Behind the Paperwork

Read how ideology and government coordination shaped genocide.

SS24.HOS.14 "Identify and summarize the key characteristics of the Final Solution, and describe how it was driven by Nazi ideology.* 14a Explain the purpose and scope of the Wannsee Conference in 1942."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show the plan's scope, circle two details that show how officials coordinated it, and number one sentence that explains how Nazi ideology drove the killing.

What Happened at Wannsee?

1. In January 1942, fifteen senior Nazi officials gathered in a villa beside Berlin's Wannsee lake. Reinhard Heydrich, a leader of the SS, called the meeting to coordinate what the Nazis called the "Final Solution of the Jewish question." That phrase concealed a plan to murder Europe's Jews. The meeting did not start the killing: German units and their collaborators had already shot hundreds of thousands of Jews after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. The officials discussed how government offices would cooperate in identifying, deporting, and exploiting Jews through forced labor as part of a continent-wide program of murder.

2. A surviving record of the meeting lists Jewish populations across Europe, including people in countries Germany did not control. This list shows the intended reach of the plan, not the number of people the Nazis had already captured. Officials discussed which people Nazi law would classify as Jewish and how different agencies would handle deportations. The language of paperwork made mass murder sound like an ordinary administrative task. Rail systems carried deportees to ghettos and killing centers, especially in occupied Poland. At killing centers, Nazi authorities murdered people on a vast scale, often using gas chambers.

3. Nazi ideology falsely claimed that Jews were a dangerous racial enemy. This antisemitic belief treated Jewish identity as something inherited, not a choice about religion or citizenship. Nazi leaders used that claim to justify excluding Jews from public life, taking their property, and eventually seeking their destruction. The Final Solution joined racist ideas to the power of the state: officials made lists, ministries exchanged information, and police and rail workers helped carry out orders. Understanding the Wannsee meeting means recognizing its purpose. It organized cooperation for a genocide already underway rather than casting a first vote to begin it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What was the purpose of the Wannsee Conference, and what evidence shows that it did not begin the killing?

2. What does the meeting record show about the intended geographic scope of the Final Solution? Explain why its population list was not a count of people already captured.

3. Identify two actions described in the passage that made the Final Solution a coordinated program rather than a single act of violence.

4. How did Nazi ideology drive the actions of the state described in the passage?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a museum exhibit displaying the surviving Wannsee meeting record. Write a 65 to 85 word label that explains the meeting's purpose and scope, contrasts its administrative language with what it concealed, connects the plan to Nazi ideology, and corrects the idea that the meeting began the killing.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Paperwork

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.14

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show the plan's scope, circle two details that show how officials coordinated it, and number one sentence that explains how Nazi ideology drove the killing. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What was the purpose of the Wannsee Conference, and what evidence shows that it did not begin the killing?	**Heydrich called the meeting to coordinate government agencies in carrying out genocide. German units and collaborators had already shot hundreds of thousands of Jews after the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union.**
2	What does the meeting record show about the intended geographic scope of the Final Solution? Explain why its population list was not a count of people already captured.	**The plan targeted Jews across Europe, including in countries Germany did not control. The list described populations the Nazis intended to target, not people already in their custody.**
3	Identify two actions described in the passage that made the Final Solution a coordinated program rather than a single act of violence.	**Accept two supported actions, such as compiling lists, sharing information among ministries, arranging deportations by rail, or operating killing centers.**
4	How did Nazi ideology drive the actions of the state described in the passage?	**The Nazis falsely portrayed Jews as an inherited racial enemy. Leaders used that antisemitic claim to justify exclusion, theft, and a government-organized campaign of murder.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This meeting record uses the language of offices and population lists, but it documents coordination for genocide. In January 1942, officials planned how agencies would identify and deport Jews across Europe, even considering countries Germany did not control. Their plans reflected Nazi antisemitism, which falsely defined Jews as a racial enemy and turned that lie into state policy. The conference did not launch the killing. Mass shootings had already begun, and officials met to organize a wider campaign of murder.

Accept varied wording that distinguishes coordination from the start of genocide and identifies Europe's Jews as the intended targets. The museum label should explain what the record's administrative language concealed.