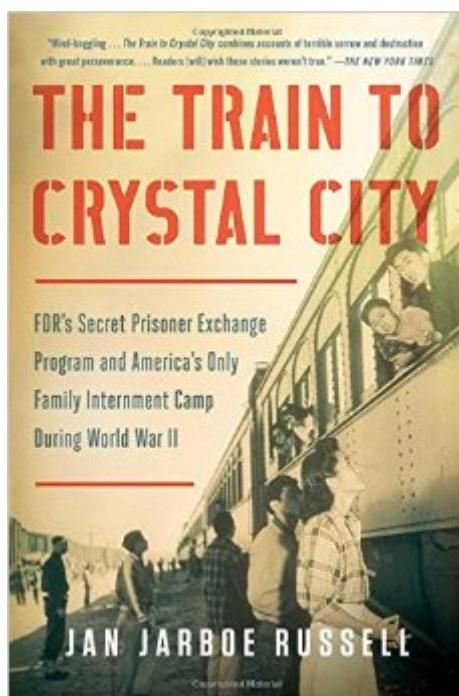


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# The Train To Crystal City: FDR's Secret Prisoner Exchange Program And America's Only Family Internment Camp During World War II



## Synopsis

The New York Times bestselling dramatic and never-before-told story of a secret FDR-approved American internment camp in Texas during World War II: "A must-read." *The Train to Crystal City* is compelling, thought-provoking, and impossible to put down. (Star-Tribune, Minneapolis). During World War II, trains delivered thousands of civilians from the United States and Latin America to Crystal City, Texas. The trains carried Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants and their American-born children. The only family internment camp during the war, Crystal City was the center of a government prisoner exchange program called "quiet passage." Hundreds of prisoners in Crystal City were exchanged for other more ostensibly important Americans—diplomats, businessmen, soldiers, and missionaries—behind enemy lines in Japan and Germany. In this quietly moving book, Jan Jarboe Russell focuses on two American-born teenage girls, uncovering the details of their years spent in the camp; the struggles of their fathers; their families' subsequent journeys to war-devastated Germany and Japan; and their years-long attempt to survive and return to the United States, transformed from incarcerated enemies to American loyalists. Their stories of day-to-day life at the camp, from the ten-foot high security fence to the armed guards, daily roll call, and censored mail, have never been told. Combining big-picture World War II history with a little-known event in American history, *The Train to Crystal City* reveals the war-time hysteria against the Japanese and Germans in America, the secrets of FDR's tactics to rescue high-profile POWs in Germany and Japan, and above all, is about identity, allegiance, and home, and the difficulty of determining the loyalties that lie in individual human hearts. (Texas Observer).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I just recently got the opportunity to preview a upcoming release, "The Train to Crystal City" by Jan Jarboe Russell. This is the untold story of not just Japanese-Americans held in US concentration camps during WWII, but the largely unknown story of German-Americans and Italian-Americans as well, many of whom had lived in the US for years but were stripped of the US citizenship and imprisoned. In addition, this story reveals how the American born spouses and their children were also incarcerated as well. That would be story enough, but there's more. "The Train to Crystal City" also details a secret prisoner exchange designed and approved by FDR whereby these now former Americans were sent to enemy combatant countries along with their spouses and children, often against their will in exchange for key individuals being held behind enemy lines, including downed airmen and US businessmen. The story details how the US military kidnapped foreign nationals---German-Mexicans or Peruvian-Japanese along with their families, with the aid of their respective governments, who then shipped to the US to be held at potential exchanges in this very same internment camp. In exchange for their support, these governments freely confiscated the businesses, homes, and assets of these individuals. Unable to return home and not wanting to be deported to war torn countries they barely knew, if at all, this is a gripping book. I urge everyone to read it.

Every American should read this book, especially those who are enthusiastic supporters of everything government does. It follows the World War II experiences of a pair of un-naturalized Japanese and German men and their families, including American citizen children born in this country, who , despite many years living in this country, were interned in a Texas concentration camp to be traded for Americans caught in or captured by those countries. There were many other American families there, along with many forcibly brought up from several Latin American countries. The German was an engineer, the Japanese, a clergyman. The G/A family were traded near the end of the European War and were instrumental in saving an American pilot and a German Jewish girl. The J/A family was sent to Japan after the war for no good reason, but eventually were allowed back to the U.S. They all had good reason to distrust government after their experience, though they loved much about America. The J-A girl sums it up nicely with a sign she hung over her bedroom door to the effect of: "If you have trouble with medical bills, go to the nearest airport. You'll get a free full X-ray and breast exam. If you mention AlQuaida, you'll get a colonoscopy." At least she retained

a wry sense of humor.

This book is an unvarnished look at what can happen in time of war. Author Jan Jarboe Russell tells the story of WWII-era immigrants who were herded into a hastily constructed family internment camp in Crystal City, a small Texas town in a desolate area near the Mexican border. While the book contains much general information about the internment camp and the personalities involved in creating it, the story is framed around the experiences of two teen girls -- one German, one Japanese -- who were herded into the camp along with their families. It's easy to say "this won't happen again," but I remember more than one person saying to me after 9/11 that "all the Arabs ought to be run out of the country." The WWII camps were built in response to fears that spies from Germany, Japan and Italy could be hiding in the immigrant communities from those Axis nations. In the general panic after Pearl Harbor, putting those immigrants in places where they could be fenced off and watched seemed like a prudent idea. Little thought was given to the suffering involved, as families were uprooted and had their businesses and bank accounts seized. Russell's exhaustive research brings the reader back to an era that many would like to forget, but it's important that we do not forget it.

I had high expectations for this book, and they were only partially fulfilled. The writing style is a bit simplistic--almost as if this were written for an audience of high-schoolers (no offense to high school students!). Also, the book jumps around from family to family, Japanese to German, and I think it could have been organized a little better. Furthermore, the first half gets a bit redundant and becomes a bit of a slog, with the telling and retelling of descriptions of camp life. That said, it really improved greatly by mid-way through the book, and I became very interested in what happened to the few families that are highlighted in the book; how the German family fared once they got on German soil and realized, to their horror, that Germany was in ruin and that they'd agreed to "repatriate" under duress and under false pretenses. Same with the Japanese family: they were shuttled around like livestock, and it was very interesting to see how a family that was not really Japanese, was able to adapt and survive in a country that viewed them with suspicion. Generally, the book was enjoyable and opened my eyes to another dimension of the true scandal that "will live in infamy"---the US imprisonment of not only Americans of Japanese descent, but also of Italian, German, Romanian, Bulgarian descent. Also, the cold, sociopathic way in which our government bureaucrats and leaders dispensed with these people, used them as bargaining chips, traded away their lives and "repatriated" entire families (how do you repatriate children born in this country, to

another country? "Repatriate" means to return to one's homeland---a point the book discusses). It is also shocking that our government kidnapped people of Japanese and German descent from South American countries, to use as bargaining chips in exchange for the return of our citizens from Axis countries.

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