

The Final Solution—The Wannsee Conference

The evolution of the Nazi policy of extermination reveals a shift to a policy of full extermination, known as the **Final Solution**.

A specific set of protocols emerged from the **Wannsee Conference** to deal with the final solution to the perceived Jewish problem in Nazi-occupied Europe.



The key element of the conference minutes was the following sentence: “Due to the war, the emigration plan has been replaced with deportation of the Jews to the east, in accordance with the Führer’s will.”³¹ This seemingly signaled a plan to relocate occupied Europe’s Jewish population

to German-occupied Poland, where a series of specially created extermination camps had been constructed.

Concentration camps built by the Nazis in the early 1930’s to house political prisoners would be repurposed to “extermination camps.”

Those camps built specifically for the mass extermination of Jews and others were primarily centered in Poland, most notably

Chelmno, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Chelmno was the first established death camp.

Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were built in early 1942, with permanent gas chambers replacing the van system used at Chelmno in order to increase efficiency and to speed up the process. Victims were sent directly to the chambers upon arrival and killed by carbon monoxide poisoning. Over the course of the war approximately 1.7 million Jews were killed within these three camps.

The most infamous of the death camps was Auschwitz-Birkenau, which served as a labor camp as well as an extermination camp.

Auschwitz’s chambers utilized a more effective gassing agent, Zyklon-B, a pre-war pesticide tested on Soviet prisoners of war that proved to be far more efficient than carbon monoxide.

Only a small number either passed into the labor camp or were selected for medical experiments under the control of camp physician **Dr. Josef Mengele**.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

The most notable instance of Jewish resistance occurred in the Warsaw ghetto in April 1943. The roots of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising lay in the first series of mass deportations from the ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp in 1942.

Several groups aimed to resist any future deportations. The two most important of these groups were the **Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB)** and the **Jewish Military Union (ZZW)**.

The first organized resistance came in January 1943 when German forces began another roundup of Jews. Both the ZOB and the ZZW responded by authorizing their members to use force in order to repel the Germans.

On April 19, 1943, German forces reentered the ghetto intent on removing the last residents there and deporting them to the camps. Both the ZOB and the ZZW fought back against the German troops with the small caches of weapons that had been smuggled in.



The resistance put up by the Jews forced the Germans to halt their advance and turn to another tactic in order to root out the Jews in the ghetto. German troops began to systematically burn down buildings turning the ghetto into a giant firetrap. Even then, it would take over a month for the Germans to officially put an end to armed resistance from the Jews.