Episode Guide: Factories of Death

March 1942–March 1943

Prisoners at forced labor digging a drainage or sewerage trench in Auschwitz.

Overview

"Factories of Death" (Disc 1, Title 3, 48:28) examines the complex annihilation system the Nazis spread throughout Europe, with Auschwitz as the hub. We learn why the first transport of Jewish men, women, and children interred at Drancy, outside Paris, were transported to Auschwitz in March 1942, and what happened to the children who were rounded up without their parents. Genocide is being perpetrated not only at Auschwitz, but at other camps, such as Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor. Astonishingly, rival Nazi camp commanders participate with enthusiasm and share ideas for the best method of mass murder.

In the program's Follow-up Discussion (Disc 2, Bonus Features, Title 9, 6:34), Linda Ellerbee talks with Déborah Dwork, Rose Professor of Holocaust History at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, and the author of Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe (Yale University Press, 1991), and co-author with Robert Jan van Pelt of Holocaust: A History (W.W. Norton, 2002); and John K. Roth, Edward J. Sexton professor of philosophy at Claremont McKenna College in California (a visiting scholar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2004-2005), author of After-words: Post-Holocaust Struggles with Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Justice (University of Washington Press, 2004), and editor of Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches? (Paragon House, 2004).

Target Audience: Grades 9-12 social studies, history, and English courses

Student Learning Goals

- Differentiate among the following terms: perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, witness, sympathizer. Provide examples of each and discuss possible motivations for people's behavior.
- Explain what belief(s) enabled the Nazis and their collaborators to murder Jewish children.
- Consider whether French officials and British officials on the Channel Islands should be labeled collaborators.
- Compare the Nazi bureaucracy at different concentration camps.
• Review the role of professionals and professional ethics in transforming concentration camps into death camps.

• Using examples from the program and readings, identify ways different people or groups respond to authority and discuss their motivations.

• Discuss the role of the United States during this period of time and its response to the Final Solution.

Content Synopsis

The chapter numbers, titles, and times below correspond to the two-videodisc set of Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State published by BBC Video (E2113).

1. Deporting French Jews (Start: 00:00; Length: 7:22): During 1942, for the first time, the Nazis began to comb Western Europe to achieve their Final Solution: the annihilation of the Jews. The first Jews sent to Auschwitz from Western Europe were from France. Relatively few German soldiers were in France, and those who were there had an easier time than the soldiers fighting in the East against the Russians. Following Germany's victory in France, the country had been divided into two zones, only one of which was occupied by Germany, but the French largely administered both zones. Although the Nazis wanted the French to turn over all Jews, the French agreed to round up only those Jews with foreign citizenship, many of whom were in France because they had fled other countries controlled by the Nazis. The first French roundup took place in July 1942 and is described by Annette and Michel Muller, two Polish Jews who were children at the time.

2. The Children (Start: 7:22; Length: 10:43) Because the Nazis' greatest need was for Jewish adults who could work, approximately four thousand children were separated from their parents and sent alone to a makeshift camp in the suburbs of Paris called Drancy. Although adults there tried to help them, as described by Odette Daltroff-Baticle, an eyewitness, within a short time the children were packed into trains and sent to Auschwitz. None of them survived. SS Corporal Oskar Gröning, who was assigned to supervise the luggage collection of incoming transports, talks about the horrific treatment of both adults and children as they arrived at Auschwitz, and describes how people were locked in an airtight room into which the poisonous insecticide Zyklon B was thrown. Explaining why he subscribed to the Nazi racial ideology, Gröning says, "We were convinced by our world view that...there was a great conspiracy of Jews against us. The enemy is the blood inside them. The enemy is growing up to be a Jew who could become dangerous." Another of Gröning's jobs was to count the money stolen from the Jews and to organize its transfer to Berlin.
3. **British Deportees (Start: 18:05; Length: 4:51):** The Channel Islands were a vacation spot for British families. In 1939 the Potts family visited there with their nanny, Therese Steiner, who had sought safety in Britain from the Nazi occupation of her homeland, Austria. At the Germans' request, the British police agreed to register all Jews on the islands, among them the nanny. The Potts children describe how their nanny was refused permission to leave with them when they returned to England. The nanny was still on the island when the Germans invaded in the summer of 1940 and was taken to Auschwitz in July 1942, where she died.

4. **Heinrich Himmler (Start: 22:56; Length: 6:44):** Heinrich Himmler made his second visit to Auschwitz, which now held about 30,000 prisoners. He was pleased with what he saw and promoted camp commandant Rudolf Höss to SS lieutenant colonel. Höss, however, knew that security at the camp was very poor. Approximately one hundred inmates had successfully escaped. Kazimierz Piechowski, a Polish political prisoner, describes how he led three other prisoners toward their workplace, which was just outside the main camp gate. They then broke into a nearby warehouse and garage and stole SS uniforms, guns, ammunition, and a car, which enabled them to bluff their way through the checkpoint. On July 16, 1942, Himmler announced that all Polish Jews in the part of occupied Poland the Nazis called the General Government—about two million people—should be resettled (a euphemism for murdered) by the end of the year.

5. **Treblinka (Start: 29:40; Length: 7:51)** Sixty miles northeast of Warsaw was a camp, called Treblinka. Unlike Auschwitz, its only purpose was to kill people. Due to minimal preparation, the camp was rife with chaos and has been described as "a scene from hell." It was difficult to dispose of tens of thousands of bodies efficiently, both at Treblinka and at Auschwitz. In late summer 1942, Höss visited Chelmo, another death camp, to learn new methods of achieving the Nazis' goals efficiently.

6. **Righteous Among the Nations (Start: 37:31; Length 10:57):** Not all Germans participated in the Nazi scheme. At the German Army headquarters in the Polish city of Przemysł, a senior officer, Lieutenant Albert Battel, who had been trained as a lawyer, heard the Jews were to be deported the next day. He used great cunning and daring to secure the release of Jews who worked for the army. Back at Treblinka, Franz Stangl became commandant near the end of 1942. In order to hide the true purpose of the camp from new arrivals, he decorated the entryway. Stangl also helped create a huge new gas chamber complex with the capacity to kill 3,800 people at one time. The complex was disguised as shower rooms and it is estimated that more than 800,000 people died there. Meanwhile, mortuaries at Auschwitz were being altered to become gas chambers.

7. **Follow-up Discussion (Disc 2, Bonus Features, Title 9, 6:34):** Professors Dwork and Roth discuss the experiences of children before, during, and after the war, and the ideological reasons that led so many of them to their death. They also discuss ways in which many children were helped to survive.
Learning Resources

Timeline: March 1942–March 1943

Biographies: Odette Daltroff-Baticle, Albert Battel, Paul Blobel, Wendy Potts Davenport, Dr. Irmfried Eberl, Adolf Eichmann, Otto Globocnik, Oskar Gröning, Henrich Himmler, Rudolf Höss, Martin Igel, Annette Muller, Michael Muller, Barbara Newman, Josef Oberhauser, Kazimierz Piechowski, Ernest Plevin, Otto Pressburger, Eugenia Samuel, Fritz Stangl, Therese Steiner, Kalman Teigman, Christian Wirth

(boldface indicates people interviewed in the program; others are mentioned or seen in archival films or dramatizations)

Glossary: arrondisement, Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna-Monowitz, Channel Islands, Chelmno, collaboration, Commandant, concentration camp, deportation, Drancy, Final Solution, Führer, gas chamber, General Government, ghetto, Guernsey, Jersey, Nazis, Oberscharführer, occupation, persecution, Przemysl, Reich, SS, Treblinka, Wannsee, Yad Vashem, Zyklon B

Readings:
3.3. "Arrivals, Departures" (Charlotte Delbo).
3.4. "Fireside Chat" (Franklin Delano Roosevelt).

Before Viewing the Episode

One of the major themes of this program concerns the experience of children during the Holocaust. Many students are likely to have read The Diary of Anne Frank, but her story is not typical because her family went into hiding in a building they owned and were able to stay together. Have students discuss why they think the Nazis believed it necessary to kill Jewish children. To what degree were these murders pragmatic and to what degree were they ideological? Continue this discussion after viewing the program to see if new information has led to new theories and/or conclusions.

Post-Viewing Discussion

A scholar has said that the presence of children sometimes facilitated and sometimes impeded German plans. What do you think this means? How did the Nazis use children against their parents? Explain what is meant by a "choiceless choice" and give examples.

How were people who were fathers, brothers, and uncles able to bring themselves to destroy children, and how were mothers, sisters, and aunts complicit in this process?
Looking at the period of the Third Reich as a whole (1933-1945), describe some of the ways children were affected by the Nazi state socially, economically, geographically, psychologically, and educationally. To help students understand some of the ways in which Jewish children were gradually isolated well before the start of World War II, distribute Reading 3.1. "Would You Like a Star Too?" an autobiographical vignette by Ida Vos. Discuss:

- In what year do you think this episode might have occurred? What evidence is there within the reading to suggest the answer?
- We meet quite a number of people in this brief story: Rachel, her mother, her father, her sister Esther, an old man, her brother Leo, the tram driver, a man on the tram. How do each of these people feel about the star...about Jews? What is their point of view?
- Why do you think the Germans made Jews wear stars when they left their homes? What effect do you think wearing such a symbol had on their Jewish identity? How might a Jewish mother, father, young girl, or small boy feel about being Jewish because of having to wear the yellow star? And how do you think the stars made the Germans feel?

In the Follow-up Discussion (Disc 2, Bonus Features, Title 9, 6:34), Professor Dwork points out that during the Holocaust, hiding was not a game. What does she mean? What kinds of issues might young children who were separated from their families and sent to hide with strangers grapple with after the war?

Reading 3.2. Watching Jewish Apartments is a primary source document that describes how local police were told to behave prior to deportations of Jews. This document can be used to begin a discussion of bureaucracy, personal responsibility, choices, and obedience to authority, looking at these issues from different points of view. Discuss:

- Who are the "third parties" indicated in this order? Where is the property of deported Jews supposed to go?
- What do you learn about Nazi bureaucracy from this reading? What choices do you think the local police had in regard to this order? What might have been the consequences of each possible course of action?
- What do you think happened to all of the belongings that the police watched over so carefully? Should the families of the owners of these apartments be compensated for their losses post-war? If so, in what way?
- Compare the actions requested by this memo to other bureaucratic actions shown in the film in regard to motivations, alternative responses, and likely consequences (e.g., the consultations among commandants to find a more efficient method of killing, the efforts of Lieutenant Albert Battel in Przemysl, and the escape of Kazimierz Piechowski and his friends at Auschwitz).
As a follow-up to this discussion, have students research the Holocaust Claims Conference (www.claimscon.org) to investigate challenges that Jews who survived the Holocaust had to face in order to receive compensation for lost property.

- **Reading 3.3. "Arrivals, Departures"** by Charlotte Delbo is a personal memoir by a political dissident and concentration camp survivor that portrays the transport and arrival system at Auschwitz. Although it is somewhat lengthy (consider reading it aloud or assigning it for homework), this poetic remembrance can be compared with Oskar Gröning's description of the arrivals scene in the program. 

  Discuss:

  o To what elements or aspects of the concentration/death camp experience does the author refer?
  o Describe what seems to be the attitude of the people arriving at Auschwitz.
  o Delbo writes, "They expect the worst—they do not expect the unthinkable." What do you think she means by this? Is there any way people could have expected the "unthinkable"? How and why?
  o Why do you think Delbo mentions so many specific cities and countries? On a map of Europe from the period, find the countries mentioned in this poem. According to Delbo, what percentage of Europe was involved in transports?

- As the Nazis begin to expand their program throughout Western Europe, the kinds of people involved in the Holocaust expanded as well. Differentiate among the terms perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, resister, and rescuer and give examples of people who fit these descriptions in the program. Which of these acts were voluntary and which were involuntary? What motivated the individual's actions?

- To help students understand other historical events during this period, and America's role in them, distribute **Reading 3.4. Fireside Chat** in which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt updates the country on Labor Day, September 7, 1942. 

  Discuss:

  o What do you find interesting about President Roosevelt's report to America? What, if anything, surprises you about it? What are the president's goals?
  o What does this speech tell you about the relative importance of what was happening to the Jews compared to the overall war effort?