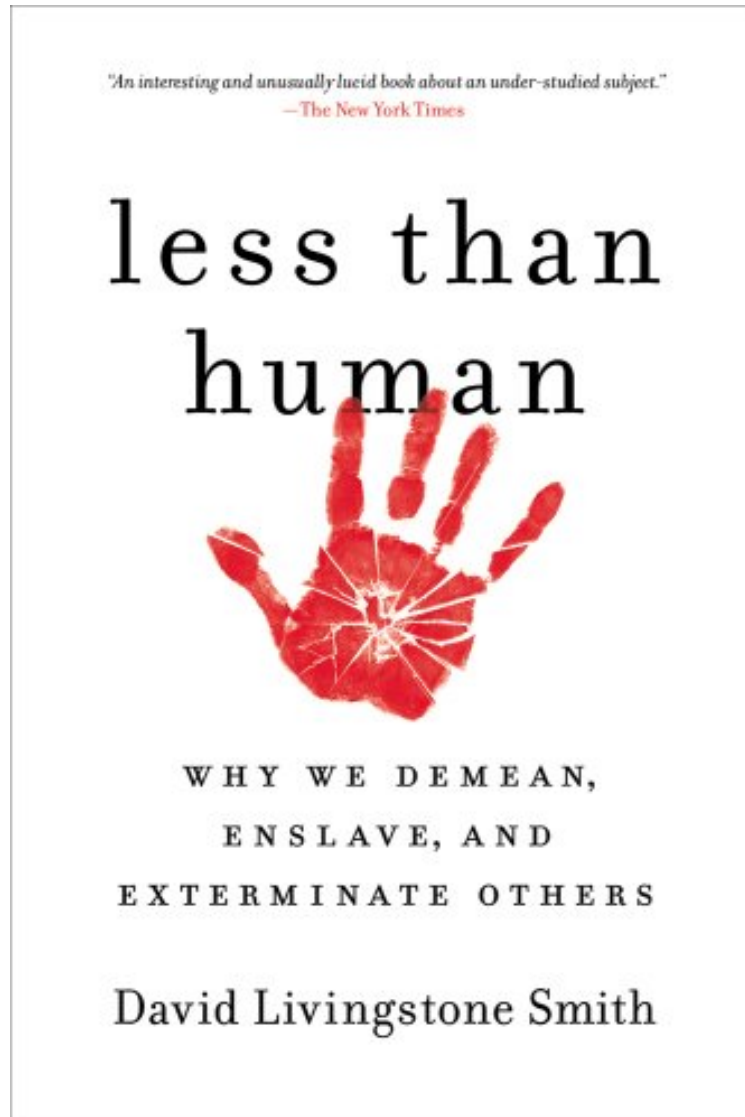


# Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others

David Livingstone Smith

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#153742 in Books David Livingstone Smith 2012-02-28 2012-02-28 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.28 x 23.24 x 5.681, .65 #File Name: 1250003830336 pages Less Than Human Why We Demean Enslave and Exterminate Others | File size: 79.Mb

**David Livingstone Smith : Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Dehumanization and multi-faith engagement By Wendy MI

remember watching World War II movies with my dad growing up. One that stuck with me was "Judgment at Nuremberg," which told the story of the war crimes trials of Nazi judges who sent Jews and others to concentration camps. This film made a strong case that the Nazi leadership were responsible for horrible crimes, but also for the possibility that the rest of the world shared some responsibility for the rise of Hitler and the genocide that would come to be known as the Final Solution. From the films and similar documentaries of my childhood I've always wondered how the Holocaust was possible. Were the Nazis, or the German people in general, a special case of human evil and monstrosity? This is a comforting thought in that it limits such horrors to a specific people and time period. But history teaches us otherwise. While the Nazi Holocaust is the best known of humanity's genocides, there are many others: the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1917, Pol Pots Khmer Rouge in the 1970s, the Hutus and Tutsis of the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s, and the mass killings in Darfur in the early 2000s. To these we could also add events in America including the enslavement and mass extermination of Native Americans and the deplorable treatment of African slaves. What do these genocides and acts of violence have in common? The process of dehumanization; thinking of fellow human beings as subhuman. David Livingstone Smith discusses the science of dehumanization in his book "Less Than Human." Given the tragic and repetitious nature of dehumanization I assumed that the body of scholarly data on this topic would be large. However, this is not the case. As Smith states in the Preface, Apart from a few dozen articles by social psychologists, there is scarcely any literature on it at all. If dehumanization really has the significance that scholars claim, then untangling its dynamics ought to be among our most pressing priorities, and its neglect is as perplexing as it is grave (3). Smith explores this important topic over the course of nine chapters. Chapter 1 explores why studying the process of dehumanization is important. He concludes that chapter with sobering words that remind us of just how close this challenge is to all of us: "Dehumanization is not the exclusive preserve of communists, terrorists, Jews, Palestinians, or any other monster of the moment. We are all potential dehumanizers, just as we are all potential objects of dehumanization. The problem of dehumanization is everyone's problem. My task is to explain why (25). Smith continues in Chapter 2 with a discussion of how the idea of dehumanization has changed over time. Smith uses this chapter to develop a theory of the dehumanization process. One of the key ideas in this chapter is the idea that human beings have an essence that makes them what they are. By contrast, at times we view others as lacking in this. This makes them subhuman, and when the enemy is viewed in this way it overrides our natural revulsion toward killing others. Smith tells us that these counterfeit human beings don't necessarily look monstrous. To the contrary, they look just like us real human beings, but that's part of the deception. Regardless of how they appear on the surface (or under it), they are conceived of as subhuman. In Chapter 3 Smith discusses the dehumanization of the indigenous people of the New World that came with colonization. Chapter 4 explores this process in slavery, where the trans-Saharan and transatlantic slave trades are in view. Chapter 5 discusses dehumanization in connection with various genocides. One of the interesting facets of the discussion in this chapter is how the subhuman other is conceived of and referred to. For example, the Germans of the Third Reich referred to Jews and other undesirables as apes, pigs, rats, worms, bacilli, and other nonhuman creatures (145). When the language of dehumanization is used then genocide is not far behind. Chapter 6 looks at the concept of race in connection with dehumanization and racism. Chapter 7 compares human violence with that of chimpanzees against their own species. After his analysis Smith comes to the conclusion that Homo sapiens are the only animals capable of cruelty and war (203). In Chapter 8 Smith explores the strange co-existence between human reticence and also willingness to kill our own kind, and also how we may have developed the tendency toward dehumanization. The final chapter goes over the major arguments advanced previously in the book, and then includes discussion on how dehumanization might be combated. Overall I found this entire volume fascinating. But given my work in multi-faith engagement I found certain sections of particular interest in application to evangelicals living in and wrestling with the challenges of religious pluralism in a post-9/11 world. Two areas of the book caught my attention, with the first offering critique of evangelical boundaries in relation to the other, and the second in terms of strategic action that can be taken that will actually work toward combating genocide. First, in Chapter 8 Smith discusses the concept of unclean animals in relation to dehumanization. He says that certain animals create visceral reactions in us. The reaction of disgust is accompanied by a peculiar sense of threat. The fear isn't that the animal itself can inflict harm the fear of maggots isn't like the fear of poisonous snakes or snarling dogs. Rather, it's the fear that they can contaminate one with something harmful (252). Later on this same page expands on this notion of contamination: "People have an intuitive theory of contamination. We not only conceive of certain things as revolting, we also attribute their foulness to pollutants that they contain pollutants that can get inside us and damage or even kill us if we come into contact with them. Although the propensity for disgust is innate, culture plays a huge part in determining what sorts of things elicit it" (252). A few pages later Smith says there is a moral connection to concepts of physical filth, and that this also explains why this form of dehumanization is often associated with religiously motivated violence (254). Although it may be difficult for evangelicals to hear, when I read this section on dehumanization and contamination I thought of the evangelical subculture and its strong emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy. When religious others are encountered that are understood as holding to false doctrine and practices this triggers fears of contamination and feelings of disgust, whether we consciously realize this or not. Having sound doctrine is important and it can play a positive role in identity formation and boundary definitions, but if

as a cultural device it causes us to see a Muslim or Mormon or Pagan as disgusting and as a contaminant, perhaps we need to revisit the place that doctrine plays in our culture and the encounter with others. How can we maintain healthy concepts of identity and boundaries without dehumanizing the other? The second major takeaway for me came in Chapter 9. In addressing how to respond to dehumanization a few possibilities are considered. The first is the appeal to reason. According to this rationalistic view, dehumanization is a symptom of ignorance, and is to be cured by administering an appropriate dose of intellectual enlightenment (268). Smith is right to reject this. Dehumanization takes place more through the process of emotion over the rational aspect of human cognition. Those approaches to interfaith that emphasize an appeal to reason miss the mark because they misunderstand human nature. Instead of the rational approach, Smith offers an alternative. He says that if we want people to treat one another humanely we ought to be appealing to their feelings instead of offering them dry theoretical arguments. We need to help people get to know one another by telling them long, sad, sentimental stories (270). Smith hits the nail on the head with this suggestion. Human beings are not only emotional creatures, we are also Homo narrans, storytelling creatures. We inhabit our own personal narratives as well as tribal and cultural ones, and these stories help us find our place in the world, and can be instrumental in shaping new views of us and them. We are following this approach through our Multi-faith Matters grant project work in telling the stories of churches involved in positive forms of multi-faith engagement. This has the potential of touching hearts and changing minds as new stories provide fresh emotional and conceptual frameworks for interacting with others. But there's a rub here. Smith argues that [t]he sentimental strategy has a greater chance of being effective than the rationalistic one does (270). By telling these stories we can move people in the right direction. But Smith asks, What is the right direction? Emotional stories have also been used to manipulate people in propaganda and have facilitated the dehumanization process. How can we tell emotional stories and move people in the right direction that does not involve manipulation and abuse? For the evangelical involved in combating dehumanization a gospel-inspired ethic is needed in order to provide a framework for emotion-inducing stories. This must include the Christian moral teachings of love of neighbor, enemy, and stranger. With these incorporated within an ethic of storytelling we can guard against the manipulation of others outside our tribe. In my opinion this book is must reading for those evangelicals involved in multi-faith engagement, religious diplomacy, and peacemaking. If we want to prevent future genocides, and make an impact on war and terrorist violence, our theologies of multi-faith encounter must be widened and deepened to incorporate the insights of the science of dehumanization, as well as other important academic disciplines.

26 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

*A Step Towards A Theory of Dehumanization* By Customer Professor Smith states in the Preface that, "In this book, I will argue that dehumanization is a joint creation of biology, culture, and the architecture of the human mind. Grasping its nature and dynamics requires that we attend to all three elements. Excluding any of them leaves us with a hopelessly distorted picture of what we are trying to comprehend." And by dehumanization, Professor Smith simply means that, "To dehumanize a person is to regard them as subhuman." Dehumanization doesn't mean to deny someone their individuality, to objectify them, to denigrate them, or even to treat them cruelly (although that certainly does happen). So, it is to this end that Professor Smith sets about explaining the psychological roots of dehumanization. Through 275 pages, divided into nine chapters, Smith examines such topics as the past thoughts of Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, Pico, Paracelsus, Hume, and Kant; and modern thinkers such as Erik Erikson, Konrad Lorenz, E. O. Wilson, Jane Goodall, and Iranaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt. He also analyzes themes like 'The Great Chain of Being,' Slavery, Nazi's, and Genocide; "In this book, I will argue that when we dehumanize people we think of them as counterfeit human beings - creatures that look like humans, but who are not endowed with a human essence - and that this is possible only because of our natural tendency to think that there are essence-based natural kinds. This way of thinking doesn't come from "outside." We neither absorb it from our culture, nor learn it from observation. Rather, it seems to reflect our cognitive architecture - the evolved design of the human psyche." In regards to cognitive architecture, I think Professor Smith's strongest argument for why we dehumanize is based on our modularity of mind (best discussed in Robert Kurzban's book: *Why Everyone (Else) Is a Hypocrite: Evolution and the Modular Mind*, and also to a lesser extent in David Berreby's book: *Us and Them: The Science of Identity*). In conclusion, Professor Smith certainly knows the material very well, and the book stays extremely focused on explaining what dehumanization means. I think Smith also shifts gears from hard scientific evidence to mere speculation very smoothly and with plenty of prudence and caution; he certainly takes a skeptical attitude, which I appreciated. The only thing that irked me a bit about the book was Chapter 6: Race. Here is a quote: "A more scientific-sounding version of the same idea [that human essence is carried in the blood,] is that essences are located in one's DNA (a notion helped along, no doubt, by the folk-theory that racial essences are transmitted in seminal fluid). Although it has a veneer of scientific respectability, this DNA theory is only marginally less baseless than the theories about blood and milk, for, as we have seen, conventional racial categories are folk categories rather than scientific ones, and don't have any genetic justification." Now, I don't know what the real answer is, but I know there are a lot of (scientifically well-versed) individuals who might find the idea that DNA has nothing to do with 'race' a bit of a stretch. Also, I would have liked to see Professor Smith mention Malthusianism (the very real, and very omnipresent struggle for existence due to scarce resources), and give it a modicum of attention because, to my way of thinking, it is really the primary

evolutionary reason we dehumanize others in the first place. Nonetheless, I think this is an exceptional book and I highly recommend it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This book helps pull hate out from the shadows and explains tactics designed to ...By CustomerIn a world where dehumanizing others has become an art form (not to be respected). This book helps pull hate out from the shadows and explains tactics designed to demean, and dehumanize in a way that make them understandable. Let us never repeat the patterns of hate from our past...and resolve to stop dehumanizing others! GREAT READ for parents, students, and anyone in search of finding PEACE in a hate filled world!

Winner of the 2012 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for NonfictionA revelatory look at why we dehumanize each other, with stunning examples from world history as well as today's headlines "Brute." "Cockroach." "Lice." "Vermin." People often regard members of their own kind as less than human, and use terms like these for those whom they wish to harm, enslave, or exterminate. Dehumanization has made atrocities like the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda, and the slave trade possible. But it isn't just a relic of the past. We still find it in war, genocide, xenophobia, and racism. Smith shows that it is a dangerous mistake to think of dehumanization as the exclusive preserve of Nazis, communists, terrorists, Jews, Palestinians, or any other monster of the moment. We are all potential dehumanizers, just as we are all potential objects of dehumanization. The problem of dehumanization is everyone's problem. *Less Than Human* is the first book to illuminate precisely how and why we sometimes think of others as subhuman creatures. It draws on a rich mix of history, evolutionary psychology, biology, anthropology, and philosophy to document the pervasiveness of dehumanization, describe its forms, and explain why we so often resort to it. *Less Than Human* is a powerful and highly original study of the roots of human violence and bigotry, and it as timely as it is relevant.

From Publishers WeeklySmith (The Most Dangerous Animal), cofounder and director of the Institute for Cognitive Science and Evolutionary Psychology at the University of New England, interrogates why man alone, in Mark Twain's words, can go "forth in cold blood and calm pulse to exterminate his kind." Smith explores the ancient practice of labeling rival tribes; specific ethnic, racial, or religious groups; and species as undeserving of compassion. He is intent on untangling the mystery of dehumanization: it's insufficient to merely demonize the criminals, he argues; we must understand why, say, the Nazis believed they had a "moral duty" to annihilate the Jews. He looks into possible biological bases, psychological and developmental roots, clues in paleolithic art, and how, over the ages, philosophers and artists have criticized or goaded on the practice. Vivid and horrifying examples of incidences (and consequences) of the harassment, torture, and extermination of certain groups saturate the bookfrom the European decimation of indigenous peoples in the Americas to Israeli soldiers' attacks on Palestinian children. Smith's compelling study and his argument that the study of dehumanization be made a global priority to prevent future Rwandas or Hiroshimas is well-made and important. (Mar.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. Smith reasonably argues that dehumanization is rooted in human nature. He offers a rigorous philosophical theory... informed by his discipline's precision, and by certain well-founded suppositions about the mind...an interesting and unusually lucid book about an under-studied subject. New York Times Sunday Book Smith's compelling study and his argument that the study of dehumanization be made a global priority to prevent future Rwandas or Hiroshimas is well-made and important. Publishers WeeklySmith offers an impressively thorough survey of 'dehumanization' as it has been deployed against Jews, African-Americans, and other 'Others' -- as an accompaniment to exploitation or extermination. Barbara Ehrenreich, Los Angeles of BooksBooks like Smith's should be required reading for all with a social conscience, and his ideas ought to find their way into every school curriculum. Valerie Curtis, Ph.D., Journal of Evolutionary PsychologyIn this powerful and original workranging widely and with impressive interdisciplinary scope over different epochs and cultures while remaining compellingly readableDavid Livingstone Smith demonstrates that our practice of representing our fellow-humans as subhuman is both inhuman and all too human. He forces us to recognize that monstrous atrocities are routinely carried out not by monsters but, alas, by ourselves. Charles W. Mills, Ph.D. author of The Racial Contract, John Evans Professor of Moral and Intellectual PhilosophyDavid Livingstone Smith produces a clear and illuminating vision of why human beings are the way we are and how we got this way. The scholarship is broad, the insight is deep and the prose is compelling. *Less Than Human* will change the way you think about things that matter profoundly. This is dazzling stuff. Steven E. Landsburg, Ph.D., author of The Big QuestionsWarning: This book will challenge you! Not that it's hard to understand -- in fact, it's wonderfully accessible -- but it raises some terrible realities. For this reason, it is all the more important that you read *Less than Human*. It is brilliantly written, carefully researched, and a wonderful and much-needed opportunity for us to explore what it might mean to be truly human'. David P. Barash, author of Payback: Why We Retaliate, Seek Revenge and Redirect Our AggressionThis is a beautiful book on an ugly topic. David Livingstone Smith uses the newest research in cognitive science to address the problems of racism, genocide, and atrocity, presenting a provocative theory as to why we come to see others as less than human. There are deep and important ideas here, and this engaging book should be read by anyone interested in the worst aspects of human nature -- and how we can come to transcend them. Paul Bloom, author of How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We Like What We Like and professor of

psychology, Yale UniversitySmith is a philosopher with a strong interest in cognitive science and evolutionary psychology. His book offers a gripping history of the horrific ways in which human beings have turned other humans into "sub-humans" and "beasts in human form," from American rhetoric rationalizing African slavery, to the Nazi persecution of the Jews, to the justifications offered for the genocide in Rwanda. He identifies a key thematic in all these campaigns of dehumanization: namely, convincing the persecutors that, when it comes to the persecuted, there is a difference between being essentially human and merely appearing human. He then speculates...that the propensity to draw an essence/appearance distinction is a legacy of natural selection itself. One need not find the evolutionary speculation convincing to nonetheless find his synthesis of the ways in which the essence/appearance distinction figures in the rhetoric of hatred and genocide throughout history insightful and memorable. Brian Leiter, Karl N. Llewellyn Professor of Jurisprudence, University of Chicago Law SchoolOne part detective story, one part horror story, one part evolutionary philosophy, *Less Than Human* is actually a book about what it means to be human. As such, there are few of us who can afford to miss it. Peter Swirski, Ph.D., author of *American Utopia* and *Social Engineering in Literature, Social Thought, and Political History*, Professor of American literature and culture at the Department of English, University of Missouri, and Research Fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced StudiesDehumanization is a thoroughly human behavior. It is a tool we have used for millennia to bolster our self-esteem, to justify slavery and exploitation, to get ourselves to kill and exterminate. Yet, despite its terrible significance, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been trained on the phenomenon -- on its origins, how it works, and how we might avoid its dreadful toll. Bringing enviably acute skills as a philosopher to bear on the subject, David Livingstone Smith draws on an impressive range of sources to argue that dehumanization emerges from the very core of our humanity, our ability to reflect upon our own thoughts. Writing in an engaging and accessible style, he uses an incisive logic to pare away the layers of his subject to reveal this troubling conclusion. This is an important book for anthropologists, who are interested in ethnocentrism, and for any human concerned about our capacity to harm one another. Paul Roscoe, Ph.D., Professor of Anthropology, University of Maine.About the AuthorDr. David Livingstone Smith is a professor of philosophy and founding director of The Human Nature Project at the University of New England. He is the author of *Why We Lie* and *The Most Dangerous Animal* and lives in Portland, Maine.