

The Wannsee Conference Student Worksheet

Introduction:

On January 20th, 1942, a group of high-ranking Nazi officials led by Reinhard Heydrich (Himmler's second in command of the SS) met in Berlin to try to decide what to do about the so-called "Jewish Question." The results of this meeting laid the basis for the machinery of the Holocaust during World War II. The document for this lesson contains the actual minutes from the Wannsee Conference, as well as a list of those in attendance.

Directions:

Download Wannsee Protocol from the World History website. See World War II on the downloads page. Read the protocol then answer the following questions:

1. In the document appear the words "expulsion of the Jews", "emigration of the Jews", "final solution of the Jewish question", and "eliminated by natural causes". Explain what each of these phrases really meant.

2. Within the document is the following statement: "All the offices realized the drawbacks of such enforced accelerated emigration. For the time being they had, however, tolerated it on account of the lack of other possible solutions of the problem." What specific drawbacks is the document referring to here? Why do you think it was felt that there weren't other solutions to the "problem"?

3. There seems to be an emphasis in the document on providing a legal basis for the "final solution." Why do you think this would have been an issue for the Nazis?

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4. There is very little mention of death, forced labor, concentration camps and other horrors associated with the plan. Do you believe this was done deliberately? Explain.

5. Why were other countries viewed, in some cases, as obstacles to implementing the plans discussed at Wannsee?

6. Cite at least three specific examples which show the cold-hearted and impersonal attitude of the Nazi leaders as they discussed the fate of the Jews.

7. Explain why the leaders went into such great detail in determining who was and wasn't considered a Jew. What seemed to be the primary criterion upon which they based their determinations? Did they have special concerns about any particular group of individuals? Explain.

8. Consider the following quote from the document: "Jews must be removed from the territory of the General Government as quickly as possible, since it is especially here that the Jew as an epidemic carrier represents an extreme danger." What do you think was meant by the phrase "epidemic carrier"? Write a few sentences speculating on why the Nazis considered Jews to be an "extreme danger."