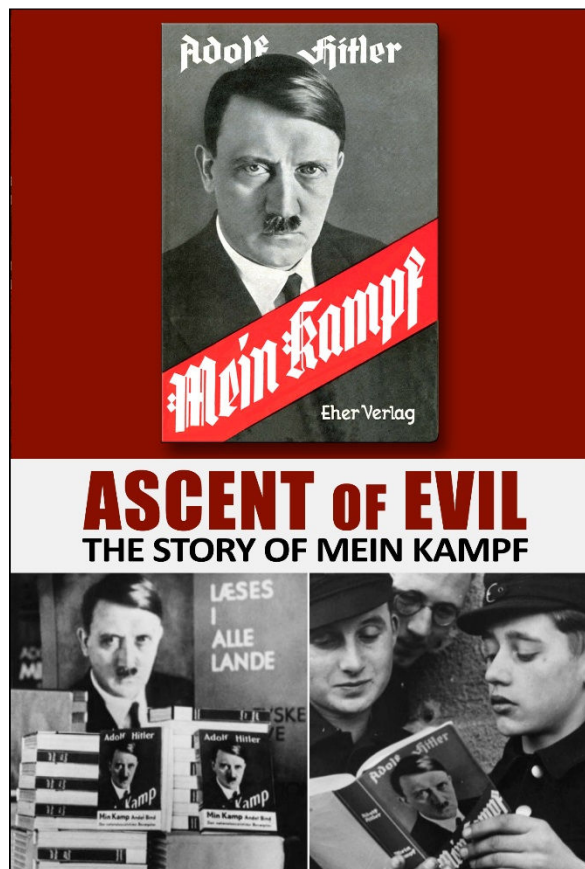




ASCENT OF EVIL THE STORY OF MEIN KAMPF



STUDY GUIDE

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ASCENT OF EVIL: THE STORY OF MEIN KAMPF – STUDY GUIDE

Ascent of Evil: The Story of *Mein Kampf* is the story of the 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.

Hitler's Early Life

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria in 1889 to Klara and Alois Hitler. His father died in 1903, and his mother in 1907. After his mother's death Hitler moved to Vienna, hoping to pursue a career as a painter, but he twice failed the entrance exam to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. He spent the next six years struggling to make a living through watercolor painting and other odd jobs, sometimes homeless or living in hostels. In 1913, Hitler moved to Munich, Germany, in order to avoid being drafted into the Austrian army. However, when World War I began in 1914, he enlisted in the Germany army, where he served throughout the war, receiving a number of awards for bravery. He was also wounded twice. It was after his second injury, while he was recuperating in a military hospital in 1918, that he learned that Germany had been forced to surrender, and that the war had ended. Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that he felt angry about Germany's defeat.

Impact of World War I on Germany

The loss of World War I resulted in some dramatic changes to the country of Germany. It went from being a monarchy, ruled by a king, to a democratic republic known as the Weimar Republic, with a president and a parliamentary democracy. In 1919 this new government ratified the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended the hostilities of the war. Under the treaty, Germany lost its overseas colonies and was forced to cede territories to Belgium, Poland, and France. The treaty also required the demilitarization of the Rhineland, an area of land along Germany's border with France. In addition, Germany was forbidden from maintaining an air force, and subject to strict limits on the rest of its military power. Finally, the country was forced to sign the "War Guilt Clause," through which it accepted responsibility for instigating World War I, and agreed to pay huge reparations for the damages caused by its actions. Most Germans, including Hitler, felt humiliated and angry at the conditions of the treaty. The treaty also imposed a substantial economic burden on the country.

Hitler Enters Politics

After World War I, the German army turned its focus towards fighting communism, which it considered to be one of its biggest threats. To fight that threat, it recruited former soldiers, including Hitler, to help keep other soldiers away from communism. Since Hitler had no official work at that time, he took the job. In addition to being a source of food and money, it allowed him to utilize his strong propaganda skills. In his position with the German army, he was sent to investigate the German Worker's Party, a small political group that had a number of views similar to his own, including opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, anti-Semitic beliefs, and a strong feeling of German pride. Hitler was attracted to the party and joined in 1919. With his charismatic public speaking ability, he quickly became one of its leaders, also attracting many new members. In 1920, the party changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). It was also known as the Nazi Party. Hitler became chairman in 1921, and under his leadership, the party continued to grow.

In 1923, Hitler and his followers attempted to overthrow the state of Bavaria in southern Germany in a rebellion known as the Beer Hall Putsch. They hoped that this coup would ultimately start a revolution against the national government in Berlin. Together with Erich Ludendorff, a general from World War I, Hitler forced his way into a Munich beer hall and proclaimed a revolution. He then led approximately 3,000 Nazis through the streets towards the center of Munich. However, Hitler and his followers were met with police fire and after more than a dozen Nazis were killed, and Hitler himself was injured, they were forced to abandon their attempt at insurrection. Hitler was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for treason, and the Nazi Party was banned by Bavaria's government.

Hitler served his prison sentence in Landsberg prison in Bavaria. While he had been sentenced to five years, he served less than a year. Many judges and members of the general public in Bavaria liked Hitler's opinions—especially his critiques of the Treaty of Versailles—and as a result of so much public approval, his time in prison was spent in comfort. It was during his time in Landsberg that Hitler wrote much of *Mein Kampf*.

Hitler's Rise to Power

The publicity from the attempted coup and the subsequent trial caused Hitler to become well known throughout Germany. After he was released from jail, he quickly began to rebuild the Nazi Party (the ban on the party was removed in 1925). In addition to the publicity he had gained through the Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler was helped by the fact that many people in Germany were looking for political change, and he promised that change. By 1930, a worldwide economic depression had led to widespread unemployment and economic depression in Germany, and as the situation worsened, many people were critical of the Weimar government. Hitler promised that under his leadership, the Nazi Party would pull Germany out of depression and make it great again. His compelling speeches, combined with widespread public discontent over the existing situation helped the party gain increasing numbers of supporters. In 1932, the Nazi Party won 37.3 percent of the popular vote, becoming the largest political party in Germany. The following

year, Hitler was appointed German chancellor. He moved quickly to eliminate all rivals, and by 1934 he was in complete control, as dictator of Germany.

World War II

Under Hitler's leadership, Germany rapidly pushed Europe towards World War II. Ignoring the Treaty of Versailles, he built up the country's armed forces, and remilitarized the Rhineland. He then began to expand Germany's territory by invading other nations. In 1938, Germany annexed Austria, then in 1939 it invaded Czechoslovakia, followed by Poland. Great Britain and France finally declared war on Germany, on September 3, 1939. The United States, the Soviet Union, China, and other nations later entered the war. Known as the Allied Powers, they fought against Germany and its allies—primarily Italy and Japan—which were known as the Axis powers. For almost six years Germany struggled to dominate Europe, fighting in France, Italy, the Soviet Union, the Balkans, and North Africa. It wasn't until 1945 that Germany was defeated, along with the other Axis Powers. After realizing that he was defeated, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin, on April 30, 1945.

In addition to fighting a war to dominate Europe, Hitler led an attempt to exterminate the Jewish people, whom he viewed as racially inferior. He insisted that the German people—or the Aryan race—were racially superior, and that the Jews threatened that racial purity. He accused them of being responsibly for many of Germany's problems including the loss of World War I, and charged that they were trying to gain control of all banks and rule the world for their own benefit. Other groups of people were also viewed as threats to Germany's purity, including gypsies, homosexuals, and the physically and mentally handicapped. All of these groups were persecuted and excluded from German society, particularly the Jews. For example, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws prohibited Jews from marrying Germans, and took away their German citizenship. Jews were also confined to ghettos and forced-labor camps. However, Hitler and the Nazi party believed that the real solution—a policy which they referred to as the "final solution"—was to exterminate the Jews and other undesirables completely. In order to do so, they established numerous concentration camps, equipped with gassing facilities that could kill hundreds of people at a time, and crematoriums to dispose of the bodies. Over the course of the war, the Nazis systematically rounded up the Jewish population of Germany and its occupied territories, and sent them to these camps, where the majority were killed. It is estimated that more than 6 million Jews died in this extermination effort, also called the Holocaust. Overall, World War II is believed to have been the most destructive war in human history, and experts estimate that it resulted in the deaths of between 30 and 60 million people around the world.

The Future of *Mein Kampf*

When Nazi Germany was defeated in 1945, the Allies decided that the copyright for *Mein Kampf* would be given to the state of Bavaria. As dictated by German law, that copyright lasted for 70 years. In addition to being given the copyright, the Bavarian government was ordered by the Allies to remove every Nazi symbol from Germany, to prevent the re-birth of another evil regime. *Mein Kampf* was one of these symbols, and so during its 70-year copyright, the Bavarian government banned reprinting of the book. However, in December 2015, the copyright on *Mein*

Kampf expired, and book entered the public domain in 2016. This means that no permission is needed to reprint it. Laws about publishing the book vary by country, but in Germany it remains against the law to publish the original text without including accompanying critical comments. Published without these comments, the book is considered to be a racist publication that might incite hate. In January of 2016, the Munich-based Institute of Contemporary History published the first reprint of the book since World War II. Their annotated version became a best-seller in Germany.



Glossary

- **Allies, Allied Powers:** During World War II, the Allied Powers were those countries that fought in opposition to Germany, Italy, and Japan, also known as the Axis Powers. The major Allied Powers were: France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, and China.
- **Max Amann (1891-1957):** Served with Hitler during the First World War, then worked in the Nazi Party. Amann was the publisher of *Mein Kampf*. For his involvement in World War II, he was later sentenced to ten years in a labor camp, and stripped of his wealth and pension rights.
- **Axis Powers:** This group of countries fought against the Allied Powers during World War II. The major Axis powers were: Germany, Italy, and Japan.
- **Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945):** Served as minister of propaganda for the Nazi regime, where he was responsible for presenting a favorable image of the regime to the German people. Following Hitler's suicide at the end of the war, Goebbels and his wife poisoned their six children, then took their own lives.
- **Anti-Semitic:** Prejudice or hatred of Jewish people simply because they are Jewish. Anti-Semitism can take the form of verbal attacks or physical harm.
- **Aryan:** Hitler believed that a person's abilities and behavior are determined by their race, and that the German people belong to a superior race called the Aryan race, which is destined to rule Europe. According to Hitler, the ideal Aryan is tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes.
- **Beer Hall Putsch:** Also known as the Munich Putsch, this was an unsuccessful attempt in 1923 by Hitler's Nazi Party and World War I military leader General Erich Ludendorff to overthrow the Bavarian government in the town of Munich, and start a revolution in Germany. Following the failed coup, Hitler was sentenced to 5 years in prison for treason.
- **Berghoff:** Hitler's most famous residence, located in the Bavarian Alps. Hitler spent a lot of time there, and the Berghoff became an important center of government for the Nazi Party.
- **Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937):** A German military leader from World War I, who helped Hitler stage the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.
- **German Workers' Party (German: Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, DAP):** The precursor of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), also called the Nazi Party. The DAP was founded in 1919 and renamed as the NSDAP in 1920.
- **Rudolf Hess (1894-1987):** Joined the Nazi Party in 1920 and became deputy party leader in 1933. After World War II he was tried at Nuremberg for war crimes, and he was convicted and given a life sentence.

- **Holocaust:** The systematic persecution and mass murder of approximately 6 million Jews by Hitler's Nazi Germany during World War II. Hitler believed that the Jews were racially inferior and threatened German society. The Nazis also killed thousands of other people whom they believed to be inferior, including homosexuals, Slavic peoples, and the mentally and physically disabled.
- **Monarchy:** A political system where a single ruler is head of state, and gains that position through heredity. Germany was a monarchy from 1871 until 1918, when the system was replaced by a parliamentary democracy.
- **Munich Agreement:** A 1938 settlement between Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and France that allows Germany to annex part of western Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland, which contains millions of German-speaking people.
- **Benito Mussolini (1883-1945):** Created the Fascist Party in Italy in 1919, and eventually made himself dictator of Italy. Mussolini allied Italy with Germany during World War II. He was expelled from power in 1943 and executed in 1945.
- **National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP):** Also called the Nazi Party, this political party began as the German Workers' Party in 1919. It was renamed as the National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1920. Under Hitler's leadership, it came to power in Germany in 1933, and governed until 1945.
- **Nuremberg Trials:** A series of 13 trials in Nuremberg, Germany, that were carried out between 1945 and 1949, in order to bring Nazi war criminals to justice. Overall, more than a hundred defendants were tried at Nuremberg; some were sentenced to death, and others to imprisonment.
- **Parliamentary democracy:** A type of government where voters elect representatives to a parliament, then a prime minister or chancellor is chosen by the political party (or a coalition of parties) that has the greatest representation in the parliament.
- **Propaganda:** The deliberate manipulation of public opinion using persuasive facts, arguments, and symbols. Propaganda often involves exaggeration, misrepresentation, or even lies. It can be a powerful tool to gain public support for a cause and is often used in wartime.
- **Treaty of Versailles:** Signed by Germany and the Allied Powers in 1919, this peace treaty officially ended World War I. In signing the treaty, Germany accepted responsibility for causing the war, and agreed to pay reparations. It also gave up some of its territory and was subject to limits on its future military power.

Timeline

- **1889:** Adolf Hitler is born in the town of Braunau Am Inn, in Austria.
- **1903:** Hitler's father dies.
- **1907:** Hitler's mother dies of cancer. He fails the entrance exams to Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts.
- **1913:** Hitler moves to Munich, Germany.
- **1914:** World War I begins, and Hitler volunteers to serve in the Bavarian army.
- **1916:** After being wounded in the leg, Hitler spends 2 months in a military hospital near Berlin. After recovering, he returns to the front.
- **1918:** Hitler is awarded the Iron Cross for bravery. Later, he is temporarily blinded by a mustard gas attack, and is recovering in a military hospital when he learns that World War I has ended.
- **1919:** While working as a spy for the German army, Hitler is assigned to investigate the German Workers' Party. He decides to join the party. The German government signs the Treaty of Versailles, accepting responsibility for World War I, and promising to pay reparations.
- **1920:** The German Workers' Party changes its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party.
- **1921:** Hitler became chairman of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The party becomes much larger under his leadership.
- **1923:** Under the control of Hitler, the National Socialist German Workers Party carries out the Beer Hall Putsch, a failed attempt to overthrow the German government.
- **1924:** After being convicted for treason, Hitler spends less than a year in Landsberg Prison in Bavaria, where he writes autobiographical manifesto, *Mein Kampf*.
- **1925:** The first volume of *Mein Kampf* is published.
- **1927:** Volume 2 of *Mein Kampf* is published.
- **1929:** The U.S. stock market crashes, starting a worldwide economic depression.

- **1932:** Under Hitler's leadership, the Nazi Party wins 37.3 percent of the popular vote, becoming the largest political party in Germany.
- **1933:** Hitler is appointed as German chancellor.
- **1934:** After German president Paul von Hindenburg dies, Hitler assumes complete control of Germany.
- **1935:** The Nazi Party introduces the Nuremberg Laws which prohibit Jews from marrying Germans, and takes away their German citizenship.
- **1939:** Nazi Germany invades Poland and World War II begins.
- **1940:** The Auschwitz concentration camp is established.
- **1941:** Germany declares war against its ally, Russia, and against the United States. Much of Europe and North American is occupied by Germany. The Chelmno concentration camp opens. It is the first camp to use gassing to kill Jews on a large scale.
- **1942:** The mass extermination of Jews in gas chambers takes place in concentration camps throughout Germany.
- **1943:** The German army suffers one of its first major defeats when it is beaten by Soviet forces in Stalingrad. Italy is defeated by the Allied Powers and Mussolini is forced from power.
- **1944:** Allied forces launch a huge invasion of Europe, landing on the coast of France, and going on to advance across Europe. The invasion helps turn the tide of the war against Germany. Soviet troops advance into Europe from the east.
- **1945:** As Soviet forces approach his bunker in Berlin, and Hitler realizes that Germany is defeated, he and his wife Eva Braun commit suicide. Germany surrenders to Soviet forces.
- **2016:** After the German state of Bavaria's 70-year copyright and printing ban on *Mein Kampf* expires, a new edition is published and becomes a best-seller in Germany.

Online Resources

- BBC History: World War Two. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/sections/world-war-two>
- Biography: Adolf Hitler. <http://www.biography.com/people/adolf-hitler-9340144>
- EyeWitness to History. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/index.html>
- Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team. <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/toc.html>
- Jewish Virtual Library. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://www.ushmm.org/>

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- Range, Peter Ross. 2016. *1924: The Year that Made Hitler*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Rosenbaum, Ron. 2014. *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Ullrich, Volker, Trans. Jefferson Chase. 2016. *Hitler. Volume 1, Ascent 1889-1939*. London: The Bodley Head.

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