On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed into law Executive Order #9066. A response to the wave of fear and hysteria that engulfed the U.S. after Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, this act mandated the arrest and detention, without arraignment or trial, of hundreds of thousands of Japanese, German, and Italian citizens, both American-born and immigrant, as well as additional thousands of Japanese living in Latin America. The order further authorized seizure and liquidation without warning of detainees’ homes and businesses. Stripped of dignity and livelihood, these so-called “enemy aliens” would sit out the remainder of World War II in various internment sites scattered across the nation. One camp in particular, a 290-acre complex located two miles outside a dusty town in south Texas, is the subject of Jan Jarboe Russell’s harrowing history, *The Train to Crystal City*.

In operation from 1942 to 1948, administered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Crystal City was the nation’s only family internment camp. Less well known is the fact that the site also served as headquarters for a secret prisoner exchange program by which German and Japanese internees in U.S. detention centers could be traded for Americans imprisoned behind enemy lines in Europe and Japan. Drawing on national archives, interviews, FBI files, diaries, journals, newspaper accounts, and personal correspondence, Russell creates a richly detailed composite of daily life in Crystal City. The reader sees, seemingly firsthand, many amenities: its schools, library, hospital, beauty shop, beer garden, movie theater, and swimming pool. Russell leaves no doubt, however, of the facility’s primary purpose: “A ten-foot-high fence surrounded the camp. Guards with long rifles were positioned in six guard towers at the corners of the fence line. Other guards, who wore cowboy hats and chaps made of cowhide, patrolled the perimeter of the fence on horseback. At night, the searchlights from the camp could be seen across the border in Mexico” (xvi).

Despite formidable research, *The Train to Crystal City* puts a distinctly human face on this somber chapter in our national narrative. Russell traces the fluctuating fortunes of scores of detainees, political figures, and government officials, charting their upheavals, losses, and unlikely triumphs, but pays particular attention to three teenage girls whose lives are irrevocably transformed and intertwined by the vagaries of war. Ingrid Eiserloh, an American citizen born to German immigrants, is interned at Crystal City with her family, “repatriated” to war-torn Germany in January 1945, and finally allowed to return to the U.S. in July 1947. Sumi Utsushigawa, a Los Angeles native of Japanese descent, also is incarcerated at Crystal City but later sent to her devastated ancestral homeland. She too returns stateside in 1947. Irene Hasenberg, a German Jew trapped in Germany’s infamous Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, joins the prisoner exchange program with her parents and brother, thanks to fake Ecuadorian passports, and ultimately makes her way to freedom and a new life in the U.S. Russell delineates these three girls in all their complexity, allowing the reader to see them as vibrant adolescents, each with aspirations and yearnings. Ingrid, for example, has a rich singing voice and enjoys German opera; Sumi treasures her collection of Mickey Mouse memorabilia and looks forward to her first prom; Irene follows the scholar’s path after her liberation, earning a doctorate in economics from Duke University. What is true for these three applies to everyone profiled: all emerge as authentic individuals, not as mere icons of injustice or oppression.

Although it would be easy to vilify all those associated with the internment program, Russell rises above that temptation. Assessing evenhandedly the actions of both major actors and bit players in this shameful drama, she creates a context for the diaspora and uncovers surprising magnanimity as well as predictable baseness in the events she records. She documents the quiet heroism of Joseph O’Rourke, officer in charge of the Crystal City camp, who did all he could to make life normal for those behind the fence line. Displaying consistent compassion for those in his charge, he supervised operation of the camp’s three schools, spearheaded construction of a swimming pool, and arranged for a high school prom. Once, during a long, hot transport of internees to Crystal City, “the train stopped, and O’Rourke left…. When he returned, he was laden with sacks of ice cream bars. He walked through the train car and distributed the ice cream to the children and teenagers on board. The teenagers unwrapped the cold bars and quickly ate them” (130). Russell also notes first lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s personal opposition to internment, as well as the conscientiousness of INS chief Earl Harrison, who in 1944 resigned in protest over U.S. immigration policies. After the war, he toured Bergen-Belsen, by that time a displaced persons camp, and its many inadequacies prompted him to write a scathing report demanding immediate reform.

Russell doesn’t overlook the other side of the equation, though. She captures memorably the fearful delirium of the time, citing this exhortation by Westbrook Pegler, who in his column for the *Washington Post* writes, “The Japanese in California should be under armed guard to the last man and woman right now and to hell with habeas corpus until the danger is over” (23). Equally strident is this outcry from General John DeWitt: “I include all Germans, all Italians, who are alien enemies…. Evacuate enemy aliens in large groups at the earliest possible date…. Get them all out” (23-24). Russell also reveals the spiteful paranoia of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who with FDR’s authorization quickly expanded the agency’s field staff from 300 to 600 investigators and greatly widened its reach: “Under Hoover’s direction, Roosevelt’s modest directive soon ballooned into a vast and illegal national campaign of targeting hundreds of thousands of politically defenseless immigrants… who if left to their own devices would have continued to live quiet, harmless lives as their children joined the mainstream of American life” (26-27). Not content with monitoring immigrants and first-generation Americans, Hoover authorized surveillance and maintained dossiers on anyone with a political vision at odds with his own, notably his nemesis Eleanor Roosevelt, on whom he kept a file until the day he died. This document, one of the largest in FBI history, numbers 4,000 pages. Russell further demonstrates that bigotry was not confined to the treatment of those linked, however remotely, with Axis powers. She discloses, for example, the blatant anti-Semitism of General George S. Patton, who once commented that Jewish displaced persons “either never had any sense of decency