## Reign of Terror Documents Name:

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| **Intro:** the Reign of Terror was the period from roughly 1793-1794 where the Revolution was at its most radical and most violent. In the name of defending the Revolution, the Committee of Public Safety and its leader, Maximilien Robespierre, executed 16,000 French people. Many of these people were denied any kind of real legal defense and many innocent people were surely killed in the name of protecting the Revolution. Robespierre argued that this terror was essential to defending the Revolution. And while it is easy to condemn Robespierre and his fellows, the Committee of Public Safety was effective. Within months, France’s fortunes had completely reversed—from being within months of collapse, to being the most successful, powerful state in Europe. The question is—**can the government’s actions be justified?** |

## Summary of the Reign [doesn’t count as a document]

**Problems facing France when the Committee of Public Safety took over:**

* France was losing the War of the First Coalition and it appeared that France might be in serious danger of being conquered.
* Many French peasants were revolting against the Revolutionary government and the government was only really in control of about 25% of France.
* Peasants and working class people could not afford even simple things like food and clothes.
* The French currency, the *Assignat*, was experiencing inflation—it had lost 25% of its value in just a year. (imagine if every dollar you owned was suddenly worth only 75 cents).

**Acts committed by the Committee of Public Safety as part of the Terror:**

* The Committee several times either ordered or allowed the killings of hundreds of prisoners in its own jails.
* Executions: the government executed 16,000 people in just 14 months.
* **The Law of Suspects:** The Committee made it a crime to speak out against the principles of the revolution. Anyone found guilty of being anti-revolutionary was beheaded.
* **The Law of 22nd Priarial:** the government suspended almost all rights to a fair trial. The accused were no longer allowed to have witnesses or legal defense and were assumed to be guilty.

## Documents

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| **Document 1:** The official charges for people executed during the Reign of Terror | | | | | | | |
|  | Spying for the Enemy | Hostile Acts against the government | Conspiracy | Anti-Revolutionary  Statements | Priests who refused to swear loyalty to France | Corruption | Total |
| Paris | 292 | 114 | 676 | 988 | 29 | 100 | 2,199 |
| Border Departments | 139 | 28 | 5 | 231 | 72 | 3 | 478 |
| Rebellious Departments | 25 | 10,291 | 19 | 57 | 162 | 1 | 10,555 |
| Peaceful Departments | 1 | 23 | 3 | 26 | 30 | 0 | 83 |
| All of France | 457 | 10,456 | 703 | 1,302 | 293 | 104 | 13,315 |

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| **Document 2: from *“The Age of Revolution”* by Eric Hobsbawn, 1962**  For the solid, middle class Frenchmen who stood behind the Terror, it was neither pathological nor apocalyptic, but first and foremost the only effective method of preserving their country. This the Jacobin Republic did, and its achievement was superhuman. In June 1793, sixty out of eighty departments of France were in revolt against Paris; the armies of the German princes were invading France from the north and the east; the British attacked from the south and west; the country was helpless and bankrupt. Fourteen months later all France was under firm control, the invaders had been expelled, the French armies in turn occupied Belgium and were about to enter on almost twenty years of almost unbroken and effortless military triumph. |

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| **Document 3: Jean-Paul Marat writing for *L’Ami du Peuple* (the people’s friend), December 18th, 1790**  “It is not on the frontiers, but in the capital that we must rain down our blows. Stop wasting time thinking up means of defense. There is only one means of defense for you. That which I have recommended so many times: a general insurrection and popular executions…  I tell you again, this is the only way which remains for you to save the country. Six months ago, five or six hundred heads would have been enough to pull you back from the abyss. Today because you have stupidly let your implacable enemies conspire among themselves and gather strength, perhaps we will have to cut off five or six thousand. But even if it needs twenty thousand, there is no time for hesitation.” |

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| **Document 4**: **Maximilien Robespierre, in a speech to the National Convention, December 25, 1793**  “Revolution is the war waged by liberty against its enemies… The revolutionary government has to summon extraordinary activity to its aid precisely because it is at war… Under a constitutional government little more is required than to protect the individual against abuses by the state, whereas revolutionary government is obliged to defend the state itself against the factions that assail it from every quarter. To good citizens revolutionary government owes the full protection of the state; to the enemies of the people it owes only death.…” |

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| **Document 5: Camille Desmoulins, in *le Vieux Cordelier*, December 20, 1793**  “You want to remove all your enemies by means of the guillotine? Has there ever been such great folly? Could you make a single man perish on the scaffold without making ten enemies for yourself from his family or his friends? Do you believe that these women, these old men, these weaklings, those egoists, these stragglers of the Revolution, whom you imprison, are really dangerous? Of your enemies there remain among you only the cowardly and the sick. The strong and the brave have emigrated. They have perished at Lyon or in the Vendée; the remainder (consisting of some renters and shopkeepers) do not merit your wrath.” |

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| **Document 6: Letter from a Parisian named Ruault to his brother, Early April 1794**  “The ferocity among the patriots is more savage than ever. The Committee of Public Safety has just had executed some 20 of the most notable revolutionaries, including Clootz, Hébert and Ronsin…The unfortunate Clootz, bowing his head to the blade, cried out, ‘Farewell humanity!’ Danton has just been arrested. This occurred because Danton and Desmoulins tried to halt the action of the guillotine, so now they will have to suffer it themselves. Their good intentions will be snuffed out with their lives.  Tomorrow they will be compelled to go before the tribunal of blood which they helped to set up. It is Danton’s misfortune to have recovered some credit among good patriots, and even among people of fashion, since his milder sentiments became known, after he joined with Camille Desmoulins in ‘Le Vieux Cordelier’ newspaper to try to stop the massacres of the Revolutionary Tribunal…  Danton’s popularity gave offence to Robespierre, who today is King of the Revolution.” |

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| **Document 7: “Why have Witnesses?” A letter written to the government by Antoine Fouquier-Tinville, a prosecutor in the Revolutionary Tribunal, 1793**  “The slowness of the procedures of the Revolutionary Tribunal obliges us to present to you a few observations… The trial of the deputies whom you have accused began five days ago, yet only nine witnesses have yet been heard. In giving evidence, each would tell their own history of the Revolution. The accused then replies to the witnesses, who respond in their turn.  This trial, therefore, will be interminably long. Besides, it should be asked: why should we have witnesses? The Convention, the whole of France, accuses these men. Proofs of their crimes are evident and everyone is convinced that they are guilty.  The Tribunal can do nothing by itself – it is obliged to follow the law. It rests with the Convention to do away with all the formalities which impede its work.” |

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| **Document 8: Reports back to the government on the opinions of French Citizens**  **January 28, 1794:** “The majority of the citizens agreed unanimously that the tribunals act well, that they acquit the innocent and punish the guilty, although murmurs are heard among the public at their judgments.”  **February 23, 1794: “**Bitter complaints already expressed numberless times, were repeated today of the arrest and imprisonment of citizens who are good patriots and are victims of ambition, cupidity, jealousy, and, in short, every human passion.”  **March 30, 1794:** “The revolutionary committees are every day falling into discredit. You daily hear that they consist of a number of intriguers, who plunder the nation and oppress citizens, It is a fact that there is no section in Paris which is not dissatisfied with its revolutionary committee or does not seriously desire to have them abolished.” |

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| **Document 9:** The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen [selected articles] |
| **Article II** – The goal of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression.  **Article IV** – Liberty consists of doing anything which does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of each man has only those limitations which assure that other members of the society can enjoy these same rights. These limitations can be determined only by the law.  **Article V** – The law has the right to forbid only those actions harmful to society. Anything which is not forbidden by the law cannot be impeded, and no one can be constrained to do what the law does not order. **Article VIII** – 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.  **Article IX** – Any man being presumed innocent until he is declared guilty, if it is judged indispensable to arrest him, any use of force which would not be necessary for the securing of his person must be severely reprimanded by the law  **Article XI** – The free communication of thoughts and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: any citizen thus may speak, write, or print freely |

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| **Document 10:** The Law of 22nd Priarial [excerpts] |
| The Revolutionary Tribunal is instituted to punish the enemies of the people. The enemies of the people are those who seek to destroy public liberty, either by force or by cunning…  The penalty provided for all offenses under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Tribunal is death.  Every citizen has the right to seize conspirators and counterrevolutionaries, and to arraign them before the magistrates. He is required to denounce them as soon as he knows of them…  If either material or moral proofs exist, apart from the attested proof, there shall be no further hearing of witnesses… |

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