

**Volume 3**

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**The Nuremberg Trials - I**

**Lead: By 1943 the tide of victory had begun to shift in favor of the Allies. How they used that victory would give shape to the postwar world. One of their first tasks was to bring war criminals to justice at Nuremberg.**

**Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: As World War II ground on, word began to slip out of occupied Europe describing terrible atrocities. These were not the acts of inhumanity normally associated with war. This was an organized terror rarely**

**experienced in the modern era. Genocide on a scale theretofore considered unimaginable was engulfing groups thought by the Nazis and their allies to be subhuman. Jews, selected evangelical Christians, homosexuals, gypsies, the mentally infirm, and others were gradually being exterminated in Hitler's twisted pursuit of racial purity.**

**Since the dawn of the modern era, philosophers and diplomats had been struggling to bring some semblance of order and moderation to the conduct of war. If it was impossible to end conflict, it was reasoned, at least the most horrific agents of destruction, if not eliminated, could be restricted in their effect. Technology was**

**overwhelming tactics and the impersonal nature of modern war and life was breaking down the few restraints custom, religion, and mercy had placed on conduct during warfare. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln issued Instructions for the Government of the Armies in the Field which held enemy prisoners of war liable for unusual and serious offenses they had committed against Federal soldiers and civilians before being taken prisoner. From 1864 to 1949, inspired by Henri Dunant, founder of the International Red Cross, the Geneva and Hague Conventions, a series of treaties signed by most of the major powers, attempted to soften the harsh effects of war on soldiers and civilians. One of the major problems**

**facing negotiators was how to define a war crime. After all, war by definition, involves killing people and 'how do you kill someone nicely'? Does it really make a difference to the victims if they are dispatched by a bullet, a waft of poison gas, a smart bomb or a thermonuclear explosion? Is it possible for a civilization to craft a morally correct way of governing deadly conflict?**

**After World War I attempts by the Allies to bring to justice Kaiser William II and nearly 900 others accused of serious war crimes were frustrated by German opposition. Only twelve cases were accepted for trial. Three defendants never showed up, charges were dropped for three**

**more, and only six received minor sentences. At the end of World War II, no such resistance was permitted. Next time: The Nuremberg indictments.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

### Resources

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