



# The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence

By *Ervin Staub*

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## The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence By Ervin Staub

How can human beings kill or brutalize multitudes of other human beings? Focusing particularly on genocide, but also on other forms of mass killing, torture, and war, Ervin Staub explores the psychological, cultural, and societal roots of group aggression. He sketches a conceptual framework for the many influences on one group's desire to harm another: cultural and social patterns predisposing to violence, historical circumstances resulting in persistent life problems, and needs and modes of adaptation arising from the interaction of these influences. Such notions as cultural stereotyping and devaluation, societal self-concept, moral exclusion, the need for connection, authority orientation, personal and group goals, "better world" ideologies, justification, and moral equilibrium find a place in his analysis, and he addresses the relevant evidence from the behavioral sciences. Within this conceptual framework, Staub then considers the behavior of perpetrators and bystanders in four historical situations: the Holocaust (his primary example), the genocide of Armenians in Turkey, the "autogenocide" in Cambodia, and the "disappearances" in Argentina. Throughout, he is concerned with the roots of caring and the psychology of heroic helpers. In his concluding chapters, he reflects on the socialization of children at home and in schools, and on the societal practices and processes that facilitate the development of caring persons, and of care and cooperation among groups. A wide audience will find *The Roots of Evil* thought-provoking reading.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"A valuable and important study." Dimensions

"Thoughtful, provocative work." Indochina Chronology

"...a serious, noteworthy effort to present a general psychosocial/cultural analysis of the causes of genocide and mass destruction in the modern age." Bridges

"Staub offers us a multi-textured psychological understanding of genocide and group violence generally, as well as some concrete proposals for promoting caring, connection, and nonaggression. The book is well written and well organized; largely devoid of psychological jargon, yet conceptually rich, it should be easily comprehended by all. While it is written from the analytical perspective of a scholar, it is illuminated by the humane spirit of a man who, as a Hungarian Jew, experienced the horrors of the Holocaust. It is a provocative book from which scholars, students and the general public can benefit greatly." Pearl Oliner, Shofar

"...a rich essay based on extensive and thoughtful scholarship....Staub's book...represent[s] major advances in understanding our vulnerability to become perpetrators and the responsibilities and opportunities that inhere in our unchosen roles as bystanders." Contemporary Psychology

"...a valiant effort to confront the horrors of genocide while trying to articulate something redemptive about human beings, which may guide future practice....a poetic vision." Jeffrey A. Atlas, New Ideas in Psychology

"...a clear, plausible study of the origins of genocide and other group violence." KLIATT

"...methodical and well done...a well-written, scholarly-researched book." George B. Palermo, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology

#### From the Back Cover

Although this book includes a great deal of historical material, it is primarily a psychological work that attempts to draw on history in the service of psychological understanding of how genocides and mass killings come about.

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#### Daniel Spencer:

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