

## Lesson 16: Handout 1

### Nuremberg trials fact sheet

After World War II ended with the defeat of Germany in May 1945, the countries that won the war (Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union), asked the question: Should Nazi leaders be punished for the crimes committed during the Holocaust? And, if so, who should be punished? What punishments do they deserve?

1. Winston Churchill, the British leader, thought that Nazi leaders should be hanged. But other leaders thought they should go to trial.

*Should those responsible for the Holocaust be killed or jailed? Do the perpetrators have the right to a fair trial in a court of law?*

2. The Allied countries agreed to put Nazi leaders on trial for two reasons: 1) to punish those responsible, and 2) to prevent future crimes against humanity. Those who organized the trials wanted future leaders to know that if they acted like Hitler and other Nazi leaders, they would be punished for their actions; they could not just get away with murdering their own citizens.

*Is bringing perpetrators to justice in courts an effective way to prevent future crimes? Why or why not?*

3. Beginning in November 1945, an international trial—a court case involving many countries—was held in the city of Nuremberg in Germany, so the trials were called the Nuremberg trials. The trials included judges and lawyers from each of the winning countries (Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union). The Nazis held on charges (the defendants) also had lawyers to defend them. Some argued that it was unfair for the Allied powers to bring the Nazis to trial because they had not broken any laws. (At this point, there were no international laws forbidding a government from murdering its own citizens.)

*Is it fair for some nations to push their laws on other nations? Should there be an international court that is more powerful than the courts of individual countries?*

4. Twenty-four men were indicted (charged with a crime) during the first set of trials at Nuremberg. These included military leaders, Nazi Party leaders, and officers who worked at concentration camps. Hitler and several other Nazi leaders were not indicted because they had committed suicide or escaped at the end of the war. Some lower-ranking officers, soldiers, and bureaucrats who participated in the Holocaust were indicted in later trials. Bystanders also were not put on trial at Nuremberg or in future trials.

*Should bystanders be punished along with the perpetrators of the Holocaust? Why or why not?*

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### Nuremberg trials fact sheet (continued)

5. The defendants were charged with four different crimes. One of these crimes was “crimes against humanity.” One of the men charged with “crimes against humanity” was Julius Streicher. He was Minister of Propaganda of the Nazi Party. He was responsible for spreading hateful lies about Jews in the newspaper and in other forms, such as children's books.

*What qualifies as a “crime against humanity”? What does it mean for a crime to be against humanity? Can words be considered a weapon? Should it be against the law to spread hateful lies? What if these lies lead to violence against innocent children, women, and men? Do those who spread these lies deserve to be punished as much as those who actually pulled the trigger or operated the gas chambers?*

6. Many Nazis charged with “crimes against humanity” argued that they were only following orders and that they had not broken any laws by their actions.

*Are Nazi leaders and others who were following the laws of their country and the orders of their elected leader, Adolf Hitler, responsible for the Holocaust? Should they be punished for obeying the orders of their superiors, even if those orders contributed to the death of innocent people?*

7. Nineteen of the defendants were found guilty. Twelve were sentenced to death by hanging. Seven were given prison sentences. Between 1946 and 1949, many more trials of Germans were held in Nuremberg. In these trials, 97 additional Germans were found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including business leaders who used slave labor, doctors who conducted experiments on concentration camp victims, and Nazi judges who sent innocent people to concentration camps.

*Is it possible to achieve justice for the crimes committed during the Holocaust? Were the trials at Nuremberg an effective way to achieve justice for the crimes committed during the Holocaust? What else could have been done so that “justice could be served”?*

8. After the war, the Allied powers also had to consider what Germany should do to “pay back” the survivors of the Holocaust and the families of the victims. After all, the Nazis had taken all of their money and property and had caused immeasurable suffering. A program was set up to provide money (reparations) to those who could prove they were victims of the Nazis, and Germany was supposed to give back stolen property to its rightful owners (if they were still alive).

*Should Germany continue to give money to survivors of the Holocaust, the families of the victims, and Jewish organizations, even though most of the individuals living in Germany today were small children or were not alive during the Holocaust?*