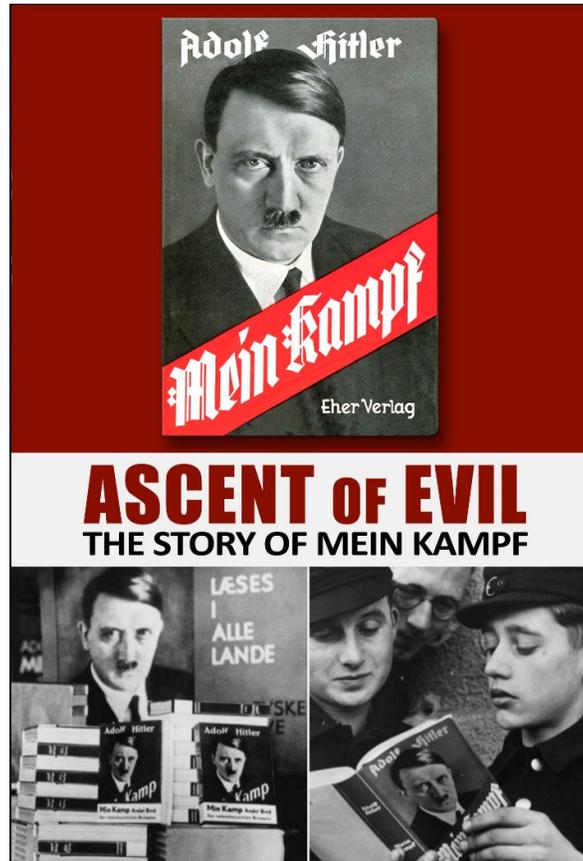


ASCENT OF EVIL

THE STORY OF MEIN KAMPF



A FILM BY

FREDERIC MONTEIL

52 mins / Color / 2016 / French & English Version / France



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SYNOPSIS

ASCENT OF EVIL: THE STORY OF MEIN KAMPF is an autobiographical manifesto written by Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler while imprisoned following his 1923 failed coup attempt in Munich. In Mein Kampf, Hitler outlined his political ideology and goals for Germany. Today, Mein Kampf is still available in libraries, on the Internet, at universities and even at bookstores worldwide.

Yet much of the history of this 720-page, two-volume screed is now forgotten. Using historical footage, photographs and interviews with scholars, Ascent of Evil plunges deep into the infamous blueprint for evil's dark secrets and reveals how this book came to be written and its impact on world.



DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

As with every French and European person, I have a direct link to this war.

My grandmother, from my mother's side, was a young German woman living in Sarrebruck, Germany in 1939. She was not a member of the Nazi Party when she first married at the young age of 17. As with millions of German men, her husband had no choice when he was forced to go and fight in the war. He was killed in the Eastern Front in Russian.

Later in the war, a neighbor returned from the front for a visit in 1944. During his furlough, the town was attacked by the Allies. My mother and the soldier managed to take refuge in a movie theater. He told my grandmother that he had always loved her and then kissed her. He promised to come back and to build her a beautiful house with blue shutters and a bathroom. His last letter came from Poland. He never came back.

Until the end of her life, my grandmother never had a house with blue shutters or even a bathroom (she used to wash herself in the kitchen) but because of their liaison, my grandmother gave birth to my mother.

My grandmother told me little about my Jewish origins. Because of the Nazi laws, she said a side of her family had changed their name to avoid persecution. My aunt said that members of our family were Holocaust victims. My father warned me, "Never talk about your Jewish origins or in the event of a war, you'll be the first to die." There was a mystery about my family origins. My family told me to "just forget this story." After my daughter was born, I drew our family tree. I saw that a branch of the family was missing. Two years ago, my mother finally solved the mystery. My great-grandmother's name was Levy. That side of the family is no longer a rumor.

I have always been sensitive and concerned about this part of my history. Since I was a young boy, I was curious and wanted to learn about it. At school, I was good in history, so I decided to pursue a master's degree in history before I become a TV journalist.

Needless to say, I was very enthusiastic when my producer, Nicolas Valode, asked me to make a documentary about Mein Kampf. He was convinced, and he was right, that much about the book is unknown. My goal was to make the most objective work possible – as if a historian had made the film. I tried to forget my preconceived feelings and thoughts about the book (i.e. that Mein Kampf is evil and a total lie) and instead focused on basic simple questions including when and how was Mein Kampf written? Was it successful? How did Hitler use the book after 1933 for his propaganda campaign?

I reviewed the work of some of the best scholars and historians of the book, including Dr. Othmar Plöckinger, an Austrian professor who—with three other historians—published a meticulous examination of the production, distribution and reception of Mein Kampf in 2011. I ultimately came to believe that this horrible book can be used as a historical document to help us understand Hitler and Nazism. Mein Kampf is a piece of his life, a part of the Nazi system.

I discovered a lot of details, some that I had forgotten since my studies and others that I had never known. I feel that this documentary is important because it shows how the book played a significant role in Nazi propaganda.

Mein Kampf and Hitler are inseparable. This documentary is also about Hitler and the ways in which he acquired power. I am astonished by the fact that when he was the head of the Reich in 1933, he was able to lie so much. Hitler wrote, "If I had known in 1924 that one day I would have been chancellor, I should have never written Mein Kampf." During his rise to power, Hitler didn't to openly display his hatred of the Jews, his racism and his desire for war.

Prior to 1939, he portrayed himself as a "man of peace." It's one of history's biggest lies, and his campaign worked until the start of the war.

A huge debate arose last year about whether or not Mein Kampf should be published. Since January 1, 2016, German publishers can now publish the book as long as scholarly analysis is included with the text. Every country has laws about publishing the book. Some nations still prohibit its publication. Unfortunately, Hitler's personality and racist ideas are still attractive to many people.

Frederic Monteil



DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Frédéric Monteil began as a television journalist for the France 3 Channel and for France 2 Channel, where he specialized in reports on the environment.

Attracted to long-form content, Frédéric began working on investigative documentaries about the environment, the economy and social issues for Capital, a well-known French TV show. While at Capital, Frédéric covered subjects as diverse as the mortician industry, a tontine investment scheme, and the development of oil schist in the United States.

Frédéric later became editor-in-chief for Let Pix, where he supervised a series of investigative documentaries for the show Pieces of Evidence and the NBC Universal television series Criminals 2.0.

Frédéric is a history enthusiast with a master's degree in history from the University of Nantes. He is also the author of a book covering the history of cinema in Nantes, France.



PRODUCTION CREDITS

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Start Images

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Archives:
Atelier des archives

Bundesarchiv
Framepool
NARA
Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Photos:
Akg images
Bildarchiv
BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image BPK
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