The Reign of Terror
June, 1793 – July 27, 1794

The Reign of Terror (June, 1793 – July 27, 1794), also known as the The Terror (French: la Terreur) was a period of violence that occurred for one year and two months after the onset of the French Revolution, caused by the conflict between rival political factions, the Girondins and the Jacobins, and marked by mass executions of "enemies of the revolution." Estimates vary widely as to how many were killed, with numbers ranging from 16,000 to 40,000; in many cases, records were not kept, or if they were, they are considered likely to be inaccurate. The guillotine ("National Razor") became the symbol of a string of executions: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, the Girondins, Louis Philippe II and Madame Roland, as well as many others, such as "the father of modern chemistry" Antoine Lavoisier, lost their lives under its blade.

During 1794, revolutionary France was full of real or imagined conspiracies by internal and foreign enemies. Within France the revolution was opposed by the French nobility, which had lost its inherited privileges. The Roman Catholic Church was generally against the Revolution, which had turned the clergy into employees of the state and required they take an oath of loyalty to the nation (through the Civil Constitution of the Clergy). In addition, the First French Republic was engaged in a series of French Revolutionary Wars with neighbouring powers.

The French government established the Committee of Public Safety, which took its final form on 6 September 1793 and was ultimately dominated by Maximilien Robespierre, in order to suppress internal counter-revolutionary activities and raise additional French military force. Through the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Terror's leaders exercised broad dictatorial powers and used them to instigate mass executions and political purges. The repression accelerated in June and July 1794, a period called "la Grande Terreur" (The Great Terror), and ended in the coup of 9 Thermidor Year II (27 July 1794), the so-called "Thermidorian Reaction", in which several leaders of the Reign of Terror were executed, including Saint-Just and Robespierre.

Activities

Read Brooman 42-49 and watch the History Channel documentary extract on the Terror and then answer the following questions.

1. Why did the Reign of Terror begin? Consider why the Committee of Public Safety was established and what is was expected to achieve.
2. What was the ‘Law of Suspects’? Why do think many innocent people may have been arrested and killed as a consequence?
3. Why did so many people die in the Vendée and Lyon?
4. What was the ‘Mass Levy’? and the ‘Law of the Maximum’, how did they contribute to the survival of the revolution?
5. What was the ‘Cult of Reason’? When is your birthday according to the French Revolutionary Calendar? This website - http://windhorst.org/calendar- will work it out for you.
6. What were the causes of the ‘coup of Thermidor’? And what were the consequences?