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The Planning Behind Answering the Jewish Question: Is the Wannsee Protocol as Important as it Has Been Interpreted to Be?

Eichmann, Adolf. "The Wannsee Protocol." *GHDI*. January 20, 1942. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1532.

The Wannsee Protocol were the minutes recorded outlining the plan created by Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942), chief of the Reich Security Main Office, to answer the Jewish question. Heydrich was prompted for such a plan at the request of Hermann Göring (1893-1946), who was acting at the request of Hitler, on July 31, 1941. At the time of the request, the Einsatzgruppen had already been taking steps to "cleanse" German lands of Jews and other enemies through the use of mass shootings, but the SS wanted to devise more efficient methods of disposing of the Jewish race. In order to fast track the deportation and extermination of Jews, Heydrich organized a secret conference with the help of the man who would later record the minutes, Adolf Eichmann. The meeting was held on January 20, 1942 in Berlin and outlined the "Final Solution," the program in which millions of Jews were systematically annihilated through mass murder. The protocol begins with Heydrich informing those in attendance that he was given express permission to handle the final solution of the Jewish question. He outlines previous plans that Nazis had taken to rid German lands of Jews and depicts the new plan, evacuations to the East. Under the evacuation plan, 11 million European Jews were to be rounded up for labor in the East and separated by sex, which Heydrich then claimed "in the course of which action a great part will undoubtedly be eliminated by natural causes" (Wolfe 1982, 7). Answering the Jewish question in the Scandinavian states is assessed, and after the advice of Assistant Under Secretary of State Luther, it is determined to involve too many difficulties for such a small Jewish population and therefore would be avoided. The final minutes of the meeting were spent discussing mixed blood and mixed marriages in regard to evacuations, along with the topic of forced sterilization. In all, fifteen high-ranking officials of the SS, NSDAP, and the government assented to the program of mass murder during the conference.

The protocol was discovered in Berlin in 1947 by Robert Kempner (1899-1993), a man who helped to prosecute the German ministries during the Nuremberg Trials (Roseman 2002, 2). While searching for trial material with other colleagues, the document was located in a German Foreign Office folder that was labelled 'Final solution of the Jewish question' (Gregor 2008, 134). The discovery of the document, although the interpretation of the document has long since become an issue of debate, played a vital role in the Nuremberg Trials by being showcased as the Nazi program towards genocide (Roseman 2002, 2). The original German document of the Wannsee Protocol can be found in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes in Berlin, Ref Inland IIg/177 (Roseman 2002, 192). Within the UC Santa Barbara library itself, the book called *The Wannsee Protocol and a 1944 Report on Auschwitz by the Office of Strategic Services*

provides images of the only known existing copy of the original protocol (Wolfe 1982, introduction). Other copies of the English version can be found, but are susceptible to being revised translations (Reitlinger 1953; Roseman 2002, 157).

The man to document the meeting was Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962), who tried to conceal the genocidal plans through crafty word usage. Eichmann rose through the ranks of the SS to eventually become an SS-Obersturmbannführer (Lieutenant Colonel) and the chief of section IV B4 in the Reich Main Security Office (*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 2016). Eichmann's knowledge of Jewish culture helped further his career and put him on the radar of Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler, who used his help to find possible answers to the Jewish question (*The History Place*, 1997). In the recording of the minutes of the Wannsee Protocol, Eichmann attempted to downplay the true nature of the meeting by using words such as emigration, ghettos, and the idea of natural reduction through the course of hard labor (Roseman 2002, 2). After the declaration of the plan to answer the Jewish question, Eichmann's main focus was the deportation of Jews to death camps and it was through his aid that the Final Solution was able to run the course that it did (*The History Place*, 1997). During the Nuremberg trial testimony of accused individuals, Eichmann was described by others as a man who felt no emotion towards the Jewish race and was depicted as taking pride in his part of the mass killings of Jews (Zeiger 1960, 102-105). To further attest to the known uncaring stance of Eichmann, it is documented that at one point during the war he tried to trade Jewish lives for badly needed goods (Grossmann 1955, 65). After the war, Eichmann was able to escape and go into hiding until 1960, when he was abducted from Argentina by the Israeli government and put on trial, and ultimately hanged for his role in mass murder of millions of Jews (*The History Place*, 1997). Although Eichmann is given credit as the author of the Wannsee Protocol, in his trial proceedings to aid his defense Eichmann claimed that Heydrich heavily edited his notes of the meeting before the final copies were sent out to leading party members (Roseman 2002, 98). Furthermore, depictions of the Eichmann trial expose a cold-hearted man who had no remorse for his role in the murders of millions of Jews (Hausner 1962, 59).

Reitlinger, Gerald. *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*. London: Vallentine, Mitchell. 1953.

Reitlinger's work provides some of the earliest insight found on the Wannsee Protocol and goes into immense detail regarding the genocide of millions of Jews. Though Reitlinger's main focus is the annihilation of Jews, he provides descriptions of fates that befell Slavs and Poles as well.

- This book relates to other later sources because it is used as reference for many later authors, i.e. Kurt Grossmann used the version Reitlinger provides of the Wannsee Protocol in his 1955 article in *The Antioch Review*. Due to this book being one of the most informative on the Final Solution at the time, Grossmann continues to cite Reitlinger throughout his works as the main source of information (Grossmann 1955, 56).
- Was unable to decipher the correlation and reasoning between the version he used of the protocol and the documented version used in the Nuremberg Trials due to waiting on an ILL request of his book and the only copies at UCSB not being able to be located by myself or library staff as of turning this version in.

- Using Google ngram viewer yielded a vast array of results when searching “Reitlinger” and “Gerald Reitlinger,” but when looking at the results many were inaccessible online or they discussed his entire work and not the topic of the version of the protocol used. Picture results attached at the end.

Grossmann, Kurt R. “The Final Solution”. *The Antioch Review* 15, no. 1 (1955): 55-72. Accessed February 10, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4609769>.

The work of Kurt Grossmann has a heavier focus on the overall aspect of the final solution, but he provides insight into the SS leaders who took part in the meeting. Grossmann discusses the Wannsee Protocol and the how the minutes made it clear that Nazis outlined a way to liquidate 11 million Jews. Following the insight on the Wannsee Protocol, Grossmann discusses what role the world played in Jewish extermination and why Jews followed the orders of Nazi’s even with knowing what was going on to an extent.

- Grossmann used the term “Final Solution” in his work instead of “Wannsee Protocol” which led to doing a Google ngram to compare the usage of the words. Even though the document is called the “Wannsee Protocol,” results for “Wannsee Conference” or “Final Solution” came back with more results - picture of results attached at the end.
- This source relates to other sources because Grossman pulls from Reitlinger’s translation of the protocol in his quoting and frequently uses his work as his main source.

Zeiger, Henry A. *The Case Against Adolf Eichmann*. New York: New American Library, 1960. Accessed February 15, 2016. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/ptid=mdp39015014152204;view=1up;seq=22>.

Zeiger’s book provides insight into the capture of Adolf Eichmann and describes the buildup of what led to these events. Through providing testimonies from the Nuremberg Trials, Zeiger was able to establish the role that Eichmann had in the final solution, although the testimonies have to be read with caution because the accused were trying to take the blame off of themselves. Zeiger quotes the Wannsee Protocol but the translation doesn’t match the wording of the original copies. The translation by Zeiger of the protocol switches entire sentences around and provides a more literal translation which slightly alters the interpretation of the document.

- Frederick Kiley provides a review that conveys how Zeiger was able to place the guilt upon Eichmann’s shoulders for the events of the Holocaust.
 - Kiley, Frederick S.. 1960. “Bargain Books”. Review of *The Case Against Adolf Eichmann*. *The Clearing House* 35 (4). Taylor & Francis, Ltd.: 250–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30199108>
- This source relates to other sources because it gives in-depth insight into the man who was behind the documentation of the protocol. Though Zeiger does have an apparent bias against Eichmann because of the crimes he was involved with committing, the book allows readers to understand better what Eichmann was like at the time of the Holocaust.

Hausner, Gideon. ”EICHMANN And His Trial." *Saturday Evening Post* 235, no. 40 (November 10, 1962): 56-57. *Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost* (accessed February 3, 2016).

This article gives compelling eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors during the trial for Adolf Eichmann. Though the article does not cover every survivor account that was provided during the trial, the gruesome accounts included here allow readers to obtain a better understanding of the man behind the murders. Hausner provides insight into the treatment of Jews by Nazis and how this relates to why Jews didn't rebel through the years.

Wolfe, Robert. *The Wannsee Protocol and a 1944 Report on Auschwitz by the Office of Strategic Services*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 1982.

The book is part of an eighteen book series that provides copies of original documents pertaining to the Wannsee Protocol that took place in Berlin in 1942. Robert Wolfe provides an introduction that gives background context as to why Nazi leaders called the conference to outline the Final Solution to answer the Jewish question. Following Wolfe's introduction, the original copy of the protocol in German is printed followed by an English translation that was used during the Nuremberg Trials and called document NG-2586. The book outlines the many subsequent policies, memos, and meetings that took place in regard to the Jewish question.

- Mark Roseman cites the protocol translation from this book in *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*, but with the note that it is a revised version of the translation (Roseman 2002, 157). Through comparing both English versions of the protocol, the main difference determined was the adding of words that clarified aspects and the moving around of words.
- Though there isn't a unique term, using Google scholar showed that after the publication of the book in 1982, the book was cited in the bibliographies and footnotes as a source in many following writings about the Holocaust.
- This source relates to other sources because it is the main document that many later authors use as a source when writing about the Wannsee Protocol. Unlike the GHDI source on the protocol, this book provides a copy of the original German document prior to translation to English.

Eichmann, Adolf. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of Proceedings in the District Court of Jerusalem*. Jerusalem, 1992.

The proceedings of Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1961 are covered in this multi-volume series, which documents the dialogue and provides microfiche copies of exhibits submitted during the trial. Throughout his testimony, Eichmann sticks to the defense that he was merely the person to take care of the technical aspects of the Wannsee Conference and did not take part in the planning or discussions. Eichmann further claims the resulting protocol was written with the aid of a secretary and was edited several times by Heydrich before circulation.

- This source relates to others because later authors, such as Roseman, use the trial proceedings in their works to document the type of man Eichmann was.

Roseman, Mark. *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*. New York: Metropolitan Books. 2002.

Mark Roseman's book presents an examination into the many different interpretations historians have of the meaning behind Heydrich holding the meeting to document the Wannsee

Protocol due to the aspect where the plan was already in place. Roseman provides not only a personal analysis of the Wannsee Protocol, but he sets the scene for the meeting by detailing the steps taken to the genocidal plans of the Nazis. In the book, Roseman omits discussion of the victims of the Holocaust and solely focuses on the men involved at the conference and how the widespread approval of genocide came to be.

- *Publishers Weekly* circulated a short, semi scathing review about the Roseman book shortly after it was published that claims little new insight was shed on the document and that at times Roseman could be repetitive.
- "The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration (Book)." *Publishers Weekly* 249, no. 9 (March 4, 2002): 65. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 14, 2016).

Richmond, Theo. "A Day of Infamy - History," *Sunday Times*, The (London, England), January 13, 2002: Culture 41, accessed February 03, 2016, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/0F8C52E846571C71?p=AWNB>.

Theo's work provides a review of Mark Roseman's *The Villa, The Lake, The Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution*, which was retitled later to *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*. The review details Roseman providing an up to date examination into the protocol in a scholarly context but without the academic jargon. Richmond provides backing to the validity of the work through pulling out the questions Roseman tries to answer in the work.

Roseman, Mark. "Shoot First and Ask Questions Afterwards? Wannsee and the Unfolding of the Final Solution." in *Nazism, War and Genocide: New Perspectives on the History of the Third Reich*, edited by Neil Gregor, 131-146. Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2008.

Roseman provides insight into the different meanings behind the meeting Heydrich held which resulted in the Wannsee Protocol. Initially the document was hailed as exposing the plan behind the mass murder of Jews, but Roseman questions this interpretation through providing new documentation and the views of other historians. Roseman discusses the evolution over time of the handling of Jews in Nazi Germany and concludes that the Wannsee Conference was not the moment when genocide was decided upon, but rather the moment in which who was in charge was addressed.

- This shorter source by Mark Roseman relates to the previous Roseman bibliography entry because both works cover many of the same interpretations of the document. This source is more concise than *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution* and provides new sources that Roseman previously did not use in his findings and final interpretations of the document.

"Adolf Eichmann." *The History Place: Biographies of Nazi Leaders*. Accessed January 25, 2016. <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/biographies/eichmann-biography.htm>.

The History Place's biography on Adolf Eichmann provides a timeline on the life of the man who documented the Wannsee Protocol, which later came to be known as the Final Solution. Eichmann rose through the SS ranks to eventually become the head of Jewish Affairs

and played a crucial role in deportation of millions of Jews into death camps by implementing the protocol. Though Eichmann escaped initially and went into hiding, he was abducted by the Israelis and put on trial, and ultimately killed, for his role in the murders of millions of Jews.

”Adolf Eichmann." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Accessed January 25, 2016.
<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007412>.

The website offers a biography of Adolf Eichmann, with a focus on his role in the deportations of Jews. Eichmann began having a hand in deportations of Jews as World War II broke out and through his success he was able to rise through the ranks and ultimately have a role in the Wannsee Conference, which “answered” the “Jewish question.” The website gives little information on the trial that took place after his capture in 1960.



