“Are you going to help me save the world?”

From Nuremberg to Now:
Benjamin Ferencz’s Lifelong Stand for “Law. Not War.”

Creed King and Kate Powell

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Who took a stand for the Jews after World War II? Pondering this compelling question, we stumbled upon the story of Benjamin Ferencz. As a young lawyer, Ferencz convinced fellow attorneys at the Nuremberg Trials to prosecute the *Einsatzgruppen*, Hitler’s roving extermination squads, in the “biggest murder trial of the century” (Tusa). Ferencz convicted all twenty-two defendants, then parlayed his Nuremberg experience into a lifelong stand for world peace through the application of law. Our discovery that Ferencz, at age ninety-seven, is the last living Nuremberg prosecutor – and living in our home state – led to a remarkable interview.

We began by researching primary sources such as oral histories and evidence gathered after the war by the War Crimes Branch of the US Army and compared these to personal accounts archived by the Florida State University Institute on World War II. Reading memos and logbooks kept by the Nazis helped us understand the significance of Ferencz’s stand at Nuremberg. Ferencz’s papers provided interviews, photographs, and documents to corroborate historical data and underscore his lifelong advocacy for peace. For a firsthand perspective, we conducted several personal interviews. Talking with Ferencz about his transformation from prosecutor to modern activist for world peace and Zelda Fuksman on surviving the Holocaust and her perspective on the Nuremberg Trials were two crucial pieces of research. A third interview with eyewitness Elizabeth Harbin provided insight into the atmosphere in the Nuremberg courtroom. Additional interviews with leaders at global peace organizations reinforced Ferencz’s influence on their efforts to protect the world from crimes against humanity.
We enjoy the creativity of exhibits. Through visual storytelling and hands-on displays, we documented Ferencz’s life beginning with his interest in international law, following it through the war and trials, and culminating with his legacy of peace through law. We used props and court documents to suggest the Nuremberg courtroom. We matted information on card stock and framed and laminated it. The life-size Ferencz mounted on foam core emphasizes how such a small man can make a big difference.

Benjamin Ferencz’s stand against injustice and his uncompromising defense of human rights is ideal for this year’s theme. The Nuremberg Trials were not the first to debate the legalities of warfare, but they may have been the most far-reaching. By itself, Ferencz’s renowned Nuremberg court case, which changed the course of international law and set a precedent for prosecuting war crimes, earned Ferencz a place in history. However, it is his evolution from prosecutor to worldwide peace activist that illustrates his impact for substantive change. Instrumental in the creation of the International Criminal Court, the world’s highest court for crimes against humanity, and a two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Ferencz’s message of hope, peace through law, and call to “Never Give Up.” inspires the next generation of leaders and activists (including us) to answer: *Yes, we are going to help you save the world.* His work no longer belongs to him alone—a true indication of his legacy and stand for “Law. Not War.”
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


This document was a key piece of evidence found by the War Crimes Branch of the US Army underscoring Hitler’s full intent on Jewish extermination from the beginning of his reign. It is included in the war section of our exhibit.


In our research, we discovered several websites and documents stating that the Holocaust was fiction. We included this photograph to show knowledge of the tragedy as confirmed by the American soldiers pictured, who liberated the camps.


Ferencz discussed his training at Harvard, before humanitarian law was a field of study. He worked as a research assistant to a professor of criminology and read every book on the subject at the law library. This answered our question about why his time at Harvard was so critical to his training as a war crimes prosecutor. There are two quotes from Ferencz about his early life from this article. We categorized this as a primary source because of the question-answer format, with Ferencz answering questions about his life and work.


The original identification badge used by Benjamin Ferencz to enter the Nuremberg Trials is a great illustration to use on Ferencz’s courtroom desk in our exhibit.


Ferencz was honorably discharged from the army with the rank of Sergeant. This photograph of him in his war uniform is used in the war and Holocaust section of our exhibit.

Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill appear confident and friendly at a gathering in Yalta. It was at this conference that the three conferred post-war on how to try the Nazis. The quote from Stalin used in our exhibit was taken from documents from the same conference. Stalin proposed immediate execution of the Nazis, but even though Roosevelt despised them, he insisted on implementing the democratic process to directly challenge Nazi atrocities.


Early in our research, we found evidence compiled by the War Crimes Branch of the US Army, but it wasn’t until later that we learned of the Institute at Florida State and its collection of memorabilia and personal papers from the men and women who participated in all military branches during World War II. The Institute also includes a specific section devoted to the War Crimes Branch. We poured over photographs taken by men who liberated the camps and their handwritten letters home describing what happened. What makes these different from research gathered previously is that we were able to select and handle original documents and artifacts that we pulled from the archives. These have not been digitized and are therefore not widely known, plus they have handwritten captions and notes on them, which made them all the more real to us. We used several in our exhibit and made sure to include the backs of the images when we laminated them.


A Harvard librarian helped us locate the only known picture of Ferencz taken while he was a student at the university. It is important because Harvard is where Ferencz’s interest in international law was cultivated.


The Cardozo Law Institute at Yeshiva University in New York created the Clinic after Ferencz made a sizeable contribution to the law school. An explanation of the Clinic’s mission and how it promotes Ferencz’s stand for peace through law is provided in the exhibit as a legacy of his work. A quote from the dean explains how Ferencz’s lifetime commitment using law to advance human rights continues to inspire the Clinic’s students.

To show how the lessons learned by Ferencz at Nuremberg are related to and can impact modern-day events, we researched various programs around the world that seek peace through law. Chappell is the director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, which provides education on peace and nuclear disarmament. He explained how Ferencz’s message of hope has influenced his organization’s work and discussed the relevance of his legacy in today’s world. Chappell gave us one of the strongest quotes for our exhibit: “Soldiers are taught how to wage war but nobody is taught how to wage peace.”


Two versions of this chart are used as an interactive feature in our exhibit: one in English and one in German. The chart explains how Germans defined Jewishness through racial classifications. We thought viewers might be curious to see whether they would pass for a “German.” The charts were first distributed in Nuremberg, the home of the Nazi party and later site of the trials.


To replicate Ferencz’s courtroom desk during the trial, we found actual court documents that he used. This particular one includes his personal notes about the defendants.


It was not enough for the Germans to exterminate the Jews; they also profited from their deeds. This photograph of Nazis looting the possessions of Jews after they had been exterminated is a good example.


The Einsatzgruppen were responsible for the development of mobile gas vans, the precursor to concentration camp gassing facilities. They originally exterminated Jews by implementing mass shootings, but a general reported that it was “morally and ethically taxing” on his soldiers to use this method of extermination. In response, they developed mobile gas chambers as a more sanitized method of extermination that succeeded in physically separating the killers from the victims. The mobile gas van used toxic carbon monoxide produced by its engine to kill those inside.
This rare image of Ferencz at age seven is the earliest known photograph of him.

At age 27, Ferencz was the youngest Nuremberg prosecutor. Even more unbelievable is that the Einsatzgruppen case was his first trial. We chose this picture as the background of our thesis because it shows Ferencz demonstrating “Law. Not War.”

While reading Ferencz’s Twitter feed, we saw a quote, “You, Sir, are among the tallest of men…” It struck us that even though Ferencz is barely five feet tall, his stature is unparalleled. To illustrate this in our exhibit, we decided to get a life-size Ferencz printed at a blueprint shop to use on the right side (he also fit the height requirements). Such a statement piece forced us to simplify our design so that the display would not be overwhelming.

Ferencz’s second book provided us with a better understanding of his vision for world peace.

Ferencz promotes his position on peace by maintaining a comprehensive website about his past role in transforming international law and his present role as advocate for global peace. He goes further to provide opinions on current issues and social problems and how they affect peace around the world.

Ferencz’s first book gave us a solid overview of his peace mission.
Speaking at a 1998 diplomatic conference in Rome, Italy, Ferencz states that aggressive war is not a national right but an international crime. This speech solidifies Ferencz’s influence on the world stage regarding matters of peace. The Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court was implemented at this same conference.

This speech builds a bridge from Nuremberg to current events on the world stage, showing us how the past is never really in the past, but a big influencer of the future.

A compilation of all twelve trials, this book provides commentary and court documents detailing proceedings at Nuremberg. We used the logo in our exhibit, and found one quote compelling as a summary for the trials: “The conscience of humanity is the foundation of all law.” Ferencz’s legal strategy was also of interest to us. We also used some of the documents as part of Ferencz’s courtroom desk display.

Knowing that Ferencz was the last living Nuremberg prosecutor, we were determined to interview him. We began with a search using his name and “Florida,” and were stunned when his address and telephone number appeared. Without an introduction, we cold-called and got his assistant, who set us up with an interview. At age ninety-seven, Ferencz is as sharp as he was in the 1940s. He answered questions and confirmed several accounts we had read about, which helped us make the case for his evolution from prosecutor and witness to history to an advocate for global peace. We used several quotes from the interview, including “Terror cannot be quantified” to title the section on the war and the Holocaust and “Never Give Up. Never Give Up. Never Give Up.” as the title for our conclusion. During a subsequent presentation that we gave on our project at a statewide Holocaust conference for educators, we were surprised to learn from a Holocaust expert that Ferencz grants very few interviews.

Another picture of Ferencz at Nuremberg is used in the Einsatzgruppen section of our exhibit. This photograph gave us the idea to recreate Ferencz’s courtroom setting. We used actual documents and props including an old-fashioned microphone replicate, headphones similar to those used for language interpretation, reading glasses, and a glass of water.


After sharing our project with Barbara Goldstein, the director of the Holocaust Education Resource Council in Tallahassee, she suggested that we contact Zelda Fuksman, who lives in our home state, for an interview. It was an ideal opportunity to gather new research about our topic. Fuksman contributed to the war and Einsatzgruppen sections of our exhibit. The details of her firsthand account made the event personal to us, and as she described how dirty, cold, and hungry she was, it brought the experiences to life in a way that reading about it does not. Because it was important to present an evenhanded account of the trials, we asked her whether justice was served and used her answer to counter Ferencz’s stand for “Law. Not War.” Fuksman’s interview is another example of restraint that we had to show while creating our exhibit. She had so much interesting information to share, but we had to edit it to only the parts that were truly relevant to our specific theme.


Three years before liberation, the newspaper reported that gas chambers were used to gas 1,000 Jews daily. The article is credited to “Daily Telegraph reporter.” We were curious about why it was anonymous, and after researching, found out that the facts we supplied by Szmul Zygielbohm, a member of the Polish government in exile. Zygielbohm gathered eyewitness accounts and smuggled them to London on microfilm hidden in a key. While the report is meticulously accurate, it was met with indifference, disbelief, and even suspicion. Zygielbojm was shocked that no one seemed to care. This article is found in the Nuremberg section of our exhibit.

We contacted Barbara Goldstein while scouting for local resources on the Holocaust. She shared a wealth of information and connected us with Zelda Fuksman, a Holocaust survivor, who shared her story with us. Additionally, Goldstein invited us to present our project at a statewide Holocaust conference for educators. The teachers quizzed us about Ferencz and noted that the section in our exhibit on his legacy gave them a fresh perspective on an often-taught subject.


This photograph shows the Nazi’s dehumanization of the Jews and how they turned them into a commodity. It was gathered as evidence by the War Crimes Branch of the US Army.


Elizabeth Harbin’s story came to us by accident. While discussing our project at a birthday party, a friend’s father revealed that his mother, Mrs. Harbin, had attended the Nuremberg Trials to watch her father’s (Judge Gladstone Kohloss) prosecution. She shared that when a large man entered the courtroom, her mother whispered to her, “Do not EVER forget this moment… That is a very bad man.” Only later did she discover that it was Herman Goering, Hitler’s right-hand man. Harbin talked about how quiet the courtroom was and how big the headphones were. While Harbin’s story was not specific to the Einsatzgruppen case and did not further our analysis, it did help us understand what it was like to be in the courtroom.


There is no way to dispute the occurrence of the Holocaust when actual human remains were found by American soldiers at a concentration camp’s crematorium. Evidence such as this left behind by the Nazis made it easy for Ferencz and other Nuremberg prosecutors to convict the defendants.


The evolution of the Nuremberg Trials is found in today’s International Criminal Court. There is a specific section in our exhibit referencing the court’s ongoing quest for peace through international law. The court’s website provided valuable background information.

Reading Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson’s opening statement for the entire Nuremberg Trials provided us with a foundation of the scope of the trials and what preceded Ferencz’s Einsatzgruppen case.


After hearing Ferencz on NPR, we felt he would make an excellent history fair topic for this year’s theme. The interview was a good overview of his life and gave us a starting point for our research. Interestingly, Ferencz viewed 9/11 as a crime against humanity, not war. He continues his stand for peace through justice by advocating for an international criminal court to hold those responsible accountable. We categorized this as a primary source because much of the interview was about his current efforts advocating for peace.


We referenced this map when determining where all the war crimes trials were held.


Initially, we contacted Dr. May because we found a letter she wrote recommending Ferencz for a Nobel Peace Prize. May shared how the entire history of the “Peace Through Law” movement began with Alfred Nobel in 1895, and while relevant, we ultimately made the hard decision to leave this off of our exhibit and focus instead on Ferencz’s movement of peace through law.


This photograph of the courtroom where a majority of the Nuremberg Trials were held provided visual inspiration for our exhibit. The wood molding on the left side of our exhibit was inspired by the wood molding pictured in this image.

Otto Ohlendorf was a leader for one of the Einsatzgruppen squads and named as the first defendant in Ferencz’s trial. Ohlendorf’s affidavit provided further evidence that Ferencz used in his trial. A copy is found on Ferencz’s courtroom desk in our exhibit.


Ohlendorf’s testimony confirmed the use of gas vans during the Einsatzgruppen’s extermination of Jews.


The steely, indifferent eyes of Ohlendorf and Jost during their trials is terrifying. The photograph gave us an idea of what Ferencz must have felt when he was prosecuting these men in court.


Paul Blobel was a leader of one of the Einsatzgruppen squads. Blobel’s statement was originally five pages long. This document shows his involvement with Einsatzgruppen OSR 101 in Kiev. This is on Ferencz’s courtroom desk in our exhibit.


With so many images to illustrate the horrors of the Holocaust, it was hard to narrow down what we would include in our exhibit. We chose this one because of the man’s haunting eyes and the way they seem to look beyond the camera directly at us. This was found by the War Crimes Branch and used as evidence at the Nuremberg Trials.
Roundup of Jews Shortly Before They Were Massacred by Einsatzgruppen. Photograph. 1941.
US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In this image, which served as evidence during the trials, we could see people that look like people we know. It made the Holocaust more intimate and real to us.


This photo of Ferencz illustrates his continued advocacy for world peace through law.


The entire world focused on news about the Nuremberg Trials. In 1945, the New York Times reported the indictment of the twenty-two men that Ferencz tried at Nuremberg.


Creative director and Guggenheim Fellow Pamela Yates uses documentary film to promote ideas about peace and human rights, and produced a film about Ferencz and his time at Nuremberg. We thought this was an interesting way that others are sharing the same message as Ferencz. Yates conveyed that Ferencz demonstrates that it takes a lifetime commitment to make real change.


In disbelief about the indifference of SS officers while on trial, we found this photograph striking because in some small way it shows the officers being forced to confront their deeds during the war. We originally included this in the Einsatzgruppen section of our exhibit, but decided that other information carried more weight.


Reading actual court documents gave us a better idea of how the trials proceeded and painted a picture of the cold-heartedness of the Nazis. We used actual court documents on our exhibit in the replica of Ferencz’s courtroom desk.
“Wanted! For Murder ... For Kidnapping ... For Theft and for Arson.” *The Daily Mirror*, September 4, 1939, p. 10.

This article appeared the day after France and England declared war on Germany. The “wanted” style poster was propaganda designed to create unity against a common enemy.


The Dachau Concentration Camp was transformed into the War Crimes Branch of the US Army, where Ferencz’s initial work as an investigator began. His work as a liberator during the war and his tenure with the War Crimes Branch of the US Army gave him needed experience for his later role as a prosecutor at Nuremberg. Using this photograph on our exhibit provides a visual for where Ferencz worked.


While making a film in Brazil, Yates took time to discuss how Ferencz had influenced her personally in her quest for peace. She shared information about *Reckoning*, the movie she made about the Nuremberg Trials, and talked of Ferencz’s worldwide influence on peace activism. Her quote of his lasting impact on peace activism is used in the legacy section of our exhibit.
Secondary Sources


Quotes about the Yalta Conference and the Einsatzgruppen case came from this book, which provided a good overview of Trial #9.


While six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, there are an additional 12 million who were also killed by Nazis. This chart provides a breakdown of various persecuted groups. We used this in creating an interactive flipchart in the war and Holocaust section of our exhibit.


The EVIDENCE graphic is found on the evidence pocket in the war and Holocaust section of our exhibit.


This map is highlighted in the Einsatzgruppen section of our exhibit to show the extensiveness of the roving death squads’ geographic range.


At the beginning of our research, we accessed this article to provide us with an overview of Ferencz’s life during the Nuremberg Trials as well as how he continues to fight for peace. The title is misleading. Ferencz is the last living prosecutor, not the last person to have been at Nuremberg. Through our research, we interviewed Barbara Harbin, who was a child attending Nuremberg at the time, leading us to assume that there are still others out there who were at the trials.


The crest added interest to the section of the exhibit on Ferencz’s academic career.

Ferencz continues to seek out publicity to promote peace. Heller explains how Ferencz continues to play an important role in his current efforts to spread world peace. This article gave us the source, from the Associated Press, calling the trial “the biggest murder trial in history.”


This chart compares the numbers of Jews in Europe before and after the Nazis’ reign. We used this in creating an interactive flipchart in the war and Holocaust section of our exhibit.


Despite the voluminous information about Ferencz on the web, we could not find anything about his foundation other than references that showed he had donated money to various Holocaust survivor organizations. We resorted to a database that gave a brief summary of the Foundation’s purpose. We supplemented this information with other references we found on Ferencz’s website.


This is a graphic feature that we used on the interactive pocket on the right side of our exhibit.


This summary linked Nuremberg with the creation of the International Criminal Court, a conclusion we had come to on our own. It reaffirmed our research and opinions. We used this to discuss the court in the legacy section in our exhibit. While Ferencz has impacted advocates around the world, Nuremberg was his first foray into peace activism, and its outcome has become one of the most influential and widely known in the world.

This video provided us with critical research for our project: Ferencz’s thoughts about the Einsatzgruppen case as it pertains to current international law and events, and evidence of the far-reaching impact of Ferencz’s lifelong quest for peace. The interview focuses on a documentary about Nuremberg that was created by Pamela Yates, who is highlighted in the “Law. Not War.” legacy section of our exhibit. Yates has spent her life advocating for peace through the creative use of documentary film.


This photograph illustrates the International Criminal Court information in our exhibit. Even though this is a photograph, it is a secondary source because it came from Getty Images, not the Hague.


Ferencz’s 95th birthday prompted several interviews in which he shared his ongoing work for peace. This moving video tells the story of his entire life – not just his time at Nuremberg – and why he feels compelled to continue fighting for world peace.


Ferencz discusses his memory of when World War II finally ended. Not only does the article provide a brief understanding of what Ferencz experienced during that time, but it also provides a recent video of Ferencz explaining it in more detail.


The dots in the war section of our exhibit are a great visual reminder of the sheer number of people who perished at the hands of the Nazis. Most people remember the six million Jews who died, but few realize that an additional 12 million also perished. We created a graphic of 600 squares, each representing 30,000 deaths, to symbolize the 18 million killed by the Nazis away from the battlefield. Rather than showing dozens of pictures of the Holocaust, we added this graphic as an alternative visualization.
The Foundation works to promote peace and prevent war. Paul Chappell, the director, gave us a personal interview and discussed the Foundation’s work. This information is shared in the legacy section of our exhibit.


That the trials were held in Nuremberg, where the Nazi party originated, was all the more meaningful and a point that we wanted to share on our exhibit.


Benjamin Ferencz established a Peace Center at Pace University centered on three fundamental pillars: research, action, and education. While not displayed in our exhibit, the Center underscores Ferencz’s commitment to continuing peace around the world.

Piehler, Kurt. Personal interview. Florida State University, May 7, 2017.

Dr. Piehler is the Director of the Institute on World War II and the Human Experience and oversees the Wilson D. Brooks Collection at Florida State University. The Institute is one of the world’s largest repositories of primary source information from World War II period veterans and civilians. Piehler helped us understand Ferencz in the context of the greater war, culture at the time and subsequent trials. He also directed us to certain collections within the Institute that related specifically to our project. We categorized this as a secondary source since Piehler knows of the war secondhand.


The logo is used as a unifying theme on the legacy side of our exhibit. We placed it in Ferencz’s hand with ribbon leading to various peace programs that have been impacted by his message of “Law. Not War.” It, too, was hard to find. We used a partial picture from www.benferencz.org and pieced it together to create a complete logo.


The red badge directs viewers to interact with our exhibit.

The red ribbon banner adds color and acts as a symbolic unifying element throughout our project.


This chart lists the names of each trial and their most notorious defendants, in particular Otto Ohlendorf for the Einsatzgruppen case. We originally used this in the Nuremberg section of our exhibit but decided that our focus was on the outcome of the trial – not who was tried.


This book recounts a conversation at the Tehran Conference where Stalin proposed a toast: “to the quickest possible justice for all German war criminals … I drink to the justice of the firing squad.” He estimated that it would rid the world of about 50,000 leading Germans, mainly military. Both Roosevelt and Churchill were shocked (Churchill because of the numbers, not the method), and later Stalin claimed it was only a joke. We highlighted this quote in our exhibit because it represents what many felt was a more just way of paying back the crimes of the Nazis. It is in direct conflict with Roosevelt’s insistence that the democratic process directly challenge Nazi atrocities.


The United Nations website has a complete section on how the youth of the world are carrying out Ferencz’s goal and legacy of world peace. It is a good example of how Ferencz’s influence is changing the modern world, which helped us build our argument for his continued relevance in peace advocacy.


Ferencz’s donation of $1 million to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is a good example of how his “Law. Not War.” beliefs are more than rhetoric.

The feature on Ferencz was televised after most of our research was finished, but it validated the significance of Ferencz as someone who took a stand for world peace and the continued interest worldwide in his mission. It also gave us a quote to use about Ohlendorf in the Einsatzgruppen section of our exhibit. The feature shows a video of Ferencz talking with children, and it is this footage that gave us the call-to-action quote from Ferencz for our title: “Are you going to help me save the world?”