



Final Solution

Code-name for the Nazis' plan to solve the "Jewish question" by murdering all the Jews in Europe. The "Final Solution" was the culmination of many years of evolving Nazi policy – commencing with Hitler's earliest writings about the need for a solution to the Jewish question in Europe, followed by the Nazis' attempts to induce mass emigration during the 1930s - through to the plan for collective exile to a specific destination and finally by 1941, the mass extermination of Jews.

In September 1919, Hitler penned his first political document, stating that the Jewish question would eventually be solved by the removal of the Jews from Europe altogether. According to Hitler, this removal would not be carried out in an emotional fashion, with pogroms and the like, but rather executed with typical German thoroughness and efficient planning. For Hitler, the Jewish question was the essential question for all Nazis. In fact, Hitler was obsessed with Jews and was determined to find a "final solution" for getting rid of them. However, his early writings and statements cannot be viewed as a blueprint for the murders put into effect so many years later.

Throughout the 1930s, Hitler believed that mass emigration was the answer to the Jewish problem. The anti-Jewish legislation passed in Germany from the time Hitler rose to national power in January 1933 to the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 was designed to convince and later coerce the Jews to leave the country. In January 1939 Hitler spoke before the German parliament. He criticized the free world for not taking in Jewish immigrants and warned that the consequences of war would include the "annihilation" of European Jewry. Experts debate whether that statement should be interpreted as a direct articulation of Hitler's intention to murder the Jews, or whether it was just Hitler's manipulative way of leaning on the free world to take in Jewish immigrants.

In 1939, after the German invasion of Poland, an additional 1.8 million Jews came under German control. Hitler did not immediately order their extermination. Instead, a plan was formulated whereby all Jews living within



the Reich were to be exiled to a reservation in the Lublin district of the *Generalgouvernement*. The Nazis attempted to implement this Nisko and Lublin Plan, however it never came to fruition. By the spring of 1940, it was clear that the Lublin program was no longer the answer to the Jewish question, as Poland did not have enough territory to spare for the Jews.

The next phase in anti-Jewish policy, introduced in May 1940, was the Madagascar Plan—a plan to deport all of Europe's Jews to the island of Madagascar, a French colony in Africa. However, the Germans were defeated in the Battle of Britain just a few months later, rendering the Madagascar idea unfeasible.

The Germans attacked their former ally, the Soviet Union, in June 1941. Mobile killing units called *Einsatzgruppen*, along with regular army, police units and local collaborators immediately began the systematic murder of the Jews in the Soviet Union. This was the first time that mass systematic extermination was implemented as a method of solving the Jewish question.

In July, Hermann Goering authorized the preparation for the "Final Solution." At the end of 1941 and early 1942, the Nazis established extermination camps, began deportations to them, and crystallized killing methods. The first gassing experiment was performed in Auschwitz in September 1941, and extermination camps at Belzec and Chelmno were constructed in late fall. Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz became extermination centers in the spring of 1942. Meanwhile, on December 12, 1941, Hitler told his intimate circle that the murder was to be extended to include German Jews, thereby including all the Jews of Europe in the plans for the "Final Solution."

At the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, German government and SS leaders met to coordinate the extermination of every Jew in Europe. From this time until the end of the war in 1945, the "Final Solution" was official Nazi policy and meant only one thing – total extermination of Europe's Jews.