“A Small World Power”:
How the Nazi Regime Viewed Mennonites

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Abstract: During the Second World War, military planners in Nazi Germany employed population transfers and genocide to reorder Europe’s racial landscape—a project that some considered compatible with the needs of Mennonites worldwide. In 1944, SS leader Karl Götz authored the clearest wartime statement regarding the place of Mennonites in National Socialist law and ideology. His confidential booklet, *The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites*, drew on the author’s own encounters with Mennonites across Europe and the Americas, as well as the input of leading pro-Nazi Mennonites. Götz’s document—reproduced below in full and in English translation—selectively cited a wide range of Anabaptist historiography to deemphasize Mennonite nonresistance while depicting the denomination as purely Aryan and as oriented toward fascism. Following the Holocaust and a hypothetical German victory, Götz and other Nazis intended to relocate tens of thousands of Mennonites from overseas to a racially cleansed Third Reich.

In 1944, a Nazi Party office responsible for overseeing racial matters in western areas of German-occupied Poland published a short booklet titled *The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites* (*Das Schwarzmeerdeutsch: Die Mennoniten*). The volume’s author was a Nazi Party member and SS leader named Karl Götz. Götz was a well-known traveler, writer, and novelist, as well as a decorated soldier. He was also well acquainted with Mennonites in Europe and overseas. Today, his text is not widely known. Even during the Third Reich, his booklet was kept confidential—“For Official Use Only.” Yet this document is significant for scholars of Mennonite history, as well as those interested in issues of nationalism, refugee politics, and religion in the Third Reich. The twelve-page booklet constitutes the clearest written record of the Nazi regime’s position toward Mennonites as a religious and ethnic community. Its

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1. Ibid., 1.
contents make evident that the reputation of Mennonites among government offices in Germany and those territories occupied by its military was remarkably positive, even late in the Second World War. Götz’s text also reveals details about unfulfilled Nazi plans for the postwar period—particularly the racist goal of reorganizing the populations and infrastructure of Eastern Europe in order to render the region suitable as Germanic “living space” (*Lebensraum*). Götz’s booklet demonstrates that state planners considered Mennonitism compatible with this vision. At the time, around 120,000 Mennonites—approximately a fourth of the denomination worldwide—lived under Nazi rule. Because leading National Socialists perceived the church as a racially-defined ethnic group of Germanic origin, they eventually planned to bring tens of thousands of members still living outside German borders “back” to Germany.

*The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites* is reprinted below in full and in English translation—its first appearance since the Second World War. The purpose of reproducing it here is to provide primary source documentation of the relationship between Nazi officials and the Mennonite Church in the Third Reich. Readers will gain a sense of how some National Socialists thought about Mennonite history and doctrine as well as how members might have fared in German-dominated Europe, had Hitler won the war. The booklet is instructive regarding the position assigned to Mennonites in Reich law and racial ideology, as well as for the unorthodox and often surprising interpretations held by the Nazi Party’s leading authority on Anabaptist history and scholarship. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Karl Götz’s booklet, however, is what it does not say. Not once does the author mention the horrific fate of Jews and other victims of Nazism during the Second World War—despite composing his text in the midst of the Third Reich’s relentless and ongoing extermination campaign, whose most famous killing sites were located in occupied Poland. Götz himself served as a *Sturmbannführer* (equivalent to major) in the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (Protection Squadron) or SS, the organization most responsible for organizing and overseeing the Holocaust. He wrote his booklet for the Regional Office for Racial Matters (*Gauamt für Volkstumsfragen*) of Reichsgau Wartheland, an administrative area infamous for anti-Polish and anti-Semitic atrocities. Wartheland was home to the Chełmno extermination camp, and numerous former

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residents experienced enslavement and murder in nearby locations, including Majdanek, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau.  

Although the words “Jew” and “Jewish” never appear in Karl Götz’s booklet, the text is nonetheless deeply anti-Semitic. The positive treatment of Mennonites in Nazi-dominated Europe must be understood in direct relation to the systematic annihilation of the continent’s Jewish population. That ranking Nazis like Götz portrayed Mennonites favorably in the same time and place that they were carrying out genocide was no accident. To the contrary, they justified mass murder by invoking conspiracy theories about Jewish plots to despoil and defile so-called Aryans, and they considered the elimination of Jews as a people to be a prerequisite for procuring land, goods, and security for these same Aryan populations. Nazi visions of creating a future safe home for Mennonites and other Aryans required, as one scholar recently put it, “a world without Jews.”  

Thus by identifying Mennonites—like other German-speakers with supposedly pure bloodlines—as Germans and Aryans, writers like Götz hoped to enlist the denomination in National Socialists’ ideology of racial extermination and replacement. Put differently, Nazi assumptions about Mennonite wellbeing, including and especially their supposed need to live in a “Jew-free” (Judenrein) context, provided one among many justifications for genocide. In turn, Mennonites numbered among the Holocaust’s intended beneficiaries.

The following pages offer an introductory essay that aims to contextualize The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites and its origins. Readers should arrive at the booklet with a sense of both how officials in Reichsgau Wartheland would have understood its contents and how Karl Götz composed the manuscript.

Two notable points can be stated at the outset. First, the history of Götz’s booklet makes evident that several leading Mennonites in the Third Reich had a hand in its composition. This is not to say that the document

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reflects the opinions of most Mennonites worldwide or even in the Third Reich. Numerous Mennonites suffered under National Socialism, whether as political dissidents, descendants of intermarriages with Jews, or as general victims of the political turmoil and widespread destruction wrought by Hitler’s war of aggression. Nevertheless, several prominent figures in the Mennonite church in Germany sought to promote their denomination’s interests by aligning themselves with the Third Reich. Their efforts successfully influenced the Nazi regime’s policy toward Mennonitism as a whole, including in the specific instance of Karl Götz’s booklet. The volume’s ideas and even its very language reflect close collaboration with several Mennonite thinkers and churchmen. Second, the racial ideology driving this document and Nazi policy more generally affected the experiences of tens of thousands of Mennonites well beyond the Second World War. Following the Third Reich’s collapse in 1945, representatives of the Soviet Union deported around 23,000 Mennonites across the Iron Curtain on charges of treason, while more than 15,000 succeeded—at least in part because of their preferential wartime treatment—in emigrating to North or South America. This document thus offers both a window onto Mennonitism’s entanglement with Nazism and the Holocaust as well as an insight into the causes behind the denomination’s postwar fate.

**CONTENT OF THE BOOKLET**

When *The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites* appeared in 1944, its primary purpose was to serve as a handbook for bureaucrats and functionaries in the newly established Nazi administrative region of Reichsgau Wartheland, located in the western part of present-day Poland. The document laid out for German officials who the Mennonites were and how they should be treated. Wartheland did not have a longstanding Mennonite population. Rather, most members in the region were recent arrivals from the Soviet Union. The first 500 had come from the war-torn city of Lemberg, currently Lviv in Ukraine. They constituted only a small part of a much larger “return migration” of German speakers invited by Adolf Hitler in 1939 to settle areas of Poland occupied by the German military during the opening months of the Second World War.

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A nonaggression pact signed by Germany and the Soviet Union granted resettlement rights to people of German ancestry. Although in general the immigrants had not previously held German citizenship, National Socialists recognized them as “racial comrades” (Volksgenossen) and claimed that relocation to Wartheland would save them from persecution in the Soviet Union. Policymakers also argued that by settling in Nazi-controlled territory, they could help to “Germanize” (verdeutschen) local soil, which had previously been inhabited primarily by Polish speakers. This “Home to the Reich” (Heim ins Reich) program ultimately brought over a million German speakers from Eastern Europe to Nazi-occupied Poland, including a substantial wave from Ukraine in 1943 and 1944. Having lived under German occupation since 1941, individuals from this region retreated westward with Germany’s military to avoid capture by the Soviet Red Army. Virtually all Mennonites in Ukraine—about 35,000 people—came to Germany and occupied Poland during the final years of the war.

In his booklet Götz explained that the majority of these Mennonites from Ukraine, including groups from the Molotschna, Chortitza, and Zagradovka colonies near the Black Sea, had arrived in Reichsgau Wartheland. He thus considered them part of the larger “Culture of the Black Sea Germans,” among which he also counted Catholic and Protestant populations. Yet while these larger denominations were well known to Wartheland officials, common knowledge about Mennonites was comparatively scarce. The Regional Office for Racial Matters thus decided to produce a short handbook explaining Mennonite history and beliefs, and their expected treatment. For this reason, The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites begins with two paragraphs intended to succinctly summarize the most important points. Götz’s opening abstract portrays the Mennonites as good Germans and desirable resettlers for Wartheland. He explained that in their old homeland of Ukraine, they had modeled “exemplary community life,” including “highly developed forms of education and pedagogy.”

Heinrich Pauls, “Die Mennonitenengemeinde Lemberg,” ca. 1939, R 69/150, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany, hereafter BArch.


readers would have immediately understood such ideas as evidence of Mennonites’ Aryan qualities. For decades, German nationalists had characterized hard work as a key trait of German identity, and during the war, the term “German work” justified excluding, expropriating, and executing Jews and other alleged non-Aryans in order to give their land and goods to supposedly more efficient and hardworking German speakers.11

Taking an explicitly global perspective, Götz noted that while many Mennonite colonists had arrived in Wartheland, most of the denomination’s members actually lived outside German-controlled territories. According to Nazi terminology, a majority of Mennonites worldwide—totaling approximately a half million—were “ethnic Germans” (Volksdeutsche). This category could be contrasted with “Reich Germans” (Reichsdeutsche), who held German citizenship. Götz’s document discussed both “Reich German” and “ethnic German” Mennonites, highlighting in particular the economic achievements and allegedly good German qualities of groups in various parts of Europe and the Americas. In Götz’s telling, the Mennonites, spread across four continents, constituted “a small world power.” He thus depicted them as geopolitically—and in the terminology of Nazism, “racially politically” (rassenpolitisch)—important and worth the attention of German policymakers. Götz further suggested, assuming that the Third Reich would emerge victorious from the Second World War, that many of these foreign-born Mennonites would eventually relocate to Germany. He alleged that some Mennonite colonies—especially in Brazil and Paraguay—were prepared to “emigrate back to the German Empire without any conditions,” a prospect that Götz welcomed. He argued, however, that their readiness to immigrate “depends to a significant degree on how we treat the Mennonites here.”12 His own booklet, in other words, was supposed not only to serve as a guide for how to handle newly arrived Mennonites in Wartheland, but also to enable the later immigration of potentially even larger waves of their coreligionists from overseas.

Structurally, the main body of Karl Götz’s booklet is divided into four parts. The first section, “From the History of Mennonites,” offers a general


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This is typical of other wartime summaries written about little-known groups for official use. Similar descriptions of Mennonites can be found in letters and reports exchanged among Nazi bureaucrats and military leaders seeking quick, reliable information about communities that came under German control during the occupations of Poland and Ukraine. This initial part of the booklet opens with the line: “The Mennonite community is not a sect.” In the Third Reich, such an assertion would not have been self-evident. National Socialists frequently exhibited skepticism toward small religious groups like the Mennonites. The Nazi Party’s Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst), for example, regularly surveilled the activities of the country’s largest Mennonite conference, the Union of German Mennonite Congregations (Vereinigung deutscher Mennonitengemeinden), drawing up so-called Sectarian Reports well into war years. Sectarianism as a concept held decidedly negative connotations. Sometimes the charge led directly to unfavorable verdicts. Just as church leaders had insisted for decades that Mennonitism was not a sect, during the Third Reich this claim helped to secure a good reputation among state offices.

The most commonly cited examples of alleged denominational sectarianism receive attention in the booklet’s second part, “Distinctive Teachings of the Mennonites.” There, Götz explained that Mennonitism was a “Free Church” (Freikirche); that its members practiced adult baptism; that they once (although no longer, at least in Germany) stressed the principle of nonresistance; and that they neither preferred to swear oaths nor were obligated by Reich law to do so. Of these four “distinctive teachings” (Sonderlehren), nonresistance and opposition to oaths brought the most difficulty for Mennonites in Nazi Germany. In the late 1930s, for example, one report described Mennonites as an “international religious sect,” alleging (somewhat erroneously) that “Besides their rejection of National Socialist racial ideology and of the larger racial community, their

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16. For example, SD Leitabschnitt Karlsruhe, “Sektenbericht,” August 19, 1940, R 58/5633, BAch.
17. Leading Mennonite historians in Imperial Germany had since the 1880s attempted to prove that their denomination was a “confession” (rather than a “sect”) comparable to Protestant or Catholic state churches in order to receive equal rights. See Abraham Friesen, History and Renewal in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition (North Newton, Kan.: Bethel College, 1994); Goossen, Chosen Nation, 53-70.
18. Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschum, 8-10.
pacifist orientation deserves special emphasis.”¹⁹ This summary led to a temporary ban on Mennonites’ ability to join the SS Clan Community (SS-Sippengemeinschaft), either as regular Schutzstaffel members or as their wives.²⁰ Church leaders, fearing lower class status and desiring to advocate for Nazi-oriented coreligionists, sought to overturn such restrictions via letters and reports to state and party offices. “The German Mennonites stand in unwavering loyalty to our Führer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler and to the Third Reich,” insisted Pastor Emil Händiges, longtime chair of the Union of German Mennonite Congregations.²¹ Karl Götz took this same position in The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, clarifying that Mennonites should not be confused with pacifists, and that according to a ruling of the Highest Party Court (Oberstes Parteigericht), they “can also be members of the NSDAP [Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)].”²²

The document’s two final sections, “The Position of the Party Regarding the Mennonites” and “Current Attitudes of Russian German Mennonites,” outline the political, religious, and racial context of Wartheland’s Mennonite settlers.²³ In the booklet’s third part, Götz reported on meetings between the prominent Mennonite scholar, organizer, and humanitarian aid worker Benjamin Unruh with the Reichsführer-SS (Commander of the SS) Heinrich Himmler as well as with Arthur Greiser, Gauleiter (equivalent to Governor) of Wartheland. Born

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²⁰. “For this reason, members of this sect cannot simultaneously be members of the SS Clan Community.” Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes to Chef des Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamtes, April 9, 1938, NS 2/220, BArch. This ban lasted only briefly, although the SS retained a certain skepticism of Mennonite sectarianism. In 1939, for example, when the Mennonite Sturmmann (equivalent to Private) Walter Karnapp sought to marry a Protestant woman, the Genealogical Office of the Race and Settlement Main Office wrote, “As in similar cases, a personal discussion with the persons should take place.”—Chef des Sippenamtes im Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS to Josef Dietrich, Jan. 17, 1939, NS 2/220, BArch. Similarly, when a Protestant SS-Rottenführer (Squadron Leader) named Helmut Fenske desired to marry a Mennonite woman in a Mennonite ceremony, SS gatekeepers requested an audience to “determine the extent to which the applicants conform to this sect and whether they are prepared to guarantee that they will advocate unconditionally and at all times for National Socialism.”—Chef des Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamtes to Führer des SS Abschnittes XXII, Dec. 1, 1939, NS 2/220, BArch. On marriage and family in the SS Clan Community, see Gudrun Schwarz, Eine Frau on seiner Seite: Ehefrauen in der “SS-Sippengemeinschaft” (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1997).

²¹. Emil Händiges, Grundsätzlicher über die deutschen Mennoniten, über ihre Stellung zu Wehrpflicht und Eid und ihr Verhältnis zum Dritten Reich (Elbing: Reinhold Kühn, 1937), 2.

²². Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschten, 10. On debates about nonresistance and oath swearing among Mennonites in the Third Reich, see Diether Götz Lichdi, Mennoniten im Dritten Reich (Bolanden-Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1977), 87-91, 118-134; Goossen, Chosen Nation, 121-146.

²³. Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschten, 11-12.
in South Russia in 1881, Unruh had been exiled to Germany after the Bolshevik Revolution. He was well known across the Mennonite world for assisting the emigration of more than 20,000 coreligionists from the USSR to Brazil, Canada, and Paraguay during the 1920s and early 1930s. In the Third Reich, Unruh served as an honorary member of the board of the Union of German Mennonite Congregations as well as official representative of multiple international aid organizations, including the North America-based Mennonite Central Committee. Speaking frequently with leading National Socialists on behalf (and sometimes without permission) of various Mennonite groups and conferences, Unruh also allowed himself to be described by men like Karl Götz as the “spiritual leader of the Mennonites” and reportedly even “pope of the Mennonites.”

Because Nazi offices generally operated according to the so-called Führer Principle (Führerprinzip), which favored authoritative leadership and dictatorial personalities, Unruh and his friends often acted as if he spoke for the entirety of the Mennonite Church, whether in Germany or worldwide, even though this was not the case.

The last section of Götz’s booklet discusses the “religious” and “racial” aspects of the Mennonite settlers in Wartheland. Here the author wrote favorably about “foundational German religious convictions.” Although later historians sometimes claimed that Mennonites and other Christians resisted National Socialism to the extent that they preserved their faith, belief in God (Gottgläubigkeit) was in fact regularly seen as a fascist quality, particularly in the Nazi-occupied East. The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, for instance, argues that for Mennonite resettlers, “Bolshevism meant the same thing as godlessness.” If some individuals had lost their faith while living in the Soviet Union, Nazi interpreters like Götz saw their return to religion under German rule as part of their so-called re-Germanization (Rückdeutschung), a process of National Socialist indoctrination. Nevertheless, Christian faith and “belief in God” were not necessarily synonymous in the Third Reich. Götz had himself left the Protestant church years before, and he was clearly skeptical of orthodox Christianity, hoping that Wartheland’s Mennonites would eventually

24. Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschthum, 9; Goossen, Chosen Nation, 149.
27. In 1944, welfare officers in Reichsgau Wartheland counted 86,000 “ethnic German” settlers, including Mennonites, from Eastern Europe who supposedly required significant “re-Germanization.”—Gauhauptamtsleiter des Gauamts für Volkstumsfragen, “Überblick über die Rückdeutschungsarbeit,” July 7, 1944, R 69/215, BArch. On re-Germanization, see Elizabeth Harvey, Women and the Nazi East (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
discard some of their more conservative teachings for an explicitly racially-oriented “German” form of faith. 28 Doing so would have further aligned their religion with what Götz described in his final paragraph as Mennonites’ already impressive racial qualities. Positing that the purity of Mennonites abroad constituted a self-evident bond with their purported fatherland, he concluded by reiterating the prediction that after the war, many communities overseas would return to a victorious Third Reich. 29

THE AUTHOR

A biographical sketch of the author of The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites clarifies how and why the booklet’s contents were produced. The SS leader and unreliable interpreter of Anabaptism Karl Götz was born in 1903 in the south German town of Neubolheim bei Heidenheim, near Stuttgart. 30 His family was of modest means, and as a young man, he traveled somewhat disaffectedly as an industrial worker to the United States. He later served as a teacher in rural Wurttemberg as


29. The assertion that all Mennonites worldwide were of German ancestry appears in numerous state reports drafted during the Second World War. As in Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschum, 8, the claim was often described as “scientifically” proven—usually a reference, whether cited or not, to the racial scientific testing detailed in Friedrich Keiter, Rußlanddeutsche Bauern und ihre Stammesgenossen in Deutschland (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1934). For example, Josef Geiger, “Ansiedlung von Deutschen in der Krim,” March 18, 1942, R 6/19, BArch: “The blood group studies that were conducted ten years ago by the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Berlin-Dahlem among 3,000 German refugees from the Black Sea region, as well as the anthropological measurements that Dr. Keiter conducted on them, led to the extrapolated results that they demonstrated a somewhat better racial constitution than could be assessed for those living in the places of tribal origin of these ‘ethnic Germans’ in the old German homeland. To the extent that one can talk about [natural] selection during around 130 years, this led to positive results.”

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well as in Palestine. These interrupted years abroad helped to awaken Götz’s interest in Germans abroad (Auslandsdeutsche), and he wrote fervently nationalist articles already during the years of the Weimar Republic. Shortly after the demise of democratic Germany and Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, Götz joined the Nazi Party and moved to Stuttgart. There he worked as a teacher and later joined the city council. In Stuttgart he also began his longtime collaboration with the German Foreign Institute (Deutsches Ausland-Institute). This organization—which researched German-speaking people outside German borders and, when possible, advocated for their interests—had been founded in 1917. From 1923, it became organized under the national Interior Ministry, and in 1933 it became ideologically and institutionally “coordinated” (gleichgeschaltet) with National Socialism.31 Götz worked first as a voluntary associate, but his responsibilities became ever greater. He eventually joined the Cultural Council (Kulturrat) and the Administrative Committee (Verwaltungsausschuss), and after the outbreak of the Second World War, he served as one of two leaders of the Commission of the German Foreign Institute for Resettlement Documentation (Kommission des Deutschen Ausland-Instituts zur Dokumentation der Umsiedlung) in occupied Poland.

During his years in Stuttgart, Götz became a well-known and prize-winning writer. He joined the National Socialist Teachers’ Association (Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerverband) as well as the Reich Association of German Writers (Reichsverbands Deutscher Schriftsteller) and received a variety of honors for his writing.32 His first book, The Children’s Ship (Das Kinderschiff), appeared in 1934.33 The story told of his experiences among German speakers in Palestine, and over 100,000 copies were printed. Further books, like The Children’s Ship, propagated ultranationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic opinions in well-written prose. During the mid-1930s, it was in the context of his literary research and writing about “Germans abroad” that Götz first became well-acquainted with Mennonitism. For eleven months in 1936 and 1937, he traveled through North and South America on behalf of the German Foreign Institute in order to raise interest for the Third Reich among German speakers in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, as well as to collect

32. These included such honors as the Ethnic German Literature Prize (Volksdeutscher Schrifttumspreis), the Wilhelm-Raabe-Prize (Wilhelm-Raabe-Preis), the Poet Prize of the City Braunschweig (Dichterpreis der Stadt Braunschweig), and the People’s Prize of German Communities and Community Association for German Poetry (Volkspreis der deutschen Gemeinden und Gemeindeverbände für deutsche Dichtung).
and eventually to publish their stories. Whenever he arrived in a new location, Götz always sought out local German speakers. Then he held propaganda lectures and exchanged news and information.

Following his return to Germany, Götz wrote two popular nonfiction books and a novel about his trip through the Americas. Mennonite figures appeared frequently in these and in other shorter works. To give one example, in a 1938 article about the heritage and genealogical practice of German speakers in North and South America, published in the German Foreign Institute periodical Genealogy of Germandom Abroad (Sippenkunde des Deutschtums im Ausland), Götz dedicated multiple pages to his experiences among Mennonites in Canada and Mexico, whom he described positively: “A group that has a significance that extends far beyond their numbers or the appearance of their groups is . . . Mennonites of German blood.” In 1944 when Götz authored The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, he reprinted this sentence nearly verbatim. Götz described multiple encounters. In Canada, he met with leading Mennonites like David Toews, head of the Mennonite Board of Colonization, as well as the editor Arnold Dyck, who gave Götz a tour through the Mennonite villages of the so-called East Reserve, which the visitor characterized as “a closed German Mennonite settlement area.” Likely through his contacts in Canada as well as via two friends of Mennonite background in Germany—Benjamin Unruh and Walter Quiring (who also worked at the German Foreign Institute, and who in the 1930s wrote two books about Mennonites in Paraguay)—Götz learned about Mennonite periodicals in Canada, Paraguay, and Brazil:

34. On the German Foreign Institute’s efforts to win support for Nazism among Mennonites and other German speakers in the Americas, see Arthur J. Smith, The Deutschtum of Nazi Germany and the United States (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 26-58; Christopher Hutton, Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-tongue Fascism, Race and the Science of Language (London: Routledge, 1999), 153-169.

35. These were Karl Götz, Brüder über dem Meer: Schicksale und Begegnungen (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1938); Karl Götz, Die Heimstätter: Ein deutsches Schicksal in Kanada (Leipzig, 1940); and Karl Götz, Deutsche Leistung in Amerika (Berlin: Franz Eher, 1940), written under contract for the East Ministry.


Mennonitische Rundschau, Steinbach-Post, Der Bote, Mennonitische Warte, Menno-Blatt, and Die Brücke.39

Whenever Götz made new friends, he attempted to discover and to strengthen their connections to what he described as the old German fatherland.

I have visited the “Kanadier” [Mennonites who came to Canada from Imperial Russia in the 1870s] and the “Rußländer” [those who came in the 1920s] in nearly all villages of the East and West Reserves, then also in the settlements Saskatchewan, north of Saskatoon, with Rosthern as a middle point, and in the half arid zone in the southwest of the province southeast of “Swift-Current,” and noted countless migration paths from East Friesland to West Prussia, from South Russia to Canada.

Götz also spoke with others who had returned to Canada from Mexico or from the Paraguayan Chaco. Because he intended to travel farther south, he asked for specific details about emigration destinations in Latin America and photographed the former farms of those who had traveled south so that when he arrived among their communities, he would have an easy entry point. In Mexico, as in Canada, he spoke animatedly with locals about their “German blood.” Götz recalled: “We sat in many homes and took notes. We sketched and photographed and attempted time and again to follow the genealogical lines back through Canada and Russia to West Prussia and to the Danzig region.”40

While Götz praised the cultural and economic accomplishments of the groups he encountered, he did not like everything he found. He described the so-called Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico as “probably the strangest, spiritually and culturally insane splinter of the German race.” Only because of his preparation in Canada, as well as the detailed knowledge of the German Consul and Nazi Party member Walter Schmiedehaus in Chihuahua, was Götz able to gain access to this “otherwise almost completely unapproachable clan.”41


considered his hosts’ way of life to be outdated, and he decried that none among them could precisely pinpoint the original location in Germany from which their ancestors had emigrated.

Similarly in Canada, alongside “progressive and racially valuable groups” Götz also found “fully ossified groups whose cultural and religious practices have not advanced since 1800.” Especially problematic in his eyes were those who “considered themselves not just a Mennonite religious community but also a Mennonite [i.e. non-German] nation.” 42 Götz mentioned such tendencies in The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, writing of “conservative [groups] that cling tightly to the ways and customs of their forefathers.” Nevertheless, he argued that “in Russia”—that is, among the Mennonites recently resettled to Wartheland—such traits had mostly died out. Götz reformulated this judgment on the last page of his booklet: “If there are still small groups of Mennonites here and here, perhaps in America, who consider their Mennonite identity not only as a religious confession but also at the same time as an ethnic concept (Volkstumsbegriff), these groups are nevertheless only a disappearing minority.” 43

With the outbreak of the Second World War, then, Karl Götz was both widely known as a National Socialist writer and unusually well informed about Mennonites abroad. During the first two years of the war, Götz worked on the Eastern Front, especially in occupied Poland, where he documented the enormous resettlement of East European “ethnic Germans” to Wartheland and other areas. This experience led to a new novel, The Great Homecoming, with 50,000 copies printed. 44 He corresponded and collaborated with intellectuals of Mennonite background like Walter Quiring, who was also helping to document the resettlement to Poland, as well as the novelist Johannes Harder, who served during the war as an SS-Untersturmführer (equivalent to Second Lieutenant) and wrote a propaganda novel, Wheat from The Volga (Weizen von der Wolga) for SS chief Heinrich Himmler’s welfare agency for German-speaking immigrants, the Ethnic German Office (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle). 45 Upon Germany’s invasion of Ukraine in June 1941 Götz also came into regular contact with the large Mennonite settlements of the Soviet Union. With the announcement of Operation Barbarossa, Heinrich Himmler and other leading National Socialists began dispatching experts

42. Götz, Deutsche Leistung in Amerika, 69-70.
43. Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschum, 4, 12.
44. Karl Götz, Die große Heimkehr (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1941).
45. This novel was never published. The letters between Götz and Harder are archived in T-81/143, NARA. On Harder, see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, “Harder, Johannes (Hans),” MennLex, <http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=art:harder_johannes_hans>.
in “ethnic German” matters to the areas conquered from the USSR. Himmler personally recommended Götz for membership in the newly constituted Special Commando R (Sonderkommando R), which under the leadership of SS-Brigadeführer (equivalent to General Major) Horst Hoffmeyer provided welfare to “ethnic Germans” in Transnistria und Ukraine.46

At Himmler’s invitation, Götz joined the SS on September 20, 1941. He served as an SS-Sturmbannführer in the staff of the Higher SS and Police Führer Black Sea (Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer Schwarzes Meer) Richard Hildebrandt. Until the retreat of the German military in 1943 following the Battle of Stalingrad and other losses on the Eastern Front, Götz worked in Transnistria and Ukraine, where he was charged with “reporting on and writing about the Russian Germans” as well as developing a Nazi-oriented education system for German speakers living in these areas.47 Götz worked especially in the settlements of Selz and Prischib, where he established two teacher training schools. The latter colony was a Protestant settlement adjacent to the Molotschna Mennonite district.48 In The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, Götz described himself as “Formerly Head of the Teacher Training School in Prischib.”49 Through this work, female German-speaking teachers were supposed to be educated in the spirit of National Socialism, learning to participate in the transformation of the occupied East into an Aryan racial utopia. Götz trained Mennonite students from Molotschna during this time, and he spoke regularly with leading Mennonites from Ukraine and other parts of the Third Reich.50 Because of his contributions, Götz was named “Inspector of the entire ethnic German educational and cultural work in Transnistria and the Ukraine.” He accompanied Himmler on a trip


47. Simon, “Chronologie Karl Götz.”

48. SS-Obergruppenführer (equivalent to General) Otto Hoffmann, head of the SS-Race and Settlement Main Office, reported to the SS-Obersturmbannführer (equivalent to Lieutenant Colonel) Hermann Roßner, head of the Molotschna Task Force [Einsatzgruppe Halbstadt], regarding Götz: “With the assignment to establish courses for the training of female teachers in the Halbstadt [Molotschna] settlement area. . . . I request that every assistance be given to Party member Götz for his work and that you instruct your school leaders to work together with Götz in a spirit of comradeship. . . . I further request that you include him in all discussions of cultural issues, given his expertise regarding the Russian Germans and their history.” —Jestrabek, “Karl Götz,” 134-135.

49. Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschum, 1.

50. When the Mennonite employee of the East Ministry, Hans Rempel, visited the “ethnic German” settlements in 1942, for example, he visited Götz in Prischib.—Hans Rempel, “Die Bodenfrage in den deutschen Siedlungen in der Ukraine,” ca. 1942, R 6/109, BArch.
through the Black Sea region, and he earned the War Merit Cross with Swords (Kriegsverdienst-Kreuz mit Schweren) as well as the Eastern Marches and Sudeten Medal (Ostmark- und Sudetenmedaille). Later in Wartheland, once German defeats on the Eastern Front had led to the resettlement of Ukraine’s Mennonites there, Götz was tapped—according to a report from SS-Obergruppenführer (equivalent to General) Werner Lorenz, head of the Ethnic German Office—“to establish the teacher training school in Lutbrandau in place of the previous teacher training schools in Prischib and Selz.”51

Karl Götz wrote his booklet, The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, while in Ludbrandau, where he continued to work with Mennonite populations.52 Having participated for multiple years in the education of Russian German Mennonites, it is no surprise that he was considered an appropriate person to author such a document about the denomination for official use. Götz could adapt many parts of his text from earlier pieces that he himself had written. Indeed, he took numerous sentences nearly word for word from previously published accounts of his travels in North and South America. He repurposed other sections, largely unchanged, from reports authored by Benjamin Unruh, who for years had prepared explanations of Mennonite history and doctrine for Nazi offices and with whom Götz had regular contact. In October 1942, it was Götz whom Heinrich Himmler approached for further information when he desired to contact Benjamin Unruh.53 Based on Götz’s recommendation, Unruh met with Himmler in December 1942 to discuss the future of Mennonites in Ukraine. As Unruh later explained, “Herr Götz is a great friend of the Mennonites. He had written a memorandum on the basis of multiple memoranda that he requested from me as well as on the basis of his own knowledge. This memorandum was the cause of my audience with the Reichsführer-SS.”54 Although there are no known

51. Simon, “Chronologie Karl Götz.” Götz was commanding officer (Standort-Ältester) of the Ethnic German Office branch in Ludbrandau, Warthegau.

52. See Karl Götz to Leiter des Gauamtes für Volkstumsfragen, Jan. 26, 1944, R 69/215, BArch; “Auch der Dichter der ‘Großen Heimkehr,’ kam mit,” Litzmannstädter Zeitung, April 8, 1944. In Wartheland, Götz and his colleagues publicly praised the resettlers: “the German character of the Black Sea Germans has been preserved with a purity unsurpassed by any other population group.” See “Karl Götz über den Leidensweg der Schwarzmeerdeutschen,” Litzmannstädter Zeitung, March 28, 1944.

53. See Geheime Staatspolizei to Karl Götz, Oct. 2, 1942, T-81/143, NARA: “With regard to surveys of the confession of the Mennonites in Germany, the Reichsführer-SS [Himmler] shares that a leading Mennonite in Stuttgart, reportedly also a longtime Party member, has through appropriate activities successfully won over numerous Mennonites for National Socialism. At the same time, the Reichsführer mentioned that you could shed more light on the matter.” Apparently, Himmler was unaware at this juncture that Benjamin Unruh was not (nor ever became) a member of the Nazi Party or that he lived in Karlsruhe, not Stuttgart.

copies of this earlier memorandum, it undoubtedly served as an important source for Götz’s 1944 booklet. Numerous sentences originally authored by Unruh—likely collated in the lost memorandum—reappear with only minor changes. Sometimes, these alterations slightly downplay Unruh’s claims. Where Unruh described all Mennonites worldwide as “without exception of German origin,” Götz wrote “virtually without exception.” Nevertheless, it is clear that Unruh’s goal to secure support from the state for his coreligionists in the occupied East by describing them positively was taken up enthusiastically by Karl Götz.

Such friendly treatment also reflected to a certain extent Götz’s own self-interest. Had Hitler’s forces won the Second World War, it would have likely been Götz’s personal task to organize a resettlement of Mennonites from overseas to a victorious Third Reich. Götz received this honor in 1944 because of his wartime accomplishments. “His knowledge of the problems of the ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union and overseas has had the result,” Werner Lorenz explained, “that the RFSS [Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler] assigned the Ethnic German Office overseas division to him and decisively wants him involved in the intended resettlement of the Germans from the United States of America and the South American states.” Thus Götz was undoubtedly thinking about the future of his own career when he mentioned “migrants from across the ocean.” Of course, such an outcome never materialized. The Third Reich fell in May 1945, and Götz spent the subsequent years in Allied captivity. His books were removed from libraries by the victorious powers.

Nevertheless, between 1951 and his death in 1989, Götz authored numerous additional works, becoming a well-known and beloved West German author. He retained his interest in Germans abroad, including

56. Simon, “Chronologie Karl Götz.”
57. Götz, Das Schwarzmeerdeutschum, 3.
58. The first volume by Götz to appear after the war was a handbook for Germans who—likely because of the fall of the Third Reich—desired to emigrate abroad. One recommended destination was Paraguay. Götz described the Mennonites in the Chaco thus: “These farmers ... have opened the Chaco through bitter struggle against drought, heat, sandstorms, against locusts and ants, despite long distances and low prices. They have proven that one can develop this 29 million hectare [112,000 square mile] endless, wild bush desert, just as the forefathers of these colonists developed the land in the Vistula Delta, in the South Russian and Siberian steppes, in Caucasus and Ural, in the North American and Canadian prairie, and as their brethren in faith developed the mountainous Mexican deserts and the Brazilian jungle.”—Karl Götz, Auswandern? Ein Handbuch für alle Fragen der Auswanderung (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk Verlag, 1951), 156. For context, Nikolaus Barbian, Auswärtige Kulturpolitik und “Auslandsdeutsche” in Lateinamerika 1949-1973 (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2014), 435.
Mennonites, and long after the war he continued to write about his numerous encounters with members of the denomination in Canada, Mexico, and Brazil.  

59 During the postwar years, Götz sold more than a million copies of his travel writings, stories, and novels, earning multiple prizes for his writing. Despite his former membership in the Nazi Party and SS, he became an honorary member of the Swabian Homeland League (Schwäbischer Heimatbund), joined the Academic Council of the Humboldt Society (Humboldtgesellschaft), and received the Honorary Ring for German Literature (Ehrenring für deutsche Literatur).  

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CONCLUSION

That leading National Socialists considered Mennonites, on average, Aryan helps to explain why tens of thousands of the denomination’s members received such generous treatment in the Third Reich. The particular nature of these policies reflected the course of the Second World War. Karl Götz’s booklet, The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites, appeared not in the wake of Hitler’s ascension to power but first in 1944. Only during the war years did large numbers of Mennonites come under Nazi rule. And while the 35,000 Mennonites in Ukraine were mostly concentrated in large colonies, once they traveled westward with the German military, they were distributed among larger non-Mennonite populations. From the perspective of Nazi offices, the collective history and religious doctrines of these resettlers appeared sufficiently unknown to justify an explanatory booklet.

At the same time, leading Mennonites, such as Benjamin Unruh, sought to ensure the religious freedom and personal safety of their newly relocated coreligionists. While Wartheland policymakers saw Mennonites and other “ethnic German” arrivals as a desirable influx of Aryan blood, Gauleiter Arthur Greiser was unfavorably disposed toward Christianity and had notoriously demoted both the Catholic and Protestant state churches to private associations. 61 The situation thus prompted Mennonite churchmen to pursue their interests within the racial ideology


60. Götz later covered up his wartime activities, untruthfully claiming, for example, that he was never a member of the SS. Interestingly, he invoked his longstanding contact with Mennonites in order to assert that his involvement in resettlement programs was harmless. At a trial in Stuttgart regarding war crimes in Transnistria, Götz asserted in 1964: “I became attached for emergency service to the Ethnic German Office on October 1, 1941 at the request of Mennonite circles (Prof. Benjamin Unruh), with the task of establishing a teacher training academy in the areas inhabited by ‘ethnic Germans’ in South Russia.”—Jestrabek, “Karl Götz,” 135.

and administrative culture of the Third Reich generally, and of Wartheland in particular. In this, they successfully cultivated the support of friendly National Socialists like Karl Götz.

The Culture of the Black Sea Germans: The Mennonites shows how some Nazi officials intended to treat Mennonites as a denomination not only during the war but also after its end. According to Götz, whole groups would allegedly relocate from overseas to a victorious Third Reich, where they would be settled in agrarian colonies. Götz’s booklet provides no exact details about how this process might have unfolded. A more precise understanding requires considering secret wartime documents, such as the now famous General Plan East (Generalplan Ost). Such records show how leading National Socialists intended to racially reorder Eastern Europe, a project whose details changed significantly over the course of the war. For example, Heinrich Himmler initially contemplated relocating the Mennonite colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna to Crimea, where they were to become part of a new administrative region, provisionally dubbed “Goth Land” (Gotengau). The military retreat from Ukraine made this impossible, however—at least in the short term. Although some leaders hoped for an eventual reconquest of Ukraine, by 1944 consensus held that East European Mennonites should settle permanently in Wartheland and other areas of the Third Reich.

What kind of treatment they—along with other coreligionists who might later have come from the Soviet Union or from overseas—would have received from a victorious Third Reich must remain a matter of speculation. One letter written by Himmler in 1944 discussed the highly ironic possibility that groups with “pacifying” qualities like Buddhists and Jehovah’s Witnesses—and perhaps North American Mennonites—could be deployed as a peaceful bulwark behind a hypothetical postwar border with the Soviet Union. According to this vision, even Mennonite

62. See for example Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher, eds., Der “Generalplan Ost”: Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs-und Vernichtungspolitik (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993); Czeslaw Madajczyk, Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan (Munich: Saur, 1994).

63. See Heinrich Himmler, Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers 1941/42 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag: 1999), 566-567.

64. “We must create a new [protective] area... in front of the German eastern border that will eventually be established,” wrote Himmler. “In the hinterland, which will be German settlement land, we want a farming community, like we recently had in Ukraine, characterized by small-scale private property and German settlement. But we must do more to bring the people in this hinterland to a weaponless form that is peaceful toward us.... The people must have a religion or worldview. We must support every type of religion and religious form and sect that exhibits a pacifying effect. In this regard, the Buddhist faith should be introduced among all Turkic peoples; among all others, the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have... like the
nonresistance might have found long-term welcome in the “Thousand-Year Reich.” While such fantasies were never realized, Nazi enthusiasm for Mennonites did have lasting consequences. The 35,000 resettlers brought by the German military and SS out of Ukraine would otherwise have been deported by communist forces to Siberia or other parts of the Soviet Union. Approximately half of all “ethnic Germans” in Ukraine experienced similar treatment prior to the arrival of the German military in 1941. The fact that Nazi occupiers treated most Mennonites in Ukraine as Aryan lent them wartime protection. As the conflict came to a formal end, many of these Mennonites fled onward to areas occupied by the Western Allied powers, particularly Great Britain and the United States. Thousands thus avoided forced return to the Soviet Union, instead traveling onward to North or South America. Collaboration with the Third Reich certainly disadvantaged those who once again found themselves under Soviet occupation. Two-thirds of the resettlers—in total around 23,000 individuals—were repatriated against their will back to the Soviet Union. More than 12,000, however (as well as an additional 3,000 who had lived in Poland, Germany, and the Free City of Danzig before the war), received aid from the North American Mennonite Central Committee to emigrate to Paraguay, Uruguay, Canada, or the United States. In this context, many claimed that they were ethnically “Dutch” or “Mennonite” and that they had suffered under—rather than received aid from—National Socialism. This dual denial of German ethnicity and of wartime collaboration helped secure advantages such as medical examinations, exit visas, and transportation financing from refugee organizations connected with the newly founded United Nations. But it was these Mennonites’ favorable treatment in the Third Reich that made their later access to such resources possible in the first place. The following primary source document shows what this treatment looked like during the darkest days of the Second World War.


65. Nazi efforts to woo conservative Mennonites in the United States included some understanding of their pacifist orientation. According to one German Foreign Institute memo, “we must recognize first of all that to the extent that America is at question, its Mennonitism stands and falls with this principle of nonresistance.”—Smith, The Deutschtum of Nazi Germany and the United States, 43.


The Mennonites have played a special role in the German cultural identity of the former Soviet Union. They have achieved superb economic accomplishments, modeled an exemplary community life, and established highly developed forms of education and pedagogy. They have produced a great number of extremely important intellectuals. Beyond this, they have a special significance for the overseas promotion of racial identity through their dispersion across the entire Americas. They have also earned general approbation in the Americas for their exemplary work, their strict way of life, and their rectitude in commerce and business.

Through their extensive relationships they constitute, to a certain extent at least, a small world power. After the war, entire groups of Mennonites overseas are prepared to emigrate back to the German Empire without any conditions. They are especially important and welcomed as return migrants from across the ocean. Their readiness to return, however, depends to a significant degree on how we treat the Mennonites here. The following documentation is intended only to encourage an informed and just treatment of those Mennonites who are now coming out of the Black Sea region (especially from the regions around Halbstadt, Kronau, and Chortitza) to Wartheland.68

FROM THE HISTORY OF MENNONITES

The Mennonite community is not a sect, in that it is not a Free Church splintered off from the Protestant church. The Mennonite community derives directly from the old Catholic church and is therefore a pure movement of the Reformation in the same way as Luther’s movement. The founder of the Mennonite movement was Menno Simons (ca. 1492). Menno was, like Luther, a Catholic priest. He led his reforming movement in the region of Friesland-Flanders. This movement stood in direct relationship with the so-called Anabaptists in German-speaking

68. During the Second World War, the three most prominent Mennonite colonies in Ukraine were known by Nazi occupiers as Halbstadt, Kronau (or Kronau-Orloff), and Chortitza. “Halbstadt” and “Kronau” were German names for colonies that Mennonites had previously called Molotschna and Zagarovka. Booklets about Chortitza and Kronau appeared during the war: Walter Kuhn, Die mennonitische Altkolonie Chortitza in der Ukraine (Sonderabdruck aus den “Deutschen Monatsheften,” September/October/November 1942); Karl Stumpp, Bericht über das Gebiet Chortitza im Generalbezirk Dnjepropetrowsk (Berlin: Publikationsstelle Ost, 1943); Karl Stumpp, Bericht über das Gebiet Kronau-Orloff (Berlin: Publikationsstelle Ost, 1943). Wartime reports about Molotschna are located in R 69/458, BArch.
Switzerland and the upper German territories. Thus, the Mennonite community was originally a German (upper German and lower German) reform movement. The doctrinal form of Mennonites is Protestant, situated between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches. Mennonites are occasionally described not only as martyrs for the cause of the freedom of conscience and religious belief, but also as martyrs of homelessness. No group of German people has wandered more, throughout the world—becoming a “people on the move”—than the Mennonites. 69 [Page 4]

The majority of Mennonites living in the Russian German colonies came from East Friesland. From there they moved to West Prussia for reasons of faith, and from there to South Russia. A large group of Mennonites also immigrated to North America, with a substantial portion of these Mennonites coming from Russia. When several of the original privileges promised them were eliminated in Russia after 1870—especially drastic limitations on their freedom from military duty—many thousands of Mennonites resolved to take up the pilgrim’s staff once again. Most of them went to the western provinces of Canada—to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

Here too they created an exemplary model of colonization.70 They cultivated the enormous wheat region in large swaths of the Canadian prairie, just like the Germans from the non-Mennonite areas of the Black Sea region did after 1874 in the U.S. states of North and South Dakota. Eighty percent of the Germans in the Canadian west are transplanted emigrants from ethnic German settlements outside traditional German borders, especially from South Russia, from Banat, and from Pennsylvania and Dakota. The Russian German Mennonites generally took the names of their settlements in Russia (which had in part already come from West Prussia) with them to Canada. Thus, for example, in the province of Manitoba there are two large Mennonite settlements to the left and right of the Red River—the so-called East Reserve and the West Reserve. In the East Reserve, for example, are the villages of Kleefeld, Hochstätt, Günthal, Steinbach, and Chortitza. Among others in the West Reserve are Gretna, Altona, Halbstadt, Winkler, Rheinfeld, Rheinland, Neu-Berghthal, Alt-

69. “People on the move” (Volk auf dem Weg) was the title of a well-known novel series (published between 1930 and 1942) by the author Josef Ponten, whose works became bestsellers in the Third Reich. The six books in Ponten’s series told the story of Russian Germans and became associated with the worldwide migrations of the Mennonites. Contemporary accounts of the Russian German Mennonites emphasized their alleged ability to retain their German language and culture wherever they settled around the world.

70. National Socialists as well as other German nationalists before them often praised North American expansionism as a model for German colonialism in Eastern Europe. See Kristin Kopp, Germany’s Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Jens-Uwe Guettel, German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, 1776-1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
Bergthal, Silberfeld, Blumenort, Kronsthal, Schöne-Wiese, Rosenort, Rosenfeld, Hochfeld, and Chortitza. The Mennonites in America, as in Russia, have a significance that extends far beyond their numbers or the appearance of their groups (approximately 90,000 in Canada). As is the case somewhat also in Russia, they have fragmented there into various groups. In addition to the conservative groups, who hold firmly to the customs and habits of their forefathers and which have nearly all disappeared from Russia, are other more progressive and open groups.

After the [First] World War, new school regulations were introduced in Canada that eliminated German as a language of instruction and imposed special regulations regarding religious instruction. This prompted some 20,000 of the so-called Old Colony Mennonites (named as such because they derive from the earliest settlement region around Chortitza on the Dnieper [River]) to take [Page 5] up the pilgrim’s staff yet again. Ten thousand moved to Chihuahua, the northernmost state of Mexico, and 10,000 went to the Chaco in Paraguay. After the World War 20,000 Russian German Mennonites succeeded in escaping out of Russia to America and Canada, where they formed an especially progressive and open group. Another group of Russian German Mennonites came after the war to Brazil. Regarding the Mennonites in Canada, Dr. Heinz Lehmann argues that between 1874 and 1879 more than 6,000 German Mennonites from South Russia allowed themselves to be persuaded to test their luck in the untouched prairies of South Manitoba. One could not have found a better sort of settlers, accustomed to life on the steppe land, who combined their experience as farmers on that land with a German attention to detail, frugality, and an indomitable work ethic. So the experiment succeeded unexpectedly well. Even before the railroad reached Manitoba from the east in 1882, the German Mennonites already demonstrated unimaginable possibilities for growing wheat on the prairie and were generally recognized as trail blazers in that great migration movement, which brought 100,000 people to western Canada in a decade or two.

Today there are half a million Mennonites in the world. They are, virtually without exception, all of German origin. Apart from the countries where this movement started—which all belonged to the “previous [Holy Roman] Empire”—when we speak of Mennonite identity we are talking about ethnic Germans living abroad. Barely 20,000 of the


German Mennonites currently live in the [Third] Reich. All the rest live as ethnic Germans, above all in former Russia, in the United States, in Canada, Brazil, Paraguay, and Mexico. Regarding the numerous migrations of the Russian Germans throughout the world, and the Russian German Mennonites in particular, one can find exhaustive information in the book Rußlanddeutsche Wanderwege, published by the German Foreign Institute in its yearbook series on the genealogy of Germans abroad.73

Through all of these many migrations the Mennonites have vigorously preserved their German identity.

Their cultural achievements have been recognized everywhere. In the Rhine Palatinate and Electoral Palatinate, they were the first to carry out systematic fertilization of their fields.74 They have been recognized as the inventors of tanks for hauling liquid manure. Beyond that, they were known there as the best flax farmers. The so-called Mannheim potatoes were also widely known. Damm, the state economics teacher, called them the most accomplished farmers in Germany. [Johann Heinrich] Jung-Stilling, the friend of [Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe, called the Palatine Mennonites “the innovating farmers of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.” The princes of Nassau, Hessen-Darmstadt, Electoral Hesse, Weimar, and Emperor Joseph II all sought out these farmers. [Johann Heinrich] Merck, a member of the war council [Page 6] in Darmstadt, wrote to Goethe, “By setting an example, these people are a treasure in our land whose value cannot be calculated.”

On the Lower Rhine the Mennonites became known especially for their exemplary accomplishments in industry. Most of them came there from the Netherlands, but also some from upper German and Swiss territories.

Mennonite families from the Electoral Palatinate migrated to Galicia under Catharine I. In 1773 more Mennonite families from the Palatinate came to Austria close to Lemberg. From France some went to Warsaw. The Volhynian Mennonites emigrated in the 1870s, some to America and some to South Russia. These former Volhynian Mennonite settlements are far less developed than the other Russian German Mennonite settlements in the south and east of the Tsarist empire.

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73. The reference is to Karl Götz, ed., Der Wanderweg der Rußlanddeutschen, a special issue of Jahrbuch der Hauptstelle für die Sippenkunde des Deutschums im Ausland 4 (1939), with articles from scholars of Mennonitism, including Kurt Kauenhoven, Friedrich Kliewer, Heinz Lehmann, Walter Quiring, Walter Schmiedehaus, and Karl Stumpf.

The Mennonites from northeastern Germany are of particular significance. The Mennonite migrations from the Netherlands and lower German territories can be classified as part of the large eastward settlement. (Prof. B[enjamin]. Unruh provides an essay on this migration in the 1937 yearbook of the German Foreign Institute noted above). The achievements of the Mennonites from Danzig and the Prussian Mennonites are widely known today throughout the [Third] Reich. In the Weichsel and Nogat regions, the Mennonite accomplishments as colonizers are especially apparent. The enormous amount of work it must have taken to create fertile meadows and fields out of those tracts of land—miles of barren swamp that support only wild bushes—can be appreciated only when we consider that all of the dikes and dams evident now in the Marienburg Werder and lakes, were first created by these farmers. They also dug the corresponding drainage ditches and built numerous mills to pump the water out. In the aftermath of a natural catastrophe—after flooding or a dam failure—they often had to start all over again. In Danzig, the Mennonite Adam Wiebe was famous as the master carpenter, city engineer, and inventor. Beginning in 1616 he served the city of Danzig as its construction officer. In 1643 he was occupied with the work of controlling the Weichsel delta. The city of Thorn requested that he construct the large Vistula bridge; and he was also active as the city builder in Riga. The Wiebe Wall and the Wiebe Barracks in Danzig honor him still today.

When Friedrich Wilhelm I wanted to drive the Mennonites out of East Prussia, the War and Domain Chamber summarized the particular significance of these people. The Mennonites were especially prized by Wilhelm of Orange, Frederick the Great, and Alexander I. Already in 1750 Frederick the Great granted them citizenship rights, whereas Danzig—which did not belong to Prussia—waited to do so until 1800 thanks to the advice of the small-minded guilds who were threatened by their competition. When General [Ludwig] Yorck [von Wartenburg] called together the estates to deploy them for the fatherland, Jakob Zimmerman, a Mennonite, created an office in his home in Königsberg to promote the effort, and his son was among the first to respond to Yorck’s call. In 1772 Mennonite groups in West and East Prussia consisted of approximately 13,000 souls on 2,038 Hulen of land. It is astonishing to see what large new Mennonite regions in eastern Europe and abroad this small group has settled and developed in the course of 180 years.

In 1713 a Prussian group emigrated to East Prussian Lithuania, which had been depopulated by the plague. This group later migrated again to Holland and then back to Prussia. From there most of them then moved on to Russia. Following the Seven Years’ War (1764) Prussian Mennonites again migrated to Neumark. There they established the villages of Brenkenhofswalde, Franzthal, and Neu-Dessau. From Neumark, some of these Mennonites moved to Volhynia, and then in the 1830s another group moved directly to South Russia.

The largest migration out of Prussia was to Russia. This began in 1788 and has been well researched. (See the work by Dr. Horst Quiring, “The Mennonite Emigration from Prussia, 1788-1870” in the journal Racial Research of Germans Abroad 2, no. 1, 1938). During this period, approximately 8,000 Mennonites went to Russia. Their numbers there increased enormously. In 1917 some 100,000 Mennonites resided in Russia. One should keep in mind that in the 1870s more than 10,000 people immigrated to [North] America. (One of the best works on the legal standing of the Germans in tsarist Russia, which also appeared in the journal noted above, is that by the legal scholar Rudolf Dettweiler, the son of the Mennonite Economic Councilor Daniel Dettweiler, who was among the first of those to fight alongside the Führer). The advance of the German settlements in Russia, and particularly the Mennonite settlements, counts among the most significant German accomplishments outside of Germany. One of the preeminent leading personalities was Johann Cornies, who already in 1835 was practicing crop rotation, leaving a field fallow, and prescribed this principle also for all Mennonites. Mennonites were especially noteworthy for their exemplary cattle breeding, alongside the mill industry as well as agricultural implements and wagon construction. Even better known was a model plow developed Johann Höhn, along with the Neufeld mowing machine and the thresher by Andreas Wurzler.

Mennonite educational practices were also very highly developed, from the elementary school to the teacher training institute, with all the state certifications for teachers and students. The social service institutions were exemplary—hospitals had the most modern equipment, poorhouses, orphanages, homes for the elderly, and the large school for the deaf in Tiege (Taurien).

The outbreak of the [First] World War marked the beginning of the demise of the Russian German settlements.

It is generally recognized that the ethnic German Mennonites in particular, through their strict lifestyle and their systems for defending against foreign infiltration, have preserved their blood integrity 100 percent. Even in the USA, where some Mennonite families have become Americanized, they have demonstrated their resemblance to the inherited ethnic lines, in that their families at least continued to speak a German dialect (Pennsylvania Dutch; Low German). There is scarcely another denomination that has exhibited such racial uniformity in their character as have the Mennonites.

In the “Georg Leibbrandt Book Series” [Sammlung Georg Leibbrandt] a volume recently appeared by Prof. Dr. Benjamin Unruh entitled “The Original Homeland of the Russian German Mennonites.” In it, he scientifically proves the Frisian origins of the Russian German Mennonites, whose remainder in Russia has now immigrated to Wartheland.

A young Dutch Mennonite [Johan Postma] was called to Danzig to research the relationship between the Dutch and Prussian Mennonites, and, by extension, the Black Sea Germans with Prof. Dr. [Erich] Kayser

78. In contrast to usually glowing depictions of Russian German Mennonites, National Socialist writers sometimes described Pennsylvania Dutch speakers in North America as degenerate Germans: “Regarding the Pennsylvania Germans, who are almost exclusively of Palatine heritage, it has been repeatedly concluded that they exhibit a long-term degeneration much more commonly than their compatriots in the Upper Rhine homeland, and it follows that the climatic and soil conditions… in the USA lead to a related change in their constitution or that, discounting Lamarkism and other environmental theories, have caused a related [natural] selection. Here it is generally forgotten, that since the emigration of the 5,000 Palatines to Pennsylvania, an unfortunate selection has also occurred in the Palatinate, as in most areas of the [Third] Reich.”—Joseph. Geiger, “Aufzeichnungen 2: Ansiedlung von Deutschen in der Krim,” ca. March 1942, R 6/19, BArch.

How the Nazi Regime Viewed Mennonites

Dr. Horst Penner has written an extensive dissertation regarding the cultural achievements of the Mennonites in the Weichsel region. A young Mennonite Germanist, Gustav Reiner in Heubuden, has published a genealogical study regarding Prussian Mennonite families. Appearing soon is a very extensive work by the deceased Mennonite pedagogue Peter Braun, the Mennonite school board member in the Molotschna colony and, like Unruh, a former teacher at the Halbstadt Central School. In this study, the achievements of the Russian German school system are clarified.

DISTINCTIVE TEACHINGS OF THE Mennonites

Like every confession the Mennonites also hold to several distinctive teachings. Because of these doctrines, the Mennonites have often been misrepresented, misunderstood, and treated badly.

a) The Mennonite church was always a Free Church, autonomous from the state. They rejected state subsidies. The Mennonites do not have any salaried clergy, but rather a system of lay preachers. The biblical texts that were rediscovered during the Reformation era were interpreted by Mennonites on their own without clerical oversight. (Mennonite preachers in Prussia and Russia are called "uncle" (Ohm). Among the Mennonites there is no title higher than Ohm).

b) The Mennonites believe in adult baptism. Each child should decide for itself whether it wants to belong to the Mennonite community. The parents do not want to preempt this decision. So baptism and confirmation are combined with the Mennonites.

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84. On the political context of “Free Churches” in the Third Reich, see Daniel Heinz, ed. Freikirchen und Juden im ‘Dritten Reich’ (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011); Philipp Thull, ed., Christen im Dritten Reich (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014), 68-104.
For the very rare converts who join them, Mennonites recognize the infant baptism of other churches. The Mennonites are, in general, tolerant. For example, in places where they are a small minority, their children attend the religious instruction of the Protestant church. Mennonite theology students earn their degrees at Protestant schools. Prof. Benjamin Unruh, the well-known spiritual leader of the Mennonites (residing in Karlsruhe), who was earlier a teacher in Halbstadt and originates from one of the oldest and highly acclaimed families, received an honorary doctorate in theology from Heidelberg University in 1937. His son-in-law [Horst Quiring], pastor of the Mennonite congregation in Berlin and currently an officer in active duty, has a doctorate from Heidelberg University based on a well-known work on Luther and mysticism.85

c) The most controversial distinctive teaching of the Mennonites is their so-called nonresistance. At the time of the Reformation the Mennonites protested against the Wars of Religion. Based on the principle of the freedom of conscience, no one should be coerced in matters of faith. For the same reason, it is also not permitted to use the sword in matters of faith. Thus, initially, nonresistance was a protest against confessional wars. Since the wars of those times were not fought over matters regarding the fatherland, but rather over matters of belief, it would be wrong to equate Mennonite nonresistance with an attitude of passivity or indifference to the fatherland. Nonresistance itself has always been a matter of fierce debate among Mennonites themselves, especially in more recent times when military service has become a duty to the fatherland and to the nation. Mennonites actually supported the national war of liberation under William of Orange and, as I have already noted, the promotional office of General Yorck was located in a Mennonite home. Today Mennonites throughout the German Empire all serve the state as soldiers and officers with weapons in their hands. The majority of the Mennonite fellowship elsewhere today also supports military service without restriction (see, for example, the Mennonite “Self Defense” units in the time around 1917 and the cavalry regiment they established in the Halbstadt region).86

The eastern settlements, along with the colonies in Russia and abroad were granted freedom from military service in order to attract settlers. In Russia, this was granted not only to Mennonites but to all German colonists up until 1874. At that point, not only [Page 10] Mennonites, but


86. Cavalry squadrons raised in the Nazi-occupied Molotschna colony were organized under the Waffen-SS per order from Heinrich Himmler. See Goossen, Chosen Nation, 159.
also Lutherans and Catholics emigrated abroad because this privilege was withdrawn. The Mennonites under tsarist rule successfully reached an agreement regarding alternative state labor service (forestry service). So only 15,000 Mennonites left Russia as a result of the loss of this privilege. In the Russian Civil War, Mennonites in Russia fought alongside people from other colonies against anarchy. Their Self Defense units were well-known. The Russian Germans in Brazil and Paraguay have made it known in Germany that they are prepared to give their sons to the German fatherland unconditionally.

Mennonite nonresistance therefore has nothing to do with any sort of pacifism. This frequently misunderstood principle was originally simply a protest against the use of violent and warlike means in the area of religion. In the course of German migrations, German farmers, including the Mennonites, have reserved the right to the privilege of nonresistance or an alternative service without weapons. That was reasonable, since they knew that otherwise circumstances could lead them into the danger of being obliged to take up arms against their own people. One needs to look at these things too more from the standpoint of ethnic Germans.

d) In place of oaths, Mennonites give solemn vows, and almost all reject swearing right up to the present day. Various states, including the [Third] Reich, have consistently recognized this position. In 1710 King Frederick I accepted Anabaptists from Bern into his lands who were being persecuted there for refusing to swear oaths. Mennonite soldiers in the German army are permitted to promise their loyalty to the Führer unto death—as Menno Simons explicitly required—in the form of a handshake rather than an oath and a solemn promise as done by their forefathers. They do not say “I swear” but rather “I affirm.” And instead of “so help me God” they say “by my word of honor.” The Mennonites do, however, recognize the legitimacy of oaths given by their fellow racial comrades.

According to a ruling of May 12, 1938, by the First Circuit Court of Celle, the highest Party court took the position that Mennonites could also be members of the NSDAP: they were exempted from swearing oaths, and could instead make a vow (Gelobnis) to the Führer.87

In all other points the Mennonites share the beliefs of the other Reformation groups. [Page 11]

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87. This decision replaced an earlier ruling: OPG der NSDAP to Gaugерicht Mü.Obb. der NSDAP, Dec. 3, 1936, NS 1/1129, BArch: “In any case simultaneous membership in the Party, including its organizations and associations, and with the Mennonites is a thing of impossibility, since the latter, as a population group, reject all combat duties.”
THE POSITION OF THE PARTY REGARDING THE MENNONITES

As is clear from the ruling of the Party court in Celle noted above, the highest Party court in the country has written that “Mennonites can also be members of the NSDAP.” A ruling of the District Court of Stuttgart on February 2, 1938, is also interesting:

The Mennonite congregations are a religious community and, like most churches, an expression of Christianity. If, among other distinctives, the doctrinal teachings of Mennonites also include particular regulations regarding the oath, it in no way departs from the religious realms that have been granted to religious communities.

For whoever takes an oath, is appealing to his relationship to God, even if he chooses another form of swearing. It is religion, however, that establishes the relationship to God. But Germans, and therefore also all members of the Party, are free to affirm all religious confessions, as long as they do not endanger the survival of the German state or violate German moral or ethical sensibilities. These qualities are not to be determined by the state or by the Party either for Christianity in general or for the Mennonite confession in particular.

Therefore, neither membership in a Mennonite congregation or the desire, in accordance with the regulations of Mennonites regarding the swearing of oaths, is an impediment to being accepted into the NSDAP.88

On December 31, 1942, the Reichsführer SS [Heinrich Himmler], along with SS-Obergruppenführer [Werner] Lorenz und SS-Brigadeführer [Horst] Hoffmeyer, the head of the Russia Commandos for the Ethnic German Office, held a thoroughgoing conversation with Prof. [Benjamin] Unruh at the Führer Headquarters [Feldkommandostelle Hochwald, East Prussia], in which the position and actions of Mennonites were approved by the Reichsführer SS [Himmler].89 On March 16, 1944, a formal conversation between Gauleiter [of Wartheland] Arthur Greiser und Prof. Unruh took place in Litzmannstadt [Polish: Łódź], which assured Russian German Mennonites who had moved to the Wartheland of their religious practices within their basic principles.90

88. See Lichdi, Mennoniten im Dritten Reich, 90-91.
89. On this meeting, see Unruh, Fügungen und Führungen, 332-334, 416; Goossen, Chosen Nation, 147-156.
90. This meeting occurred while Greiser was in Litzmannstadt for a three-day conference of Nazi administrators in Reichsgau Wartheland, held from March 14-16, at which the “relocation and settlement of Germans from the Black Sea region constituted a major topic.” See “Die Parole: Alles für den Sieg / Führertagung des Gaues Wartheland der NSDAP,” Litzmannstäder Zeitung, March 19, 1944., For context, Goossen, Chosen Nation, 170-171.
CURRENT ATTITUDES OF RUSSIAN GERMAN MENNONITES

a) Regarding Religion

In religious matters, what holds true for the Russian German Mennonites is also the case for all Russian Germans. Throughout the Bolshevist period, the people there generally preserved a sense of basic religious convictions. For them, Bolshevism meant the same thing as godlessness. Their revulsion against Bolshevism reflected their revulsion against the atheist movement. It is now clear that the most essential aspect of their [Page 12] religious sensibility remained God or the divine. All things related to Christian dogma were considerably diluted. Among the youth an inclination toward an explicit godlessness, even to the point of atheism, is even occasionally evident, though fortunately very seldom, which we must reject on the basis of our foundational German religious convictions. Humans are now once again searching for forms of religious expression. That in so doing they occasionally hit upon things in accord with Christian doctrine is understandable. Specifically the Mennonites, along with the other Russian Germans, will move away from dogmatic confessional forms, with the help of intelligent broadminded leadership, to a clearer and thoroughly German form of faith in God. They desire the divine; the honorable fear of the Almighty, the Incomprehensible, the Sublime. When this is preached in its appropriate manner, then their religious needs will be met. Leading Mennonite men are working on this, so that the Mennonite culture can be directed to this German spiritual form of a general religious posture.

b) Regarding Race

Prof. Unruh has demonstrated that the ethnic German Mennonites throughout the entire world stand overwhelmingly on the side of the Führer. The Mennonites in Brazil have reported to the [Third] Reich that plans for their return settlement should be accelerated. Ninety percent of the Mennonites in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay are ready to resettle in the [Third] Reich without any conditions; 10 percent would do so under certain conditions. If there are still small groups of Mennonites here and there, perhaps in America, who consider their Mennonite identity not only as a religious confession but also at the same time as an ethnic concept, these groups are nevertheless only a disappearing minority. All other

91. See Unruh, “Die ev. Mennoniten.”
92. Benjamin Unruh quoted from this decision in a letter to Ernst Kundt, April 26, 1940, R 127518, PA AA.
93. These percentages refer only to the Fernheim colony. See Thiesen, Mennonite and Nazi?, 135-138. For more details on this claim see the other essays in this volume.
Mennonites today stand firmly on an unwavering affirmation of their German racial identity. More than many other groups, the Mennonites perceive the times today as a great transformation in their tragic fate of having constantly been a people on the move. They deeply recognize the magnitude of the present epoch, a time in which whole population groups have taken off—in the middle of the war and after hundreds and hundreds of years in unfriendly foreign lands—to the country of their forefathers, which has called them all to return home. For the new German Empire has living space (Lebensraum) for all of its children.\textsuperscript{94} The era in which they were forced to bleed out in the service of foreign peoples, the era in which Germans forgot about each other, has come to an end.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{94} Götz took this sentence word for word from the second-to-last sentence of his book \textit{Deutsche Leistung in Amerika}, 117.

\textsuperscript{95} Similarly to the penultimate sentence, Götz took his final sentence word for word from the end of his book \textit{Brüder über dem Meer}, 254. It is notable that Götz conducted the research for these two books, \textit{Brüder über dem Meer} and \textit{Deutsche Leistung in Amerika}, in North and South America in 1936 and 1937, when he for the first time became personally acquainted with Mennonite communities outside of Germany.