The Holocaust,Genocides, and Mass Murder of WWII: Crash Course European History #40

Crash Course: European History
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Hi Iâ€™m John Green and this is Crash Course European History.

Today, weâ€™re going to talk about the Holocaust, which was an integral part of Nazism in World. War II.

The genocide of the Holocaust--millions of Jewish people were systematically murdered--shows humanity at its most depraved. And weâ€™ve thought a lot about how much footage to show from the camps where so many millions were condemned to death, and weâ€™ve decided not to have a Thought Bubble in todayâ€™s episode. But we will be showing some archival footage, not least because anti-semitic disinformation campaigns throughout the last seventy years have sought to minimize or outright deny that the Holocaust happened.

Maybe thereâ€™s no countering such conspiracy theories--the evidence of the Holocaust is vast, including hundreds of thousands of witness accounts, testimony from war crimes trials, and extensive documentation by the Nazis themselves of their attempts to systematically eliminate. Jewish people from the world--and also others deemed inferior, including disabled people,. Roma people, many Slavs, Communists, and LGBT people.

But we think it is important to try to tell the truth, both in what we say and in what we show. Some maintain that the Holocaust is incomprehensible--an outsized phenomenon beyond ordinary concepts of good and evil. And in some ways thatâ€™s true, but it ignores the centuries of anti-Semitism that laid the groundwork for the dehumanization of Jewish people that intensified in the 20th century.

It is critical that we remember the horrors of the holocaust. History is, in the broadest sense, collective memory, and as Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel has written, â€œWithout memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future.â€• And so let us try to remember. [Intro] The beginning of the mass murder occurred late in the 1930s, when doctors mobilized to murder some 200,000 disabled people in the T4 project, which aimed to save the purported purity of the German race. In Permission for the Destruction of Worthless Life (1920), a noted jurist and a psychiatrist argued that people deemed â€œwithout valueâ€• should be eliminated.

T4 murderers used carbon monoxide gas to kill their victims, including in mobile gas chambers. Many of these victims were taken from institutions without the knowledge of their families. The list of dangerous people or people without value resulted from multiple hatreds: of disabled people, but also of Jewish people, and Sinti and Roma people, and certain groups of Slavs such as Poles, Czechs, and Russians, also homosexuals, black people, and Jehovahâ€™s.

Witnessesâ€”to name just a few. In the 1930s, political opponents and these marginalized people comprised those in early concentration camps, which were more like large-scale prisons, albeit ones where murder was common, as distinct from the extermination camps that were set up later in the war, and which functioned primarily as places to systematically murder people. In 1939, as German soldiers moved through Poland they murdered many Poles including.

Polish Jews, especially going after the most literate citizens, like political leaders, teachers and professors. And as Nazi forces moved eastward, Christian citizens joined in this murderous rampage against Jewish people, as a supposedly righteous crusade against those who had killed Jesus. Jesus, for the record, was Jewish, and he was killed by Roman authorities not Jewish ones, but none of this hatred was fact-based.

Special Nazi forces called the Einzatzgruppen took the lead but they were joined by civilians and policing officials. Hitler had always aspired to rid Germany of Jews, initially by means like forced migration or the creation of such dire living conditions that Jewish people would die at a rapid rate. And the creation of the Warsaw ghetto embodied this hope for ethnic cleansing: some thirty percent of the cityâ€™s population was jammed into two percent of its space to live on drastically reduced rations and necessities such as coal and medical supplies. â€œThe more that die, the better,â€• enthused Hans Frank, Governor of German occupied Poland.

And then, in the early years of the war, the plan for what became the Holocaust took shape, in part because it was felt that Poles were not being converted into slave labor fast enough and also because it was felt that Jewish people were not dying quickly enough. As the Nazi invasion of the USSR (Operation Barbarossa) began to fail by the end of 1941,. Nazi officials set in motion a system of industrial killing modeled on the T4 program, including plans for transport of Jewish and other victims to extermination camps.

They then communicated these plans to those responsible for carrying them out at the Wannsee. Conference outside Berlin in January 1942. Jewish leaders were tasked with selecting members of their conquered communities supposedly to be resettled to the east.

But these â€œresettlementsâ€• were not resettlements--instead, they entailed being transported to the new extermination camps and gassed on arrival (as was the case for most children and women) or worked to death (as was the case for boys and men and some women). Some camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau were both labor and extermination camps, while others such as Chelmno were solely to murder captives. And it should also be noted that mass killings continued around captured cities and towns, not just in extermination camps.

Nazi soldiers who objected, and there were some, were simply given other assignments. It was possible, the record shows, to just say no. But many soldiers and other authorities believed in the so-called â€œFinal Solutionâ€• of killing all Jewish people.

Soliders and other authorities were often white supremacists--although historians have differing judgements about the weight of other motivations, such as obedience to authority, the normalization of mass murder, or greed and opportunities to steal from victims--just to name a few of the possible motivations. Eventually, people were able to begin reporting not just the brutality of forced deportations but also their lethal outcome. This was called the â€œJewish mouth-radio.â€• But resistance was incredibly difficult for people who were weakened by starvation, and lack of medical care, and a range of other physical and mental abuse.

Still, in 1943 Jews in the Warsaw ghetto used guns provided by the Polish resistance to rise up against their Nazi occupiers. The Germans slaughtered most of the ghetto inhabitants, with a few escapees joining other resistance groups in Poland. In the camps themselves, resistance was even less plausible for people living on two hundred calories a day and constantly monitored by heavily armed guards.

From the beginning, the Nazis, though proudly committed to, in Hitlerâ€™s words, â€œthe destruction of the Jewish race in Europe,â€• did a lot to hide their mass murder. Death camps had ornate entry gates adorned with cheering messages. Those to be murdered were greeted by bands playing merry tunes.

So imagine the shock as new inmates were stripped of their illusions of safety in the camps: â€œYou see those flames?â€• one

newly arrived wife and mother was asked by a seasoned prisoner. â€œThatâ€™s the crematory over there. . . Call it by the name we use: the bakery. Perhaps it is your family that is being burned at the moment.â€• Some miraculously survived.

Women, raised to be guardians of tradition, often celebrated Jewish holidays, and the birthdays of their fellow inmates, and cared for one another when possible. And they were strengthened by these deeds. One chronicler of the death camps, Italian chemist Primo Levi, credited his survival to another prisoner who shared his bread ration and did favors.

Thanks to these acts, Levi wrote, â€œI managed not to forget that I myself was a man.â€• Serving in a camp where overworked and starved prisoners were to be immediately murdered,. Levi described how the Nazi regime drained away the â€œdivine sparkâ€• so that prisoners came to feel like â€œnon-men.â€• He went on: â€œIf I could enclose the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image which is familiar to me: a faceless man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of thought is to be seen.â€• Given that, â€œOne hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death. . . .â€• But people also kept their humanity and hope in spite of the odds against them. In 1943 hundreds of captives rose up at the Treblinka Extermination Camp, killing Ukrainian guards.

Although most of the rebels were killed, some successfully fled to join resistance forces. A year later at Auschwitz, women prisoners smuggled in explosives that men used to blow up a crematorium and assassinate guards. But none of the resisters survived.

Overall, deaths from the deliberately planned and executed extermination of Jewishâ€”the. Holocaust, or Shoah as it is known in Hebrewâ€”are estimated at six million people not to mention the abuse and torture of those who survived to the liberation of the camps in 1944 and 1945. Itâ€™s tempting to focus on those stories of survival, because we have records and accounts of the experiences of people like Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, but we have to remember that most people did not have miraculous escape stories.

Most people were simply murdered for who they were. Of course, combatants in World War II also unleashed additional mass murder beyond the. Holocaust itself.

In 1943, German forces uncovered victims of the 1940 Soviet execution of some 22,000 Polish military officers and professionalsâ€”engineers, professors, and lawyers, for example. Just like Nazi executions of the intelligentsia, the goal was to deprive a conquered people of their leadership. But Soviet executions did not primarily aim to bolster â€œRussian bloodâ€• or a â€œRussian race,â€• although with the outbreak of war non-Russians were often driven out of businesses and some professions.

But the Holocaust was very different because it was a systematic attempt to eliminate a people from the world via mass murder. It was genocide. Now, as weâ€™ve mentioned, Jewish people were not the only victims of Nazi mass murder:.

Millions of non-Jewish Poles were also killed. In the Naziâ€™s so called â€œracial science,â€• Slavs were not seen as all the same: Slovaks and Croats were seen as superior to Poles and Czechs for example. And Russians were seen as among the lowest Slavs because they were seen as â€œJudeo-Bolsheviksâ€•â€”a term that combined anti-Semitism with the hatred of Soviet communism.

Obviously, although some Bolsheviks were Jewish, many were notâ€”Lenin and Stalin to name just two of the most notable examples. But German soldiers murdered freely, motivated by the propaganda and speechifying filled with hatred for these twin demonized entities. Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Belarusians, and others also joined in the slaughter because they too had been taught to hate Jewish people and had age-old animosities toward Russian might in the region and newer animosities toward Bolshevik ambitions for conquest in eastern Europe.

Often individuals didnâ€™t need encouragement by the Germans for murder and even murdered in advance of their arrival because they wanted to help the Nazis out and also take the possessions of their murdered neighbors. One notorious case occurred in Jedwabne, Poland where townspeople rounded up their Jewish neighbors, raped and beat to death many of them and burned the rest alive in a barn. Then, following the Nazi example, they took their neighborsâ€™ possessions for themselves.

So by the end of World War II, had people taken a lesson from all this? I donâ€™t know. Racism and jingoistic nationalism remained powerful forces in European life, and in human life--as indeed they are today.

In some towns, surviving Jewish people who returned to claim their property were driven out or even murdered;. And the diverse group of refugees who sought safety and shelter after the war often found none, as indeed Jewish trying to escape Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s had been denied refuge around the world. After the war ended, many survivors of the camps gathered in port cities of the Mediterranean waiting for ships to take them anywhere that would accept them.

In the U. S., where anti-Semitism remained high, only five thousand Jewish people were allowed entry. And thatâ€™s very important to understand: Anti-Semitism was not only a destructive force in Europe, then or now.

And that consistent, long-term imagining of Jewish people as evil or inferior or inhuman allowed the horrors of the Holocaust to happen unchecked, and kept Jewish people from the safe harbor they might otherwise have found. And that is something to remember not only about history but also about our world today. As the Israeli holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer has written, â€œThou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander.â€• Thanks for watching.

Iâ€™ll see you next week.