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HARD TIME IN THE BIG EASY NEW ORLEANS' UNIQUE ROLE IN THE WWII INTERNMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN ENEMY ALIEN DEPORTEES

Pro-Nazi, anti-Nazi or Jew? These were the three categories used in a November 1944 report classifying the "enemy aliens" and their family members--most of them Germans or Austrians--then being held at the Algiers Detention Station in New Orleans, Louisiana. This document sheds light on a little-known aspect of WWII internment history, namely, New Orleans' unique role in the internment of European nationals deported from Latin America to the United States as part of a Washington-led hemispheric security initiative, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In stark contrast to its famed nickname as the fun-loving "Big Easy," New Orleans served both as a port or "Gateway to the Americas" through which thousands of named enemy aliens passed en route to internment camps throughout the country, and as the site of an "anti-Nazi" facility where Jewish and other "problem" internees were housed.

Drawing on archival sources explored more fully in my forthcoming study *Enemy Aliens in the Crescent City: New Orleans' Role in WWII Internment* (LSU Press, 2021), I argue that the problematic classification of the internees named in the 1944 document displays the faulty intelligence work and corrupt inter-American relationships that characterized the Latin American aspect of the US internment program. Although only about 10 percent of the "Germans" forcibly displaced to the United States were avowed Nazis, they often dominated conditions in camps in Texas and elsewhere in the South, where they were held alongside a few Jews also labeled "enemy aliens." This Jewish contingent was finally congregated at New Orleans' Camp Algiers in early 1943, investing the site with a unique role as a welcome "refuge," despite the internees' experience of internment as a form of incarceration. Using the 1944 list alongside ship manifests, reports of camp visits, correspondence, refusal of repatriation declarations, pleas to Jewish relief organizations and other documents, I build on and expand previous scholarship by Max Paul Friedman and Harvey Strum that considers the Latin American component of the U.S. Enemy Alien Control Program and the specific role of Jews in it.

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