

SCIENCE BEHIND THE HOLOCAUST:
NAZI SCIENCE & THE EXPERIMENTED CHILDREN OF AUSCHWITZ

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History 299: Workshop: The Holocaust
2017

Medicine is marked as the science of healing in the world. It is meant to treat, diagnose and heal people. It is a method for humanity to repair and regenerate until it falls into the wrong hands. History has painted gruesome pictures across textbooks and has paralyzed the thoughts of many survivors who tremble when they speak about what was done to them all in the name of science. Doctors and scientists involved in these brutal cases that were eager to use medicine to aid their own agendas crossed lines that many did not know they could cross. The doctors and scientists that stood behind the racial ideologies and policies implemented by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust crossed many of those lines. These lines were crossed due to their blind commitment to policies rooted in the mere debilitation and exploitation of the Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and anybody else who did not fit the characteristics of the superior Aryan race.

As a result, Nazi physicians such as Doctor Josef Mengele medically experimented on patients in order to advance racial science and simultaneously contribute to the German war effort. Not only did doctors and scientist's in Nazi Germany kill in the name of medicine but they used the most vulnerable and weak in their experiments. The group at focus throughout this essay are the experimented children in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

While there were a number of experiments and many other cruel atrocities that took place in Auschwitz, the medical experimentation and exploitation of children is an unforgettable crime. It is topic that has been covered but is one that raises many questions that should be examined given the impact that Nazi science directly and indirectly has had on the children used in an attempt to advance racial agendas. As children were precisely selected, taken care of to a certain extent and used; their childhood was one embedded in the walls of the hospitals they were kept in and their suffering stems from the tenants found at the core of the Nazi science that sealed their fate even before their scars were formed.

The Nazi biomedical vision was one formed even before Hitler came to power. In *When Medicine Went Mad*, Robert Proctor explains that “racial hygiene [was] established at German universities before the Nazi [rose] to power, and by 1932... racial hygiene had become a scientific orthodoxy in the German medical community.”¹ Abstract policies and theories at an earlier time rooted in racial science had been around long before Hitler had pitched it to the German people. They were already being discussed and taught at seminars in German universities. Doctors and scientists collaborated in the demise of some inferior race thus relating the superiority of the German people to some sort of hereditary link. Among German scholars and scientists, Nazi racial science was based on the “facts of inheritance and variability”².

These theories of inheritance were based on the concept of traits being passed down through generations. They highlight the mere fact that the positive and negative attributes were all inherited and that men differed in their genetic value. They outlined the idea that Germany would collapse if all people that did not derive from the Aryan race continued to reproduce. Eventually, Nazi ideas of hereditary science became the foundation for experiments of doctor’s like Josef Mengele.

Similarly, the biomedical vision involving the racial science came from the mere fear of degeneration that had started to spread among German scientists towards the end of the 19th century. The birth of the Nazi medical vision was an extension of an already existent fear carried by a group of Germans. It was the fear of being outsmarted, outlived and to a certain extent overpowered by another race that was not German; this was the fear of degeneration that had

¹ Caplan, Arthur L. *When medicine went mad: bioethics and the holocaust*. (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 1992.), 27.

² *Ibid.*, 25.

started to spread among German scientists. The early racial science movement was meant to be nationalistic and their main goal initially was to prevent national degradation. The early forms of racial science were not based on science at all but actually invented by a faction of scientists who felt strongly towards protecting some perfect superior race. As Nazi scientists began to feel stronger about their racial theories, they attempted to mixed the study of Genetics with Eugenics.

Robert J. Lifton explains, “Eugenics is a term coined by Francis Galton in 1883 to denote the principle of strengthening a biological group on the basis of ostensible hereditary worth; despite its evolutionary claims and later reference to genetic laws, eugenics has no scientific standing”.³ While it has no scientific standing, scientists and doctors were insistent on proving the other side wrong. And as Hitler came to power, he implemented a program that tore down every obstacle that rose up in his attempt to cleanse Germany of all enemies tainting the superior German race.

Furthermore, Hitler’s totalitarian regime either gave physicians and scientist’s the power to use medicine to support their racial agenda or simply forced them to continue the work by administering threats and using fear. As the Nazi war unfolded, there were no regulations set for doctors designated to conduct their research using the victims of the Holocaust. Eventually, as Hitler and the Third Reich implemented policies that defined the Jews, Gypsies and other victims as “pathological”.⁴ Physicians examined Jewish men, women and children in an attempt to prove that even their simplest characteristics are pathological and that they are scientifically racially

³ Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000.), 24.

⁴ Emanuel, Ezekiel J. *The Oxford textbook of clinical research ethics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

inferior. These physicians consisted of a group that were either there because they were Germans who were using the pool of human beings at the concentration camps for science or they were prisoners picked out when brought in the camp to do the bidding of doctors who didn't always want to get their hands dirty. For example, Dr. Miklos Nyiszli was specifically selected upon his arrival at Auschwitz by Dr. Josef Mengele, the head of the medical staff, who was present at every selection. Not only was he there to select twins for this experiments but he also picked out men that were qualified doctors whose work could prove useful to the advancements of Nazi medicine.

As a result, the doctors that worked under Mengele consisted of the group of men he selected who had delivered satisfactory answers to the questions he asked them upon arrival. Nyiszli explains that "Dr. Mengele ordered all doctors to step forward...asked those who had studied in a German university, who had a thorough knowledge of pathology and had practiced forensic medicine to step forward..."⁵ Doctors that were qualified enough according to Mengele's standards were selected to work under his authority.

While they were fortunate enough to live in better conditions than most of the prisoners of the camp; they were still reminded that they were still easily disposable if they weren't up to par with Mengele's expectations. As the doctors and physicians were granted full access to use the victims being sent to concentration camps to be exterminated and exploited, medical experimentation in camps became essential to the advancement of Nazi science. In *The Nazi Doctors*, Lifton affirms that "the human experiments performed by Nazi doctors, while tangential to questions of ecology, were fully consistent with the regime's larger biomedical

⁵ Nyiszli, Miklós. *Auschwitz ... A doctor's eye-witness account*. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1973.),19.

vision”.⁶ And out of all the experiments that took place in concentration camps, the different sides of Auschwitz are still remembered as the most notorious.

Auschwitz was created in the June of 1940 and was based on the model of the traditional concentration camp intended mainly for Polish prisoners.⁷ Auschwitz was a systemic camp built on fear and humiliation. This particular camp was looked upon as the one with the racial cure. As Hitler ordered the “solving of the Jewish question”, the officers and physicians at Auschwitz crossed every line there was to cross.⁸ As it is explained through Dr. Nyiszli’s testimony, Mengele and various SS doctors would watch him perform autopsies on patients and would ask questions throughout his examination process. Along with these German physicians that willingly crossed such lines in the name of their profession, there were French and Greek doctors that would call him inquiring about the kinds of discoveries he had made in his autopsies.

The twisted love for medicine for the doctors who worked for the theories of Nazi science continued to live inside the walls of Auschwitz. The experimentation and the medicalized killing that took place at Auschwitz was viewed as a necessity and appropriate since it pertained to the cause. As a result, the selections at Auschwitz were very peculiar even to the point that people volunteered to be picked in hope to live under better treatment than the person standing to their right. Except, the conditions on the other side didn’t necessarily have a different outcome.

⁶ Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000.), 151.

⁷Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000.), 155.

⁸ Ibid., 157.

Subsequently, one of the most important group that one is to focus on in Auschwitz are the children. Children during the Holocaust were very vulnerable. They were fragile in nature and given that a small child is still developing, physicians believed that they were regarded as containing rare material of scientific interest.⁹ In the eyes of Nazi scientists, Jewish children were the legacy of the inferior race and racial pathogen they were trying so hard to combat. In their perspective, the still growing bodies of these children held the secrets that would help advance and verify hereditary ideas of Nazi science along with aiding many other experiments. Children were specifically hand-picked at selections and some members of the medical staff, like Doctor Mengele, were present at mostly every selection process that took place at the ramp.

Children that were picked were sent to live in different parts of the concentration and were treated much differently than others. Twins, especially, had special blocks which were usually between medical units and in close proximity with the camp hospitals. Scholar Robert Lifton explains the concept that children, some adolescents but mostly twins, that were selected for medical research had “special status”.¹⁰ They were monitored with better care given their medical value and they were allowed to move about more freely among the camps.

Given their scientific value to Mengele, children at times played football outside and were given milk with better food which helped them recuperate from all the blood that was being taken. With the freedom they were granted, children were rarely found in trouble if caught stealing extra food or going to restricted areas. And eventually by using their freedom and status

⁹ Weindling, Paul. *Victims and Survivors of Nazi Human Experiments: Science and Suffering in the Holocaust*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 165.

¹⁰Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000.), 348.

they organized and sold mostly food and inside information; all in an attempt to create a thriving economy.

Historians like Robert Jay Lifton have analyzed that given their importance, this hope to be treated better at least allowed them to cling onto their humanity. They were rewarded for their cooperation and were permitted to keep their clothes and even their hair. Since one during their childhood is inclined to create some sort of familial connections in order to simply grow, children living in better conditions attempted to make those connections with certain people on the medical staff. One of the most important figures in Auschwitz who was always around the children was Doctor Josef Mengele. Mengele treated the children with care but only because they were key to his research. And as much as some, like survivor Annetta Able, would like to profile Mengele as one who may have truly cared for the experimented children; there is a side to Mengele that fully contributed to the suffering and scars of those children.

One of the horrid accounts of Mengele's brutality was when he selected 20 children as they arrived to Auschwitz just to inject them with tuberculosis bacilli and later on kill them in order to harvest and send their organs to research centers.¹¹ Mengele was friendly to some children but he was brutal in his overall manner. He directly killed children at times because either he lost his temper or he needed to perform postmortem examination of the organs. Essential to Mengele's research was his obsession over twins. He obsessed over twins because a huge part of his research included the discovery of multiple births which he used twins for.

Along with the multiple births, he used twins to find for the hereditary theories of Nazi science. He selected female and male twins and took extensive bloodwork and measurements.

¹¹ Emanuel, Ezekiel J. *The Oxford textbook of clinical research ethics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. April 18, 2011), 23.

He was very meticulous about every single detail in his research involving any set of twins. At times, he would inject one twin with either a disease or a combination of things just to kill both twins and compare postmortem examinations of both. The intended purpose behind the Twin research conducted by Mengele was to “demonstrate a hereditary basis for group differences in behavioral and physical characteristics, a theme consistent with the Nazi biomedical vision of the superiority of the Aryan people”.¹²

Consequently, the main focus of this research will be to find those connections between the core tenants of Nazi science and their link to the experimented children of Auschwitz. Why were children, specifically, important in order to advance Nazi science? Why were these children important to the doctors, like Mengele, that were experimenting on them? The approach taken to this main question will further be broken down into questions like did the different experiments performed on these children help verify Nazi theories or was it just hopeless murder?

Examining primary sources of survivors such as Dr. Miklos Nyiszli and Susan Vigorito that share their stories of being at Auschwitz and first-hand experiencing the horrors of the medical experimenting process, the questions asked throughout the research are answered. There are newspaper articles and other accounts of similar experiences that provide a more thorough insight into the different aspects of the medical experimentation of children. Specifically, Dr. Nyiszli’s account of his experience paints the true picture of how the horrifying fates of children were beneficial to Nazi science.

Along with the primary sources, there are secondary sources from scholars like Paul Weindling and Robert Jay Lifton that outline and analyze how children were used to advance

¹² Caplan, Arthur L. *When medicine went mad: bioethics and the holocaust*. (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 1992.), 286.

Nazi science and also why children were easy targets. There are a couple different approaches taken to truly understand the layers found throughout this issue. The question that these sources shed a light on ask in what various ways did the environment that these children were confined to affect them? The secondary sources illustrate the type of lives these experimented children lived. They also highlight the special treatment of these children and puts emphasis on why these children were treated better. Lastly, all the sources combined truly report on the nature of the different physicians and staff who invoked the horrors on young children in Auschwitz. They do not fail to entail the fact that the medically reserved group of children in Auschwitz were merely there for the sake of science.

The children used in the experiments suffered a terrible fate. And the survivors of those medical experimentation in Auschwitz, to this day, suffer from the scars they acquired during their time at Auschwitz. Children were subjected to inhumane cruel procedures without the use of anesthetics and continued to suffer immensely. They're privacy was violated and to a certain extent, the constant picking of their simple body parts created deep scars on their psyche. Children were vulnerable and fragile during the Holocaust and the experimented children of Auschwitz were bent in traumatizing ways in order to fit the absurd scales of Nazi eugenics.

Anthology Documents

Document #1: Caplan, Arthur L. *When medicine went mad: bioethics and the holocaust.*

Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 1992.

Editorial Introduction:

This source is a testimony of Eva Mozes Kor who is a survivor of Mengele's experiments. She was one of the twins that was subjected to the medical experimentation that was conducted on sets of twins in Auschwitz under Doctor Josef Mengele and his staff. The survivor's experience is written as a testimony she delivered at the conference on May 17-19, 1989 at the University of Minnesota arranged through Arthur Caplan and his colleagues. Her testimony is part of the introduction in the book *When Medicine Went Mad* by Arthur Caplan. The book is a series of articles from the speeches delivered by survivors and scholars that have examined the Bioethics behind the medical experimentation conducted during the Holocaust. This book was found through google scholar. Her testimony is written to voice her story and to address the physicians, public health officials and scientists who want to use the information provided by the Nazi scientists in order to make further advances in their own research. The conference was held to address all types of questions that came up with the ethics behind the lines that Nazi scientists crossed while conducting their medical research.

In its entirety, Eva's entire testimony was very helpful and is extremely relevant to my project. She is a survivor of the medical experimentation and lives on to tell the horrific trauma she went through as a child and how it had an impact on her in her youth. The parts most relevant to my project are the details she provides of her encounters and as terrifying as they are to read; they shed light on the real horrific events that happened. For example, further down in my excerpt, she provides a chilling account of the countless hours she had to spend in medical

labs as a guinea pig for Mengele's experiments. Her testimony is important because it shows how the young were targeted and used to advance Nazi science. She describes certain procedures conducted on her and her sister that allow her testimony to be viewed as one that paints a picture of what these children really went through. And that's what my project is really about. It is about shedding light and emphasizing the fact that the youth population did not have a childhood to begin with. It is about the fact that as they continued to live in the concentration camps and spend every single day in labs and being measured; they were robbed of the chance to simply be a child.

Excerpt:

“If there were any dead twins in the barracks, he would become very upset” ...” Three times a week we were taken to the blood lab. There they tied both my arms to restrict the blood flow. In one arm, they gave me shots; from the other they took blood, lots of blood—at least two vials and often more. On a few occasions, I saw twins faint from loss of blood. They wanted to learn how much blood we could lose and still survive” ... “Three times a week we were taken (always accompanied by an SS guard) to the Auschwitz I labs for experiments. These would last from 8-10 hours. They would strip us naked and put a group of us, all children, in a big room. Every part of our body was measured, photographed, marked, and compared to charts. Every movement we made was noted. I felt like a piece of meat... These experiments were emotionally very difficult to deal with, but the deadly ones were done in the blood lab”.

Document #2: Caplan, Arthur L. *When medicine went mad: bioethics and the holocaust*. Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 1992.

Editorial Introduction:

This source is a testimony of Susan Seiler Vigorito who is another survivor of Mengele's experiments. She was one of the twins that was subjected to the medical experimentation that was conducted on sets of twins in Auschwitz under Doctor Josef Mengele and his staff. The survivor's experience is written as a testimony she delivered at the conference on May 17-19, 1989 at the University of Minnesota arranged through Arthur Caplan and his colleagues. Her testimony is part of the introduction in the book *When Medicine Went Mad* by Arthur Caplan and is found right after Eva Mozes Kor's testimony.

The book is a series of articles from the speeches delivered by survivors and scholars that have examined the Bioethics behind the medical experimentation conducted during the Holocaust. This book was found through google scholar. She spent her time in Auschwitz in a wooden cage in Mengele's private laboratory. The ways she was experimented on and the data obtained through the various experiments she endured was used for Mengele's specific dual birth research and also for disease experiments.

Vigorito's testimony is important to my research because she explains the core tenants of Mengele's research delving into his obsession with twins. She outlines the fact that twins were used to fuel discovery of the secret of multiple births in the perspective of Nazi scientists. Her experience in Auschwitz is one of the prime examples of the medical horrors that twins and children endured. Not only were twins measured, taken blood from extensively but they were also injected with various diseases and other unknown pathogens. Their bodies were dissected

and autopsies were performed all in the name of advancing and verifying the theories of Nazi science.

Excerpt:

“There was an interest among Nazi doctors to discover the secret of multiple births. If the Nazi scientists could acquire this knowledge, the Aryan Uebermensch could be multiplied by double the natural rate and world conquest would be more imminent. Doctor Josef Mengele...prided himself on his research on twins. The twins were usually children. I was one of these children and I spent a year in a wooden cage in Mengele’s private laboratory... The victims were considered nothing other than “items of experimentation, to be disposed of when the information needed was recorded” ... [Nazi doctors] also became involved in disease experimentation. Typhus, tuberculosis, and syphilis were injected into victims to study the progress of the disease... victims were murdered, an autopsy was performed to study the internal effects of the disease, more data were recorded, and the victim’s body was exterminated... Experiments were carried out without anesthesia or pain relievers...”

Document #3: Broder, Jonathan. "Auschwitz Survivors Recall Horror of Nazi Experiments."

Chicago Tribune, February 07, 1985. Accessed April 03, 2017. www.chicagotribune.com.

Editorial:

This source is a newspaper article from the Chicago Tribune that was published in 1985. It is written by Jonathan Broder. It is an article that was found through Rutgers Library Database, specifically through ProQuest. It is an account of the 30 survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camp that were subjected to medical experimentation specifically under Mengele. One by one the survivors told their stories in the conference held at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. All of these survivors were either twins or people that were forced to work with the twins. People that were either nurses, wardens or physicians that were also prisoners of the camp. The witnesses that gave their testimony initially did it to create international pressure for Mengele's capture and trial.

This article provides the insight of what was truly taking place under Mengele not only through the eyes of another twin survivor but also through the eyes of another faculty member of Mengele's staff. Lastly, Kriegel's testimony as a surviving twin not only explains the horrors of what she went through but it also outlines how the constant power struggle between her and Mengele affected her. She knew she was important to his work and at times she used this concept against him. It is a firsthand testimony that shines the light in the mind of the young twins that were trying to hold on to their lives.

Excerpt:

"Vera Alexander, 62, lives in Israel, described how she worked as a warden in a block housing about 100 Gypsy twins. She told how Mengele impregnated one girl with the sperm of

another twin, pampered her during her pregnancy and attended the birth himself..." But when he saw that there was only one baby and not twins, he tore the baby right out of the mother's uterus, threw it into an over and walked away" ...Perhaps the most harrowing testimony came from Vera Kriegal...For 10 days [Kriegal said], she was cramped in a small cage with her twin sister. Mengele came every day and injected them with a solution that caused violent reactions for tests, and I said a collection of hundreds of human eyes pinned to the wall...She said the only things that kept her alive in her two years at Auschwitz were her hatred of Mengele and his need of her for his experiments. "I had my own private war with Mengele. I fought him by being unruly. He would say do one thing, and I would do another. Once he became very nervous, but he didn't beat me because he needed me."

Document #4: Michel, Ernest W. "I Saw Him in Action." *The New York Times*, March 06, 1985.

Accessed April 03, 2017.9

Editorial:

This source is found in New York Times newspaper and is focused around Mengele and his horrific crimes. The specific article used in the anthology is written by survivor Ernest Michel. He was a prisoner in Auschwitz. Due to his calligraphy skills that he acquired as a student, he was set with the task of recording names of the dead and the reason behind their death. The group of male nurses he worked with were given a special task where they were to transport inmates from a truck to the barracks and back and forth.

This is where he encountered the different types of experiments that young teenage girls endured. Many of the records of the vast types of experiments were attempted to be destroyed by Nazis as forces began shutting these camps down. This source is relevant because it reports on the other types of horrific experiments that were taking place and it reports them through the eyes of another person forced to do work under Mengele's authority.

Excerpt:

“When the truck arrived, I found six to eight women in various states of despair. Among them was a beautiful teenage girl from Hungary. She obviously was very agitated and fearful. In the room where the “medical services” were performed, one girl was still connected to an electrical machine...for electric-shock experimentation. We found two of them dead, one the Hungarian girl. Two obviously were in a come; the others were breathing hard and irregular. I noticed that the teeth of those still alive were clenched and that wads of paper were placed in their mouths.”

Document #5: Nyiszli, Miklós, Tibère KREMER, and Richard Seaver. *Auschwitz ... A doctor's eyewitness account. Translated by Tibere Kremer and Richard Seaver, etc.* New York: Arcade Publishing, 1973.

Editorial:

Dr. Miklos Nyiszli was transported with his wife, daughter and other doctors to Auschwitz in 1944. This book was found on google scholar. It is his testimony as a physician who was forced to work under Mengele. He was selected as he volunteered for the job in hopes of surviving longer. By meeting all of Mengele's requirements and continuing to prove himself through the dissection processes and his reports; Nyiszli served as physician to the Sonderkommando. He witnessed the inhumane and horrific deaths of countless men, women and children. He specifically delivered the reports and performed the examinations on the corpses of twins Mengele sent to his dissection room. His brutal and horrifying accounts illustrate the true horrors of Mengele and his work.

There are several parts of his testimony that are important to the research. He provides in depth accounts of the sets of twins he had to dissect and the horrific diseases they were injected with. He uncovered the inhumane ways they were killed and saw how children were Mengele's guinea pigs. He also provided an in-depth explanation of the physicians that were found in Auschwitz. From the men who were there for their twisted love of medicine, like Mengele, to the men who were simply forced to work under these monsters to stay alive; he tells it all.

Excerpt:

“The in vivo experiments were succeeded by the most important phase of twin-study: the comparative examination forms the viewpoints of anatomy and pathology. Here it was a question

of comparing the twins' healthy organs with those functions abnormally, or of comparing their illnesses. Since it was necessary to perform a dissection for the simultaneous evaluation of anomalies, the twins had to die at the same time. Twin brothers died together... Where, under normal circumstances, can one find twin brothers who die at the same place and at the same time?... That was why Dr. Mengele separated twins... why they had good food and hygienic living conditions... The twins had died at the same time and were now lying beside each other on the big dissecting table. It was they who had to resolve the secret of the reproduction of the race. To advance one step in the search to unlock the secret of multiplying the race of superior beings destined to rule was a noble goal... The immediate objective was the increased reproduction of the German race. The final objective was the production of pure Germans in number sufficient to replace all of whom were condemned to be destroyed.

Document #6: VHA Testimony of Izidor Back.Introduction:

Izidor Back was born in Romania on November 23, 1927. He was a Romanian Jew raised by his parents with fairly orthodox Jewish values. He was the youngest of the family and also had a twin brother, Anton Back. Izidor was first put in the Romanian ghetto of Sighet until him and his family were deported to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. During his time at Auschwitz, him and his brother were selected under the orders of Doctor Josef Mengele. His life in Auschwitz according to his testimony was one that turned out better than others.

The aspect of his life story that is most relevant to my project is specifically the time from his selection due to him being a twin until his entire time in the Kranken house. The huge part of his interview that is important to the topic of research is his special treatment. As a twin, there were horrific things one had to endure. Except, not everybody's stay was deemed awful. His wasn't ecstatic to be there but he was among the many that adapted and wanted to create that thriving economy.

From the interview, Back explained certain instances where he found himself in situations where if it was to be anyone else, they would have been killed off. Izidor explains in the Segment #33 of his interview that he looked forward to his visits to the lager where Mengele and his staff inspected them. He explained that in the beginning, they would give them milk and macaroons. The medical experiments that Izidor and his brother went through weren't anything extremely brutal painful. In his opinion, they were simply tedious. Izidor and his twin had found a way to work the system in the camp. They knew to stay alive, one was to abide by Mengele. And that's exactly what he did.

Document #7: VHA Testimony of Annetta Able.

Introduction:

Annetta Able was born in February 4th, 1924 in Yugoslavia. She was raised in Prague, Czechoslovakia. She was a twin and was very close to her sister. She lived an untraditional Jewish life since she only really connected to her Jewish heritage on holidays. She wasn't given any specific Jewish education and her family was fairly liberal. In her childhood, she was mostly surrounded by Czech and non-Jewish families. Eventually around 1941, her family were then deported to the Ghetto in Czechoslovakia while her and her sister stayed at the orphanage. Once they were 18, they were transported to the ghetto in Czechoslovakia. Eventually her and her sister were then deported to Auschwitz and she found herself working under Mengele in the hospital.

This part of her testimony is most important to the topic of research. Her testimony is one of a twin but more specifically, she was an older twin rather than a younger child twin. In her perspective, she had the "privilege to be taken care of [under Mengele]". During her time at the camp, her experiences weren't horrifying like the experiences of most twins. She talks about how Mengele would bring them to Gypsy camps and let the Gypsies play music for them. By taking care of them because they were twins, he would order food for them after he'd have taken his extensive measurements. She endured many many tests like the other twins but wasn't specifically injected with any unknown pathogen. She didn't know what exactly was going on around her and was unaware of the horrors that were taking place around her.

Conclusion

As the sources unfolded the information that pertains to the specific questions asked throughout this research, there were many layers added to the scars of the experimented children of Auschwitz. As one flipped through the haunting pages of testimonies, it wasn't just about the experiments anymore. The sides of survivors, the events witnessed by nurses, wardens and physicians forced to cut, measure and rip apart the bodies of children carrying their own Jewish legacies. The environment that these children and physicians were confined to in Auschwitz was the one where survival became a top priority.

Twins sold themselves on ramps because their medical and scientific value was of some value to Mengele. And doctors stood straight in line, answering questions so they could be on Mengele's staff just so they could breathe longer. Doctors like Mengele explained through secondary and primary sources were deemed God. He, specifically, held the lives of many in the tips of his fingers and in the wave of his hands. But it was the children, the children that he selected and he needed for his science that played an important role in determining the truths behind the theories of Nazi science.

Subsequently, the children that survived the wicked grasps of Nazi science and medicine speak out against what was truly done to them. But not all of their experiences create a mirroring explanation of what they endured. For instance, the testimonies of Susan Vigorito and Vera Kriegal were similar and revealed the horrific and inhumane treatments child twins endured at the hands of Mengele and his staff. They were both confined to the cages in Mengele's laboratory.

As they were injected with pathogens that their doctors to this day can still not figure out are, the one thing that kept them going was their play on the concept that Mengele needed them.

Kriegal explains how the war she had with Mengele was the sole thing that kept her going the year that she spent in his cage as his test subject.¹³ The extensive measurements that Eva Mozes Ker and her sister went through and the extensive bloodwork both Vigorito and Ker were subjected to conveyed a very important message. Regardless of the why, for the why is answered when one is exploring the connection between these experiments and Nazi science; it revealed that there was a struggle between Mengele and the experimented children.

For the sake of his science, these children were valuable to him and he needed them healthy. Their importance was the concept that most of the children in the camp held onto dearly. They abided by his rules and at times like Vigorito even spited him which at times would get him nervous because harming them meant harming his research. So, by fully adopting the role of Mengele's research, these children were able to stay alive and they were able to adapt. Among all the death that surrounded them, the types of death that they were aware or even not aware of; these children of Auschwitz were somewhat persistent on surviving.

Subsequently, the rule abiding behaviors of these children and their understanding of their own importance creates the clear link to the Nazi science behind all of the experiments conducted. Vigorito's testimony sheds light on the interest among Nazi doctors. Nazi doctors were really interested in finding the secret of multiple births. By using twins, they could attempt to find the secret to multiplying the number of children produced; they could use this same tactic in order to increase the reproduction rate of their superior Aryan race.¹⁴ Dr. Miklos Nyiszli's

¹³ Broder, Jonathan. "Auschwitz Survivors Recall Horror of Nazi Experiments." (*Chicago Tribune*, February 07, 1985.)

¹⁴ Nyiszli, Miklós, Tibère KREMER, and Richard Seaver. *Auschwitz ... A doctor's eyewitness account. Translated by Tibere Kremer and Richard Seaver, etc.* New York: Arcade Publishing, 1973.

testimony provides a good number amount of explanations on why twins were specifically selected and how Mengele and other scientist's believed that their young, still developing bodies held all types of rare scientific secrets. Nazi scientist's believed that the bodies of these children held many scientific secrets which is why they were not only subjected to test out or verify simply hereditary theories but were also used to find vaccine for different diseases. Ernest Michel was one of the male nurses that stumbled upon the electric-shock experiments that young girls were tortured with and Dr. Nyiszli found traces of syphilis and tuberculosis in the dead dissected bodies of sets of young male twins.¹⁵

As facts from the documents of Vigorito and Nyiszli's, their testimonies highlight the reasons behind Nazi scientist's obsession behind twins and that link found between the experimentation of children and the core tenants of the Nazi racial biomedical vision is of historical significance. It is the convergence of these core ideologies found in both documents that signify the larger pattern which emphasizes the importance of healthy children and connect them to Nazi racial ideologies.

Scientist's used the remnants, which were the Jewish and Gypsy children, that were carrying the Jewish legacy in their blood to aid and regenerate their superior race. They used the data recorded and the blood taken in order to generate a pure Aryan race. They used their ideas of heredity on these children and picked them apart with the objective of creating a pure Aryan out of them. And that is also why Mengele was present at every selection, why he was so upset when things went wrong; it was the fate of his people that was bestowed in his hands and he was left with the labeled diseased people that he was so programmed to hate that were initially the

¹⁵ Nyiszli, Miklós, Tibère KREMER, and Richard Seaver. *Auschwitz ... A doctor's eyewitness account. Translated by Tibere Kremer and Richard Seaver, etc.* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1973.) 31.

only ones that could help him find his answers. And historian Robert Lifton emphasizes that according to the Third Reich and Hitler, it was these answers that were going to heal Germany thus making the lives of human beings so disposable.¹⁶

As the research delves further into the lives of the experimented children, the ways they were treated; the various affects that Auschwitz's environment has on these children is a recurrent question. With the importance, time and resources Mengele and his staff dedicated to their work revolving around the children; they were taken care of. Children in Auschwitz could get away with things other prisoners in the same camp would get killed. The two VHA testimonies of Izidor Back and Annetta Able converged to answer the question of the better treatment of twins in Auschwitz. Back explains when he was caught stealing food, he would be let off with a warning.

On the contrary, prisoners in concentration camps were shot for not being able to stand straight on their own two feet and these children could move about freely, organizing food and even using it to monitor and build their own little world. According to scholar Robert Lifton, Mengele "permitted mothers of young female twins to stay on their block with them, apparently out of concern that the children remain in good physical and mental condition".¹⁷ It was their status that aided their sense of normality and it is through these witnesses that one draws a conclusion that these little things allowed them to hold onto parts of themselves. While being surrounded by death, Annetta Able explains that Mengele took them to the Gypsy camp so they could hear the music. The historical significance of the similarities found in both of the

¹⁶ Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000.) 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

testimonies is that things like music, better food and no beatings became the coping mechanism that allowed these children to cling to the pieces left of their childhood. The games of football sets of twin boys enjoyed and the milk the twins had after being poked, prodded and measured was their upside or even the highlight of their day. Except, in all of these coping mechanisms, their happiness and even in their fear; there is a common factor that can be related to a larger problem.

This larger pattern seen through the analysis of historians and even in the testimonies of witnesses is Dr. Mengele and his evils. In the testimonies of Vigorito, Ker and even in the fear of warden Vera Alexander, Mengele's name always comes up when it comes to unraveling the scars of experimented children. Babies were ripped from wombs of mother's impregnated because they weren't twins that would aid the growth of the Aryan race. Mengele's name haunted the barracks of children when they're mothers were sent back to the other side of camp because it meant death had arrived. To the children, Mengele was father, mother and murderer.¹⁸

Dr. Nyiszli's testimony sheds some light on Mengele's influence. Because it wasn't just children whose lives Mengele held in the grip of his hands; it was the lives of the Jewish prisoners that worked under him. It was the life of every prisoner in Auschwitz and he had authority over it. He had authority over it because of science. And there are still many questions surrounding Mengele and the experimented children relating to the idea that how far did science go? How did his status as a doctor, a physician and a scientist justify the crimes he committed?

The lives of children and the fear he spread in the concentration camps was what got him the name "Angel of Death". Except, why was he called an Angel? Perhaps, it may have been due

¹⁸ Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000.) 356.

to the connection and bond he had formed with the children. It may have been due to the things he went out of his way to do for them, to help them maintain well physically and mentally. But throughout survivor testimonies and historical analysis of scholars like Weindling and Lifton, all that Mengele did was in the name of Nazi science.

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