

## WORLD WAR II: JUDGMENT DAY--THE EUROPEAN WAR

Political leaders often say that history should be the judge of their actions-- confident that history will never rule. But this time History has indeed assembled a Final Court of Judgment to assess their responsibility. It is now in session and there will be no appeal. In the dock are those charged with contributing to the outbreak of the Second World War, a conflagration that killed as many as sixty million people. The trial of those most proximately guilty has already adjourned after condemning Hitler and his Nazi minions. But what others helped set the stage for the grim spectacle? Who else is responsible for the carnage unleashed by the Nazis?

You are the defense counsel and advocate for the accused ghosts of World War II. Your mission: in a five-minute speech, to present a compelling defense of your client and to indict another among the defendants who now tremble before the Final Court.

In your speech you may wish to refer to:

- > The international situation (e.g., the balance of power, alliances, military strategies and plans, windows of opportunity and vulnerability, etc.)
- > Domestic situations (e.g., national perceptions or misperceptions, the abilities or shortcomings of national leaders, democracy or autocracy, etc.)
- > Accidents, misunderstandings, and the perceptions, misperceptions, and honest mistakes of individuals.

Those called to judgment are as follows:

### THE ACCUSED

### THE CHARGE

British interwar pacifists

Their ideas led Britain to a policy of weakness that let Hitler run wild.

British leaders

They failed to stop Hitler when he began rearmament in 1933, when he remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936, and when he seized Austria in 1938; and they appeased him at Munich in 1938.

U.S. isolationists

They hindered Franklin Roosevelt's ability to deter German aggression, leading Germans to believe they could aggress with impunity.

Soviet leaders	They cooperated with Hitler in 1939 (in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) instead of deterring his aggression.
American Wilsonians	They devised a flawed Versailles system that left Germany both strong and bitter, surrounded with small weak states that could not contain it.
German Weimar-era scholars	They failed to refute, and sometimes echoed, toxic historical lies that German nationalists purveyed to the German people. These lies laid the basis for Hitler's rise.
The interwar German public	It chose to believe these toxic lies and willingly voted Hitler into power.
French policy makers	They embraced a defensive military doctrine when deterring Hitler called for offensive capabilities, and they participated in appeasing him.

Your job is to advocate a point of view in your speech, not to present the matter from all sides. Your presentation therefore need not be entirely judicious or even-handed.

Please provide an outline of your speech to your audience. This outline could be written on a blackboard but a 1-page handout often works better.

A good format for your speech is: sum up your argument quickly at the outset so your audience knows where you are going; then proceed through the body of the argument.

Please come prepared to hold your remarks to five minutes. The Chief Justice of the Final Court of Judgment may cut you off if you run over.

We recommend that you practice your speech a couple of times--to the mirror or, better still, to a friend--before giving it.

*THE MOMENT OF JUDGMENT SWIFT APPROACHES--  
HOW THEN DO YOU PLEAD?*