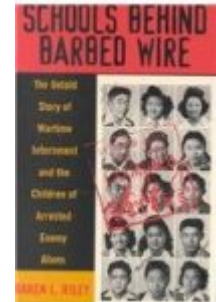


**Karen L. Riley.** *Schools behind Barbed Wire: The Untold Story of Wartime Internment and the Children of Arrested Enemy Aliens.* Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. xix + 175 pp. \$69.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7425-0171-3.



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## Schooling in American Internment Camps

Although much has been written about the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans and their immigrant parents, in camps run by the War Relocation Authority (WRA), less research has been done on the camps run by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In *Schools behind Barbed Wire*, Karen Riley helps to fill this gap by telling readers the story of the schooling that took place at the Crystal City Family Internment Camp, located in south-central Texas, near the town of Crystal City.

In December 1942 German internees arrived at the Crystal City site, which had once been a migratory labor camp run by the Farm Security Administration. They were brought there to enlarge and expand existing buildings, in preparation for Japanese internees who were scheduled to arrive in a few months. The plan was for the Germans to build additional facilities for the camp and then move on to live at a separate site, since the Geneva Convention called for separate internment camps for each nationality. The Germans, however, stopped their work to protest this arrange-

ment, demanding that they be allowed to live in the buildings they had built. After some negotiations, INS officials decided to house both groups at the Crystal City camp, albeit in segregated sections. Three months later, the first group of Japanese men arrived with their wives and children.

The camp population fluctuated as internees arrived and departed. By June 1945 the camp had received 4,751 internees, and the original 159 buildings had increased to 694. The guard towers and barbed-wire perimeter enclosed internee houses, a grocery store, a laundry, a meat market, a hospital, a library, and three schools. The author focuses on these schools, and the schooling of the youths of German and Japanese descent who attended them.

Three types of schools were established in the Crystal City camp: an American school run by the INS, a German school run by German internees, and a Japanese school run by Japanese internees. Students generally attended one of them, although some of those who attended the American school also attended the German or Japanese school for language and other lessons. Each of the

three schools faced difficulties acquiring necessary personnel, classroom space, and materials. They even lacked basic necessities, such as drinking water and lavatories.

Riley mined files at the National Archives and interviewed a good number of former internees and participants to gain personal stories of their experiences in the camp. These stories give the reader a sense of the routines of school life in each of the schools as well as the social life and interactions among internees. Informal encounters between Japanese American and German American youths, for example, forged friendships and positive intercultural exchanges.

Partly because of their experiences prior to being sent to Crystal City, Germans and Japanese internees reacted differently to what greeted them at the internment camp. German men who had been arrested had been their families' breadwinners, and when U.S. authorities suddenly took them away, their wives and children were left with no financial help. With nowhere else to turn to, many of these abandoned women went to the INS detention stations to demand government support. German resentment over this ill-treatment accompanied them to Crystal City, and most parents selected the German school instead of the American school for their children.

In contrast, many of the Japanese spouses and their children arrived from the WRA camps in which they had lived in poorly insulated barracks with little privacy, and had eaten in mess halls instead of at home. Such an environment had dampened their morale and worked against family cohesion. Thus Japanese immigrants and their American children who arrived from the WRA camps were pleasantly surprised to see that they were to live not in barracks but in houses with kitchens in which they could cook their own meals and live in more homelike conditions. Moreover, at the WRA camps, the youths had stood out as children of suspected enemy aliens who had been arrested. Once at the Crystal City

Family Internment Camp, these same youths could be more relaxed and less self-conscious about their families' status. Partly as a result of their generally positive reactions to the Crystal City camp environment, Japanese parents from the WRA camps tended to send their children to the American school. As a consequence of the contrasting sentiments of the Germans and Japanese, Japanese-American youths constituted ninety-five percent of all students at the American school.

In addition to family members who had been residents and citizens of the United States, Crystal City housed German and Japanese who had been forcibly removed from Latin American countries and then taken to U.S. internment camps. At the Crystal City camp, their children attended either the German school or the Japanese school.

The author provides a helpful distinction between the subjects of this book—those who were sent to what were called internment camps run by the INS—and other civilians put in what were called relocation centers run by the WRA. Those placed in the INS internment camps were Germans, Italians, and Japanese who were suspected of engaging in subversive activities; their spouses and children joined them in these camps. Those in the WRA camps were Japanese immigrants and their American-citizen children, neither of whom were suspected of anything in particular.

A few more paragraphs on the context of the internment camp program would have helped the general reader unfamiliar with these camps. For example, how many internment camps did the INS operate? Where were the other camps located? How was the Crystal City camp unique and how was it similar to the other INS camps? Without getting into great detail about the other INS-operated camps, some discussion would have provided a useful framework in which to place the Crystal City camp. In addition, an endnote pointing to useful sources would have aided readers wanting to learn more. For example, one good general introduction to all of the incarceration

sites, including the INS internment camps, is *Confinement and Ethnicity* (1999).[1]

Similarly, it would have helped the uninformed reader to understand the author's use of the term "relocation center," if the narrative had provided the larger context of U.S. incarceration history. For example, it would have been beneficial to include a brief explanation of the forced removal of American citizens and their immigrant parents--all of Japanese ancestry--to what government officials first called concentration camps, but later designated euphemistically as relocation centers. Ten of these were scattered in isolated areas of the country. Once again, an endnote suggesting key sources would have been helpful.

All in all, readers will find that Riley has unearthed rich sources, and brought them together in a narrative that helps us better understand schooling in American wartime internment camps.

Note:

[1]. Jeffery F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites* (National Park Service, 1999).

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