

"Monumental... Conot has succeeded as nobody has before in placing the Nuremberg trials in perspective." — Chicago Tribune

# JUSTICE AT NUREMBERG

**Robert E. Conot**



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Here, for the first time in one volume, is the full story of crimes committed by the Nazi leaders and of the trials in which they were brought to judgement. Conot reconstructs in a single absorbing narrative not only the events at Nuremberg but the offenses with which the accused were charged. He brilliantly characterizes each of the twenty-one defendants, vividly presenting each case and inspecting carefully the process of indictment, prosecution, defense and sentencing.

## Justice at Nuremberg Details

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Author : Robert E. Conot

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## From Reader Review Justice at Nuremberg for online ebook

### Alan says

Since 1969-1971, when I served in Uncle Sam's army in Germany only 25 years after WW2, I have read perhaps a dozen books on German history, looking for insight into how the Germans could have done what they did.

"Justice at Nuremberg" lays out the undeniable horrors in the very words (correspondence, journals) of those who committed them. Even after all those other books, this one practically made my hair stand on end. The cold detachment of the Nazis, their utter brutality . . . just leaves me without words.

The surprise? The disunity of the prosecution team, the major charges that were dropped, and the sort of "stick your finger in the wind" when it came to sentencing.

The book is thorough, detailed, and, at times, tedious. It's not about "great reading." It's about truth and worth the read for that alone.

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### Joe says

This book was extremely well researched and documented. The author's writing style made also made it an easy read. I would recommend it. However, be aware that although the title is 'Justice at Nuremberg', I estimate that 75% of the book focuses on and describes in some detail the horrible crimes of the Nazi criminals, and not as much on the trial itself. Yes, a portion of the book does provide descriptions of the judges, lawyers, their speeches, legal issues, prisoner life in prison during the trial, etc. But while this was the area I was most interested in, it composed only a minority part of the book.

Having said that, if one were interested in the atrocities of WW-2 in Europe, this is a well researched and easy to read book.

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### John says

The work offers a comprehensive overview of perhaps the most famous legal proceedings of the 20th century, the post-World War II trial by the victorious Allied nations of top Nazis such as Hermann Goering, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and others. Journalist Robert Conot (1929-2011), whose parents died in the Holocaust, manages to combine an enormous amount of material on the trial's original conception and organization, its proceedings, and all the personalities involved--the 24 defendants, the judges, the prosecution and defense attorneys, and others--into an engrossing narrative.

The emphasis is on story-telling rather than analysis--Conot's occasional attempts to discuss the larger significance of Nazism or the trials' influence on international law are unmemorable. As a story, however, Justice at Nuremberg is gripping and powerful. In particular, the section devoted to explaining the prosecution's case is an excellent summary, in only about 200 pages, of the rise of Nazi Germany and the multitude of crimes committed by the regime.

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### **Bou says**

This was a sort of disappointment because I expected something else. About three quarters of this book describes the crimes that the accused performed and not so much on the trial itself. Unfortunately, this was what I was looking for and therefore after 107 pages, I decided to let this one go.

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### **Jonnie Enloe says**

Fact filled and a relatively easy read. Helps to have pre-war Nazi History foundation before reading as some of the details of the trials are based Pre-War.

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### **Alejandro Teruel says**

The impression this book might make on its readers depends very heavily on what they know about the history of Germany from the end of World War I to the end of World War II, the rise and fall of the Third Reich, Nazism, and the Holocaust and other atrocities committed at the time, and the evolving nature of international law, particularly in regard to war crimes.

Published in 1983, almost forty years after the Nuremberg trials took place, the book is an attempt to come to grips with a complex attempt to redefine the basis and concept of war crimes. In his introduction Robert Conot sets out his goals:

For the first time, the leaders of a nation were charged with international crimes committed on a scale so vast as to strain belief [...] Yet, contrary to the expectations of the participants, the trial has never been fully explored. Although the record has furnished a documentary bonanza for histories of the Third Reich, there has been an absence of knowledge and comprehension of the trial except.

Thus, this statement and the title of the book builds up clear expectations that focus on the trial itself. This seems to be reflected in the structure of the book as set forward by Conot in his *Acknowledgments and Methodology*:

*Part I: Crime and Punishment* -the origination of the trial concept and organization of the tribunal.

*Part II: Interrogation and Indictment* -the imprisonment of the accused at Nuremberg and the preparation of the case.

*Part III: Prosecution* -an account of Nazi criminality and the defendants' complicity, interwoven with the presentation of the evidence.

*Part IV: Defense* -the testimony of the defendants and their witnesses.

*Part V: Judgment* -the deliberations of the judges, their verdict, and the aftermath.

However he also warns the reader that:

*Justice at Nuremberg* presented a particularly difficult problem in construction and organization because of the vast scope of the subject and the charges, the large number of defendants, and the enormous amount of material available[...] Moreover, it was necessary to reconcile three complementary but sometimes disparate elements: 1) The origins and preparations for the trial, followed by the trial itself. 2) The characters and actions of the twenty-one defendants. 3) The history of Nazi Germany applicable to the trial -particularly the criminal acts perpetrated.

Thus he attempts to explicitly inject (2) and (3) into parts I, II, and III. In my opinion, this is not entirely successful and makes for a rather clumsy and certainly very slow first half of this six hundred page book.

The author devotes very little space to the first part (less than thirty pages), a third of which at least is really the story of two escapees from Auschwitz and thus is really an attempt to provide two concrete, personal stories the reader can grasp and empathize with.

Part two (some sixty pages) is mainly devoted to trying to provide biographical and character sketches of the *dramatis personae*, that is the accused, the judges, the prosecutors and the attorneys for the defense. The sketches are sometimes annoyingly shallow and there is a tendency to underestimate the intelligence of some of the accused and their attorneys for the defense -a quick glance at the results of the intelligence tests administered to the accused which are listed in the Wikipedia entry on the trial should quickly disabuse this notion.

Part three constitutes the bulk of the book and takes up over two hundred pages because it is in this part that the author tries to cover most of the history of the Third Reich and its atrocities. The history is written in a simplified and sometimes overly dramatized way. For readers familiar with the main outline of the history of the Third Reich, this part becomes rather tedious up to about the two hundred page mark when the stories of the appalling atrocities committed by the Nazi regime take center stage.

The trial itself is swamped by the character sketches and the history of the Third Reich and only becomes the main focus of the book in the last two parts, which definitely fulfills the book's initial promise. Whether or not the first half of the book couldn't have been better written and heavily pruned is a moot question -the answer would I believe, certainly be affirmative for readers who come to the book with some knowledge of the history of the third Reich.

The closing pages of the last chapter of the book briefly looks at what, if anything, the Nuremberg trials accomplished in terms of international justice:

In December 1948 the United Nations passed a Genocide Convention, calling upon every state to take action against groups committed to the destruction of people on religious, ethnic, national, or racial grounds. But the United States where segregation still held sway, refused to ratify the convention, and the Soviet Union did so only with reservations.  
[...]

Despite the lack of an international criminal code and the obsolescence of several clauses of the Hague and Geneva conventions, most nations, including the United States, have agreed through treaty to outlaw the barbaric practices that came to light at Nuremberg. Reprisals may not be taken against hostages and prisoners of war. Forced labor is outlawed [...] The armed forces

regulations of all of World War II's major combatants now state that orders that would embrace the commission of a crime are illegal and need not be obeyed.

[...]

On the other hand, it is also true that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

What greater irony than the fact that the Jews, whom Hitler equated with bolshevism, have been the principal sufferers of repression in the Soviet Union! [...] Power politics in the name of self-interest has continued as before, and none of the Nuremberg prosecuting nations has been without sin. The United States has, on and off, practiced ideological imperialism. The French, in attempting to perpetuate colonialism, engaged in some of the same kinds of terror for which the Nuremberg defendants were condemned. The British, French and Israelis attacked Egypt in 1956. The Soviets have crushed nationalist movements in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Afghanistan. Brushfire wars have proliferated.

[...]

Thus, while many of the principles of Nuremberg have been incorporated into international law, practices have changed little.

Fastforwarding from 1983 to present day 2017, one sees further advances in international law -for example the creation of the International Criminal Court in 2003- coming hand in hand with the expansion of terrorism and some of the more questionable counter-terrorist practices. For all their faults, the Nuremberg trials courageously helped denounce and judge the horrors and crimes supposedly civilized nations were capable of, but the struggle against the darker recesses of humankind capable of committing such atrocities is every bit as relevant and pertinent world-wide today as it was one hundred years ago when World War I ended and the seeds for World War II were being ploughed.

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### **Terry Graap says**

I like history books that start from the beginning and go to the end. Well, this book they did it in each chapter. I was too thrilled about the format. And the trial didn't start until you were well into the book.

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### **Sandra says**

No es solo la historia del juicio sino de los múltiples crímenes que cometieron los nazis mientras estuvieron en el poder y durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Es, por tanto, un libro bastante denso, minucioso, quizás hasta aburrido. Pero merece la pena.

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### **Stephen Rynkiewicz says**

Our family papers show keen interest in the evils and evildoers of World War II, and not just because my cousin Herb Gawronski was a busy judge in Allied-occupied Germany. Conot's courtroom drama certainly fades alongside the breathtaking scale of war crimes: Germans on the home front who had not recognized the Final Solution also failed to ask about emaciated foreigners who replaced their conscripted co-workers, or healthy elders at the old-age home suddenly pronounced dead from lingering illness. The evasive defendants at Nuremberg embody not only the banality of evil, but also the sin of comfortable ignorance.

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**Alex says**

Good overview of the trial, covering the political decisions in forming the tribunal, and the key events of both the prosecution and defense. Could have included a bit more on the life of the key players outside of the courtroom.

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**Eileen says**

Intense!

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**Shukti says**

Excellent account of the war crimes tribunal - lots of insight into Hitler's "men".

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**Jim says**

I read this immediately after I met my first holocaust denier. Whom I can never understand because the Nazis admitted it. And the HD nuts deny that they did, yet it's throughout this soi-disant "first comprehensive dramatic account of the trial of the Nazi leaders". Speer is the best example.

Speer was described by a friend as "Hitler's unrequited love". Odsbodlikins!

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**William Brockman says**

This is a detailed account of the trial of the Nazi Party leaders a Nuremberg. It covers the establishment of the court, how judges were chosen, and the political considerations that were present.

The trial, verdicts, and aftermath are also covered.

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**Gary says**

Enjoyed it very much. Loved hearing about what went on behind the scenes regarding the trials of some of the most evil men in history.

