

## **Panel: “France and United States as Works in Progress”**

### **Brittney Fullmer**

**Title:** “Was the Reign of Terror Necessary?”

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Deborah Bauer

**Paper written for:** H355: Old Regime and Revolutionary Europe (Fall 2014)

I am **Brittney Fullmer**, a senior history major at IPFW. I have always enjoyed learning and studying about the past, but the first time I can remember really falling in love with it was in high school in my U.S. history class. The excellent professors and history program at IPFW have fueled that passion even more. Next semester I will be doing an internship at the Allen County Public Library, working with 19<sup>th</sup> century archives. After I graduate in December 2015, I am thinking about pursuing library or museum work.

### **Abstract**

For many scholars, the French Revolution is a fascinating topic because it was a complex, tumultuous, and pivotal period in the history of Europe. The Reign of Terror in particular continues to generate debate. Some say it was a necessary evil to combat threats and preserve the Revolution, while others argue that is simply untrue. The debates on both sides are wide and varied. There certainly were threats to the Revolution, yet the radicalization under Maximilian Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety was the result of a misguided ideology, which led to large scale, unnecessary bloodshed.

The violence and repression during the Reign of Terror was a reaction by the new government to legitimate threats to the Revolution, as well as other pressures. Though the new government was not overly oppressive or violent at first, the Law of Suspects, the Law of 22 Prairial Year II, along with other measures, drove the country towards the most violent and irrational period of the Revolution. At the end of the Terror, 300,000 suspects had been arrested and 17,000 sentenced to death—many more were executed without trial.

There is still much debate about the intentions of Robespierre and the radical leaders. The evidence, however, shows that most were not bloodthirsty, but simply very misguided. The frightening conclusion is that misguided ideology can cause just as much destruction as any bloodthirsty tyrant.

### **Bibliographical Note**

While researching and writing my paper, I utilized various secondary and primary sources. Since the topic of the French Revolution was fairly unknown to me, I started with a general work on the subject, titled *The French Revolution* by M.J. Sydenhama. This gave me a lot of the background information I needed to start my work on the Reign of Terror. Next, I combed through “The Course of the Terror 1793-94,” which outlined in detail the events of the Terror and also provided analysis. This was a journal article by David Andress, whose specialty is the French Revolution—it was a great help with my own research. Several of the primary sources I

used came from a document collection put together by Laura Mason and Tracy Rizzo. These documents included "Constitution of the Year I," "Law of 22 Prairial Year II," "Law on Suspects," and "Maximilian Robespierre, Reporting on the Principles of Political Morality." Each of these documents imparted important details, as well as the ideas and words that came directly from the Reign of Terror. All of these sources gave me a solid foundation for my paper and allowed me a better understanding of this significant time in history.