). This showed another view of Robespierre that had changed on rights, and who deserved them. This was but a marker for when many began to question Robespierre, because he was beginning to be less specific as to who would be targeted next.

This instilled great fear into many of his colleagues, therefore, caused a secret hostility towards Robespierre. When rationalizing terror in Robespierre’s famous speech “ The Political Philosophy of Terror”, which he made to the National Convention on February 5, 1794 he stated “ Terror is only justice prompt, severe and inflexible; it is then an emanation of virtue: it is less a distinct principle than a natural consequence of the general principle of democracy, applied to the most pressing wants of the country.

(Robespierre 3) In another part of the speech, Robespierre also made a point of saying “ If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, amid revolution it is at the same time [both] virtue and terror: virtue, without terror is fatal; terror, without which, virtue is impotent. ” (Robespierre 3) When looking at the meaning of Robespierre’s speech, his word choice

needs to be examined. In this speech Robespierre attempted to say that virtue came hand in hand with justice in the form of terror.

According to Princeton University, terror is defined as “panic: an overwhelming feeling of fear and anxiety”; justice is defined as “the quality of being just or fair”, and virtue is defined as “the quality of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong” (Princeton). Essentially, Robespierre was saying that instilling panic, in the form of fear and anxiety into the masses, was justifiable and fair if it was felt it was the ‘right’ thing to do. The problem with this idea was that he left the decision of what the ‘right’ thing to do was up to his own discretion by making many of the decisions of the Reign of Terror.

Therefore his argument was not stable under questioning. Is it possible for one person to decide what is right and wrong for a whole country? Although Robespierre’s speech was convincing in its eloquence, and not meant to reveal any flaws in the ideas or the personality of Robespierre, under analysis, it is subject to a great deal of moral questioning. With the Terror continuing to become more intense, Danton and many other previous supporters of the Terror, began to feel that it needed to end.

They formed a group called the Dantonists to support their opinion. But Robespierre with his continually growing paranoia and accusations, accused them as being enemies of the Revolution. He did not see the Dantonists as a difference of opinion, he saw them as a threat to his opinion, and therefore, a threat to himself. He felt that this was a direct threat to the government

and the revolution. He eventually had Danton and his followers executed for treason on April 5, 1794.

From this, rose many questions regarding how far Robespierre was willing to take this 'Terror'. After the execution of the Dantonists, Robespierre launched France into the most severe part of the Revolution, The Great Terror. The Great Terror started in the spring of 1794 and ended in the summer of 1794. Executions by guillotine increased to 800 or more every month because of Robespierre's increasing power and paranoia and his call for the execution of anyone who not only appeared to be a threat to the revolution but a threat to he himself(Schultz).

The Downfall On June 6th, 1794, many people who were questioning Robespierre's sanity, had their questions answered. On that day the guillotines hung silently because Maximilien Robespierre had declared the day a national religious holiday, the Festival of the Supreme Being (McGowen 109). Earlier in the Revolution Christianity had been banned, but Robespierre had never been a full supporter of this and felt that the people needed something to believe in. Robespierre began to support the Cult of the Supreme Being and declared it as the national religion.

On the day of the Festival of the Supreme Being, there was a papier-mache mountain constructed in the centre of Paris from which Robespierre came out of the top to speak to the people of France as a prophet of the Supreme Being. His speech on the ideals of their new religion was ironically similar to many of his political speeches, with quotations such as; " Republican

Frenchmen, it is yours to purify the earth which they have soiled, and to recall to it the justice that they have banished!

Liberty and virtue together came from the breast of Divinity. "(Robespierre 1). In this quotation Robespierre mentioned both liberty and virtue as the ideals of the " Supreme Being". Liberty and truth were also what he justified many of his actions with before the new cult had been announced. This made many of the citizens of France wonder if his power had gone to his head and who he really thought he was. On June 27, 1794 Robespierre met with the Convention, and made a speech full of threats to the members because he felt that some were traitors.

While doing this, he carried a list which he said had the names of those who needed to be executed, but, he refused to reveal (Schama 843). This did not make sense to the other members of the National Convention and some became very worried that they were on Robespierre's list. When Robespierre returned to the National Convention on July 29th, 1794 to read the names of those he suspected of treason, he was surprised to find that he was shouted down so that he could not speak (McGowen 112).

Robespierre, along with many of his followers, were then arrested and taken to the City Hall, to be watched over night, and to be executed the next day. While Robespierre was being held in the City Hall, a gun shot from Robespierre's room was heard by the guards. The guards ran upstairs to see what had happened and Robespierre was seen laying on his desk unconscious with a gunshot wound to the jaw. What seemed like an

unsuccessful suicide attempt left Robespierre unable to speak when he awoke laying on the table of the Committee of Public Safety.

While many of his former colleagues ridiculed and mocked him, Robespierre could do nothing but lay in silence and await his execution. When sent to the jail cell to have his hair cut off, along with one of his supporters, the supporter pointed to a painting on the wall of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and said " At least we did that. " Robespierre was then loaded onto a common criminal cart and in the afternoon of July 28, 1794 he was killed, along with the Terror that he brought upon France(Schultz). Conclusion

During the Reign of Terror, Maximilien Robespierre took the Terror and the violence too far. Although his charismatic speeches often seemed to be able to justify his means, they were made by an educated and trusted man, who had become overwhelmed with the power and stresses gained from the French Revolution. Though it appears Robespierre was doing what he had rationalized in his mind was the only thing he could do, this involved the execution of thousands of people. He often gave reasons for these executions in a general sense, but he rarely had reasons for each single execution.

If a name was on a list of people suspected of not supporting the revolution, Robespierre often executed them without trial or question. Many of these executions were completely unnecessary and could have easily been avoided. Robespierre also became unreliable because he was continuously changing his mind on important topics which made many uneasy. Although Robespierre had been nicknamed ' The Incorruptible' because of his extreme

dedication to the Revolution this also was a partial cause of his down fall because he often over looked the needs of the people.

A major one of these needs was the feeling of safety. With Robespierre's scare tactics and continuous executions made everyone in France feel uneasy. The Reign of Terror was a prime example of the flaws of humanity. It showed how human beings can easily commit unjustifiable acts, such as Robespierre, during his reign over France, with the terror he brought upon his people. Even though many people throughout the Terror expressed concern and voiced belief that it should stop, Robespierre continued to intensify the Terror and to execute those who did not agree with what he was doing.

This made many people become very sceptical of him. When Robespierre started the Festival of the Supreme Being many French citizens along with Robespierre's colleagues began to wonder what exactly was going on in his head and if he would ever stop. It seemed that Robespierre's extreme paranoia had driven him mad. This question was answered when Robespierre stormed into the National Convention, threatening its members, many of those who had supported the Revolution, of execution. The peers of Robespierre then came to a decision that the Terror must be stopped.

At this moment France realized the Reign of Terror could never end without putting an end to the one who created it. Appendix Declaration of the Rights of Man 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good. 2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible

rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. 3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation.

No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation. 4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law. 5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law. 6. Law is the expression of the general will.

Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its foundation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents. 7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed, any arbitrary order, shall be punished.

But any citizen summoned or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense. 8. The law shall provide for such punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no



one shall suffer punishment except it be legally inflicted in virtue of a law passed and promulgated before the commission of the offense. 9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law. 10.

No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law. 11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law. 12. The security of the rights of man and of the citizen requires public military forces. These forces are, therefore, established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they shall be intrusted. 3. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means. 14. All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes. 15. Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration. 16.

A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all. 17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except

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where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified. Bibliography Bienvenu, Richard. The Ninth of Thermidor. United States. Oxford University Press, Inc. , Oxford University Press, Inc. , 1970.

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