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The hand of the world clock is loudly striking the hour in which the destiny of our nation must be decided in one way or another. The process of consolidation in which the great states of the earth are involved at the moment is for us the last warning signal to stop and search our hearts, to lead our people out of the dream world back to hard reality, and show them the way to the future which alone will lead the old Reich to a new golden age.

Questions

1. For Hitler, what is the relationship between the “state” and “race”? What threatens the German state? Why was prerevolutionary Russia able to maintain a state? Why must the Bolshevik state inevitably fail?

2. Why must Germany expand into Russia?

3. How does Hitler conceptualize the relationship between states?

Hanna Lévy-Hass, Diary of Bergen-Belsen (1944–1945)

Bergen-Belsen was nowhere near the worst of the Nazi concentration camps. It had no gas chambers and included some groups the Nazis hoped to exchange for prisoners held by the Allies. Therefore its prisoners were treated less badly than others elsewhere. Still, food was inadequate, sanitation was terrible, and brutality was rampant. For some types of inhabitants, this was effectively an extermination camp even in its earlier form. Probably 18,000 of the 20,000 Soviet prisoners of war held at the camp between summer 1941 and spring 1942 died. Death rates were then relatively low until 1944.

Circumstances worsened dramatically in late 1944. As Soviet armies neared the Nazi camps in the East, thousands of prisoners were moved to Bergen-Belsen; its population rose from 7,300 in July 1944 to 60,000 in April 1945. Food rations became even more inadequate, and the minimal sanitary facilities were overwhelmed. Tens of thousands died during these last months, and 13,000 more died shortly afterward from diseases contracted in the camp. Ultimately, British soldiers burned the facility to prevent the spread of typhus.

Hanna Lévy-Hass (1913–2001) was a Jewish schoolteacher in Yugoslavia who joined the resistance when the Nazis invaded. At one point she considered joining other partisan fighters in the hills, but decided not to for fear that the Nazis would kill all the other Jews in her village in retaliation. Deported to Bergen-Belsen, she managed to survive and to keep a secret diary, excerpted below. She returned briefly to Yugoslavia after the war, but lived most of her remaining life in Israel.

December 1944

Starvation is everywhere; each of us is nothing more than a shadow. The food we receive gets scarcer each day. For three days we haven’t seen a piece of bread. Some people have saved theirs and now they open up their miserable provisions and everything is moldy. Bread is gold. You can get anything with bread; you will risk everything for bread. And there are more and more thieves, especially at night. Someone suggested we take turns staying up and keeping watch so we could catch them. The hunt lasted two nights in the densest darkness. It was very dramatic, very noisy. No one slept and the results were nil.

Anyone who has a little bit of bread keeps it under his pillow or rather makes a pillow out of it. That way they feel more secure when they sleep. The mothers, especially, resort to this method to ensure a few mouthfuls for their children. As for the workers who are out working all day, they’re forced to lug their entire stock with them everywhere in their bag. And their entire stock means six days’ rations, at most, which is about half a loaf. The temptation is strong. Everyone ends up at some point eating the entire six days’ worth in one day.

In order to mobilize the maximum number of internees possible for all kinds of work, the Germans have multiplied their terror tenfold. Each day, before dawn, at four o'clock in the morning, everyone must be up. We feel hunted. A feverish coming and going, marked by anguish and terror. * * * It's the middle of winter; it's bitterly cold. At five o'clock, the human columns must already be in perfect order in the Appellplatz. This is the first Appell of the day (Arbeitsappell—roll call for work). It's still completely dark out, we stand for at least two hours waiting for the officer in charge who has to count us and send us off to work. Frozen, extremely weakened, famished, we feel our strength abandon us. But no leaving the square, no moving, even.

Due to the icy cold and starvation, many faint and collapse to the ground. Twice, I myself became violently dizzy and nearly succumbed. * * * But I managed to gather myself one more time. Falling ill here is not a good thing. No one and nothing in the world can help us. We die, and that's it.

The German officer finally deigns to count us at seven or seven thirty. He begins with a hearty volley of insults and cursing directed at everyone, he starts to let fly, kicking people for no reason, randomly. Afterwards, he chooses his victims, those who dare to explain why they can't work. These are the ones he "sets right." Systematically, he lunes at them, gives them a back-breaking beating, drag them on the ground, and tramples them—after which he forces them to stand up and take their place in the ranks.

December 1944

The camp commander was just dismissed. Kramer was appointed in his place. Kramer, however, is the former commander of Auschwitz. Ominous reminder. All commentary is useless. * * * The camp regime gets more atrocious by the day. Beatings are commonplace; punishments that in the past were given to individuals and meant depriving one person of bread or of food are now collective measures meted out to the camp as a whole. What difference does it make if there are small children and sick people among us? * * *

An atrocious fright has gripped all of our hearts. We feel that there will be no one to look after us anymore. We are completely at the mercy of the new commander, a villain and avowed anti-Semite. Absolute Master of the camp, he is subordinate to no one. No authority exists for us, except him. God Himself is powerless here.

Kramer does what he likes. Endless transports keep pouring in. Processions of strange creatures move constantly between the blocks and the barbed wire. Pitiful, their terrifying appearance so unlike that of human beings. Ghosts. They look at us with fright and we look at them the same way. * * * We change places every day, each time more tightly squeezed together. Finally, they give the order that we are to sleep two to a bed, so the three-tiered bunks now contain six people. The space between the bunks is even narrower than before. This is how we emptied half of our barracks to make room for new arrivals.

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What is important to us at the moment is Kramer and his band. He has imposed a new command on us, composed of Aryans, common criminals (the Häftlinge) of German, Polish, or French nationality. They are well-fed types, big and strong as bulls. They continually strut among us with clubs, beating whomever they wish. They wear convicts' clothes, those striped pants and long shirts with large numbers marked on the back. But the most tragic thing is that by their very nature, they are criminals in the worst sense of the word. Their body and soul sold to the devil—to Kramer—they have nothing of humanity left in them. Cynical, cruel, satanic. You should see the perversity of joy they take in beating people. I've noticed it clearly. They are wild animals disguised as men. This is what the Germans have done, what they have reduced them to. And it seems that it is on us that they intend to take their revenge.

These hardened criminals are our masters from this moment on, free to dispose of our lives, our souls, our children. We are enslaved under these vile serfs. What an infernal scheme! The Nazi brute is never short of ideas when it comes to finding a way to humiliate man better, to crush him better. The new command, these new Kapos attack the male internees especially. * * * There
is a place called the *Stuppenkommando*. It's the death commando. In the evening, after work, not one of the men who have worked there returns unscathed. They are beaten to the point of being broken, bloody, and swollen. Yesterday, December 30, two men died under their bludgeons. The same day, two others were brought back to the camp on stretchers carried by their comrades. The "*kapos*" also strike the women or, worse yet, succeed in prostituting them.

January 1945

I succeeded in talking to some of the women from the transport that came from Auschwitz. Most of them are Jewish women from Poland, Greece, or Hungary. They tell us what they've experienced at Auschwitz. In 1943 and 1944 alone, during the time they were there, hundreds of thousands of people were exterminated. They are among the few hundred who miraculously managed to get out of there.

"There are no words to describe what we went through," they tell us. And they tell us of mass murders, by gas, of 99 percent of the detainees who were eliminated in this way, of their executioners' depraved behavior. They tell us all this while scrutinizing us to see if we believe them: because, they say, they are beginning themselves to doubt the truth of what they say. They fear that no one will ever believe them, that their words will be taken as those of aberrant, demented people. Only a few hundred women remain alive out of all those who were deported to Auschwitz. The men and the children were immediately eliminated, as were the elderly and the weak. A Jewish woman from Greece tells me that out of seventy thousand Greek Jews interned at Auschwitz with her, only three hundred women are still alive. She herself saw her parents and her entire family disappear in smoke.

It's strange. These women who have escaped from hell and who worked in the kitchens, in the depots, in the orchestra, even, seem relatively healthy. They're all robust, well preserved. It's bizarre, when you compare them to our own bodies. They tell us: Back there, in Auschwitz, people got enough to eat. On top of that, the internees themselves had organized a sort of mutual assistance program and made arrangements to procure what they needed. In general, they didn't suffer from hunger. On the other hand, the risk of death hovered over everyone, each person knew he was under constant threat of a sudden, irrevocable death, as each one imagined himself already consumed by the flames.

The death factory functioned at full capacity every day. Columns of men, of women, several hundreds and sometimes even one or two thousand per day, waited their turn at the entrance to the gas showers. The crematory smoked right before their eyes, and they just watched, knowing exactly what it meant. The smoke spoke to them of the fire where their loved ones had burned and where they themselves would soon end their existence. No, they weren't hungry there, our companions from Auschwitz tell us, dismayed by our tales of the methodical hunger we are subjected to. All this just shows that the goal is the same, only the means vary. Back there, a brutal and cynical process, mass assassinations by gassing; here, a slow extermination, calculated in a cowardly way through hunger, violence, terror, consciously sustained epidemics.

January 1945

Death has moved in to stay. It's our most loyal tenant. Always and ever present. Men die en masse due to vile treatment, hunger, humiliation, dysentery, and vermin. They fall, they collapse. Their number diminishes rapidly. Many of my acquaintances ended their lives in this manner. Every morning we find one or two corpses in the beds. One, two, three, four. We end up confusing the living and the dead. Because in essence the difference between them is minimal; we are skeletons who still possess some capacity to move, they are immobile skeletons.

There is yet a third category: those who still breathe a little but remain lying down, unable to move. We wait for them to pass, to make room for others. It's not surprising that we confuse them with the dead and that we lose count.
April 1945

I am terribly ashamed to have lived through all this. Men are rotting and decomposing in the mud. There are reports that in one of the neighboring blocks acts of cannibalism have arisen. According to a personal statement by a German doctor who finally came to our block to take stock of the "progress" of mass deaths—according to his statement, then, over the past two months, February and March, more than seventeen thousand internees per month died—that is to say, thirty-five thousand out of forty-five thousand internees.

If only they had been simple, humane deaths. "*" Ah, no, I don't want to die like this. I don't want to! It would be better to die right away, as quickly as possible "*" like a human being. What? Allow your body and soul to putrefy and to wallow in their own filth, to slowly but irrevocably disappear from total starvation, to sink into nothingness, devoured by pus and stench and going through all the stages of decomposition before rotting to death? Because that's exactly what it is: we don't die here, we rot to death. Why wait? That would be an affront to human dignity. What a disgrace, what an immense disgrace. "*" "*"

I look at this gloomy barracks full of ghosts, humiliation, hatred, these motionless sick people reduced to total powerlessness, these living and already putrefied corpses "*" a dark abyss where an entire humanity founders. "*" Oh, no, as long as my brain can function normally, I will not allow myself to end like this. It is my duty to die like a man, to avoid a death worse than all deaths, a death that isn't a death.

* " "*"

This darkest and most degrading slavery imaginable has made it so that life in this camp has nothing in common with life as humans conceive it.

It is indeed a cruel plan aiming to cause the systematic and certain end of thousands of human lives. Of that, there is not the slightest doubt, not the slightest doubt. It requires nothing but to see clearly and to follow attentively everything that goes on in order to deduce, with no hesitation: this camp is not made to hold civilian deportees or prisoners of war for a specific period of time, to temporarily deprive them of freedom for whatever political, diplomatic, or strategic reasons with the intention of holding them and releasing them alive before or after the cessation of hostilities. "*" "*" No: this camp is consciously and knowingly organized and arranged in such a way as to methodically exterminate thousands of human beings according to a plan. If this continues for only one more month, it is highly doubtful that one single person among us will come through.

Questions

1. Who is in charge of the prisoners, and how do they behave?

2. How does Lévy-Hass compare the horrors of Bergen-Belsen with those of Auschwitz? What does she conclude about the goals of the Nazis?

3. What can you tell about Lévy-Hass's view of herself and her fellow prisoners? Explain.

E. B. Sledge, At Okinawa (1945)

World War II was the most destructive war in the history of mankind. At least 50 million people, soldiers and civilians, were killed. In the Pacific the most costly fighting was for the island of Okinawa. Between April and June 1945, 12,000 American soldiers, 110,000 Japanese soldiers, and perhaps as many as 150,000 civilians died. The following excerpt about Okinawa comes from the memoir of Eugene Bondarant Sledge (1923–2001). Born in Alabama, Sledge joined the Marine Corps in 1942. Although he was enrolled in officer candidate school at the Georgia Institute of Technology, he left the program to fight as an enlisted man. In 1944 he took part in the brutal campaign on the island of Peleliu and in 1945 on Okinawa. After the war he taught biology at the University of Montevallo in Alabama. He began writing With the Old Breed immediately after the fighting on Peleliu, but did not finish it until the late 1970s. The memoir was initially intended for