

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
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British interwar pacifists	Their ideas led Britain to a policy of weakness that let Hitler run wild.
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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.
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U.S. isolationists	They hindered Franklin Roosevelt's ability to deter German aggression, leading Germans to believe they could aggress with impunity.
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Soviet leaders	They aided Hitler's rise by ordering Germany's communists to focus their hostility on Germany's social democrats instead of the Nazis. Later they cooperated with Hitler in 1939 (in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) instead of deterring his aggression.
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American Wilsonians They devised a flawed Versailles system that left Germany both strong and bitter, surrounded by 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. But if you take excessive liberties with the facts you risk public humiliation at the hands of critical questioners who are not fooled by your fancy footwork.

Please provide an outline of your speech to your audience. This outline can be presented as a 1-page handout, by Powerpoint, or written on a blackboard.

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.

Further advice: keep your argument simple. Make a few key points. Don't make every argument you can--make only the strongest ones. Too many arguments leaves an audience confused.

Please hold your remarks to five minutes. The Chief Justice of the Final Court of Judgment will 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. You can also practice using the facilities of MIT's writing and Communications Center and can get helpful advice from their staff.

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