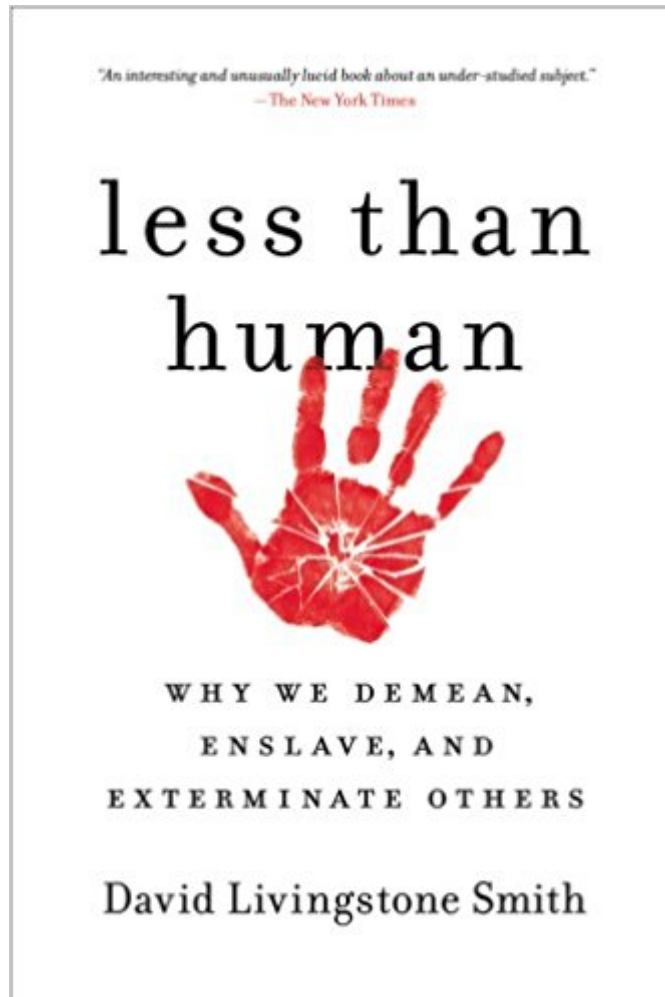


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# Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, And Exterminate Others



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2012 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Nonfiction A 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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: St. Martin's Griffin; 1 edition (February 28, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1250003830

ISBN-13: 978-1250003836

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.9 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (27 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

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.

I found this book, "Less than Human," in our Library's new acquisitions section and thought it worth a look. However, a quick look turned into an all night read as I discovered myself fully absorbed and engaged with Dr. David Smith's fascinating work. "Less than Human" addresses our ability to dehumanize our fellow man thereby allowing us to perpetrate all manner of violence upon him, from war to outright genocide. Dr. Smith makes it clear that he is investigating the processes behind dehumanization, cultural, biological and psychological, that lead to humans treating others as less-than-real people and is not exploring the extensive assortment of additional concepts this wide ranging term encompasses, such as the objectification of women or the social marginalization of specific people. One aspect of the book that I enjoyed was its balanced approach. Often many of the works emanating from academia have an inherent anti-Western bias, but "Less than Human" is free from such indoctrination instead dealing with dehumanization as a worldwide characteristic, originating in per-historic societies and displayed in both tribe and polis. In addressing dehumanization, Dr. Smith uses a vast array of investigative tools to set the stage, such as specific historical illustrations (like Sub-Saharan slavery and the Armenian genocide), evolutionary explanations (citing Jane Goodall's field work with chimpanzees) and explicit psychological confessions (such as quotes from fellow soldiers like WWI stormtrooper Ernst Junger). After outlining the problem, in the later half of his book, Dr. Smith takes a more detailed look at the actual

mechanisms of dehumanization, such as its essential racial component and uniquely Homo sapiens quality. Though the reader will find points of disagreement with Dr.

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