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The U.S. Internment of Families from Latin America in World War II

by

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Abstract: Durante la Seconda guerra mondiale gli Stati Uniti organizzarono la deportazione di migliaia di civili tedeschi, italiani e giapponesi dall'America latina e li internarono in campi di detenzione. Sospettati di fare opera di spionaggio o di propaganda a favore delle potenze dell'Asse, in maggioranza si rivelarono completamente innocenti. Questo saggio si occupa delle famiglie coinvolte nella deportazione. Esso mette in luce i pregiudizi sui ruoli di genere nella mentalità dei funzionari governativi ed è un significativo esempio della violazione delle regole sulla base di una falsa promessa di sicurezza, come pure dell'impatto sulla gente comune di politiche sicuritarie adottate sulla base dell'identità collettiva anziché sugli atti degli individui.

There has been worldwide attention to the U.S. prison for suspected terrorists at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, where foreigners are locked up in violation of national and international law, and U.S. officials have begun to realize that many of their prisoners were harmless[1]. Few observers realize we are to some extent watching a rerun. Once before, the United States built special camps outside the legal system to hold foreigners seized abroad who were suspected of undermining American security. It was during the Second World War, when the targets were 4.000 German and 2.200 Japanese civilians, along with 288 Italians, taken from 15 Latin American countries to be interned in the Texas desert[2].

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[1] T. Lasseter, *America's prison for terrorists often held the wrong men*, in "McClatchy Newspapers", 15 June 2008, available on-line at http://www.mcclatchydc.com/detainees/story/38773.html.

[2] Deportee numbers by nationality appear in National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NA), Special War Problems Division (hereafter SWP), Record Group 59 (hereafter RG59), Box 70, folder "Statistics", Subject Files 1939-54, White to Bingham, 28 Jan. 1946.

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The US government feared these people were involved in conspiracies on behalf of the Axis powers, and reacted as is common in wartime, suspending formal processes designed to protect individual rights and to make law enforcement effective, and substituting frenetic activity that proves to be counterproductive while causing great sorrow on a human scale. Like the prisoners at Guantánamo, the internees were a diverse group. A handful were hardcore Nazi organizers with military experience. About one German internee in 10 was a member of the Nazi Party, and it made sense to keep them under surveillance. But few had been involved in any activity on behalf of the Axis powers, and many others resembled the more pathetic of the Guantánamo prisoners: turned in by personal rivals, picked up by mistake, or sold by bounty hunters to American officials who lacked the local knowledge and language skills necessary to do their own investigating.

As a result, the inmates were a diverse crowd. Eighty-one of the prisoners were Jewish refugees, some of whom had survived German concentration camps only to be trapped in a Kafkaesque system that the US government built to avoid the nuisance of the legal process[3]. The FBI reported after the war that it had evidence of espionage against only eight of the 4.058 German internees, and evidence against Japanese and Italians was equally scant[4]. A detailed historical investigation focusing on the Germans, who were assumed to be the most threatening of the three groups, established that the deportation program did not contribute to U.S. national security and actually represented a net loss to national goals, even setting aside questions of justice and individual rights[5].

In a global conflict marked by unmeasurable brutality, the worst of it perpetrated by the Axis powers, this episode does not begin to compare with the suffering borne by civilians targeted for destruction or living where the shooting war took place. Nor does it reach the scale of injustice of the better-known incarceration of 120.000 Japanese Americans on the basis of their ethnic origin. This lost shard of history nonetheless remains instructive about the false promise of violating law and principle in the name of security, as well as the impact on ordinary people of security policies undertaken on the basis of collective identity rather than individual acts.

The internment of civilians from Latin America began immediately after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, and the flaws in the program were almost immediately apparent. After ships and planes

[3] Jewish internees identified in "German Nationals Deported from the Other American Republics Who Are Presently Detained in the US", Oct. 1945, in SWP, RG59, Box 70, folder "Statistics" Subject Files 1939-54; NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/4215, Campbell to Hull, 27 Jul. 1942; NA, RG59, SWP, Henkin, *Confidential: Heinz Luedeking (Nicaragua),* 2 Jan. 1946; "Luedeking, Heinz, Nicaragua", Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48, Box, and individual camp rosters in SWP.

[4] NA, RG59, 862.20210/6-1746, FBI, *German Espionage in Latin America,* June 1946, pp. 38, 105-106; NA, RG59, 862.20210/10-1446, Hoover to Neal, 14 Oct. 1946.

[5] For the complete history of the program, on which this article is based, see Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.

disgorged their cargo of allegedly dangerous civilians from Latin America, U.S. camp commanders expecting to guard hardened saboteurs found they were holding ordinary farmers, old men, and even whole families. The plight of the families, whether interned in the camps or left behind and separated from husbands and fathers for years, not only burdens the conscience. It also demonstrates how the peculiar assumptions about gender roles that are latent in the thinking of many government officials contributed to the failure of a program designed to protect national security.

Interned civilians were not officially subject to the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, but the US government expected to follow the principle that "the treatment rendered alien enemies in this country will largely determine the treatment to be afforded to American citizens to be contemporaneously interned in other countries"[6]. What that meant in practice could vary according to the conditions of the camps and the whims of the commanders. At Camp Kenedy, Nazi prisoners for a time enjoyed such leeway that they were able to hold celebrations of Adolf Hitler's birthday and intimidate or even assault Jewish and Social Democratic prisoners. Conflicts between pro- and anti-Nazi prisoners were so common that the U.S. government eventually established a segregated camp outside New Orleans to house anti-Nazi prisoners, before finally establishing a process of conditional release for them in 1943. Italian prisoners were held until October 1942, when President Franklin Roosevelt announced on the occasion of Columbus Day that Italians would no longer be considered enemy aliens, in a simultaneous appeal for Italians in Italy not to oppose the Allies and for Italian-Americans in the United States not to oppose the Democratic Party in congressional elections that November[7]. (Roosevelt had never considered the Italians to present much of a threat: "I don't care so much about the Italians - the president told his attorney general, Francis Biddle - they are a lot of opera singers, but the Germans are different, they may be dangerous")[8].

The first deportees to arrive from Latin America were held in encampments and forts run by the US Army's Provost Marshal General. Then, as their numbers increased, they were moved to specially prepared camps under the authority of the Border Patrol, a division of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, itself part of the Justice Department. The largest camps were in Texas: Camp Kenedy, for

[6] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/1521, Long to Hull and Welles, 31 Oct. 1941. By 6 January 1942, the US government had decided to "supply as liberal a regime as possible for civilian enemy aliens detained or interned in this country and to treat them as favorably as prisoners of war". See "Department of State Bulletin", 66, 16 July 1944.

[7] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/4825A, Welles to AmEmbBuenos Aires, 13 Oct. 1942.

[8] F. Biddle, *In Brief Authority,* Doubleday & Co., Garden City, NY 1962, p. 207. See also NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/3520 3/5, Rockefeller to Welles, *Reclassification of Italians. Repercussions in Latin America,* 26 May 1942; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, Biddle Papers, Box 1, Cabinet meeting July-Dec. 1942, 2 Oct. 1942; L. Rossi, *L'etnia italiana nelle Americhe: la strategia statunitense durante la seconda guerra mondiale*, in "Nuova Rivista Storica" 79, 1, 1995, pp. 115-142; O. A. Ciccarelli, *Fascist Propaganda and the Italian Community in Peru during the Benavides Regime 1933-1939*, in "Journal of Latin American Studies", 20, 1998, pp. 361-388.

single men; Camp Seagoville, for single women and married couples without children; and Crystal City, for family groups and the overflow from other facilities.

Camp Kenedy was the largest facility for male deportees from Latin America. A former Civilian Conservation Corps workers'camp 35 miles southeast of San Antonio, Camp Kenedy was hurriedly expanded in April 1942 to handle over seven hundred internees, but it was not finished when they arrived. The dismayed internees were herded into the stockade by mounted Texas police handling lassos and found a disordered site still under construction. There were no books in the library, no organized activities; "the main physical exercise consists of walking around the camp inside barbed wire", reported Swiss inspectors, who found the place in an "uproar"[9].

The first summer at Kenedy was the worst. Border Patrol officials in charge of the camp believed that the Germans would soon be repatriated, so making improvements would be "a waste of both time and money". The so-called "Victory Huts" for the Germans and 16 Italians were second-hand castoffs; they did not weather well, cracking and leaking badly. (Camp authorities followed the Geneva Convention standard of segregating nationalities, and applied their customary view of racial hierarchies. That meant that the smaller number of Japanese internees had it even worse, living en masse in old CCC dormitories instead of the four-man huts)[10].

After a year of operation, Kenedy got a "new face" as the infrastructure was completed and the internees and camp authorities realized they were in for the long haul and started planting gardens and decorating their huts, and sports facilities were provided. Father Johannes Weber, deported from Guatemala, painted a mural depicting scenes from the life of Jesus on the camp's chapel walls. Commander Williams found Weber indispensable for maintaining the morale of the prisoners - "and for mine" - he told a visiting Justice Department official. (Asked why Weber was interned, Williams replied that Weber's dossier indicated that "he is supposed to be a Nazi". In Williams' opinion, though, "He's no more of a Nazi than I am")[11].

After renovations, the camp remained spartan and the thin walls and feeble heatings units could not keep out the winter cold. Still, even the German government acknowledged, in response to inquiries from internees' relatives, that conditions in the US camps were acceptable. Internees in letters at the time and interviews conducted years later had only positive things to say about their

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[9] Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (hereafter SBA), Berne, E2200 Washington/15, Band 1, Max Habicht to Swiss Foreign Ministry, *Report on the Visit to Detention Stations for Civilian Intenees in the United States of America,* 18 Aug. 1942; NA, RG59, SWP, Box 20, "Kenedy '42" Inspection Reports on War Relocation Centers, 1942-46, Albert Greutert, Swiss Consul at New Orleans, *Inspection of the Camps at Kenedy and Fort Sam Houston, Texas*; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PAAA), Bonn (now in Berlin), Rechtsabteilung, R41557, Zivilgefangenen-Austausch-Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika,Skowronski to AA, 29 May 1942; C. H. Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate: The Peruvian Japanese and the United States*, University of Washington Press Seattle, Washington 1981, p. 30.

[10] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/4715, Gufler and Herrick, *Report on Civilian Detention Station, Camp Kenedy,* 22 May 1942; SBA, E2200 Washington/15, Band 10, Noten an Staatsdepartement, Jan.-Juni 1944, Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 14 Jan. 1944.

[11] J. Mangione, *An Ethnic at Large*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York 1978, p. 328.

treatment by the guards. Gerardo Bohnenberger from Guatemala, who spent two years in Kenedy, expressed a typical sentiment. "Muy correctos", he said. "I have no complaints against them"[12]. Nosy neighbors in town wrote to the local paper to protest the "pampering" of Axis internees. Commander Williams replied to the *San Antonio Express* and the *San Antonio Light* that he followed the principle of the Geneva Convention, namely "to treat them as humanely as we want our boys to be treated by the enemy"[13].

Some deportation orders negotiated between U.S. and Latin American officials affected entire families of Axis nationals and their Latin American relatives. Other family members volunteered to accompany their deported men, faced with the choice of going into the camps or separation and an uncertain existence for the uncertain duration of the war. Single women were generally not targeted for deportation, but some appeared in the camps as well. They included Latin Americans married to German men who had been repatriated to Germany; they did not join their husbands because they wished to avoid the war in Europe or were apprehensive about life under Nazism for women who did not meet the standards of Aryan racial purity. Other single women had served as maids in German homes in Latin America. They agreed to internment after losing their jobs when the households were broken up by the deportations.

Until the completion of Crystal City, families and single women were held at Seagoville, south of Dallas, in a former women's prison designed to resemble a college campus, under the command of Joseph O'Rourke. German internees and the few Italians slept on maple beds in brick buildings, one room per family, while the Japanese were relegated to wooden Victory Huts. There was a two thousand-book library, movies, language lessons, a music teacher, elementary school and weekly story hour in English and Spanish for the children. Photography buffs had a darkroom at their disposal, while dancers enjoyed the Victrola. Seagoville internees were aware of their privilege. Karl Wecker wrote to a relative, "I am rather pampered than persecuted. And while I profoundly detest being deprived of my freedom, I am treated in a correct and humane fashion by the detaining authorities". Internee Alicia Klemm made her approval even more obvious. Pregnant on arrival at Seagoville, she gave birth to a boy on May 19, 1942, and named the baby Joseph O'Rourke Klemm after the camp commander[14].

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[12] Gerardo Bohnenberger, interview by author, Guatemala City, 18 May 1996.

[13] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/6189, Kelley to Gufler, 12 Feb. 1943. Further on camp conditions see Bundesarchiv-Koblenz (hereafter BA-K), Lateinamerikanischer Verein, Heimkehrerberichte über Südamerika, R 64 III/6, Karl-Albrecht Engel, *Zusammenfassender Bericht über die Zeit von 1942-1945 (Guatemala - Internierung USA),* 18 Jun. 1945; Hugo Droege, interview by author, Guatemala City, 22 May 1996; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, R42003, "Deutsche Zivilgefangene in den Ver.St.v.Amerika - Lager, 1942-1944".

[14] SBA, E2200 Washington/15, Band 1, Max Habicht to Swiss Foreign Ministry, *Report on the Visit to Detention Stations for Civilian Intenees in the United States of America,* 18 Aug. 1942; NA, RG59, SWP, Box 21, Inspection Reports on War Relocation Centers, 1942-46, Herrick, *Supplemental Report on Alien Detention Station,* 26 Jan. 1943, "Seagoville '42-'43," and Schnyder and Zehnder report, "Seagoville, '44-'45"; SBA, E2200, Washington/15, Band 4, Noten von und an Staatsdepartement, Nov.-Dez.1942, Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 29 Dec. 1942; Wecker quoted in A. Krammer,

Seagoville was too small to accommodate all the families brought from Latin America, so Crystal City was opened for business in January 1943, in a dry region 110 miles south of San Antonio. Families with school-age children were moved there, and only childless couples, a few with infants, and single women remained at Seagoville. Crystal City was originally a migrant labor camp surrounded by spinach fields. Like Camp Kenedy, Crystal City welcomed its first arrivals before construction was complete. The camp had a rather grim aspect at first, but detainees were allowed to use their personal funds for "morale boosters", a concept which soon broadened to include cultivating flowers, building screened porches, landscaping their gardens, ordering clothing from Montgomery Ward catalogs. The largest families had their own cottages, one-story frame buildings with kitchens, bathrooms, showers, and hot water. Even the Victory Huts here had running water and iceboxes. The screens couldn't keep out the desert critters - Black Widow spiders, millipedes, cockroaches, biting ants, even rattlesnakes and moccasin snakes - that came through the cracks in the walls. Summer temperatures inside the huts hovered between 100 and 120 degrees from morning to night, and the heat sometimes led to "breakdowns". But there were few other complaints about the facilities[15].

Conditions at Crystal City became so unlike what one might expect for a prison camp in wartime that the Department of Justice commissioned a documentary film about the place. It showed scenes of an ice truck on delivery making its rounds of neat wooden shacks surrounded by flowerbeds and vegetable gardens, a general store, laundry, blacksmith, garage, volunteer fire department, and hospital. The large, circular community swimming pool was crowded with the splashing of hundreds of children at play, a jarring contrast to the barbed wire fence and guard towers surrounding the town on all sides[16]. Every child received a liter of milk a day, and so did every couple. Arturo Contag, a Nazi Party member from Quito, and his wife had eight kids, so every morning there were nine bottles of milk lined up on their porch. "I never had it this good in Ecuador", he liked to tell the other internees[17].

These halcyon images square with the memories of some former Crystal City residents, particularly those who were children or resilient teenagers at the time of internment. "The prison camp was beautiful, at least for us kids", recalled Hans Joachim Schaer, five years old when interned with his parents from Costa Rica. "In

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Undue Process: The Untold Story of America's German Alien Internees, Rowman and Littlefield, New York 1997, p. 104.

[15] NA, RG59, SWP, Box 21, Inspection Reports on War Relocation Centers, 1942-1946, "Seagoville '44-'45", Maurice Perret (IRC), *Camp de Seagoville, Texas,* 6 May 1944; NA, RG59, SWP, Box 19, Inspection Reports on War Relocation Centers, 1942-1946, "Crystal City", Herrick, *Report on Crystal City Internment Camp,* 31 Jan 1943; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in den V. St. v. Am., R41879, Degetau to Schulz, 15 May 1944; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Amerikanische Zivilinternierte in Deutschland, Biederbeck to Schulz, R41570, 12 May 1944; J. Mangione, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

[16] NA, Accession Number N3-85-86-1, INS, *Alien Enemy Detention Facility,* 16mm color/B&W film, 1946[?].

[17] Gunter Lisken, interview by author, Guayaquil, 17 February 1998.

the mornings we had a bottle of milk, we had a swimming pool, we had a dispensary, they treated us nice". Werner Kappel was nineteen when arrested with his father in Panama. "When you're young, nothing bothers you as much", he said. "It was harder on the older people"[18]. With 1.600 minor children in detention at the camp's peak size, schooling was an important activity. Elementary classes were conducted in four languages (English, German, Japanese, and Spanish for the Latin American children); an English-language high school sent many of its graduates on to college after the war. The kids spent most of their free time at the huge swimming pool, converted from a refurbished irrigation tank with $2.500 in materials furnished by the government and labor supplied by the internees[19]. Four years of administrative experience and steady physical improvements carried out cooperatively by the authorities and the internees themselves created, by 1945, one of the most comfortable detention facilities for civilian internees run by any country involved in the war. The contrast with prison camps in Europe and the Pacific was impossible to miss.

Crystal City was also a relief to those internees who had been held in camps in Latin America before being shipped north. Latin American camps and jails, including US-administered Camp Empire at Balboa in the Panama Canal Zone, were far grimmer. Camp Balboa was run by military men responsible for defending the primary target in the Western Hemisphere, and they were tough on their charges. The first arrivals went two weeks without bathing and saw their Red Cross care packages plundered by US soldiers. Many of the internees were mature or older men from the white-collar professions, unaccustomed to hard physical labor, who were ordered to clear thick brush with machetes in the intense midday heat. Working in their underwear, they swallowed salt tablets every half hour under the gaze of occasionally brutal guards. Sickness, exhaustion, and ringworm were common. One internee suffered a heart attack; another lost fifty pounds. Roaming police dogs attacked Alfredo Brauer and forced him up against the barbed-wire fence, lacerating him so badly he spent a week in the hospital[20].

In Cuba, US officials persuaded the government to intern German nationals at a prison on the Isle of Pines, offering to fund the project as well. Sanitary conditions were acceptable in the six-story stone building, but the prisoners were locked inside for a month or more at a time without being able to go out for sunshine or

[18] Hans Joachim Schaer, interview by author, San José, 26 March 1998; Werner J. Kappel, telephone interview by author, Sun City Center, Florida, 30 March 1999.

[19] Lisken interview; NA, Accession Number N3-85-86-1, INS, *Alien Enemy Detention Facility,* 16mm color/B&W film, 1946[?].

[20] Swiss diplomats representing German interests told the State Department that each successive wave of German internees reported similar complaints, as did their letters to family members in Germany. SBA, E2200 Washington/15, Noten an Staatsdepartement, Jan.-Juni 1944, Band 10, Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 5 Apr. 1944. See also PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in den Ver.St.v.Amerika - Lager, 1942-1944, R42003, Rudolf Lindgens to Swiss Embassy, 21 May 1942; Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde (hereafter BA-L), Rückwandereramt der AO, Krapf Josef, 3601000301, Josef Krapf to Geheime Staatspolizei Nürnberg, 23 Oct. 1942; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in Panama, 1941-1944, R41856, Schroetter to AA, 21 Jun. 1944; Alfredo Brauer, interview by author, Quito, 5 February 1998; Otto Luis Schwarz, interview by author, Guayaquil, 16 February 1998.

exercise. Family visits were restricted to five minutes a month. US ambassador Spruille Braden claimed in his memoirs that he arranged for a special women's facility to be built for Axis nationals because the matron of the Cuban women's prison was renting out her charges as prostitutes[21].

Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, after consulting with US Ambassador Boaz Long, ordered the roundup of all German citizens and several Italians and Japanese. Some 120 of them were sent to the notorious Managua prison known as *El Hormiguero*, The Anthill, where they stood or squatted on the bare floor of a large roofless cell enclosed with wire. There were no washing facilities and so little food that the inmates had to rely on meals brought by their families. Most of the prisoners grew ill, but German doctors were not allowed to visit them. Some of the elderly Germans and those who were married to Nicaraguans - more than half of the total - were moved to a confiscated German farm, "Quinta Eitzen," where conditions were somewhat better. But there was not much room for debate in Somoza's Nicaragua. When the Spanish vice-consul offered to represent the Germans on internment and exchange issues, he was charged with spying and jailed for a year. The Germans were left for much of the war without a diplomatic representative. The local head of the Red Cross was not inclined to lobby for better treatment - he happened to be Somoza's private secretary[22].

Costa Rica placed Germans awaiting deportation in the San José penitentiary and, when that filled up, built an internment camp in the warehouse district. On their own initiative, the prisoners replaced the bedbug-ridden mattresses with new ones, sprayed DDT in their cells, whitewashed the building, and asked their families to bring them meals. Prison authorities firmly upheld the Calderón Guardia administration's tradition of graft. Family members could obtain access by bribing the guards with bottles of whiskey; renting a room inside the prison for conjugal visits cost twenty *colones* an hour. The director of the secret police, Undersecretary of Public Security Col. Rodríguez, summoned Germans to his office for private interrogations, demanding cash from the men and sex from the women in exchange for leniency. In an indication of who really controlled the internment program, however, Costa Rican officials did not release anyone from the camp without first getting approval from the US minister[23].

Not all Latin American internment facilities were so debased. Conditions were relaxed at the Hotel Sabaneta in Fusagasugá, Colombia, fenced off as an

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[21] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/2825 1/2, Briggs to Bonsal, 15 Apr. 1942; NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/4858, Lutkins to Braden, 13 Oct. 1942; Georgetown University Library, Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, Larue R. Lutkins, 18 Oct. 1990; S. Braden, *Diplomats and Demagogues*, Arlington House, New Rochelle NY, 1971, p. 288.

[22] NA, RG84, Box 18, "711.5," Costa Rica, San José Legation: Confidential File, Boaz Long to Secretary of State, 20 Jan. 1942; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in Nicaragua, 1941-1944, R41839, Ecklauer [?], 2 Feb. 1942, and Felicisimo Carpeña to AA, *Die Lage der Deutschen in Nicaragua,* 14 Jul. 1943; G. von Houwald, *Los alemanes en Nicaragua*, Editorial y Litografía San José, Managua 1975, p. 148.

[23] Inge Von Schröter, interview by author, San José, 26 March 1998; NA, RG84, Box 18, "711.5," Costa Rica, San José Legation: Confidential File, Scotten to Secretary of State, 16 Sept. 1942 and 22 Sept. 1942; *Campos de Concentración*, in "Siete Días"*,* 12 Jan. 1998, Canal 7, San José, Costa Rica.

internment camp for those Germans well-connected enough to avoid deportation to the United States. The hotel was home to some one hundred Germans by 1944. Walter Held, interned at "Fusa" for three months, was then released to live on a nearby farm he owned. While in camp, he said, "most of us spent the whole day playing cards". Meals were "simple, not bad, but simple". Other Germans got out merely by renting rooms in town and checking in regularly with the guards. Götz Pfeil-Schneider claims he often left the hotel to go drinking in Bogotá with friends on the police force. "It was a very good life we had there in Fusa," he remembers[24].

In the United States, given the efforts to make camp conditions adequate for civilians in a wartime context, prisoners did not complain much about their physical surroundings. Their sufferings were of a different nature. Until the establishment of Crystal City as a family camp, most deportees were separated from their families and often unable to communicate with them. Mail service for internees was plagued by long delays, an inevitable result of wartime conditions and the censorship process. Delays of months were routine. The families of some deportees heard nothing from their men for a year and a half, greatly increasing the mental anguish on both sides. Camp Kenedy authorities dealt with the shortage of Spanish-speaking censors at first by prohibiting the writing of letters in Spanish, which meant many internees could not communicate with their Latin American families[25].

That some letters home never made it out of the US at all is evident because the undelivered originals are still sitting in the dusty file boxes of the Special War Problems Division today. These letters and the copies in the censors' files testify to the distress caused by the separation of families. Heinrich Meendsen-Bohlken, a farmer residing in Guatemala for twenty-three years, petitioned the US government from internment not to be repatriated to Germany because "I love my wife and she cannot and will not go to Germany. I love Guatemala, where I passed all my manhood and I would feel a stranger in my country of birth, where I have no family and friends". To his Guatemalan wife, Lucía de la Cruz, the internee wrote:

> You are suffering the bitternesses of life, alone, solely because I am a German. You, who never liked my countrymen, said that I was an exception…Now, what injustice! I am here as a criminal prisoner and [the Nazis] are laughing at us because they are free with their German wives, although they were founders of the party. I, on the contrary, a friend of the Americans, am here imprisoned, for the one great crime of having been born in Germany.

[24] NA, RG 59, 862.20210/17-1746, Hoover to Lyon, 17 Jul. 1946; Walter Held, interview by author, Bogotá, 9 March 1998; Götz Pfeil-Schneider, interview by author, Bogotá, 15 March 1998; see also A. López Michelsen, *Los Elegidos*, Tercer Mundo, Bogotá 1967, p. 333.

[25] PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Zivilgefangenen-Austausch-Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, R41562, Hermann Egner to Swiss Legation Washington, *Camp Kenedy - Texas,* 27 Jun 1942; Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 7 Jan. 1943, Band 7; Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 17 Mar. 1944, Band 10; DoS to Swiss Legation Washington, 19 Mar. 1945, Band 11; all in SBA, E2200, Washington/15; Eva Bloch, interview by author, Guayaquil, 18 February 1998; Otto Luis Schwarz, interview by author, Guayaquil, 16 February 1998.

Meendsen-Bohlken reminded his wife to collect "the affidavits for Mr. Edward F. Ennis of the Department of Justice in Washington" and ended with few words of encouragement. (Postwar investigators found no evidence of any kind against Meendsen-Bohlken, and characterized his political sentiments as "violently anti-Nazi")[26].

Ernst Blumenthal, interned at Kenedy, wrote to the Swiss Legation to ask that his wife Anneliese be reunited with him. "My wife literally vegetates in a most sub-altern position as a woman-servant. Her physical state is as low as possible", Ernst wrote. With a salary of $10 a month and in poor health, Anneliese was "on the point of starving in a disastrously hot, tropical climate", and being "the wife of me, a JEW, does not get one cent of relief from the German Representative in Colombia". Anneliese wrote to her husband in December, 1942, after having had no word from him for ten months:

> Dear Mucki,
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> It is so long since I have heard from you; the reason is a mystery to me. Every day I wait for mail, which might bring me news regarding our reunion. I hope you are not sick, or that nothing has happened to you…I have such a longing to be no longer alone; I would like to be with my *Hase* [rabbit] and to rest. How long will it last until mankind is freed from the leprosy in human form?[*] Write soon, my love, don't keep me waiting long for mail, it is all I have here, except my work from early morning to late evening. My life is so unhappy and bitter, and I often feel so unlucky…One must have great strength to endure everything. Continue to care for me as I do for you. Receive in thought my love and kisses.
>
> Your Anneliese.

Both Blumenthals had been held in a German concentration camp before fleeing to Latin America. Ernst would spend the entire war in a series of US camps, joined by Anneliese in mid-1943[27].

Beyond such psychological strain, family members left behind in Latin America faced endless difficulties. The most obvious was the need to find a source of income. Wives and children who might have wanted to continue a business or look for work found their companies blacklisted or ruined by the war, their savings frozen, real property confiscated, and potential employers unwilling to hire Axis

[26] NA, RG59, SWP, Box 33, folder "M," Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48, Meendsen-Bohlken, "Petition for non-repatriation," 15 May 1943; NA, RG59, SWP, Box 43, Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48, folder "Meendsen-Bohlken, Heinrich, Guatemala", Heinrich Meendsen-Bohlken to Maria de la Cruz Meendsen-Bohlken, "Postal Censorship Extract," 19 Oct. 1943 (censor's translation), and postwar AECS report.

[*] I.e. Nazism. "Mucki" and "Hase" are terms of endearment in German.

[27] SBA, E2200, Washington/15, Noten von und an Staatsdepartement, Sept.-Okt. 1942, Band 4, Ernst Blumenthal to Harrick at Swiss Legation Washington, 26 Nov. 1942, and Swiss Legation Washington to Gufler at DoS, 2 Oct. 1942; NA, RG59, SWP, Box 36, Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48, folder "Blumenthal, Ernst, Nicaragua", Anneliese Blumenthal to Ernst Blumenthal, 2 Dec. 1942 (censor's translation), and unsigned, *Confidential: Ernst Blumenthal,* 3 Jan. 1946.

nationals for fear of getting blacklisted themselves. For the same reason, landlords evicted their German tenants and hotels would not rent them rooms. A few foresighted individuals had cash hidden away; others sold eggs or garden vegetables in the markets. The rest relied on relief funds provided by the German government via the Spanish or Swiss Embassy[28].

Some families had signed up to follow their men on the next available ship, and heeded instructions to sell off their possessions and report with two suitcases for transport. The unreliability of international transportation and the low priority of these movements compared to the shipment of troops and materiel meant that some families were left for indefinite periods waiting to sail. Swiss diplomats tried to help families in Guatemala who had liquidated their property, delivered their suitcases to customs to be sealed and stored, then found themselves with nothing but hand luggage and evaporating funds during weeks of delay[29].

The racially mixed character of many of the families led to tensions in the context of a war fought according to racialized ideologies. In Nicaragua's Puerto Cabezas, a German-born wife of a deportee informed Nicaraguan wives waiting for the same ship that they would never be accepted in Germany and that Hitler would annul their marriages[30]. Those women whose marriages were not official, who were not German citizens or who had been expatriated by Nazi anti-Jewish law, were ineligible for German relief payments made through the Spanish or Swiss embassies. They were left to fend for themselves, sometimes doubly blacklisted by the remnant pro-Nazi German community, which charged them with racial impurity, and by the US Embassy and local government, which charged them with political unreliability. Ostracized at every turn, at least one Latin American wife was forced to sell herself. Twenty-one-year-old Rosa Grothe watched her husband Kurt bundled off to internment in the United States from their home in rural Honduras; he was repatriated to Germany in July 1942. Rosa was unable to keep their little store open on her own, and she knew as a *mulatta* she would be unwelcome in a Germany ruled by racial laws. The way out of her predicament is made dismally clear by an FBI report that Rosa was "in contact with American sailors from vessels touching at La Ceiba while working in a local cantina of unsavory reputation". After about a year of that life, Rosa volunteered to be interned in the United States. Held at Seagoville, she was ostracized by other German wives, who "drew the color line" and would have nothing to do with her[31].

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[28] SBA, E2200, Washington/15, Band 3, Noten von und an Staatsdepartement, Dez.1941-Juni 1942, Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 27 May 1942; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, R41839, "Deutsche Zivilgefangene in Nicaragua", Ecklauer [?], 2 Feb. 1942. Oda Droege, interview by author, Guatemala City, 22 May 1996; Ilse Schwark, interview by author, Quito, 28 January 1998; Otto Luis Schwarz, interview by author, Guayaquil, 16 February 1998.

[29] SBA, E2200, Washington/15, Band 4, Noten von und an Staatsdepartement, Sept.-Okt.1942, Sig., Swiss Legation Washington to DoS, 7 Oct. 1942.

[30] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/3751, Stewart to SecState, 30 Jun. 1942.

[31] I have given Rosa the pseudonym "Grothe" here. *Summary of Justice Files,* 8 Jul. 1944, in folder titled with Rosa's real name; NA, RG59, SWP, Box 40, Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48.

German men were almost without exception the principal targets of deportation. The State Department considered German women to be "inherently non-dangerous" by virtue of their gender[32]. (Art would later imitate life in Alfred Hitchcock's 1946 film *Notorious,* when Ingrid Bergman, infiltrating a ring of German-Brazilian agents, received instructions from her FBI handler to memorize the names and statements of "everyone you meet - I mean the men, of course"). The only case found in the files where a woman was directly targeted for deportation was Theolinde Zillmer-Zosel, and it is indeed an oddity. Zillmer-Zosel, who called herself "Tabú", came to Guatemala in 1935 and was deported in 1942. In between, she claimed to have worked as a secret agent for Goebbels, directed President Jorge Ubíco's counter-espionage organization, and to have served the US embassy in some secret capacity. German authorities refused to accept her for repatriation, declaring that she had been stripped of her citizenship for treasonous acts and would be tried and imprisoned if returned to Germany. US officials determined that she was delusional. A State Department official resolved the dilemma of what to do with Tabú with the observation, "I believe she has been sent to Seagoville. Can't we forget her?" She was interned until the end of the war[33].

Once deported, the men were of necessity largely idle during the period of their internment. They had to keep up their own morale, peform chores for camp upkeep, and overcome boredom through sports and hobbies. ("Most of us studied English", recalled Gerardo Bohnenberger. "The pessimists studied Russian")[34]. But it was the women left behind who struggled actively to cope with daunting circumstances. Along with the principal task of feeding themselves and their children, many deportees' wives tried to defend their property from confiscation, usually caught up in a hopelessly corrupt process. They collected affidavits, character references, and other documents on behalf of their husbands. Those who had contacts among the local elite or government officials lobbied for the return of their men. Those without connections sometimes agitated in public.

From San Salvador, a group of "twelve forlorn and unhappy women" repeatedly petitioned the US State Department after "waiting for more than a year for the reunion with our husbands"[35]. One of the twelve, Carmela Groskorth, wrote to her husband that there was still no response as of July 1943: "It is so aggravating to

[32] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/4570, Hull to Biddle, 9 Nov. 1942.

[33] SBA, E2200, Washington/15, Noten von und an Staatsdepartement, Dez.1941-Juni 1942, Band 3, Tannenberg, *Memorandum Concerning Mrs. Theolinda Zillmer-Zosel,* 14 Apr. 1942; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in den Ver.St.v.Amerika - Lager, 1942-1944, R42003 Hellmann to AA, 26 Jan. 1943; NA, RG38, ONI, Box 45, folder "Zillmer, Theolinde," Naval Attaché--Guatemala City, Personality Files 1940-6, Guatemalan Police Department, "Datos Personales", 7 Feb. 1942, and "Conversation with Tabu (Zillmer)," 12 Feb. 1942; NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/2643, Lafoon to Warren, 18 Apr. 1942; Zillmer-Zosel's postwar file in NA, SWP, Boxes 31-50, Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens, alphabetical.

[34] Bohnenberger interview. Russian courses also mentioned in NA, RG59, SWP, Box 20, Inspection Reports on War Relocation Centers, 1942-46, "Kenedy '43-'44", M.A. Cardinaux (IRC), *Camp Kenedy*.

[35] NA, RG59, SWP, Box 69, Subject Files 1939-1954, folder "El Salvador, A", Margarete Langenbeck to DoS, 19 Aug. 1943.

find ourselves before a most cruel indifference. We are now ready to write to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Perhaps this Society will take an interest in us"[36].

In Costa Rica, hundreds of women signed a petition by the wives of German deportees demanding the return of their husbands. They obtained the backing of the influential and progressive-minded Archbishop Víctor Sanabria Martínez, and one of them, Ester Pinto de Amrhein, sued successfully in the Costa Rican Supreme Court on behalf of her husband Franz, a thirty-one-year resident of Costa Rica. Two Costa Rican presidents supported her appeal. But apparently Costa Rican sovereignty mattered little in the eyes of US officials running the internment program: despite the highly dubious nature of the charges against him, Amrhein was released only in March 1946. Although never involved with the Nazis, he had been seized because of his important commercial position in Costa Rica[37].

In Panama, Lydia Albert de Brauchle wrote in August 1943 to the Minister of Government and Justice, Camilo de la Guardia Jr., asking him to intercede with US authorities for the release of her husband Alfred and son Erwin:

> They were interned on the 11th of December 1941 for I don't know what reason. We immigrated as farmers with the permission of the Panamanian government in 1929 and since then we have been living in the mountains. My conscience tells me our conduct has always been good, always according to the laws of the country. I heard several people say that the internment of my husband and my son was caused by a mistake or a calumny. I am 60 years old and incapable of working, since I am often sick. Therefore I implore your Excellency to investigate this affair again to see if it is possible for them to free both or at least my son Erwin. He was only 17 years old when he came to Panama, so he has spent nearly all of his life here, never involving himself in politics, because this is not his character.[38]

A postwar US government investigation found no accusations against either Brauchle and no indication of any reason for their arrest. Erwin Brauchle returned home in 1947; his father Alfred never did. He died in Crystal City[39]. Although their protests did not achieve their immediate goal of getting their husbands back, the women did compel a change in US practices, showing how misguided was the notion that women made up an inactive and irrelevant population on the basis of their gender, and demonstrating that the objects of foreign policy can also influence its evolution. At first, the deportation program was intended to prevent potentially subversive Axis nationals from making trouble in Latin America. But soon after

[36] NA, RG59, SWP, Box 69, Subject Files 1939-1954, folder "El Salvador, A", Censorship report on Carmela Groskorth to Ernst Julius Groskorth, 9 Jul. 1943.

[37] Franz Amrhein, "A" in NA, RG59, SWP, Box 31, Name Files of Enemy Aliens, 1942-1948, contains the testimonials. The wives' campaign is mentioned in C. Calvo Gamboa, *Costa Rica en la segunda guerra mundial, 1939-1945*, Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, San José 1985, pp. 37-38.

[38] C. H. Cuestas Gomez, *Cotito, crónica de un crimen olvidado*, Litho Editorial Chen, Panama 1993, pp. 23-25.

[39] Brauchle postwar reports in NA, RG59, SWP, Boxes 31-50, Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens, alphabetical.

the deportations began, it was clear even to the State Department that the plan had backfired. "In our hurried effort last winter to remove from Central America as many as possible dangerous subversive males", Secretary of State Cordell Hull wrote to Attorney General Biddle in November 1942, "we left behind for eventual repatriation their inherently non-dangerous wives and minor children. Our representatives in those countries now report that these women and children who were left behind constitute a most dangerous focus of anti-American propaganda and that they should be removed at the earliest possible opportunity"[40]. In other words, in an effort to rid Latin America of pro-Axis propagandists, the US had handed Axis propaganda a most effective argument: the Colossus of the North was splitting up families and leaving women and children to starve.

Now the wives, driven to political activism by adverse circumstances, suddenly lost their gender's "inherently non-dangerous" status and became threatening in US eyes. The policy shift their activities brought about can be read in the passenger manifests of US transports. Beginning in 1943, the ships formerly reserved for men started ferrying volunteer women and children to New Orleans, and Crystal City was established as a family internment camp[41].

Family reunification was not an altruistic policy, and the State Department readily exploited the desire of families to stay together in order to achieve its goals. When the US Embassy was at an impasse in its efforts to persuade the Costa Rican government to hand over another batch of German male suspects, some of them socially well-connected, Chargé d'Affaires Edward G. Trueblood blocked the transportation of the wives and children of men already interned in the US until the Costa Rican government agreed to "at least an equal number of dangerous male enemy aliens to be deported simultaneously" - thereby turning popular pressure for family reunification into pressure on the Costa Rican government to approve additional new deportations it opposed[42].

Some of the men deported from Guatemala urged their families not to join them in internment, but instead to try to endure the separation where they were, in the hopes of regaining their confiscated property or at least permission for the men to return home after the war was over. However, the Spanish Embassy was running out of relief funds, and other German assets in Guatemala were frozen by the Banco Central, under unofficial US tutelage. Here, too, the families' destitution provided a leverage point for more deportations. "If we do not concur in the proposal to release frozen German funds, pressure probably will be forthcoming to

[40] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/4570, Hull to Biddle, 9 Nov. 1942.

[41] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/2426, Schofield to Attorney General, 27 Mar. 1942; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in Panama, 1941-1944, R41856, Schroetter to AA, 6 Apr. 1942; SBA, E2200, Washington/15, Noten von und an Staatsdepartement, Sept.-Okt.1942, Band 4, DoS to Swiss Legation Washington, 31 Oct. 1942; NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/5093, Hull to AmLegBern, 24 Nov. 1942; NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/5848, Hull to AmEmbLima, 22 Jan. 1943; NA, RG84, Box 26, folder "711.5," Costa Rica: San José Embassy Confidential File, Department of State, "Policy of the United States Government in removing dangerous Axis nationals from the other American republics," 28 May 1943; PAAA, Rechtsabteilung, Deutsche Zivilgefangene in den V. St. v. Am., R41879, Sakowsky to Theiss, 10 Mar. 1944.

[42] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/7464, Trueblood to Secretary of State, 7 Oct. 1943.

induce us to remove to the United States for internment most or all of the German nationals now receiving relief funds," warned Ambassador Boaz Long. "Very good", responded the Special Division's Sidney Lafoon. "Let's not unfreeze"[43]. This order, coming near the end of 1943, showed the State Department's determination to continue the deportation-internment program, even as it was receiving strong indications from inside the camps that most of the people already seized were anything but spearheads of Hitlerian conquest.

Over the next two years, two-thirds of the European internees were repatriated to Germany and Italy, exchanged for citizens of the Americas held by the Axis. Pressure from civil liberties groups, American Jews, and conscientious officials inside the Justice Department led to the conditional release of most of the Jewish internees and several active anti-fascists. After the war, the remaining Jewish internees were released from the supervision of the Justice Department; of the original eighty-one, four had died, two voluntarily returned to Latin America, one went to Germany to help in reconstruction, and the rest sought to stay in the United States. By departing to Mexico or Canada and re-entering the country with legal entry visas, they were able to begin the process of acquiring citizenship. In 1954, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 was amended so that aliens "brought to the United States from other American republics for internment" could request a change of immigration status. That law permitted the Jewish internees to join several hundred Peruvian Japanese internees in becoming US citizens[44].

Internees who had been repatriated to Germany faced a wholly different set of challenges. Those in the eastern zone who hoped that their Latin American documents would give them some protection against the severe treatment meted out by the Soviet occupiers sometimes saw their passports "torn up before their eyes by Russian military authorities"[45]. Dora Rosero Schonenberger, trapped with her husband George in Jena at the end of the war, flew an Ecuadorian flag over their house, but the soldiers laughed it away. She later told Ecuadorian journalists that "the cruelty of the Muscovites reached terrible extremes". The Schonenbergers' savings account disappeared when the Soviets destroyed the bank's archive. Her family finally bribed their way out of the Soviet zone with two bottles of cognac. In the British zone, they slept on the floor of a destroyed factory converted into a camp for Latin Americans; there she gave birth to a daughter[46]. In February 1947, Germans from Latin America lost their last meager refuge when they were ruled ineligible for treatment as "displaced persons" and the occupation forces "took appropriate action to deny them DP care and to evict them from

[43] NA, RG59, 740.00115EW1939/7572, Boaz Long to Secretary of State, 26 Oct. 1943.

[44] Figures on the Jews from H. Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South 1942-1945*, in "American Jewish Archives", 42, 1990, pp. 42-43, except for the returnee to Germany, Friedrich Karl Kaul, whom Strum missed, from Kaul's SWP records. See also Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate* cit., pp.170-171.

[45] NA, RG59, 340.1015/12-446, Maj. Richard N. Thompson to HQ Berlin Command, *Confiscation and Destruction of DP Identity Papers,* 19 Nov. 1946.

[46] *Crueldad rusa llegó a extremos terribles no solo con los alemanes sino con ciudadaños de Naciones Unidas*, "El Telégrafo", 29 Sept. 1946.

assembly centers"[47]. Some were finally able to return to their families in Latin America after a four-year absence, only to begin the laborious and often unsuccessful process of trying to recover property that had been expropriated during the war through quasi-legal means. The State Department forbade the granting of transit visas or space on US vessels to anyone who had been repatriated during the war[48]. To prevent genuine war criminals from escaping to Latin America, the Combined Repatriation Executive and Combined Travel Board met regularly with representatives of the US, British and French occupation forces to review, and usually reject, applications by Germans wishing to travel abroad. The Latin American deportees were also caught up in this system. French authorities, however, were more lenient[49]. The Schonenbergers obtained French visas and passage to Buenos Aires in the summer of 1946 and then made their way back to Ecuador[50]. Hugo Droege finally got out of Germany in 1948, making the trek on foot to the French border with two Guatemalans, hitchhiking to Paris and eventually obtaining passage on a series of steamers and small planes for a circuitous return to Guatemala and reunion with his wife Oda and three young children after an absence of five years. Oda Droege had managed to support the family with the help of neighbors while hearing only occasionally about her husband's fate from the few letters that reached her in Guatemala. They then began the laborious process of rebuilding a plantation that had fallen into disuse[51].

What conclusions can be drawn from this experience? One answer comes from Raymond Ickes, head of South and Central American Affairs for the Justice Department's Alien Enemy Control Unit and the U.S. official most intimately familiar with the inner workings of the internment program. After touring 18 countries in Latin America, questioning U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers, and closely examining the evidence against the deportees, his assessment was devastating: "It was wheel-spinning, and a complete abrogation of human rights", Ickes said. "The whole operation, if once in a great while it caught someone who was actually, potentially involved, I just couldn't find it, I never did"[52]. Even the context of total war against a fearsome enemy in his view made the program "understandable, not justifiable"[53].

The emergency internment of enemy nationals was not unique to the United States; all nations involved in the war engaged in the practice. But because of its exceptional relationship with Latin America, the United States took an exceptional

[47] NA, RG59, 862.20210/2-2447,Owen to Dreier, 24 Feb. 1947.

[48] NA, RG84, Box 34, "711.5," Ecuador: Quito Embassy Confidential File, Byrnes to AmReps, 31 Oct. 1946.

[49] NA, RG59, 340.1015/1-3147, Muccio to SecState, 31 Jan 1947; NA, RG59, 711.62115AR/2-1048, AmEmbParis to SecState, 10 Feb. 1948.

[50] *Crueldad rusa llegó a extremos terribles no solo con los alemanes sino con ciudadaños de Naciones Unidas*, "El Telégrafo", 29 Sept. 1946.

[51] Hugo Droege, interview by author, Guatemala City, 22 May 1996; NA, RG59, 862.20210/6-1648, Davis to SecState, 16 Jun. 1948.

[52] Raymond Ickes, interview by author, Berkeley, California, 18 September 1997.

[53] Ickes interview.

step other major powers did not, or could not, take: removing for internment enemy aliens from foreign countries not under occupation. In carrying out this policy, US officials departed from the standards set for individual internment of US residents, ignoring the element of selectivity and breaking national and international laws. The program proved unsuccessful at improving U.S. security, and the costs associated with the program went beyond the damage done to ethical standards and the law, to the diversion of resources from the war effort - the funds, shipping, and personnel required for this complex operation. Any assessment of the wisdom of such policies should include the costs incurred by the internees, who lost homes, property, businesses, and productive years of their lives, and whose families were split apart. To that accounting must be added a significant cost in international credibility and esteem.

The Axis countries started the war and prosecuted it in criminal fashion, and thus bear some responsibility for the fate of their citizens abroad. But just as the magnitude of the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, should not justify self-defeating policies that include the mistreatment of innocents, the fact that World War II was begun by the Axis powers should not obscure the ineffective and unjust treatment of civilians whose only crime was the accident of birth. If this small story has understandably receded into the background of a war marked by far greater horrors, its lesson about the futility of misguided security programs based on ethnic origin remains relevant today.