

Blueprint of Industrialized Genocide

The Wannsee Protocol, a summary of what is commonly referred to as the Wannsee Conference, was a secret meeting of senior Nazi officials in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on January 20, 1942. The conference, overseen by director of the Reich Main Security Office Reinhard Heydrich, was called to **ensure cooperation of administrative leaders in the implementation of the final solution to the Jewish question**. On July 31, 1941, Hermann Göring, acting on Adolf Hitler's instructions, advised Heydrich to *develop a more efficient way to exterminate* the approximately eleven million Jews who lived in Europe. Heydrich sent invitations to the conference to relevant ministries on November 29, 1941, with an attached copy of Göring's telegram that authorized the planning of the final solution.¹ The administrations requested to attend were the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Propaganda, Ministry of Justice, and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories.² Additionally, high ranking representatives of the SS were invited, making the total number of attendees fifteen.

The conference, which had been postponed multiple times before finally convening on January 20, lasted only about ninety minutes. Attendees discussed the most effective way to annihilate the Jewish population in Nazi occupied Europe, making it *Judenfrei*, or "free of Jews." The mass murder of Jews, as well as other undesirable populations, was already taking place under Heydrich's *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing squads in conquered territories. However, this method was not considered adequate and Göring authorized the planning for a "total solution of the Jewish question" in territories under German control.³ Under the T4 program, experimentation with murder by poison gas had taken place to euthanize the disabled and other undesirables that were *Lebensunwertes Leben*, or "life unworthy of life."⁴ In December 1941, experiments with exhaust fume poisoning began in mobile trucks in Chelmno in occupied Poland to formulate *industrialized mass murder* and test if this was a viable option for the Nazi state's

¹ Roseman, Mark. *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (2002), 81.

² Browning, Christopher R. *The Origins of the Final Solution : The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942* (2007), p. 406.

³ Ibid, 315.

⁴ Proctor, Robert N. (1988). *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, 177.

genocidal goals. The submitted plan produced by the meeting proposed that **Jews in Nazi-occupied territories be shipped by railway to Poland where they would be worked to death in extermination camps or murdered using poison gas.**

The Wannsee Protocol was exposed as *the blueprint for the Holocaust* in 1947 by Robert Kempner, a German lawyer serving as assistant U.S. chief counsel during the Nuremberg trials, where prominent members of Nazi Germany who had planned or participated in the Holocaust were prosecuted. First discovered in March 1947 in files seized from the German Foreign Office, the document was labeled “*Geheime Reichssache*,” or “Secret Reich matter,” and was the only copy to survive the war.⁵ The copy, which was labeled number sixteen of thirty, had once belonged to Martin Luther, Undersecretary of the Reich Foreign Ministry. Once the document was examined by Kempner, the prosecution believed it to be the “Rosetta stone of Nazi murder.”⁶ The document was used as evidence of involvement in crimes against humanity and other offenses for the subsequent twelve Nuremberg trials from 1946 to 1949.

After the capture of Adolf Eichmann in 1960, there was a *renewed interest in the Wannsee Protocol*. The ensuing trial was televised throughout Israel as well as the United States and was covered globally by major newspapers. During his trial, Eichmann drew attention back to Wannsee by declaring he “had felt moral satisfaction at Wannsee—“a certain solace”—because he had tried to save the Jews.”⁷ He continued his defense by comparing himself to Pontius Pilate, stating that they had both resorted to complicity in murder after nothing else could be done to save innocent lives.⁸ The 1963 book by Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, published in the immediate aftermath of his trial, expanded on Eichmann’s role in the Holocaust and his role at Wannsee. Arendt cited the Wannsee Protocol as an example of the bureaucratization of industrialized mass murder and Eichmann’s motivation as professional promotion rather than ideological hatred in what she referred to as the “banality of evil.”⁹

The Wannsee Protocol has become infamous for its role as the “*smoking gun*” of the *Holocaust*. It is the best piece of existing evidence detailing the Nazis’ blueprint for the industrialized genocide of Europe’s Jews and was used to convict many high-ranking Nazis. However, many historians believe that **the protocol did not mark a new period of National**

⁵ Kempner, Robert. *Ankläger einer Epoche (Prosecutor of an Epoch)* (1983), 93.

⁶ Roseman, Mark. *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (2002), 3.

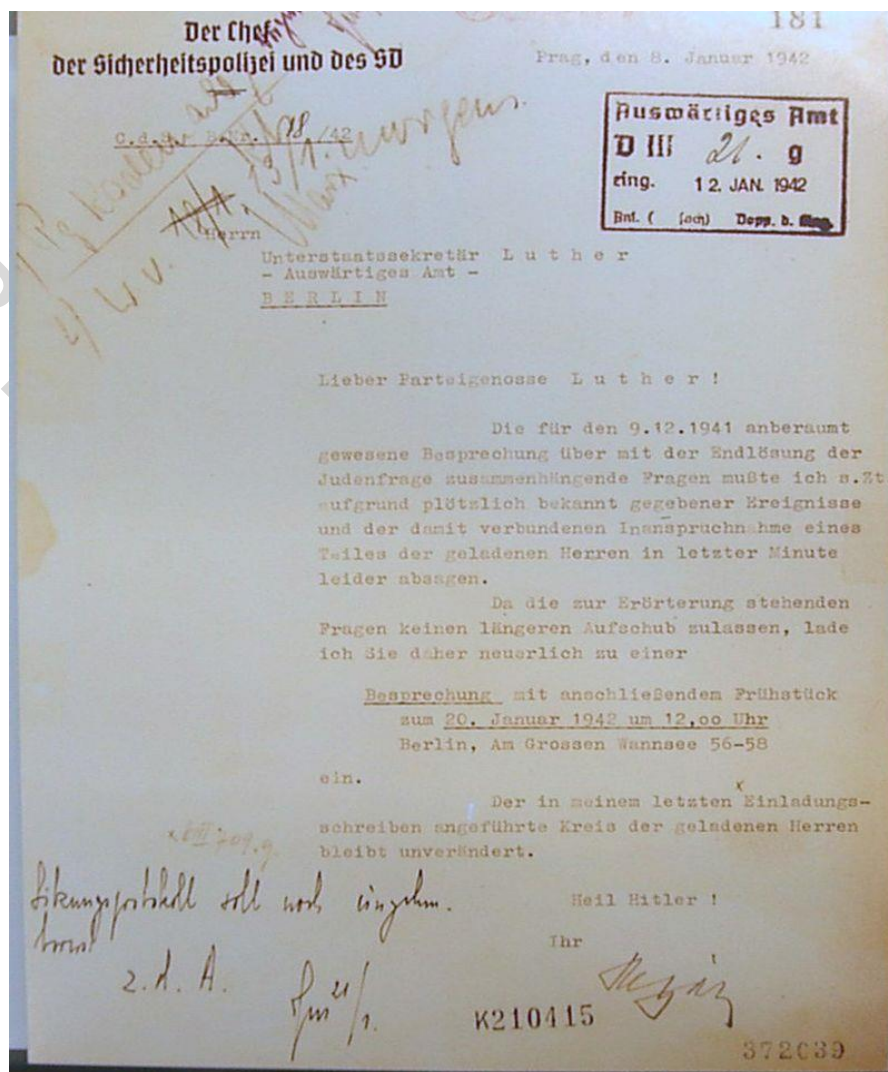
⁷ Bigart, Homer. “Eichmann Testifies He Felt Like Pilate” (1961) *New York Times*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), p. 135.

Socialism because of the shootings and gassings already underway in the east.¹⁰ Instead, the protocol serves as the best piece of existing evidence for the intent of industrialized mass murder. As historian Mark Roseman declared, “The Wannsee protocol was rather a signpost indicating that genocide had become official policy.”¹¹

This is a letter from Reinhard Heydrich to Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Martin Luther, inviting him to the Wannsee Conference. Luther’s record of the meeting is the only copy to survive the war.



¹⁰ Roseman, Mark. *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (2002), 5.

¹¹ Roseman, Mark. *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (2002), 156.

This document from the Wannsee Conference shows the number of Jews residing in European countries. The purpose of the conference was to ensure cooperation amongst all government offices in the extermination of Europe's Jewish population.

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Land	Zahl
A. Altreich	131.800
Ostmark	43.700
Ostgebiete	420.000
Generalgouvernement	2.284.000
Bialystok	400.000
Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren	74.200
Estland - judenfrei -	
Lettland	3.500
Litauen	34.000
Belgien	43.000
Dänemark	5.600
Frankreich / Besetztes Gebiet	165.000
Unbesetztes Gebiet	700.000
Griechenland	69.600
Niederlande	160.800
Norwegen	1.300
B. Bulgarien	48.000
England	330.000
Finnland	2.300
Irland	4.000
Italien einschl. Sardinien	58.000
Albanien	200
Kroatien	40.000
Portugal	3.000
Rumänien einschl. Bessarabien	342.000
Schweden	8.000
Schweiz	18.000
Serbien	10.000
Slowakei	88.000
Spanien	6.000
Türkei (europ. Teil)	55.500
Ungarn	742.800
UdSSR	5.000.000
Ukraine	2.994.684
Weißrußland aus- schl. Bialystok	446.484
Zusammen: über	11.000.000

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Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order

Grossman, Kurt R. "The Final Solution." *The Antioch Review; Yellow Springs, Ohio*. Issue 15, no. 1 (March 1, 1955): 55-72. Accessed February 14, 2019.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1301283901/citation/B8F2F7C7DE745B6PQ/1?accountid=14522>.

This source is an in-depth analysis of the Holocaust and the role of the Wannsee Conference. It discusses how the Wannsee Conference was the blueprint for the genocide in Poland but *was one of many steps taken to reach the Final Solution*. The author discusses from his personal experiences how Germany's genocidal state was a slow manifestation of policies beginning with the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. This journal does not have the protocol published in full but does contain some excerpts from it. It is a good source for understanding the slow march to the Final Solution and the many steps taken before the Wannsee Conference.

Bigart, Homer. "Eichmann Testifies He Felt Like Pilate." *New York Times*, June 27, 1961.

Accessed February 16, 2019.

<https://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/115434972/FEA6016CCDED43ECPQ/1?accountid=14522>.

This article covers the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem for his presence at Wannsee and involvement in the Holocaust. It discusses Eichmann's defense of his actions and *assertion that he had saved Jews from their death* prior to his involvement at Wannsee. The article also discusses Eichmann's comparison of himself to Pontius Pilate, and the disbelief in many spectators at the audacity of this claim. This source references the conference at Wannsee but does not publish any of the protocol. This is a good source for understanding the atmosphere surrounding the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem and the renewed interest in the Holocaust and Nazi genocide.

"Eichmann Drank Toast After Dooming of Jews." *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 22, 1961. Accessed February 17, 2019.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/141451913/79604D2EDE29433APQ/7?accountid=14522>.

This article covers the trial of Adolf Eichmann and his admittance that attendees of the Wannsee Conference drank a toast after the meeting to celebrate the formulation of the

Final Solution. The author gives details about the charges facing Eichmann as well as his defense for participating in the Wannsee Conference. When testifying about his involvement at Wannsee, Eichmann admitted, “it was regarded as a glorious deed to kill Jews and to exterminate them like bacteria and that lack of mercy was considered a good quality.” Eichmann also admitted that he “lacked civil courage” for being complicit in the planned annihilation of Europe’s Jewish population. This article is a good source for understanding the *cavalier attitude many of the Holocaust’s architects had towards their role in genocide*.

Roseman, Mark. “The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A

Reconsideration.” Metropolitan Books. New York, New York. 7 May 2002.

This book is an in-depth analysis of the Wannsee Protocol and its overall importance towards the Holocaust. It details the evolution of the persecution of Jews in Germany and, later, all of Nazi occupied Europe, from 1919 until 1945. It begins with a synopsis of Hitler’s radical antisemitism in the aftermath of World War I up to the persecution of Jews in Nazi occupied Europe at the start of the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. This source also examines the legacy of the protocol, *rebutting the common narrative that it was a major shift in Nazi policy towards genocide*. Instead, this book argues that **genocide had already been decided on by the time of the conference** in 1942 and the real historical legacy of the protocol is that it offers a clear picture into the bureaucratization of mass murder as well as irrefutable evidence of genocidal intent.