



# GERMAN AMERICAN *Internee Coalition*

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## **US World War II Treatment of German Americans and Latin Americans**

During World War II, the US violated the civil liberties of American citizens and resident aliens of "enemy" ethnic groups, primarily those of German, Italian and Japanese ancestry. Violations included internment and relocation. Members of these ethnic groups, including millions of European Americans, served in the US armed forces. Some were immediate family members of internees. The Wartime Treatment Study Act (H.R. 1425/S. 564) would require study of these issues, among others, with respect to European Americans. The Act is summarized on page 2. Specific discriminatory government policies are listed below.

### **US Government Wartime Policies.** All numbers are estimates and are likely higher.

- Alien registration branding 300,000 Germans as "enemy aliens," restricting travel and property ownership rights.
- Exclusion from large military areas under military orders causing family disruption, loss of homes and jobs. Relocated families subject to hostility and suspicion in new homes. Finding employment was difficult. No government support for relocation. At least 50,000 Germans subject to removal from California prohibited areas.
- Hostile FBI raids and ransacking of homes and arrests with no warrants, unlimited imprisonment while awaiting parole and internment hearings. Hearings with minimal, if any, due process at which no witnesses or counsel were allowed. Internees did not know why they were interned. Families did not know where their loved ones were taken for days or weeks.
- Internment of at least 11,000 German aliens and their families, including US-born children. Families separated, homes and belongings lost. Little or no government support for families left behind. Limited admittance to family camps based upon application to government. Some children placed in orphanages when parents arrested and interned. At least 2,650 German Americans, including families with US-born children, exchanged for Americans held in Germany. Exchanged families survived cruel wartime conditions, such as hunger and Allied bombing.
- Persons of German ancestry were last ethnic group released from camps, some held till late 1948.
- Deportation, expatriation and repatriation of German Americans--resident German aliens and US citizens.
- Internees and excludées returned to communities facing unemployment, financial straits, loss of homes and belongings and stigmatization. No government support. Many families disrupted permanently. Many internees forbidden to speak of internment. Most internees have not spoken out of fear of the government, shame or other personal reasons.

**Pursuing the "Good Neighbor Policy," the US government pressured Latin American countries to do the same, with similar results.** Originally the State Department, through the Special War Problems Division, targeted individuals and businesses considered a threat to national security, using informants of dubious quality. Two other reasons for this secretive program are clearly stated in US documents: 1) the US wanted to supplant German businesses in Latin America with their own 2) some of those arrested were to be used in exchange for American prisoners behind enemy lines in Europe. Corrupt governments in Latin America also used the program to acquire significant properties by expelling their owners.

- US government financed prison building and operation, as well as deportation proceedings in Latin America.
- Approximately 8500 civilians of German ethnicity arrested and held without charges in prisons throughout Latin America. An unknown number sent directly to Germany.
- 4058 Germans, many of them with their native born wives and children, deported from Latin America to the US between 1941 and 1945 and interned.
- Consulates and embassies ordered not to issue visas to the deportees. On arrival, prisoners charged with illegal entry into the country, allowing indefinite detention.
- At war's end, the US worked vigorously to repatriate all remaining prisoners rather than allow them to return to their chosen country. Many never saw their homes again.
- No legal basis existed for this secret State Department program.

**Additional Information:** See [www.gaic.info](http://www.gaic.info) or contact Karen Ebel at [kebel@gaic.info](mailto:kebel@gaic.info)

**Wartime Treatment Study Act –H.R. 1425/S. 564.** The Act would establish two commissions. One commission would review the US government's World War II policies regarding European Americans (resident aliens and US citizens) and European Latin Americans and related civil liberties violations. The second commission would review the US government's refusal to allow Jewish refugees fleeing persecution entry to the US during World War II. Significant features of the WTSA:

- Duties include reviewing the facts and circumstances of and underlying rationale for governmental wartime policies regarding US resident and Latin American "enemy" Europeans and granting asylum to Jewish refugees fleeing persecution. Written report of findings and recommendations must be submitted to Congress 18 months after first meeting. (Sec. 102 & 202)
- Seven members per commission appointed by President, Senate and Congress, respectively. Two representatives each from the German and Italian American communities on one and two representatives of Jewish refugees on the other. (Sec. 101 & 201)
- Commissions authorized to hold hearings and obtain information from government entities to perform their duties. (Sec. 103 & 203)
- Congress could act on Commissions' recommendations, which might include, among other things, formal acknowledgement and establishment of education fund, as it deems appropriate.

### Selected Bibliography

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### Websites

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