

Robespierre (Great Lives Observed)

George F. E. Rude

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This political portrait of the greatest revolutionary leader in modern history comes to us from a writer who has established his pre-eminence in quite a different area: in the history of those unrecorded "crowds" of ordinary people who so often change the course of human events. George Rude has always eschewed "greatman" theories of history, but here he fixes his sights on the undeniably major figure that shaped so much of the French Revolution-the Incorruptible, Maximilien Robespierre. More than any other individual, Robespierre personifies the French Revolution. Its high-mindedness, its humanity, its use of terror, its ruthless devouring of its own children, its world-shaking success and its apparent failure- all these contradictory characteristics are reflected in the mind and career of its greatest son. Mr. Rude's book begins with a narration and description of Robespierre's life, together with an analysis of how his image has evolved, over the 180 years since his death, from the opinions held about him by his opponents and supporters. In the ensuing sections Mr. Rude discusses in closer detail just what the elements in Robespierre's complicated make-up were that made him the ideologue and political leader he was. His stimulating and no doubt controversial presentation establishes Robespierre's claim to greatness "as the first great champion of democracy and the people's rights."



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