



Adolf Hitler

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Pulitzer Prize-winning historian John Toland's classic, definitive biography of Adolf Hitler remains the most thorough, readable, accessible, and, as much as possible, objective account of the life of a man whose evil effect on the world in the twentieth century will always be felt.

Toland's research provided one of the final opportunities for a historian to conduct personal interviews with over two hundred individuals intimately associated with Hitler. At a certain distance yet still with access to many of the people who enabled and who opposed the führer and his Third Reich, Toland strove to treat this life as if Hitler lived and died a hundred years before instead of within his own memory. From childhood and obscurity to his desperate end, Adolf Hitler emerges as, in Toland's words, "far more complex and contradictory . . . obsessed by his dream of cleansing Europe Jews . . . a hybrid of Prometheus and Lucifer."

Adolf Hitler Details

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From Reader Review Adolf Hitler for online ebook

Dpwarzyn says

Dismissed by some historians, Toland produces here the most objective biography of Hitler imaginable. Rooted on the solid ground of interviews with former Nazis living in hiding and inaccessible to other historians, makes a case for sour grapes.

Further, most people are very comfortable condemning Hitler as the devil, or some such reincarnation. However, if you want to meet the man, experience what he experienced, see him as he saw himself, then this is the book for you.

Toland employs a device where he allows his subjects to edit his writing based on their interviews--also unorthodox. What results is a purity that just rings true. There are some show stopping revelations in this book, but it is not for the feint of heart.

Lewis Weinstein says

This is one of the very best accounts of the Nazi period. I have now read the sections covering 1932-33 which tell the story of Hitler's rise to the Chancellorship, including who helped him and why.

Michael says

Although it's not perfect, I've rated this book five stars because it has served so long as my "go-to" reference on Hitler. Toland avoids a lot of the mistakes of popular treatments of Hitler's life by being very careful about his sources, and making use of (and cross-referencing) interviews with surviving witnesses on a large scale. Particularly in terms of reconstructing Hitler's early life, he presents a far more convincing narrative than Alan Bullock had, although of course the uncertainty of sources from this period always leaves questions open. At times, he does take Mein Kampf at its word, when of course much of that autobiography was written for propaganda purposes, but at least he avoids doing so when there are sources that contradict Hitler's story.

Although it is quite long (over 1000 pages), the book is written in an engaging style with many vignettes and anecdotes that make it more accessible as a narrative. Certain stories, such as the tragic tale of the little dog "Fuchsl" who was Hitler's pet in the trenches of World War I, have stayed with me over the years and colored my understanding of history. It includes many still photographs that give insight into the people and events in different stages of Hitler's life, and of course tells the story of World War II and the Holocaust, both of which are points of major interest to non-professional historians. The details of the mass exterminations were (and are) still under constant scrutiny and so precise information will need to come from other sources, but Toland does exceed Bullock in this and other areas, simply by virtue of making better use of the sources available at the time and ignoring more questionable sources.

With a bit more distance from the events, a better biography was probably inevitable. It was now possible to be a bit more objective, with the war firmly in the past and the din of war propaganda (from both sides) out of the researcher's ears, but this book also has the benefit of being written while many participants, victims, and witnesses were still living, and Toland made excellent use of his opportunities. It is not a comprehensive

history of the Third Reich, much less fascism, and its brief section on international imitators of Hitler is most unsatisfying, but that is not the purpose of the book. It remains a very good treatment of its subject, although of course the serious researcher will want to become familiar with the newest interpretations of the evidence and not rely overly on a book nearly forty years old.

Erik Graff says

My first substantial adult reading experience at age ten was Shirer's *Rise & Fall of the Third Reich*. Dad had served in both theatres--indeed, almost everyone's father had served in WWII or Korea in our government-assisted community in Lake County, Illinois. The War, wars in general, were very much on my mind, on our minds, during childhoods endured through the centennial years of our own civil war.

The Cold War was of primary concern. Like everyone else, I feared the Russians and Chinese. Then, as I learned more, I feared the Koreans, the Czechs, the E. Germans, the Rumanians, the Poles, the Albanians, the Estonians, the Latvians, the Lithuanians, the Cubans, the Yugoslavs, the Bulgarians, the Mongolians, the Hungarians and the Vietnamese--especially the nefarious Viet Cong and their subversive ilk throughout the poorer countries of the world. That's what school taught, what the papers reported, what tv showed. Stalin, Mao and Hitler, Nazism and Communism, were virtually as one to my mind--all dictators, all war-mongers. I fully expected I'd have to fight like Dad had--and I was frightened at the prospect. I suffered this terrible ambivalence of fascinated fear throughout primary school.

One of my first research projects in high school was a paper on the war in Vietnam. I read several books, mostly accounts by US soldiers who had served there. All were very much pro-war, anti-insurgency. Then, one night at the grandparents, I got into a discussion about the topic with Dad and his mother's husband, Christian Stousland. They were very much opposed to the war. A know-it-all, I argued manfully with them for hours, learning in the process that there was quite a lot I didn't know. That night I went home and read and thought. I remembered the *Life Magazine* account of the recent US invasion of the Dominican Republic. There there had seemed to be some ambiguity, some suggestion that maybe we'd supported military dictators against the people. Could this be so? The more I looked into such matters, the more I doubted previous certainties.

High School history classes and membership in the school's Social Science Club did the rest of the job. By junior year I was torn between Trotsky and Gandhi, Communism and pacifism, and believed virtually nothing reported in the mainstream press or by the president about American foreign policy intentions.

Hitler's Germany returned to mind in this context. Could there be some similarity to the Germans' democratic acquiescence to Hitler's policies and our own democratic endorsements of foreign aggression? I began, again, fitfully, to study the history of WWII and the politics behind it.

A subtheme of this study has been to understand the minds of people like Hitler or Theodore Roosevelt who had come to power as advocates of aggressive violence. Toland's biography of Hitler was a good start as regards the former since it is a thorough, but popular, survey of the man's thought and actions.

Kate says

At 1,035 pages, they weren't screwing around when they decided to call this book "the definitive biography." I can pretty much tell you what Hitler ate for breakfast everyday between 1933 and 1945 (for instance, on April 30th, 1945 he ate a bullet).

A few months back, I picked up a biography of Diana Mitford, wife of Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, and close friend of Adolf Hitler. In its entirety, the book was relatively dull, but I was captivated by Mitford's characterization of Hitler as a brilliant thinker, an enthusiastic leader, and (perhaps most unsettling of all) a compassionate and generous friend.

It occurred to me that I had never considered Hitler from any other perspective than the one offered in grammar school textbooks. It was startling to think of him as a living, breathing human being - one who takes tea and see films with friends. I decided then to read the longest and most comprehensive biography of him that I could get my hands on. Enter John Toland and this behemoth of a book. I wanted to comb through Hitler's experiences and find out what made him into such a horror of a human being. And also, I wanted to know how he managed to persuade an entire nation to turn a blind eye (or worse) to one of the most horrific atrocities perpetrated in recent history.

This book is amazing. There is literally not a single dull page among all 1,035. Though I was unable to identify anything particularly extraordinary in Hitler's early life that would explain his monstrous behavior later on, I came away with a better understanding of the many forces that combined to contribute to this train wreck of a period in German history.

Sofia says

Leer sobre un Adolf Hitler desde la perspectiva de un ser humano, que fue niño, adolescente y adulto soñador como lo son muchos, con ideales, planes, maravillado por el mundo artístico y su paso por alcanzar estas ilusiones. Hitler que de adolescente dejó todo por avocarse a la arquitectura y a la pintura, que pasó por ser un indigente en las calles de Austria y donde un judío era su amigo y vendedor de postales. Un joven devastado por la muerte de su madre, arruinado además en su carrera artística, y preso por un ideal que lo llevó a dejar una huella imborrable dentro de la historia.

John nos relata la historia de un Adolf Hitler sin tomar la posición de un juez acusador, sino que demuestra con pruebas, hechos, historias, investigaciones, relatos sobre cómo vivió uno de los revolucionarios más importantes del siglo XX. Desde las primeras reuniones en cervecerías, los planes conspirativos, los actos de traición. La camaradería y familiaridad de Hitler hacía su círculo más íntimo.

Es un libro que muestra los mitos sobre la vida y muerte de Adolf Hitler y da detalles para que uno mismo se de una conclusión. Uno de ellos sobre su homosexualidad, y es claro que Hitler le dijo a varias personas que de tener familia su lucha no sería la misma; o los mitos de que el Führer alemán se encontraba en Argentina o Brasil, cuando su salud se hallaba en pésimas condiciones. Mitos que se dieron a conocer gracias a un EEUU y un URSS ávidos de victoria cuando también ellos cometieron bastantes delitos, experimentos humanos, asesinatos y destrucción de ciudades.

Da un paseo por los campos de concentración y los campos de exterminio, donde más de 6 millones de judíos, testigos de jehová, homosexuales, camisas rojas y otros padecieron la temible Solución final, llevada a cabo por el antisemitismo de Hitler y la ayuda de unos pocos, porque es bien sabido que el pueblo alemán y la mayoría de manos derecha de Adolf no sabían lo que ocurría.

Me gustó tanto este libro que parece mentira que todas esas acciones ocurrieron, es increíble como un ser que usa su cerebro para lograr sus metas es tan bien recibido, acompañado hasta sus últimos suspiros y que sin

lugar a dudas trascendió en la historia mundial.

Mmkay says

Ponad 1000 stron opisu życia i śmierci Hitlera. Zaskakująco dużo informacji o jego młodości. Książka opisuje nie tylko samego Hitlera, ale i jego otoczenie. Szczególnie dobrze widać to podczas opisu drugiej wojny światowej, gdzie momentami główna postać książki odchodzi a wręcz na drugi plan. Z polskiej perspektywy, brakowało mi więcej informacji o reakcjach Hitlera na powstania w Polsce. Ogólnie, niesamowity musia być wkład pracy w stworzenie takiego kompendium. Nie jest też napisane w suchy, naukowy sposób, tekst czyta się bardzo dobrze.

Thar Lun Myat says

This book was about a life of a stubborn and cruel man, Adolf Hitler. He started to make his dreams come true. He made the most destructive war in history all because Germany lost one war before he became the fuhrer.

Richard Fulgham says

I believe you trust Toland. I checked out his sources. He seems to be truthful. Fascinating book! Good read.

Przemek Skwiercz says

Bardzo dobrze napisana książka. Mimo ponad tysiąca stron druku nie ma nudnych fragmentów. Nie jesteśmy również zasypywani danymi statystycznymi. Widzimy A.H. jako osobę a nie monumentalną postać historyczną. Moim zdaniem ta biografia jest lepsza niż klasyczne już "Studium tyrańi". Niestety widac że książka powstała w latach 70-tych i powieła wiele mitów (po Bullock'u) jak np. częściowo żydowskie korzenie A.H. Osoby zainteresowane współczesnym stanem wiedzy o A.H. powinny sięgnąć po książki Wernera Maser'a. Reasumując bardzo dobra książka a bardzo zły człowiek.

Stinger says

How does one positively rate a biography on the most hated person of the 20th century? If the story is narrated like a novel and contains fruitful lessons, it is possible. And this is the case with John Toland's work on Adolf Hitler. I must admit, it was not a carelessly light read. While the story is easily engaging, I felt the heaviness its historic implications upon the Jewish people (among other targeted populations) as I read. The benefit of studying the man behind the infamous name is learning behavioral pitfalls to avoid. Hitler was a deluded narcissist to the Nth degree, with skills for crowd manipulation and personal blame-shifting. His life philosophy was akin to "might makes right." He had a strong sense of God's sovereignty, but towards the end played the victim of his generals' supposed disobedience. His life aims were to destroy Jewry in Europe like

an abscess is lanced as he put it and oppose bolshevism's spread to the continent. The day Hitler committed suicide, he uttered words of prophesy while deflecting the blame. "I know that by tomorrow millions of people will curse me - Fate wanted it that way."

Rafal says

Monumentalne, ciekawe dzieło. Z czego masz różnorodnych szczegółów i ciekawostek z życia hitlerowskich wyśszych sfer.

Niestety, chyba widać nie rozmiar powoduje, że chwilami jest chaotycznie a logika cięarów myśliwych bywa krucha. Ale i tak wiedza, która z tego pójnie jest ogromna. Wynika z niej, że Hitler miał sporo szczercia. Zarówno wtedy, gdy dochodzi do władzy jak i wtedy, gdy już ją sprawował i wywoływał kolejne konflikty. Los mu sprzyjał co w połączeniu z jego fanatycznym poczuciem misji od Boga dało efekt, który znamy. I który wydaje się taki podobny do dzieła polskiego Wodza kilkadziesiąt lat później.

(view spoiler)

No więc z tych i wielu innych powodów ta wielka księka jest ciekawa. Ale ciesz się, że mam ją już za sobą.

Matt says

Toland's extensive biography of Hitler is, in a word, unbelievable. No aspect of the guy's life goes untouched and it is told in a very easy-to-read fashion.

The book focuses solely on Hitler, so if you wanted an overview of the Holocaust in general you won't find it in here. In fact, during the war the book focuses more on war tactics and strategy than the humanitarian crisis in the Third Reich. It sheds some light on Himmler, but given that the Fuhrer essentially told Himmler how to take care of the "Jewish problem" and Himmler just did it, there was little need for Toland to delve too deep into it (though Hitler's anti-Semitism is certainly explored throughout the 900 pages).

Honestly, it's an undertaking to read this book. It took me two months, which meant that was two months in which most of my reading was devoted to a crazy megalomaniac who somehow seized those delusions of power. On the back cover there is a quote from *Newsweek* that nicely sums up how I feel about this book: "The first book that anyone who wants to learn about Hitler or the war in Europe must read."

David says

Even at 1,000+ pages, this book was not a complete biography of Hitler. Superb research and extensive documentation was presented, detailing the events of his life and some of his compatriots, but in the end, I still did not understand the man, nor grasp how he was understood and admired by so many who followed him and believed in his vision.

Hitler obviously had a gift of oratory, but there is little offered here to help understand how that worked. He

displayed at least two other character traits typical of strong leaders, but traits that I see—and I think research is beginning to bear out—as deep flaws. One is supreme confidence in one’s intuition and the other is ruthless perseverance. These qualities in the extreme can indeed lead to success, but at a price of the soul.

Toland did manage to show some of the grey area in the man who would be Fehr. Hitler’s persona is typically portrayed in the post-war modern world as one of all black. He is analogous with evil. When we want to thoroughly demonize anyone, we compare them to Hitler. It is too easy to fall into this binary mindset, and lose sight of the subtleties of any person, and with it a realistic perspective. Toland did express this when he cited Graham Greene’s observation that “the greatest saints” were “men with more than a normal capacity for evil,” and the most vicious men have sometimes narrowly evaded sanctity. Make no mistake about it, Hitler was an epic mass murderer. But as Toland points out, had he died at the age of 50, after ten years in power but before the invasion of Poland, he would today be regarded as one of the greatest leader in German history, if not the world. He was, in fact, a tremendous success, coming out of relative obscurity, having spent time as a political prisoner, and then rising to the most powerful position of exalted leader, with social and economic programs that were enormously popular. His anti-Semitism probably would have been little noticed by history or been explained away, as we do with the slaveholding practices of the founding fathers of America. One need not even go back that far to discover our own sins, and Toland claims that Hitler did so as well. “Hitler’s concept of concentration camps, as well as the practicality of genocide, owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history. He admired the Camps for Boar prisoners in South Africa and for the wild Indians in the South West, and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America’s extermination—by starvation and uneven combat—of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity.” In 1890, when Hitler was a one-year-old, the US Cavalry systematically massacred men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, winding up an era of nationally sponsored genocide against Native Americans and a massive land-grab. They called it “manifest destiny”; Hitler called his land quest “lebensraum” (living space). While Hitler was instigating an anti-semitic policy in Germany, African-Americans in the United State were systematically and shamelessly oppressed, lynched, and subjected to Jim Crow laws and slavery by another name. Many Americans, like many Germans, didn’t pay attention nor show sympathy for the oppressed.

But a dictatorship is not a democracy. There is a difference between Hitler’s Final Solution and American racism, but mostly in terms of magnitude, in ruthless perseverance. Hitler was, initially, massively successful in his program of ethnic cleansing. But, ultimately, he failed in a way that would have horrified him, had he lived to see the outcome, with the establishment of a powerful Jewish state and the spread of communism beyond what would probably have been possible without his declaration of war on the Soviets and their march into Eastern Europe.

But I’m still left with the haunting unanswered question. How did he do it?

David A says

“Adolf Hitler” (Ballantine Books, 1st September 1986 edition) by John Toland is probably my favourite history biography. It is a masterful detailed and absorbing account of the life of the most evil figure of modern world history. I read it 25 years ago when I was a 14 year old school boy, having been given an assignment to do for history class. When I came across it in our school library, and I spent the next few weeks reading it. Every spare minute I got I dived back in and was engrossed until I was finished. I got the Wordsworth Military Library edition of it a few years ago, but I was delighted to have found a Ballantine edition in a book shop. Toland perfectly sets out his subject dealing with his boyhood including how his name was actually Schicklgruber. His aimless wanderings in his 20’s are also clearly dealt with. Perhaps the

book really takes off for me though when we enter the era of the First World War, and the treatment of Germany at Versailles following Germany's surrender which to me seems the lynchpin Hitler's life turned on. Toland clearly sets out the how Hitler established his gang of thugs, the taking over of a sideline political party, the fashioning of that party into a well oiled political machine and the eventual establishing of total power with the death of President von Hindenberg. As we know Hitler's regime was premised on 'Lebensraum' for the German "Übermensch" and the smashing of the Jewish race in Europe whom he believed were responsible for all Germany's woes. What I particularly liked about this book is the fact that Toland was in a position to seek out and interview the surviving members of Hitler's regime to conduct research for the book. This adds something later authors were unable to achieve, first hand recollections and memories of their part in his regime. The thing I find astounding about Hitler is how he could hijack an intelligent industrious nation and dupe them down the path to total destruction. How one man could bring a nation to near total annihilation by the force of his oratory and political thinking has fascinated me. How Hitler commanded such blind and total obedience, especially from the Army has been long since a question I still fail to answer with adequate satisfaction. All in all Toland's book is quite simply a brilliant book, and true to his form is written in the narrative style without comment or criticism, so what you get is the actual story of Hitler's life minus an analyses which can distract. Other works adequately provide analyses, but to get to know the subject, this book is the real deal. You will see traces of Toland in most works on Hitler which have followed since. Couldn't recommend highly enough.

David Applegate says

Hitler was not just the world's greatest motivational speaker, he was confident, dedicated and calculated. Yet for all his charm, ability and intellect he choose to waste it on revenge over the first world war. The book is a powerful lesson in unchecked power and might give some insight how he came to power and why no authority should be absolute.

Arminius says

I can not believe that there is a better book available that covers the second most written about man in human history –Adolph Hitler. His chronicled life shows not only his evil prejudices but also his normal side. Toland gives plausible reasons for Hitler's anti-Semitism. He exposes lies spread about Hitler such as his refusal to shake Jesse Owens hand after Owens' Olympic victory. Very good and surprisingly funny anecdotes are incorporated such as Hitler's crazy cousin spreading pamphlets claiming Hitler was part Jewish. It is a brilliantly researched book.

Paul Bryant says

(updated with further nasty comment)

Hitler was the world's greatest motivational speaker. You go to one of his meetings and he gives you astonishing dreams, and he gives you permissions. Next day, you see an old Jew in the street. Last week, you wanted to give him a kick. Today, you actually do that, right there, and he falls over. But a policeman was watching you the whole time. Sheiss! Now you're in for it. You look up from the Jew and meet his eyes. He laughs briefly and shrugs, and walks on. He was at the meeting too.

Some times when I listen the Bob Dylan I think - Hitler would have had you killed if he had half a chance. Along with Leonard Cohen, Paul Simon, George and Ira Gershwin, Philip Roth, Lou Reed, Mark Rothko - you could name dozens more - every one would have been shipped off to the nearest extermination centre. Himmler would have seen to it in his meticulous way. Their hatred was limitless.

And just a quick something about this great book - it rang my head like a bell many years ago. You know where they say "it was a biography but I was turning the pages like it was a thriller"? This is the one that does that.

Michelle says

If you ever wanted to read 900 pages about one of the most evil, if not *the* most evil person ever to live, this is the book for you. This book goes into painstaking detail about the lives of his parents and grandparents, his childhood, young adulthood as a struggling artist and in the German army, and his rise in the National Socialist (Nazi) party in Germany, and how he began to amass control of Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc. What I liked about this book is that it is so incredibly thorough. It explains exactly how people suspect he might have been of some Jewish descent. It tells about his days of homeless wandering and exactly how he fell in with (and became the leader of) the National Socialist movement. It details how he was able to annex Austria and Czechoslovakia so easily in those early days of the war and how his bad decisions regarding invading Russia turned the tide for him.

What is also amazing about this book is it, in all fairness, showed a different side of Hitler. He sincerely cared about the German people, the workers and the men in his army. When the people and the army had to sacrifice because of the war, he insisted that his generals and he himself sacrifice, too. He encouraged beautification initiatives in places like factories because he wanted the workers to have a pleasant place to work. Of course, he did not care about all German citizens, only the Aryan ones.

The book stayed mostly with Hitler's day to day life and did not focus on the atrocities of the Holocaust. The few mentions of the concentration camp conditions were enough to remind you of their horrors (and will bring tears to your eyes).

Christopher Telcontar says

There are any number of serious, well researched Hitler bios in print, and there are several that are middling or downright awful. This is the third full length bio of Hitler that I've tackled, and I find it the most appealing, the others being Bullock's Study In Tyranny and Kershaw's two volume Hitler. Bullock's is a bit dated now, I think, and he did not have the depth of current research now available on the Third Reich, while Kershaw's, while excellent in many respects, is for me too narrowly focused, especially once the war starts. Both Bullock and Kershaw give too much play to the election cycle in 1932-1933 that eventually put Hitler in the driver's seat, and Bullock is too cursory with Hitler's childhood and WW1 experiences.

Many might say Toland went too far to make Hitler a person, rather than retaining him as monster and 20th

century ultimate villain, but I find that view distasteful. Put the emotions aside and treat him as an historical figure and a human, and you can study his life in a little more neutral frame of mind. You won't be able to completely shed your distaste for the man, the myth or the legend, but you can appreciate his timeframe and what led to his decisions with a little better clarity.

Toland does an excellent job with Eva Braun, bringing her forward from the shadows and fleshing out the dismissive view nearly every historian has taken of her since Speer casted her as the dumb blond of history. He takes her diary entries and interviews with her sister and makes her human, as well. He uses the surviving members of the inner circle and their recollections as a starting point for his research, rather than as gospel truth itself, such as David Irving might use. His treatment of Goring's contributions to the Reich does get short shrift, but his brief portrayals of Goebels and Himmler are fascinating, but Ribbentrop gets virtually no stage time at all, and Speer is mercifully left waiting in the wings.

If there is one aspect of the history of Hitler that he pushes too hard, it is his assertion that Hitler had Jewish extermination planed and premeditated from an early point, and was fairly open about in his later 1930's speeches. I don't quite buy it, but until I can find texts of those speeches, specifically one given at Sonthofen in 1938 or 1939, I can't say definitively yes or no on this point.

The last point to remember about Toland is that he was a journalist first, and not a trained historian, and so the professionals tend to look down their noses at him, Kershaw and Hastings most of all. But I love his writing. He is a storyteller by profession as a journalist, and he really brings you into the story, with solid writing and good flow. He belabors nothing, and so long as you have a basic familiarity with the story of the Reich, you can take the very long trip in this book and enjoy it quite heartily.

Footnote: Mussolini and Franco are fleshed out well, too, while Stalin, Churchill and FDR remain at long range, viewed from Hitler's eyes, over the hill and through a glass dimly.

I give I 4 and a half stars and recommend the full two volume edition, which is sometimes hard to find these days. Be sure what you're buying if you look for it. There is an audio edition available from major library systems now also, which I listened to, and it's narrated quite well, with a voice actor who is very familiar with German (thank goodness!) and doesn't fumble any of the names or pronunciations.
