

**Volume 5**

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**Wannsee Conference - III**

**Lead: During World War II the Nazi extermination of Jews and other genetically undesirable groups was reduced to banal bureaucratic efficiency.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: In the summer and early fall of 1941, nearly everywhere German Armies were triumphant. The plains of Russia passed quickly under the tracks of German tanks pressing ever-eastward into the Soviet**

**heartland. In this euphoric period of Nazi hubris when all the world seem to bow in deference to their ambitions, the decision was made to move in a more systematic way to accomplish one of Hitler's great desires, the total annihilation of the Jewish race and all other groups considered by the Nazi's to be genetically inferior.**

**After years of playing at whipping up anti-Semitic sentiments Hitler's henchmen were ready to go into the extermination business in a serious way. Already mobile execution units, *einsatzgruppen*, had followed the armies eastward and killed many thousands, but one bullet at a time**

would not accomplish the Führer's grand design, and even the most loyal Nazi troops were finding the personal slaughter of helpless men, women and children to be difficult.

A better way was needed. Reinhard Heydrich came up with the plan and in a speech on December 12, 1941 in the Chancellery, Hitler confirmed his support in front of a group of 50 high-ranking state officials. The Jews would be made to pay. In his account of the speech Goebbels used the word "extermination." Heydrich called a group of important Nazi leaders together at the Berlin suburb of Grosse-Wannsee to get them on board. The meeting was held on

**January 20, 1942. The earlier idea of transporting Europe's Jews to Madagascar was dropped. Instead, they would be rounded up, transported east, and organized into a slave labor system. The minutes do not mention direct extermination, but within a few months, the gas chambers of Poland were working hard at their gruesome task.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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