

**Marilyn Grace Miller.** *Port of No Return: Enemy Alien Internment in World War II New Orleans.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021. 296 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8071-7527-9.



**John E. Schmitz.** *Enemies among Us: The Relocation, Internment, and Repatriation of German, Italian, and Japanese Americans during the Second World War.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021. Illustrations, maps. 430 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4962-2414-9.

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## US Internment in the Second World War

Historical studies of internment during the Second World War have substantively grown in the last twenty years. Numerous theses, books, and articles have been published exploring the treatment of millions of civilians displaced and interned in various areas around the world but with a large emphasis on Europe and North America. Scholarship has examined the experience of internment from several angles, such as state policies, daily reality in camps, and memories of internees according to their places of captivity and ethnic origins. The global phenomenon of internment has raised several questions about the impact of World War II—as a global-scale armed conflict—on violations of human rights, legal civil rights, and the principle of citizenship committed

by states. As many scholars have argued, internment policies were based in part on a collective fear of the presence of enemies, real or imagined, within the population, but also on a racist perception of ethnicity. Those aspects justified multiple states, belligerents and neutrals, to categorize many individuals on their territory as “enemy aliens.” In contrast to soldiers detained as prisoners of war, whose status and treatment were regulated by the Geneva Convention, civilian internees, though held in a larger number, suffered a lack of protection from international law as their detention, developed by state authorities, was blurred and arbitrary.

In the case of the United States, more than 30,000 enemy aliens were interned between 1941 and 1946 in camps administrated by civilian authorities and guarded by military forces. In addition, Washington relocated some 140,000 Japanese, German, and Italian Americans on the territory for security reasons. Almost seventy years after the closing of camps and repatriation centers, many facets of the subject are still unknown. The particularity of these operations was the mixed composition of the detainees. As defined by officials in Washington, the concept of “enemy aliens” referred to refugees and immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1941 and members of enemy merchant marines, but also to Japanese, Italian, and German Americans suspected of being part of pro-enemy activities as members of a “Fifth Column.” Moreover, internment targeted enemy nationals in Latin America; Washington requested South American governments to keep them in custody on the assumption that they were “high security risks” for continental security. This group of people, including some 4,000 Germans, 2,200 Japanese, and 280 Italians, would later be deported to the United States in order to “secure” their detention. A total of 3,300 of them would be repatriated to Germany by the US government. This troubling but complex and fascinating page of the history of US participation in World War II is the subject of two recent books, by John E. Schmitz and Marylin Grace Miller.

The two books under review, though employing a different approach to understand US internment, argue similarly that the historiography is overshadowed by the case of Japanese American removal and relocation, now recognized as a national tragic violation of rights of US citizens based largely on racist prejudices. According to Schmitz and Miller, however, the case of Japanese Americans should not be conflated with the internment of German, Italian, and Japanese noncitizens. Both authors also state that collective fears of noncitizens have been present in the United States since the nineteenth century, which has justified several

legislative decisions against them. The context of the Second World War significantly expanded the national “paranoia” of “aliens.” The use of the word “alien” itself referred to those estranged and excluded. The creation of state programs and sub-departments, such as the Special War Problems of the State Department and the United States’ Enemy Alien Control Program in charge of internment, should thus be understood as a response to the perceived security threats of “enemies among us.” The Fifth Column paranoia was shared by the “Sixth Column of people who believed in it,” as argued by historian Max Paul Friedman, including a large part of the American population, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and most of his administration and close advisers.[1] As Schmitz and Miller suggest, the idea of a Fifth Column, real, imagined, or exaggerated, motivated the Roosevelt administration to enforce legislation against enemy aliens by 1939, but more significantly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. This policy would cause forced displacement, family separation, community disintegration, job and property loss, and sometimes public repudiation.

In this context, some indications of the presence of fascism and Nazism in Latin America motivated the intervention of Washington despite the “Good Neighbor Policy,” in place since 1933, of US non-intervention in Central and South American politics. The Roosevelt administration first asked Latin American governments to identify, locate, list, and intern enemy nationals, and then later to transfer them to the US. As both books show, this group of people, which also included Czechs, Austrians, and Poles, were part of a process of categorization of enemy aliens according to their political opinions on or affiliation with fascism and Nazism as defined (or the perception of it) by US authorities. According to Schmitz and Miller, the definition of categories was often blurred between who was considered a Nazi collaborator or sympathizer. Moreover, the stigma of enemy aliens had many consequences not only on in-

ternees and their families but also more broadly on US citizens from the same ethnic origin and religious community (Italians, Germans, the Japanese, and Jews).

To explain US internment policy, many scholars have argued that it has been mostly a manifestation of racism. This precise argument, particularly present among the historiography of Japanese internees, is critically nuanced in Schmitz's book, *Enemies among Us*. The author, whose own father was interned at the Crystal Lake camp in Texas, is interested in the causes, conditions, and consequences of America's selection, relocation, and internment of Germans, Italians, and the Japanese. He suggests that factors other than racism influenced the formulation and implementation of internment. According to him, though racism was present among policymakers and American society, the collective fear against enemies in the US (real or imaginary) and the obsession for security based on the Fifth Column menace had a more significant role in the development of internment. To prove his argument, Schmitz places the US relocation, internment, and repatriation operation in a broader chronological and international context. Considering his work as "revisionist in his analysis and comparative in its narrative," he notices multiple contradictions but also consistency in US internment policies (p. 7). He advances three primary reasons to explain these policies: racism and a general mood of intolerance in American society; the Fifth Column fear; and internees' need for protection and exchanges of US nationals with Axis regimes. By doing that, Schmitz explains Washington's leading role in the repatriation and exchanges of internees during and after the war.

As the first four chapters explain, the story of internment in the US began before the country's entry in the Second World War in December 1941. Years before the war, US authorities were already planning to locate and intern all individuals considered as a possible national security risk in case of an armed conflict. Schmitz shows that various

waves of immigrants in the US since the beginning of the twentieth century had fueled debates on American citizenship and anti-immigrant discourse based on ideas of race and ethnicity and justified legislation against noncitizens. This discussion intensified in the context of the First World War. Schmitz also notices that Fifth Column fears were well present in the US during the inter-war period in reaction to the rise of fascist regimes in Europe. In response, various US authorities (the Roosevelt administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], the State Department, and state governments) already thought about plans and legislation to control and limit the presence of "aliens." This trend was largely enforced during the first phase of the Second World War between September 1939 and December 1941, while the United States was still a neutral nation. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had a major impact on policymaking within both political and military spheres. This turning point brought strict legislation against enemy aliens, such as the well-known Executive Order 9066 authorizing the relocation of certain categories of the population from the East and West Coasts for security reasons. The scare of "enemies among us" was also on a continental level as Washington negotiated an agreement with Latin America to detain enemy aliens on their territory and then to transfer them to the United States. Once again, this large population movement was based on a widely held belief in a Fifth Column menace reinforced by Axis victories until 1942.

In the last part of the book, Schmitz explores the exchanges and repatriation of enemy aliens organized by Washington to protect US nationals detained in Axis countries. This diplomatic process involving multiple countries proved to be a necessity for Washington to have a certain number of internees to exchange with Axis powers. The final chapter discusses the reality in internment camps and relocation centers, a weakness in Schmitz's analysis. By focusing largely on the period before 1942, Schmitz discusses mostly the Fifth

Column scare on various levels and neglects the evolving context of US detention policies and administration and their influence on camp life between January 1943 and 1946. The reader does not get a sense of the internment experience during the war until the last chapter. In addition, in several places, the author advances different numbers of various categories of internees in different periods, sometimes making the reading confusing and making it difficult to get a full overview of the history of World War II internment in the US. Nevertheless, *Enemies among Us* explores interesting questions by arguing that racism is not a central element to explain US internment, which raises questions for future research about the connection between race and the fears of the Fifth Column; for instance, how was the recognition, selection, and categorization of American nationals interned abroad organized for exchanges and repatriation?

Using a different approach to explore internment, Miller's book, *Port of No Return*, examines the specific camp Algiers located in New Orleans (the Crescent City). More precisely, she focuses on the men, women, and children who experienced this tragic episode of World War II in New Orleans to offer a "human story" of internment. According to her, this story merits mention given the "aura of mystery and secrecy surrounding" this camp (p. x). Still unknown in public memory and in the historiography of internment, camp Algiers served as a point of delivery for many of the ships carrying enemy aliens and family members deported from Latin America. It also served as a threshold from which aliens were dispatched to a network of internment facilities in the US. In addition to being held in captivity, internees at camp Algiers suffered from several security measures regarding their citizenship and legal status, as many were stripped of passports and other personal documents and charged with being illegal immigrants. As Miller mentions, New Orleans is part of the larger history of the handling of internees, as a port of entry for the human trafficking of internment.

Her book suggests that the Crescent City played a pivotal role in the massive history of World War II internment and was "utterly unique" in terms of the US's wartime management of fears of insecurity, conspiracy, and invasion (p. 2). Among the diverse personal cases that she examines, Miller gives great attention to Jewish internees. According to her, their cases are particularly troubling because they were victims of multiple discrimination: targeted by the Nazi regime in Europe, then refused in the US as refugees and moved to Latin America, interned as potential Nazis and sometimes with Nazi elements, and finally transferred to the US. By chronicling this in depth, Miller's study contributes to a deeper understanding of the multiple visage of US internment during the Second World War.

Through six chapters, Miller examines not only daily life in the camp and US internment policies but also the various trajectories of different people who experienced camp Algiers, representing diverse ethnic origins, backgrounds, social classes, and political opinions. According to Miller, American government leaders were concerned with the origins of these captives despite a lack of evidence on most of them for being any real "high security risk." The blurred process of classification under which individuals were labeled as enemy aliens by US and Latin American governments—ethnicity, language, nationality, country of birth, religious affiliation, race (in the case of Jews), and citizenship—as well as the political categorization of internees often based on stereotypes remained indeterminate and unclear both for detainees and officials. Such categorizations had an impact not only on the captives but also on their families torn apart by the internment. The study is a classic micro-history. Miller uses camp Algiers as a case study through which to examine the large processes of internment operations. For Miller, racism and anti-Semitism were rife among US authorities; the idea that captives were true Fifth Columnists also persisted, which explained the internment policies. Critical of US policies, especially toward

“innocent” civilian internees perceived as dangerous enemies, the author exposes the infringements upon rights committed by both US and Latin American authorities.

Unfortunately, there remain some ambiguities in Miller’s approach as her work does not engage much with the wider historiography of internment. In addition, the relationship between the US and Germany would require exploration as the detention of civilian prisoners represents a complex phenomenon that includes different components and reciprocity between captor states. The custody in New Orleans was also directly influenced by other camps in the US as well as larger diplomatic negotiations between Washington and Berlin. This aspect constitutes an example of how macro-structural factors should be examined in the study of camp Algiers. Miller focuses on more factual or anecdotal aspects of the detention, such as daily life, individual journeys, manifestations of anti-Semitism and Nazism, and personal stories of different internees. On this topic, the study is sometimes more descriptive than analytic. In short, Miller proposes interesting views on the various personal cases of internment, but unfortunately, this approach makes it difficult to delimit the importance of camp Algiers and the uniqueness of the Crescent City in the history of civilian detention during the Second World War.

In this context, a comparative or transnational approach is an interesting option to observe the question of camp Algiers.[2] Among the voluminous historiography on war captivity in the last twenty years, historians have tended to explore internment beyond the boundaries of a single nation or a particular camp. In so doing, scholars seek to generate a global understanding of this wartime phenomenon. Along the same line, an interesting point involved in this subject, but not discussed by the two books under review, is that other countries, including Canada, South Africa, and Australia, also interned enemy aliens and noncitizens. These policies were motivated by a

similar Fifth Column scare as in the US. Following recent works on the First World War, historians should see this process on a global and transnational scale.[3] Internment concerned not only democratic regimes such as the US and Britain but also Vichy France and postwar occupied Germany. Though Schmitz gives importance to the experience of World War I and makes a few references to other captor states during World War II (for example, Canada and Britain), he does not engage with this aspect in his analysis. For instance, Schmitz mentions that the US categorization of internees was based on the Canadian and British models but does not mention how US authorities considered these policies. Policymakers and policies, diplomacy, localities, camps, and personal and cultural experiences of internment, including expatriation and repatriation, were all interconnected in internment in the US.[4] One prominent example of this complex phenomenon is the exchanges of internees between the United States and Axis powers, which involved other Allied countries.[5]

Another point not discussed in detail in the two books is the role played by international humanitarian entities, such as the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions. Humanitarian actors and international law are mentioned only as side aspects within policymaking in Miller’s last chapter and Schmitz’s work. A better understanding of the International Red Cross and the interpretation of the Geneva Convention by Washington during the Second World War, however, would reveal a rich perspective on the internment operation in terms of how humanitarian and human rights discourses and international law contributed to the shaping of the US internment policy. This point is particularly interesting considering that though the treatment of civilian internees was blurred in the 1929 Geneva Convention, humanitarian law was taken into consideration by state authorities. Nevertheless, these two books present tremendous and fascinating studies for the public on the

history of internment. The reading is highly recommended to anyone interested in the history of US experience with civilian internees.

#### Notes

[1]. Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57.

[2]. For instance, see Rachel Pistol, *Internment during the Second World War: A Comparative Study of Great Britain and the USA* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

[3]. See, for example, Matthew Stibbe, Panikos Panayi, and Stefan Manz, *Internment during the First World War: A Mass Global Phenomenon* (New York: Routledge, 2019); and Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War: A European and Global History, 1914-1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[4]. David Cesarani and Tony Kushner, *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Miriam Kochan, *Britain's Internees in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983); Jonathan F. Vance, ed., *Encyclopedia of Prisoners of War and Internment*, 2nd. ed (Millerton, NY: Grey House, 2006); Ernest Robert Zimmermann, Michel S. Beaulieu, and David K. Ratz, *The Little Third Reich on Lake Superior: A History of Canadian Internment Camp R* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015); and Rhonda L. Hinder and Jim Mochoruk, *Civilian Internment in Canada Histories and Legacies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020).

[5]. Arie J. Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity: Britain and the United States and Their POWs in Nazi Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

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