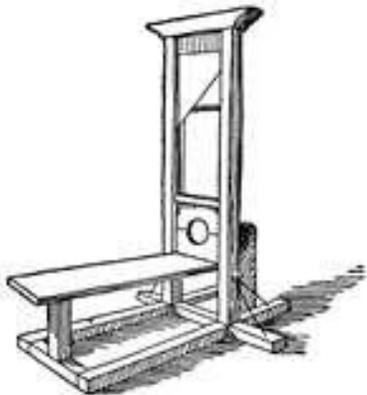


Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____

The Reign of Terror

Directions: Read the passage and complete the review questions.



The Reign of Terror (1793-1794) was a dreadful expression of revolutionary excess, provoked by fear and uncertainty. Amid the shambles of an old order and the instability of newly established institutions, France's leaders waged a terrible campaign against the enemies of the Revolution, real and imagined, within and without France's borders.

For the next seven years, despite wide swings in character and membership, the revolutionary government would be at war with most of Europe. Because of the changing array of forces allied against France, wars during this period are known as Wars of the Coalitions, coalitions that have extended well beyond the end of the Revolution.

While war created havoc abroad, fanatic zeal created bloodshed at home. Fear of agitation by aristocratic *emigres* abroad, and paranoia over possible counter-revolutionaries at home, fueled the Reign of Terror. These days the word "terror" pops up in every rotten movie. But when they say Reign of Terror they mean it. Chances were if you were popular with the in-crowd on Thursday, by Monday the same crowd would be cheering your trip to the guillotine. There were so many people to do away with- estimates around 11,000- that a kind of cottage industry in capital punishment sprang up. One patriotic citizen came up with the idea of shackling a bunch of prisoners to a boat and then sinking it. This scientific approach to killing was, sadly enough, but an omen of things to come.

The particular agency responsible for this carnage was the Committee of Public Safety, a title about as appropriate as "MTV News." Its most infamous figure was Maximilian Robespierre, called "the Incorruptible." A more appropriate name would have been "le Terminator." Single-minded, ascetic, and inexhaustible, Robespierre personified the radical revolution-right up until July 25, 1794, when he too, was guillotined. A famous cartoon of the time showed a snake biting its tail, with a caption that read: the revolution devours its own."

Robespierre's death signaled a reactionary movement that ended the Reign of Terror. The Committee of Public Safety was eliminated, and the Directory (1795-1799) was formed- an oligarchic arrangement whereby a rotating directorship of five, elected by the national legislature, held executive power. Naturally, such a government by committee was practically an invitation for a coup d'état that would effectively end the Revolution. That coup d'état came with the appearance of the little General from Corsica who overthrew the directorship and made himself emperor.

1. During the Reign of Terror, where did the French government look for its enemies?

2. What types of fear caused the Reign of Terror to last so long?

3. Approximately how many people were killed during the Reign of Terror?

4. What was the most common way to execute the guilty during the Reign of Terror?

5. Who was in charge of the Reign of Terror?

6. How did the Reign of Terror end?

7. What was the Directory?

8. What is a coup d'état?

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