Law After War

Assess Robert Jackson's arguments and legacy at Nuremberg

SS24.HOS.21a "Assess the contributions of Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson and the arguments he made as Chief Prosecutor for the United States at the Nuremberg Trials."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two actions Jackson took to build the trial, circle two arguments he made about responsibility or fair judgment, and write 1 beside a detail that helps you assess a strength or limit of his work.

Robert Jackson at Nuremberg

1 In November 1945, Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson stood in a courtroom in Nuremberg, Germany, as chief prosecutor for the United States. The Allies had defeated Nazi Germany, but Jackson argued that victory alone could not settle responsibility for its crimes. He helped shape the London Charter, which created the International Military Tribunal and listed crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Rather than punish a nation as a whole, the tribunal would examine charges against individual leaders. This choice made the courtroom, not the battlefield, the place to test evidence of their actions.

2 Jackson's opening statement argued that powerful officials could not escape judgment by claiming they acted for a government. He also insisted that prosecutors prove their case with evidence under fair procedures, instead of treating defeat as proof of guilt. To show planning and responsibility, his team presented captured German records, including orders and meeting notes. These documents let the accused leaders' own words help establish what they knew and did. Jackson framed aggressive war as a deliberate choice by leaders, not an unavoidable event, linking decisions to the destruction that followed. His argument made individual accountability central to the trial.

3 Jackson called the trial an effort to place law above revenge. He warned that the standards used against Nazi leaders would also have to guide the nations judging them. The tribunal convicted some defendants and acquitted others, showing that verdicts were not automatic. Still, critics noted that the Allies did not put their own wartime actions on trial, and some challenged whether all the charges had been clearly defined before the war. Jackson's work left a lasting model for prosecuting leaders for international crimes, even as debates over fairness and consistent enforcement continued.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Jackson's work on the London Charter change the way Nazi leaders could be judged?

2. How did captured German records support Jackson's argument about individual responsibility?

3. Why did Jackson insist on evidence and fair procedures? What outcome in the passage supports that approach?

4. What detail from the passage limits the trial's claim to apply a fair standard to all nations? Explain your choice.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label assessing Jackson's contribution to the Nuremberg Trials. Include a specific action he took, explain one of his arguments, and weigh one limit before giving your judgment.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two actions Jackson took to build the trial, circle two arguments he made about responsibility or fair judgment, and write 1 beside a detail that helps you assess a strength or limit of his work. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Jackson's work on the London Charter change the way Nazi leaders could be judged?	**The charter created a tribunal with defined charges, allowing individual leaders to be tried on evidence rather than punishing Germany as a whole.**
2	How did captured German records support Jackson's argument about individual responsibility?	**Orders and meeting notes used leaders' own words to show what they knew and did, connecting them to decisions.**
3	Why did Jackson insist on evidence and fair procedures? What outcome in the passage supports that approach?	**He argued that defeat alone was not proof of guilt. The tribunal acquitted some defendants as well as convicting others.**
4	What detail from the passage limits the trial's claim to apply a fair standard to all nations? Explain your choice.	**The Allies did not put their own wartime actions on trial, raising a question about whether the standard applied equally.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Robert Jackson helped turn the defeat of Nazi Germany into a public test of leaders' responsibility under law. As U.S. chief prosecutor, he helped shape the tribunal's charter and used captured German records to connect officials with decisions. He argued that prosecutors had to prove guilt, not assume it from defeat. Yet the Allies did not put their own wartime actions on trial, weakening the claim that the rules applied equally. Despite that limit, his approach offered a lasting model for international prosecutions.

Accept other supported assessments, including discussion of whether the charges were clearly defined before the war. Responses should connect Jackson's actions and arguments to a reasoned judgment, not simply list them.