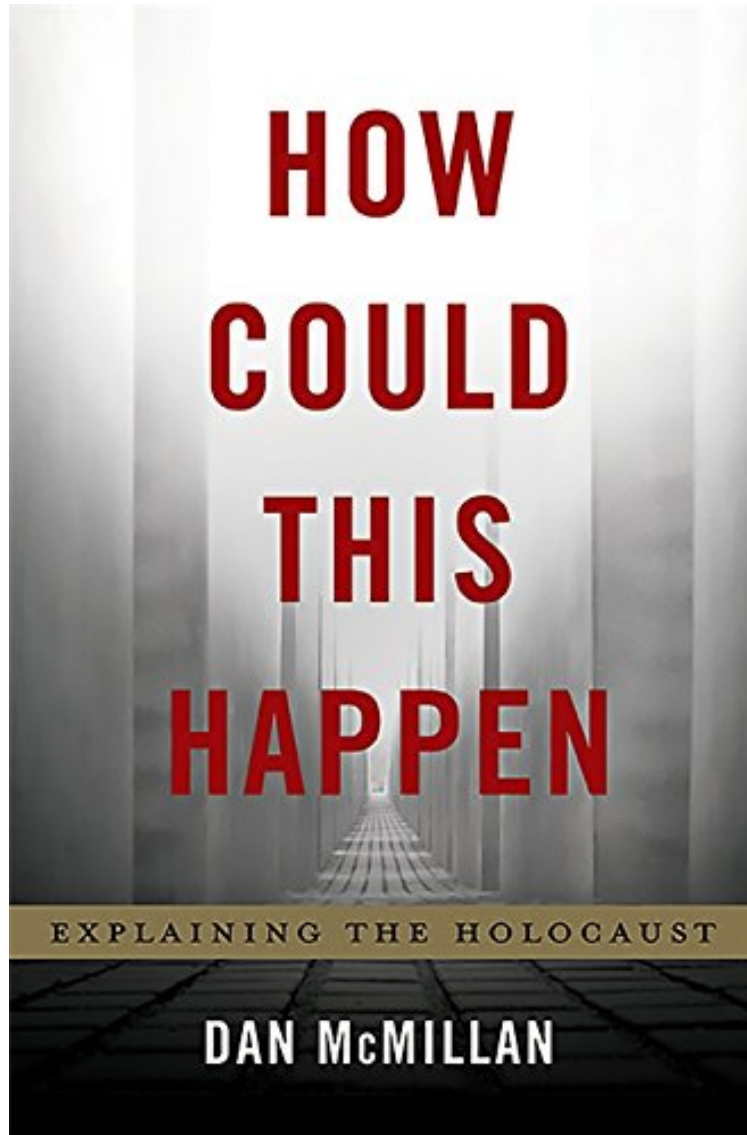


(Free download) How Could This Happen: Explaining the Holocaust

How Could This Happen: Explaining the Holocaust

Dan McMillan

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Dan McMillan : How Could This Happen: Explaining the Holocaust before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How Could This Happen: Explaining the Holocaust:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Profound Work of HistoryBy William John CoxAs I was arguing the Holocaust Case in Los Angeles in 1981, I said, "the question today among reputable historians is not whether or not the event occurred but rather, an analysis of why it occurred and what it means to us today." We prevailed when the judge took judicial notice of the fact that "Jews were gassed to death at Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Poland

during the summer of 1944. "Finally, now, after more than 30 years, historian and attorney Dan McMillan has produced a comprehensive answer to my question. Step by step, Dr. McMillan logically produces an understanding of the Holocaust which has never been previously achieved. The deniers will not be persuaded by this profound work, but fair-minded people of every language and culture will find an answer to the question, How Could This Happen. McMillan's findings are particularly pertinent during the current presidential primary elections, as right-wing candidates increasingly cast immigrants in the role of scapegoats for America's economic failures. With candidates seeking to outdo each other in demanding that all immigrants be tracked like FedEx packages or forced to pay for and build a wall of exclusion, we must learn and apply the lessons of history if we are to avoid becoming complacent and complicit in the crimes against humanity done in our name for our national and economic security. Understanding why "psychologically normal" Germans with "free will" could make such "horrible choices" requires us to "think twice before assuming that we would have done better had we stood in their shoes. . . . We are the Germans and they are we." 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A book that makes a valiant attempt to explain how and why the holocaust happened

By Herbert L Calhoun

This book begins by trying to disavow us of the notion that because the racist extermination of 6 million Jews occurred, we must not conclude that man is basically evil. Dan McMillan will not allow us to "throw our hands up in the air" at the complexities that led to one of the world's greatest moral disasters. Instead, he gives us a cogent, cleanly-written narrative that, even if it does not always convince us that he is right, does nevertheless give us the outlines of a testable theory that could explain both why and how the holocaust occurred. The shorter version of the author's theory is that it took an impossible combinations of dangerous ideas, ruined people, and unimaginable bad luck to make this catastrophe happen. In the longer version, he tries his best to pull all of these improbable pieces together into a powerful analytic narrative that at least solves the puzzle of the historical circumstances that gave rise to the Third Reich and the holocaust that followed in its wake. In this longer version, rather surprisingly, German history plays the dominant role, as the author shows us how the holocaust occurred above all else because Germany did not become a democracy before its own 1918 socialist inspired revolution. This revolution not only gave Germany's rightwing ruling elite the upper hand, but also the motive and the opportunity to fight a sustained battle against instituting democratic reforms and against their greatest fear of all: a Communist revolution similar to what had just occurred a year earlier in Russia. In this battle, fought as much against democratic reforms as against the fear of a Communist revolution, the rightwing ruling clique used racism and anti-Semitism as well as extreme nationalism as their primary weapons of choice. Jews were made the scapegoats for all of Germany's problems -- from the lost of WW-I, to fomenting the socialist led revolution of 1918, to keeping class antagonism alive; and most of all, to being over-represented in the professions and the culture of German society. This palpable and deeply rooted race-based hatred for Jews, even more so than its turbulent history and its fear of Communism, set the table for the arrival of the little Austrian Corporal, Adolph Hitler, the most extreme racist and anti-Semite of them all. Against all odds, this most unattractive and most ill-prepared of political characters gained the backing of rightwing cliques in the upper class and wrested power from an anarchic series of weak autocratic regimes pulled together by Otto von Bismarck. By 1934, Hitler had tricked his way into power as the sole holder of German power and legitimacy. Two important milestones in Hitler's intellectual preparation for leadership were the honing of his oratorical skills in the coffee houses of Munich and Berlin; and the adoption of his own manifesto, "Mein Kampf," written while he was in jail. Importantly, we discover here for the first time that "Mein Kampf," was parroted in toto from themes written by a member of the ultra rightwing Pan-German society, named Heinrich Class. Class called his book "If I were Emperor." In his manifesto of everything Germans held dear at the time, Class rhapsodized about German racial superiority; its need to unify around a charismatic leader and around a kind of tribal loyalty that would be more precious than loyalty to family. The Manifesto also called for a robust and muscular German nationalism and militarism that would wipe away the shame of the Versailles Treaty and would at the same time benefit Germany's new superior status on the world stage, allowing it to acquire colonies and expand its territories to provide the much needed additional living space. But above all else, Class' manifesto vilified Jews as being genetic and morally inferior traitors who were destructive to German unity, and thus at the very least, were unworthy of German citizenship, and at most should be banished from German lands. Hitler's version of Class' Manifesto went him one better by suggesting that Jews "be done away with completely." At the same time, reaching its high water mark in the decades leading up to WW-II, an intellectual movement was introduced to Hitler by America called "Scientific Racism." Grossly misreading Darwin's theory of Evolution, its culmination was the American Eugenics program, which, like Heinrich Class' Manifesto, was used by Hitler as a template for inventing a new sociobiological policy to go hand-in-hand with his ideology of nationalism and racism. It called for culling the world of inferior beings and designating them as "unworthy of life." In Hitler's mind the target for this new social policy was always to be used to rationalize a way of "doing away with" all Jews. Shadows of Hitler's fear of Communism as well as his program for "weeding out the unfit" because they represented a costly "dead weight" on society, can still be seen today as a not too well-hidden twice-removed subtext of all of America's Republican Party's domestic social programs. The Hitler adaptation of these ideas claimed that Jews were genetically inferior -- hard-wired, as it were, at birth to be destructive -- and thus morally and biologically "unfit" to be Germans as well as ultimately undeserving of life. Rather paradoxically, he made this claim

at the same time that most Germans hated Jews not because they were inferior, but because they were perceived genetically superior -- as in being too successful and over-represented in German media, and in German professional and cultural life. Hitler's contradiction of course will forever beg the question of how Jews could be both unfit and inferior at the same time that they were perceived to be the most successful professional ethnic group in Germany? Then, despite his utter lack of competence, came Hitler's stunning, almost magical string of successes that would serve to bound even the most skeptical Germans to him and his racist ideology. By bringing Germany out of the depression in only four years; reversing the humiliating Versailles Treaty; unifying all Germans around a charismatic leader and around the idea of "the Volk;" building up one of the world's most formidable military machines, and using it to overrun Europe in less than a year, Hitler earned the undying fealty of all but a dwindling fraction of the German population. Germans could now forget that they lost two million in WW-I. By the beginning of 1941, the only elements in the Hitler/Class agenda for attaining German biological superiority that had not yet been fulfilled was taking over Russia, to get more living space, and ridding German society of the "much-reviled Jew." With all of Germany's solidarity centered on completing this last perhaps most important of the Hitler/Class agenda items, Hitler allowed his plans for a "final Solution of the Jewish problem" to "leak" to the proper members of his staff. And they, as always, "working toward the leader," behind a wall of secrecy, "read Hitler's mind," and intuited what had to be done, and with minimal orders and instructions, they set about the business of getting the machinery for industrialized murder up and running, ready to roll towards genocide. Had the Russians not stopped Hitler in his tracks, the world today would be a very different place in which to live. QED.

Summary and Analysis

From this point onwards, the author structures his narrative in such a way that even though he later denies it, he nevertheless seemed to try subtly to pin the responsibility for the holocaust on the German people collectively -- rather than on the criminal Hitler government and his henchmen -- where the responsibility justifiably should have been laid. As one strain of the author's argument goes, "ordinary Germans had to know what was going on" and thus should have rebelled against Hitler's criminal regime and its murderous machinery of death. However, this argument is undercut by the reality of the fact that most Germans were in lockstep with Hitler's virulent anti-Semitism. Yet, the fact that they were passive-aggressively complicit, does not mean that their share of the responsibility was equal to that of the Nazi regime. Far from it in fact. In his unstated but implied thesis, the author strongly insinuates that the German people allowed their anti-Semitic emotions to get the better of them; and that this clouded their moral judgment so much so that it was easy for Hitler's soothing nationalistic oratory to seduce them. And then Hitler used this seduction to further lower their moral inhibitions and further confuse their moral compasses. But their moral compasses had already veered so far off course that they were reduced to willingly engaging in mass murder along side Hitler's henchmen, all with the Fuhrer's permission and moral protection. And while there is much to be said for this thesis, I believe it obscures subtleties that when raised to higher visibility in the analysis, could alone constitute an even more robust alternative explanation. The alternative explanation I speak of is that of connecting the dots between several not so obvious variables and then assessing their combined role in producing the holocaust. To wit: Hitler being a tool of Germany's rightwing ruling cliques of businessmen, professional, and the military officers corps -- all rightwing ideologues; his virulent racism and anti-Semitism that grew more and more rabid over time; and the fact that all of the murders were "state sanctioned," and were carried out behind a wall of state protected secrecy; one erected by a criminal/Fascist "national security state" specifically to engage in the business of genocide. The ideological manifesto that Hitler executed to perfection was a "carbon copy" of the Pan-German Heinrich Class' own racist manifesto. And thus, even though Hitler's regime was a legitimate government, the very fact that it had a formally acknowledged policy of genocide against Jews, rendered it little more than a criminal enterprise with outer trappings of a government. The mere existence of plans for genocide rendered the Third Reich, both legitimate and criminal. The author seemed more than just a bit reluctant to accept the fact that governments can be both criminal and legitimate. In fact, he seemed to have willfully ignored this distinction altogether. But the distinction is important not only to better expose the Nazis' criminal element and criminal intent, but for another reason: All orders to kill Jews were always "issued verbally" so as not to leave a paper trail, and always "behind a wall of secrecy," (usually at the "Top Secret" level) so the outside world would never know that mass murder was taking place. Moreover, like in any criminal organization, (and as Franz Stangl found out upon discovering that he could not simply resign from his job as sentry at a Euthanasia murder factory), the penalty for being suspected of exposing one's "guilty knowledge," was the same as in the Mafia for refusing to carry out an order of murder: the perpetrator is allowed to exit the wall of secrecy only in a pine box. The fact that there were instances where Germans were excused from this ultimate threat, does not mean that the Germans in question were any less intimidated by it. Nor, does excusing them from time to time, make the Nazi regime any less a criminal enterprise. It seemed to me that the author went to great pains to minimize both the criminality of the Hitler regime, and the rightwing ruling clique that handpicked and put him in office. As well, he minimized the severity of the implicit threat the criminal Nazi system held over the heads of anyone who refused an order or chose to reveal "state secrets" about the murders. Again, Gitta Sereny's Franz Stangl (in her book "Into the Darkness") seems to be the perfect case in point: While an Austrian police, Stangl hated and was rewarded for hunting down Nazis. Then, after Austria was annexed to Germany, Stangl, cleverly erased his past as a Nazi-Hunter, and became a Nazi. And as

mentioned above, he ended up a Security Guard at a Euthanasia facility. Once he learned what went on inside that facility, he balked at being associated with it in any way. But by then it was already too late. When he sought to resign or get reassigned, he was presented with an unexpected life-threatening fait accompli. He was told in the cold-bloodiest of terms that he was already beyond the point of no return, deep inside the Nazi inner sanctum, and could leave only via a pine box. So what did Stangl do? He kept his head down like all "good Nazis" did, and became the best Nazi he could be, eventually ending up as the commandant of two of Germany's most notorious death camps, Treblinka and Sobibor. Not to belabor the point, but I believe that a criminal racist rightwing regime that is allowed to erect a screen of secrecy, behind which it can then carry out mass murder without impunity, is by definition a criminal regime -- even if it might also be taking place within the boundaries of a legitimate state. I believe this arrangement of factors is arguably a much more potent set of causative factors than those insinuated by the author. For, these are factors that are more the rule than the exception in modern genocide. And while it cannot be denied that having a nation of "willing executioners" makes genocide infinitely easier, the trigger to the genocidal gun, is a criminal government operating with impunity behind a shield of state secrecy anxious to pull it. Five Stars

15 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Explaining the unexplainable horror of the Nazi Holocaust against world Jewry is grim but necessary reading in an age of terror

By C. M Mills

You should buy this book! I first saw Dr. Dan McMillan speak on the Holocaust in a lecture on C-Span. This scholar sent me to the computer to order his book. While whole libraries of books have written documenting the Holocaust this fine effort by McMillan actually seeks to explain why the horror of Hitler's insane and evil plan to destroy every Jew in Europe developed. A Summary of McMillan's conclusions regarding the holocaust":

1. The author defines the Holocaust as: "...the determined attempt by the German government during World War II, aided by collaborators in most European countries, to murder every single person of Jewish ancestry on the European continent-some 11 million human beings by the German's own calculations." (page 1). Six million were eventually slaughtered in six major extermination camps as well as countless concentration camps where prisoners were starved, shot, beaten, gassed, experimented on and beaten to death in horrific ways that are repugnant to the soul of any thinking and compassionate human being.
2. Why Germany? McMillan points to a number of vital factors among which are:
 - a. Germany's loss of two million soldiers in World War I followed by total defeat against the Allied Powers.
 - b. Germany's out of sight inflation and poverty following the imposition of war reparations.
 - c. The failure of the Weimar Republic to stabilize dissident and rebellious elements in the fractured society.
 - d. Germany failed to become a democracy until 1918. German aristocrats looked to strong and dictatorial leaders such as Iron Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck to rule Germany.
 - e. Germany had only been a united nation since 1870. McMillan shows how Pan-Germanic right wing nationalistic groups arouse in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany. These groups were virulent Anti-Semites blaming the World War I loss to a stab in the back by Jewish industrialists and members of the socialist movement. A hatred of Communists and Slavic peoples grew as did hatred of the Jew as the symbol of German defeat and degradation.
 - f. Racism through the eugenics movement explained that some races were smarter and stronger than others. The Jews were placed at the bottom of the barrel along with Slavic peoples. Scientific Darwinism in which racial struggle was seen as nature's battle in the survival of the fittest became the governing noxious philosophy.
 - g. Hitler arose as an evil failure who blamed the Jews for the World War I defeat. Hitler wanted to destroy Jewry and seize lands in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for German expansion eastward.. He reduced Jews to vermin who were less than human. McMillan's graphic descriptions of the actual process of extermination in the camps and how ordinary men became brutalized by the evil regime into becoming mass killers is frightening.
 - h. McMillan importantly explains that Germans are human beings who react just like the rest of us. What would we have done in Nazi Germany as persons who had been indoctrinated by a cruel dictatorship? McMillan raises disturbing but necessary questions. How Could this Happen is an important addition to our understanding of the German Holocaust.

The Holocaust has long seemed incomprehensible, a monumental crime that beggars our powers of description and explanation. Historians have probed the many sources of this tragedy, but no account has united the various causes into an overarching synthesis that answers the vital question: How was such a nightmare possible in the heart of western civilization? In *How Could This Happen*, historian Dan McMillan distills the vast body of Holocaust research into a cogent explanation and comprehensive analysis of the genocide's many causes, revealing how a once-progressive society like Germany could have carried out this crime. The Holocaust, he explains, was caused not by one but by a combination of factors from Germany's failure to become a democracy until 1918, to the widespread acceptance of anti-Semitism and scientific racism, to the effects of World War I, which intensified political divisions within the country and drastically lowered the value of human life in the minds of an entire generation. Masterfully synthesizing the myriad causes that led Germany to disaster, McMillan shows why thousands of Germans carried out the genocide while millions watched, with cold indifference, as it enveloped their homeland. Persuasive and compelling, *How Could This Happen* explains how a perfect storm of bleak circumstances, malevolent ideas, and damaged personalities unleashed history's most terrifying atrocity.

