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Austro-Hungarian Enemy Aliens (USA)

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Austrian and Hungarian citizens working in war-related industries were exempt from many restrictions on enemy aliens, but many labor leaders and intellectuals were arrested and interned, often without evidence of wrongdoing. All enemy aliens were subject to xenophobic harassment, which often resulted in violence.

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1. Enemy Aliens

When the U.S. Congress declared war on Austria-Hungary on 7 December 1917, the approximately 3 million Austrian and Hungarian citizens residing in the [United States](#) became [enemy aliens](#). Like the Germans before them, they were required to register with government authorities and abide by strict restrictions on their movements and activities. They also became the targets of xenophobic discrimination and violence, which were already rampant in the wartime United States.

2. Persecution During the War

Unlike their German counterparts, however, hundreds of thousands of Austrian and Hungarian citizens were employed in vital war related industries, and as a result, President [Woodrow Wilson \(1856-1924\)](#) encouraged Americans to allow those workers to continue at their jobs unharrassed.

This benefitted members of certain ethnic groups, especially Poles and Czechs, but not all Austrian

and Hungarian citizens escaped persecution. Most notably, approximately 2,300 Austrian, Hungarian, and German citizens were interned in camps at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia and Fort Douglas, Utah. There were sharp class differences among the internees. Members of the Industrial Workers of the World and other labor organizations were common targets; some U.S. officials and business owners used the wartime climate to undermine labor unions, especially those whose members held radical political views. In addition to these workers, upper-class German speakers, including musicians, scholars, engineers, and newspaper editors were interned; most were accused of [espionage](#), though those charges were often unsubstantiated. Outside the camps, the war dramatically weakened ethnic institutions, especially the ethnic press. The Trading with the Enemy Act also restricted the movement of money and other goods between the United States and Austria-Hungary, creating economic problems for many individuals, especially families with members in both countries.

3. Post-War Legal Status

Opportunities for change in the legal status of Austrian and Hungarian citizens began with U.S. recognition of the [Czechoslovak](#) government in exile on 3 September 1918, but many wartime policies continued until the summer of 1921 because it was not clear how the shift in sovereignty from the Habsburg Empire to its various successor states affected the citizenship of enemy aliens in the United States.

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