

Unit 6 / Lesson 6.1 / Overview

Unit 6: The German Killers and Their Methods

Lesson 6.1: The Nazi Camp System

Background:

During the 1930s, the Nazi Party launched an extensive campaign of terror against the Jewish population in Europe, which continually worsened with time. The Nazis and their collaborators identified Jews, robbed them of their citizenship, property, and belongings, and segregated them from non-Jewish society. However, most of the world did not suspect their increasingly brutal actions would result in the systematic annihilation of European Jewry. It is important to understand how the Germans were able to murder approximately six million Jews and other groups that were also subject to persecution by the Nazis, including Roma/Sinti, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, Slavs, Jehovah's Witnesses, communists, homosexuals, and the physically and mentally handicapped, while conducting a full-scale war against the Allies.

Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, also known as Operation Barbarossa, on June 22, 1941, set the second phase of the war in motion. As German troops swept through Eastern Europe, more and more Jews fell under German control. It was no longer possible for the Nazis to solve the Jewish "problem" by forcing Jews to emigrate from areas of German control.

Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing squads) followed the Wehrmacht (the German army) into the newly occupied regions for the purpose of arresting and murdering Jews and political opponents. Between June 1941 and December 1941, hundreds of thousands of Jews died in mass executions near their homes at the hands of the *Einsatzgruppen*, and – it is important to note – these perpetrators included not only Germans but former neighbors and countrymen of the Jewish victims. The Germans effectively exploited the existing antisemitism of the local populations to recruit individuals to help terrorize and ultimately murder their Jewish neighbors.

However, the methods used by the *Einsatzgruppen* could not kill Jews in sufficient numbers in a timely manner to satisfy Germany's goal of "cleansing" Europe of all its Jews. Therefore, prior to the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, German leaders devised a more efficient plan of large-scale mass murder that would coordinate all the resources that Germany had at its disposal. Killing centers were set up using the gassing technology that had initially been used in the T-4 Program, in which tens of thousands of Germans with physical and mental disabilities were killed. These killing centers – Chelmno, Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz-Birkenau – were in remote areas of Poland, near train lines, and developed primarily for the sole purpose of facilitating the murder of Jews in the spring of 1942. Despite the attempts to hide these death camps, those who lived near them were aware of their existence and of what was happening inside.

In addition to the killing centers, hundreds of concentration and labor camps were established throughout Germany and Eastern Europe where Jews and other deportees were forced to work as slave laborers and were worked to death or died because of the horrific living conditions, starvation, and lack of medical care in the camps. An important factor that cannot be ignored when studying this aspect of the Holocaust is the role that German businesses played in

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supporting the camp system so that they could benefit from the use of slave labor. An example is Auschwitz-Birkenau, which primarily began as a labor camp but later turned into a killing center, and which was encircled by factories of many of Germany's largest industrial companies. The relationship of German industry to the concentration camp system broadens the circle of those who helped make the "Final Solution" possible and leads us to ask important questions about those who were responsible for the Nazis' success.

Video Running Time: 14:34

Goal:

Define the purpose and role of the extensive Nazi camp system in implementing the "Final Solution" to answer "The Jewish Question" and identify the victims of the Nazi camp system.

Essential Questions:

- What was the purpose and organization of the Nazi camp system?
- Who was sent to a Nazi camp, and what was life – and death – like in the camp system?

Learning Goals:

- Students will explain how the role of camps changed between 1933 – 1945.
- Students will identify the different types of camps (killing center, concentration, slave labor, and transit).
- Students will identify what groups of people were sent to camps and why they were targeted.
- Students will summarize the aspects of the administration and hierarchy in the camp system.

Success Criteria:

- Students will compare the roles of the different types of camps (transit, prisoner of war, slave and forced labor, killing centers, and detention centers).
- Students will explain how different groups of people, such as Jews, Roma/Sinti, and political prisoners, were identified in the camps.
- Students will be able to show that the Nazis murdered people through the barbaric living conditions, organized murder (e.g., gas chambers and vans), and death marches.
- Students will explain what role the Nazi camps played in the "Final Solution."
- Students will recognize the role of perpetrators in the camp system, including SS, kapos, and guards.

Topics For Further Discussion:

- Explore why Auschwitz became a symbol of the Holocaust.
- Explain the role of the Wannsee Conference in the "Final Solution."
- What does the timeline of the camp system tell you about how the war impacted the growth and use of camps?

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Recommended Background Reading from *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader*

Unit 6 – Lessons 6.1; 6.2; 6.3

Chapter 6

- Introduction to **Chapter 6: The German Killers and Their Methods**
- “Deciding to Kill” from *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution* by Mark Roseman
- “Bringing Death to Jews” from *Masters of Death* by Richard Rhodes
- “Bringing Jews to Death” from *The Destruction of the European Jews* by Raul Hilberg
- “Political Soldiers” from *Hitler’s Police Battalions* by Edward B. Westermann

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Unit 6: The German Killers and Their Methods

Lesson 6.1: The Nazi Camp System

Question	
What types of camps were part of the Nazi camp system?	
What was the first camp, and when and why was it established?	
What were the functions of camps?	
What were the leading causes of death in the camps?	
Who was in charge of the Nazi camp system and what was the legal structure of the camps?	
How did the purpose of the camps change with the onset of World War II?	
Who were the first people in the camps?	

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What were Operation Reinhard camps and what was their sole purpose?	
What were the main parts of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and what were their functions?	
What opened in Auschwitz II / Birkenau between March 22 and June 25-26, 1943?	
What was the purpose of the death marches?	
What are <i>stolpersteine</i> , and what is their purpose?	

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Answer Key

Question	Possible Answers
What types of camps were part of the Nazi camp system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration camps • Death camps/killing centers • Forced labor camps • Transit camps • Penal camps • Prisoner of War camps (Slide 3)
What was the first camp, and when and why was it established?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dachau, in March of 1933 • For political prisoners who were held in so-called “protective custody” (Slide 4)
What were the functions of camps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punish people • Use prisoners as slave labor for the war effort (Slide 4)
What were the leading causes of death in the camps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harsh conditions • Disease • Starvation rations • Unsanitary conditions (Slide 4)
Who was in charge of the Nazi camp system and what was the legal structure of the camps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SS was responsible for running the concentration camp system • Heinrich Himmler was the head of the SS • The camp system existed outside the legal structure of the German state • People could be rounded up and held in camps indefinitely without trial or even access to a lawyer (Slide 6)
How did the purpose of the camps change with the onset of World War II?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the start of World War II, camps were primarily used to imprison people considered to be enemies of the state • After the war started, camps were used to murder individuals who did not fit into the Nazi racial hierarchy, specifically Jews and others • Source for forced and slave labor (Slide 7)

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Who were the first people in the camps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opponents of the Nazi regime • German Communists • Socialists • Social Democrats • Jehovah's Witnesses • Homosexuals • "Asocials," a group comprised of habitual criminals, enemies of the state • Jews were members of some of the above groups (Slide 10)
What were Operation Reinhard camps and what was their sole purpose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bełżec • Sobibór • Treblinka • They were death camps • There was no selection • Most prisoners were murdered upon arrival • Sole purpose was to murder Jews • Approximately 1.7 million Jews were murdered in Operation Reinhard camps (Slide 11)
What were the main parts of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and what were their functions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auschwitz 1 – slave labor camp and killing center • Auschwitz II or Birkenau – slave labor and killing center • Auschwitz III or Monowitz – slave labor (Slide 12)
What opened in Auschwitz II / Birkenau between March 22 and June 25-26, 1943?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four large crematoria and gas chambers began operating • The Nazis were capable of murdering over 8,000 people each day (Slide 13)
What was the purpose of the death marches?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized to relocate prisoners from the camps in the East and bring them to locations in the Reich to continue to be used as slave labor for the German war effort (Slide 15, 16)

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What are <i>stolpersteine</i> , and what is their purpose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stumbling stone or block, which is placed in the pavement in front of buildings throughout Germany and other countries from which Jews and others were deported; purpose is to serve as a memorial (Slide 17)
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Unit 6: The German Killers and Their Methods

Lesson 6.1: The Nazi Camp System

Slide 1 – The Nazi Camp System

Welcome to Lesson 6.1 of *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*, from The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This presentation will give you an overview of the topic “The Nazi Camp System.” This lesson was prepared by Doug Cervi, who taught social studies and the Holocaust at Oakcrest High School in Mays Landing, New Jersey. Mr. Cervi is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education and an adjunct professor at Stockton University in New Jersey.

Slide 2 – The Nazi Camp System

The Nazis set up a system of camps initially used to detain and incarcerate various groups of people they considered their enemies.

This photograph shows the main gate to the Auschwitz concentration camp, with its familiar sign stating “Arbeit Macht Frei,” or “Work will make you free.” Auschwitz is the best known of the Nazi camps, but it was not established until 1940.

Slide 3 – Establishment of the Camps

The Nazi camp system would eventually expand to thousands of different camps, which would include concentration camps, death camps, forced labor camps, transit camps, penal camps, and prisoner of war camps.

This photograph shows the main entrance to Birkenau, also known as Auschwitz II.

Slide 4 – Timeline of The Camp System

This timeline shows when the major concentration and death camps were established. Dachau was the first camp to be established; it opened in March of 1933 and was intended for political prisoners, who were held in so-called “protective custody.”

The camp system evolved as decisions were made regarding the disposition of the Jews of Europe, and in response to the labor needs of the German state. Most concentration camps were established not only to punish people but also to use prisoners as slave labor in the many industries organized for the German war effort. The Auschwitz complex was a mixed-function camp: a death camp, a concentration camp, and a slave labor camp. Historians have determined most people in these camps would die within months because of the harsh and unsanitary conditions, disease, and starvation rations.

Slide 5 – Map of the Major Concentration and Death Camps

This map from 1945 shows the major concentration and death camps. It also shows misconceptions of the camp system in the immediate aftermath of the war, with Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Stutthof considered death camps at the time. However, after years of thorough

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research we now have a clearer picture and have evidence that these were actually mixed-function camps. It should also be noted that the dotted lines on the map show pre-war borders.

Slide 6 – Concentration Camp System

Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and the German police, presided over the entire concentration camp system. The system was run by the SS and existed outside of the legal structure of the German state; people could be rounded up and held in camps indefinitely without trial or even access to a lawyer. Himmler, shown here, was the main Nazi official responsible for conceiving and managing the implementation of the “Final Solution,” the Nazi plan to murder the Jews of Europe. He was captured after the war and committed suicide before being charged for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Slide 7 – Purpose of Camps

The Nazis used the camps for a number of purposes. Before the war they were primarily used to imprison people considered to be enemies of the state.

After the onset of the war, the function of the camps expanded to include the murder of individuals who did not fit into the Nazi racial hierarchy, specifically Jews, but also Roma and Sinti, Soviet prisoners of war, and members of the Polish intelligentsia and others.

Camps also served as a source for forced and slave labor.

This photograph shows concentration camp inmates at forced labor hauling cartloads of earth for the construction of the “Russian camp” at Mauthausen concentration camp.

Slide 8 – Organization of the Camps

All of the camps were under the supervision of the SS Death’s Head Units; each had a Commandant and guard command. Dachau, the first camp, became the training ground for all future camps.

In this photograph you see SS officers socializing on the grounds of the SS retreat some 18 miles from Auschwitz.

Slide 9 – Type of Camps

Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany established more than 44,000 camps and other sites of imprisonment, including ghettos, throughout Europe. Included in this number are killing centers, concentration camps, slave and forced labor camps, transit camps, prisoner of war camps, prisons, and detention centers. Many of these camps had subcamps.

Dachau had 124 subcamps and Auschwitz-Birkenau had almost 50 subcamps. Many of these camps were located near major cities – Dachau near Munich, Majdanek in Lublin, Buchenwald near Weimar, Sachsenhausen near Berlin – making it likely that the local population would have had some idea of what was going on in them.

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The death camps were located by the SS in remote areas of German-occupied Poland, especially in the eastern part of the country.

Slide 10 – First People in the Camps

Many people are under the impression that Jews were the first people imprisoned in the camps, but that would come later. The first people in the camps were political opponents of the Nazi regime and included German Communists, Socialists, and Social Democrats. Among others imprisoned were Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and "asocials," a group that was comprised of habitual criminals, enemies of the state, and others. Jews were included as members of some of these groups.

This inmate photograph is of Urszula Plenkiewicz, a Polish political prisoner at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Prior to Urszula's arrest on November 2, 1942, by the Gestapo, she saved the life of Krystyna Kon, a young Jewish woman whom she hid in her home for more than a year. Urszula survived the war and was recognized as a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial.

Slide 11 – Operation Reinhard Camps

The Operation Reinhard camps were established for the sole purpose of murdering Jews, mainly from occupied Poland, but as the war progressed, from other countries as well, in order to implement the "Final Solution." Conceived in the fall of 1941, the first camp began operations in March 1942. There were three Operation Reinhard camps – Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. These camps were death camps. Almost all Jews deported to death camps were murdered upon arrival. A few were spared to work in the camps. This program was named after Reinhard Heydrich, who was a key architect of the "Final Solution" and coordinated the Wannsee Conference in January of 1942. Heydrich was assassinated in June of 1942. Approximately 1.7 million Jews were murdered in Operation Reinhard camps.

This photograph shows Jews being forced into boxcars for deportation to the Bełżec killing center located in German-occupied Poland.

Slide 12 – Auschwitz

The Auschwitz concentration camp complex consisted of three main parts – Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II (Birkenau) and Auschwitz III (Monowitz) – and a system of subcamps.

In early 1940, SS authorities chose a former Polish army base in Oświęcim, in occupied Polish territories annexed directly into the Third Reich, for the site of a future concentration camp. On May 20, 1940, the SS brought to Auschwitz 30 German "professional criminals" from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. They would serve as the first functionary prisoners, and brutally oversaw other prisoners. The first transport of Polish prisoners consisting of 728 men arrived on June 14, 1940. This date is considered to be the beginning of the camp's operation. Auschwitz was planned to hold 30,000 prisoners. The first gassing with Zyklon-B gas pellets on a mass scale took place at the beginning of September 1941, in Auschwitz I.

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In the fall of 1941, the decision was made to create Birkenau. Monowitz, Auschwitz III, was established in October 1942 as a concentration camp. Prisoners there were used to build a new factory for the production of synthetic rubber for I.G. Farben, a major German chemical and pharmaceutical conglomerate.

Slide 13 – Auschwitz – Slave Labor and Killing Center

In the spring and summer of 1942, Birkenau started functioning with two small gas chambers. Between March 22 and June 25-26, 1943, four large crematoria and gas chambers were built at Birkenau and began operating. The Nazis were capable of murdering over 8,000 people each day.

In November 1944, Himmler ordered the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau to be destroyed. The Soviet army liberated the Auschwitz main camp on January 27, 1945.

This photograph shows the ruins of crematorium II, at Birkenau.

Slide 14 – Deportation Routes to Major Camps

Here we see the train routes to the major camps, including Chełmno, Treblinka, Sobibór, Bełżec, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Trains came to these camps from both Western and Eastern Europe.

Slide 15 – Death Marches

This photograph shows prisoners on a death march to the Mauthausen camp in 1945.

Slide 16 – Death Marches

With Germany losing the war and Soviet troops advancing from the east, death marches were organized to relocate prisoners away from the camps in the East and bring them to locations in the Reich. The Nazis believed they could still win the war and hide the crimes they had committed. The death marches began in December 1944, in what was considered one of the worst winters in European history. Concentration camp prisoners, most in terrible physical condition, began walking toward Germany. German guards would shoot those who could not continue because of their failing physical condition. Thousands died on these marches.

In April 1945, this photograph was clandestinely taken from the second story window of a home in Germany while a family member stood outside and gave potatoes to the prisoners.

Slide 17 – Jewish Death Toll by Camp Location

We will never know the exact number or the names of all the victims of the Holocaust, but the approximate number of Jews murdered was about 6 million. The numbers are staggering and almost impossible to comprehend.

This slide shows the approximate number of Jews murdered in killing centers, concentration camps and ghettos. It does not include Jews murdered in shooting actions or in other acts of violence outside of camps and ghettos.

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This photograph shows a *stolperstein* (a “stumbling stone” or block). *Stolpersteine* are placed in the pavement in front of buildings throughout Germany and other countries from which Jews were deported. Almost every “stone” begins with HERE LIVED... this *stolperstein* says:

HERE LIVED IRMA REHFELD
BORN: BODENHEIMER IN 1892
WIDOW OF BASSFREUND
DEPORTED: MARCH 3, 1943
MURDERED IN AUSCHWITZ

Slide 18 – Summary – The Nazi Camp System

The camp system, which included concentration camps, labor camps, transit camps, and killing centers, as well as camps which combined several of these functions, was brutal and deadly. The camps were primarily run by the SS Death’s Head Units. As the camps were liquidated the prisoners were often shot or forced on death marches, where many more died.

Thank you for joining us today as we learned about “The Nazi Camp System.” Please continue your educational journey with us. This concludes our presentation of Lesson 6.1 from *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers*™. On behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you.

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Name: _____

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Circle the correct answers below.

1. Which of the following is not an accurate description of the purpose of the camps?
 - a. To imprison those opposed to the Nazi regime
 - b. To remove pressure from the existing prison system
 - c. To murder individuals who did not fit into Nazi racial expectations
 - d. To serve as a source of forced or slave labor
2. Of the following statements, which is the most accurate?
 - a. Camps were designated for the exclusive purpose of incarcerating Jewish prisoners
 - b. The majority of camps had mixed functions and served multiple purposes
 - c. Political prisoners were sent to facilities other than camps
 - d. The camps of Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Stutthof were solely classified as death camps
3. What does it mean that the camps “existed outside the legal structure of the German state?”
 - a. No one knew about concentration camps
 - b. Only lawyers could visit people in camps
 - c. People could be rounded up and held in camps indefinitely without trial or access to a lawyer
 - d. People could get a fair trial if their attorney came to camp and there were people from their town who would say they were good citizens
4. Administration of the camps fell onto what person or groups?
 - a. Administration was directly handled by Hitler and his immediate staff
 - b. Local governmental officials managed the administrative duties
 - c. The SS Death’s Head Unit managed the camps, with responsibilities divided among a commandant and the guards
 - d. Business leaders who the camp directly served, such as IG Farben at Auschwitz, were in charge
5. What was the primary purpose of the death march?
 - a. To hide Nazi crimes from the approaching Allied forces
 - b. To relocate prisoners away from the front
 - c. To empty out camps so they could be repurposed for the defense of the Reich
 - d. To move the prisoners to alternative holding areas inside of Germany so they could continue to be used as slave labor

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Lesson Quiz with Answers Highlighted and Bolded

1. Which of the following is not an accurate description of the purpose of the camps?
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Link to Google Form Quiz (Instructions Available in the Appendix)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18kiWqP6iml0GaAHZ5DrF_u2XqQYCxvmCwXb506wDur0/copy

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Slide 1 - Yevgeny Khaldei via Getty Images

Slide 2 - Stanisław Łuczko, source: IPN Archives, GK-9-1-82-1

Slide 3 - Yad Vashem, Photo Archive, Jerusalem

Slide 4 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 4A - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 5 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Marilyn Spencer

Slide 6 - Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S72707 / Fotograf(in): Bauer, Friedrich Franz,
<https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/dba/en/search/?yearfrom=&yearto=&query=Bild+183-S72707>

Slide 7 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 8 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Anonymous Donor

Slide 9 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Robert A. Schmuhl

Slide 10 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 11 - From the Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York

Slide 12 - Stanisław Łuczko, source: IPN Archives, GK-9-1-82-1

Slide 13 - Stanisław Mucha, source: IPN Archives, GK-9-1-105-3

Slide 14 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 15 - Yad Vashem, Photo Archive, Jerusalem

Slide 16 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Maria Seidenberger

Slide 17 - Ann May Mollengarden