Knowledge and Action

Assessing Allied responses to Nazi mass murder

SS24.HOS.18a "Evaluate American and Allied officials' knowledge of and response to the Final Solution."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline evidence of what American and Allied officials knew, then circle two decisions they made and label each "help" or "limit" based on its effect on rescue.

Warnings, Decisions, and Rescue

1. In August 1942, a message sent through Swiss channels reached the U.S. State Department. It warned that Nazi Germany planned to murder Europe's Jews. Department officials did not immediately make the warning public, partly because they sought confirmation. American Jewish leader Stephen Wise received the message but was asked to wait before announcing it. In November, after further reports, Wise made the warning public. On December 17, the United States and other Allied governments issued a joint declaration condemning the Nazis' systematic murder of Jews. By then, officials had credible evidence of mass killing, even though they did not know every detail of the camps.

2. A public statement did not automatically open an escape route. At a 1943 conference in Bermuda, British and American representatives discussed refugees but made no major new commitments to admit them. Immigration restrictions, wartime transport shortages, and concerns about security narrowed the choices officials considered. In 1944, the U.S. government created the War Refugee Board, which worked with diplomats and aid groups to support rescue, relief, and safe passage. Its efforts helped save tens of thousands of people, including Jews threatened by Nazi persecution. The board came late, after millions of Jews had already been murdered.

3. In 1944, some advocates asked the United States to bomb the rail lines leading to Auschwitz, a Nazi killing center. The War Department rejected requests to divert aircraft from existing military missions. Whether such bombing would have saved many lives remains debated. Striking rail lines might have disrupted transports, but repairs could have restored them. This debate cannot erase a clearer contrast: Allied governments publicly acknowledged mass murder in 1942, yet a dedicated U.S. rescue agency was not created until 1944. To evaluate their response, weigh both what officials knew at the time and what their decisions did or did not make possible.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What did Allied officials know by December 1942, and how did their public response address that knowledge?

2. Compare the Bermuda conference with the War Refugee Board. Which response did more to help people survive, according to the passage?

3. How does the timing of the War Refugee Board affect your evaluation of the U.S. response?

4. Why would it be inaccurate to claim that bombing the rail lines would certainly have saved many lives? How should that uncertainty affect your judgment of the War Department's decision?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise an American official in early 1944. Write a five- or six-sentence memo recommending one change to the response, using two facts from the passage about what officials knew and did, and acknowledging one wartime constraint or uncertainty.

Knowledge and Action

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline evidence of what American and Allied officials knew, then circle two decisions they made and label each "help" or "limit" based on its effect on rescue. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What did Allied officials know by December 1942, and how did their public response address that knowledge?	**They had credible evidence of systematic mass murder of Jews, and they issued a joint declaration condemning it.**
2	Compare the Bermuda conference with the War Refugee Board. Which response did more to help people survive, according to the passage?	**The Bermuda conference produced no major new commitments to admit refugees. The War Refugee Board supported rescue and safe passage and helped save tens of thousands of people.**
3	How does the timing of the War Refugee Board affect your evaluation of the U.S. response?	**The board helped save lives, but it was not created until 1944, after officials had evidence of mass killing in 1942 and millions of Jews had been murdered.**
4	Why would it be inaccurate to claim that bombing the rail lines would certainly have saved many lives? How should that uncertainty affect your judgment of the War Department's decision?	**Bombing might have disrupted transports, but the lines could have been repaired. The refusal can be evaluated as a decision not to divert aircraft, but its effect on possible rescues cannot be stated with certainty.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Your government condemned the systematic murder of Jews in December 1942. Yet the Bermuda talks produced no major new commitments to admit refugees. Expand rescue funding and use diplomats to help more people reach safety, building on the War Refugee Board's work. Wartime transport shortages may limit how many people can leave. Still, the gap between early knowledge and the late creation of a rescue agency makes a stronger effort necessary.

Accept supported judgments that distinguish public condemnation from direct rescue and recognize that officials faced constraints. Do not require students to claim that bombing rail lines would have succeeded.