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## The reign of terror during French Revolution 1792 – 1794

### Questions to ponder

1. Account for the outbreak of the reign of terror in France from 1792 – 1794.
2. Why did the French Revolution which started peacefully end into the reign of terror?
3. Why did the French revolution which began with much restraint and moderation took a new and radical turn from 1793-1795?
4. Account for the change in the course of French revolution from 1792-1794.
5. Account for the revolutionary violence in France between 1792 and 1794.

Note that those questions require a discussion for the causes of the reign of terror of 1792-1795.

The **Reign of Terror** (1793-1794) was a period of extreme violence and political purges during the French Revolution, which saw the public executions and mass killings of thousands of counter-revolutionary 'suspects' between September 1793 and July 1794

### Causes of the reign of terror between 1792-1794

1. **Political Instability:** The revolution had created power vacuum and on-going conflicts between different political factions, such as the Girondins and the Jacobins. The instability made it difficult to maintain order and led to radical measures.
2. **External Threats:** France was surrounded by hostile monarchies that feared the spread of revolutionary ideas. The threat of foreign invasion and internal counter-revolutionary movements created a sense of emergency.
3. **Economic Hardship:** Food shortages, inflation, and economic turmoil exacerbated social tensions. The state's attempts to control prices and seize goods often led to further unrest.
4. **Radicalization of the Revolution:** The rise of radical groups like the Jacobins, who believed in more extreme measures to protect the revolution, pushed for harsher actions against perceived enemies.
5. **Committee of Public Safety:** Established to address the crises, the Committee of Public Safety, led by figures like Maximilien Robespierre, implemented policies that justified the use of terror to achieve revolutionary goals.

6. **September Massacres:** The massacres of September 1792, where suspected counter-revolutionaries were killed, set a precedent for the use of violence to maintain revolutionary control.
7. **The weak character of King Louis XVI:** Failure of the king to institute meaningful reforms and controls the revolution led a spirit of mob justice resulting into the reign of terror.
8. **The inherent weakness of the National convention contributed to the outbreak of reign of terror.** The national convention formed in September, 1792 by the National legislative Assembly was full of suspicions and power struggles causing the massacre of opponents.
9. **The war between the revolutionary forces and Austria fuelled the reign of terror.** The defeat of the revolutionary forces by the combined forces of Britain, Spain, Austria, Holland and Prussia compelled the Jacobin leaders in the National Convention to take immediate aggressive and radical actions against any perceived enemy.
10. **The press (print media) also instigated the reign of terror.** For instance , the newspaper "Friends of the people" called for immediate execution of all people who supported the Roman Catholic Church and King Louis XVI.
11. **The execution of King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette:** caused his loyalist to seek revenge leading to the reign of terror.
12. **Constant rebellions in the different parts of the country caused multiple deaths in towns like Lyton, Toulon and so on.**
13. **The refusal of most noble to give up their privileges led to massive deaths.** Most nobles refused to comply with revolutionary reforms and ended up killed by angry peasants.
14. **Rooting:** Some people simply killed others in order to steal their possession.

### **Negative effects of the reign of terror during 1789 French revolution**

The **Reign of Terror** (1793-1794) had several negative effects on French society and the course of the revolution:

1. **Loss of Life:** Thousands of people were executed, including many who were not directly involved in counter-revolutionary activities. Estimates suggest that around 35,000 to 45,000 people were executed during this period.
2. **Destruction of property:** the reign of terror led to massive destruction of property such as Bastilles, Hotel de Ville, and numerous properties of the noble and the Catholic Church.
3. **Climate of Fear:** The widespread use of terror created a climate of fear and suspicion. People were afraid to speak out or express dissenting opinions, leading to a stifling of free expression and political debate.
4. **Economic Disruption:** The revolutionary government's policies, including the Maximum (price controls) and the use of the assignat (revolutionary currency), led to economic instability and hardship.

5. **Internal Divisions:** The Reign of Terror deepened divisions within the revolutionary movement. The radical Jacobins, led by figures like Robespierre, clashed with more moderate factions, leading to further political instability.
6. **International Isolation:** The extreme measures taken during the Reign of Terror alienated other countries and contributed to the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars, as foreign powers sought to contain the spread of revolutionary ideas.
7. **Legacy of Distrust:** The period left a legacy of distrust and aversion to extreme ideologies, which influenced French politics for years to come.
8. **Free to exile:** the reign of terror forced a big number of people mostly the noble and Catholic church official to free to exile
9. **Most European monarchs become more conservative:** the Prussian, Russian and Austrian monarchs and others became more oppressive and repressive in order safe guard themselves from the barbaric activities of the French Revolution. It became treasonable to make sentiments against the state

### **Positive effects of the reign of terror during 1789 French revolution**

While the Reign of Terror is often remembered for its brutality and negative consequences, it did have some positive effects:

1. **Strengthening of Revolutionary Ideals:** The Reign of Terror reinforced the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity by eliminating perceived enemies of the revolution. This helped to solidify the revolutionary government's control and commitment to these principles.
2. **Centralization of Power:** The Committee of Public Safety, which led the Reign of Terror, centralized power and took decisive actions to address the crises facing France, such as food shortages and military threats.
3. **Military Successes:** The revolutionary government implemented measures to bolster the French military, leading to significant victories against foreign coalitions and counter-revolutionary forces. These successes helped to secure the revolution and expand its influence.
4. **Economic Reforms:** The revolutionary government introduced measures to control prices and manage resources, which aimed to stabilize the economy and address the needs of the population.
5. **The reign of terror replaced the dictatorial monarchy with a French Republic following the execution of King Louis XVI.**

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