

THE "FINAL SOLUTION"
THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE
AND
THE NÜRNBERG LAWS

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From
Various Sources

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(This material has disturbing content)

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The Wannsee Conference

On January 20, 1942, fifteen high-ranking Nazi party and German government officials gathered at a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to discuss and coordinate the implementation of the "Final Solution."

Reinhard Heydrich, SS chief Heinrich Himmler's head deputy and head of the Reich Main Security Office, held the meeting in order to involve key members of the German ministerial bureaucracy, including the Foreign and Justice Ministries, whose cooperation was needed to implement the killing measures.



Picture above - Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the SD (Security Service) and Nazi governor of Bohemia and Moravia, 1942

The ministries to be represented were Interior, Justice, the Four Year Plan and Occupied Eastern Territories. The Foreign Office was to be represented by an undersecretary, as Heydrich suspected that State Secretary Weizsäcker was not fully aligned with the objectives of the regime. Also invited were representatives of the Reich Chancellery, the Nazi Party Chancellery and the Race and Resettlement Main Office of the RSHA, and the head of the Gestapo. When Hans Frank, head of the General Government in occupied Poland, heard of the meeting, he demanded to be represented, and Heydrich quickly agreed. SS-Sturmbannführer Lange was invited for his experience in executing German Jews in Latvia. Heydrich's right-hand man Adolf Eichmann was to take the minutes.

Heydrich opened the meeting with the announcement that Hermann Göring, the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, President of the Reichstag, Prime Minister of Prussia, and last but not least the designated second in command in the National Socialist hierarchy and Adolf Hitler had granted him an extensive degree of power which included the coordination of all anti-Jewish measures.

Thus, the purpose of the meeting was to outline the newly planned "Final Solution", which would entail the rounding up of all Jews throughout Europe. They would be transported eastward and organized into labour gangs. Work and living conditions would be extremely harsh as to kill large numbers by natural reduction. Any survivors would be treated accordingly. "Treated accordingly" was a euphemism for "extermination".

Responsibility for the entire project was placed in the hands of Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer-SS, and head of the Gestapo and the Waffen-SS.

The final protocol of the Wannsee Conference never explicitly mentioned extermination, but within a few months after the meeting, the first gas chambers were installed in some of the extermination camps in Poland. These six camps, Belzec, Birkenau, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka were in operation in Poland.

The Wannsee Conference did not mark the beginning of the "Final Solution." The mobile killing squads were already slaughtering Jews in the occupied Soviet Union. Rather, the Wannsee Conference was the place where the "final solution" was formally revealed to non-Nazi leaders who would help arrange for Jews to be transported from all over German-occupied Europe to SS-operated "extermination" camps in Poland. It is interesting that not one of the men present at Wannsee appears to have objected to the announced policy. Never before had a modern state committed itself to the ethnic cleansing of an entire group of people.



Picture above - Adolf Eichman

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Wannsee Attendees

Those present, when the Wannsee conference convened, midday, 20 January 1942, were:

- SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich (Chief of the RSHA and Reichsprotektor of Bohemia-Moravia), presiding
- Dr Josef Bühler (Government of the General Government)
- Dr Roland Freisler (Reich Ministry of Justice)
- SS-Gruppenführer Otto Hofmann (Race and Resettlement Main Office, RuSHA)
- SA-Oberführer Dr Gerhard Klopfer (NSDAP Chancellery)
- Ministerialdirektor Friedrich Wilhelm Kritzinger (Reich Chancellery)
- SS-Sturmbannführer Dr Rudolf Lange (Deputy Commander of the SS in Latvia)
- Reichsamtleiter Dr Georg Leibbrandt (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories)
- Dr Martin Luther (Foreign Office)
- Gauleiter Dr Alfred Meyer (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories)
- SS-Gruppenführer Heinrich Müller (Chief of Amt IV (Gestapo), Reich Security Main Office (RSHA))
- Erich Neumann (Director, Office of the Four Year Plan)
- SS-Oberführer Dr Karl Eberhard Schöngarth (SD, assigned to the General Government)
- Dr Wilhelm Stuckart (Reich Ministry for the Interior)
- SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann (Head of Referat IV B4 of the Gestapo), recording secretary

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Fate of the Wannsee Attendees

- Reinhard Heydrich was assassinated in Prague in June 1942.
- Dr Josef Bühler was tried in Poland for war crimes and executed in Krakow in July 1948.
- Dr Roland Freisler was killed in an air-raid in Berlin in February 1945.
- Otto Hofmann was sentenced to 25 years in prison for war crimes, but was pardoned in 1954. He died in December 1982.
- Dr Gerhard Klopfer was charged with war crimes but was released for lack of evidence. He died in January 1987.
- Friedrich Wilhelm Kritzinger was acquitted of war crimes and died in October 1947.
- Dr Rudolf Lange was killed in action in Poland in February 1945.
- Dr Georg Leibbrandt was charged with war crimes but the case against him was dismissed in 1950. He died in June 1982.
- Dr Martin Luther finished the war in a concentration camp after falling out with Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, and died in Berlin in May 1945.
- Dr Alfred Meyer killed himself in April 1945.
- Heinrich Müller was last seen in Berlin on 30 April 1945. His fate is unknown, but he probably died in Berlin in the next few days.
- Erich Neumann was briefly imprisoned and died in mid 1948.
- Dr Karl Eberhard Schöngarth was executed for war crimes (killing British prisoners of war) in May 1946.
- Dr Wilhelm Stuckart was imprisoned for four years before being released for lack of evidence in 1949. He was killed in a car accident in November 1953.
- Adolf Eichmann was executed (hanged) in Israel in May 1962.

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Eichman's Lists of Jewish Numbers

In preparation for the conference, Eichmann drafted a list of the numbers of Jews in the various European countries. Countries were listed in two groups "A" and "B".

List "A" countries were those under direct Reich control or occupation (or partially occupied and quiescent, in the case of France); list "B" countries were allied or client states, neutral, or at war with Germany.

The numbers reflect actions already completed by Nazi forces; for example, Estonia is listed as *judenfrei* ("free of Jews"), as the thousand Jews who remained in Estonia after the German occupation had been virtually exterminated by the end of 1941.

List "A" (Eichman)

- Old Reich [Germany proper]: 131,800
- Ostmark [region of the former Austria, incorporated in the Reich]: 43,700
- Eastern Territories [Polish areas annexed by the Reich]: 420,000
- General Government [occupied Polish lands]: 2,284,000
- Bialystok [district in eastern Poland, under German civil administration]: 400,000
- Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia: 74,200
- Estonia: free of Jews
- Latvia: 3,500
- Lithuania: 34,000
- Belgium: 43,000
- Denmark: 5,600
- France/occupied territory: 165,000
 - unoccupied territory: 700,000
- Greece: 69,600
- Netherlands: 160,800
- Norway: 1,300

List "A" Sub-Total: 4,536,500

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List "B" (Eichman)

- Bulgaria: 48,000
- England [i.e., United Kingdom]: 330,000
- Finland: 2,300
- Ireland: 4,000
- Italy including Sardinia: 58,000
- Albania: 200
- Croatia: 40,000
- Portugal: 3,000
- Romania including Bessarabia: 342,000
- Sweden: 8,000
- Switzerland: 18,000
- Serbia: 10,000
- Slovakia: 88,000
- Spain: 6,000
- Turkey (European portion): 55,500
- Hungary: 742,800
- USSR: 5,000,000 [including subtotals for:]
 - Belarus exclusive of Bialystok: 446,484

- Ukraine: 2,994,684

List "B" Sub-Total: 6,755,800

Grand Total: 11,292,300

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The Final Solution

The "Final Solution" was the Nazis' code name for the deliberate, carefully planned destruction of European Jewry. The Wannsee Conference determined the way in which Hitler's decision to solve the "Jewish Question" through systematic mass murder was to be transmitted to the appropriate ministries and bureaucracies. Invitees to the conference did not deliberate whether such a plan should be undertaken, but instead discussed the realization of a decision that had already been made.

At the time of the Wannsee Conference, most participants were already aware that the National Socialist regime had embarked on the mass murder of Jews. Some had learned of the actions of the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units), which were already slaughtering tens of thousands of Jews in the German-occupied Soviet Union. Others were aware of the killing of Jews in a "local solution to the Jewish question" in Serbia. None of the officials present at the meeting objected to the policy announced by Heydrich.

Heydrich indicated that over 11,000,000 Jews were eventually to be subjected to the "Final Solution," with the "Nürnberg Laws" serving as a basis for determining who was a Jew. "Under suitable supervision, the Jews shall be... taken to the east," Heydrich announced, "and deployed in appropriate work... Able-bodied Jews, separated by sex, will be taken to those areas in large work details to build roads, and a large part will doubtlessly be lost through natural attrition. The surviving remnants... will have to be treated appropriately..."

Despite the euphemisms which appeared in the protocols of the meeting, the aim of the Wannsee Conference was clear - the coordination of a policy to exterminate European Jews.

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THE

NÜRNBERG LAWS

Overview

In 1933, although less than 1% of the German population was Jewish. Jews contributed significantly to German culture. Many had served in World War I, and they thought of themselves as Germans first and Jews second. Moreover, they considered Germany their home, and their passionate ties and loyalty to Germany caused them to be blind to the harsh reality of anti-Semitic measures. The Nürnberg Laws were the first attempt by the Nazi government to define the Jews, and then would go on to play a pivotal role in the process that lead to the annihilation of the Jewish population.

A conference of ministers was held on 20 August 1935, to discuss the economic effects of Party actions against Jews. Adolf Wagner, the Party representative at the conference, argued that such actions would cease, once the government decided on a firm policy against the Jews.

Dr. Schacht, the Economics Minister, criticized arbitrary behavior by Party members as this inhibited his policy of rebuilding Germany's economy. It made no economic sense since Jews were believed to have certain entrepreneurial skills that could be usefully employed to further his policies.

Schacht made no moral condemnation of Jewish policy and advocated the passing of legislation to clarify the situation. The following month two measures were announced at the annual Party Rally in Nürnberg, becoming known as the Nürnberg Laws. Both measures were hastily improvised (there was even a shortage of drafting paper so that menu cards had to be used) and Jewish experts from the Ministry of the Interior were ordered to Nürnberg by plane.

The Laws

The first law - The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, prohibited marriages and extra-marital intercourse between "Jews" (the name was now officially used in place of "non-Aryans") and "Germans", and also prohibited the employment of "German" females under forty-five in Jewish households.

The second law - The Reich Citizenship Law, stripped Jews of their German citizenship and introduced a new distinction between "Reich citizens" and "nationals."

The Nürnberg Laws by their general nature formalized the unofficial and particular measures taken against Jews up to 1935. The Nazi leaders made a point of stressing the consistency of this legislation with the Party program which demanded that Jews should be deprived of their rights as citizens.

Hitler now had more direct control over the government and political attitude towards Jews in Nazi Germany. In the period 1937 to 1938, harsh new laws were implemented, and the segregation of Jews from the German "Aryan" population began. In particular, Jews were punished financially for their "race."

On March 1, 1938, government contracts could not be awarded to Jewish businesses. On September 30 of the same year, "Aryan" doctors could only treat "Aryan" patients. Provision of medical care to Jews was already hampered by the fact that Jews were banned from being doctors or having any professional jobs.

On August 17, Jews had to add "Israel" (males) or "Sara" (females) to their names; and a large letter "J" was to be imprinted on their passports on October 5. On November 15, Jewish children were banned from going to public schools. By April 1939, nearly all Jewish companies had either collapsed under financial pressure and declining profits, or had been persuaded to sell out to the Nazi-German government, which further reduced their rights as human beings; they were now, in many ways, effectively separated from the German populace.

The increasingly totalitarian, militaristic regime that Hitler imposed on Germany allowed him to control the actions of the SS and the army. On 07 November 1938, a young Polish Jew named Herschel Grynszpan attacked and shot two German officials in the Nazi-German embassy in Paris over the treatment of his parents by the Nazi-Germans.

Joseph Goebbels took the opportunity to impress Hitler, and ordered retaliation.

On the night of 09 November 1938 the SS conducted the Night of Broken Glass ("Kristallnacht"), in which the storefronts of Jewish shops and offices were smashed and vandalized. Approximately 100 Jews were killed, and another 20,000 sent to concentration camps.

Collectively, the Jews were made to pay back one billion RM (Reich Mark) in damages; the fine was collected by confiscating 20% of every Jew's property.

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THE "FINAL SOLUTION"

Overview

The Nazis frequently used euphemistic language to disguise the true nature of their crimes. They used the term "Final Solution" to refer to their plan to annihilate the Jewish people. It is not known when the leaders of Nazi Germany definitively decided to implement the "Final Solution." However, the genocide or mass destruction of the Jews was the culmination of a decade of increasingly severe discriminatory measures.

Under the rule of Adolf Hitler, the persecution and segregation of the Jews was implemented in various stages. After the Nazi party achieved power in Germany in 1933, its state-sponsored racism produced anti-Jewish legislation, economic boycotts, and the violence of the Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass") pogrom, all of which aimed to systematically isolate Jews from society and drive them out of the country.

After the September 1939 German invasion of Poland (the beginning of World War II), anti-Jewish policy escalated to the imprisonment and eventual murder of European Jewry. The Nazis first established ghettos (enclosed areas designed to isolate and control the Jews) in the Generalgouvernement (a territory in central and eastern Poland overseen by a German civilian government) and the Warthegau (an area of western Poland annexed to Germany). Polish and western European Jews were deported to these ghettos where they lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions with inadequate food.

After the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, SS and police units (acting as mobile killing units) began massive killing operations aimed at entire Jewish communities. By autumn 1941, the SS and police introduced mobile gas vans. These panelled trucks with the exhaust pipe reconfigured to pump poisonous carbon monoxide gas into sealed spaces, killing those locked within, were to complement ongoing shooting operations.

Four weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union, on July 17, 1941, Hitler tasked SS chief Heinrich Himmler with responsibility for all security matters in the occupied Soviet Union. Hitler gave Himmler broad authority to physically eliminate any perceived threats to permanent German rule. Two weeks later, on July 31, 1941, Nazi leader Hermann Goering authorized SS General Reinhard Heydrich to make preparations for the implementation of a "complete solution of the Jewish question."

In the autumn of 1941, SS chief Heinrich Himmler assigned German General Odilo Globocnik (SS and police leader for the Lublin District) with the implementation of a plan to systematically murder the Jews of the Generalgouvernement. The code name Operation Reinhard was eventually given to this plan, named after Heydrich (who was assassinated by Czech partisans in May 1942). Three killing centers, with no purpose other than mass murder, were established in Poland as part of Operation Reinhard -- Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

The Majdanek camp served from time to time as a killing site for Jews residing in the Generalgouvernement. It had gas chambers, in which the SS killed tens of thousands of Jews, primarily forced laborers too weak to work. SS and police killed at least 152,000 people, mostly Jews, but including a few thousand Roma (Gypsies) in gas vans at the Chelmno killing center, about thirty miles northwest of Lodz. In the spring of 1942, Himmler designated Auschwitz II (Auschwitz-Birkenau) as a killing facility. SS authorities murdered approximately one million Jews from various European countries at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

German SS and police murdered nearly 2,700,000 Jews in the killing centres either by asphyxiation with poison gas or by shooting. In its entirety, the "Final Solution" called for the murder of all European Jews by gassing, shooting, and other means. Approximately six million Jewish men, women, and children were killed during the Holocaust -- two-thirds of the Jews living in Europe before World War II.

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APPENDIX

HOLOCAUST STATISTICS

Country	Initial Jewish Population	Estimated % Killed	Estimated Killed	Number of Survivors
Poland	3,300,000	91%	3,000,000	300,000
USSR	3,020,000	36%	1,100,000	1,920,000
Hungary	800,000	74%	596,000	204,000
Germany	566,000	36%	200,000	366,000
France	350,000	22%	77,320	272,680
Romania	342,000	84%	287,000	55,000
Austria	185,000	35%	65,000	120,000
Lithuania	168,000	85%	143,000	25,000
Netherlands	140,000	71%	100,000	40,000
Bohemia Moravia	118,310	60%	71,150	47,160
Latvia	95,000	84%	80,000	15,000
Slovakia	88,950	80%	71,000	17,950
Yugoslavia	78,000	81%	63,300	14,700
Greece	77,380	87%	67,000	10,380
Belgium	65,700	45%	28,900	36,800
Italy	44,500	17%	7,680	36,820
Bulgaria	50,000	0%		50,000
Denmark	7,800	0.8%	60	7,740
Estonia	4,500	44%	2,000	2,500
Luxembourg	3,500	55%	1,950	1,550
Finland	2,000	0.03%	7	1,993
Norway	1,700	45%	762	938
Total	9,508,340	63%	5,962,129	3,546,211

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