



Introduction

In Erskine Childers' spy novel *The Riddle of the Sands*, the English college chums Davies and Carruthers go on a duck hunting holiday by sail to the Schleswig fiords. En route Davies diverts his yacht to the German East Frisian islands. Worried about England's weak North Sea coast defenses and chased off by the aptly-named German gunboat *Blitz*, the two begin to suspect something sinister afoot. Under cover of thick fog, the pair navigate the treacherous sandbanks to discover a nefarious plot: hidden away on the island of Memmert they spy hundreds of German barges readied for the invasion of England and overhear invasion-scheming German officers. Davies, it turned out, had visited the East Frisian islands previously and had fallen in love with a beautiful German girl, Clara. It was then that he had started to suspect that her father, Dollmann, might be an English double agent and that something suspicious was brewing on the island. Discovered, Davies, Carruthers, Clara, and Dollmann escape, the disgraced Dollmann sacrificing himself to the rough seas on the way back to England where the plot is revealed to the Admiralty.

Published in 1903, *Riddle of the Sands* was enormously popular in its time and remains a fascinating document of Edwardian Britain's love-hate relationship with Imperial Germany: admired for its efficiency and industrial progress yet also feared as an economic and imperial rival. It also tapped into real invasion fears. Indeed, it was itself only barely a novel, based as it was on Childers' own suspicions about Germany awakened by the Transvaal Crisis and then deepened while serving as an artillery driver during the Boer War. As a yachting enthusiast Childers had cruised along the Frisian coast to Cuxhaven and through the Kiel Canal all the way to Schleswig in 1897. There, as an amateur spy of sorts, he had taken note of canal and railway work along the German coast. Indeed, reviewers of the book had a hard time reading it as fiction.¹

¹ Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service Recently Achieved*, with an introduction by Eric J. Grove (1903; Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), ix–xvi; see also Richard Scully, *British Images of Germany: Admiration, Antagonism & Ambivalence, 1860–1914* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

As reflected in *Riddle of the Sands* and in many other British invasion novels from that era, Imperial Germany's naval and world power ambitions had anchored themselves into the British psyche as a menace years before the High Seas Fleet posed any kind of threat to Britain and long before the First World War. Yet it is almost impossible today to separate fictive images animating Edwardian paranoia from the real rivalry between Germany and Britain that contributed to the outbreak of the First World War. Indeed, nearly the entire history of the German Empire has come to be narrated as a prelude to war. Imperial Germany has effectively become synonymous with cataclysm, its history a pathology of dysfunctional illiberal and authoritarian politics, persistent Junker militarism, and the erratic, warmongering Kaiser Wilhelm II.

While this narrative of German menace was well formed before the First World War, it coalesced during wartime into the full image of "beastliness." This was informed by the German invasion of Belgium, the mistreatment of Belgian civilians, and the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare that led to the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, events that offered endless material for Entente and US wartime propaganda. The postwar issues of German war guilt, reparations, and loss of the bulk of the German navy and colonies were of course much invested in that image. The longevity and persistence of the pathological image of Imperial Germany can clearly also be explained by its appeal as a prelude to the Third Reich, giving the Great War – a war that many Europeans and Americans had come to view as pointless by the late 1920s – some meaning. The rise of Hitler and then the outbreak of the Second World War merely confirmed what many British historians like Louis Namier and A. J. P. Taylor had known about the Germans all along.²

After the Second World War, the rehabilitation of West Germany, and its integration into a Western alliance bloc, German historians like Walther Hubatsch and Gerhard Ritter sought to salvage the imperial past in their reassessments of German history as a usable legacy for a German identity that was, unlike the Third Reich, part of a Western and Christian civilizational trajectory. While these narratives went too far in claiming a radical break with that path in 1933, they contributed to a reassessment of Imperial Germany less haunted by the Great War and began to resituate that history and war in a context of global entanglements and great power diplomacy putting Imperial Germany into a comparative imperial context.³

² L. B. Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals* (London: G. Cumberlege, 1944); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development German History Since 1815* (London: H. Hamilton, 1945).

³ Walther Hubatsch, *Die Ära Tirpitz: Studien zur deutschen Marinepolitik* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt-Verlag, 1955); Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des "Militarismus" in Deutschland*, 4 vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1954–68).

That all changed with the publication of Fritz Fischer's book *Griff nach der Weltmacht* in 1961 (translated as *Germany's Aims in the First World War*).⁴ He exposed the apologetic tendentiousness of Gerhard Ritter's interpretation of German policy in the First World War, but Fischer's intervention had the unintended effect of also shifting attention away from comparisons of Imperial Germany with other imperial powers. Fischer also reaffirmed the continuities of thinking and policy between the Kaiserreich and Third Reich, notably in the policies of conquest and annexation in eastern Europe.⁵ This work and especially his follow-up book, *Krieg der Illusionen (War of Illusions)*, likewise cast Imperial Germany's global entanglements before the war in uniquely sinister terms as a prelude to the First World War, a war German leaders allegedly actively planned and then precipitated.⁶ While Germany's global wartime strategy was an important component of Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, the focus on the domestic German origins of the war very much overshadowed it. Likewise overshadowed were the strong continuities of liberal imperialism in evidence in German *Weltpolitik* (World Policy) initiated after 1895.⁷

One interesting consequence of the success of Fischer's interpretation was that the difficult and contradictory legacy of liberal imperialism in Britain, France, and the United States escaped critical scrutiny, undoubtedly welcome in Britain and France, which had both expanded their colonial empires after 1918 and retained formal colonies well into the 1960s and beyond. Because of the clear continuities that Fritz Fischer also identified between German war aims in the First and Second World Wars, German peculiarity could be highlighted, and the many parallels that in fact existed between British, French, American, and German imperialism and their common links to Western liberalism were almost entirely obscured.⁸ In contemporaneous treatments and thereafter German liberalism was narrated as an obvious failure and compared unflatteringly with British, French, and American liberalism, a

⁴ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des Kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18*, 2d ed. (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1962); Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, with an introduction by Hajo Holborn and James Joll (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967). Due to problems with this translation, notably abridgements and inaccuracy, I will be using the German edition of this work throughout.

⁵ See Fritz Fischer, *World Power or Decline: The Controversy over Germany's Aims in the First World War*, trans. Lancelot L. Farrar, Robert Kimber, and Rita Kimber (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 113–24.

⁶ Fritz Fischer, *Krieg der Illusionen: Die deutsche Politik von 1911 bis 1914* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1969); Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914*, trans. Marian Jackson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975).

⁷ See Jennifer Jenkins, "Fritz Fischer's 'Programme for Revolution': Implications for a Global History of Germany in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 2, Special Issue: The Fischer Controversy after 50 years (April 2013): 397–417.

⁸ See Fritz Fischer, *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871–1945*, trans. Roger Fletcher (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979).

perspective that conveniently overlooked the realities of British and French violent colonial tutelage and Algerian, American, Australian, Canadian, and South African settler colonialism, genocide, racial segregation, and non-white disenfranchisement.⁹ According to that narrative, the stagnation and fragmentation of the German liberal movement in the 1890s made the German Protestant middle strata susceptible to the siren song of *Weltpolitik*, drawing them out of liberal party politics into the mushrooming nationalist associations where they could be mobilized against their traditional Catholic and Socialist enemies to defend the authoritarian political status quo.¹⁰

This interpretation of German imperialism with its narrative of liberal failure became a pillar of critical German historiography in West Germany in the early 1970s in what we might call the Kehr-Fischer-Wehler synthesis, an argument that drew on the earlier work of Eckart Kehr on German naval policy and then Hans-Ulrich Wehler's works on Bismarck and German imperialism that stressed the domestic political purposes of German overseas imperialism and pointed to Germany's uniquely illiberal, authoritarian, and militaristic historical trajectory since the nineteenth century.¹¹ More recently, the influence of this argument has shaped the development of a parallel interpretation among scholars seeking to establish a link between Germany's allegedly peculiarly violent colonial history and German atrocities in the First World War and under National Socialism.¹²

In light of the power of these narratives of Imperial German prewar aggression and menace, it may come as a surprise to some readers that Imperial Germany waged no wars of conquest between its founding and the

⁹ Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (New York: Knopf, 1972); James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Cf. Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 213–390.

¹⁰ Sheehan, *German Liberalism*, 276–78.

¹¹ Eckart Kehr, *Schlachtfloottenbau und Partei-Politik 1894–1901: Ein Versuch eines Querschnitts durch die innenpolitischen, sozialen und ideologischen Voraussetzungen des deutschen Imperialismus* (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1930); Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preussisch-deutschen Sozialgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1965); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, 3rd ed. (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972).

¹² See Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, eds., *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwest Afrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2003), 45–63; Jürgen Zimmerer, “The Birth of the ‘Ostland’ out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Post-Colonial Perspective on Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (June 2005): 197–219; Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

outbreak of the First World War. Between 1895 and 1914 Germany was also one of the only major world powers that did not wage war to acquire new colonial territory, and what it did acquire by negotiation, purchase, or lease was extremely modest by international comparison: parts of French Congo abutting Cameroon, half of Samoa, the tiny Caroline, Palau, and Mariana Islands in the Pacific, and the isolated Chinese leasehold of Kiaochow (Jiaozhou). Just for perspective, in those same years the British gained control of the Sudan, Nyasaland, Rhodesia, the Transvaal, Swaziland, Amantongaland (Maputaland), the Chinese leasehold Weihaiwei (Weihai), and Tonga. The French seized control of Mauritania, Morocco, Upper Volta, Madagascar, Laos, and the Chinese leasehold Kwangchow Wan (Guangzhouwan), while the Japanese gained Port Arthur (Lüshunkou) and Talien (Dalian), colonized Formosa and Korea, and expanded their position in southern Manchuria. The Americans, for their part, gained control of the Philippines, half of Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Panama Canal Zone, and they intervened militarily in Cuba, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Mexico. Even a relatively weak power like Italy gained Cyrenaica and Tripolitania (Libya).

The other major objectives of German *Weltpolitik* fared no better. The Berlin-Baghdad railroad was not completed by 1914, still some 800 kilometers of track short. Germany also “lost” the dreadnought arms race with Britain by 1912, and the political purposes of the fleet as a diplomatic lever to force Britain into a neutrality agreement or colonial concessions achieved nothing. The reality is that Germany’s navy never acquired the strength to threaten the British Isles, much less Britain’s trade or its colonies, and it obviously also ultimately failed to deter war. Perhaps not surprisingly, German foreign policy in the decade before the First World War was roundly denounced as weak, adrift, and feckless by the German public. Indeed, the prevailing perception by 1914 was that in most arenas that mattered, *Weltpolitik* had failed. Thus Imperial Germany’s actual provocations and actions before 1914 stand in remarkable contrast to the perceptions of those actions, especially in Britain and the United States.

The bifocal vision adopted in interpreting the German Empire from the perspective of 1918 and 1945 and the inordinate attention given its brief formal colonial gambit in Africa have also almost completely buried Germany’s many other overseas entanglements that long predated the founding of the German Empire and that continued to be a very important part of its presence overseas after unification. There is, indeed, little if any wider awareness of the length and depth of those connections. We are accustomed to viewing the Age of Discovery and Europe’s overseas expansion as Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and later French and English affairs, ones in which German-speakers did not much participate. Though less conspicuous, Germans were nevertheless aboard Portuguese caravels, Spanish galleons, and Dutch fluyts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as crewmembers, missionaries,

cartographers, scientists, physicians, merchants, bank agents, planters, and mercenaries. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Germans were aboard Dutch and British ships in similar capacities and often important agents of description, translation, and mediation between Europe and the rest of the world. For example, two German physicians in Dutch service in Japan, Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716) and Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866), would play key roles both in the transmission of European medical knowledge to the Tokugawa shogunate and in shaping Europe’s perceptions of Japan.¹³

The ranks of such German traveler-scientists would swell in the nineteenth century, led by such legendary figures as Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), whose extraordinary journeys gave names to many plants, animals, rivers, mountain ranges, and other places in the Americas. He would be followed by a whole host of German geographers, geologists, naturalists, and ethnographers, such as the brothers Adolf, Hermann, and Robert Schlagintweit (1829–57, 1826–82, 1833–85, respectively), whose extraordinary investigative journeys from the Himalayas down the Deccan plateau to Ceylon produced a monumental survey of India in 1861 commissioned by the British India Office. Only a few years later in the late 1860s Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905) would undertake extensive geological expeditions in China and come to play a major role in Western perceptions of opportunity in the Middle Kingdom. He was followed by Johannes Justus Rein (1835–1918), whose multivolume work on the flora, fauna, and people of Japan based on his extensive excursions deep into the archipelago in the early 1870s was considered definitive at the time and immediately translated into multiple languages.¹⁴

Beyond the familiar story of German emigration to North America, Germans had also developed isolated settler communities, missions, and merchant diasporas not only in many parts of the British Empire but also in such places as Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, West Africa, the Ottoman Empire, the Dutch East Indies, Samoa, and China by the 1860s. Meanwhile, between 1816 and 1860 the tonnage of shipping entering Hamburg increased fivefold,

¹³ Josef Kreiner, ed., *Deutschland-Japan: Historische Kontakte* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Gundermann, 1984); Edgar Franz, “Deutsche Mediziner in Japan – ein Beitrag zum Wissenstransfer in der Edo-Zeit,” *Japanstudien – Jahrbuch des Deutschen Instituts für Japanstudien* 17 (2005): 31–56.

¹⁴ See Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt’s New World* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2015); Ulrike Kirchberger, *Aspekte deutsch-britischer Expansion: Die Überseeinteressen der deutschen Migranten in Großbritannien in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999); Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 27; Shellen Xiao Wu, *Empires of Coal: Fueling China’s Entry Into the Modern World Order, 1860–1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Matthias Koch and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Johannes Justus Rein: Briefe eines deutschen Geographen aus Japan 1873–1875* (Munich: Iudicium, 2006).

driven in large part by rapidly-growing trade with North and South America. By 1860 nearly one million tons of goods was entering its harbor.¹⁵

As already alluded to, the prominence of university-educated people – geographers, scientists, physicians, and clerics – in this German exploration and discovery is a striking feature, and it may not come as a surprise that university scholarship was a cornerstone of Germany’s worldwide influence long before Germany was unified. Indeed German research universities had by 1870 gained a truly global reputation, attracting students from all over the world and serving as a nexus for scholarly connections that entangled Germany with the outside world decades before Germany ever acquired formal colonies, a navy, or significant industrial export markets and overseas investments. German universities would remain one of the most powerful institutions of German global connection and play a key role both in the dissemination of imperial information and in imperial politics up to and during the First World War. It is thus odd that while valuable contributions have been made to our understanding of the global and transnational entanglements and the global economic context of Imperial Germany’s history, the key role of universities in that globalization is missing almost entirely.¹⁶ Even in histories of the nineteenth century that aspire to be global, such as Jürgen Osterhammel’s impressive *Transformation of the World*, the German university is treated as a European export to the rest of the world rather than as a node of global connection that brought the world to Germany and then facilitated many active personal links to such places as Japan, China, Latin America, and the United States.¹⁷

This is a book about Germany’s global scholarly connections after it was founded as a modern state in 1871 and how these fatefully intersected with the later quest for formal colonies and the national ambition to become a world power. It is about how this “empire of learning” became entangled with the task of learning about the world and devising an imperial strategy, hence the double

¹⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Paper and Iron: Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897–1927* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33.

¹⁶ See Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, trans. Sorcha O’Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Niels P. Petersson, “Das Kaiserreich in Prozessen ökonomischer Globalisierung,” in *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 49–67; Cornelius Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization: Economy and Politics in Germany, 1860–1914*, trans. Alex Skinner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014). Two notable recent exceptions are Ho-eun Kim, *Doctors of Empire: Medical and Cultural Encounters between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*.

¹⁷ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 798–808.

meaning of the book's title *Learning Empire*. It is a story about the German Empire told from the globe inward toward Germany. While this may seem an odd strategy, the intention is to highlight how misleading it is to treat Imperial Germany purely endogenously and its later imperial gambits as emanating from the metropole outward. In reality the transportation and communications revolution unfolding in the decade before German unification – exemplified by transcontinental railways such as the Union Pacific, transoceanic steamships, undersea telegraph cables, and the completion of the Suez Canal – rapidly accelerated the transfer of people and ideas that were already part of the fabric of German life at the empire's founding. Those experiences entered German consciousness and parlance by the burgeoning newspaper, journal, and book print media, where the term *Weltwirtschaft* (world economy, i.e., globalization) was increasingly common by the 1880s.¹⁸ Detailed scholarly and journalistic treatments of the process of agricultural and industrial development, urbanization, and colonization from overseas thus accompanied Germany's own modern development and became important metrics of its progress. The rapid traffic of university-educated people and the dissemination of their ideas through journalistic and scholarly description, comparison, and analysis was at the very heart of the formation of mental maps of the world that later came to justify *Weltpolitik* as a response to the challenges of globalization. That is, Imperial Germany's history was inescapably global from the very beginning, not as the result of policies of outward colonial expansion or the forces of industrialization and urbanization in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁹

Another important ambition of this book is to recover the strands of liberal imperialism that made up the cloth of German *Weltpolitik*. This is important for a number of reasons. The heavy investment in narratives of “liberal failure” and imperialism as an authoritarian ruse has largely written liberalism out of German *Weltpolitik*. This has wider implications. As Adam Tooze has argued, the hold of Mark Mazower's “Dark Continent” thesis to explain the tragedy of interwar history that culminated in fascism and National Socialism gives excessive weight to the resurgence of the supposedly illiberal and atavistic imperialistic impulses of the “old world” against the forces of progress.²⁰ This thesis overlooks the genuine novelty of the new global imperialism that took form around 1900 and that ultimately contributed to the outbreak of world

¹⁸ Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, eds., *Geschichte der Globalisierung: Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 63–70; Quinn Slobodian, “How to See the World Economy: Statistics, Maps, and Schumpeter's Camera in the First Age of Globalization,” *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015): 307–22.

¹⁹ See Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation*, 15–20.

²⁰ Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (New York: Viking, 2014), 17–20, 22; cf. Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), x–xv, 3–40; Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

war in 1914, which in war and after would morph into interwar militarism and fascism. This was an imperialism that before 1914 had grown out of liberal nationalism, was often self-consciously progressive, and that managed to mobilize the democratized masses not just in Britain and France, but also in Germany, Japan, Italy, and the United States.²¹ Indeed, the mutated DNA of liberalism can be found in the interwar right and in the metastasis of fascism.

We are familiar with narratives of interwar instability that treat the prewar liberal *Pax Britannica* as a force for peace, stability, and international order only to be ultimately shattered by world war.²² That reading tends to overlook the fact many of the destabilizing forces of the period before 1914 can be traced back to Britain's violent outward expansion in the Victorian era, the battleship arms race it started with its imperial rivals France and Russia in the late 1880s, and the strategic realignments that were necessary due to its imperial overextension undertaken in the Edwardian era. Globalization required the acceptance of certain international rules largely defined by Britain, but the very legitimacy of those rules was being undermined by the tensions that emerged between Britain's imperial claims and its actual power, and along with that, its self-serving abuse of those very rules as it found itself increasingly overstretched.²³

Clear definitions of German liberalism and liberal imperialism are in order before continuing any further. For the purposes of this study, "liberalism" is understood not as a party designation but rather as a broader political ideology linked intimately to German nationalism and associated closely with the Protestant and Jewish urban middle classes of Imperial Germany. Like its close cousins in Britain and France, this liberalism placed the emancipated individual (not class, church, or king) at its core, was committed to representative government (if not necessarily parliamentarism or democracy), and saw scientific, social, economic, and cultural progress as desirable and the result of individual freedom, initiative, and upward mobility. It was an ideology that gave priority to civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and market forces in creating social order and in that march of progress, yet one that was

²¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 56–83.

²² See, for example, John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1986).

²³ See Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Harold James, *The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

also committed to older German ideals of a classless civil society (*Mittelstandsgesellschaft*), the rule of law (*Rechtsstaatlichkeit*), and the state as a patron and guarantor of religious, educational, scientific, and artistic freedoms (*Kulturstaatlichkeit*).

German liberal imperialism was the projection abroad of those liberal values and ideals to become the equal of other great world powers. In practice that involved gaining both formal colonies and informal spheres of influence. While committed to colonization and the spread of *Deutschtum* (Germanism), liberal imperialists came to criticize colonial bureaucratic tutelage (*Kolonial-Assessorismus*) and the abusive practices of colonial concession companies. Instead, they sought greater colonial self-administration and to incentivize colonial subject people into becoming rational (firmly-settled and docile, yet acquisitive) producers and consumers, aiming at their integration into a German and worldwide division of labor through investments in colonial railways and more scientific forms of colonial policy. They hoped to turn the colonies into sources of key imported raw materials, a market for German manufactured goods, and where feasible, a destination for Germany's emigrant population otherwise lost to the United States and British Empire.

In the Wilhelmine period, German liberal imperialists fully embraced Germany's industrial future and the challenges of *Weltwirtschaft*, prioritizing free trade and private overseas investments to expand German export markets and spheres of interest well beyond formal colonies into such places as Latin America, China, and the Ottoman Empire. This reflected the waning popularity of settler colonialism within their ranks due to the disappointing record of Germany's African colonies as settler destinations. Even so, a significant coterie of liberal imperialists continued to place much stock in the liberating potential of settler colonies and never quite gave up hope for securing them somewhere. They saw them as valuable laboratories of self-reliance, self-government, and social mobility on the model of American and British experience in North America, and they believed they would heal deficiencies in the German national character inherited from centuries of princely tutelage and status snobbery. Finally and most importantly, German liberal imperialists were deeply invested in the German navy as a symbol of national unity and guarantor of Germany's maritime destiny as a major trading and aspiring world power.

Some readers may find the prominence given in this book to liberalism surprising given the still prevalent notion of German "liberal failure." Much research since the 1980s on German bourgeois society, liberalism, and German political culture has come to question this thesis and its supporting trope of the supposedly apolitical German bourgeoisie.²⁴ While it is true that the

²⁴ See David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Dieter Langewiesche, *Liberalism in Germany*, trans. Christiane Banerji (Princeton: