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978-0-521-67408-9 - Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler

Shelley Baranowski

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## Nazi Empire

Drawing on recent studies of the links between empire, colonialism, and genocide, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* 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 among 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*.

Shelley Baranowski is Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Akron. She is the author of *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (2004); *The Sanctity of Rural Life: Nobility, Protestantism, and Nazism in Weimar Prussia* (1995); and *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites and the Nazi State* (1986) and the co-editor, with Ellen Furlough, of *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America* (2001).

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### Praise for *Nazi Empire*

“For more than a decade now, historians have been rediscovering that the best key to the question of the continuities of German history is to be found in the histories of German expansionism since the mid-nineteenth century. Admirably attuned both to the longer-term patterns and to the Nazi empire’s terrible specificities, with an assured grasp of detail and a clear analytical vision, Shelley Baranowski has given us the best critical synthesis yet of that steadily mounting scholarship.”

– Geoff Eley, University of Michigan

“This fine new political history of Germany between 1871 and 1945 does a wonderful job of synthesizing all of the most recent literature in English and German. In particular, Baranowski offers an insightful and judicious discussion of continuities and discontinuities across this period of German history, and a careful analysis of what ‘empire’ meant to successive generations of Germans.”

– Suzanne L. Marchand, Louisiana State University

“Linking the Nazi regime, the Holocaust, and colonialism has become a controversial hypothesis in recent years, raising fears in some quarters that the Holocaust’s uniqueness might be questioned. Shelley Baranowski’s achievement in *Nazi Empire* is to transcend the problem by embedding the genocide of European Jewry into a broad historical narrative while preserving its distinctive features. Reasonable yet provocative, at once sober and humane, this book is a chilling portrait, as she puts it, of ‘the Third Reich’s own horrific contribution to the history of European imperialism.’”

– A. Dirk Moses, University of Sydney and  
the European University Institute, Florence

“In this ambitious book, Shelley Baranowski, an expert on the history of Nazi Germany, defines for readers what was distinctive about the Nazi version of racial empire. At the same time, she offers a valuable guide to the growing literature on German colonialism and its links to Nazism.”

– Lora Wildenthal, Rice University

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*For my students*

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## Preface

This book originated several years ago at the suggestion of Frank Smith of Cambridge University Press, who asked me to write an accessible text on the Third Reich for undergraduates. Having devoted my career up to this point to writing on more specialized topics, I jumped at the chance to survey a field that has produced a huge and scarcely manageable literature. In fact, *Nazi Empire: German Imperialism and Colonialism from Bismarck to Hitler* has become much broader in its chronological scope than Frank intended. I am thus very grateful to him for allowing me to go beyond what he originally envisioned to explore German history from the Second to the Third Reich as a problem of empire. Although I hope that this book will appeal to its intended audience, I have found its organizing principle sufficiently fascinating, and challenging, to want to pursue it further in the future. Suffice to say, I am indebted to Frank for encouraging me to develop a project with long-term as well as short-term possibilities.

As this project has taken shape, I have been privileged to work with Eric Crahan, my editor at Cambridge, who has professionally guided the manuscript to completion, patiently answering my questions and concerns along the way. Jason Przybylski ably handled the details that accompanied the transition from submission to production, as did Bindu Vinod, who capably supervised the production process. Cambridge's anonymous readers of my original prospectus and the first draft offered thoughtful criticisms and suggestions, which I hope the final product reflects. My thanks go as well to Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama for giving me the opportunity to present an earlier version of my

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work at the stimulating interdisciplinary conference, entitled “Germany’s Colonialism in International Perspective,” that they organized at San Francisco State University in September 2007. Catherine Epstein generously shared parts of her forthcoming book on Arthur Greiser, the Nazi leader of the Warthegau. I deeply appreciate the help of the staff of the German Federal Archives, Digital Picture Archive, in Koblenz which supplied many of the illustrations in this book. The same applies to Jim Retallack of the University of Toronto and the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., who gave me permission to reproduce a map from the GHI’s “German History in Documents and Images.” Last but certainly not least, the staff of the Photo Archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was very forthcoming in providing me with additional images from their superb collection. The views or opinions expressed in this book and the context in which the images are used do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of, nor imply endorsement by, the Holocaust Museum.

I conclude with my thanks to sources of support closest to home. A faculty development leave from the University of Akron gave me the time to compose a workable first draft. For more than twenty years I have been fortunate to work with a wonderful group of colleagues in the history department, who have provided a collegial and intellectually stimulating environment. I am especially grateful to Stephen Harp, who read and commented on a portion of an earlier version of this work. My students, both past and present to whom this book is dedicated, have personified the indivisible bonds between one’s teaching and one’s scholarship. And, as always, my love to my husband Ed and to my family.