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CURRICULUM GUIDE

Investigating the Holocaust

Nuremberg: Its Lesson for Today

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Morgenthau Holocaust Collections Project

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SECTION IV

Crimes Against Humanity

WARNING

This section contains film segments depicting graphic images of death, violence, brutality and destruction. The documents presented in this section describe equally graphic descriptions of mass killings, cruelty, human suffering, and inhuman experimentation carried out on Jews by the Nazis.

Teacher discretion in using this material with their students is advised.

The Nazis employed a "win at all costs and show no mercy" approach to war. It is difficult to grasp the extent to which Nazi policies and behavior led to extreme violence and the complete dehumanization of entire populations. An approach of isolating and dehumanizing Jews in Germany and its occupied territories fostered growing mob violence that laid the groundwork for mass murder. Concentration and death camps were created to punish those deemed politically dangerous or racially, physically, or behaviorally inferior. Closing the final charges of the indictment in the Nuremberg trial, prosecutors charge that all defendants committed crimes against humanity, pursuing policies of murder, slavery, and plunder against civilian populations. Aged, sick, and mentally ill people were also targeted and murdered.

Film Segment 9
Nazi Occupation – A Policy of Mass Murder (Running Time 3:34)

Defendants in the Nuremberg trials were charged with directing mass murder throughout territories occupied by Nazi Germany. Evidence presented by prosecutors showed the process by which Nazi leaders systematically murdered or enslaved populations, in one case razing a village to the ground as an example to other occupied peoples.

Film Segment 10
Nazi Evil in Action (Running Time 2:50)

The Nazis used concentration and death camps to punish those deemed politically dangerous or racially, physically, or behaviorally inferior. At the Nuremberg trial, former Auschwitz camp commandant, Rudolf Höss, described the brutality and criminality, which led to the deaths of one million people there, mostly Jews, from starvation, illness, or outright murder.

Film Segment 11
Nazi Exploitation, Enslavement, and Murder of Civilians (Running Time 3:17)

Closing the final charges of the indictment in the Nuremberg trial, prosecutors charge that all defendants committed crimes against humanity, pursuing policies of murder, slavery, and plunder against civilian populations. The aged, sick, and mentally ill were also murdered.

SECTION IV

Crimes Against Humanity

Film Segment 12
Nazi Anti-Semitism – When Hatred Forges Policy (Running Time 3:45)
As the number and ferocity of wartime atrocities increased, Nazi crimes against humanity peaked in their campaign to destroy Europe's Jewish population. An approach of isolating and dehumanizing Jews in Germany and its occupied territories fostered growing mob violence that laid the groundwork for mass murder.

Film Segment 13
The Nazi Final Solution - Annihilation of the Jews of Europe (Running Time 2:52)
It is difficult to grasp the extent to which Nazi Party policies and behavior led to extreme violence and the complete dehumanization of entire populations. Nuremberg trial testimony details the Nazi's approach to designating Jews to slave labor or the death chambers, and the repugnant practice of extracting wealth from the doomed to support the Nazi regime.

Vocabulary

Aryan – term used in Nazi Germany to refer to non-Jewish and non-Roma (Gypsy) Caucasians. Northern Europeans with especially "Nordic" features such as blonde hair and blue eyes were considered by so-called race scientists to be the most superior of Aryans, members of a "Master Race."

Auschwitz – the largest Nazi concentration camp complex, located 37 miles west of Krakow, Poland. The Auschwitz main camp (Auschwitz I) was established in 1940. In 1942, a killing center was established at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II). In 1941, Auschwitz-Monowitz (Auschwitz III) was established as a forced-labor camp. More than 100 subcamps and labor detachments were administratively connected to Auschwitz III.

Birkenau – Nazi camp also known as Auschwitz II, Birkenau contained systematic mass killing operations. It also housed thousands of concentration camp prisoners deployed at forced labor.

Crematorium – a facility containing a furnace for reducing dead bodies to ashes by burning.

Fascism – a political movement that exults the collective nation, and often race, above the individual and that advocates: a centralized totalitarian state headed by a charismatic leader, expansion of the nation, preferably by military force; and forcible suppression and sometimes physical annihilation of opponents real and perceived.

Final Solution – name of Nazi plan to annihilate European Jews.

Gestapo – the German Secret State Police, which was under SS control. It was responsible for investigating political crimes and opposition activities.

Ghetto – a confined area of a city in which members of a minority are compelled to live.

Killing Centers, Concentration Camps, Death Camps – Nazis established killing centers for efficient mass murder. Unlike concentration camps, which served primarily as detention and labor centers, killing centers (also referred to as "extermination camps" or "death camps") were almost exclusively "death factories." German SS and police murdered nearly 2.7 million Jews in the killing centers either by asphyxiation with poison gas or by shooting.

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Protective Detention (*Schutzhaft*) – an instrument of detention that permitted secret state police detectives to take persons suspected of pursuing activities hostile to state interests into custody without warrant or judicial review of any kind. Protective custody most often meant indefinite internment in a concentration camp.

Resettlement – a Nazi euphemism for deportation and murder.

Yellow Star – a badge featuring the Star of David (a symbol of Judaism) used by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust as a method of visibly identifying Jews.

Questions

Essential Questions for Crimes Against Humanity

1) Why did the Holocaust occur?
2) How can such a thing be prevented from ever happening again?
3) What actions and inactions allowed the Holocaust to occur?
4) How did Hitler use anti-Semitism as a tool to advance the power of the Nazi party?
5) What role do those who bore witness to the Holocaust play in our understanding its importance today?
6) How were the Nazis so easily able to bully their way to power?
7) How did the Nazis use conspiracy to perpetrate their crimes?
8) How did the victims of the Holocaust demonstrate their courage to resist and survive?
9) What methods did the Nazis use to discourage critical thinking?
10) Who is culpable for allowing the Holocaust to occur?
11) How did the Nazis use division as a political tool?
12) How did the Nazis use hate speech to "desensitize" and "normalize" their actions and behaviors?
13) Why was/is it so important to seek justice for the victims of the Holocaust?
14) Who was/is responsible for the Holocaust?

Extension Questions

1) How could such evil take such a hold on so many for so long?
2) How did "dehumanizing" the Jews make destroying them easier for the Nazis and their collaborators?
3) How does a doctrine of "total war" justify the massacre of civilian populations?
4) What must we do that this never happens again?

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5) The Holocaust did not happen overnight, it occurred through a series of carefully planned actions that created a "slippery slope" from which there was no return. Why did so many people miss, or ignore, the signs of what was to come?

6) Is humanity capable of curbing inhumanity?

7) How were the Nazis able to so successfully and systematically close the avenues of resistance and escape for the Jews?

8) How did hate speech, intolerance, scapegoating, anti-Semitism, conspiracy, division, prejudice, peer pressure, propaganda, and hate each play a role bringing about the Holocaust?

Documents

Document IV-A: ***Rabbi Stephen Wise's Letter to FDR and Pages from His Memo on Nazi Atrocities, December 2-8, 1942***

At the infamous Wannsee Conference held in January 1942, a group of Nazi bureaucrats met to organize "a final solution" to Europe's so-called Jewish problem. As the plan for systematic, mechanized killing was implemented in the following months, news reports began to publicize the scope of Nazi atrocities against Jews. Rabbi Stephen Wise and other Jewish leaders collected detailed reports from their sources abroad. In this December 2, 1942, letter, Wise requests a meeting with Roosevelt to convey his group's findings. At an Oval Office meeting on December 8, they presented FDR with a memo summarizing their information. Select pages of the memo are also provided here. Wise appealed to Roosevelt to bring attention to the horror and to do what he could to stop it. FDR was sympathetic, but noncommittal. He confirmed that Wise's report was consistent with information he had received from other sources. But he maintained that the Allies were fighting for the rights of all people, and could not elevate one group over another. (Official File 76c: Church Matters-Jewish, 1942).

Document IV-B: ***Report by the Office of Strategic Services on Germany's Extermination of the Jews, March 17, 1943***

Throughout the war, President Roosevelt received information about the Nazi death machine from a variety of sources, including the State Department, Treasury Department, his own personal network of informants, private relief and Jewish organizations, and the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor of the CIA). This OSS report describing a further escalation of Nazi violence against Jews was received in the White House Map Room on March 17, 1943. (Map Room Papers; MR 203(12); Sec. 1; OSS Numbered Bulletins, March-May 1943; Box 72).

Document IV-C: ***Selected Pages of the Vrba-Wetzler Report on Auschwitz-Birkenau April-October 1944***

On April 7, 1944, two Slovakian Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz made a daring escape from the death camp. Having heard German guards talk about the imminent arrival of Hungarian Jews, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler sought to warn the world of the gas chambers and crematoria at the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex in an effort to halt the Hungarian deportations. Upon reaching safety, the two men dictated a detailed report about the camp, including how it functioned, an estimated number of deaths, and drawings of the grounds and gas chambers. The Vrba-Wetzler report was typed up by the Slovakian Jewish Council, but summaries of the report did not begin reaching outside Jewish organizations and Allied governments until June. A full copy of the report – selected pages of which are seen here – did not arrive at the

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War Refugee Board until October 1944. The report prompted Board Director John Pehle to appeal once again to the War Department to bomb the rail lines and the camp. But, once again, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy rejected the proposal, arguing that Allied bombers would have to fly unescorted over thousands of miles of enemy territory and that the mission would divert resources from military targets. By this time, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews had died at Auschwitz. (War Refugee Board Records; General Correspondence; German Extermination Camps; Box 7).

Document Based Questions

Document IV-A: ***Rabbi Stephen Wise's Letter to FDR and Pages from His Memo on Nazi Atrocities, December 2-8, 1942***

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Document Based Questions

1) According to the report "Blue Print for Extermination," how many Jews had been killed in Nazi Europe up to that point?
2) How was the extermination of the Jews in Nazi Germany being brought about?
3) Who does the report blame for the policy of exterminating the Jews of Europe?
4) What evidence is given as confirmation of the existence of the extermination program?
5) From what sources does the evidence presented come?
6) What does the ratio of the number of ration cards printed to the number of Jews in the occupied territory say about the German commitment to feed the Jews?
7) How does the report say the Germans responded to the British (R.A.F. Royal Air Force) bombing of the German city of Cologne?
8) What message was the German response meant to send? For whom was it intended?
9) How were the Germans reducing the population in the ghettos in Poland?
10) What is the economic reasoning used by Herman Backe, Secretary of State for Economics, for the exportation and extermination of the Jews of Eastern Europe?

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11) What "double purpose" does the movement of Jews from Western and Central Europe to Eastern Europe serve?

12) How was "death by deportation" accomplished?

13) What other "scientific methods" were employed by the Nazis to exterminate the Jews?

Document IV-A Extension Question

1) How widespread was the reach of the Nazi's brutality? Ask your students to locate and highlight each of the countries listed in the report.

Document IV-B: ***Report by the Office of Strategic Services on Germany's Extermination of the Jews, March 17, 1943***

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Document Based Questions

1) What is the source of this document?

2) What is the source of the information contained in this document?

3) According to this report, what is the new Nazi policy regarding the killing of Jews?

4) In what way does this new policy differ from the previous policy?

5) According to the report, what was the goal the Nazis were trying to achieve?

6) What is the number of Jewish victims who have suffered from the new policy?

7) What does the report suggest will happen to "the methods" being employed in Berlin?

Document IV-B Extension Questions

1) Why do you suppose the Nazis have decided to pursue this new policy at this time and place?

2) What possible justification could there be for shooting someone "on the spot" just because of who they are, where they come from, or what they believed?

Document IV-C: ***Selected Pages of the Vrba-Wetzler Report on Auschwitz-Birkenau April-October 1944***

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Document based Questions

1) How long were the two escaped prisoners held at the Auschwitz concentration camp?
2) What makes the information these men are providing so valuable?
3) How do we know this information is accurate and reliable?
4) Describe the "registration" process the prisoners were subjected to when they arrived at the camp.
5) How did many of the men react to the tattooing of the identification numbers?
6) What does "protective custody" really mean?
7) About how many men were being held at the camp?
8) Describe the colored triangle identification system.
9) How were the Jewish prisoners' triangles different from the other prisoners?
10) How were the prisoners forced to spend their time at the camp?
11) Describe the "living quarters" the prisoners were assigned to live in.
12) What security measures were employed to prevent the prisoners at the camp from escaping?
13) What method did the Nazis use to kill the Jewish prisoners?
14) How were the bodies of the murdered prisoners disposed of?
15) About how many prisoners does the report indicate were killed at the camp each day?
16) Describe what happened when the crematorium was inaugurated in March 1943. What was the Nazis officials' reaction to what they saw that day?
17) How many Jews were murdered at Birkenau between April 1942 and April 1944?

Document IV-C Extension Activity

Silently reflect on the information presented in the report. Then journal about your feelings.

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Video Questions

1) Who were the main targets of the Nazi movement?
2) What did the Nazis do to the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice after the assassination of the German SS officer Reinhard Heydrich? What message were they trying to send?
3) In addition to the outright murder being carried out in the camps, what other factors contributed to the high number of inmate deaths?
4) About how many Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) died in the camp?
5) What kinds of medical experiments were carried out on the prisoners in the camps?
6) What was the Nazi attitude regarding the use of slave labor?
7) What would happen when a prison laborer was no longer able to work?
8) What was the Nazi attitude regarding plunder of the areas they had conquered?
9) Who were the so-called "useless eaters"? How were they treated? Why?
10) What policy was employed in an effort to keep Nazi blood free of Jewish 'contamination' and influence?
11) What did the Nazis decide to do with the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943?
12) How were those who resisted the Nazis dealt with?
13) What was the Nazi policy regarding warning shots when it came to escaping prisoners?
14) How were prisoners of war (POWs) treated by the Nazis?
15) How were the civilian populations under Nazi control treated?
16) When war occurs, how do we determine the difference between a death that is a "crime" and a death that is part of the nature of war?
17) Why did the people of 1920s – 1930s Germany allow themselves to accept/go along with what the Nazis were doing?