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# The United States and the fascist threat in Latin America during World War II

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The United States and the Fascist Threat in Latin America  
During World War II

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May, 1997

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**Abstract**

This thesis is the author's attempt to locate the origins of policies employed by the United States during World War II to control, through confinement, deportation and repatriation, German and German Jewish nationals living in Latin America. It also recounts the difficulties that several German nationals faced at the hands of a somewhat intransigent but entirely apathetic United States government. Through an examination of select State Department records, memoirs of government officials and letters of Axis nationals interned by the United States during World War II, one can better understand the reasons behind this little known aspect of American foreign policy.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

*Ernest C Bolt, Jr.*

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THE UNITED STATES AND THE FASCIST THREAT IN LATIN AMERICA  
DURING WORLD WAR II

By

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B.A., Ohio State University, 1992

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

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## Introduction

With many scholars focusing on the battles that took place in Europe and the Pacific during World War II, little has been written about the policies employed by the United States in Latin America between 1940 and 1946. The bulk of the material published on Inter-American relations during the war years has focused on Allied counterespionage efforts and on the effects of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policies.<sup>1</sup> As a "Good Neighbor" to the Latin American Republics, the United States would oppose armed intervention into the region by any power and intervene itself only when asked by a Latin American Republic to do so.

World War II would change this policy. As European fascism grew and spawned conflict, so too did American fear that this violent political system would migrate to the unstable countries south of the United States. In his book, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate: The Peruvian*

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Good Neighbor" refers to a policy employed by the Roosevelt Administration in the 1930's. This new policy, offered by the United States to the Latin American Republics, was one of friendly assistance – a significant change from the interventionist policies the United States had employed in the region for the previous forty or more years.

and the United States, Harvey Gardiner uncovered one of the targets of American counterespionage in Latin America during World War II – Japanese civilians.<sup>2</sup>

Thousands of innocent Japanese families were arrested and deported either to the United States or directly to Japan for fear that they might attempt to sabotage the Allied war effort in the Western Hemisphere. The Japanese sent to the United States awaited an uncertain fate in dusty, poorly equipped internment camps scattered throughout the south and southwest. According to Gardiner, American officials urged the Peruvian government to control its population of Japanese nationals by arresting them and then, once they were in custody in either Peru or the United States, used them in personnel exchanges with the Japanese government.

But what of the German and Italian nationals living in countries south of the Rio Grande? This thesis is the author's attempt to locate the origins of the policies employed by the United States during World War II to control, through confinement and deportation, German nationals living in Latin America. It also recounts the difficulties that several German nationals faced at the

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<sup>2</sup> C. Harvey Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate: The Peruvian Japanese and the United States* (Seattle, 1981).



hands of a somewhat intransigent but entirely apathetic United States government. The thrust for concern about the German nationals living in Latin America came from certain officials in President Roosevelt's Administration who worried that there would be an increased sense of nationalism among this group. They concluded that German nationals would become increasingly hostile toward the United States should it enter the war on the side of the Allies. Administration officials, such as Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, strongly believed that the heightened hostility from Axis nationals could take many forms - anything from subversion to sabotage.

To repulse such efforts, Berle and other State Department officials with close ties to the White House initiated a security program designed ostensibly to aid the Latin American Republics in their efforts to secure their governments from the Axis national, resident threat. But the program, initiated and run by overzealous intelligence officers and phlegmatic bureaucrats, eventually turned into a massive trade in human goods.

Evidence of the program and its effects are outlined in the only published material on the subject - Harvey Strum's, "Jewish Internees in the American South, 1942-

1945".<sup>3</sup> This short article written for the *American Jewish Archives*, contains copious information gleaned from the Joseph Chamberlain and Cecilia Razovsky Papers collected at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Strum follows a group of German Jews who were arrested in Panama, interned in the United States, and eventually released. Although Strum deserves praise for his investigation into a heretofore unknown topic, he fails to discuss the origins of the policy.

The group of Jews arrested in Panama, whom Strum follows throughout their captivity, were arrested because they were German. Their Jewishness would not have been a factor had they not been from an Axis allied state. Panamanian government officials knew they could arrest German nationals with American approval and support. The fact that the German Jewish nationals were frequently business owners, landed or wealthy simply made them the most attractive targets. Thus, it was Panamanian opportunism and not American anti-Semitism that placed German Jews living in Panama in internment camps.

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<sup>3</sup> Harvey Strum, "Jewish Internees in the American South, 1942-1945," *American Jewish Archives* (Spring/Summer, 1990).

Similarly, Strum concludes that anti-Semitic officials in the Roosevelt Administration may have undermined efforts to free the Jewish internees once they arrived in the United States. There is clear evidence that there were anti-Semitic elements in the Roosevelt Administration; however, they were silenced by the strong efforts of other Roosevelt Administration officials, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. for example, who were determined to aid the Jewish internees.

Nevertheless, it was not Harvey Strum's article in *American Jewish Archives* that sparked the investigation behind this thesis. In November, 1994 the National Broadcasting Company aired a story entitled "Roundup", during an episode of its investigative program *Dateline NBC*. The story focused on two of the men who were among the Germans arrested in Latin America and subsequently interned in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The program concluded that the plot to arrest and deport the Germans and German Jews was directed by General George C. Marshall, then United States Army Chief of Staff. Additionally, the program's producers speculated that among the Germans repatriated

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<sup>4</sup> "Roundup", *Dateline NBC*, prod. Christopher Scholl, National Broadcasting Company, November 30, 1994.

during the war there were Jews who may have been sent to their deaths at the hands of the German government.

The severity and obscurity of these charges demanded further investigation. After a careful review of the program transcript and the Strum article, it was apparent that a formal investigation of the United States involvement in the internment-repatriation program was needed. One book, the aforementioned *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, helped to focus the search for documentary evidence. Harvey Gardiner's painstaking, scholarly study gives a true depiction of not only what happened to the Japanese in Peru during the war years but also what happened to "Good Neighborship". However, Gardiner's study was limited to Peru. This narrow scope suggested that a close review of documentary evidence from the other Latin American Republics might reveal more information. Further, it seemed necessary to review the documentary evidence used by *Dateline NBC* resulting in its charges against General Marshall.

After many hours of research reviewing the documents at three branches of the National Archives in and around Washington, D.C. and at the George C. Marshall Library in Lexington, Virginia, there is no evidence that General

Marshall created the arrest and internment program. Nor is there any concrete evidence that any Jews were deported to Germany during the war. However, there is some circumstantial evidence to support the latter claim.

The documents used by *Dateline* indicate that General Marshall was involved but do not show that he had influence at the policy-forming level. They also show that there is only circumstantial evidence that some Jews were exchanged during the war. This evidence comes from the passenger lists of two ships, the *Gripsholm* and *Drottningholm*, which were used to repatriate Axis national during the war. On the lists are several families from Latin America with typically Jewish surnames.<sup>5</sup> These lists are the only evidence that Jews were exchanged and fail to prove conclusively that the internees were in fact Jewish. However, some of these internees' records, like many others, were absent from the State Department's Special War Problems Division files, where much of the internees'

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<sup>5</sup> The names of Axis nationals on repatriation lists were reviewed by Mr. James Steincamp, Director of the HaMerkaz/Community Resource Center (Richmond, Virginia), to determine the possible ancestry of the families. Although Mr. Steincamp could not determine if the families were in fact Jewish, he did agree that some of the names of families, like Rosenbaum and Koch, could be Jewish in lineage.

personal information for this thesis was found. This made it nearly impossible to determine many of the internees' ancestry.

But what was found among the thousands of unorganized telegrams and dispatches produced by the United States Army and State Department during World War II reveals the origins and effects of a little known episode in United States foreign policy.

## CHAPTER I: A HEMISPHERE IN DANGER?

By December 1938, Nazi Germany had become a threat to the security and peace of Europe. Hitler stood unopposed as Britain, under the guidance of Neville Chamberlain, appeased German expansionism by allowing the *Abwehr* to occupy the Sudetenland. American President Franklin D. Roosevelt was worried that a rearmed and embittered Germany would call on its military to resolve its territorial disputes. In an attempt to prevent the outbreak of yet another European war, Roosevelt appealed to both Hitler and Mussolini to settle problems with their neighbors amicably.<sup>1</sup>

President Roosevelt's appeal was intended not only to prevent war, but also to halt the spread of fascism. With the Spanish government under attack by the fascist Francisco Franco, it looked as though a plague had spread across Europe all the while getting closer to the New World. President Roosevelt and officials in the State Department saw this westward progression and moved to secure the Western hemisphere from the fascist threat.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1933-1945* (New York, 1979), 185, 166; Raymond J. Sontag, *A Broken World* (New York, 1972), 341-347.

Latin America was the most vulnerable region in the hemisphere. Its governments were weak economically, militarily, and politically and at least two employed officials who held fascist beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Thus, what communism was in Latin America during the 1980's, fascism was in the 1930's. President Roosevelt saw it as a menace to democracy in the New World and in an address to the Western hemisphere pledged that

we are determined to use our energies and our resources to counteract and repel the foreign plots and propaganda--the whole technique of underground warfare originating in Europe and now clearly directed against all the republics on this side of the ocean.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, he feared that Germany would attempt to gain control of Latin-American states through a system of economic and political subversion culminating in an attempt to gain control of the entire hemisphere. Thus, not only was Latin America in danger; so too was the United States.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 39; Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1989), 72-81.

<sup>3</sup> Address by the President to the Western hemisphere, 12 October 1940, *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington, 1973), 292.

<sup>4</sup> Adolf Berle, *Latin America - Diplomacy and Reality*



In order to conquer the New World, the Nazis would call upon German nationals living in the region to influence the economic or political structure of their adopted countries. President Roosevelt and the State Department thought these groups carried the seeds of subversion: they had to be contained. Although President Roosevelt was deeply concerned about the threat these individuals posed to the hemisphere, he delegated the task of containing the German population in Latin America, and the fascist threat it embodied, to his State Department staff.

Led by Secretary Cordell Hull and Undersecretary Sumner Welles, the State Department staff understood President Roosevelt's concerns and agreed that Germany would have to perform a campaign of economic and political subversion prior to establishing a military presence in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> Hull and Welles also thought that once a country had fallen under the control of the Nazi regime, either economically or politically, it could become a place for Hitler to stockpile arms and build airfields for

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(New York, 1962), 77; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1933-1945* (New York, 1979), 233-236.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Rout and John Bratzel, *The Shadow War: German Espionage and United States Counterespionage in Latin America during World War II* (Frederick, 1986), 25-52.

attacks on the Panama Canal or the United States. With this in mind, they formulated some unusually extreme policies to secure the hemisphere from Axis penetration, policies that marked the beginning of the end of the spirit of Good Neighborship. Of these policies, the most stringent involved the German, Italian, and Japanese nationals living in Latin America.

With their distinct appearance, the Japanese were easy to identify and therefore less worrisome to the State Department; the Italians and Germans, however, had assimilated much more easily into Latin American culture and in many cases had intermarried with the indigenous population, eventually acquiring wealth and status. This made them harder to distinguish and potentially dangerous. But, to a much greater degree than the Italians, the Germans had retained more of their native culture and had even set up German schools in the communities in which they lived.<sup>6</sup> Since they had assimilated and had also attempted

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<sup>6</sup> Alton Frye, *Nazi Germany and the American Hemisphere, 1933-41* (New Haven and London, 1967), 67,77. German schools throughout Central and South America had strong connections to the Father Land and often received financial aid from the German government. In fact, by 1935, Brazil had 1260 German schools within its borders. Costa Rica and Guatemala had the greatest number of schools in Central America with their combined enrollment level at over 500 children.

to preserve much of their own culture, the German nationals posed the most serious threat to the region.

There were three obvious reasons the State Department feared the German population in Latin America. Primarily, the many well-established German businesses posed the economic threat. Secondly, German nationals who operated businesses and lived in the region could influence the political atmosphere by stirring up German patriotism and fascist ideology. Finally, fanatical pro-Nazi German nationals could carry out sabotage campaigns against Allied military bases and shipping.

Prior to the outbreak of war in Europe, President Roosevelt became exceedingly concerned about the economic threat Germany posed to the Latin American republics. He wanted to ensure that they were prohibited from gaining an economic foothold in the region, believing that once a country became financially dependent upon Germany, its reliance upon and allegiance to the United States would weaken until it eventually would become a German client state. Throughout early 1939, Roosevelt warned the American public about the growing threat the Axis posed to the Western Hemisphere. While at the Pan-American Union in April 1939, President Roosevelt vowed that he would protect

the hemisphere from belligerents and "also give economic support, so that no American Nation need surrender any fraction of its sovereign freedom to maintain its economic welfare."<sup>7</sup> Not only did this proclamation reassure the American public that its government would fight to preserve democracy in the Western hemisphere, it also served as a warning to Italy and Germany that the United States was fervently opposed to fascism.

Understanding the need to counter German economic expansion, Undersecretary Sumner Welles undertook a crusade to align the Latin American republics behind the United States. Any stronger commitment to the security of Latin America would be political death at home. Initially, then Welles sought safety through hemispheric solidarity rather than initiating any hemispheric defensive measures that involved an American military commitment.

President Roosevelt likewise perceived that military pacts with Latin American countries were an impossibility since most of Congress and the American public wanted to avoid any entangling alliances. Therefore, he ordered the State Department to work toward achieving Latin American

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore, 1979), 82.

neutrality, while at the same time, pulling Latin America closer to the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Often, Welles conspicuously displayed his concern for the safety of Latin America. Just a month before the Eighth Pan-American Conference, where he would push for hemispheric solidarity, Welles proclaimed

that we are in a position to defend ourselves from all aggression from whatever source it may arise, and to be prepared to join with our fellow democracies of the New World in preserving the Western Hemisphere safe from any threat of attack.<sup>9</sup>

This statement caused many pundits to conclude that Welles would present a treaty for hemispheric defense at the conference. Welles, however, had no intention of attempting to create a strong alliance with the American Republics. He knew that an isolationist American public and its representatives in Washington would be cool to such a pact.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, he ordered the American delegation

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<sup>8</sup> This point is discussed in much greater length in Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 74-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Even though Welles had to limit the United States' involvement in security pacts with Latin American nations at the Lima Conference, he and the President used Lima as a first step in turning the United States toward internationalism. Many of President Roosevelt's speeches

to secure the acceptance of a resolution that called for unity of action when there was "intervention in the hemisphere by a non-American state."<sup>11</sup> The resolution, although couched in much weaker language than a true defensive pact, still drew hostility from one delegate. Argentinean delegate José Mariá Cantilo rejected the proposal and offered up his own. He called for an improved inter-American consultation process, an idea which had been suggested years earlier at the Buenos Aires conference of 1936. Welles was pleased with the suggestion and accepted the proposition which obligated the foreign ministers of the American Republics to hold a conference if the hemispheric peace was imperiled.<sup>12</sup> Cordell Hull, on the other hand, found the terms of the resolution too weak, but finally agreed that the Declaration of Lima was as close as the State Department could get to a defensive pact as long as Argentinean opposition remained potent.

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echoed his Pan-American Union speech of 1939 and were intended to evoke a response from the American public which would favor greater involvement in foreign affairs. For an excellent discussion of this see, Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt & the Isolationists, 1932-45* (Lincoln, 1983), 357-362.

<sup>11</sup> Rout and Bratzel, *Shadow War*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

President Roosevelt was also pleased with the agreement, for now he could pursue other means of securing the hemisphere. Prior to the Declaration of Lima, he and Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall had become worried that through the use of modern aircraft the Axis powers could attack Brazil by flying bombing missions across the Atlantic from Dakar, Senegal.<sup>13</sup> But with the Declaration of Lima concluded, President Roosevelt had an agreement that provided the United States with a consultative system that provided at least some measure of security. Even if Germany or Italy launched a direct attack on one of the American Republics, the State Department could quickly gather its resources to construct an effective defensive strategy before the situation became perilous.

President Roosevelt also found that by arguing for economic solidarity in the Western hemisphere, he could indirectly attack Nazism and gain public support for his foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, by convincing the American public that fascism threatened to spread to the Western

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley E. Hilton, *Hitler's Secret War in South America: German Military Espionage and Allied Counterespionage in Brazil, 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 195; Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939* (New York, 1963), 341.

<sup>14</sup> Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 80.

hemisphere, he could more easily move America away from isolationism.

But as the fascist governments in Europe expanded, the urgency for hemispheric unity grew. The outbreak of war in Europe in the fall of 1939 caused President Roosevelt and Undersecretary Welles to invoke the hemispheric consultation system that had been created in Lima for the first time. Welles represented the United States at the meeting which took place in Panama City, Panama. The assembly lasted a little over a week and produced sixteen declarations that Welles hoped would preserve peace in the Western Hemisphere. One of the declarations, the Pact of Panama, established a hemispheric neutrality belt which extended three hundred miles out to sea and surrounded both North and South America. This was President Roosevelt's very own design and for this reason he made sure it was patrolled regularly by American ships.<sup>15</sup> On the whole, the Pact of Panama did little to thwart German economic penetration into Latin America; however, it successfully moved the United States closer to internationalism and further away from isolationism.

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<sup>15</sup> Robert A. Divine, *The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II* (1965; reprint ed., New York, 1979), 80.



Although President Roosevelt and Undersecretary Welles had campaigned arduously for a greater American presence in Latin America, Adolf Hitler would be the man most responsible for turning America away from its isolationist stand. Soon after Germany's attack on Western Europe in the spring of 1940, the American public had a change of heart. Realizing that the Nazis were not simply interested *Lebensraum*, the desire to remain detached from the events in Europe turned into an impatient urge to aid the Allies by sending both countries many tons of material aid. German military successes also heightened fears in the White House and State Department that Hitler could be ready in short order to attack the American Republics. Fear of just such an attack prompted Roosevelt to ask his generals to develop a plan to counter a possible Axis invasion of South America.

"Operation Pot of Gold", though a War Department creation, was the result of a British intelligence report warning that thousands of Nazi agents were sailing for Brazil to coordinate the overthrow of the government with the help of a group of sympathetic Brazilians.<sup>16</sup> Fortunately, the report turned out to be false; but, the

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<sup>16</sup> Hilton, *Hitler's Secret War*, 195.

Roosevelt Administration continued to believe Hitler would seek to dominate Latin America. Soon after the "Pot of Gold" scare, the Roosevelt Administration took actions that it hoped would counter any German attempts at subversion south of the Rio Grande. Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, increasingly involved in the formulation of policy regarding the Latin American republics, regularly voiced concern that nothing had been done to organize "the landing of 'fifth column' or other similar penetrations" in Latin America.

Berle had become a highly respected member of the State Department staff: his colleagues as well as President Roosevelt sought him out because of his expert information gathering, a skill which eventually awarded him direct access to the oval office. In mid-1940 he began warning the chief executive and his associates in the Roosevelt Administration that "fifth column" activities in Latin America had not been addressed.<sup>17</sup>

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover was one of the first to act upon Berle's appraisals. Although the FBI had been consulting with the United States military on counterespionage by presidential

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<sup>17</sup> Rout and Bratzel, *Shadow War*, 31.

order for almost a year, Hoover sought even more input. At a series of meetings beginning in late May 1940, Berle, Hoover, and representatives of Army G-2 met to discuss "the creation of an intelligence agency for action in Latin America".<sup>18</sup> Hoover clamored for control of the new agency and, while talks about its creation were still going on, sent an agent to Mexico in what became a masterful *fait accomplis*. Through this move and by using his skills at bureaucratic infighting, the FBI chief easily won control of all cloak and dagger operations in Latin America. On June 24, 1940 President Roosevelt directed him to establish the Special Intelligence Service (SIS). Hoover's plan was to secure the United States by wiping out the Nazi spy nests in Latin America. Support for Hoover's designs came from none other than Adolf Berle, who pledged the support of the American diplomatic missions in Latin America.<sup>19</sup>

While Hoover set about organizing his new agency, Berle put his hemispheric concerns down on paper. On September 10, 1940, he presented his colleagues with a document entitled *German Inroads and Plans in the Other American Republics*. In *German Inroads*, Berle assessed the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>19</sup> Hilton, *Hitler's Secret War*, 196.

threat posed by German economic and political penetration in Latin America. He concluded that German espionage and economic advances in the region might support a pro-Axis government or "encourage revolutions which would emphasize the might ... of Germans everywhere."<sup>20</sup> Berle, like other State Department officials, was haunted by the fact that thousands of German nationals lived, worked, or just passed through the Latin American Republics every year. He saw these individuals as dangerous because they carried the seeds of subversion. Once recruited by the Nazis, they would spread fascism effectively enough to take over, or at least, influence a Latin American government to ally with Germany. Although Berle's conclusions seemed valid to his colleagues, they were in fact based on two anomalous, unsubstantiated reports of pro-Nazi groups attempting to organize a few abortive subversive plots.<sup>21</sup>

Lack of evidence, however, failed to inhibit Berle's crusade to stop Nazi subversion in Latin America. Just five months later, he produced another document entitled *The Pattern of Nazi Organization and their Activities in the Other American Republics*. As in *German Inroads*, Berle

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Rout and Bratzel, *Shadow War*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

saw economic and political subversion coming from German communities and firms already in the New World. Using little documentary evidence and possibly driven by a desire to increase his bureaucratic pull, the undersecretary came to an astounding conclusion. He claimed that "virtually all the Reichsdeutschen in Latin America are sincere supporters of the Nazi regime."<sup>22</sup>

*Patterns of Nazi Organization* also contained a plan to counter Nazi subversion which Berle sent in secret to the all of the United States embassies in Latin America. In the plan, the embassies were told to gather information on any suspicious German person, group, or firm within their jurisdiction. The response from the embassies was overwhelming as lists of suspected Nazi agents and firms poured into the State Department. This was just the kind of response Berle had anticipated. It validated his admonitions and provided J. Edgar Hoover with the information he needed to eliminate German espionage.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., In a study done by Leslie Rout and John Bratzel, Auslandsorganisation (AO) membership during 1938 and 1940 in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico never surpassed 7% of the total German population of each country.

The State Department also ordered its missions to shore up support for SIS activities with governments throughout Latin America. For example, as early as June, 1941, the United States ambassador to Panama, Edwin C. Wilson initiated a series of discussions with Panamanian government officials. After holding informal talks with several cabinet ministers, Wilson was granted his request to talk with Panama's President Arnulfo Arias.<sup>23</sup>

On June 28, 1941, Wilson, who had been informed of the meeting just hours before it was to take place, called on President Arias. After the usual pleasantries, Ambassador Wilson, possibly shaken by the impromptu nature of the meeting, abruptly inquired about security matters in and around the Panama Canal. He admitted that he was "preoccupied [with] the question of this vital area of the canal... [and that] in the last war-when the United States

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<sup>23</sup> Wilson memorandum to Hull and Welles, 30 June 1941, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, 711.129-711.1928/981A, National Archives II, College Park, MD (hereafter RG 59, followed by decimal file number, page number (if applicable), and location). Wilson issued his memorandum in report form and added at the end that he felt "the [State] Department must keep in mind... that what has developed in Panama is about as near an approach to Hitlerism as the characteristics of Latin Americans and the peculiar circumstances affecting Panama could be expected to permit."

entered the war-Panama at once ranged itself on [the American] side, enemy aliens were interned and there was complete cooperation between the two administrations in defense matters."<sup>24</sup>

President Arias's response was quite positive. He agreed to remove any Germans or Italians whom the United States thought were dangerous to the interior of the country where they would have to report regularly to local authorities, with the provision accepted by Wilson that he could not deport any naturalized or temporarily naturalized Panamanian citizens. But before he was dismissed, Arias added that he wanted to avoid "anything that looked as if Panama was being made to trot along at the heels of the United States."<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Good Neighbor policy required the appearance of non-intervention in Latin America: as long as Panama still looked independent, it would allow the United States to carry out counterespionage operations around the canal zone.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. This was an indirect referral to comments which had been made by officials in South American countries, especially Argentina, who adamantly opposed United States intervention in Latin American affairs. The Argentinean government continually rejected an alliance with the United States throughout World War II.

The summer of 1941 brought a major change in America's foreign policy. With the threat of Axis subversion in the Western Hemisphere growing, a greater degree of intervention in Latin America was needed. On July 17, 1941, in a press release issued by the State Department, President Roosevelt announced what he called "The Proclaimed List of Certain Blocked Nationals". The list consisted of persons

deemed to be acting for the benefit of Germany or Italy or nationals of those countries and persons to whom the exportation directly or indirectly, of various articles or materials is deemed to be detrimental to the interest of national defense.<sup>26</sup>

Coffee plantations, restaurants, and various other businesses owned by Axis nationals were placed on the list by SIS agents, American diplomats, and officials from the Latin American republics. Once a business was put on the list, it was extremely difficult to have its name removed. Updated and regularly enlarged, the "Proclaimed List" was the most effective weapon in the economic war on the Axis presence in Latin America.

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<sup>26</sup> Press release, 14 July 1941, United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941* (Washington, 1958), 6: 269 (hereafter *FRUS*, followed by appropriate year).



Adolf Berle found more than a modicum of relief in the "Proclaimed List" policies since they implemented many measures to combat the Nazi subversion he had discussed in *German Inroads*.

The "Proclaimed List" was the result of an American mission that had spent the last four months of 1940 surveying "the nature and extent of the problem arising from the representation of American business by undesirable firms throughout the other American Republics."<sup>27</sup> The mission was made up of representatives of the Department of State and the FBI, the two government agencies most concerned with hemispheric security. Both agencies had obtained lists from "certain well-informed American residents recommended by the missions for such consultations."<sup>28</sup> This coordinated information gathering effort was a major coup for both agencies and their leaders: The staffs of the United States embassies in Latin America and their SIS collaborators looked as though they

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<sup>27</sup> Hull to Diplomatic and Consular Officers in the American Republics, 28 August 1941, *FRUS, 1941* 6:271, 273. In this seven section memorandum, Hull laid out the "Proclaimed List" system which had been created only after it was announced by the President on July 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

were contributing to the battle against fascism, while Adolf Berle and J. Edgar Hoover could again stand out for their information gathering capabilities.

A little over a month later, Secretary of State Hull issued the procedures and policies for maintaining the "Proclaimed List". In the memorandum Hull outlined the Roosevelt Administration's plan for an attack on any pro-Axis economic activity in Latin America. The State Department, in order to ensure the stability of the region, enlisted "the voluntary cooperation of American foreign-trade firms in replacing agencies or sales outlets which appeared to be undesirable under existing conditions."<sup>29</sup> In fact, American businesses benefited greatly by volunteering their services. From 1940 to mid-1941, American firms increased their imports from Latin America by greater than ten percent and continued to increase their purchases every year until the end of the war.<sup>30</sup> By replacing pro-Axis firms with American companies, the Roosevelt Administration boosted inter-American solidarity while removing any financial benefits that could go to Germany. However, with such a policy in place, it looked

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 271-272.

<sup>30</sup> Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 167.

as though America was trying to gain a monopoly on business in the American Republics. To dispel this criticism, the Administration included a disclaimer which read, "the list is not to be used to place the handling of American products solely or principally in American hands and will not be administered to serve selfish or acquisitive trade ends."<sup>31</sup> But the policy makers in Washington had failed to consider that the American Republics might attempt to benefit unfairly from the policy. They were not bound to obey directives from the State Department and could manipulate much of the information flowing to the American embassies concerning German nationals.

In addition to the disclaimer dealing with American business interest, the State Department added several more. There was concern that the American missions might place persons on the list solely on the basis of nationality. As a result, the State Department prohibited the embassies from doing so but also told them to report any German, Italian, or Japanese nationals to their superiors in Washington.<sup>32</sup> To ambassadors and attachés these instructions must have seemed altogether contradictory.

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<sup>31</sup> Hull to Diplomatic and Consular Officers in the American Republics, 28 August 1941, *FRUS*, 1941 6:276.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, It is unclear what the State Department meant

Recommendations for the list had to be sent along with a complex series of ratings. The State Department had contrived a system by which the embassy staffs could determine whether or not an Axis national qualified for "blacklisting". Some of the categories used to rate suspects included whether or not they had children in a local German school or if they were a member of a German colony.<sup>33</sup> The rating system was developed from the information gathered by the State Department and the FBI in 1940, following the lead of, Assistant Secretary Berle and FBI Director Hoover. The State Department had also been secretly sending funds for information gathering purposes to American diplomats in Latin America since the inception of Hoover's SIS.<sup>34</sup>

Subsequently, financial support was set aside for the construction of internment camps for Axis nationals. Just a day after President Roosevelt issued the Proclaimed List, Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Attorney General Francis

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when it asked its missions to report any German, Italian or Japanese national. One assumes that this did not mean that these individuals were to be placed on the "Procaliamed List" but were pointed out for possible further investigation.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 284-285.

<sup>34</sup> Hilton, *Hitler's Secret War*, 197.

Biddle agreed that the War Department would furnish "permanent custodial detention of all alien enemies directed interned by any authority in ... [the] Canal Zone."<sup>35</sup> However, no action was taken at that time to begin building internment camps for Axis nationals in Latin America.

By October 21, 1941, small tent camps had to be constructed at American military bases to accommodate the supposedly dangerous Axis nationals who had recently become casualties of the "Proclaimed List" policy. The Army's Puerto Rican Department was promptly informed by a local representative of the FBI that he knew of 300 male alien enemies who were in need of internment. However, his list of suspects was much longer if one included women, children, and subversive American citizens: all together, the FBI agent placed 725 persons on his list.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> E. Reybold to Marshall, 14 August 1941, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, 212.27, microfilm copies in the George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, VA (hereafter RG 59, followed by decimal file number and location).

<sup>36</sup> Adjutant General's Office to the Puerto Rican Department, 24 October 1941, Records of the Caribbean Defense Command, Record Group 338, File 014.311-045, National Archives Branch Depository, Suitland, MD (hereafter RG 338, followed by decimal file number).

American military commanders in Latin America were given contingency plans as early as March 1941 containing instructions on the internment of "alien enemies". But because officials in the Roosevelt Administration were extremely worried that among the thousands of Jewish refugees coming from Europe, Hitler might include Nazi agents the War Department failed to exclude Jewish German nationals who had lived in the region for generations or who had recently immigrated there in flight from Nazi persecution in Europe. Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long was the man in the State Department most alarmed by the prospect that German agents were secretly seeping into Latin America on boats loaded with German Jewish refugees. For some time, Long had been receiving intelligence reports from the American republics that there were in fact refugee spies. These reports alarmed the Latin-American Division of the State Department so intensely that it began discouraging the admission of refugees into Central America and the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup>

Long had always been staunchly against admitting refugees into the United States or Latin America. He

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<sup>37</sup> Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, 1970), 129.

believed that "only an infinitesimal fraction of the immigrants" were refugees from Hitler's tyranny and even went so far as saying "some are certainly German agents and others are sympathizers... coming here because it is away from the scene of combat and looks like a safe place."<sup>38</sup> Long had made these comments after attending, by presidential request, a meeting of the McDonald Refugee Committee on September 4, 1941. Also in attendance were Rabbi Stephen Wise, President of the American Jewish Congress, and Joseph Rummett, Archbishop of New Orleans, two men the Assistant Secretary believed "hated him" and saw him as "the embodiment of a nemesis" because of his restrictionist views on immigration.<sup>39</sup> Long was probably correct to assume this, because he did serve as an obstacle to their mission of making immigration to the Americas easier for the Jews of Europe.

Throughout the war, Rabbi Wise lobbied the State Department to provide a safe haven for Jews who wanted to escape Nazi persecution. Thus, when Panama attempted to enact a decree law which would include Hebrews on its

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<sup>38</sup> Fred L. Israel, ed., *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long: Selections from the Years, 1939-1944* (Lincoln, 1966), 216.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

prohibited immigration list, he moved quickly to have it stopped.<sup>40</sup> In a letter to Assistant Secretary Welles, Wise expressed his concern that the new law would close yet another door in the face of European Jewish refugees and would set a precedent for other American republics to follow. In response, the Secretary handed the problem over to his most trusted colleague, Sumner Welles who asked ambassador Wilson to discuss the matter "at an early and opportune moment" with the Panamanian authorities. Apparently, Welles wanted to find out if the charges were actually true, and if they were, for Wilson to inform the Panamanians of "the unfortunate effect which anti-Semitic measures... would produce on public opinion in the United States."<sup>41</sup>

During the last week of September 1941, a memorandum assessing the projected anti-Jewish decree law was produced

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<sup>40</sup> The initial complaint concerning the Panamanian decree law came in the form of a letter sent to the Secretary of State by an American citizen of Jewish descent living in New York City. see Estelle M. Sternberger to Cordell Hull, 20 September 1941, RG 59, 819.24/700-819.42/8-2444, National Archives II. A decree law is one promulgated by the President Roosevelt without the involvement of the adjourned Panamanian Parliament.

<sup>41</sup> Wise to Welles, 31 October 1941, RG 59, 819/700-819.42/8-2444, National Archives II.



by the State Department. Appropriately alarmist in tone, the document expressed significant concern that such an anti-Semitic measure "would be regarded as a great victory for Nazi ideas and would... constitute a precedent for similar legislation in other American republics."<sup>42</sup> Not only did the decree law prohibit Jewish immigration, it also robbed all Panamanian Jews, who did not have at least one parent born in Panama, of their citizenship. Furthermore, the State Department concluded that the Panamanian President had been "familiarized with fascist practices" when he had served as a Minister to Fascist Italy.

The decree law's similarity to measures adopted in Germany must have frightened the State Department. Not only did it look "Hitleresque", it could only increase the already unwieldy levels of Jewish immigration to the United States. European Jews headed for Panama would look to the United States for refuge, as would the recently expelled Panamanian Jews. Economic and personal interests were also among the reasons President Arias was enacting the decree law. By ousting Jewish business owners, he made businesses

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<sup>42</sup> Unsigned State Department memorandum, September 1941, RG 59, 711.129-711.1928/981A, National Archives II.

available for native Panamanians to purchase or for the Panamanian government to nationalize.

The decree law was not the only difficulty President Arias had presented to the State Department. A month earlier, Ambassador Wilson met with Arias again to discuss the still unfinished problem of the Axis nationals in Panama. In an attempt to convince President Arias that he should be more concerned about them, Wilson explained that "in the last war Panama aligned itself with the United States and after consultation, which had been going on for some time between the authorities of Panama and the Canal Zone, enemy aliens were arrested by Panama and interned... and later removed to the United States."<sup>43</sup> President Arias responded by agreeing to remove any Axis nationals with provisional citizenship to the country's interior, but he had not considered what he would do with those who had not become naturalized Panamanians. It was at this point that Arias changed the subject. Suddenly, he wanted to discuss problems with American defense site leases in Panama and suggested that until the lease agreements were resolved,

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<sup>43</sup> Wilson memorandum to the State Department, 26 September 1941, RG 59, 711.129-711.1928/981A., National Archives II.

American concerns about Axis nationals in Panama would not appear on the negotiating table.

However, Wilson and his superiors in the State Department only had to deal with Arias for another month. By November 22, 1941 Panama had found a new leader under the administration of President Ernesto de la Guardia, who promised American officials he would not enact any of Arias's anti-Semitic measures.<sup>44</sup> This must have been a relief to many in the State Department. However, after United States ambassador Wilson met with Panama's new Foreign Minister, the specter of anti-Semitism in Panama arose once again. The Panamanian diplomat explained to Edwin Wilson that although most of the Jews in Panama behaved admirably "a less desirable class of Jews had come to Panama, political refugees from Poland for the most part, who had through their sharp business dealings, incurred ill will from Panamanians."<sup>45</sup> Thus, even though the leaders had changed, anti-Semitism remained strong in the Panamanian government.

As the United States entry into the war approached, there was little more the State Department could do to

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<sup>44</sup> Wilson to Hull, 22 November 1941, RG 59, 819/700-819.42/8-2444, National Archives II.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

secure the hemisphere. Sumner Welles, Adolf Berle, and Breckinridge Long continued to warn their superiors of the threat posed by enemy aliens in the American Republics. President Roosevelt also remained concerned that German and Italian nationals could easily subvert one of the typically unstable Latin American governments. Moreover, Axis nationals with financial and political influence were the most likely to attempt such subversion. Unfortunately, many of the wealthiest Germans living in the American republics were Jews, making them the most vulnerable to investigation by their adopted country's government or by the SIS.

While President Roosevelt found some peace of mind in the Declaration of Lima, he and the State Department knew that when the United States entered the war, Axis nationals in Latin America would become even more dangerous to the security of the hemisphere. To abate their potency in the political affairs of the region, a systematic method for ridding the American Republics of them and the dangers they ostensibly represented was needed.

## CHAPTER II: SECURING LATIN AMERICA

Almost immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941, eight Latin American nations declared war on Germany. Among the eight, Panama was the country of greatest concern to the Roosevelt Administration. Should the canal fall into enemy hands or be disabled, allied shipping would be severely hampered.

To prevent such an event, officials from the State Department and the Republic of Panama met to discuss what security measures could be taken in and around the canal zone. They came to an agreement on December 12, 1941, the same day the Panamanian Government declared a war on Germany. In order to secure the canal, the State Department ordered the Army to begin and carry to completion the construction of an internment camp for "Japanese and other enemy aliens" and to apprehend all enemy aliens in the canal zone and the Republic of Panama

for immediate internment in the as yet unfinished camp.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the war, this camp, constructed within the canal zone at Balboa, Panama, would be the primary holding area for all Axis nationals arrested in Latin America by the United States Army and the Latin American governments.

Although some areas in the canal zone were ready to hold the Germans, Italians, and Japanese temporarily, it appeared that the United States Army was far from prepared to deal with the political uproar caused by the internment program. As quickly as the Army began interning enemy aliens, it started to release internees whose family members had descended upon the camp pleading for the discharge of their relatives. Shocked and angered by the Army's unilateral actions, a representative from the Panamanian military immediately called United States ambassador Wilson to exhort him.<sup>2</sup> Wilson then sent an urgent message to the commander of the Panama Canal

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<sup>1</sup>Adams to Caribbean Defense Command (hereafter CDC), 12 December 1941, RG 338, 014.311-045, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson to Andrews, 19 December 1941, RG 338,

Department, Lieutenant General Frank M. Andrews, urging him to release only internees who had been cleared by the Panamanian government. Furthermore, he notified Andrews that "these internees, who have been arrested by the Panamanian police on Panamanian territory, have been turned over to the Canal zone authorities to hold temporarily ... until ... an adequate internment camp can be constructed."<sup>3</sup> The Army's practice of releasing the internees angered the Panamanian authorities who wanted the enemy aliens removed, for as long as they remained in Panama there was still the chance they could be released. However, with their quick removal the Panamanian government moved to take possession of their unattended shops and farms.

In fact, only three months had passed since Ambassador Wilson had warned the Panamanian government that the State Department was concerned about several racist measures about to be enacted in Panama, including

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014.311-045, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

an effort to close 50 Jewish businesses and prohibit the preparation of meat according to Jewish dietary restrictions. Wilson had been told by President Arias that there were elements in the Panamanian government that wanted to "despoil" the Jews in Panama of their property.<sup>4</sup> Although none of these measures were enforced, they showed that the political climate in Panama encouraged discrimination against the Jewish population.

The roundup of Axis nationals was filled with extraordinary irony for both the Americans and the Panamanians. While the Panamanians rounded up Axis nationals at the behest of the United States, they could also dispose of the Jews the United States had asked them to quit discriminating against several months earlier. Furthermore, the Panamanian government could now intern any Axis national and confiscate their business -- using the "Proclaimed List" rubric -- with the full political and logistical support of the United States military. In

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<sup>4</sup> Wilson to Hull, 4 October 1941, RG 59, 819.4016/12, National Archives II. In this memorandum, Wilson discusses an informal dinner conversation he had with



the bright glare of the war, the Roosevelt Administration had been blinded. Its anxiety over securing the Western hemisphere overrode its concern for the rights of a small section of Panama's citizenry.

Panama was not the only Latin American country that would experience the State Department's war on Axis subversion. The American entry in World War II caused a frenzy of arrests and internments throughout the region. The Panama Canal Zone would become the headquarters for the coordination of a collaborative effort among the United States and many Latin American countries to rid the New World of Axis nationals. For the United States, security was the primary concern; however, for the Latin American Republics, the issue was mostly economic.

Costa Rica, for example, arrested Axis nationals and, like Panama, had trouble keeping them in custody. On January 2, 1942, the Costa Rican government sent an urgent message to General Andrews warning him that "influential Costa Rican relatives of Germans ... [were] strongly

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President Arias.

pressing [the] President and [the] Ministers to release some of those arrested and unless they are immediately removed from this country ... [the] President will be forced to release them."<sup>5</sup> The message also implied that no more arrests would be made until assurance was given that those enemy aliens already in custody were quickly removed from the country by the American military. Embarrassed, American officials immediately responded by promising to remove the enemy aliens by air if necessary.<sup>6</sup> The Costa Ricans were obviously less enthusiastic about the arrest and internment of Axis nationals than the United States.

Panama, however, with an anti-Semitic agenda and the support of a huge United States military presence, readily enlisted in the program. Panama's embrace of the arrest and interment program is evidenced in a message sent by Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall to General

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<sup>5</sup> CDC memorandum to the State Department, 2 January 1942, RG 338, 014.31-5, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Andrews on January 18, 1942. In the message, Marshall informed his colleague that should he need any further help from the Panamanian government in securing the Canal Zone from enemy aliens, a conference could be called to discuss what measures could be taken. Marshall also told Andrews that he believed any requests made of the Panamanians "for additional cooperation in the accomplishment of [his] mission would be favorably entertained."<sup>7</sup> Although the Panamanian government continued to cooperate with American wishes that it arrest and intern enemy aliens, by the end of January 1942 it had released most but not all of its Jewish internees.<sup>8</sup>

Other countries also began cooperating with the United States and the British forces in the region by either allowing the allies to arrest enemy aliens within their borders or by handing enemy aliens over to the

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<sup>7</sup> Marshall to Andrews, 18 January 1942, RG 59, 212.27, George C. Marshall Library.

<sup>8</sup> Strum, "Jewish Internees in the American South, 1942-1945", 32. According to Strum, twenty-nine Jews still remained in custody at Balboa, Panama.

allied forces stationed in their countries.<sup>9</sup> In early February, British officials in Trinidad had interned forty-two enemy aliens and divided them into two groups, Jewish and non-Jewish. In addition to those in British custody, another 291 enemy aliens were conditionally at liberty, most all of whom were German and Austrian Jews.<sup>10</sup>

By February 8, 1942 there were 132 internees in United States Army custody in the Canal Zone. Of the 132 internees thirty-five were non-German and only eleven were German Jews. One of the German-Jewish internees, Gerhard Schlesinger, was listed simply as a German. In 1938, however, the Nazis had had little trouble uncovering Schlesinger's extraction. He was arrested and sent to Buchenwald in 1938 but released provided he leave Germany. After seeking exile in Poland, Schlesinger and his wife Charlotte were forced to flee persecution once again when the Nazis invaded that country in September 1939. For an

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<sup>9</sup> CDC Trinidad Sector to Andrews, 6 February 1942, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

entire year, they continued their flight east across the vastness of the Soviet Union to Japan, making their final destination the apparent safety of the Republic of Panama.<sup>11</sup>

Another German-Jewish refugee interned in the Canal Zone was Frederick L. Kappel. In 1938 he too had narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Nazis. After he was ordered by the Gestapo to leave Germany, he fled to Panama via Denmark.<sup>12</sup> Both men had been apprehended in the first wave of arrests made by the Panamanian authorities just after the outbreak of the war.

While Schlesinger and Kappel wondered what fate awaited them, General Andrews and Ambassador Wilson repeatedly urged Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to order the evacuation of all the internees in the Canal Zone to the United States. The camp at Balboa in the Canal Zone had reached capacity and work on a new camp had stopped. By February 20, there were 110 German, 214

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<sup>11</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Japanese, twenty-three Italian, and thirty-four miscellaneous internees at Balboa. However, the most severe problem for the Americans was not the internees themselves but rather their 1821 dependents.<sup>13</sup>

When the State Department initiated its campaign to intern "dangerous" enemy aliens, it failed to anticipate that many would have dependents, a problem which might not have occurred had many of the Axis nationals been allowed to keep their property and businesses. Without any means of support, the women and children of the internees were forced to follow them to the camps, causing a huge refugee problem for the Canal Zone authorities. Their only alternative was to deport the internees and their families to the United States.

However, there were no facilities in the United States capable of handling so many internees, nor were there any facilities suited to accommodate the needs of women and children. The Roosevelt Administration was

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<sup>13</sup> Andrews and Wilson memorandum to Stimson, 20 February 1942, RG 59, 212.27, George C. Marshall Library. They also told Stimson that the internees were not allowed

already in the throws of relocating thousands of Japanese Americans: an influx of Axis nationals from Latin America would only add to their mounting frustration.

By the end of February a permanent camp still had not been constructed in the Canal Zone for the 424 enemy aliens interned there. This concerned the Canal Zone authorities because the Balboa camp consisted entirely of tents and could be used only during the Panamanian dry season which ended in mid-April.<sup>14</sup> However, with 323 of the aliens slated to be transported to the United States for "indefinite internment", Canal Zone authorities could at least breathe a little easier. In this group, ten of the enemy aliens listed themselves as Jews, Frederick Kappel and Gerhard Schlesinger among them. However, American officials once again had failed to list Schlesinger as a Jew. In fact, he was probably not the only one. There were at least five other internees with

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to have visitors or receive mail that was uncensored.

<sup>14</sup> Assistant Adjutant General's report to Andrews, 28 February 1942, RG 338, 014.31-5. National Archives Branch Depository.

typically Jewish surnames who were simply listed as Austrian or German.<sup>15</sup>

One of the internee's family members wrote an emotional appeal to Army G-2 for his release. Sigismund Gottesman, whose final fate is unknown, was the subject of a heart felt appeal for release by his son-in-law, Frederick E. Knoh. Knoh described Gottesman as a "descent [sic] and honorable" man who had given "very much money" to people seeking "to escape the homicidal actions of Hitler."<sup>16</sup> He also complained that his father-in-law had not been given a hearing and was unaware of the reasons behind his confinement. This was true: unfortunately, the luxury of hearings and review boards were unavailable to the internees for much of the war. By the end of March 1942, the number of internees in the tent camp at Balboa had grown by nearly one hundred, with the new total

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Knoh to Andrews, 19 March 1942, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository.



reaching 517.<sup>17</sup>

During the first two weeks of March 1942, the State Department and the German Government, with the Swiss government serving as moderator, began a series of discussions which would determine the fate of many of the internees. By month's end, American and German officials agreed that the "reciprocal repatriation" of the internees was preferable to internment.<sup>18</sup> Germany, which had initiated the talks, wanted to receive the internees in large scale personnel exchanges with the Allies. This idea found acceptance among State Department officials, like Sumner Welles, who were eager to relieve themselves of the trouble of finding facilities for the internees and who wanted the quick return of American citizens still in German occupied territory. Welles, who at the time was serving as Acting Secretary of State, negotiated the

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<sup>17</sup> Assistant Adjutant General's report to Andrews, 31 March 1942, RG 338, 014.311/383.6, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>18</sup> State Department to the British Embassy, 27 March 1942, *FRUS, 1942* (Washington, 1965), 1:344; Israel, *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long*, 228.

logistics of the exchange program.<sup>19</sup>

He sent the terms for the exchanges to Leland Harrison, United States Minister to Switzerland. In the ten point telegram, Welles laid out a comprehensive system for exchanging official and non-official German personnel for their Allied counterparts in German custody. Welles agreed "on the basis of reciprocity" to return "all non-official European Axis nationals in the United States desiring to leave... except for any individuals whose return may be considered prejudicial to the national interest" to Germany aboard the Swedish exchange vessel *Drottningholm*. The ship would be filled with "Axis career officials and their dependents to the extent that suitable accommodations are available... and ... will then be filled to capacity with European Axis non-officials received from other American Republics."<sup>20</sup> The Acting Secretary also anticipated that a second voyage might take

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 345-49.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

place since the German Government had warned that the *Drottningholm* was not large enough to accommodate the entire group on a single voyage. Furthermore, it was agreed that all non-official personnel unable to be carried by the *Drottningholm*, would be repatriated by neutral commercial vessels as suggested by Germany.

This was an ideal arrangement for the State Department. Its internment program was originally an unwanted but necessary logistic and diplomatic nightmare; however, it was becoming a useful tool. Propitiously, the State Department had hundreds of German nationals in custody who were not United States citizens and therefore could be used in personnel exchanges with Germany. But for the internees, this situation posed a serious threat to their safety, especially those who were Jewish or openly opposed to Nazism. Even though Welles had stated that only those internees desiring repatriation would be returned to Europe, the possibility remained that some misinformation provided by an overzealous Latin American

Republic or an errant SIS agent could place a Jewish or an anti-Nazi internee in the hands of the Gestapo.

In April 1942, with nearly thirty Jewish men and 560 non-Jewish internees still in custody at the Balboa camp, the American military began the deportation-repatriation process that Sumner Welles had organized with the German government.<sup>21</sup> At about the same time the State Department started to ship internees out of Panama, American officials in Peru were in negotiations for the implementation of a similar program in that country. They soon found however that the Peruvians were not as cooperative as the Panamanians. As a result of Peru's uncooperative posture, the State Department issued a report dated April 9, 1942 and entitled, *Measures Which Peru Might Take To Improve Its Cooperation With The United States*. The largest section of the six-point report was devoted exclusively to subversive activities.<sup>22</sup> State

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<sup>21</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 32; Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Division of the American Republics Report, 9 April 1942, RG 59, 711.1928/984-711.25/259. National Archives II.

Department officials found the Peruvian Government "most unwilling to cooperate in the expulsion of dangerous Axis non-officials".<sup>23</sup> Peruvian reluctance most likely stemmed from the many Fascists who held positions of authority in the government. Apparently, the State Department had considered affecting their removal but acknowledged "their elimination would be a rather drastic check up".<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the Peruvian government eventually agreed to round up its Axis-nationals in exchange for some trade agreements and military hardware. An enormous \$29 million lend-lease contract as well as an agreement for the United States to purchase Peruvian raw materials to be used in war related industries constituted just part of the carrot that was waved in front of the Peruvian officials. In addition to the lend lease agreements, the United States also expanded the airport and placed a coastal battery at the port city of Talara.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 21.

With an American presence established in Peru and the deportation to the United States of the Axis-nationals who had been held in Panama, the State Department had accomplished much toward securing Latin America from Nazi sabotage and subversion. In the process, Sumner Welles discovered that from the cumbersome task of cleaning the undesirable elements out of the New World, the State Department could rescue hundreds of Americans stranded in Nazi occupied Europe.

For the "enemy aliens", however, there were few advantages and little hope for their futures. Although most of the Jewish internees had been released in January, several families remained in custody on their way aboard a United States transport ship to an uncertain fate along with hundreds of non-Jewish German internees. They had been arrested, interned, divested of their property, and deported for no reason other than their nationality. Many of the non-Jews had requested repatriation to Germany which to them must have seemed to be the fastest way to

gain freedom; however, they had little choice: there was nothing left for them in Latin America.

### CHAPTER III: BRINGING THE THREAT HOME

With the Peruvian government participating in the internment program, the State Department had to begin shipping internees back to the United States for safekeeping. With more arrests anticipated, room would be needed to house internees temporarily if camps in the United States were unprepared to receive them directly from Latin America.

For those internees already in custody however it was time to begin the journey north. But before leaving Latin America for internment camps in the United States, they had to undergo yet another humiliation. At the docks, just prior to embarking, they were herded through processing.

A sergeant in the military police, Clarence H. Bowser had been assigned to escort and process the internees. He stayed aboard the transport ships and disembarked only at one of those Latin American ports where internees were picked up.<sup>1</sup> Upon arriving at a Latin American port,

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<sup>1</sup> Sergeant Clarence H. Bowser to Captain Herbert K. Harris, 17 October 1942, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository. Although Sergeant Bowser's statement was made months after the shipment of internees to the United States began, it serves as an excellent example of the methodology used by the United States military to process the internees.



Bowser and his fellow soldiers in the United States Army Military Police (M.P.) gave each internee a badge with a number on it and lined them up on the docks with their baggage in front of them. They then searched through their belongings, taking out anything that was a security risk – even cigarettes and whisky – and placed them in unmarked boxes, making it impossible to identify whose possessions were contained inside. They then boarded the ship where the indignities continued.<sup>2</sup>

The conditions aboard the transport ships were less than ideal. In one instance conditions were so miserable that three of the internees drafted a report describing the inhumanities and degradations they suffered. Bernhard Buesken, Anna Eckstein, and Martha Zeuner were living in Costa Rica when they were arrested and slated for internment in the United States. From San Jose, they were taken to Puntarenas where they embarked upon the *M.S. Puebla*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Buesken, Frau Anna Eckstein, and Frau Martha Zeuner to unknown, 22 February 1943, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository. As with Sergeant Bowser's account, the three internees' wrote their letter of complaint well after internees began to arrive in the United States for internment; however, their letter

According to the internees, they were forced to leave their baggage on the dock for unsupervised inspection while they boarded the ship. The soldiers then destroyed some of the luggage by breaking locks and prying open chests and even by dropping some of the baggage into the water.<sup>4</sup>

Once aboard the *Puebla*, the soldiers split the internees into two groups – the men in one and the women and children in another. The men were crammed into three small rooms at the bow of the ship – eighteen to twenty-four per room. The soldiers gave each man only six square feet in which to reside throughout the journey. The women and children, on the other hand, stayed in more spacious cabins.<sup>5</sup>

The suffering caused by the intolerably cramped conditions aboard the *Puebla* were compounded by a delay in the ship's departure. For six days it sat listless, loaded with internees, in the humid tropical port roasting under a blazing sun. Furthermore, evening anti-submarine blackouts required that the ship's portholes remain closed, cutting

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reveals the pernicious treatment enemy aliens faced during captivity.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

off what little air had been circulating through the ship.<sup>6</sup> The heat and humidity were unbearable for the sick and pregnant women and especially their children, some of whom had whooping cough.

Some women were deprived of the privilege of going out on deck. Also, as punishment for not keeping their cabins "tidy", the internees claimed that one of the ship's personnel intentionally dirtied the deck only to delight in watching the internees clean it. They also charged their captors with general "bullying" and failure to provide proper medical care. Although doctors and nurses were available to internees, they were not allowed direct access and had to submit requests for examinations to the soldiers. But their most serious charge was that after completing the voyage, four of the internees, two men and two women, were selected at random from the group and asked to sign a statement asserting that they had "no complaints" with regard to their treatment aboard the *Puebla*.<sup>7</sup> There is no evidence that the State or War Departments investigated the charges made by Buesken, Eckstein, and Zeuner.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

However, the United States eventually repatriated all three along with their families to Germany in early 1944.<sup>8</sup>

As for the internees on the way to the United States from Panama, they arrived at New Orleans on April 18, 1942. Once again, the soldiers separated the men from the women and children, who were transported by rail to the Seagoville Detention Center in Texas.<sup>9</sup>

The Seagoville Detention Center was in close proximity to Dallas and had recently been converted from a Federal prison for women into a reasonably comfortable facility for the female internees and their children. The men, however, were shipped to camps that contained few if any comforts. After some initial confusion on the part of the INS as to where the male internees would be housed, it was decided that they would be split and sent to several different camps scattered throughout the southern United States: these camps included Camp Kenedy in Texas, Stringtown Internment Camp in Oklahoma and Camp Forrest in Tennessee.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Special War Problems Division Report, 4 April 1946, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>9</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

By July 1942, many of the internees from Latin America had been placed in the two camps located in Texas - Crystal City and Kenedy. However, Fred Kappel and his son Werner were forced to remain at the Stringtown Camp for several months longer. Both camps were run by the INS in a militaristic fashion. They contained barracks surrounded by barbed wire fencing and search lights with a duty of armed guards patrolling the grounds. The soldiers subjected the internees to regular roll calls and forced them to live as though they were prisoners of war. There was, however, a camp store where the internees could purchase cigarettes and special foods and a schedule of academic and vocational training in which they could participate voluntarily.<sup>11</sup> Although they were treated well physically, the emotional damage caused by their arrests for "criminal activity" and by the separation from their families was immense.

The internees' only hope for release was to appeal through proper channels; but first they needed a spokesman. Dr. Fritz K. Kaul recently had earned a doctorate in law from the University of Berlin and had been appointed an assistant to the faculty there when he was forced to resign

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<sup>11</sup> Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 29-31, 59-61.

in 1933 as a result of the anti-Jewish laws passed by a newly empowered Adolf Hitler. Two years later, Kaul was still in Berlin practicing law when he was arrested for "High Treason" and sent first to Lichtenburg and then to Dachau concentration camps. In June 1937, Kaul was released on the condition that he leave Germany immediately. Initially, he immigrated to Columbia where he held several meager jobs and earned enough money to help his parents immigrate to Columbia to live with him. But soon after immigrating Kaul's parents were allowed entry into the United States. Kaul, on the other hand, remained in Latin America and moved to Panama on a temporary visa to work for a manufacturer.<sup>12</sup>

After spending a little over two years working in Panama, Kaul's visa was revoked by the Honduran government. He was deported summarily to Nicaragua where he was arrested on December 19, 1941 as an "enemy alien" - one of the hundreds of German and Japanese nationals captured during the mass arrests that took place in Latin America following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Personal History Data Sheet, Special War Problems Division, 12 December 1942, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

After examining Kaul's experience and educational background, there is no doubting the Camp Kenedy internees' decision to elect him as their spokesman. Dr. Kaul took his position quite seriously and immediately sent letters appealing for his and the other Jewish internees release to the Legation of Switzerland in Washington, D.C..<sup>14</sup> The response, however, came slowly. On July 21, 1942, three weeks after he had mailed his initial complaint, Kaul received a response from the Swiss Legation. His letters had been turned over to the State Department and he was told "to communicate directly with the State Department for decision and further action".<sup>15</sup> Again, Dr. Kaul began

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<sup>14</sup> The Legation of Switzerland was charged with overseeing the internees' well-being. Overall, they handled the task in a coldly bureaucratic manner. Displaying little concern for their charges, the Legation often responded to the internees' complaints for release by telling them to contact the State Department or other entities sympathetic to their plight. In October 1942, however, the Legation eventually approached the National Refugee Service (NRS) directly in hopes that it could aid the internees.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Fritz K. Kaul to Special War Problems Division, 24 July 1942, RG 59, National Archives II. In his letter Dr. Kaul argued strongly on behalf of the internees. His three-page letter digressed into a long legal discourse, which would have made any bureaucratic head spin. He argued on behalf of Max Kaufmann - an internee whose story will be told later in this paper.

sending correspondence to officials he hoped would recognize the foolishness of confining German Jews. In his letters to the Swiss Legation, Kaul pointed out several basic facts he thought might move the bureaucratic wheels in Washington forward.<sup>16</sup> He explained that none of the internees felt an "ounce of allegiance" to Germany and gave a brief summary of each of his fellow internee's recent history. In one of his most obvious and compelling arguments, he concluded that since they were Jews, they were no longer German citizens and therefore could have no formal allegiance to Germany.<sup>17</sup>

In Panama, Kaufmann had finally found a stable environment – a deserved respite after fleeing Nazism – and was about to be granted permission by the INS to legally immigrate to the United States. But before he received formal permission to do so, his restful life in Panama and future in the United States were taken from him on December 9, 1941 when he was arrested as a "dangerous" enemy alien.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Special War Problems Division, Name Files of Internees, RG 59, National Archives II.



The evidence against Kaufmann was scant at best. According to the authorities, Kaufmann had engaged in various suspicious activities. In Panama at the restaurant where he was employed as a waiter, a group of pro-Nazi Germans frequently requested that Kaufmann serve them. Further, an informant had seen Kaufmann delivering an envelope to the French Consulate and departing without it. In response, Kaufmann argued that he never had a group of Germans request him at the restaurant and that he had taken money to the French Consul's wife, whom he had met socially, for the Consul to take to his (Kaufmann's) mother in France. Even though there was no documentary evidence linking Kaufmann to any subversive activities, he was still interned and would remain in custody for years.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Kaul's appeal was handled by the Swiss Legation in a typically bureaucratic fashion. Similarly, most of the internees' appeals either became mired in a game of, as Harvey Strum termed it, "passing the buck" or were simply ignored. Fred Kappel experienced the same kind of apathy. Upon arriving in the United States, he too was appointed spokesman for his group of nineteen Jewish men. Kappel's rage, however, became much more apparent, and he often

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

expressed it in his appeals for release. In a letter to a lawyer in New York, Kappel cursed the young United States Army captain in Panama who had placed him under arrest by exclaiming that "[he was a] playball in the [hands of] the Panamanian authorities and seems to have believed...even the absurdest denunciation from any damned fool." The enraged internee continued arguing, "that all the articles of the constitution were violated, we had no hearing...[and], shortly said, everybody had another excuse, why they held us, only nobody knew and knows in fact, why."<sup>20</sup> Kappel was not the only person concerned that his and the other internees civil rights had been violated. On May 8, the Army Adjutant General's office alerted the commander of the base where Kappel and his charges were interned that "There is no record in this office of any of [the internees] having been accorded a hearing".<sup>21</sup>

Confounding Kappel's anger was the internment of his son Werner and one of his employees George Karliner. Apparently, the younger Kappel and his friend Karliner had

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<sup>20</sup> Fred L. Kappel to Alfonse M. Spiegel, 14 April 1942, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>21</sup> Howard F. Bresee to Colonel Bryan, 8 May 1942, RG 407, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository.

been running a secret gambling operation when the mass arrests of German nationals took place in Panama. In fact, the Panamanian authorities arrested Karliner while he was playing cards and, at the time, he was unable to produce his immigration documentation.<sup>22</sup>

The rage and contempt expressed by Kappel were the obvious result of the sense of mistrust he and the other internees felt toward the INS and the United States Army. However, their emotional pleas did not go entirely unnoticed. Relief organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the National Refugee Service (NRS) assisted the internees with everyday needs and even helped them file their release appeals.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Report on George Karliner, 17 January 1946, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>23</sup> Fritz Kaul to Legation of Switzerland, 1 November 1942, Special War Problems Division, Name Files of Internees, RG 59, National Archives II; Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 28, 33-34, 37-38. In fact, the NRS along with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) were major factors in obtaining the release of the internees. Both the NRS and the AJJDC pleaded continually with United States government authorities for the release of the internees. The YMCA ensured that the internees basic material needs were met on a daily basis. In the above cited letter, Kaul asked the Swiss Legation to inform a Mr. Fisher of the YMCA who had "promised him personally and verbally" to support the

But during the summer of 1942, the exchange program organized by Sumner Welles began in earnest and the internees appeals would have to wait. The Swedish ships *Drottningholm* and *Gripsholm* were chartered to transport the Axis officials and non-officials from ports in Latin America and the United States to ports in Europe and the Far East. By June 1942, the SS. *Drottningholm* had made two such voyages and on July 15 of that same year, left port with 800 non-official Axis nationals en route to Göteborg, Sweden.

Although the INS had asked the internees whether or not they wanted to return to their homelands, the agency never gave any guarantees that those internees who wished to remain could do so until the end of the war. While interned at the Stringtown, Oklahoma camp and prior to his transfer to Camp Kenedy, Fred Kappel wrote the Swiss Legation about his non-Aryan descent, and his desire not to

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refugees material needs. The influence of both the NRS and the AJJDC are discussed in greater detail on pages 74-75 of this thesis. However, for a more in-depth look at the role these organizations played in the effort to free the internees one should examine the above citation of Strum's *Jewish Internees in the American South*.

be exchanged.<sup>24</sup> But letters like Kappel's must have seemed an exercise in futility similar to the internees' appeals for release: their concerns had frequently been overlooked by both the State Department and the Swiss Legation. Consequently, they remained in a state of anxiety. Evidence of these fears can be found among the hundreds of letters, like those written by Fritz Kaul and Fred Kappel, sent to the State Department and Swiss Legation by internees who were panicked by the prospect of returning to Germany.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fred Kappel to Legation of Switzerland, 26 June 1942, Special War Problems Division, Name Files of Internees, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>25</sup> The numerous internees' release appeals can be found among the name files of enemy aliens in the Special War Problems Division of the State Department records located at the National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. Both Fred Kappel and Gerhard Schlesinger's stories had been described in summary form by Harvey Strum in his article, *Jewish Internees in the American South*. In order to better understand the process Strum used to make his conclusions, it was necessary to examine more closely Schlesinger and Kappel's information. However, since Kappel was an internee group spokesman, his file contained much more information than the other internees, not to mention the curious circumstances of his son and George Karliner. This made them ideal subjects for study. The case of Fritz Kaul was nearly identical to Kappel's. As a group spokesman Kaul left a longer "paper trail" to follow. The name files of other internees contain standard form letters, which were actually appeals for release. Although important in

After the *Drottningholm* had completed its three exchange voyages in the summer of 1942, the State Department did not plan any more such trips. This would have been welcome news to the German-Jewish internees had they been told; however, they heard nothing about the decision.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, life in the camps continued and had become considerably more tolerable for the internees.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, news of their plight had reached some influential people who were determined to find a way to win the internees' freedom. The National Refugee Service

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understanding the quantity of internees, the form letters failed to reveal anymore than the desire of internees to either remain in the United States or to be repatriated to Germany.

<sup>26</sup> List of German Nationals Deported By The Other American Republics Who Were Deported via the United States. Special War Problems Division, Subject Files, 4 June 1946, RG 59, Archives II.

<sup>27</sup> At the Kenedy and Stringtown camps, a remuneration program was started for some of the internees who wished to work. Fritz Kaul to Legation of Switzerland, 1 November 1942, Special War Problems Division, Name Files of Internees, RG 59, National Archives II.

(NRS), under the direction of Joseph Chamberlain, had finally become aware of the internees' situation.<sup>28</sup>

After arriving in the United States in April and suffering some indignities at the hands of pro-Nazi internees, Fred Kappel had appealed to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) for help. The AJJDC succeeded in separating Kappel's group from the pro-Nazi group and in contacting the NRS. And soon thereafter, efforts of other aid organizations started to attract some attention. On behalf of the internees, Joseph Chamberlain targeted Attorney General Francis Biddle and Edward Ennis Director of the Justice Department's Alien Enemy Control Unit to free the Jewish internees, sending letters and requesting meetings. However, both leaders claimed that they did not have the authority to release them. He then turned to Secretary of War Stimson, who after meeting with Chamberlain, declined to make a determination and handed the issue over to the head of the Aliens Division of the Office of the Provost Marshal, Colonel B. Bryan. Bryan

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<sup>28</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 32-33. Months earlier, several of the internees' wives had reached the leader in the Jewish Welfare Board and the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Rabbi Nathan Witkin who became one of their most ardent advocates.

concluded that the Panamanian government was the only entity that could decide the internees' fate and proposed that the NRS communicate with the commanding officer of the CDC in Quarry Heights.<sup>29</sup> Although the INS had demurred on the question of whether to release the internees, it gave the married male internees a welcome Rosh Hoshana gift. Just before the holiday celebrating the Jewish New Year, nearly all of the married male internees were allowed to rejoin and live with their families at Seagoville.<sup>30</sup> The single men, however, remained at one of the other enemy alien camps maintained by the INS.

By December 1942, concern over what to do with the internees continued to grow in the Army administration, since it had accumulated 267 more Axis nationals from Costa Rica, Guatemala, and San Salvador for transfer to the United States. Like those in Panama, officials in all three of the tiny central American republics were unwilling to hold the Axis nationals for long periods because of influence wielded by many of the detainees and their families. On December 6, the CDC informed General Marshall in an urgent overture:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 33-34.



It is understood that these countries have apprehended and arrested these enemy aliens on being urged by the United States to do so...it is highly desirable to get these enemy aliens out of these countries as they will not continue to hold them.<sup>31</sup>

The United States Military Attaché in Costa Rica was especially concerned that he would be placed in an "embarrassing" position with the Costa Rican Minister of Security should the enemy aliens detained there not be deported "now".<sup>32</sup> Less than a week later, Army Chief of Staff Marshall responded, ordering that arrangements be made to remove the enemy aliens from Costa Rica to the United States for future exchange "with interned American civilian nationals."<sup>33</sup>

Central America was not the only region in Latin America from which the United States was interning Axis nationals. Peru had been rounding up Axis nationals for

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<sup>31</sup> Brigadier General H.C. Ingles to Marshall, 6 December 1942, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>32</sup> Military Attaché in Costa Rica to Field Office Military Intelligence Service (hereafter cited as FOAMS), 5 December 1942, RG 338, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>33</sup> Marshall to CDC, 12 December 1942, RG 338, National Archives Branch Depository.

months, and in December, had arrested 1,000 Japanese and 250 Germans. The Peruvians previously had not exhibited much zeal for the internment program; however, their attitude changed markedly after United States officials promised to lease land for United States military bases there and purchase Peruvian raw materials. United States Ambassador to Peru R. Henry Norweb was pleased with this change in the Peruvians' attitude and called it "distinctly favorable for the removal of such Germans and Japanese as may be designated as dangerous."<sup>34</sup>

However, the camps back in the United States could not handle such large groups of internees and once again United States officials were faced with the possibility of another diplomatic embarrassment. But once Chief of Staff Marshall was informed, accommodations and transportation became available immediately.<sup>35</sup> By February 17, CDC Commanding General Brett had informed the United States military attaché in Lima that no more than 450 enemy aliens would be deported from the United States military outpost at Callao,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.; Norweb to Ingles, 23 December 1942, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository; Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Marshall to CDC, 8 January 1943, RG 338, National Archives Branch Depository.

Peru.<sup>36</sup> The United States transport ship *Frederick Johnson* was chartered to pick up its human cargo on February 22, but complications delayed the ship's departure for several days. The Peruvian authorities had become confused after receiving contradictory and often conflicting instructions from the United States embassy in Lima, bringing the whole operation to an immediate halt pending an investigation by a local "special agent".<sup>37</sup> Possibly fearing that misinformation had been spread by an Axis agent, the CDC had made a prudent move in delaying the transport ship's departure. In this instance, however, there was no counterespionage involved. A series of minor miscommunications had escalated into a huge misunderstanding. Nevertheless, the confusion was only temporary, and the *Frederick Johnson* set sail on February

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<sup>36</sup> United States Military Attaché Lima, Peru to Brett, 17 February 1943, RG 338, National Archives Branch Depository. The number of enemy aliens scheduled to be deported out of Callao fluctuated through January and February, because American officials in Peru became worried that the Peruvians were arresting Germans and Japanese without proper cause.

<sup>37</sup> United States Military Attaché Lima, Peru to Brett, 20 February 1943, RG 338, National Archives Branch Depository; War Department to CDC, 21 February 1943, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository.

24, after the passenger list had been pared down to 250 enemy aliens.<sup>38</sup>

While the *Frederick Johnson* sailed for the United States, the authorities back in Washington finally started to take a closer look at the internment program they had initiated just fourteen months earlier. Having already arrested and interned thousands of enemy aliens, a more exact policy was needed in order to ensure that the selection of enemy aliens was more focused – a reaction no doubt to the chaos experienced in Peru. In an attempt to resolve enemy alien selection problems, the War Department prepared a policy statement establishing guidelines for selection. The War Department concluded in its letter that:

- 1) All internees will be selected or approved by authorized representatives of the United States Government designated by the Department of Justice and will be shipped to the United States for internment.
- 2) Only ring leaders, known subversives and those of most suspicious character will be considered.
- 3) No family groups will be interned.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Brigadier General Douglas L. Weart to Marshall, 25 February, RG 338, 014.311, National Archives Branch Depository.

<sup>39</sup> Stimson to Welles (unsigned), 24 February 1943, RG 59, 014.311, George C. Marshall Library.

However, it is unclear if the policy was enacted since the correspondence was never signed by Secretary Stimson. Furthermore, enactment of the policy would have little effect on those already interned because nowhere in the letter was the release of those already in custody mentioned. Nevertheless, the mass arrests policy would have to change, especially with the Peruvian government arresting uncontrollably large numbers of German and Japanese enemy aliens at the behest of the United States. Apparently, American officials discovered that the Peruvians were careless in their selection of enemy aliens, possibly arresting persons who had little or no connection to subversive activities. The Peruvian authorities cooperated in order to ensure their lend-lease agreements with the United States would remain intact; thus, they needed to supply American officials with a steady stream of internees in order to keep up appearances. As long as it looked as though there were a never ending supply of Axis agents in Peru, the United States would continue to offer up goods and services to the Peruvians.

As March came to an end, official custody of internees was passed from the War Department to the Department of Justice. In the second week of February 1943, just days

prior to the appearance of the War Department's policy letter, hearings were granted for some of the internees from Panama. They took place at the Algiers (Louisiana) Detention Center where many of the internees had been transferred from the camps in Texas.<sup>40</sup> Each internee's record was investigated thoroughly by Justice Department officials who had gone all the way to Panama to see if the aliens were actually who and what they claimed to be. In addition to a thorough background check, the internees signed affidavits declaring their Jewishness, loyalty to democratic principles, opposition to Nazism, and crime-free past.<sup>41</sup>

Fred Kappel was one of the internees granted a hearing in February, the outcome of which was a tremendous relief.<sup>42</sup> In August, Kappel and fifty-three others, including Kappel's son Werner, were released as internees-at-large. Under their new status the internees could live as parolees; they were free in a sense but had to find

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<sup>40</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>42</sup> Department of Justice Memo, 15 September 1943, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.

sponsors near their residences in order to provide the NRS and INS with updates on their behavior and whereabouts.<sup>43</sup>

Fred and Werner Kappel were among nine fortunate internees who immediately found sponsorship in St. Louis, Missouri. Employees of the Biderman Furniture Company decided to give the internees the chance to live a superficially normal life.<sup>44</sup> After a brief stay in Atlanta and Kansas City, Fred and Werner arrived in St. Louis. Although it is possible that the Kappels worked for the Biderman company, there means of support is not clear. However, Werner quickly found an unlikely employer considering his previous status. On December 30, 1943, he was inducted into the United States Army as a Private and sent to the 1772nd Reception Center, Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. The younger Kappel's friend, George Karliner also answered the muster. Upon release as an internee-at-large, Karliner enlisted in the United States Navy as an ensign and served honorably.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Military History of Werner Kappel, 18 December 1945, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>45</sup> Report on George Karliner, 17 January 1946, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.

But even earlier to enlist was internee at large Max Kaufmann. After moving to Minnesota for a short period, Kaufmann joined the United States Army at Fort Snelling and in less than a year had been promoted to Private First Class. He continued to serve in the United States in non-combat roles and was promoted to Corporal before receiving an honorable discharge in September 1945.<sup>46</sup>

But, of the three internees who enlisted, Werner Kappel's record deserves special notice: he was among the soldiers who returned with General Douglas MacArthur to the Philippines. On Luzon, during a bloody fight to free American prisoners of war from Japanese forces, Kappel took a serious wound. Fortunately, he survived and for his courage was awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge and the Purple Heart. While mending in an Army hospital in El Paso, Texas, he continued to petition for United States citizenship - a mission he had started upon enlisting in the Army. But even after his heroic contributions, Kappel again had to face investigations into his past.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Biographical Information on Max Kaufmann, 5 March 1946, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.

<sup>47</sup> Military History of Werner Kappel, 18 December 1945, Name Files of Internees, Special War Problems Division, RG 59, National Archives II.



The INS was typically indifferent, ignoring Kappel's military record and unwarranted internment. This brought a strong response in the form of letters from friends of the Kappels. One of the most compelling was sent by George A. Lubeley who had sponsored the Kappels in St. Louis. "It seems almost inconceivable," Lubeley argued, "that this boy, who has fought and bled for this country should be denied citizenship."<sup>48</sup> Letters such as Mr. Lubeley's and help from the Military Personnel Division of the War Department finally broke the bureaucratic cycle. On June 30, 1943, while still in the hospital in El Paso recovering from the wounds he received in the Philippines, Private Kappel was given the citizenship he so obviously deserved.

However, most of the other internees allowed to remain in the United States had yet to receive citizenship. And taking into account the difficulties Werner Kappel faced, they could not have expected admittance in a timely and straightforward fashion. Furthermore, many of the internees-at-large still awaiting decisions from the INS were too old or, for various reasons, simply unable to serve in the United States military - an unquestionable mark of patriotic distinction which must have made Werner

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Kappel's application more attractive to the authorities. But there was hope for them in the friends they had made in the relief organization community. The AJJDC and the NRS would clear the morass of paperwork and claim freedom for the internees.

## CHAPTER IV: Conclusion

Although the war in Europe would end in May 1945 and the war in the Pacific in August that same year, the internees still in custody continued to feel uneasy about their status since no attempt had been made by the United States government to stabilize their political situation.

Most of the internees sought one of two solutions – to return to the countries in which they were arrested or apply for United States citizenship. However, much to their astonishment, these options were absent from the list of choices offered by the State Department.<sup>1</sup> The commonly accepted outcome State Department officials envisaged rested on the premise that the internees would be shipped back to Germany in the same manner as the many pro-Axis internees who had been repatriated during the war.<sup>2</sup> But with Germany's infrastructure and economy in ruins, it was inconceivable to the War Department that successful repatriation was possible. Further opposition

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<sup>1</sup> Although the State Department wanted to repatriate the internees, there was some speculation from Attorney General Biddle about returning the internees to Latin America. Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 40-41.

to the plan came from officials in the Justice Department who understood that they were not empowered to force the aliens out of the country.<sup>3</sup> To circumvent this, President Truman issued Proclamation 2662 declaring

All alien enemies now within the continental limits of the United States (1) who were sent here from other American republics and (2) who are within the territory of the United States without admission under the immigration laws are...subject upon the orders of the Secretary of State to removal to destinations outside the limits of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>4</sup>

But this hard-line policy was short lived as pressure was brought to bear upon Albert Clattenburg, Jr., Assistant Chief of the Special War Problems Division of the State Department who, by the way, had been an ardent advocate of the repatriation scheme. Representatives from major human rights organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the NRS, stood firmly against the wishes of Clattenburg and the State Department. These groups argued for special hearings for the internees to determine who could or could not remain in the United States. Finally, overwhelmed by the stiff political pressure from the two

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gardiner, *Pawns in a Triangle of Hate*, 115.

relief organizations, the State Department allowed hearings to proceed case-by-case. Although this was welcome news, it also made it clear that the internees would be barred from wholesale admittance to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

When sweeping changes in the internees' status did materialize, they were only incremental. Their parole supervision was lifted at the end of November 1945, and by March 1946, they were no longer internees-at-large. The final outcome came in the summer of 1953 when the Refugee Relief Act was passed, allowing any alien brought to the United States from Latin America before July 1, 1953, to petition to change their political status to that of immigrant.<sup>6</sup>

Between July 15, 1942 and January 7, 1945, over three thousand German nationals from Latin America were repatriated via the United States.<sup>7</sup> And with a combined

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<sup>5</sup> Strum, *Jewish Internees in the American South*, 40-41. Although the internees in the United States were not released as a group, there were internees held in Canada who were freed in this manner.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> List of German Nationals Deported By The Other American Republics Who Were Deported via the United States. Special War Problems Division, Subject Files, 4 June 1946, RG 59, Archives II.

total of 1178, Colombia and Peru lost the highest number of German nationals, no doubt the result of the greater economic intrusion by the Nazis in Colombia, and the strong American presence in Peru. Other countries with high deportation rates were Ecuador at 338, Guatemala at 380, Mexico at 251, Costa Rica at 234, Bolivia at 161 and Panama at 129.<sup>8</sup> But these numbers tell only part of the story. It should be assumed that not every German national passed through the United States on their way back to Europe. Some may have been transported directly from Latin America across the Atlantic to Portugal or made their way back to Europe in another manner. For these unofficial repatriations, there are no records.

Clearly, however, the United States initiated and managed the program not because of anti-Semitism, as implied by *Dateline NBC*, but because it saw what appeared to be a genuine threat to national security. The Roosevelt Administration and the State Department understood that efforts to stop Axis intrusion in Latin America were necessary. Had the Nazi government maintained and carefully managed a professional nest of agents in the Western Hemisphere, who knows what mischief they could have

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

created. The opportunities to uncover Allied secrets were there. And in many instances, Nazi agents discovered valuable information on Allied shipping routes.

However, most of the Axis agents were ineffectual – a fact the Roosevelt Administration failed to discover early on. Similarly, the State Department failed to review its internee selection policies when the United States Ambassador was told by Panamanian officials that bureaucrats in the Panamanian government were plotting to “despoil” Jewish merchants of their businesses. These factors, combined with an overzealous corps of counterespionage agents and bureaucrats, created an environment of reckless disregard for the careful selection of possible Axis agents. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism could have been a factor when internees’ appeals went unanswered for months or even years into their confinement. As was mentioned previously, Breckinridge Long clearly thought that Jews would not make ideal citizens.

General Marshall, on the other hand, displayed no anti-Semitism whatsoever and could not have conceived of any anti-Semitic use of the internment and repatriation program. The program was initiated by Adolf Berle and Sumner Welles. With their far-reaching authority and close

ties to the White House, they worked with the FBI, under the auspices of the "Good Neighbor", to secure the hemisphere by helping the Latin American governments defend themselves from Axis subversion. For the internees who originally had come to the United States seeking refuge from the war in Europe, their road to citizenship was extraordinarily long and extremely difficult one.



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\_\_\_\_\_. National Archives Branch Depository, Suitland, Md. Records of the Caribbean Defense Command. RG 338. The disorganization of this now defunct archive increased the projected research time for this thesis considerably. Daily correspondence between the headquarters of the CDC and the War Department clarified the logistics of the internment-repatriation program and helped in understanding General Marshall's role in it.

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## Vita

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