

The Nuremberg Trials: An International Responsibility to Uphold Justice

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Individual Website

I have had the privilege of visiting Nuremberg several times in my life. My father was born and raised in this city and much of his family still lives there. Until recently, I was unaware that Nuremberg was the birthplace of international justice as we know it today. When I learned more about the International Military Tribunal that took place in Nuremberg, as well as a visit to Dachau Concentration Camp, I became fascinated with the IMT and the crimes it tried.

After reading about the trial on the University of Missouri's extensive online resources, I turned to primary sources documenting the trial – both official records and personal accounts by participants on both sides, like those of prosecutor Telford Taylor and defendant Albert Speer. The most important part of my research involved visiting the Nuremberg Palace of Justice and the courtroom where the main trial took place. An exhibit at the site covers in great detail the background and intricacies of the trial. On two separate occasions, I had the opportunity to speak at length with an expert on World War II and post-World War II German history, Ingo Eigen. His expertise about the Nazi Era, Nuremberg Trials, and how both affected postwar Germany was invaluable. I also interviewed my grandmother about her experiences during the war and in postwar Germany, and how she recalls that the Nuremberg Trials affected the national psyche at the time. The final step in my research was to consult books, professional journals, and essays written by renowned experts and legal professionals. They provided both positive and negative perspectives about the trials, as well as a variety of opinions on how Nuremberg has affected international trials since 1946. In these, I also found most of my information about the ad-hoc tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Documents produced by the Red Cross, United Nations, and International Criminal Court rounded out my research, providing insight into how each organization developed and was influenced by the Nuremberg Trials.

I chose the website format because it lends itself ideally to presenting this topic, providing a combination of text and visuals, as well as the inclusion of short video clips and interactive timelines. I structured the website to guide the viewer in a logical manner through the events that led to the rise and fall of the Nazi empire, the Nuremberg Trials themselves, and the events that established the international justice system we have today.

By signaling a new era in international justice, in which the international community has taken up the responsibility for holding accountable those who commit war crimes and egregious violations of human rights, the Nuremberg Trials exemplify the theme “Rights and Responsibilities in History.” Despite several high-profile attempts, this responsibility had never successfully been fulfilled before. Nuremberg’s legacy is that it laid the foundation for the international community to assume the responsibility of protecting human rights through peaceful and fair means – the perfect amalgamation of rights and responsibilities.

(494 Words)