The terror: civil war in the French Revolution,

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The French Revolution marks the foundation of the modern political world. It was in the crucible of the Revolution that the political forces of conservatism, liberalism and socialism began to find their modern forms, and it was the Revolution that first asserted the claims of universal individual rights on which our current understandings of citizenship are based. But the Terror was, as much as anything else, a civil war, and such wars are always both brutal and complex. The guillotine in Paris claimed some 1500 official victims, but executions of captured counter-revolutionary rebels ran into the tens of thousands, and deaths in the areas of greatest conflict probably ran into six figures, with indiscriminate massacres being perpetrated by both sides. The story of the Terror is a story of grand political pronouncements, uprisings and insurrections, but also a story of survival against hunger, persecution and bewildering ideological demands, a story of how a state, even with the noblest of intentions, can turn on its people and almost crush them.

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