



Volume 4: Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890
Society for German Colonization, Founding Manifesto (March 28, 1885)

Voluntary associations were an important means of spreading colonial enthusiasm. Manifestos like this one, drafted by the African adventurer Carl Peters for the newly founded Society for German Colonization, argued that Germany had thus far lost out on the acquisition of colonies. This had produced what Peters identifies as a “deplorable national state of affairs,” requiring quick, vigorous action. Here colonialism is portrayed as both an economic and a patriotic necessity, in part to accommodate emigrants who might otherwise be lost to the German nation.

German Colonization

The German nation has been left empty-handed in the partitioning of the world as it has taken place from the beginning of the fifteenth century up to today. All the other civilized nations of Europe have outposts beyond our continent where their language and customs can take firm root and flourish. As soon as the German emigrant has left the borders of the Reich behind him, he is a stranger on foreign territory. The German Empire, mighty and strong through a unity won by blood, has become the leading power on the European continent; but everywhere her sons abroad have to adapt to nations that are either indifferent or even hostile to ours. For centuries, the great stream of German emigration has become assimilated into foreign races and disappeared within them. Germandom outside Europe is constantly in national decline.

In this fact – so incredibly distressing to national pride – lies an enormous economic disadvantage for our people! Year after year, the strength of about 200,000 Germans is lost to our Fatherland! This massive concentration of power usually flows directly into the camp of our economic competitors and increases the strength of our opponents. Foreign branches carry out the German import of products from tropical zones, which causes many millions in German capital to be lost to foreign nations each year! German exports are dependent on the arbitrariness of foreign tariff policies. Our industry lacks a market that is secure under all circumstances, because our nation lacks colonies of its own.

In order to remedy this deplorable national state of affairs, practical and vigorous action is necessary.

With this as a starting point, a society has convened in Berlin whose objective is the practical initiation of such action. The Society for German Colonization intends to take up the realization

of carefully planned colonizing projects in a resolute and sweeping manner, thus supporting and supplementing the efforts of other organizations with similar aims.

The society has set the following tasks for itself as priorities:

1. Acquisition of appropriate colonial capital.
2. Finding and purchasing suitable territories for colonization.
3. Directing German emigration to these areas.

Filled with the conviction that the energetic launch of this great national mission must not be postponed any longer, we venture to turn to the German people with the request that they actively support the efforts of our society! The German nation has proven repeatedly that it is prepared to make sacrifices for general patriotic endeavors – may it also participate resourcefully in the solution of this great historical question.

Every German whose heart beats for the greatness and honor of our nation is asked to join our society. It is necessary to make up for centuries of oversight and to prove to the world that the German people have inherited not only ancient imperial glory from our forefathers but also their old German-national spirit!

Source: Society for German Colonization, founding manifesto by Carl Peters (March 28, 1885), in E.A. Jacob, *Deutsche Kolonialpolitik in Dokumenten, Gedanken, und Gestalten der letzten fünfzig Jahre* [*German Colonial Politics in Documents, Reflections, and Figures From the Last Fifty Years*]. Leipzig, 1938, pp. 85-87.

Original German text reprinted in Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperialismus. Seine geistigen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen. Ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch* [*Imperialism: Its Intellectual, Political, and Economic Foundations. A Source- and Workbook*]. Hamburg: Hoffman and Campe, 1977, pp. 124-25.

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