

Good essay on the french revolution

[Society](#), [Terrorism](#)



The French Revolution is typically the main historical dividing line between the ancient European regimes and the modern world. It marked the transition from the traditional social order to a democratic system.

Nevertheless, the transition process was long and violent which eventually led to Napoleon Bonaparte rising to power in 1799 through a military coup d'état. Even though much of its impact was confined to France, it spread to other parts of Europe and the rest of the world. It marked the beginning of the revolutionary wars in the world over. The French Revolution marked the first occasion whereby a democratic government employed political terror was used as a weapon to advance its political course. Thousands of people were executed for political crimes and violence was a common occurrence during that period. Today, political terror and the increasing threat of terrorists is a reality, all of which seem to have taken cue from the French Revolution. Much debate has been generated on the way the French revolution was carried out. Some people argue out that terror began with the revolution and was the main driving force of the revolution from the on-set while others cite the fact that terror in the revolution was inevitable. It can be argued that the use terror in the revolution was the "labor pains" that the country had to undergo in order to reap the benefits of democracy. Despite the debate surrounding terror, it should be noted that the reign of terror in the French Revolution was inevitable. It was necessary and a justified part of the revolution. To ensure the success of the revolution, terror was always bound to happen.

It is a common saying that desperate times always call for desperate measures. A few years after the French revolution had begun; France found

itself in desperate times. In as much as the constitution had been written and some progressive and elite reforms being implemented all over the country, the country was engaging in costly wars with Prussia and Austria and the government had also been overthrown. The revolution unified France as a country, enhanced the power of the state and also symbolized unity (Gough, 16). Even though the reforms were for the better, most people were against the reforms that were being instituted. Consequently, the French government undertook desperate measures which resulted in the execution of thousands who did not subscribe to the newly instituted reforms (Gough & Anne-Marie, 6). This was tragic given the deaths of the thousands of the civilians. As with any other reform process, oppositions are always bound to happen, with others taking extreme measures to oppose them. As with France, the monarch system was not working for them and the rule by the social classes only meant that there would be more poor people. In a bid to completely transition to a democratic system that would ensure the rule of law and equality, and also overthrow the current system, there was the urgent need to employ extreme measures (Livesey, 21). Although hundreds were executed using the guillotine, the reforms that were instituted made France a model nation for democratic government all over the world. The French conservatives criticized the revolution mainly because it abolished the monarchy, weakened the powers of the Catholic Church and destroyed the feudal system. The conservatives also saw that the revolution was part of a conspiracy to destroy civilization that had taken years to be achieved (Gough, 6). There was always going to be a confrontation between the two factions given the different ideologies that they championed for. The

conservatives supported the status quo while the revolutionaries supported a democratic system. The revolutionaries attempted to solve the problems that France was undergoing by building an entirely new system from scratch rather than modify the system that was already in place (Gough, 6).

Consequently, they were creating a catastrophe that would ultimately result in violence simply because change is a slow and gradual process. Terror was employed to change people's ideologies and way of lives during the revolutionary period. Since the revolutionary reforms offered a system of democratic rule, promoted equality and unified the country, terror was one of the way by which the revolutionary message was to be communicated to the rest of the population. It was more like a means to an end. Although a means that was tragic given the massive executions of the civilians, the end result was a united, equal and democratic nation.

The "Reign of Terror" was not only an integral part of the revolution but was also a defense tactic employed by the French republic against its enemies.

Terror was a response to the circumstance of the war. The republican democrats also agreed that terror was a response to the way the war was being fought and was a way of defense of the democracy (Gough, 8). Terror was mainly used when the republic was threatened by defeat by both internal and external enemies. When the revolutionaries felt like their position was threatened by the civil war or the external war, they employed terror. They used all forms of violence, including the use of the guillotine, to quash those who tried to threaten their position. The use of terror was only abandoned when the threat was over. The weeks that followed the execution of the king, there was an increase in the internal and external wars. For

example, the Austrian and the Prussian armies moved into France's countryside. The government was unable to assemble an army from the protesting and disgruntled peasants. With the convention panicking from the rising threats, it established the Committee of Public Safety whose sole role was to maintain order within France and also to protect the country from external threats. The "Reign of Terror" ensured that the revolutionary government avoided military defeat at all costs. The Republican army was able to retaliate from any attacks by the British, Spanish, Prussian and Austrian armies when they attacked. With the use of terror, the revolts were defeated with much ease (Frey & Marsha, 10). The Ventose Decrees proposed to impound the properties of people opposing the revolution and the exiles. It was argued that those who opposed the revolution had surrendered the civil rights which included the right to property (Frey & Marsha, 12). The properties seized were then distributed to the poor. In as much as it was not enforced for long, it proved effective in silencing the enemies of the revolution. The use of terror enabled that the revolution was success without both internal and external threats.

The "Reign of Terror" was also as a result of the political culture of France in the 18th century and the influence of the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For a very long time political debates in France were deliberately suppressed. Politics was discussed in private gatherings by the social elites and the wealthy bourgeoisie. Many of these people believed that only reason could be used to cure the problems that the country was facing at the time. These people were attracted to the ideas treated human beings more like geometrical objects (Gough, 8). As a result, they were influenced greatly by

the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his publications such as the Social Contract 1762 and Confessions 1782, Rousseau highly condemned the civilization of the human societies and proposed a return to the primitive societies (Andress, 481). Rousseau believed that this could be only achieved if the government was democratic and whereby the community's general will controlled all the decisions. Such ideas led to the revolutionaries opting to build a completely new system rather than reform the new systems. In doing so, the revolutionaries claimed to be representing the general will of the people and denounced all attempts to oppose the reform that they were bringing along. Given that the ideas of the revolutionaries represented that of the general community, as they claimed, all those who opposed the revolution were quickly branded as traitors (Andress, 483). The revolutionaries as a result employed all forms of terror to silence, intimidate and eliminate the critics and the " traitors." François Furet believed that terror was already inherent in the revolutionary ideology and it was not a pragmatic response in a bid to reverse the 1793 military disasters (Mona, 12). His ideology was mainly influenced by that of Rousseau who believed in the " general will" of the community and that one section of the community would completely dominate the society. With the recognition of the influence of the abstract reasoning and Rousseau's ideas, it can be concluded that terror was an integral part of the ideology of the French Revolution and could not be avoided during its course.

Even though the " Reign of Terror" may seem to be unfair to many people and a cruel act, it proved an effective tool by which the revolution was going to succeed. Robespierre himself believed that it was nothing other than

justice (Andress, 480). He was a supporter of equality, justice and a supporter of the civil rights. It is proof that terror was already a mechanism that the revolutionaries were going to employ in order to achieve success. Terror was already embedded in the revolution and hence it was inevitable (Andress, 481). In as much as it resulted in the deaths of many individuals, it proved to be the method by which the revolutionary war was going to be won.

As discussed above, terror was inevitable. There was no way that the revolution was going to take place without the use of terror by the revolutionaries. A number of factors were responsible for the terror including ever-increasing threat from both internal and external forces, the circumstance of the war, the existing political ideology that existed in France and the theories put forward by thinkers such as Rousseau. Terror, indeed, was only used as a means to an end. The results of the revolution such as a united nation, a democratic form of government, equality and the abolition of the rule by social classes justify the use of terror during the revolution. In as much the “Reign of Terror” was a tragic period for France, it was inevitable. It was clear that sacrifices had to be made to ensure a better form of government and system for the French and as a result such measures were employed.

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