

**Maximilien Robespierre - III**

**Lead: Surrounded by enemies from without and within, France's Revolutionary government appointed a Committee of Safety in the Spring of 1793. It saved France in part by a Reign of Terror.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Leading the Committee was Maximilien Robespierre, a north country lawyer turned radical politician. He faced a set of daunting challenges. A coalition of European armies were massed on the border**

**determined to crush the Revolution. Peasants were in revolt, the City of Lyon had rebelled and the Mediterranean naval base at Toulon had been surrendered to the British. To deal with the external threat, the Committee called the entire nation to arms, the so-called *levé en masse*. By 1794 850,000 men were under arms, dwarfing and defeating enemy armies. The peasants were suppressed and Lyon retaken with brutal tactics. In the south, a young artillery officer, Napoleon Bonaparte, recaptured the Toulon naval base and at 23 was promoted to brigadier general and his first taste of national acclaim.**

**To rid the country of internal dissent the Committee instituted the**

**Reign of Terror. Aristocrats, uncooperative priests, monarchist politicians, unsuccessful generals, anyone too moderate or not extreme enough had their necks shaved by the guillotine. Robespierre's journalist friend Desmoulins, wrote of this period, "the gods are thirsty." By the summer of 1794 an estimated 40,000 had died. Robespierre was elected President of the National Convention on June 4th, but his overweening power made enemies and allies very nervous. A plot emerged and he was arrested on July 27th. Revolutionary justice is swift and the next day the heads of he and 22 of his followers rolled into the bloody baskets on the Place de la Revolution. Caught in the death machine of his own creation,**

**Robespierre would in the early years be condemned as a bloodthirsty tyrant, but later historical reflection softened this analysis and he is also remembered as a champion of the poor, destitute and politically oppressed.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

### Resources

**Carr, John Laurence. *Robespierre: The Force of Circumstance*. London, UK: Constable & Robinson, 1972.**

**Jordan, David P. *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*. New York, NY: The Free Press, 1985.**

**Lewes, George Henry. *The Life of Maximilien Robespierre*. London, UK: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1899.**

**Rude, George. *Robespierre*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967.**

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