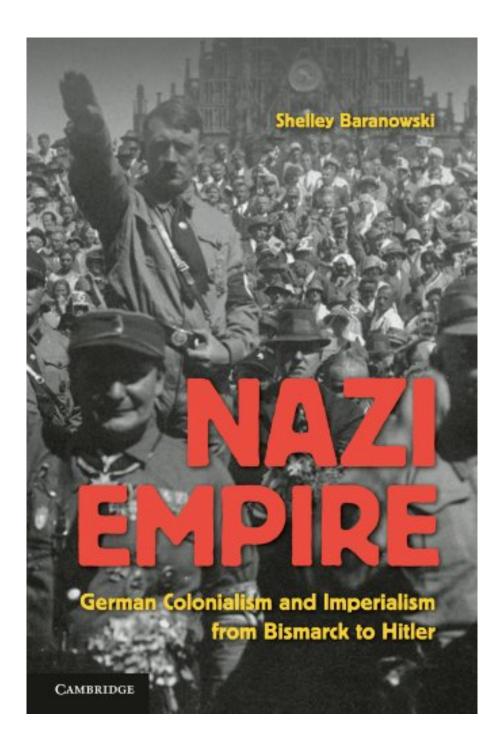


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Drawing on recent studies of the links between empire, colonialism, and genocide, Nazi Empire, 1871-1945 examines German history from 1871 to 1945 as an expression of the aspiration to imperialist expansion and the simultaneous fear of destruction by rivals. Acknowledging the important differences between the Second Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich, Shelley Baranowski nonetheless reveals a common thread: the drama of German imperialist ambitions that embraced ethnic homogeneity over diversity, imperial enlargement over stasis, and "living space" as the route to the biological survival of the German Volk.

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German Continuities between 1871-1945: Excellent Synthesis

### By Matt Obenritter

University of Akron should consider itself lucky to have a scholar like Professor Baranowski among its faculty. Proof of this fact is overt to any student of modern Germany or the Third Reich for that matter, particularly so when they finish this book. What this book accomplishes in less than 400 pages is astounding. Baranowski has produced one of the most coherent syntheses over the German nation and its internal struggles to secure its place in the world between 1871 and 1945 and how that endeavor culminated in the atrocities of the Third Reich - as well as or better than any I've read. (As a scholar of modern German history who has read hundreds of books covering this era; that's saying a lot).

There is a discernible theme reoccurring from the unification of Germany in 1871 to the inception of the Third Reich which Baranowski makes clear; she describes it as "the fear of annihilation lurking within the promise of greatness" (pg. 38), both of which came about in the wake of Germany's defeat of the Danes in 1864, the declining Austrian empire in 1866, and its western neighbor France in 1871. Up to that point, Germany had been the victim of internal strife so to speak, mainly the remnants of an antiquated feudal system where regional princes once reigned supreme. Baranowski fails to cover at any length how industrialization followed by economic progress played its part in fostering national interests abroad or how the Zollverein and the exclusion of Austria by the Prussian Junkers helped forge a nascent nationalism in what was to become Germany. There are other books which cover this topic and it would be a bit unfair to disparage her brilliant work since its title is concerned with colonialism and imperialism. It is worth at least mentioning however since competition for resources emerged in the wake of the modern Industrial Revolution - with Germany being a bit of a latecomer to the competition abroad taking place between powers like France and England. It is amid this international atmosphere that Germany sought its rightful place in the colonial sun.

Baranowski neatly divides the book into six distinct chapters which she gives near uniform attention: Imperial Germany from 1871-1914; Imperial Germany during the Great War; the Weimar Republic between 1918 to 1933; the early Third Reich from 1933-1939; Nazi colonialism in occupied Europe during WWII; and finally she closes with the Final Solution and the ensuing Holocaust. Despite the inimitable distinctions occurring through each historical period, the tension of an imperial/colonial empire pervades each. Continental fears of dissolution by outside forces and a longing for a German empire are juxtaposed in Baranowski's text. Professor Baranowski shows how during the years leading up to the First World War, political and economic leaders, hoping that efforts abroad would bring all Germans together - pushed for a colonial solution, thinking it would help resolve tensions caused by the incomplete unification of the German states.

A unified Germany under Bismarck first had to contend with national consolidation, a fact which remained at the forefront of Bismarck's political and nationalistic ambitions. Concomitantly, German fears of domestic and external imperial competitors ultimately led to a radicalization of imperial policies that both provoked Germany's European neighbors and increased the stakes for Germany's survival. Signs of this reality show up when Kaiser Wilhelm II and his military advisors chose to categorically increase their maritime war-fighting capacity, embarking on a naval arms race with England. Unfortunately for Germany, reckless abandonment of diplomacy and aggressive expansionism became the focal concerns of Kaiser Wilhelm II, whose involvement in policy-making after Bismarck's departure ruptured the fabric of the international tapestry. Noted historian Mary Fulbrook once wrote that Kaiser Wilhelm II "played a major role in unleashing the First World War" and Baranowski's judgments about Wilhelm II pretty much solidify and substantiate this remark. Baranowski makes considerable effort (justifiably so) to discuss Wilhelm II's botched foreign policy and his affinity for all things military. Collectively, Baranowski demonstrates how the large central homeland of Germany with its efficient industry, coupled with an educated population and a belligerent Kaiser awash in notions of imperialist ambitions and delusions of grandeur led Germany into the First World War.

Losing the First World War brought about political change and the Weimar Republic. Sadly, the Weimar period was fraught with difficulties as Germany had to contend with Allied occupation from Britain and especially France, accept full responsibility for instigating the Great War, pay exorbitant war reparations (Kriegsentschädigung), essentially give up its military, and cede any territory it had acquired during the colonial period. It was amid this environment and the subsequent global economic Depression that the National Socialists arose. Baranowski provides loads of evidence that paramilitary organizations like the Free Corps and its Nazi successors helped keep colonial ambitions alive and well during the Weimar era. Meanwhile, once the Nazis seized power and Hitler took center stage, Baranowski illustrates the continuities of European racialist imperialism and particularly its use by the Nazi regime which she claims "linked" German political anxieties and fears of racial mixing (pg. 190). Nazi laws and oppression thereafter functioned well in an atmosphere where Germans were privileged while racial outsiders were marginalized. It was the perfect collusion of pseudo-science and propaganda which slowly and insidiously laid a

Throughout the text, Baranowski sketches a thematic diagram outlining the German penchant for imperialistic and uncompromising behavior between 1871-1945, as their ideologies of conquest and the efforts to acquire adequate living space (Lebensraum) found heightened efficaciousness in the mind of Third Reich Germans. Namely, because their concept of utilizing what they wanted to multiply their culture and ideologies had zero consideration for the earth or the impacted peoples. German notions of empire were consistently fed by a propaganda meal consisting of: the fear of encirclement, illusory ideals of racial supremacy, a fear of both Marxism and Slavs, and of course by a pervasive anti-Semitism. One could argue that Germany's attempt at empire climaxed with the invasion of the Soviet Union and ended in both defeat and the perpetration of the worst crime thus known to humanity.

Masterful prose with substantial citations accompany the journey through Baranowski's work and her thesis that the Germans feared annihilation and longed for international greatness is cleverly interwoven therein. In the end, Baranowski's study of German empire between 1871-1945 is noteworthy for its succinct and accurate judgments and should be read by anyone interested in either modern German history or anyone trying to understand some of the historical continuities upon which the Third Reich established its short-lived foundation.

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Excellent history from angles I had not explored before

nightmarish framework followed later by horrendous consequences.

By Brian Gueck

Excellent history from angles I had not explored before. The ruthless brutality expressed by both the Germans and other so-called more beneficent colonial nations in history is exposed but absolutely nothing as categorically evil as the Nazi oppression was. This can be a most difficult book to read and ponder as there are a lot of horrors. A book that needs to be read to help understand (if it can be understood) the nature of the violent human beast that emerges in different times and ages.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Widespread Racist and Genocidal German Concepts of Slavs and Jews Long Preceded Hitler By Jan Peczkis

The roots of modern German genocidal imperialism followed not only the unification of Germany, but also her spectacular economic growth in the late 1800's. In fact, by the 20th century, Germany had the most dynamic economy in Europe, and only the U. S. economy had grown more rapidly since the American Civil War. (pp. 9-10). Clearly, the Germans were "feeling their oats" and lusting for global power status.

Where should German growth proceed? Some policies trended towards the establishment of colonies in Africa. In 1914, Heinrich Class wrote a work, touching on MITTELEUROPA, in which he suggested that German living space (LEBENSRAUM) should be in the east, at the expense of the Poles, who should be removed, and replaced with German settlers. (p. 44).

Large-scale proto-Nazi German views of themselves, and Poles, antedated even WWI. In fact, by the start of the 20th century, the Pan Germans had already moved beyond an ethno-cultural definition of Germanness to a racial and biological one. (p. 42). Furthermore, genocide was already latent in German thinking. The author realizes that, (quote) Together, the Pan Germans and HAKATISTEN sought to promote German settlements, ban the influx of cheap German labor outright, and expel Prussian Poles to the United States. (unquote)(pp. 42-43).

The foregoing can be generalized. The author points out that, (quote) Social Darwinian ideas were not confined to the natural or social sciences. In addition to being disseminated in the press, popular literature became yet another means of legitimating imperialism and its underlying notions of race war. Popular fiction in the Wilhelmine era described Poles as racially different from the Germans. (unquote)(p. 55).

Bismarck and von Bulow (Buelow) were bad enough to Poles. However, von Bulow's successor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, adopted aggressive proto-Nazi views of Poles. He saw the Germans and Slavs as engaged in a "racial struggle" for survival. (p. 65).

Baranowski characterizes Ludendorff's rule over Poland, during WWI, as a harsh one. (p. 87). In addition, although she does not consider Judeopolonia, she makes it obvious why Poles (notably the Endeks) saw the Jews as Pole-aloof, if not actively pro-German, and feared an eventual joint German--Jewish rule over Poland. Citing a German-language source, she writes, (quote) Ironically, that policy [promotion of German cultural values] extended to Jews, who in addition to experiencing less repression than under the tsars, also presided over the revitalization of Yiddish culture. As the German armies advanced eastward during the summer of 1915, German-Jewish soldiers proved essential as interpreters and procurers of transport and supplies, while the German administration of the Ober Ost [Supreme Command of the East] disproportionately represented Jews and Protestants. (unquote)(pp. 88-89).

The hyperinflation under Weimar and the "draconian" nature of the Versailles accords are commonly exaggerated, and made into an excuse for German support of Nazism. While recognizing the post-WWI difficulties facing the Germans, Baranowski implicitly rejects such exculpatory reasoning, as she comments, (quote) In actuality, the Weimar economy was no worse off than those of other European nations in the postwar period. Alternatively, it was somewhat stronger despite its territorial losses, because little fighting had taken place on German soil. Weimar governments avoided paying most of the reparations it ostensibly owed. (unquote)(p. 123). Far from unilaterally punishing Germany, the American policies included loans and investments for Germany, enabling modest and episodic recoveries in 1924, 1925, and 1927. (pp. 143-144).

The eventual 1939 German-Soviet aggression against Poland, that began WWII, long preceded the Nazis. Although Baranowski does not mention Hans von Seeckt's post-WWI statement about the new Polish state

as intolerable to both Germany and Russia, she does mention 1920's German military planning, including the German-Soviet Rapallo Pact. (p. 216). The Reichswehr already then favored war with Poland over lost German colonial territories, and--interestingly--reckoned the recovery of these territories a greater priority over the return of the Saar, the annexation of Austria, and the remilitarization of the Rhineland. (p. 150).

Baranowski provides interesting insights into the Nazi movement. Although Junkers commonly supported the Nazis because of such motives as hatred of bourgeoisie parties and parliamentary democracy (p. 268), it is incorrect to see Nazism as a movement sponsored by the privileged. In fact, Nazism had an unusually broad-based following among most of German society--irrespective of religion, geographical region, social class, etc. (p. 165). The author also points out that the support of big business for Nazism came AFTER their ascent to power, as she quips, "In fact, relatively few employers joined the Nazi Party or openly sided with it before 1933." (p. 167). Ironic to the misrepresentation of Nazism as a conservative movement, the murdered victims of the Rohm (Roehm) Purge were disproportionately politically conservative opponents of Nazism. (p. 198).

Attention is now focused on WWII. The author elaborates of Nazi mass murder of Slavs in Poland, the USSR, etc. She also realizes the genocidal character of GENERALPLAN OST as she comments, (quote) In some versions, 51 million people were to have been driven out. Following population transfers and the deliberate confiscation of food that would likely entail the physical annihilation of most of the population of eastern Europe, roughly five million ethnic German settlers would begin to replace the victims over a generation, pushing Germany's ethnic boundary one thousand kilometers to the east. (unquote)(pp. 299-270).

Now consider the Jews. Ironic to current attempts to blame Christianity for the Holocaust, the author realizes that the same pre-Hitler eventually-genocidal German attitudes towards Slavs also found Jews as targets. She writes, (quote) To the Pan Germans, continental expansion was the antidote to the insidious workings of `international Jewry' that prevented Germany from assuming its rightful place among the world powers. The Pan German demand for living space at the expense of the Slavs to the east so that the German population would have room to grow and prosper would be the key to combating the Jews as well as the Poles. The ethnic cleaning of Slavs would give Germany the resources to counterbalance British power and its accompaniment, the `global Jewish spirit,' as the prelude to further overseas colonization. (unquote)(pp. 45-46).

Baranowski adheres to the functionalist view of Holocaust origins. Unfortunately, her treatment of Polish-Jewish relations at this time is superficial and irresponsible. (p. 346).

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