

Source Analysis: Radical Revolution and the Terror

Inquiry Question: How did **radicalism** impact the French Revolution?

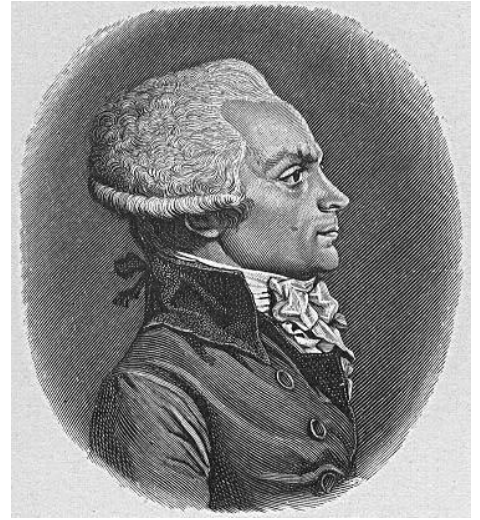
Instructions: Using your knowledge of the French Revolution **interpret** the following primary sources.

Source A: Maximilien Robespierre's speech to the National Convention in January 1794

Criterion D: Thinking Critically

iv. Interpret different perspectives and their implications.

Society owes protection only to peaceable citizens. The only citizens in the Republic are the republicans... the royalists, the conspirators are only strangers or enemies. This terrible war waged by liberty against tyranny, is it not indivisible? Are the enemies within not the allies of the enemies without? The assassins who tear our country apart; the intriguers who buy the consciences that hold the people's mandate; the traitors who sell them; the mercenary pamphleteers hired to dishonour the people's cause, to kill public virtue, to stir up the fire of civil discord, and to prepare political counter-revolution by moral counterrevolution ... are all those men less guilty or less dangerous than the tyrants whom they serve?"



Interpretation: What is the purpose of political terror according to Robespierre?

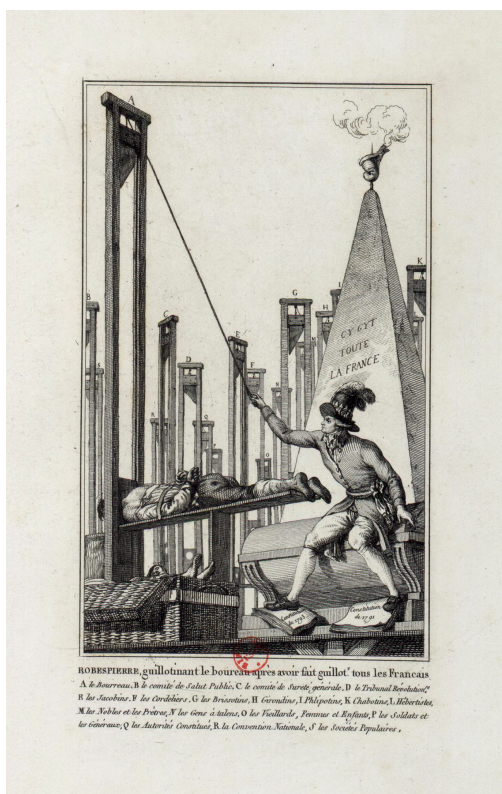


Image Caption: This cartoon from 1794 depicts Robespierre executing the executioner after having everyone else in France executed.

Source B: Maximilien Robespierre's speech at the Festival of the Supreme Being in June 1794. The Festival was intended to generate support for Robespierre's new religion which would replace Christianity in France.



[The Supreme Being] did not create kings to devour the human race. He did not create priests to harness us, like vile animals to the chariots of kings; and to give to the world examples of baseness, pride, perfidy, avarice, debauchery, and falsehood. He created the universe to proclaim His power. He created men to help each other, to love each other mutually, and to attain to happiness by the way of virtue...

Republican Frenchmen, it is yours to purify the earth which they have soiled, and to return the justice that they have banished! Liberty and virtue together came from the breast of Divinity. Neither can abide with mankind without the other...

The monster which the genius of kings had vomited over France has gone back into nothingness... Frenchmen, you war against kings; you are therefore worthy to honour Divinity... Hatred of bad faith and tyranny burns in our hearts, with love of justice and the fatherland. Our blood flows for the cause of humanity. Behold our prayer. Behold our sacrifices. Behold the worship we offer Thee."

Interpretation: What is the role of the Supreme Being according to Robespierre? What does he say about kings?

Source C: Witness accounts of the Festival of the Supreme Being in June 1794.

“As president of the National Convention, Robespierre led the procession. He wore his usual light blue coat and carried a posy of flowers in his hand. People noticed that there was a considerable gap between his colleagues and himself. Some ascribe this to simple deference, others think that Robespierre was using it to underline his sovereignty. I am inclined to think that it was due to the detestation of Robespierre.

It seems certain that his downfall was agreed in that triumphal procession; many were well aware of this, and if the gap was not its chief cause, at any rate, his opponents made use of it to increase their numbers and convince others of his dictatorship. For the rest, the ceremony ended with an ambiguous speech without strength or vigour, and Robespierre gained nothing from his intended triumph.”

...

It was not only members of the National Convention who perceived his theocratic intentions. There was a vigorous expression from a genuine sans culotte, reported by someone who heard it at the Tuileries: ‘Look at the bastard! It’s not enough to be master, he wants to be God as well!’

Interpretation: What is this writer’s perspective on Robespierre’s speech at the Festival of the Supreme Being? Does he appear to support Robespierre? Why or why not?

