Justice on Trial

Examine the U.S. role in holding Nazi leaders accountable.

USH.C.5.3.C "Examine the United States of America's participation in the Nuremberg Trials which held Nazi leaders accountable for war crimes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions the United States took to hold Nazi leaders accountable, circle details showing how the trials tested individual guilt, and number one limit of the trials.

The United States at Nuremberg

1 In November 1945, a courtroom in Nuremberg, Germany, became a place to test whether national leaders could be judged for wartime acts. The United States joined Britain, France, and the Soviet Union in creating the International Military Tribunal. These four powers chose judges and prosecutors, agreed on charges, and put major Nazi leaders on trial. Rather than treating defeat alone as proof of guilt, the tribunal examined the actions of individuals. Its charter listed crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. U.S. participation helped turn demands for punishment into a courtroom process with charges, evidence, and defenses.

2 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson served as the chief American prosecutor. His team used captured German documents, films, and witness testimony to connect defendants to decisions and acts. In his opening statement, Jackson argued that powerful officials should face the law rather than escape responsibility because of their rank. Prosecutors had to show what a particular defendant had done, ordered, or helped plan. Defense lawyers could challenge evidence and question witnesses. American prosecutors did not act alone: the other three Allied powers also presented cases. The shared trial made accountability a joint effort, while the U.S. supplied a leading voice and evidence.

3 In October 1946, the tribunal convicted some defendants and acquitted others; convictions brought prison terms or death sentences. These different outcomes mattered: they showed that the judges did not simply declare every accused person guilty. U.S. military tribunals later held twelve additional trials at Nuremberg, in the American occupation zone. They prosecuted groups including doctors, judges, and industrialists for their roles in Nazi crimes. Yet many people responsible for atrocities were never tried. The trials established that official power did not place a person beyond legal judgment, but they could not account for every crime or every victim.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the United States help make the first Nuremberg trial a legal process rather than punishment based only on defeat?

2. How did Jackson's team use evidence to support the idea that leaders should be judged for their own actions?

3. Why do the acquittals matter when judging whether the U.S.-backed tribunal tested guilt instead of assuming it?

4. How did the later U.S. trials extend accountability, and what limit remained?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum display has room for one label about the U.S. role at Nuremberg. Write four or five sentences that select two U.S. actions, explain how they worked together to hold Nazi leaders accountable, and evaluate one limit the label must not hide.

ANSWER KEY

Justice on Trial

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.5.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions the United States took to hold Nazi leaders accountable, circle details showing how the trials tested individual guilt, and number one limit of the trials. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the United States help make the first Nuremberg trial a legal process rather than punishment based only on defeat?	**The United States joined three other powers in creating a tribunal with judges, prosecutors, charges, evidence, and defenses to examine individuals' actions.**
2	How did Jackson's team use evidence to support the idea that leaders should be judged for their own actions?	**The team used captured documents, films, and witness testimony to connect particular defendants to decisions and acts.**
3	Why do the acquittals matter when judging whether the U.S.-backed tribunal tested guilt instead of assuming it?	**Some defendants were acquitted while others were convicted, showing that the judges considered individual guilt rather than treating every accused person as guilty.**
4	How did the later U.S. trials extend accountability, and what limit remained?	**U.S. military tribunals tried doctors, judges, industrialists, and others beyond the major leaders in the first trial, but many people responsible for atrocities were never tried.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The United States helped create a tribunal that could charge Nazi leaders under agreed rules. American prosecutors then used captured records and testimony to connect specific leaders to specific acts, giving judges evidence to consider instead of assuming guilt from defeat. Together, these actions turned the demand for punishment into a process for judging individuals. The label must also say that many people responsible for atrocities were never tried, so courtroom accountability remained incomplete.

Accept other accurate pairs of U.S. actions if students explain how they worked together. A valid limit must come from the passage and must not imply that no Nazi leaders were held accountable.