

Terms of Racial Endearment: Nazi Categorization of Mennonites in Ideology and Practice, 1929–1945

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ABSTRACT

The Christian Mennonite denomination maintained a privileged position within National Socialist thought and policy through its conceptual and legal association with an evolving series of racial categories. Nearly all the world's half-million Mennonites lived outside German borders between the World Wars. This allowed a small number of church leaders and sympathetic scholars to shape their image within Germany, especially as Hitler's wartime expansionism brought a fourth of the denomination's members under Nazi rule. Casting Mennonitism as part of one or more subgroups within a larger Germanic whole benefitted most adherents in regions administered by the Third Reich while simultaneously enabling their enrollment in propaganda and empire building.

In November 1929, the Nazi Party organ, *Völkischer Beobachter*, carried a front-page article entitled "The Death of the German Farmer Community in Soviet Russia." Authored by Alfred Rosenberg, the editor and National Socialist ideologue who had led the party while Hitler was in prison, it outlined the plight of some 13,000 German-speaking refugees from Stalinization who, encamped in Moscow, sought escape from the Soviet Union to Germany. For Rosenberg, the crisis symbolized a world-historic clash between what he called Judeo-Bolshevism and the German race. "Bolshevism is a comrade of the Jewish efforts to destroy the entire Germanic world," Rosenberg wrote. "The National Socialist movement recognized this danger from the beginning and built that into its essence; the extermination of the despairing German farmers in Soviet Russia gives opportunity to sharpen this recognition anew."¹ Penned shortly before the appearance of Rosenberg's bestselling book, *Der Mythus des 20.*

Jahrhunderts, these ideas would famously go on to dominate both domestic law and foreign policy in the Third Reich.²

Only the most discerning readers of Rosenberg's article would have learned that nearly all the 13,000 refugees in Moscow were members of the Mennonite faith, a historically separatist Christian denomination with origins in Europe's sixteenth-century Reformation. Rosenberg used the word Mennonite just once in his essay, in a parenthetical aside. Like the vast majority of interwar Germany's population, the Nazi philosopher likely possessed, at best, passing familiarity with the religion, a small fraction of whose half-million adherents lived within German borders. He certainly did not dwell on the nineteenth-century emigration of thousands of Mennonites out of imperial Germany because of opposition to military conscription laws, nor did he discuss ongoing traditions of theological pacifism in the denomination's North American strongholds.³ Rather, Mennonites were relevant to Rosenberg as part of a much larger global diaspora of alleged racial comrades, whose travails abroad could help stoke radical nationalism in the Weimar Republic.

Mennonites' relationship with National Socialism is currently garnering extensive study. Despite historic opposition to military service as well as selective skepticism toward German nationalism within the denomination, anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism rendered segments of the church sympathetic to fascism. Pro-Nazi sentiment could be found during the 1930s within Mennonite communities in Brazil, Canada, the Free City of Danzig, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, and the United States. Hitler's expansionism eventually brought 125,000 Mennonites—approximately one fourth of the denomination worldwide—under Nazi rule.⁴ Recent scholarship has illuminated the far-reaching impact of fascist ideology among Mennonites outside German lands,⁵ the participation of some Mennonites in the crimes of the Holocaust,⁶ and efforts following World War II by church institutions on both sides of the Atlantic to suppress charges of collaboration.⁷ This literature has dramatically increased awareness about the denomination's involvement with Nazism. By focusing almost exclusively on Mennonites' own experiences, however, the relevance of new material for the broader historiography has been limited to discussions of Free Churches during the Third Reich.⁸

This article examines Mennonites' place in Nazi ideology and practice from the 1920s through the Second World War. Far-right authors in Germany discussed the denomination in hundreds of books and articles. Most references appeared in works broadly about Germans in foreign countries. This literature conceptually treated Mennonites as part of multiple shifting categories, including Germans Abroad, Russia Germans, ethnic Germans, Frisians, Dutch, and Black Sea Germans.⁹ Nazi-oriented Mennonites helped integrate their denomination into these secular umbrella groupings through scholarship and personal encounters with the Third Reich's bureaucracy. Identifying with one or more of many subsets of Germanness allowed members to

assert belonging within the Nazi racial community while also accounting for their coreligionists' diverse histories and global demographics. For National Socialist rulers, such language facilitated the group's enrollment in propaganda and empire building without legitimating theology as an alternative identity source. At the height of the Holocaust, when Alfred Rosenberg—then Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories—toured German-controlled Ukraine, he described his visit to the region's oldest Mennonite colony as the “most moving moment of the entire trip.” But in his journal, he referred to residents by ethnicity as “Frisians,” not as Mennonites at all.¹⁰

Refugees and the Radical Right

Mennonites gained attention among Nazi intellectuals through the refugee crisis of 1929. Only 13,000 Mennonites lived in Weimar Germany itself. While the denomination had roots in the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement in Central and Western Europe, Catholic and Protestant rulers alike had persecuted members during the Reformation and its aftermath, stifling growth. Anabaptist leaders such as the ex-priest Menno Simons of Friesland, whose name Mennonites bear, promoted adult baptism, skepticism toward worldly authority, and nonviolence. Even as some Mennonites and other Anabaptists found toleration in early modern states, economic hardship and political restrictions persisted. Foreign rulers and immigration authorities meanwhile invited Mennonites to colonize, Christianize, and otherwise “civilize” lands seized from native inhabitants. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, around 45 percent of Mennonites in German lands relocated abroad, approximately half going to North America and half to imperial Russia. Opposition to military service supplied the most intractable barrier to Mennonites' integration into German national culture. By the First World War, however, most members in Central and Western Europe had abandoned strict nonresistance.¹¹

The crisis of 1929 reflected the Soviet Union's changing position toward its minority populations, including 100,000 Mennonites. Having arrived in the Russian Empire from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Kingdom of Prussia, and imperial Germany, Mennonites had settled from the Black Sea to Siberia in predominantly agrarian colonies. Soviet bureaucrats, like their tsarist predecessors, often categorized these communities as German. Denominational spokespersons sometimes combatted anti-German sentiment by recounting roots in the Dutch Reformation and by claiming that their *Plattdeutsch* dialect was more akin to Dutch than German. In contrast to the 20,000 Mennonites who left the Soviet Union for Canada between 1923 and 1927, departures of Catholic and Protestant German speakers totaled only several hundred—a more typical count for minorities in the communist empire.¹² Mennonites' history of recent emigration, alongside their perceived Germanness, wealth, and religiosity rendered them disproportionate targets of Soviet repression. Yet, unlike most other victims of Stalin's “Revolution from Above,” thousands of

Mennonites responded to collectivization and the deportation of wealthy “kulak” farmers at the decade’s end by traveling to Moscow and demanding permission to emigrate.

In Weimar Germany, the refugees’ plight generated substantial press. Noncommunist writers broadly expressed solidarity with their “brethren” abroad, while the far right harnessed the story to bolster narratives of democratic weakness and to call for national renewal at a time of world economic downturn.¹³ “Homeless German Colonists: Who Will Help Them?” asked the *Völkischer Beobachter*, which between November 1929 and January 1930 featured over a dozen articles on the refugees, three on its front page.¹⁴ In the months before the Nazi Party’s major electoral breakthrough, propagandists fused the refugee crisis with antisemitic allegations about unemployment, political leadership, and the ostensible humiliations of the Versailles Treaty. One editorial railed against Weimar law for protecting citizens of “Polish, Jewish, Negro, or other blood” while ignoring suffering Germans abroad: “This provision of the constitution ensures a race suicide for the German people.”¹⁵ Weimar officials had little desire to intervene in Soviet affairs, but public opinion forced them to act.¹⁶ They brokered the admission of 5,671 refugees to Germany, housing them in three transit camps called Hammerstein, Mölln, and Prenzlau.¹⁷

The refugees’ arrival in Germany facilitated Mennonites’ integration into rising forms of racialized scholarship. In January 1930, the internationally recognized eugenicist Eugen Fischer dispatched three technicians from Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics to conduct anthropometric studies in the Hammerstein camp. During the same month, Otto Aichel of the Anthropological Institute at the University of Kiel sent a five-person team to examine the refugees in Mölln and Prenzlau.¹⁸ These researchers employed state-of-the-art techniques recently honed through racial studies of other populations in Germany and abroad. The visitors took photographs and conducted bloodwork. They assessed hair, skin, and eye pigmentation and measured the size, shape, and location of noses, ears, and foreheads. Subsequently, the anthropologist Friedrich Keiter conducted comparative studies of Mennonites in the Free City of Danzig. He extrapolated that distantly related Central European Germans and “Russia German farmers” were as racially alike as biological twins.¹⁹ Keiter’s continued popular and technical writings helped to construe Mennonites as a subgroup of a larger Germanic race.²⁰

Like Keiter, other right-wing scholars took interest in Mennonites after the 1929 refugee crisis. The event provided fodder for anticommunist émigrés like Georg Leibbrandt and Adolf Ehrt, who coauthored a book on the destruction of Germans in the Soviet Union.²¹ Within three years, both published substantial works on Mennonites, joined the Nazi Party, and took positions in Hitler’s bureaucracy.²² Others, such as Otto Auhagen, Germany’s cultural attaché in Moscow, and Protestant pastor Jakob Stach worked directly with the migrants.²³ Hans Rempel was himself a refugee in the Mölln

camp, and Benjamin Unruh represented the migrants in dealings with the Weimar government.²⁴ Over the following decade and a half, around three dozen writers would produce much of the literature on Mennonites that appeared in scholarly journals and book series in Germany. As a group, these individuals could be roughly divided between Eastern European émigrés and native-born German citizens who radicalized as they studied Germans in diaspora abroad. Nearly all were men, and they tended to be at early stages in their professional careers when Hitler came to power. More than half were practicing or former Mennonites.

Late Weimar scholarship on Mennonites categorized most members of the denomination as “Germans Abroad” (*Auslandsdeutsche*). This term held nineteenth-century connotations of mass migration and overseas imperialism.²⁵ By the 1920s, cultural organizations including Stuttgart’s German Foreign Institute, founded in 1917, and the older Association for Germandom Abroad increasingly pushed irredentist agendas. Right-wing activists cast the loss of German territories to Poland and France after World War I as amputations of a metaphorical national body. Anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism permeated such discussions. Practitioners of the emergent discipline of “East research” particularly linked fears of Judeo-Bolshevism to the subcategory of Russia Germans (*Rußlanddeutsche*), said to be ideal victims of this alleged cabal.²⁶ Mennonites in the Soviet Union as well as migrants who settled in the Americas were frequently grouped as Russia Germans. Other Mennonites who traced their roots to Switzerland, France, and southern German states received less attention. Weimar scholars nonetheless also referred to these groups as Germans Abroad. They used subheadings like German Americans or German Canadians and further differentiated them by region (e.g., Pennsylvania Germans) or tribal heritage (e.g., Palatines).²⁷

The piecemeal dispersal in 1930 of migrants from the German refugee camps augmented perceptions of Mennonites’ denominational homogeneity. A minority of refugees remained in the Weimar Republic, while most soon traveled onward by ship to Brazil, Canada, and Paraguay. Scholars who specialized in Germans Abroad in these countries tracked the establishment of new settlements. The arrival of thousands of Mennonites in Paraguay’s Chaco drew special praise, since no previous European group had successfully colonized the area.²⁸ Walter Quiring made his career at the German Foreign Institute by publicizing this movement.²⁹ The geographers Herbert Wilhelmy and Oskar Schmieder likewise trumpeted accomplishments in the Chaco.³⁰ Such writings entwined depictions of the denomination with notions of a unified community of Germans scattered across the globe. “The migrations of the Russia German Mennonites belong to the most spatially impressive population movements of the postwar period, perhaps even of the history of the German race overall,” claimed one illustrated coffee-table volume, *Das Buch vom deutschen Volkstum*. The book’s introduction acknowledged the denomination’s small size but argued that it could nevertheless serve as “an allegory for the entire fate of Germandom.”³¹

By the early 1930s, Mennonites were a minor staple of the increasingly racist literature on Germans Abroad. Descriptions of their purported colonial skill appeared in new encyclopedias such as the *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums*, and atlases like *Volksdeutsche Kartenskizzen* featured diagrams of their settlements.³² These works emphasized agricultural and ethnic qualities over religious analysis, avoiding discussions of tenets such as adult baptism or nonresistance, sometimes even failing to use the word Mennonite. The denomination was useful to the extent it served preconceived ideological aims. Scholars' a priori approach can be credited with the antithetical treatment they granted to other ethnicities living among Mennonite groups. Several German anthropologists, for instance, lodged with Mennonites in the Paraguayan Chaco while studying local Enhlet Indians. Although photographs of the Mennonites emphasized tidy yards, crisp clothes, and tasks associated with civilized life, those of Enhlet showed them with bows and arrows or laboring in log and grass "huts," thus framing indigenous inhabitants as racially primitive.³³ During the Third Reich, the same academics often continued studying Mennonites. Codification of racial law, however, complicated authors' impulses to idealize the denomination.

Categorizing Mennonites in the Third Reich

The melding of Nazi racial ideology and German state policy after Hitler's accession to power in 1933 prompted rightist scholars of Germans Abroad to evaluate their subjects' political loyalties. Separatist sentiments and distinctive cultural practices among Mennonites in foreign countries had previously drawn comment, as when Heinz Kloß noted of Russia German groups in Canada:

This part of Mennonitism living in or formally from the Ukraine is a distinct tribe (*Stamm*) just like the Palatines or the Swabians, a tribe that speaks its own Low Saxon dialect and that, through its particular worldview and history, also differentiates itself more than most other German tribes from the larger German language group and is not far distant from becoming its own [non-German] race (*Volk*).³⁴

Under the Third Reich, pronouncements of this character reflected less detached assessments than ideological condemnation. German academics claimed that Mennonites often portrayed themselves as "a special race,"³⁵ "a Mennonite race,"³⁶ or "their own, special race."³⁷ The strongest allegations associated them with antisemitic tropes. "Like the Jews," read a scathing report on Paraguay's settlers to the German Foreign Office, "Mennonites believe the bonds of blood make them not just a *single* race, but the 'chosen race' of God."³⁸

Intimations of disloyalty held consequences for Mennonites within and, to a lesser extent, beyond German borders. While Latin American colonies received school materials and industrial equipment from Nazi cultural organizations, members living

in the Third Reich required state sanction to operate churches, publish, and generally participate in public life.³⁹ Religious leaders voiced broad approbation for Hitler's program and influential clergy joined the party.⁴⁰ Articulating overall support for National Socialism, they avoided their denomination's assimilation into larger Protestant state churches. Remarkably, churchmen even won concessions exempting Mennonites from swearing oaths in most party and state capacities. Yet misinformed or outdated bureaucratic reports could elicit sudden, unfavorable verdicts. In 1936, the Nazi Party's highest court briefly excluded Mennonites from party membership, erroneously citing opposition to armed service.⁴¹ Another assessment in 1937 incorrectly described their "pacifist orientation" and "rejection of National Socialist racial ideology."⁴² This prompted a temporary ban on Mennonites within the SS clan community, even though many individuals already belonged.⁴³ Denominational leaders could usually reverse such rulings, but security services continued to monitor them as a "sect."⁴⁴

Mennonites in the Third Reich also contended with public debates about the fate of their coreligionists in the Soviet Union and, especially, those who fled. Contemporaneously with the transfer of refugees from Moscow to the Weimar Republic in 1929, over a thousand German-speaking individuals had escaped from Siberia over the Amur River into China. These episodes inspired a spate of novels as well as two of the Propaganda Ministry's important early films.⁴⁵ *Flüchtlinge*, released in 1933, depicted the fortunes of Russia German exiles in the Chinese city of Harbin. The plot borrowed liberally from press accounts of refugees in the same city. Joseph Goebbels awarded *Flüchtlinge* the first State Film Prize. The script simply called protagonists "Volga Germans," although statistically, over half would have been Mennonites.⁴⁶ By contrast, the 1935 film *Friesennot* gave its characters recognizably Mennonite traits. *Friesennot* followed a small German colony in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. Goebbels described the film in his diary as "indescribably exciting"; Hitler was "thrilled."⁴⁷ But Mennonite spokespersons in Germany contested the plot arc, in which the deeply pious villagers overcome Christian pacifism to fight their Bolshevik oppressors. Church leaders feared being wrongly tarred as unpatriotic.⁴⁸

Academic publishing provided a forum for Mennonite intellectuals and their sympathetic colleagues to establish the denomination's compatibility with Germanness. Writers with church ties initially sought to woo coreligionists abroad, lauding Nazi ideology in religious newspapers across the Americas and at a Mennonite world conference in the Netherlands.⁴⁹ By 1936, they formed a higher-profile campaign within the Third Reich. New periodicals, such as the church-sponsored *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, aimed to rescue Mennonite history from earlier sectarian portrayals. Editors emphasized a four-hundred-year-old story of "fighting and suffering" in which the denomination led "millions of Germans" in migrations abroad.⁵⁰ This line of interpretation achieved purchase in broader scholarship largely through two academic channels, both opened in 1937. First, members of the university-affiliated

Ethnic German Research Societies (which included “overseas” and “East European” divisions) founded the journal *Deutsches Archiv für Landes- und Volksforschung*, edited by Emil Meynen. Second, scholars associated with the German Foreign Institute, the League of Germandom Abroad, and Munich’s German Academy collaborated on the rival publication *Auslandsdeutsche Volksforschung*, edited by Hans Beyer.⁵¹

Situating the denomination within Nazi scholarship required finesse. Non-Mennonite academics were inclined to treat Mennonites favorably, since counting Mennonites as Germans could augment the importance of their regions or periods of study. But writers also protected their own reputations by disparaging groups deemed un-German, disloyal, or bizarre. When Karl Götz of the German Foreign Institute traveled across the Americas in 1936 and 1937, he dubbed Mexico’s Old Colony Mennonites “the strangest, spiritually and culturally insane splinter of the German race.”⁵² Similarly in Canada, Götz identified “fully ossified groups whose cultural and religious practices have not advanced since 1800.”⁵³ Far-right authors rarely praised horse-and-buggy Anabaptists like the Amish, who mostly ignored Nazi advances. One image in *Das Buch vom deutschen Volkstum* showed Hutterites in Manitoba looking away from the camera, literally turning their backs on what they would have considered prideful technology. They received the label: “a Christian-communist sect.”⁵⁴ Researchers frequently blamed inbreeding and isolation for causing ultraconservatives to identify as “an independent ‘race’ or an independent ‘tribe.’”⁵⁵ Some, like Hans Beyer, denigrated separatism for fracturing German political unity abroad.⁵⁶

Non-Mennonite scholars pointed to religious asceticism to explain what they considered to be the identity confusion of some groups. Authors did applaud religion for aiding colonists abroad in retaining German customs. Emil Meynen, à la Max Weber, credited traditionalist ecclesiology with enabling Anabaptists to exercise unusual influence among Pennsylvania Germans.⁵⁷ Walter Kuhn, based on studies in Galicia, estimated Mennonites to be fourteen times better settlers than Protestants and fifty times ahead of Catholics.⁵⁸ Yet writers simultaneously criticized Germans Abroad, and especially Mennonites, for narrating their character in religious rather than racial terms. Jakob Stach noted, “the word ‘Mennonite’ can mean both religion and race, and the term ‘Low German’ can, for Mennonites, also mean both race and religion.”⁵⁹ Stach and his colleagues responded by demoting religion in their publications. They grouped radically different groups as “German,” despite acknowledging that migration patterns usually followed faith, not race. “The religious confession of a person is a much clearer and meaningful characteristic than national or linguistic affiliation,” wrote Kuhn—immediately prior to counting nearly all Galician Protestants as Germans (although many spoke Polish) and summarily excluding German-speaking Jews.⁶⁰

In early 1938, shortly before the Third Reich’s annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland, Nazi authorities redefined Germans Abroad. The term now meant German citizens outside Germany. Noncitizens whose “language and culture

had German origins” received the label “ethnic Germans” (*Volksdeutsche*).⁶¹ This change reflected military expansionism and plans to process new populations under German rule. It also legally recategorized most Mennonites abroad as ethnic Germans. Nazi scholars adjusted their attitudes toward the denomination apace. Heinz Kloß, for instance, had since the mid-1930s overseen a German Foreign Institute program to sow pro-Nazi sentiment among German speakers in the United States. Kloß and his colleagues tried not to alienate potential supporters through “indiscreet tactics,” notably avoiding criticism of Mennonite pacifism.⁶² Instead, they pushed subtly fascist literature through reliable locals. Kloß’s strongest Mennonite contact was John Kroecker, a Soviet émigré in Kansas who quietly circulated propaganda. As Kloß’s mandate transformed into recruiting “returnees” for Hitler’s war machine, however, he invited Kroecker to Germany to hone more aggressive skills.⁶³ Kroecker became one of several Mennonite intellectuals to relocate from the US and Canada in 1939.⁶⁴

Recategorization of Mennonites beyond the Third Reich as noncitizen ethnic Germans functionally demoted the denomination from its prior reputation as a church of Germans Abroad. Germany’s Mennonite intelligentsia worked to cement even this lesser status. They joined forces with allies in the Association of Russia Germans who represented Catholics and Protestants in the same predicament. Scholarship in the Association’s organ, *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*,⁶⁵ a new book series (Sammlung Georg Leibbrandt),⁶⁶ and a special journal issue of *Sippenkunde des Deutschtums im Ausland*⁶⁷ stressed racial ties, amplified antisemitism, and promoted migration to the Third Reich (and thus citizenship) for ethnic Germans. Mennonite writers struggled to protect denominational interests while aligning with the more powerful Russia German lobby. Some unchurched authors readily abandoned the name Mennonite. Heinrich Schröder preferred “Frisians” (*Friesen*) for those of Low German heritage, as popularized by the film *Friesennot*.⁶⁸ But faith leaders like Benjamin Unruh used the combined term “ethnic German Mennonites.”⁶⁹ Regardless, race usually trumped religion, as when Unruh and Schröder collaborated in 1939 to resettle a group from Paraguay to the Reich to “maintain our friendly relationship to Germany.”⁷⁰

Negotiating Germanness in War and Genocide

Nazi expansion during World War II redefined the Third Reich’s relationship to ethnic Germans and, by extension, Mennonites. Hitler justified military aggression as a means of protecting downtrodden racial comrades abroad, while the new *Lebensraum* secured by soldiers in Eastern Europe was supposed to house many of the world’s nineteen million ethnic Germans.⁷¹ Mennonites who came under Nazi occupation, if counted as Aryan, could anticipate integration into the “master race.” This might include receiving favorable treatment and rations as well as goods, houses, and businesses seized from Jews and other murder victims. Mennonites who failed to achieve this status, however, could themselves be despoiled, deported, and killed. Indeed, Nazi

attitudes toward the more than 100,000 Mennonites encountered in the Free City of Danzig, Poland, France, the Netherlands, and the Soviet Union differed significantly by location. Throughout the war years, denominational leaders in Germany urged advantageous categorization for fellow Mennonites, so long as lending support did not compromise their own privileged position. These writers continued to present Mennonitism worldwide as a uniformly German church, disavowing members of questionable loyalty or unclear Aryan credentials.⁷²

The joint Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 established a template for Mennonite involvement in racial warfare. Church leaders cheered their reunification with congregations in northern Poland and the Free City of Danzig, which had once been part of Germany. As these 8,000 Mennonites joined the racial community, scholarly institutions with expertise in ethnic Germans reoriented from civilian knowledge generation to wartime missions. The German Foreign Institute, for instance, assisted and eventually fell under the jurisdiction of the Ethnic German Office of Heinrich Himmler's SS.⁷³ Mennonite authors like Walter Quiring and non-Mennonite counterparts such as Walter Kuhn helped sort conquered populations by race, a process involving the subjugation of Jews and other alleged enemies as well as the importation of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans.⁷⁴ Denominational leaders simultaneously wrote to Reich authorities attesting to the racial integrity of the single Mennonite congregation to be resettled from Galicia,⁷⁵ and they encouraged the two churches in central Poland to conform to their own theological practice.⁷⁶ These spokespersons also benefitted from the decision of coreligionists in North America to distribute humanitarian aid in Poland, abetting renewed avowals that all Mennonites were Germans.⁷⁷

Hitler's opening of a western front in 1940 precipitated another era of denominational redefinition. A majority of France's 3,000 Mennonites spoke German and lived in regions that, like western Poland, were soon annexed to the Reich. Spokespersons in Germany rendered legal assistance when the Gestapo briefly shuttered several churches, but they also denounced as "anti-German" the one congregation in France to openly oppose Nazi policies.⁷⁸ That the Netherlands's 65,000 Mennonites spoke Dutch and, in some cases, resisted occupation further challenged the denomination's German image. Church leaders in the Reich had previously clarified their faith's debts to the Dutch Reformation.⁷⁹ Now they helped scholars like Erich Keyser of Danzig elevate the Dutch on racial hierarchies. Keyser reinterpreted Mennonite history in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and imperial Russia as a story of Dutch colonization.⁸⁰ He and his Mennonite colleagues buttressed projects such as the eastern resettlement of thousands of Dutch volunteers under a new Dutch East Company. "The Dutch were the true vanguard of the reconquest of the German East," wrote one booster. "Even if they, as Mennonites, led a distinctive religious life, they still otherwise stood with the other German tribes here in the East in a united racial front."⁸¹

Senior Nazis' wartime interest in Mennonites concentrated principally on groups in Soviet Ukraine. Having been construed in racial scholarship as archetypal ethnic Germans, these populations fit National Socialist dreams for human material that could replace the Jews, Slavs, and others whom they planned to murder or remove from Eastern Europe. After Hitler's 1941 abrogation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Soviet authorities evacuated approximately half of Ukraine's Mennonites and other German speakers before German troops arrived. Most of the Soviet Union's Mennonites thus spent the war in Siberia or with the Red Army. However, 35,000 remained in German-controlled Caucasus, Crimea, and Ukraine. Nearly all of these lived within or near the imagined borders of a projected Reich province called *Gotengau*. According to the secret *Generalplan Ost*, Nazi racial engineers intended to increase the German presence in this hypothetical *Gotengau* tenfold within fifteen years to around one million inhabitants.⁸² Mennonites comprised a third of ethnic Germans already in the region, rendering them a critical seed population.⁸³ Occupiers referred to the colonies with the most Mennonite residents as Chortitza, Halbstadt, and Kronau. All three inspired jurisdictional disputes among covetous Nazi agencies.

Mennonites in German-controlled areas of the Soviet Union were, like their neighbors, subject to racial classification and the privileges or punishments it entailed. Academics who had previously categorized the USSR's Mennonites as ethnic Germans in theory thereby prepared Nazi forces to favorably handle a majority of those they encountered, while consigning any who did not meet criteria for ethnic German status to repression. Many scholars with expertise in Mennonitism took part in this wartime process from afar or in person. Georg Leibbrandt helped plan the "Final Solution" at the Wannsee Conference, and fellow Russia German activists in the East Ministry produced maps and handbooks on the Soviet Union's ethnic Germans for military and administrative use.⁸⁴ Specialists often accompanied such documents in the field. Hans Beyer consulted for *Einsatzgruppe C* while this murder squad and its aides, including local Mennonites, slaughtered thousands of Jews and communists around Chortitza.⁸⁵ Karl Stumpp headed an East Ministry team of eighty people that separated ethnic Germans from Jews and Slavs in colonies like Kronau.⁸⁶ Hans Rempel made further recommendations for ethnic cleansing.⁸⁷ And Karl Götz, based in Halbstadt, oversaw SS education programs for ethnic Germans across Ukraine.⁸⁸

For leading National Socialists, Mennonites living in the Reich Commissariat Ukraine and nearby war zone, above all, constituted part of the region's broader ethnic German populace. Field reports from SS commandos, East Ministry officials, and other visitors tended to compare Mennonites favorably to neighboring Protestants and Catholics. Both Himmler and Rosenberg appear to have shared this view, although only rarely did either man distinguish among ethnic Germans by religion. And while their offices sanctioned Mennonite church life as an antidote to atheist Bolshevism, Nazi organizational priorities for ethnic Germans lay with administration, welfare, agriculture, and defense. In practice, authorities preserved an inexact division between

groups by religion to maintain morale. This pattern persisted even when the course of the war led occupiers to consolidate ethnic German colonies or move them wholesale. By early 1944, as the eastern front retracted, Himmler ordered the evacuation of all 350,000 ethnic Germans from Ukraine and Transnistria to Nazi-occupied Poland. He also designated that they be called Black Sea Germans (*Schwarzmeerdeutsche*).⁸⁹ Codifying this previously informal term just as members left the Black Sea region allowed Himmler to manage their resettlement en masse to the west.⁹⁰

The term Mennonite shaped wartime decisions at midlevel tiers, even if this label meant little at top Nazi echelons. Since one in ten Black Sea Germans was Mennonite, those traveling west in 1944 could benefit during fresh rounds of categorization when perceived as belonging to a superior subgroup. “Mennonites are surely among the most reliable Germans,” one migration officer wrote, suggesting that they be placed to “influence fellow settlers of less clear loyalty.”⁹¹ Inversely, Mennonites could also be disadvantaged by association with larger groupings. They complained, in some cases, to Nazi officials who had run their colonies in occupied Soviet areas. Especially in the Warthegau province, where most Germans had migrated from elsewhere, Black Sea Germans faced prejudices. New arrivals reported property confiscations, cramped quarters, and undesirable employment.⁹² Concerned SS officers sought to improve conditions through the Gau Office for Ethnic Questions, whose activities included circulating a brochure on Mennonites by Karl Götz. This document, which reflected much of the scholarship about the denomination appearing in Germany since the 1920s, encouraged Warthegau administrators to treat members well so that, following the war, “whole groups of Mennonites overseas” would relocate to Germany.⁹³

While fantasies of a global Mennonite migration to Hitler’s empire collapsed with the Third Reich, the legacies of the denomination’s entanglement with Nazism persisted into the postwar years. As Europe’s Mennonites were liberated or came under Allied occupation, their perceived relationship to Germanness mediated access to housing, mobility, and material goods. Indeed, 10,000 Mennonites from eastern Germany, occupied Poland, and the former Free City of Danzig had fled westward in 1945 in advance of Soviet troops, most ultimately making new homes in West Germany rather than returning to the reconstituted Polish state. Coreligionists in France and the Netherlands buried links to wartime Aryan status. They preferred narratives of resistance and repression.⁹⁴ Finally, a majority of Mennonites from the USSR who had retreated as Black Sea Germans with the SS now faced repatriation by the Red Army. Church leaders from Europe and North America aided those who escaped deportation. Invoking Nazi-era and earlier writings about the unclarity of these groups’ Germanness, spokespersons cast them as a unique “ethnic minority of neither German nor Russian origin.”⁹⁵ More than 15,000 Mennonites migrated from Europe to the Americas by 1955, most receiving United Nations assistance as non-Germans.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Studying how Nazi racial categories structured power in the Third Reich and facilitated wartime atrocities requires understanding how these systems absorbed and were, in turn, changed by alternative organizational criteria. Mennonitism as a concept was not intrinsically consistent with National Socialist ideology nor were Mennonites as humans, in their myriad manifestations, preordained to meet with approval from far-right nationalists. The denomination's relationship to religious tenets like pacifism and its inclusion of potential non-Germans first had to be clarified. Contingent factors, including the 1929 refugee crisis and a longer history of global migrations, favorably conditioned members' admission into Nazi consciousness, and Mennonite leaders knew their communities would benefit if National Socialists treated them as predominantly or exclusively German. But maintaining privilege necessitated constant modification by supposed racial experts. Far-right scholars writing within as well as outside religious institutions vouched for the compatibility of Mennonitism (selectively defined) with German identity. Their efforts to reorient the faith around racial ideology lent it legitimacy in the eyes of Nazi bureaucrats. Church spokespersons could then press for legal concessions as part of the overall German people.

The place of Mennonites in Nazi thought and practice from the Weimar Republic through World War II reflected the denomination's movement through a heterogeneous set of racial categories. Subdivisions within Germanness provided key resources. Terminology such as Germans Abroad, Russia Germans, ethnic Germans, Frisians, Dutch, and Black Sea Germans afforded cover to people of otherwise dubious value, which explains these labels' proliferation and popularity in the Third Reich. By identifying as an ethnic subgroup or series of subgroups within Germanness, Mennonites could justify themselves as distinct yet still within the bounds of racial acceptability. However, reclassifying the denomination using racial criteria meant downplaying religious characteristics. Nazi officials who invoked the term Mennonite when making decisions about people in the Third Reich or occupied Europe frequently employed racialized definitions: Mennonites were loyal Germans while non-Aryan or subversive individuals were inherently non-Mennonite. This logic gave most Mennonites safe passage, brokered at the expense of a minority of members along with millions of Jews and other Europeans consigned to robbery, enslavement, and execution. Mennonitism was intertwined with Nazism, twisted by terms of racial endearment.

Notes

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1. Alfred Rosenberg, "Das deutsche Bauernsterben in Sowjetrußland," *Völkischer Beobachter*, November 24/25, 1929.
2. Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg: Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich: Blessing, 2005), 179–231. On Judeo-Bolshevism, Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 83–162.
3. See Cornelius Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1993); John Lapp and Arnold Snyder, eds., *Global Mennonite History Series*, 5 vols. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003–2012).
4. The classic account is Diether Lichdi, *Mennoniten im Dritten Reich* (Bolanden-Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1977). James Lichti, *Houses on the Sand? Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008) treats Mennonites comparatively. For historiography, John Thiesen, "Menno in the KZ or Münster Resurrected: Mennonites and National Socialism," in *European Mennonites and the Challenge of Modernity: Contributors, Detractors, and Adapters*, ed. Mark Jantzen, Mary Sprunger, and John Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2016), 313–328. More recently, Marion Kobelt-Groch and Astrid von Schlachta, eds., *Mennoniten in der NS-Zeit: Stimmen, Lebenssituationen, Erfahrungen* (Bolanden-Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 2017).
5. In Canada: James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada, 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 195–203; in Latin America: John Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933–1945* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora, 1999), and the 2017 issue of *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kulture der Mennoniten in Paraguay*; in the Netherlands: Alle Hoekema, "Niederländische Taufgesinnte während des Zweiten Weltkriegs," in *Mennoniten in der NS Zeit*, ed. Kobelt-Groch and von Schlachta, 173–184, and the 2015 issue of *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*; in the US: John Thiesen, "The American Mennonite Encounter with National Socialism," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 27 (1992): 127–158.
6. Gerhard Rempel, "Mennonites and the Holocaust: From Collaboration to Perpetuation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 4 (2010): 507–549; Viktor Klets, "Caught between Two Poles; Ukrainian Mennonites and the Trauma of the Second World War," in *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789–1945*, ed. Leonard Friesen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 287–318; James Urry, "Mennonites in Ukraine During World War II: Thoughts and Questions," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93, no. 1 (2019): 81–111; Mark Jantzen and John Thiesen, eds., *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).
7. Ted Regehr, "Of Dutch or German Ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC, and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (1995): 7–25; Steven Schroeder, "Mennonite-Nazi Collaboration and Coming to Terms with the Past: European Mennonites and the MCC, 1945–1950," *Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 2 (2003): 6–16; Benjamin W. Goossen, "From Aryanism to Anabaptism: Nazi Race Science and the Language of Mennonite Ethnicity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 2 (2016): 135–163.
8. Diether Götz Lichdi, "Minderheiten, die sich lange fremd blieben: Mennoniten und Juden in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus," in *Freikirchen und Juden im "Dritten Reich"*, ed. Daniel Heinz (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011), 65–76; Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Mennoniten und der Nationalsozialismus," in *Christen im Dritten Reich*, ed. Philipp Thull (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014), 68–84; Astrid von Schlachta, "Vereint leben oder einzeln zugrunde gehen?: Die Mennoniten in der NS-Zeit zwischen Einheitskirche und Kongregationalismus," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 30, no. 1 (2017): 46–61.
9. Scholarship on these terms has emphasized their constructed and malleable nature. Works on ethnic Germans are especially extensive, including, among many others, Valdis Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Doris Bergen, "Tenu-

- ousness and Tenacity: The *Volksdeutschen* of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Holocaust,” in *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*, ed. Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 267–286. However, most of this literature has either uncritically included Mennonites as logical adherents or ignored their involvement altogether.
10. Alfred Rosenberg, “Besichtigungsreise durch die Ukraine vom 18.6. bis 26.6.42,” T-454/105, Captured German and Related Records, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA). My approach follows scholarship on the susceptibility of allegedly national populations to switch, drop, or ignore ethnic affiliations, including Tara Zahra, “Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119; Pieter Judson, “When is a Diaspora not a Diaspora? Rethinking Nation-Centered Narratives about Germans in Eastern Europe,” in O’Donnell, Bridenthal, and Reagin, *The Heimat Abroad*, 219–247. Literature on National Socialists’ efforts to solidify national identities is voluminous. Recent examples include Gerhard Wolf, “Negotiating Germanness: National Socialist Germanization Policy in the Wartheland,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (2017): 214–239; Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 218–257.
 11. Peter Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772–1880* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
 12. Jochen Oltmer, *Migration und Politik in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 196. On Mennonites and the Soviet state, see Terry Martin, “The Russian Mennonite Encounter with the Soviet State 1917–1955,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 20, no. 1 (2002): 5–59.
 13. Harvey Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, 1926–1933* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 162–180; John Eicher, “A Sort of Homecoming: The German Refugee Crisis of 1929,” *German Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (2017): 333–352.
 14. “Heimatlose deutsche Kolonisten: Wer hilft ihnen?” *Völkischer Beobachter*, November 15, 1929.
 15. J[oseph] Geiger, “Brüder in Not!” *Völkischer Beobachter*, November 28, 1929.
 16. Auswärtiges Amt to Reichskanzlei, November 6, 1929, Nachlaß Benjamin Unruh, box 9, folder 47, Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, Bolanden-Weierhof, Germany (hereafter MFS).
 17. Approximately 10,000 of the 13,000 refugees seeking exit via Moscow in 1929 were Mennonites, while 3,885 of 5,671 who entered Germany were Mennonites. Frank Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), 236.
 18. On these institutions, Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, 1927–1945* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 112–117; Karl-Werner Ratschko, *Kieler Hochschulmediziner in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Essen: Klartext, 2014), 122–143. For one refugee’s account, Gerhard Schartner, “Lebensgeschichte und -erinnerungen,” 1986, unpublished manuscript, author’s possession. Kurt Kauenhoben, “Die Sippen der Rußlanddeutschen Siedlung Fernheim im Gran Chaco, Paraguay,” *Sippenkunde des Deutschtums im Ausland* 3 (1938): 154, reported that test results were archived in Berlin and Kiel during the 1930s, but these files are no longer among the institutes’ papers at Archiv der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft or Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein.
 19. Friedrich Keiter, *Rußlanddeutsche Bauern und ihre Stammesgenossen in Deutschland* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1934), 31.
 20. Friedrich Keiter, “Über Korrelation der Gesichtszüge,” *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* 11, no. 3/4 (1934): 243–253; Friedrich Keiter, *Menschenrassen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1936), 95, among others.
 21. H. Neusatz [Leibbrandt] and D. Erka [Ehrt], *Ein deutscher Todesweg* (Berlin: Eckart, 1930).

22. Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873–1880," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 6, no. 4 (1932): 205–226 and 7, no. 1 (1933): 5–41; Adolf Ehrnt, *Das Mennonitentum in Rußland* (Berlin: Julius Beltz, 1932). See Martin Munke, "Vom Scheitern eines Experten: Georg Leibbrandt im Nationalsozialismus," *Osteuropa* 67, no. 1–2 (2017): 107–120; Lorna Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern and Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 4 (2007): 573–594.
23. Erwin Warkentin, "The Mennonites before Moscow: The Notes of Dr. Otto Auhagen," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2011): 201–220; Jakob Stach, *Das Deutschtum in Sibirien, Mittelasien und dem Fernen Osten* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), 219.
24. Johannes Rempel, *Mit Gott über die Mauer springen* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2013), 164–165; Heinrich Unruh, *Fügungen und Führungen: Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, 1881–1959* (Detmold: Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums, 2009), 235–278.
25. Bradley Naranch, "Inventing the *Auslandsdeutsche*: Emigration, Colonial Fantasy, and German National Identity, 1848–71," in *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 21–40, among others.
26. James Casteel, *Russia in the German Global Imaginary: Imperial Visions and Utopian Desires, 1905–1941* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 143–170; Hans-Christian Petersen, "The Making of *Russlanddeutschtum*: Karl Stumpp oder die Mobilisierung einer 'Volksgruppe' in der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Minderheiten im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit*, ed. Cornelia Eisler and Silke Götsch-Elten (Münster: Waxmann, 2017), 163–190.
27. Examples include Heinz Kloß, "Rußlanddeutsche in den Vereinigten Staaten," *Petermanns geographische Mitteilungen* 77 (1931): 171–178; Heinz Lehmann, *Das Deutschtum in Ostkanada* (Stuttgart: Ausland und Heimat Verlags-Aktiengesellschaft, 1931), 8–11; Walter Kuhn, *Die Jungen deutschen Sprachinseln in Galizien* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1930), 4.
28. The first Mennonites in the Chaco came from Canada, drawing some attention from Nazis: Bruno Fricke, "Das Drama der Sklaven im Chaco," *Münchener Beobachter*, August 22, 1926. See John Eicher, "Rustic Reich: The Local Meanings of (Trans)National Socialism among Paraguay's Mennonite Colonies," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 4 (2018): 998–1028.
29. Walter Quiring, *Deutsche erschliessen den Chaco* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1936); Walter Quiring, *Rußlanddeutsche suchen eine Heimat* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1938). See Ted Regehr, "Walter Quiring (1893–1983)," in *Shepherds, Servants, and Prophets: Leadership among the Russian Mennonites, ca. 1880–1960*, ed. Harry Loewen (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora, 2003), 313–335.
30. Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy, "Das deutsche Landvolk in Südamerika," in *Lebensraumfragen europäischer Völker*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1941), 354–373, among others.
31. Paul Gauß, ed., *Das Buch vom deutschen Volkstum* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1935), 4.
32. *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums*, 3 vols. (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1933–1938); Friedrich Lange, *Volksdeutsche Kartenskizzen* (Berlin: Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland, 1934).
33. Hans Krieg, *Chaco-Indianer* (Stuttgart: Strecker und Schröder, 1934); Hans von Becker, "Lengua und Kaiotugui: Indianerstudien im Chaco Boreal," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 73, no. 6 (1941): 358–415. See Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, "Reshaping the Chaco: Migrant Foodways, Place-making, and the Chaco War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 50, no. 3 (2018): 579–611.
34. Heinz Kloß, "Mennoniten in Kanada," *Die Literatur* 6, no. 2 (1928): 642.
35. Hans Beyer, "Hauptlinien einer Geschichte der ostdeutschen Volksgruppen im 19. Jahrhundert," *Historische Zeitschrift* 162, no. 3 (1940): 519.
36. Karl Götz, *Deutsche Leistung in Amerika* (Berlin: Franz Eher, 1940), 70.
37. Walter Quiring to Ernst Kundt, October 7, 1935, R 127518, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin, Germany (hereafter PA AA).
38. Manfred Kossok, "Die Mennoniten-Siedlungen Paraguays in den Jahren 1935–1939," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 8 (1960): 369.

39. Benjamin W. Goossen, "Taube und Hakenkreuz: Verhandlungen zwischen der NS-Regierung und dem MCC in Bezug auf die lateinamerikanischen Mennoniten," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay* 18 (2017): 138–145.
40. See Emil Händiges, *Grundsätzliches über die deutschen Mennoniten, über ihre Stellung zu Wehrpflicht und Eid und ihr Verhältnis zum Dritten Reich* (Elbing: Reinhold Kühn, 1937). Congregations in the Free City of Danzig appear to have had particularly high party membership. Five of seven Danzig-area Mennonite churches (which exercised influence in Germany) were led by party members.
41. Oberstes Parteigericht der NSDAP to Gaugericht München-Oberbayern der NSDAP, December 3, 1936, NS 1/1129, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany (hereafter BArch).
42. "Merkblatt über die Sekte 'Mennoniten,'" ca. 1937, NS 2/220, BArch.
43. Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes to Chef des Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamtes, April 9, 1938, NS 2/220, BArch.
44. SD Leitabschnitt Karlsruhe, "Sektenbericht," August 19, 1940, R 58/5633, BArch. Although the Third Reich recognized Mennonites as a "Free Church" rather than a "sect," the *Sicherheitsdienst* lumped these categories together.
45. Novels included Josef Ponten, *Volk auf dem Wege*, 6 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1930–1942); Werner Kortwich, *Friesennot* (Leipzig: Insel, 1933); Gerhard Menzel, *Flüchtlinge* (Breslau: Wilh. Gottl. Korn, 1933); Ernst Behrends, *Beata* (Heilbronn: Eugen Salzer, 1935); Alexander Schwarz, *In Wológdas weißen Wäldern* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1935); Hans Harder, *Das Dorf an der Wolga* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1937).
46. 550 of 1066 German-speaking refugees in Harbin were Mennonites. Stach, *Das Deutschtum in Sibirien*, 234. See John Toews, "Die Flucht rußlanddeutscher Mennoniten nach China (1929–1934)," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 36 (1979): 27–48.
47. Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: April 1934–Februar 1936* (Munich: Saur, 2005), 328–329. *Flüchtlinge* and *Friesennot* are treated in David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema: 1933–1945* (London: Tauris, 2006), 108–109, 207–213.
48. Benjamin W. Goossen, "Mennoniten als Volksdeutsche: Die Rolle des Mennonitentums in der nationalsozialistischen Propaganda," trans. Helmut Foth, *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 71 (2014): 54–70; Marion Kobelt-Groch, "Sind sie es—oder sind sie es nicht?" in Kobelt-Groch and von Schlachta, *Mennoniten in der NS Zeit*, 149–168. *Friesennot* also gave its characters several Catholic characteristics in line with a tradition of fusing Mennonitism and Catholicism in popular culture to boost (Protestant) German nationalism. Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 219–246.
49. Germany-based writers published extensively in *Die Brücke* (Brazil), *Menno-Blatt* (Paraguay), and the Canadian papers *Der Bote*, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, and *Mennonitische Volksquarte*. Christian Neff, ed., *Der Allgemeine Kongreß der Mennoniten* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1936) gives proceedings of the Netherlands conference.
50. "Unser Zeitschrift," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 1, no. 1/2 (1936): 1. See Helmut Foth, "'Wie die Mennoniten in die deutsche Volksgemeinschaft hineinwachsen': Die Mennonitischen Geschichtsblätter im Dritten Reich," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 68 (2011): 59–88. New genealogical periodicals also appeared, e.g. *Mitteilungen des Sippenverbandes der Danziger Mennoniten-Familien* (1935–1944).
51. Guntram Herb, *Under the Map of Germany: Nationalism and Propaganda 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 1997), 134–135.
52. Karl Götz, "Sippenkundliche Randbemerkungen zu einer Amerikareise," *Sippenkunde des Deutschtums im Ausland* 3 (1938): 127–128.
53. Götz, *Deutsche Leistung*, 69–70.
54. Gauß, *Das Buch vom deutschen Volkstum*, 339.
55. Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy, *Deutsche Ackerbausiedlungen im südamerikanischen Grasland, Pampa und Gran Chaco* (Leipzig: Deutschen Museums für Länderkunde, 1938), 127.
56. Hans Beyer, *Aufbau und Entwicklung des ostdeutschen Volkstums* (Danzig: Paul Rosenberg, 1935), 109–110.

57. Emil Meynen, "Das pennsylvaniendeutsche Bauernland," *Deutsches Archiv für Landes- und Volksforschung* 3, no. 2 (1939): 273, 286–287.
58. Walter Kuhn, *Deutsche Sprachinsel-Forschung* (Plauen: Günther Wolff, 1934), 328.
59. Stach, *Das Deutschtum in Sibirien*, 47–48.
60. Walter Kuhn, *Bevölkerungsstatistik des Deutschtums in Galizien* (Vienna: Julius Springer, 1930), 3.
61. Doris Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994): 569.
62. Arthur Smith, *The Deutschtum of Nazi Germany and the United States* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 39. See Christopher Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-tongue Fascism, Race and the Science of Language* (London: Routledge, 1999), 144–187.
63. Heinz Kloß to John Kroeker, April 5, 1939, John J. Kroeker and Katherine Janzen Kroeker Papers, box 2, folder: Heinz Kloss, Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, KS (hereafter MLA).
64. Harold Bender to Cornelius Krahn, December 9, 1947, Robert Kreider Papers, box 6, folder 5: CRALOG Correspondence 1947, MLA; Selinda Fast, "Alexander J. Fast," *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* 69 (1954): 6–9.
65. For instance, Joseph Geiger, "Rußlanddeutsche sind nicht Deutschrussen!" *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten* 11, no. 1 (1939): 2–5.
66. "Zur Einführung der Sammlung," in Christian Kugler, *Großliebental* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1939), v–xii. This series produced ten volumes by 1944.
67. Karl Götz, ed., *Der Wanderweg der Rußlanddeutschen* (vol. 4, 1939). Condensed articles from this issue appeared in *Deutschtum im Ausland* 22, no. 5 (1939).
68. Heinrich Schröder, *Rußlanddeutsche Friesen* (Langensalza: Julius Beltz, 1936). See Gerhard Rempel, "Heinrich Hajo Schroeder: The Allure of Race and Space in Hitler's Empire," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 29 (2011): 227–254. "Frisian" (as opposed to "Flemish") had long been a religious designation for some Mennonites. This ecclesiastical term referred to neither geographic nor ethnic heritage, and by the twentieth century, it held little everyday significance. Christian Neff and Nanne van der Zijpp, "Frisian Mennonites," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1956), 413–414. Kurt Kauenhowen, "Das westpreußische Mennonitentum und auslanddeutsche Sippenkunde," *Sippenkunde des Deutschtums im Ausland* 1 (1936): 133, credited *Friesennot* with stimulating use of "Frisian" as a racial descriptor for Low German Mennonites. Nazi officials began referring to Mennonites' "Frisian" blood after the film's November 1935 release. For instance, Erhard Graf von Wedel to Auswärtiges Amt, December 22, 1935, R 127502, PA AA. Literature reviews treated Schröder as the scholarly authority on this concept: Margarete Woltner, "Die rußlanddeutsche Forschung 1934–1937," *Deutsches Archiv für Landes- und Volksforschung* 2 (1938): 476; Walter Kuhn, "Die Erforschung der neuzeitlichen deutschen Ostsiedlung," in *Deutsche Ostforschung: Ergebnisse und Aufgaben seit dem ersten Weltkrieg*, vol. 2, ed. Hermann Aubin, et al. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1943), 165–173.
69. Benjamin Unruh, "Die ev. Mennoniten," ca. 1939, Nachlaß Christian Neff, box 23, folder 21, MFS.
70. Benjamin Unruh to Orie Miller, July 4, 1939, Nachlaß Benjamin Unruh, box 9, folder 48, MFS.
71. Heinz Kloß, *Brüder vor den Toren des Reichs* (Berlin: Paul Hochmuth, 1942), 3.
72. For an interwar example, James Irvin Lichti, "Die Stellungnahmen deutscher Mennoniten zur Auflösung des Rhönbruderhofes in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 49 (1992): 73–91.
73. Ernst Ritter, *Das Deutsche Ausland-Institut in Stuttgart 1917–1945: Ein Beispiel deutscher Volkstumsarbeit zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976), 136.
74. Regehr, "Walter Quiring," 323; Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 176.

75. (Ca. 550 individuals). Ernst Crous, "Deutscher Mennoniten in Galizien (Kleinpolen)," and Heinrich Pauls, "Die Mennonitengemeinde Lemberg," R 69/150, BArch.
76. (Ca. 700 individuals). Abraham Braun to Gustav Ratzlaff, March 30, 1940, Vereinigung, box 3, folder: 1940 Jan.–Juni, MFS.
77. Goossen, "Taube und Hakenkreuz," 145–156.
78. Abraham Braun to Emil Händiges and Ernst Crous, August 15, 1941, Vereinigung, folder: 1941 Juli–Dez., MFS. Nazi authorities imprisoned several members of the resistant Sarrebourg church. Stéphane Zehr, "Krémer contre Hitler: Une résistance mennonite en Alsace-Lorraine (1925–1945)," *Souvenance Anabaptiste* 37 (2018): 8–27.
79. For instance, Benjamin Unruh, "Die Herkunft der Rußlanddeutschen mennonitischen Glaubens als Beitrag für die sippenkundliche Erfassung des Rußlanddeuschturns," *Sippenkunde des Deutschturns im Ausland* 2 (1937): 124–132.
80. Erich Keyser, "Die Niederlande und das Weichselland," *Deutsches Archiv für Landes- und Volksforschung* 4, no. 6 (1942): 592–617, among others. See Alexander Pinwinkler, "Volk, Bevölkerung, Rasse, and Raum: Erich Keyser's Ambiguous Concept of a German History of Population, ca. 1918–1955," in *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1920–1945*, ed. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (New York: Berghahn, 2005), 86–99. "Sitzung des Ausschusses der Konferenz der ost- und westpreußischen Mennonitengemeinden für Geschlechts- und Familienforschung," November 23, 1942, Vereinigung, box 3, folder: 1942, MFS, describes Keyser's contacts with Mennonites. His Mennonite protégés included Horst Penner, Johan Postma, and Herbert Wiebe.
81. Claudine Takats, "200 Jahre holländische Kolonisationsarbeit im deutschen Osten," *Deutschturn im Ausland* 25, no. 7/8 (1942): 158. See Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel, "'Germanje': Dutch Empire-Building in Nazi-Occupied Europe," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (2017): 240–257.
82. Czesław Madajczyk, ed., *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (Munich: Saur, 1994), 51–52, 124.
83. "Zusammenstellung der erfassten Volksdeutschen im Reichskommissariat Ukraine, in Transnistrien und im Heeresgebiet," ca. July 1943, T-175, roll 72, NARA.
84. Martin Munke, "Georg Leibbrandt: Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete," in *Die Teilnehmer: Die Männer der Wannsee-Konferenz*, ed. Hans-Christian Jasch and Christoph Kreuzmüller (Berlin: Metropol, 2017), 213–226; Julia Landau, "Publikationsstelle Ost/Sammlung Georg Leibbrandt," in *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Personen, Institutionen, Forschungsprogramme, Stiftungen*, ed. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (Munich: Saur, 2008), 486–496.
85. Karl Roth, "Heydrichs Professor: Historiographie des 'Volkstums' und der Massenvernichtungen," in *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft, 1918–1945*, ed. Peter Schöttler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 291–294; Rempel, "Mennonites and the Holocaust," 530–535.
86. Eric Schmaltz and Samuel Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and its North American Legacy," *Holocaust & Genocide Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 28–64.
87. Hans Rempel, "Die Bodenfrage in den deutschen Siedlungen in der Ukraine," ca. 1942, R 6/109, BArch.
88. Werner Lorenz to SS-Personalhauptamt, September 14, 1944, A3343 SSO, roll 21A (Karl Götz 11.3.03), NARA.
89. Heinz Reinefarth to Rudolf Brandt, March 1944, T-175, roll 72, NARA.
90. For instance, when Alfred Rosenberg protested plans to settle Ukraine's ethnic Germans in Nazi-occupied Poland, Himmler invoked the term "Schwarzmeerdeutsche" to argue that the group should be kept together (under his jurisdiction). Heinrich Himmler to Alfred Rosenberg, April 13, 1944, T-175, roll 72, NARA.

91. "Ansiedlung von Russlanddeutschen im Altreich," July 20, 1944, M894, roll 10, NARA.
92. Horst Hoffmeyer, "Die Lage der Russlanddeutschen im Warthegau," ca. June 1944, T-175, roll 72, NARA.
93. Karl Götz, *Das Schwarzmeerdeutschum: Die Mennoniten* (Posen: NS-Druck Wartheland, 1944), 3. Himmler tasked Götz with resettling ethnic Germans from overseas. See Benjamin W. Goossen, "'A Small World Power': How the Third Reich Viewed Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75, no. 2 (2018): 173–206. Plans for this migration, continuing into 1944, could draw on meticulous counts of Mennonites abroad: Heinz Kloß, *Statistisches Handbuch der Volksdeutschen in Übersee* (Stuttgart: Publikationsstelle Stuttgart-Hamburg, 1943), 44, 48–49, 75, 83–88, 117, 129, 131.
94. For instance, *Fourth Mennonite World Conference Proceedings* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1950), 23–30, 212–218.
95. Mennonite Central Committee, "Memorandum on the Mennonite Refugees from South Russia," April 6, 1948, AJ/43/572, folder: Political Dissidents—Mennonites, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France.
96. Goossen, "From Aryanism to Anabaptism," 157. Many of Germany's experts on Mennonitism participated in or benefitted from the denomination's disentanglement from Nazism. At postwar trials, Unruh and Götz discussed Mennonite connections to distance themselves and colleagues from the Holocaust: United States of America v. Ulrich Greifelt et al., December 17, 1947, M894, roll 4, NARA; Heiner Jestrabek, "Karl Götz," in *Täter, Helfer, Trittbrettfahrer: NS-Belastete von der Ostalb*, ed. Wolfgang Proske (Münster: Klemm & Oelschläger, 2010), 135. Most such scholars enjoyed postwar careers in government, academia, or church life, often continuing to publish on Mennonites.