

MOCK TRIAL: FRANCIS BEVERLEY BIDDLE

Francis Biddle



Francis Biddle was a distinguished American legal scholar and wartime Attorney General of the United States, 1941-45. He earned his law degree with special academic honors (cum laude) from Harvard Law in 1911 and served as private secretary to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes from 1911 to 1912. He practiced law in Philadelphia and went on to join Roosevelt's New Deal in 1934 as the first chairman of the National Labor Relations Board. He was a US circuit judge, an appeals court judge, the Solicitor General, and eventually Attorney General. He at first opposed Japanese-American Internment (Executive Order 9066) but gave in to pressure from the military to imprison 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent from the west coast for several years during the war.

Biddle is best known as the US representative at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, also known as the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, where former Nazi leaders were tried for war crimes and a new category of crimes labeled "crimes against humanity." The Nuremberg Tribunals tried 23 members of the political, economic and military leadership of Nazi Germany for war crimes, including genocide. Several of the defendants were convicted and hanged, while others received long prison terms despite reported repentance; several were acquitted. The Tribunal consisted of judges from the Soviet Union, the U.S., Great Britain, and France. Decisions on sentencing were not the sole discretion of one representative but were collaborative, and presumably influenced by the politics of that situation and time.

Resources:

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[The second volume of Biddle's autobiography.]

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