

WORLD WAR II: JUDGMENT DAY--THE PACIFIC WAR

Political leaders often say that history should be the judge of their actions--confident that history will never rule. But this time History has indeed assembled a Final Court of Judgment to assess their responsibility. It is now in session and there will be no appeal. In the dock are those charged with contributing to the outbreak of the Pacific War (1941-45), a conflagration that killed many millions of Chinese, Japanese and other Asians, and scores of thousands of Americans and British. Who is responsible for this vast carnage?

You are the defense counsel and advocate for the accused ghosts of the Pacific War. Your mission: in a five-minute speech, to present a compelling defense of your client and to indict another among the defendants who now tremble before the Final Court.

In your speech you may wish to refer to:

- >The international situation (e.g., the balance of power, alliances, military strategies and plans, windows of opportunity and vulnerability, etc.)
- >Domestic situations (e.g., national perceptions or misperceptions, the abilities or shortcomings of national leaders, democracy or autocracy, etc.)
- >Accidents, misunderstandings, and the perceptions, misperceptions, and honest mistakes of individuals.

Those called to judgment are as follows:

THE ACCUSED

THE CHARGE

U.S. isolationists They hindered Franklin Roosevelt's ability to deter Japanese aggression, leading Japan's leaders to believe they could aggress with impunity.

U.S. Pacific hard-liners Dean Acheson and others pushed provocative policies that triggered Japan's attack on the United States, while failing to devise adequate deterrence.

The Japanese military It sought to seize a vast and unneeded Asian empire by violence.

Japanese civilians They failed to stop Japan's wild military, instead going along with its imperial adventures.

Western powers (incl USSR) They colonized much of Asia before 1900, thereby provoking Japan to a campaign of aggression in self-defense.

Your job is to advocate a point of view in your speech, not to present the matter from all sides. Your presentation therefore need not be entirely judicious or even-handed. But if you take excessive liberties with the facts you risk public humiliation at the hands of critical questioners who are not fooled by your fancy footwork.

Please provide an outline of your speech to your audience. This outline can be presented as a 1-page handout, by Powerpoint, or written on a blackboard.

A good format for your speech is: sum up your argument quickly at the outset so your audience knows where you are going; then proceed through the body of the argument.

Further advice: keep your argument simple. Make a few key points. Don't make every argument you can--make only the strongest ones. Too many arguments leaves an audience confused.

Please hold your remarks to five minutes. The Chief Justice of the Final Court of Judgment will cut you off if you run over.

We recommend that you practice your speech a couple of times--to the mirror or, better still, to a friend--before giving it. You can also practice using the facilities of MIT's writing and Communications Center and can get helpful advice from their staff.

*THE MOMENT OF JUDGMENT SWIFT APPROACHES--
HOW THEN DO YOU PLEAD?*