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Book Review of, Nazis and Good Neighbors: the United States' Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War Two

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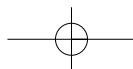
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Nazis & Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign Against the Germans of Latin America in World War II. By Max Paul Friedman. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii + 359 pp. \$30)

Max Friedman's work examines how the United States pressured Latin American countries during World War II to expel their German citizens, who were then interned in Texas for the course of the war. Based on extensive research in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, he not only describes the factors that created this flawed policy but also captures its high human cost. Friedman is



clearly mindful of parallels between the World War II era and that of the post-September 11 world. But he avoids overworking this comparison, and in the end his history is both readable and fair.

In the years before World War II the German Reich attempted to unite all Germans abroad under the leadership of the Nazi Party. The German government's crude tactics largely failed, but they served to inflame U.S. fears that a German fifth-column endangered hemispheric security. British intelligence manipulated these fears to its own ends, and by the start of the war the United States worried that German expatriates might launch sea and air attacks upon the Panama Canal or carry out spectacular acts of sabotage. As a result, the U.S. government called upon Latin American countries to adopt a deportation program.

As Friedman describes, this effort was marred from the start by bad intelligence, anti-Semitism, and weak leadership. Nothing typified the lunacy that sometimes characterized this program more than the fact that the United States brought Jewish refugees from the Holocaust and interned them in camps where there were gangs of violent Nazi activists. Anti-Semitism may have also led the U.S. State Department to block an exchange of German internees for Jews held at Bergen-Belsen, even though Germany was willing to do so. The entire deportation program was riddled with contradictions. Many of the German deportees were clear anti-Nazis, some of whom enrolled in the U.S. Army, and at least one of whom won a Purple Heart for valor. Yet U.S. intelligence performed so poorly that hard-core Nazis remained behind in Latin America. As the deportation program continued, it came to be defined by commercial motives, as the United States sought to eliminate German business competition, while Latin American leaders took advantage of an opportunity to expropriate the holdings of a wealthy minority. By the end of the war the U.S. government was continuing to push Latin American countries to expel Germans, while welcoming into the United States the German scientists who had led the V-2 rocket program.

Friedman's account argues that in general the internees in the United States were treated well. A minority of the internees were hard-core Nazis, and the German government did have an active espionage effort. But Friedman argues that ultimately the U.S. program undermined the Good Neighbor Policy, created enduring resentments in the region, and failed to enhance the security of the United States. With his rigorous research and readable narrative, Friedman has created a balanced account of a flawed policy.

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