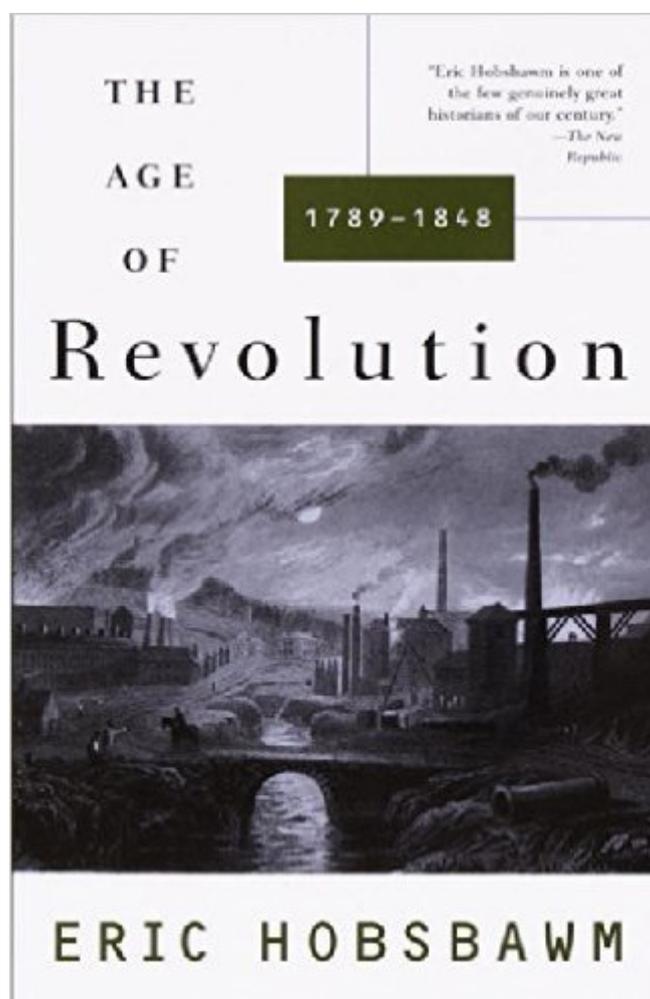


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The Age Of Revolution: 1789-1848



Synopsis

This magisterial volume follows the death of ancient traditions, the triumph of new classes, and the emergence of new technologies, sciences, and ideologies, with vast intellectual daring and aphoristic elegance. Part of Eric Hobsbawm's epic four-volume history of the modern world, along with *The Age of Capitalism*, *The Age of Empire*, and *The Age of Extremes*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

(4.5 stars) In his preface, Hobsbawm explains: "The object of this book is not detailed narrative, but interpretation and what the French call *haute vulgarisation*. Its ideal reader is that theoretical construct, the intelligent and educated citizen, who is not merely curious about the past, but wishes to understand how and why the world has come to be what it is today and whither it is going. Hence it would be pedantic and uncalled-for to load the text with as heavy an apparatus of scholarship as it ought to carry for a more learned public. My notes therefore refer almost entirely to the sources of actual quotations and figures, or in some cases to the authority for statements which are particularly controversial or surprising." I quote Hobsbawm's preface in full because it seems to capture the great strengths and modest weaknesses of this book. First, the prose. It can be cumbersome, particularly when bearing the weight of unfamiliar names, places and "isms." But the complexity is necessary in my opinion. The author is trying to stuff sweeping movements, grand figures of history, and the capital "M" Modern revolution into 300 pages of declarative sentences without abridging the truth. That's hard work. And as readers, we are asked to do some hard work as well. But that brings up the great strength of Hobsbawm's work. He succeeds. Ideas like "Nationalism" and "Industrialism"

become understandable in twenty pages or less. You see how the railroads were born and how they fueled speculation. How we all used to live in the country, isolated, living and dying in the same county, perhaps never to receive more than a letter (there were no newspapers, no mass media of any type) from the outside world.

In *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*, Eric Hobsbawm examines sixty pivotal years beginning with the construction of the first factory system in Lancashire and the French Revolution in 1789 and concluding with the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848. According to Hobsbawm, the period was marked by two watershed events, the twin upheavals of the British Industrial Revolution and the contemporaneous French Revolution. Described as "twin craters of a larger, regional volcano," Hobsbawm stresses the far-reaching societal impact of these revolutions beyond the borders of the two rival nations. The introduction of a bourgeois middle class within a capitalist industrial reorganization of social relations formed what Hobsbawm identifies as "the greatest transformation in human history" since Mesopotamia. Giving rise to explosive new capital and social opportunities, the volcano unleashed unforeseen destabilizing forces capable of collapsing the top-heavy liberal, capitalist expansion. According to Hobsbawm, the publication of the Communist Manifesto marked the beginning of a worldwide social critique and chain reaction, testifying to the pervasive influence, at once promising and tragic, of the dual revolution in Britain and France. Hobsbawm launches his discussion by first describing the agrarian/feudal world of 1780 and the preconditions that fostered the Industrial and French Revolutions. Britain was free of a feudal monarch, and private enterprise had been accepted in that nation for more than a century. Britain also had the natural resources and colonial empire necessary to provide the raw materials, primarily coal and cotton, to fuel a rapid industrial expansion.

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