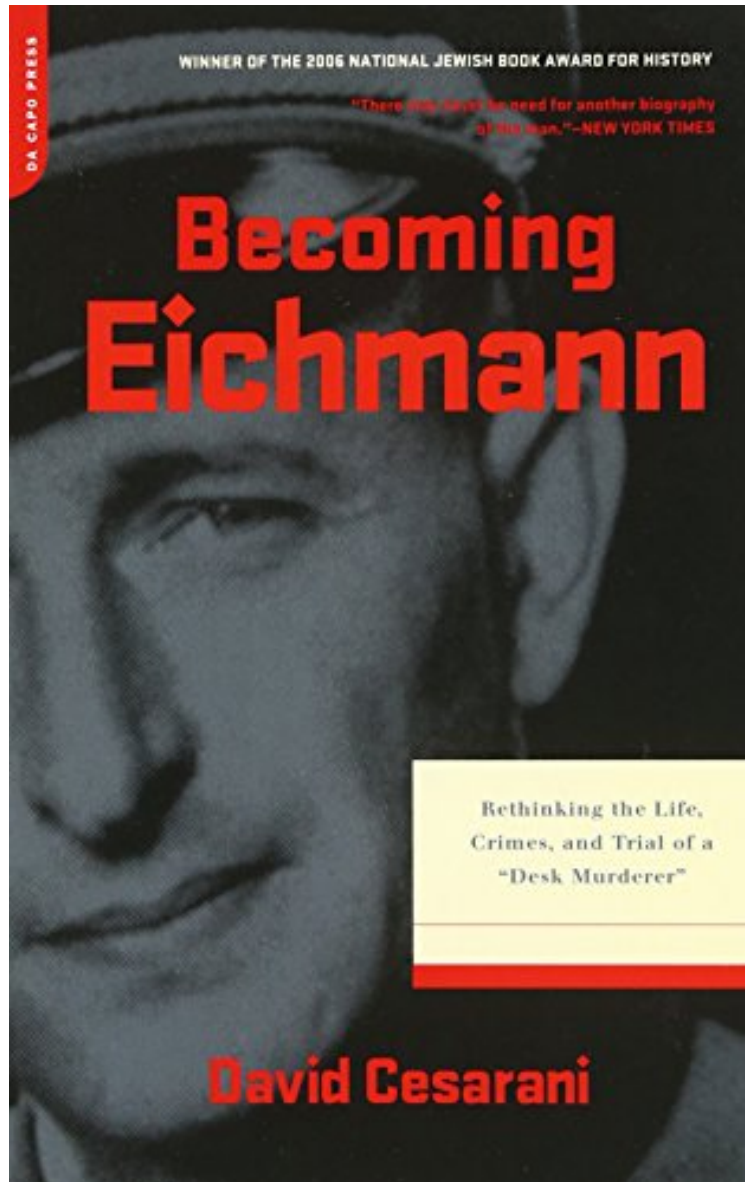


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Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"

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Becoming Eichmann, the first account of Eichmann's life to appear in over forty years, reveals a surprising portrait of the man once seen as epitomizing the banality of evil. Drawing on recently unearthed documents, David Cesarani explores Eichmann's early career, when he learned how to become an administrator of genocide, and shows how Eichmann developed into the Reich's expert on Jewish matters, becoming ever more hateful and brutal. This sobering account deepens our understanding and challenges our preconceptions of Adolf Eichmann and offers fresh insights into both the operation of the Final Solution and its most notorious perpetrator.

From Publishers Weekly To the Israeli prosecutor who interrogated him in 1961, Adolf Eichmann was a fanatical anti-Semite and a central figure in the annihilation of the Jews. To Hannah Arendt, he was a dim-witted bureaucrat, a cog in the machinery of destruction that was the Holocaust. British historian Cesarani, author of numerous books on the Holocaust and Jewish history, offers a more complex and nuanced portrait. Based on research into sources that were unavailable in the 1960s and on the most recent scholarly work on the Holocaust, Cesarani corrects the historical record on numerous issues. Contrary to popular myth, he says, Eichmann had a normal childhood and a socially and professionally successful young adulthood. Eichmann joined the SS not because he was a misfit but because, like so many German and Austrian middle-class men, he found the Third Reich a great engine of social mobility. Cesarani's biography is convincing on many counts. But in the end, the broad outlines of Arendt's portrait in her brilliant Eichmann in Jerusalem remain standing. Eichmann may have been more intelligent and skilled than she concluded, but he was the perfect expression of the highly bureaucratized and systematic killing process that the Nazis perfected. 8 pages of bw photos, 2 maps. (May 15) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist *Starred* Since Adolf Eichmann's trial and execution, scholars have looked to the events of the Holocaust logistician's life to assess the depth of his guilt and to speculate on the social mechanisms that turn individuals genocidal. Cesarani aims to strip away some of the mythology that such efforts have invariably generated. His thesis--that Eichmann's evil arose not from banal bean counting but from the bureaucrat's ambitious careerism--both builds upon and pointedly rejects Hannah Arendt's visceral Eichmann in Jerusalem and will certainly attract attention for doing so. Yet Cesarani does more than simply reopen the cog-or-monster debates that surrounded Arendt's assessment. Pointing out key moments in which Eichmann overcame his own humanity--swallowing his initial shock at the sight of mass shootings and finding recovery from a "total moral collapse" in Hungary in 1944--Cesarani emphasizes Eichmann's deliberate choices, habituation to power, and gradual desensitization to mass atrocity. In doing so, he presents a compelling vision of Eichmann that comports with our current awareness of the psychological dynamics of genocide. Similarly compelling is Cesarani's fascinatingly Darwinian description of the ever-changing bureaucratic structures of Nazism to which Eichmann was continually adapting as he rose in the ranks. Few biographies, and fewer Holocaust histories, are as innovative or as nuanced. Brendan Driscoll Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Carefully researched and clearly presented An important work." -- Bowling Green Daily News, 5/28/06 "Compelling Cesarani's treatment of the lengthy trial is superb A truly great book." -- Roanoke Times, 8/6/06 "Detailed and insightful... Highly recommended." -- (Choice, October 2006) "It is the deeper layers of this book that are the most thought-provoking... Works well on all levels." -- Jewish Book World, Fall 2006 "Meticulously researched Highly readable and interesting." -- Cleveland Jewish News 4/21/06 "Penetrating and eminently readable new biography of Eichmann." -- Jerusalem Post, 8/18/06 "Well presented and exhaustively documented Helpful discussions of what the Eichmann story has meant to different people at different times." -- Pittsburgh Tribune- , 05/28/06 "[A] monumental biography." -- Forward, 6/23/06 "First full biography... since the 1960s... thoroughly researched... there may never be need for another biography of the man. -- New York Times Book , 05/14/06 "Well presented and exhaustively documented. -- The Washington Times, 05/07/06