

Washington University in St. Louis

## Washington University Open Scholarship

---

Spring 2018

Washington University  
Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts

---

Spring 2018

### Robert M. W. Kempner and the Politics of Postwar Justice

Sophie Lombardo

*Washington University in St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta\\_spr2018](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Lombardo, Sophie, "Robert M. W. Kempner and the Politics of Postwar Justice" (2018). *Spring 2018*. 83.  
[https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta\\_spr2018/83](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018/83)

This Abstract for College of Arts & Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University

Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2018 by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact [digital@wumail.wustl.edu](mailto:digital@wumail.wustl.edu).

ROBERT M. W. KEMPNER AND  
THE POLITICS OF POSTWAR JUSTICE  
*Sophie Lombardo*

*Mentor: Anika Walke*

Using Nuremberg prosecutor Robert M. W. Kempner as a case study, this thesis examines the successes and shortcomings of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) and American-led denazification proceedings in Germany from 1945-1949. By examining Kempner's conduct as lawyer, researcher, and public figure, it considers the extent to which geopolitical and legal pressures shaped and limited the Nuremberg Trials. It contends that Kempner, a German-Jewish émigré who had previously served in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, proved an invaluable researcher and interlocutor between German and American parties at Nuremberg. In his efforts to navigate a complex web of legal, pedagogical, and pragmatic aims, however, he struggled to maintain the war crimes enterprise's legitimacy in the eyes of the German and American publics. Amidst particularly strong backlash, he even recommended entering into a guilty plea with defendant Bohle—ultimately, the only defendant to plead guilty at Nuremberg. Moreover, this project shows that, amidst emerging Cold War tensions, a successful American-led denazification would be an incomplete denazification. As revealed by Kempner's relationships with a number of former Third Reich officials, prewar networks reemerged during the proceedings, both to legal and geopolitical effect. By consulting autobiographical sources as well as trial transcripts, court memos, prosecutorial correspondence, and other archival materials contained in the Robert M. W. Kempner Collection at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, this thesis provides a biographical case study as a lens through which to better examine the forces that influenced a historic set of proceedings. An analysis of the trials Kempner prosecuted both “within the kingdom of the Nurnberg courthouse” and “in the eyes of the German and European public,” this project provides considerable insight on the Allies' qualified success in denazifying Germany after World War II.