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THE INTERNMENT OF GERMAN AND ITALIAN ALIENS COMPARED WITH THE INTERNMENT  
OF JAPANESE ALIENS IN THE UNITED STATES DURING WORLD WAR II:  
A BRIEF HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

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## PREFACE

The internment in the United States during World War II of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans, aliens and native-born citizens alike, has been the subject of numerous articles and books. Less well known is the fact that a significantly smaller number of German and Italian aliens, and some citizens, were also interned, despite the fact that they comprised a greater population than the Japanese Americans, and were present in larger numbers in equally sensitive and strategic areas of the United States.

Recently, a Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was established (P.L. 96-317, July 31, 1980) "to gather facts to determine whether any wrong was committed against those American citizens and permanent resident aliens affected by Executive Order No. 9066" which authorized the War Department in 1942 to exclude persons from designated military areas.

The reasons for this disparity in treatment form the basis for the attached report.

aliens had been taken into custody, brought before an Alien Enemy Hearing Board and then released, paroled, or interned, for the duration of the war. Those interned, if not considered a threat, were allowed later to apply for parole. 3/

Early Japanese military and naval successes, and a belief that the American mainland would be attacked, convinced many Americans, especially those living on the West Coast, that this somewhat selective screening process was not satisfactory. It was not long before calls were heard for an evacuation of all aliens, but especially the Japanese, from designated military areas. In January 1942, for example, Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt, commander of the Western Defense Command, stated that the only solution was "evacuation of all enemy aliens from the West Coast and resettlement or internment under positive control, military or otherwise." 4/

Certain steps had already been taken (via Presidential proclamations in December 1941 and January 1942) to regulate the conduct and movement of enemy aliens. However, none of these measures was as severe as some desired. In January and February of 1942, additional measures were announced by the

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3/ Hoover, J. Edgar. Alien Enemy Control. Iowa Law Review, v. 29, March 1944. p. 402-403. Paroled meant that the individual was released but was under the observation of a "sponsor" selected by the Hearing Board.

4/ Conn, Stetson, et al. Guarding the United States and Its Outposts. The Western Hemisphere. United States in World War II. Prepared for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1964. p. 123.

United States Attorney General by which aliens were excluded from various areas on the West Coast. 5/

Continued agitation against aliens on the West Coast resulted in the issuance of Executive Order No. 9066 on February 19, 1942. This order gave the Secretary of War, or his military commanders, the authority "to exclude American citizens as well as alien enemies, from such areas as the Secretary should designate." 6/ Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt was designated as the military commander to carry out the provisions of the executive order in the Western Defense Command. Successive proclamations by DeWitt restricted the movement of aliens. Finally, on March 24, 1942, DeWitt issued the first formal evacuation order in Civilian Exclusion Order No. 1 by which all Japanese, aliens and nonaliens, were excluded from military areas in the State of Washington. Later orders extended exclusion to California and Oregon. 7/

Six days later, General DeWitt announced that certain classes of aliens might be exempted from the exclusion orders. Eligible for exemption were the following:

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5/ U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, National Defense Migration; Findings and Recommendations on Evacuation of Enemy Aliens and Others From Prohibited Military Zones. Fourth Interim Report pursuant to H. Res. 113. House Report no. 2124, 77th Cong., 2d sess., May 1942. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print Off., 1942. p. 160-162. Hereafter cited as Tolan Committee, Findings and Recommendations.

6/ Ibid., p. 163. It should be noted that authority to deal with aliens was now removed from the Justice Department. P.L. 77-503 (March 21, 1942) enforced exclusion from military areas.

7/ Tolan Committee; Findings and Recommendations, p. 164-165.

1. German and Italian aliens 70 or more years of age.
2. German and Italian aliens, parents, wives, husbands, children of (or other person residing in a household whose support is dependent upon) any officer, enlisted man, or commissioned nurse on active duty in the Army of the United States (or any component thereof), United States Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard.
3. German or Italian aliens, parents, wives, husbands, children of (or other person residing in a household whose support is wholly dependent upon) any officer, enlisted man, or commissioned nurse who on or since December 7, 1941, has died in line of duty with the armed forces of the United States indicated in the preceding paragraph.
4. German and Italian aliens awaiting naturalization who had filed a petition for naturalization and who had paid the filing fee therefor on or before December 7, 1941.
5. Patients in hospitals, or confined elsewhere, and too ill or incapacitated to be removed therefrom without danger to life.
6. Inmates of orphanages and the totally deaf, dumb, or blind.

However, Japanese were declared ineligible for all except categories 5 and 6. Thus, for all practical purposes, evacuation from the West Coast was limited to the Japanese. 8/

There was some opposition to the evacuation of the Japanese, but this was stilled by the Japanese victories in the Pacific in early 1942. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, for example, acquiesced because he had come to the conclusion that the "racial characteristics" of the Japanese were "such that we cannot understand or trust even the citizen Japanese." 9/ Attorney General Francis Biddle's efforts to prevent evacuation were derided on the West Coast as "Biddling along," and he yielded; but he did resist successfully

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8/ Tolan Committee; Findings and Recommendations, p. 165.

9/ Burns, James MacGregor. Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970. p. 215.

similar measures on the East Coast and was instrumental in setting up one or more hearing boards in each judicial district. 10/

Opposition to the evacuation of German and Italian aliens met with more success because the presence of large numbers of these people was not perceived as a threat to national security, nor did they provoke the sort of hysteria and panic engendered on the West Coast by the Japanese population. Moreover, the problems posed in moving such large numbers deterred any major effort for evacuation. Nevertheless, General DeWitt expressed a determination to proceed against the German and Italian aliens as soon as the evacuation of the Japanese was completed. Several of his staff members opposed such plans and they were aided by similar resistance in the War Department.

In February 1942, Secretary of War Stimson directed General DeWitt to "not disturb, for the time being at least, Italian aliens and persons of Italian lineage" unless they constituted a definite danger. In support of this order, Stimson stated that the Italians were "potentially less dangerous, as a whole, than those of other enemy nationalities" and that because "of the size of the Italian population and the number of troops and facilities which would have to be employed to deal with them, their inclusion in the general plan would greatly overtax our strength." 11/

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10/ Galkins, C. Wartime Attorney General. Survey Graphic, v. 31, October 1942. p. 423.

11/ tenBroek, Jacobus, et al. Prejudice, War and the Constitution: Census and Consequences of the Evacuation of the Japanese Americans in World War II. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975. p. 302. A similar conclusion was reached by a congressional committee investigating evacuation. In March 1942, the committee called mass evacuation of German and Italian aliens an "unmanageable proposal," and internment for the duration of the war was considered "unthinkable." U.S. Congress. House. Select Committee Investigating  
(continued)

By March 1942, the War Department had decided that any evacuation of German and Italian aliens would "produce repercussions throughout the nation," and Attorney General Biddle was contending that any evacuation of these groups would "have the gravest consequences to the nation's economic structure and war morale since it would be bound to produce confusion and disaffection among persons of those nationalities." 12/

Consequently, Lt. General Hugh A. Drum, commanding general of the Eastern Defense Command, was informed that there was to be no evacuation within his command. General Drum's statement on April 27, 1942, regarding the establishment of military zones and approved conduct therein contained the announcement that "Mass evacuation is not contemplated. Instead thereof, such evacuations as may be considered necessary will be by selective processes applicable to enemy aliens, or to other persons deemed dangerous to remain at large within the area or within its zones." 13/

However, General DeWitt still recommended mass evacuation of German and Italian aliens on the grounds of military necessity. If his recommendations

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(continued) National Defense Migration. National Defense Migration; Preliminary Report and Recommendations on Problems of Evacuation of Citizens and Aliens from Military Areas. House Report No. 1911, 77th Cong., 2d sess., March 19, 1942. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1942. p. 25. See Ibid., p. 21-16 for reasoning of committee regarding a "flexible policy" for German and Italian aliens. The same committee reported that there were, according to the 1940 census, 126,947 Japanese, foreign-born and citizen, in the United States. Most of the Japanese were concentrated on the West Coast with 88.5 percent residing in the States of California, Oregon, and Washington. In contrast, German aliens amounted to 314,105, and Italian aliens, 690,551. When the number of German and Italian foreign-born naturalized citizens is included, the figure approximates four million. See Ibid., 91-92, 230.

12/ Conn, Stetson, Guarding the United States, p. 145.

13/ Tolan Committee; Findings and Recommendations, p. 36.

were not to be adopted, DeWitt requested "definite instructions to the contrary that would exempt him from all responsibility for the consequences." 14/

In the meantime, the House Select Committee investigating the evacuation of enemy aliens issued its fourth report in which various recommendations were made for the treatment of aliens. The committee also reiterated a statement made in a previous report regarding the evacuation of German and Italian aliens:

If the Japanese evacuation creates serious questions, it is because an entire group out of our population is being bodily removed, family by family. This is in the nature of an exodus of a people. The numbers involved are large, but they are by no means as large, for the whole country, as those who will be involved if we generalize the current treatment of the Japanese to apply to all Axis aliens and their immediate families. Indeed, this committee is prepared to say that any such proposal is out of the question if we intend to win this war. 15/

On May 15, 1942, General DeWitt was informed that there was to be no "collective evacuation of German and Italian aliens from the West coast or from anywhere else in the United States." The War Department would, however, authorize individual exclusion orders "against both aliens and citizens under the authority of Executive Order 9066." 16/ In a letter to DeWitt from Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy on May 20, McCloy told DeWitt that in approving evacuation under Executive Order 9066, "both the President and

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14/ Conn, Stetson, Guarding the United States, p. 146. On May 5, 1942, President Roosevelt wrote to Secretary of War Stimson that on the subject of evacuation of German and Italian aliens, he was "inclined to think this may have a bad effect on morale." See Polenberg, Richard. War and Society: The United States 1941-1945. New York, J.B. Lippincott Co., 1972. p. 61.

15/ Tolson Committee; Findings and Recommendations, p. 31.

16/ Conn, Stetson, Guarding the United States, p. 146.

the Secretary of War did so with the expectation that the exclusions would not reach such numbers . . . . We want, if at all possible, to avoid the necessity of establishing additional relocation settlements." 17/

Thus there was no mass evacuation of German and Italian aliens in the United States during World War II, despite the fact that the Italians were more numerous than the Japanese on the West Coast and the Germans more so on the East Coast. For example, New York State alone contained more German aliens than the number of Japanese, both aliens and citizens, on the whole Pacific Coast. 18/ Part of the reason for this lack of action was the sizeable logistical problem it would have imposed at a critical period of the war. More important was the inability of the American people in World War II (in contrast to World War I) to fear "that people of German or Italian descent, unlike the Japanese-Americans, owed a divided allegiance." 19/ Indeed, as early as November 1942, Attorney General Biddle announced that Italian aliens were no longer considered "aliens of enemy nationality." 20/ As one

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17/ Weglyn, Michi. *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps*. New York, William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976. p. 291. In June 1942, President Roosevelt assured Herbert Lehman, then Governor of New York, "that he was 'keenly aware of the anxiety that German and Italian aliens living in the United States must feel as the result of the Japanese evacuation of the West Coast.' Would Lehman assure them 'that no collective evacuation of German or Italian aliens is contemplated at this time?'" See Burns, Roosevelt: *The Soldier of Freedom*, p. 268. It was the opinion of Attorney General Biddle in 1943 that Executive Order 9066 "was never intended to apply to Italians and Germans." See Michi, *Years of Infamy*, p. 73.

18/ Grodzins, Morton. *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1949. p. 173.

19/ Polenberg, *War and Society*, p. 41.

20/ *Ibid.*, p. 42. Earlier in the year, Roosevelt rejected the idea that the Italians in the United States constituted a threat and dismissed them as "a lot of opera singers." See Burns, Roosevelt: *The Soldier of Freedom*, p. 214.

historian of wartime America concluded, "Since Germans and Italians were numerous, politically influential, well assimilated and widely dispersed, Roosevelt and Biddle believed that it would be unwise to take action against them." 21/

Nevertheless, selective individual exclusions were carried out, based on information from the FBI and the results of individual hearings by a board of army officers. Anyone judged "potentially dangerous" was ordered to leave the area. Grounds for exclusion included pre-Pearl-Harbor ties with German or Italian organizations and expressions of "admiration, sympathy, or loyalty to Hitler, Mussolini, the Nazi Party, Fascism, or the Fatherland." 22/ For example, in the Western Defense Command, from August 1942 to July 1943, 174 individuals, including native-born citizens and enemy aliens, were given exclusion orders. Many of those excluded were German-born or Italian-born American citizens. Similar action was taken in the same period by the Eastern and Southern Defense Commands. In these instances, 59 and 21 persons, respectively, were excluded from the coastal area. 23/

Detention of enemy aliens was originally under the control of the Army. However, in early 1943, operation of the camps was transferred to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. By the end of the year, there were

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21/ Polenberg, War and Society, p. 61.

22/ Barnhart, Edward N. The Individual Exclusion of Japanese-Americans in World War II. Pacific Historical Review, v. 29, May 1960. p. 113.

23/ Ibid., p. 113-114. In at least one case in 1943, that of a German-born American citizen in Philadelphia who had close ties with two German organizations, an order to leave the area was refused. This position was ultimately upheld later in the year by a Federal judge who ruled that the "Army lacked the right to exclude persons arbitrarily from coastal defense areas under present circumstances." New York Times, May 8, 1943, p. L 17, and August 21, 1943, p. 13.

sixteen internment camps scattered throughout the United States, most of them located in Texas, New Mexico, California, Montana, and North Dakota. One camp, Crystal City, Texas, was used solely for the internment of families. 24/

By July 1942, some 7,469 aliens had been taken into custody. However, many were released or paroled after investigation so that only 1,692 were actually interned. 25/ The peak number of inhabitants of the camps appears to have been reached at the beginning of 1944 when 9,341 aliens were being held. By the end of the year, only 6,238 remained in custody. 26/ Exact numbers are difficult to ascertain since in many cases they did not include German and Italian seamen interned when their ships were caught in American waters after the declaration of war, several thousand enemy aliens from Latin American, and a similar number awaiting deportation.

Within a few years after the war, all internment camps were phased out. Some "detention" facilities were still maintained, however, for aliens awaiting disposition of various legal actions. The last internment camp, the family facility at Crystal City, Texas, closed on February 27, 1948. 27/

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24/ U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Annual Report. 1943. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1943. p. 14-45.

25/ Ibid., Annual Report. 1941, p. 26-27.

26/ Ibid., Annual Report. 1942, p. 21. For descriptions of various camps see Harrison, Earl G. Civilian Internment--American Way. Survey Graphic, v. 33, May 1944. p. 229-233, 270. Some members of the German American Bund were denaturalized and spent time in the camps. See Diamond, Sander A. The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924-1941. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974. p. 345-346; and Bell, Leland V. The Failure of Nazism in America: The German American Bund, 1936-1941. Political Science Quarterly, v. 85, December 1970. p. 585-599.

27/ U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Annual Report. 1948. p. 19-21. Several camps closed during the war. For example, the Kenedy Internment Camp, Kenedy, Texas, closed in September 1944, the Kooskia Internment Camp, Kooskia, Idaho, closed in May 1945, and the Seagoville Internment Camp, Seagoville, Texas, closed in June 1945. See Ibid., Annual Report. 1945. p. 27.

## APPENDIX A: EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 9066

## EXECUTIVE ORDER—No. 9066

## AUTHORIZING THE SECRETARY OF WAR TO PRESCRIBE MILITARY AREAS

WHEREAS the successful prosecution of the war requires every possible protection against espionage and against sabotage to national defense material, national defense premises, and national defense utilities as defined in Section 4, Act of April 20, 1918, 40 Stat. 533, as amended by the Act of November 30, 1940, 54 Stat. 1220, and the Act of August 21, 1941, 55 Stat. 653 (U. S. C., Title 50, Sec. 104):

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders who he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion. The Secretary of War is hereby authorized to provide for residents of any such area who are excluded therefrom, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary, in the judgment of the Secretary of War or the said Military Commander, and until other arrangements are made, to accomplish the purpose of this order. The designation of military areas in any region or locality shall supersede designations of prohibited and restricted areas by the Attorney General under the Proclamations of December 7 and 8, 1941, and shall supersede the responsibility and authority of the Attorney General under the said Proclamations in respect of such prohibited and restricted areas.

I hereby further authorize and direct the Secretary of War and the said Military Commanders to take such other steps as he or the appropriate Military Commander may deem advisable to enforce compliance with the restrictions applicable to each Military area hereinabove authorized to be designated, including the use of Federal troops and other Federal Agencies, with authority to accept assistance of state and local agencies.

I hereby further authorize and direct all Executive Departments, independent establishments and other Federal Agencies, to assist the Secretary of War or the said Military Commanders in carrying out this Executive Order, including the furnishing of medical aid, hospitalization, food, clothing, transportation, use of land, shelter, and other supplies, equipment, utilities, facilities, and services.

This order shall not be construed as modifying or limiting in any way the authority heretofore granted under Executive Order No. 8972, dated December 12, 1941, nor shall it be construed as limiting or modifying the duty and responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with respect to the investigation of alleged acts of sabotage or the duty and responsibility of the Attorney General and the Department of Justice under the Proclamations of December 7 and 8, 1941, prescribing regulations for the conduct and control of alien enemies, except as such duty and responsibility is superseded by the designation of military areas hereunder.

THE WHITE HOUSE,

February 19, 1942.

## APPENDIX B: PUBLIC LAW 503, MARCH 21, 1942

## AN ACT

To provide a penalty for violation of restrictions or orders with respect to persons entering, remaining in, leaving, or committing any act in military areas or zones.

March 21, 1942  
[H. R. 6723]  
[Public Law 503]

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That whoever shall enter, remain in, leave, or commit any act in any military area or military zone prescribed, under the authority of an Executive order of the President, by the Secretary of War, or by any military commander designated by the Secretary of War, contrary to the restrictions applicable to any such area or zone or contrary to the order of the Secretary of War or any such military commander, shall, if it appears that he knew or should have known of the existence and extent of the restrictions or order and that his act was in violation thereof, be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction shall be liable to a fine of not to exceed \$5,000 or to imprisonment for not more than one year, or both, for each offense.

Violation of military  
restrictions.

Penalty.

Approved, March 21, 1942.

## APPENDIX C: CIVILIAN EXCLUSION ORDER NO. ]

## CIVILIAN EXCLUSION ORDER NO. 1

HEADQUARTERS, WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY,  
*Presidio of San Francisco, California, March 24, 1942.*

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Public Proclamations Nos. 1 and 2, this headquarters, dated March 2, 1942, and March 16, 1942, respectively, it is hereby ordered that all persons of Japanese ancestry, including aliens and nonaliens, be excluded from that portion of Military Area No. 1 described as "Bainbridge Island," in the State of Washington, on or before 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., of the 30th day of March 1942.

2. Such exclusion will be accomplished in the following manner:

(a) Such persons may, with permission, on or prior to March 29, 1942, proceed to any approved place of their choosing beyond the limits of Military Area No. 1 and the prohibited zones established by said proclamations or hereafter similarly established, subject only to such regulations as to travel and change of residence as are now or may hereafter be prescribed by this headquarters and by the United States Attorney General. Persons affected hereby will not be permitted to take up residence or remain within the region designated as Military Area No. 1 or the prohibited zones heretofore or hereafter established. Persons affected hereby are required on leaving or entering Bainbridge Island to register and obtain a permit at the Civil Control Office to be established on said Island at or near the ferryboat landing.

(b) On March 30, 1942, all such persons who have not removed themselves from Bainbridge Island in accordance with Paragraph 1 hereof shall, in accordance with instructions of the Commanding General, Northwestern Sector, report to the Civil Control Office referred to above on Bainbridge Island for evacuation in such manner and to such place or places as shall then be prescribed.

(c) A responsible member of each family affected by this order and each individual living alone so affected will report to the Civil Control Office described above between 8 a. m. and 5 p. m. Wednesday, March 25, 1942.

3. Any person affected by this order who fails to comply with any of its provisions or who is found on Bainbridge Island after 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., of March 30, 1942, will be subject to the criminal penalties provided by Public Law No. 503, 77th Congress, approved March 21, 1942, entitled "An Act to Provide a Penalty for Violation of Restrictions or Orders with Respect to Persons Entering, Remaining in, Leaving, or Committing Any Act in Military Areas or Zone", and alien Japanese will be subject to immediate apprehension and internment.

J. L. DE WITT,  
 Lieutenant General, U. S. Army,  
 Commanding.