

# “The Welser Phantom”: Apparitions of the Welser Venezuela Colony in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Cultural Memory

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As far as the position of the [colonial] government toward the natives is concerned, the spirit of German humanity would certainly prevail. The Nicobar Islanders are the legitimate but incompetent owners of the land. They have to be protected to all intents and purposes. Their physical and spiritual well-being has to be cared for sufficiently.

– Franz Maurer<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In 1867, Franz Maurer, spoke about the attempt to establish a permanent German colony in the Bay of Bengal. His perspective is representative of nascent German Imperial desires for a share in Europe’s colonial projects before the establishment of the German Reich in 1871. In the nineteenth century, Germans had conflicted feelings about staking a claim to colonial lands in light of the existing imperial-colonial possessions of the English and the French (Knoll and Hiery 9-11). Maurer’s position demonstrates German anxieties and fantasies stemming from Enlightenment thought and the growing desire for Imperial power within the German-speaking lands. He explains that the Nicobar islanders’ claim to sovereignty over their territory would be respected, yet, at the same time, Germans would provide needed “protection” and instill the “spirit of German humanity” in the islanders. The German Empire assumed the roles of protector, just caretaker, and teacher of German humanism to emphasize its rationale in *protecting* and not simply colonizing the Nicobar Islands. Maurer’s rhetoric reveals how Enlightenment ideology and the desire to rule over colonies were conflated in the push for German colonialism in the nineteenth century. During this period, imperialists also sought out information on what had been the first overseas German colonial venture in the New World—the sixteenth-century Welser colony of Venezuela—to further promote the idea of the need for German protection in potential colonies.

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<sup>1</sup> Maurer, who had come from Berlin, argued to the recently founded North German Federation for the colonization of the Nicobar Islands (a group of about twenty islands situated in the Bay of Bengal that had already been colonized by Denmark and the Austrian Holy Roman Empire).

Franz Maurer. “Outline for the Foundation of a German Colony and Naval Station of the Nicobar Islands, April 1867.” In Arthur J. Knoll’s and Hermann Hiery’s *The German Colonial Experience: Select Documents on German Rule in Africa, China, and the Pacific 1884-1914*. Lanham, Md: UP of America, 2010. p. 9-11.

This article explores the mostly-forgotten history of the sixteenth-century Welser colonization of Venezuela as it was reinterpreted in Germany’s cultural memory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When Imperial Germany began to colonize parts of Africa and the South Pacific, the Welser episode resurfaced in its popular culture. The colonial legacy left by the imprint of the Welser period drove the idea that Imperial Germany had a legitimate right to the project of colonization in Africa and the Pacific, but, historians, politicians, and writers in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries recalled the failure of the Welser colony amidst racialized proposals for the German colonization of Africa, and eventual genocide, including that of the Herero people.<sup>2</sup> For some Germans, the Welser colony in Venezuela became a hopeful symbol for their own utopian colonial desires. Later, after the loss of its colonies at the end of WWI, Germany continued to try and make sense of its colonial past while paving the way for the transition between the short-lived German Empire, the democratic Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich. After Germany’s defeat in World War I, the 1919 Treaty of Versailles drafted by the victorious powers of Great Britain, France, the United States and other allied states imposed significant territorial provisions on Germany including the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France and the cessation of parts of its European territories to Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Germany lost 13 percent of its European territory and one-tenth of its population while simultaneously surrendering all of its extra-European colonies.<sup>3</sup> This national loss had tremendous consequences for how the first German colony was reimagined: Post-WWI writers continued the project of remembering the Welser period as part of an ethnic German national identity.<sup>4</sup> Historians and novelists writing in Nazi Germany from 1938 to 1944 continued to interpret the Welser period in a manner that facilitated the image of Aryan conquistadors planting the seed of German nationhood on the American continent. Historical records such as the chronicle of the Spanish Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566), author of *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (*Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*; 1552), critique the Welsers’ actions in Venezuela; Las Casas reappears in later German literature as an antagonist who unjustly smears the Welser family name. Venezuelan historiography, on the other hand, continued the Spanish colonial depiction of their German competitors as barbaric,<sup>5</sup> before a post-WWII revisionist wave in Latin America and Germany revisited

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<sup>2</sup> The Herero genocide from 1904-1907 is referred to as the first genocide of the twentieth century, and it took place in German occupied Southwest Africa (modern-day Namibia). The Herero people rebelled against German colonial rule and the colonists responded by driving them into the desert where approximately 100,000 people died.

<sup>3</sup> The colonial possessions of the German Empire from 1884-1919 included the Africa colonies of German East Africa (present-day Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya), German Southwest Africa (Namibia and parts of Botswana), and German West Africa (Cameroon and Togo), as well as the Pacific colonies of German New Guinea, Micronesia, German Samoa, and the Marshall Islands.

<sup>4</sup> See Knoll and Gann: While pre-Weimar era materials were readily available, scant attention was paid to Post-World War II literature. Yet, as these authors—writing in 1987—remind us, the Federal German Republic and the German Democratic Republic shared the characteristic of being “ruled by the successors of German parties that the Wilhelminian Establishment had been wont to stigmatize as *reichsfeindliche Elemente* (elements hostile to the Reich,) and that now [in 1987] look upon the *Kaiserreich* with hostility” (xiv).

<sup>5</sup> Rafael María Baralt, the eminent pre-Positivist Venezuelan historian, was one of the first who wrote about the Welsers and continued the anti-German sentiment attributed to *cronistas* like Las Casas. Baralt replays the theme of the “foreign” nature of Charles V’s Flemish and German advisors such as the Welsers:

this period with a critical eye to debunk the pro-nationalist agendas prevalent on both sides.<sup>6</sup>

I will first provide a short history of the Welser period before analyzing German works of history and historical fiction from the nineteenth century through the Third Reich which revive the legacy of the Welser Venezuela colony. I argue that the Welser colony was resurrected first to serve Imperialist expansionist aims, to rectify the Spanish-driven “smear” campaign against the Welsers, and to racialize German colonization. After discussing the ways through which German colonialism has been linked to the Holocaust, and specifically how the Welser episode was historicized during the Third Reich, I argue that young Germans’ attempts to “decolonize” public space by contextualizing the history of colonial street names, for example, is a new form of engaging with Germany’s colonial past and combating contemporary racism and anti-Semitism.

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Venezuela is given over “a la rapacidad de manos extranjeras” [to the rapacity of foreign hands] (194). This anti-German stance continues into twentieth-century historiography until revisionists began to deconstruct these problematic and nationalistic historical perspectives. Guillermo Morón’s 1956 *Historia de Venezuela* set out to continue the historiographic revisionist trend, reexamining the Welser period. He continues this exploration in his more comprehensive 1971 *Historia de Venezuela* (Vol.I) in which he writes: “toda la acción alemana todavía está en polémica” [all of the German actions are still polemical] (Morón 192). The most influential scholar to challenge the thought of Hispanists was Juan Friede (1902-1990). Born in a German town in present-day Poland, he came to Colombia by way of Vienna. In the “Note to the Reader” from his 1961 *Los Welser en la conquista de Venezuela*, Friede states that his goal is to investigate the role that the Welsers played in the colonization and conquest of Venezuela and Colombia and not to come to their defense (7), yet, German scholars such as Fröschle see Friede’s work as rectifying some of the misleading information in the existing Spanish and Venezuelan historiography which they view as having been tainted by religious and nationalist attitudes (772).

<sup>6</sup> German immigration to Latin America increased in the nineteenth century. Venezuela’s own “Colonia Tovar” was founded in 1843 by Swabian residents. More than 30,000 people of German ethnicity immigrated to Chile. Many Germans started to arrive in Guatemala in the middle of the nineteenth century and some would go on to form a small group of coffee barons there with large parcel of lands worked by indigenous workers. Ulrich Stelzner’s and Thomas Walter’s 1997 *The Civilizers (Die Zivilisationsbringer)* documents this history and interviews some of the German coffee, indigo, cardamon plantation owners in Guatemala who reminisce about Hitler—as well as their descendants: young entrepreneurs who have continued their family businesses or now work for multinational German corporations such as Mercedes-Benz. This film is an important contribution to the discussion of the connections between Nationalist Socialism’s expansionist politics and German settler colonialism outside of the Reich. These colonists continue the Imperial colonial projects initiated by the German colonists in Africa. Within Guatemala, similar violence between the colonizers and indigenous populations impacted these German barons’ relationship with their indigenous workers. Within Stelzner’s film, German barons, in a paternalistic fashion, discuss their role in Guatemala’s progress as “benevolent,” at the expense of indigenous peoples battling against land confiscation and imminent human rights abuses.



Fig. 1 Details from *Genealogical Table of the Family von Welser*, 1666, with engravings by Georg Strauch and Emanuel Stenglin (courtesy of the Library of Congress Special Collections).

## The Welser Episode: Its History

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Fugger and Welser families were the wealthiest of the patrician families in Augsburg, a Free Imperial City which had recently surpassed Nuremberg as a center for intra-European commerce. The Welser Company, headed by the Welser family, conducted business across Central Europe, as well as in Antwerp, Lyon, Venice, Seville, and Lisbon. The Fugger and Welser families played an important role in Habsburg affairs as Imperial diets (official meetings for the Holy Roman Empire) were held in these cities. The Welsers and the Fuggers contributed money to Charles I of Spain's electoral campaign before he was crowned Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. As Emperor, Charles relied on these families to secure loans to finance his many wars (Tracy 308). The Welser family's illustrious members included Bartholomäus Welser V, a German banker and head of the Welser Company. It was this special relationship between the Welsers and the emperor which may have provided the Welser Company with the opportunity to secure the original contract to “pacify” and govern the Province of *Beneçuela*, a part of modern northwestern Venezuela, and the colony of Coro.

The 1528 contract between Emperor Charles V and Welser company agents Heinrich Ehinger (a member of the powerful Ehinger patrician family of Constance and a well-known German merchant in Zaragoza) and Hieronymus Saylor (Bartholomeus V's son-in-law) asked the Welsers to “pacify the land and to place it in our service in a manner that we can profit from it,” yet the colony failed despite Welsers' hopes for lucrative business

expansion beyond their Caribbean holdings in Santo Domingo.<sup>7</sup> Spanish criticism of the Welsers’ faith (they were suspected of being Lutherans) also contributed to the German colony’s eventual demise as confessional differences grew in significance back home in Europe. The Germans thought the colony’s demise was due to Spanish mistrust in their governance, while the Spanish claimed it was due to the Germans’ emphasis on conquest rather than colonization and their desire to see immediate returns on their investments. By 1556, the territory was again officially governed by the Spanish. The colony would end in tragedy for the Welsers: the last Welser governor, Philipp von Hutten, and Bartholomeus Welser V’s only son, Bartholomeus VI, were beheaded by Juan de Carvajal. Carvajal had taken over as governor while the Germans had been in absentia during a three-year expedition to find gold, though he, too, would later be sentenced to death by the Royal Audience of Santo Domingo in 1546.

While writers, historians, and judicial figures have imagined and reinvented the Welser colony through a variety of literary, historical, and visual genres, they differ in how positively they view this German conquest. Spanish authors of historical accounts or *crónicas* (from the sixteenth- through eighteenth centuries) usually depict the German governance of the Welser colonies as flawed, typically providing a pro-Spanish, anti-German perspective. The Welser period of governance remained largely absent from German cultural memory for two centuries until the nineteenth-century German Empire exhumed the memory of this long-lost Venezuelan colony. During the nineteenth century, the Welser episode became a model to emulate and was lauded as the first German colony. It served as an example of Germany’s right to colonize territories not yet claimed by France and England in spite of Germany’s late arrival on the contemporary colonial scene.

In nineteenth-century literature, the Welser governors and lieutenant governors reappear in literary and historical works as German heroes: These included Ambrosius Ehinger (also referred to as Alfinger or Dalfinger in Spanish sources), Nikolaus Federmann, Bartholomeus Saylor, Georg von Speyer (Jorge de Spira), Heinrich Rembolt, Philipp von Hutten, and Bartholomeus Welser VI (the Younger). Their Spanish “antagonists” also reappear, including the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, who came to be known as one of the first defenders of indigenous peoples, and who in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552) employed the infamous word pun *alemán/animal* [German/animal] to describe the barbarity of the German colonizers.

## German Nineteenth-Century Sources—The Failure of the Welsers Haunts the German Empire’s Colonial Success

In Germany’s second imperial era (1884-1914), the strength of the first ethnically German Reich (the Holy Roman Empire) during the Middle Ages became a model to uphold. Hayden White’s *The Practical Past* argues that every work of historiography and

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<sup>7</sup> The 1528 contract between the Spanish Crown and the Welsers held certain stipulations. It allowed Germans to govern a section of northern South America provided the Welsers bring fifty German miners, found two settlements with 300 residents, and build three forts. They were also allowed to import 4,000 African slaves to the Americas. A copy of the original contract can be found at the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla. Justicia, legajo 56, f.1, p.1. See the [transcription](#) at Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes: “Capitulación de los Belzares con la Corona de Castilla.”

every modern novel presupposes a whole philosophy of history (21). In doing so, he provides the example of the "too confining" historical figure, the slave Margaret Garner who committed infanticide rather than having her child suffer a life under slavery serving as an inspiration for Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. In a similar turn, both writers of history and historical fiction in nineteenth-century imperial Germany sought to reinvent the history of the Welser Venezuela colony for the purpose of contemporary empire-building. The legacy of the Enlightenment and Germany's Imperial desires drove nineteenth-century German historiography in its attempt to reinterpret the Welser period with both German protagonists such as Nikolaus Federmann and Spanish antagonists such as Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas. In reality, Germans attempting to reimagine their colonial past oftentimes had to rely on non-German sources including Las Casas. As Suzanne Zantop elaborates in *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870*, German historiography in the nineteenth century replayed both the failure of the Welser enterprise as a colony and Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas's indictment of the Germans as barbaric in the sixteenth centuries, albeit with a twist:

In almost obsessive revisitings and reworkings, the violent and by no means glorious story of the Welsers' failed colonization turned into the foundational fiction of Germany's colonial origins, and of colonizing as a specifically German calling. In fact, the retelling of the Welser story helped to circumscribe German national identity by creating a national self as colonizer. (29)

Venezuela became part of the Welser family identity and legacy in the seventeenth century, almost one hundred years after the Welsers lost the Venezuela contract, as the map of their Venezuela possession on their genealogical tree suggests. In the nineteenth century, the figure of the sixteenth-century Swabian conquistador functioned as a model to emulate in future colonial enterprises. New imperial officers aimed not only to solidify their colonies, but to expand them; if the Germans had failed in Venezuela, they would not do so again in Africa.



**Fig. 2** Details from *Genealogical Table of the Family von Welser*, 1666, with engravings by Georg Strauch and Emanuel Stenglin (courtesy of the Library of Congress Special Collections).

As White acknowledges in his investigation of the philosophy of history and metahistory, history is not about the fight between “fact” and “fiction.” Rather, historians wish for the discourse of history “[to] be faithful to its referent” even though it has “inherited conventions of representation that produced meaning in excess of what it literally asserted” (51). This excess of meaning developed into the florid literary style that became part of nineteenth-century positivist historiographical convention. To analyze this “literary excess” in the context of historical narrative, it is necessary to examine how both narrator, and the era in which the narrative was told, helped determine Welser-Venezuelan history in nineteenth-century Germany.

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Viktor Hantzsch, the German geographer, historian, and map cataloguer for the Royal Library of Dresden compiled the stories of German travelers from the early-modern era in *Deutsche Reisende des XVI Jahrhunderts* (1895). The popular volume retraced the steps of adventurers, travelers, and conquerors within an imperialist and nationalist framework during Germany’s age of expansion. Hantzsch write of the Welsers: “Doch bleibt ihnen der Ruhm, dass sie die ersten Deutschen waren, die nach großartig angelegten Plänen und unter bedeutenden Opfern versuchten, unserm Volke den ihm gebührenden Anteil an den Schätzen der neuen Welt zu sichern” [Nevertheless, they retain the glory that they were the first Germans who—after magnificent planning and through significant sacrifice—sought to secure for our people

their due share of the treasures of the New World] (9). Hantzsch emphasizes the Welsers’ “German” identity by connecting their sacrifices to Hantzsch’s own contemporary readers, “unserm Volke.” Moreover, he emphasizes that colonial Portuguese and Spanish projects benefitted from “deutschem Fleiss” [German industriousness] and “deutschem Kapital” [German capital] (10). Spanish and Latin American reinterpretations of the Welser episode would describe this reliance on the reputation of German industriousness as a liability.<sup>8</sup>

Hantzsch emphasizes that nineteenth-century Germans were not aware of this episode in Germany’s colonial history for various reasons. Firstly, Spanish archives such as the General Archive of the Indies held most of the sources, as the Welsers’ own financial records were partly destroyed and only recently recovered in fragments. More importantly, Las Casas and the other *crónistas* created a black legend about the Germans which portrayed the Welser enterprise as “eine lange Reihe von Greuelthaten” [a long list of atrocities] (17). Hantzsch then attempts to rectify misunderstandings about the Welser governance of Venezuela:

Erst neuerdings hat eine vorurteilsfreie Geschichtsschreibung, welche die vorgekommenen Grausamkeiten weder leugnet, noch beschönigen will, aber als durch die Umstände erklärt betrachtet, es dem Deutschen ermöglicht, mit Freude und Stolz auf die Pläne jener Pioniere deutscher Kultur im Lande von Klein-Venedig hinzublicken.

[Impartial writing of history which neither seeks to deny the atrocities that occurred nor sugar-coat them, but to view and explain them in context, has only recently made it possible for Germans to look back at the plans of those pioneers of German culture in the land of Little-Venice [Venezuela] with happiness and pride.] (17)

Hantzsch was the first nineteenth-century historian who looked critically at Spanish historiography of the Welser Venezuela governance, albeit with an eye towards restoring glory to its legacy.<sup>9</sup>

Hantzsch criticizes Las Casas and the Spanish historiography for its portrayal of German ruthlessness, pointing out that the Spanish and Portuguese used similar practices in their conquest. Most of the *crónistas*’ histories, according to Hantzsch, replicate Las Casas’s view that the Germans were cruel. Thus, the Spanish *crónicas* portray Ehinger “als ein roher Kriegsknecht von unerhörter Grausamkeit” [as a rough mercenary of unprecedented cruelty], Federmann “als ein gewissenloser Abenteurer von grenzenloser Habsucht” [as an unscrupulous adventurer with boundless avarice], and Hohermuth “als ein gewalthätiger Landverwüster und Sklavenjäger” [as a violent destroyer of land and slave hunter]. Only the mild and “gerechten” [just] Juan Aleman and the “liebenswürdigen

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<sup>8</sup> See Ramón Carande Thobar’s 1965 three-volume history of Charles V and his economic policies: *Carlos V y sus banqueros* [Charles V and his Bankers]. For Carande, the Welsers did not live up to their reputation for administrative competence: “The Welsers’ wretched performance in Venezuela would prove that he overestimated their talents, on the other hand, the same (foreign) merchants, who conducted business in the Indies, despite many announcements to the contrary, would quickly realize that they could reap the benefits of the Indies without actually being there” (Volume I, 457).

See also W. Wintzer’s (1900) *Die Deutschen im tropischen Amerika: Mexiko, Mittelamerika, Venezuela, Kolumbien, Ekuador, Peru und Bolivien*. Wintzer points out, that although the Welser episode had an “unglückliche[n] Ausgang” (unlucky ending, 47), the German émigrés there were very successful in trade (48). See also Haebler’s (1903). *Die überseeischen Unternehmungen der Welser und ihrer Gesellschafter*. Haebler was the first scholar who completes a systematic study of the Welser period in Venezuela in German.

und leutseligen" [gentle and affable] Phillip von Hutten escape Las Casas' judgment (47). Hantzsch reframes the story by describing the Welsers as no less and no more brutal than Spanish conquistadors. He also tries to contextualize the Germans' mistreatment of the natives in a new light:

Auch lassen sich ihre Ausschreitungen wenn auch nicht entschuldigen, so doch sehr wohl erklären. Die Indianer waren keineswegs jene friedlichen Naturkinder, als welche sie Las Casas zu schildern versucht, sondern sie erschwerten den deutschen Entdeckern durch hinterlistige Überfälle, durch Wegschaffung und Vernichtung der Lebensmittel und durch den Gebrauch ihrer vergifteten Pfeile das Vordringen nach dem Innern ungemein.

[Although their excesses cannot be excused, they can be explained. The Indians were not the peaceful children of nature that Las Casas portrayed, rather they greatly hindered the German discoverers' progress into the interior through deceitful attacks, through removal and destruction of food supplies, and through their use of poisoned arrows.] (48)

Hantzsch justifies German violence against the indigenous population by relabeling their resistance as malicious: Their poisoned arrows, their misinformation, and their denial of food to the Germans were justifiable grounds for their later repression. Like many sixteenth-century Spanish conquerors, Hantzsch views conquest "gegen die Heiden" [against the heathens] as "ein gottwohlgefälliges Werk" [a god-ordained work] and the slave raids as "ein berechtigter Zweig des Handelsgewerbes" [a legitimate branch of commerce] (48). Hantzsch also highlights that Las Casas, too, supported the African slave trade—omitting the fact that he later renounced this position and suggesting that Las Casas's opposition to Amerindian slavery did not provide him a moral high ground. Hantzsch concludes that although the facts could not be excused, they could be critiqued and placed in perspective: In the end, fin-de-siècle Germans should look back upon their colonial history with pride: "Vielmehr müssten die Deutschen der Gegenwart stolz darauf sein, dass es unter ihren Vorfahren im Zeitalter der Entdeckungen Männer gab, welche mit Einsetzung ihres Lebens sich bemühten, ihrem Volke einen Anteil an den Ländern und Schätzen der neuen Welt zu sichern" [Indeed, present-day Germans should be proud that among their ancestors during the time of discovery, there were men who risked their lives to secure a share of the lands and treasures of the New World for their people] (49). In his version, the Welser agents, including Federmann, were not conquerors intent on plundering, but rather colonists favoring settler colonialism and determined to work the land and reap the benefits of "Little Venice" (or "Little Germany"). Hantzsch's underlying message is that through pride in their history of colonialism, Germans would be able to remake history in their favor.

In summary, Hantzsch essentially reframes German colonial history: seeking to correct Spanish bias he lends his support to the decisions made by the Welsers, and, most importantly, attempts to connect past German colonial efforts to a present, imperial feeling of "Germanness." This emphasis on German national "pride" and the call to "our people" bridges the ethnic identity of both the Welsers in sixteenth-century Venezuela and his own fin-de-siècle audience. The emphasis on a German ethnic and cultural group identity which would become nationalist in scope permeates nineteenth-century accounts of the Welser-Venezuelan period in an effort to promote Germany's prospering colonial ventures.

For some, the Venezuela Welser colony became the lost paradise that nineteenth-century German colonialists sought to reconstruct in their new grand colonial ventures. It was peopled with dwarves and Amazons; as Zantop recognizes, it became “a kind of colonial ‘urnarrative’” (21). As the first German colonization it was a touchstone, and this resurrection of the narrative of the Welser Venezuela colony by German nationalists coincided with attempts to expand Germany’s current empire. Poets, historians, and novelists eulogized Welser agents. Adolph Seubert’s 1887 poem “Ambrosius Alfinger” is representative of this larger trend. Seubert (1819-1880), himself a military colonel and commander, also wrote plays and sonnets including an anthology of sonnets dedicated to the heroes of Swabia, combining his love for history with imperial-colonial wanderlust and nostalgia. In “Ambrosius Alfinger” natives kill the first Welser governor, but in dying he fertilizes the virgin South American soil with his own spear and blood:

Wem haben Cortez’ und Pizarro’s Thaten  
 Die junge Seele feurig nicht bewegt?  
 An Abenteuern ward die Luft erregt,  
 Es flog der Geist nach jenen Goldkorn staaten/  
 Der Rühmsten Einer, der sie einst durchfegt  
 Ein Schwabe war’s! Er und die Seinen traten  
 Zuerst den Grund vom Reiche der Granaten;  
 mit seinem Herzblut hat er ihn belegt./  
 Er kämpfte dort mit wilder Schwabekraft,  
 War er sich gleich des Zieles nicht bewusst,  
 Für Deutschlands Sache—ein vergess’ner Held./  
 Doch wo er pflanzte seiner Lanze Schaft,  
 Wo ausgeblutet seine tapfre Brust,  
 Erwuchs ein Recht uns an die neue Welt.

[Whose young fiery souls were unmoved  
 by the exploits of Pizarro and Cortez?  
 The air was alight with adventure  
 It flew the spirit after those places full of gold./  
 The awesome one, that once came through  
 It was a Swabian! He and his men marched  
 first the garnet-rich grounds  
 with his blood, sweat, and tears was occupied/  
 He battled there with truly Swabian strength,  
 Though himself unconscious of the goal,  
 For Germany’s cause—a forgotten hero./  
 Yet where he planted deep his spear,  
 And where his valorous breast did bleed its last,  
 In the New World we planted a rightful claim.] (Seubert 82)

Alfinger/Ehinger’s blood stains the virgin land, but also, through the act of bloodshed renders Venezuela German (21). Retellings of the beheadings of Welser agents Phillip von Hutten and Bartholomeus Welser VI at the hands of Juan de Carvajal likewise describe their sacrifice as the legitimization of the German possession of Venezuela. Seubert

presents Ehinger as a forgotten hero in need of remembrance; tales from popular culture did the same with Von Hutten and Bartholomeus Welser VI. These poems and tales suggest that Welser blood ran through American lands, staining it and planting it with German roots. In a footnote, Seubert writes that a valley “wo sich besonders häufig mit den Indianern schlug trägt noch seinen Namen” [where he fought particularly often with the Indians still bears his name] (82). In the cartographic record there is a “Valle de Ambrosio” under Lake Maracaibo which probably denotes to the valley of Chinácota where he was killed by an arrow shot by a member of the Chitarero nation.<sup>10</sup>

Seubert adopts a historical tone in his footnote, citing a Spanish source who had been the official royal chronicler for Philip II of Spain. His use of a Spanish form of Ehinger’s last name (“Alfinger”) also suggests his use of Spanish sources. He acknowledges that Ehinger as a leader had to fight the Chitarero Indians “weil er gegen die Indianer mit große harte verfuhr” [because he led the Indians with severity] and acknowledges, as well, that Federmann, whom he also names but to whom he does not dedicate a sonnet, continued Ehinger’s tradition of inland expeditions documented in his travel narrative, *Indianische Historia* (Hagenau: 1556). Yet, Seubert does not admit to actually reading the *Indianische Historia*; his main source was the royal Spanish *crónista* Antonio de Herrera y Tordesilla’s (1525-1626) *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del mar Océano que llaman Indias Occidentales* (1601-1615) [General History of the Deeds of the Castilians on the Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea Known As the West Indies]. Herrera y Tordesillas, the crown’s official historian, would later be accused of plagiarizing entire unedited works.

1892 celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’ encounter. The *Hamburgische Festchrift zur Erinnerung an die Entdeckung Amerikas* [Hamburg Commemorative Publication on the Remembrance of the Discovery of America] (Hamburg: L. Friederichsen & Co., 1892) published two handsome volumes meant to commemorate the German presence in the Americas, particularly the Hanseatic cities and Northern Germany’s important commercial role in the Americas. The second volume, written by Hermann A. Schumacher (a former ambassador from the German Empire to Bogotá and Lima as well as the former General Consul in New York), includes a history of the Welser Venezuela colony and translates parts of the epic poem on the conquest of Venezuela and Nueva Granada written by Juan de Castellanos (*Elegías de Varones Ilustres de Indias* [Elegies of Famous Gentlemen of the Indies])<sup>11</sup> lauding and applauding the Welser governors. Schumacher’s son (Dr. H. Schumacher) prepared the manuscript after his father’s death; in his introduction to both texts he writes: “[...]Castellanos der einzige

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<sup>10</sup> See for example Emmanuel Stenglin’s map “Venezuela, provincia in America occidentali. Quam olim Dni. Velseri Patricij Augustani possidebant, a Carolo V. Imperatore ipsis consignata” [Augsburg: 1640?]. Digital copy available at Yale University Library: Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4215260>

See also Fernández de Oviedo’s hand-drawn manuscript map of Lake Maracaibo which accompanies the Madrid copy of *La Historia General*. According to Rudolph Schuller’s “The Date of Oviedo’s Map of the Maracaibo Region,” it was drawn to correspond to the account sent from Venezuela to Spain about Ehinger’s death which probably did not occur until 1533. The map was, at the earliest, drawn later in 1533, but it could also have been created as late as 1536.

<sup>11</sup> Castellanos’ work deals with the period from 1522 to 1560. The first part of the *Elegías* covers the period up to 1578, but was published in 1589. The second part was written around 1584, while the third part was written around 1601; both the second and third parts were only published in 1847.

spanische Dichter ist, welcher deutsche Thaten verherrlicht, welcher die Welser-Unternehmungen in Venezuela mit eifrigem Interesse verfolgt und in ruhiger Würdigung niedergeschrieben hat” [Castellanos was the only Spanish poet that glorified German deeds, who traced the Welser Venezuela colony with interest, and who wrote about it with quiet appreciation] (21). Dr. G. Neumayer writes the first volume’s introduction, discussing the importance of Schumacher’s project vis-à-vis the writings of others such as Abbé Raynal’s *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes*: “Ein Vergleich der Darstellungen Raynal’s mit den geschichtlich getreuen Schilderungen in den Werke Schumacher’s [...] belehrt uns ohne Weiteres über die Bedeutung des letzteren, vom nationalen Standpunkte betrachten” [A comparison of Raynal’s representation with those true historical depictions in Schumacher’s work... teaches us about the significance of the latter, especially considered from a national perspective] (xxxix).

It is no surprise that nineteenth-century imperialists were interested in the history of the Welser Venezuela colony. Issues of the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* (DKZ), the newspaper of the *Deutsche Kolonialverein* that later became the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* [German Colonial Society] reveals many ways that German colonialists remembered the “Welser colony”: Paul Dehn, author of *Deutschland und Orient*, writes:

Wenn heute mit den Geistern der Welser und Fugger und der kühnen Hansaführer der Genius der deutschen Überlieferung herniedersteigen würde, um das Thun und das Wollen seines Volkes zu prüfen — was würde er empfinden und urteilen? Wohlbekannt sind ihm die beiden weltgeschichtlichen Thatsachen der jüngsten Zeit: wie im den deutschen Volk das nationale Bewusstsein endlich feste Form angenommen, wie nunmehr auch ein wirtschaftliches Nationalbewusstsein zum Durchbruch zu kommen begonnen hat.

[If the genius of German tradition would descend today, along with the spirits of the Welser, Fuggers, and the bold Hanseatic leaders, to prove the deeds and will of the people, how would he judge them? Well-known to him are the historical facts of the recent past: how national consciousness has taken a specific form in the German people, how we have begun to have a breakthrough also in the economic realm.]<sup>12</sup>

In this passage it is the Welsers’ ghosts, along with those of other “bold” merchants and leaders, who judge nineteenth-century imperialists’ nationalism and their colonial undertakings.

More articles followed: On February 18, 1888, an article was published regarding the Welsers’ involvement in Francisco de Almeida’s trip to India and East Africa in 1505. Balthasar Sprenger accompanied Almeida and published his travel narrative of the trip illustrated with woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair in 1509.<sup>13</sup> Lucas Rem, a Welser agent based in Lisbon, wrote about his experience negotiating the terms of contract between the

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<sup>12</sup> Until 1889, the *DKZ* was gathered in bands (*Hefts*) and then bound together as a yearbook with an index. It was in 1889 that the newspaper changed format under editor Gustav Meinecke, and was printed weekly. Hathi Trust Digital Library has digital copies of the *DKZ*: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org>

<sup>13</sup> See Springer, Balthasar, *Die Merfart vn[d] erfahrung nüwer Schiffung vnd Wege zu viln onerkanten Jnseln vnd Künigreichen von dem großmechtigen Portugalische[n] Kunig Emanuel Erforscht funden bestritten vnnnd Ingenomen*. [Oppenheim]: 1509. Available from the Bayerisches Staatsbibliothek’s digital library.

Welsers and the Portuguese King Manuel I for this voyage in his diary (52-53).<sup>14</sup> The article showcased the author’s pride in the history of German involvement in the Portuguese overseas trade in the Indian Ocean.

On April 25, 1891, the *DKZ* published “Die öffentliche Hauptversammlung am 30 Juni” [The public meeting on June 30th] a sub-article related to “Die Versammlung der deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft in Nürnberg am 29 und 30. Juni 1891” [The Convention of the German Colonial Society in Nuremberg on June 29-30, 1891]. The article references the important events of the meeting and recalls the work of Martin Behaim, the fifteenth-century Nuremberg merchant, cartographer, and the creator of the famous globe or *Erdapfel* (1492) which incorporated knowledge of the West African coast. The author also refers to the Welser colony of Venezuela as inspiration for the members of the German colonial society: “Denn in unserer Gesellschaft ist auch ein Teil jener Idealen und praktischen Kraft verkörpert welche im Mittelalter neue Wege einschlug und den Augsburger Welser nach Venezuela führte” [In our association, we embody the ideals and practice that also opened up new roads in the Middle Ages that would lead the Welsers from Augsburg to Venezuela] (104). The author cites Philipp von Hutten’s own wanderlust and at the end, describes how great it was for the colonial assembly to be presented with a version of Germany’s past involvement in colonial endeavors which even included an exhibit of nautical and scientific instruments at the German National Museum “der das Alte mit dem Neuen verbindet” [that connects the old with the new]. The article then glorified the German empire’s recent colonial adventures: “Aus dem Schutt der Jahrhunderte heraus, wo er versteckt wie des Reiches Krone lag, hat der deutsche Geist sich wieder emporgerungen und will noch —in letzter Stunde— eine der Zeit entsprechende Bethätigung [sic] in den deutschen Kolonien erstreben” [From the rubble of the century, where it was hidden like the Holy Roman Empire’s crown, the German spirit wrestled itself up, and in this final hour, will strive in the German colonies for the time of its relevant operation] (104). Here the Welser colonial past was invoked at an important meeting of colonists who would dictate Germany’s colonial future.

In a later issue from January 12, 1905, a commemorative chronology titled “Kalender 12 bis 18 Januar” remembered the day when “Georg Ehinger von Konstanz [...] landet in der Nähe von Paraguana mit 147 Ansiedlern (Spanier und 24 deutsche Bergleute aus Joachimsthal)” [George Ehinger from Constance landed close to Paraguana with 147 colonists including Spaniards and 24 German miners from Joachimsthal] (13). The same issue’s section entitled “Aus den Abteilungen” [From the Branch Offices] contains announcements for past lectures which include those from: “Privat Dozent Dr. Passarge am 9. Dezember in Breslau über Venezuela und am 8. und 10. Dezember in Forst i.L. und Lissa über Deutsch-Südwestafrika und den Hereroaufstand” [Independent Researcher Dr. Passarge on December 9 concerning Venezuela and on the December 8 and 10 in Forst Lausitz and Lezno on German Southwest Africa and the Herero rebellion). Dr. Otto Karl Siegfried Passarge (1866-1958) had been a prominent German geographer working in East Prussia and later the Colonial Institute in Hamburg, with experience as a colonizer and miner for the British West Charterland Company in South Africa who had also traveled on the Orinoco River in Venezuela. The National Socialists would later embrace Passarge’s anti-Semitic theories of racial geography.

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<sup>14</sup> “Der portugiesische Vizekönig Don Franzisko d’Almeida, sowie die Augsburger Kaufleute Balthasar Sprenger und Hans Mayr im Jahr 1505 in Kiloa.” *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung*. Berlin. 18 Februar 1888.

Many nineteenth-century German colonizers took colonial history as their inspiration, if not necessarily the Welser example. Wolfgang Struck describes this dynamic with respect to Carl Peters (1856-1918), who founded the German-East African Society and began German colonization there. In his *Im Goldland des Altertums: Forschungen zwischen Zambesi und Sabi* (1902; English Translation *The El Dorado of the Ancients* [New York, 1902]) Peters recalls how he was inspired by a map of Africa he found in an atlas.<sup>15</sup> Peters fantasizes about the continent’s natural resources including mythical gold deposits while at the same time invoking the Portuguese conquerors.<sup>16</sup> When Peters wrote his narrative he had already been discharged at the request of the German Empire because of his brutal treatment of the native Tanzanian population. Dubbed “hangman Peters” by the critical press, he made the case for his innocence through tropes of conquest: maps and conquerors. Through these references he creates a narrative of history in which his personal role as perpetrator of violence plays out in a never-ending colonial narrative. Peters’ references suggest the growing appetite for reclamation among the reading public. Peters himself likely read the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* and was in all probability aware of the Welser episodes. Yet during Peters’ years of tenure in Africa, historians like Hantzsch had only just begun their work to reclaim the Welsers’ legacy. By 1900, both Peters’ successors as well as his contemporaries—as seen in the frequent references to the Welsers in the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*—had come to view the Welsers as their forefathers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The atlas’ seven volumes (*Atlas historique ou nouvelle introduction à l’histoire à la chronologie et à la géographie ancienne et moderne etc.*) were published from 1705-1719 in Amsterdam at the publishing house of L’Honoré & Chatelain.

<sup>16</sup> The German Colonial Association (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*) began in 1882 as the German Colonial Association (*Deutscher Kolonialverein*), a group meant to convince Otto von Bismarck of the necessity of Germany’s colonial expansion. In 1887, the Colonial Association merged with the Society for German Colonization (*Gesellschaft für Deutsche Kolonisation*) which Karl Peters had created in 1884 to facilitate the conquest of East Africa (Pierard 19).

<sup>17</sup> Despite his many critics, Peters was able to return to Germany in 1914, after Emperor Wilhelm II had bestowed upon him the right to use the title of Imperial Commissioner. During Hitler’s rule, Peters was again revived as a national hero and a propaganda biopic detailing his struggles directed by Herbert Selpin was released in 1941.



Fig. 3 Book Cover: Wilhelm Wintzer's *Der Kampf um das Deutschtum: Die Deutschen im Tropischen Amerika* [The Fight for Germanness: Germans in Tropical America]. München: Lehmann, 1900.

## The Twentieth Century: Idealizations of German Conquistadors during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich

Konrad Haebler had already written about the Fuggers and the Spanish spice trade when he published his book on the Welsers' in 1903. *Die überseeischen Unternehmungen der Welser und ihrer Gesellschafter* (Leipzig: C.L. Hirshfeld) narrates the Welser enterprise as an early colonial undertaking, highlighting the problems between the previous Spanish governor in the Province of Venezuela, Juan Martínez de Ampié, who governed from 1527-1529, and the first Welser governor, Ehinger, who governed from 1529 until his death in 1533.<sup>18</sup> Michaela Schmölz-Häberlein who has written about the popular reception of the Welser period from the nineteenth century through the post-WWII era, has also written about the timeliness of Haebler's work: The Venezuela blockade of 1902-1903

<sup>18</sup> A. F. Pollard attested to Haebler's pedigree in the *The English Historical Review* (1906): "No one is better qualified to write such a book than Dr. Haebler: the friend of the present King of Saxony, who married the infanta of Portugal and who took Dr. Haebler with him to that country in 1889, his historical studies have centered in the connexion [sic] between Germany and Spain and Portugal, a connexion which was particularly close in the early sixteenth century, and which alone made these oversea enterprises of the Welsers possible"(159).

stoked new interest in Venezuela among ordinary Germans; at that time, German, Italian and British ships blocked Venezuelan ports to protect their business interests after Venezuelan President Cipriano Castro refused to pay off debts incurred by foreign companies during the Venezuelan Civil War (324-25). Suddenly Imperial Germany had a problem with Venezuela, and Germans started to pay attention to their older colonial history there.

Even after Germany lost her colonies in the Versailles Treaty of 1919, historical narratives that sought to recreate the Welsers' colonization of Venezuela appeared throughout the era of the Weimar Republic.<sup>19</sup> In his historical account for young adult audiences entitled *Auf der Jagd nach dem goldenen Kaziken: Die erste deutsche Kolonie der Welser in Venezuela 1527 bis 1555* [On the Hunt for the Golden Cacique: The First German Colony of the Welsers in Venezuela 1527-1555, 1929], Otfried von Hanstein (1869-1959) describes Las Casas's life and works and discusses his project to convert, rather than exploit, the natives (116). Yet he writes that Las Casas “war ... ein Spanier, und jede[r] Grausamkeit, die ein Mann, der einer Anderen Nation angehörte, erschien in umso Schwärzeren Lichte” [was a Spaniard, and any cruelties committed by a man who belonged to another nation, appeared in a worse light] (Hanstein 116). With respect to Las Casas's depiction of the Welsers in *Brevissima Relación*, he exclaims: “Armer Ambrosius Dolfinger<sup>20</sup> und arme Welser! Dieser sonst so gerechte Richter hat ihnen Unrecht getan” [Poor Ambrosius Dolfinger and poor Welsers! This otherwise just Judge has done them wrong] (118). While praising Las Casas for his respect for human rights and his recognition of Indians as human subjects, Hanstein writes that Las Casas's fierce Spanish nationalism and fervent faith left him blind in his judgment of the Germans: “Dolfinger, der wie die Welser und Fugger der katholischen Religion auch nach der Reformation treugeblieben war, sei ein verstedter Lutheraner” [Dolfinger, who like the Welsers and the Fuggers, had remained faithful to the Catholic Religion, was seen as a Lutheran] (118). Hanstein protests Las Casas' reading of all Germans as Lutherans (though to be fair, while the Fuggers remained Catholic, some of the Welsers did convert). Even so, Hanstein acknowledges “Ambros Dolfinger war kein Engel” [Ambrosius Ehinger was not an angel] and admits that Ehinger was probably as cruel as Pizarro or Cortez (119). After all, the Welsers undertook the project “um Gold zu machen” [to make money] (119). Hanstein's account, written during the Weimar era, recognizes that the venture was economic in nature, but nonetheless valorizes the Welsers. It points out that Spanish undertakings were equally profit-driven and critiques Las Casas's anti-German account. During a time when others were highlighting the German character of the Welser colony and their colonial enterprise, Hanstein actually emphasizes their similarity to the Spanish. While this is somewhat surprising for an author who mostly wrote popular adventure books and historical fiction destined for children and young adults, Hanstein did devote a significant

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<sup>19</sup> It is useful also to consider Germany's colonial history before and after WWI. WWI Allied powers benefitted from presenting German colonial atrocities as more serious as their own, particularly after the German invasion of Belgium. For example, the “Lord Bryce Commission Report on Alleged German Outrages in the German Invasion of Belgium” was rapidly translated into ten languages. In British propaganda, the Germans are depicted as barbaric Huns eager to rape and pillage the gendered Belgian territory. Nicoletta F. Gullace has argued that the gendered representation of German violence against women and children changed the language of war (716). Waldeyer-Hartz's fictional retelling of the Welser period may have sparked a need to revitalize a glorious rather than barbaric self-image.

<sup>20</sup> Ehinger is again referred to as Dolfinger.

amount of his oeuvre to writing about the Americas, albeit at times in a propagandistic tone.<sup>21</sup>

Other accounts fictionalize the Welser period as a longing for lost territories. Hugo von Waldeyer-Hartz’s *Die Welser in Venezuela: Bilder aus der Frühzeit deutscher Kolonialgeschichte* [The Welsers in Venezuela; Pictures from Early Modern Colonial History] (1927)<sup>22</sup> opens with the scene “Der Kaiser in Augsburg A.D. 1530” in which the masses wait for Emperor Charles V’s arrival. After he arrives, Charles spots Bartholomeus Welser V (the Elder) in the crowd:

“Sieh da, der Herr von Venezuela!” Karl schritt lebhaft auf Bartholomä Welser zu?

“Habt Ihr gute Nachrichten von drüben? Ist das Dorado von Gold und Silber endlich gefunden, das Ihr erwartet? Oder ist es noch immer die Ware von Schwarzen und brauen Heidenmenschen, die den besten Gewinn abwirft.”

[“Look over there - the Lord of Venezuela!” Karl approached Bartholomeus Welser excitedly.

“Do you have good news from there? Did you finally find the Dorado of gold and silver that you sought? Or is it still the trade with black and brown infidels that yields the best profit?”]

In this meeting, the Emperor asks Bartholomeus Welser for news of silver and gold discoveries. Yet, the Emperor ironically acknowledges that the truly profitable trade is the transatlantic slave trade; after all the Welser Company received one of the first permits or *licencias* to import 4,000 African slaves to the Americas.

Bartholomeus Welser’s response describes Venezuela as a site of German Holy Roman rule. Although the reader knows that an international and ethnically mixed crowd awaits the Emperor in Augsburg, the German nation dominates in this colonial narrative:

[...]aus allen Nationen und Himmelstrichen. Neben Hispaniern, Flandrensern, Burgunden, standen Deutsche der verschiedene Stämme dazu Kroaten, Griechen, Italiener, ja selbst braune Araber in Weissen Burnussen und schwarze Äthiopier fehlten nicht. *Und allen, die das Gepränge des Einzugs bestaunten, ward offenbar, das der Kaiser ein gewaltiger Herrscher sei und Deutschland ein machtvolles Reich.*

[...]from all nations and corners of the earth. Next to the Spanish, Flemish, and Burgundians, stood Germans of all tribes, Croatians, Greeks, Italians, even brown

<sup>21</sup> For a list of books written by Hanstein: See Aiga Klotz’s *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur in Deutschland 1840-1950*: Band II, 2014. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2014. pp. 134-137. Most are adventure, travel, and science fiction works aimed at a young adult German reading public.

In 1945, Allied forces carried out a reverse book censorship. Between 1946-52, within Soviet-occupied Berlin, the four lists of proscribed literature, *Liste der auszusondernden Literatur*, were published. The February 1946 list included a few of Hanstein’s works. See the *Verzeichnis der auszusondernden Literatur* prepared by the *Abteilung für Volksbildung im Magistrat der Stadt Berlin*. Available on the Internet Archive:

<https://archive.org/stream/Abteilung-fuer-Volksbildung-der-Stadt-Berlin-Verzeichnis-der-auszusondernden-Lit/AbteilungFuerVolksbildungDerStadtBerlin-VerzeichnisDerAuszusonderndenLiteratur1946187S.Scan>

<sup>22</sup> Hugo von Waldeyer Hartz (1876-1942) was a naval officer and writer. He wrote other texts such as *Von Tsingtau zu den Falklandinseln* (Mittler, Berlin 1917) that were decommissioned as Nationalist Socialist propaganda in the *Liste der auszusondernden Literatur* from the Soviet-occupied zone.

Arabs in white burnouses and black Ethiopians were not absent. *And it was obvious to all who marveled at the pomp of the march that the Emperor was a powerful monarch and that Germany was a powerful Empire.*] (11, my emphasis)

The colonial anxieties manifested in this narrative emphasize the power of the German empire and its leader as being recognized by the Spanish, Flemish, Burgundians, Croatians, Greeks, and Italians. The “brown Arabs” and “black Ethiopians” represent colonial subjects who also recognize the superiority of the Empire.



**Fig. 4 Book Cover:** Erich Reimers’ *Die Welser landen in Venezuela. Das erste deutsche Kolonialunternehmen.*

[The Welsers Land in Venezuela: The First German Colonial Undertaking].  
Leipzig: W. Goldmann, 1938.

## Reading the Welsers During the Third Reich

During Hitler’s rule, authors of popular fiction and history promoted the myth of the greatness of the Aryan conquerors and the cruelty of the Spaniards including Las Casas. Erich Reimers’ historical novel *Die Welsern landen in Venezuela* (The Welsers Land in Venezuela, 1938) draws upon archival material to tell the story of the Welsers’ most

famous leaders, including Ambrosius Ehinger, Nikolaus Federmann, and Philipp von Hutten. In Venezuela, Reimers writes, Ehinger encountered “die feindlichen Umtriebe der Spanier” [the hostile activity of the Spanish] (33). He states that the land had been depopulated “Unter dem Einfluß der brutalen spanischen Kolonisationsmethoden” [Under the influence of the brutal Spanish methods of colonization] and that Spanish slave hunters terrorized the natives on the coasts of Venezuela. In regards to the Welsers, Reimers emphasizes Las Casas’s triple identity as the “frühere Sklavenhalter, spätere Dominikanermönch und Deutschenhasser” [former slave owner, and later Dominican monk and German hater], alleging that he advanced human rights for the Indians while demanding the import of 4,000 African slaves from Emperor Charles V (41).

1938 was also the year of the *Tag der deutschen Kunst* [Day of German Art] in Munich which featured a “Welser” float in its parade. The *Tag der deutschen Kunst* had taken place from 1933 onwards, but 1938 and 1939 were years in which Nazi propaganda culture fully appropriated all aspects of German history to culminate in a pageant and parade performed in the presence of German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. As Ines Schlenker argues, by “‘proving’ the historical continuity and logical development from the Teutons to the New Times, Nationalist Socialism could present its achievements as the culmination of the cultural and historical development that began two millennia ago” (70-71). The main iconography of the event, publicized on the program pamphlet replaced an earlier image of Athena with the head of “der Bamberger Reiter” [Bamberger Horseman], an equestrian secular statue of an anonymous King adopted by the Nazis to further solidify their idea of a great northern race entrenched in Germanic culture (Schweizer 198). The parade was conceived as representative of the political and artistic history of the German people: These were divided into the Germanic, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, and Neo-Classical periods before the parade culminated with the “New Times.” There were some important changes to the previous ensemble: in the Renaissance parade grouping, the Welser float—complete with a silver ship and German *Landsknechten*—was added to the lineup in 1938. As Schweizer notes, the Day of German Art had much to do with the celebration of economic elitism and colonialism. The 1938 *Tag der deutschen Kunst* program explicitly describes the reasons why the Welser float was introduced:

Kaum war die Welt in all ihren Weiten erkundet, da blühte schon der überseeische Handel. Die Welser zählten mit zu den ersten, die unserer Heimat die Schätze fremdländischer Erde erschlossen. Sie liehen dem Kaiser das Gold, rüsteten Schiffe für ihn und empfangen dafür Venezuela als Pfand. Sie lebten im Wohlstand wie Prinzen, hielten sich farbige Diener, seltene exotische Tiere und reiste in eigenen Kutschen und Sänften.

[Barely had the world been thoroughly explored when overseas trade was already thriving. The Welsers were some of the first that accessed the treasures of foreign lands for our homeland. They loaned the emperor money, equipped ships for him, and asked for Venezuela as collateral. The Welsers lived prosperous lives like royalty, kept colored servants, exotic pets, and traveled in their own coaches and litters.]<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Originally from *Programmheft* 1938 (16).

In short, the Nationalist Socialist version of the Welsers in the 1938 *Tag der Deutschen Kunst* was that they had succeeded where other nations had failed. It was through their capital that they were allowed access to the lucrative overseas market. The Venezuela possession became an icon for wealth in territories and labor. Here the human slaves whom they kept as servants are featured as part of the exotic menagerie that accompanies the Welsers, no different from their pets. In this orientalizing image of the Welsers, they are remembered for living a life of luxury and travel, carried on the backs of humble servants.



**Fig. 5** *Tag der Deutschen Kunst* 10. Juli 1938 (Day of German Art July 10, 1938-Munich). The group picture depicts the Welser float. Stereograph photograph by Heinrich Hoffmann. (Courtesy of Art Resource/BPK Bildagentur, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München Abtlg. Karten u. Bilder).

In the world of popular literature, German works written during Hitler’s rule tend to narrate the colonization of the world with Germans placed on equal footing with larger colonial powers such as the Spanish, English, Portuguese, French, and Dutch. Gustav Faber continues this narrative of German colonization with a biographical catalog that includes notable Germans involved in exploration efforts throughout the world in 1944, thirty years after the Treaty of Versailles brought Germany’s colonial venture to its conclusion. In his *Deutsches Blut in fremder Erde* (Berlin: Junge Generation, 1944),<sup>24</sup> Faber recounts the story of many German explorers abroad.<sup>25</sup> At a time of Nazi eastward expansion, this new propagandistic history of German colonization, presented men such as Welser governor

<sup>24</sup> Junge Generation was a publisher of books for children and youth active during the Third Reich. Other titles were Theo Bohner’s *Ae Ntonga! Hallo Freund! Unser Leben in Kamerun*; 1935 [Hi Friend! Our Life in Cameroon]; Rolf Rumbek’s *Der silberne Kolibri Kriegspfad im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert - Erzählung aus dem Südamerika der Gegenwart* (1940) [The Silver Hummingbird’s War Path- Stories from Present-Day South America]; Heinz Kindermann, eds. *Rufe über Grenzen: Antlitz und Lebensraum der Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschen in ihrer Dichtung* (1938) [Cries from over the Border: The Face and Territory of Border- and Expatriate Germans].

<sup>25</sup> Ulrich Schmidl (1510-1579), a German explorer who accompanied Mendoza to Argentina; Philipp von Hutten (1505-1546); the Welser agent who was beheaded in Venezuela; Jakob Leisler (ca. 1640-1691), a German-born American colonist; Arthur Phillip (1738-1814), the son of a German father and English mother who became an English captain and founded Sydney; Johann Cesar Godeffroy (1813-1885), who established a German presence in the South Pacific; and Kurt Faber (1883-1929), a world traveler.

Philipp von Hutten, as “great” German heroes who battle (and sometimes lose) against both “foreign” agents and native populations.



**Fig. 6 Book Cover: Gustav Faber’s *Deutsches Blut in Fremder Erde* [German Blood in Foreign Lands] (Berlin: Junge Generation, 1944). Wartime edition.**

For Faber, Philipp von Hutten’s violent death was the root cause of the failure of the colony. He saw it as the triumph of Spanish power. He describes the Tocuyo episode and Carvajal’s capture of Von Hutten and Bartholomeus Welser, Jr. as trickery. In fact there is a resemblance to Weimar-era depictions of German defeat in WWI, and the clause to take on German guilt, as the result of trickery and foreign interests. To Faber, Carvajal was a “Falscher, bübischer Spanier” [False, roguish Spaniard] (44). He charges that, “Mit offenen und geheimen Mitteln arbeiten fremde Mächte, an ihrer Spitze spanische Interessenten” [Foreign powers work with both open and secretive methods, but at the top there are parties with Spanish interests] (45). Accounts such as Faber’s and even those written earlier during the Weimar Republic depict the Spaniards’ claim that Germans were Lutherans and cruel to the natives as chauvinist falsehoods.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Labeled a “National Socialist Propagandist” Faber made it to the “Autoren, deren sämtliche Werke aus dem Bestande zu entfernen wird” [authors whose entire corpus of work were to be removed from circulation] in the *Verzeichnis der auszusondernden Literatur* (February 1946) prepared in Soviet-occupied Berlin by the *Abteilung für Volksbildung im Magistrat der Stadt Berlin* (26). Available in the Internet Archive:

From the 1930s onwards, German attention to colonialism in the Americas played a small part in larger Third Reich politics. As Gerhard Drekonja-Kornat has noted, Hermann Rauschning’s polemical and at times discredited *Conversations with Hitler* quotes Hitler as having felt entitled to the South American continent because “The Fugger and Welser dynasties had relations [t]here” (qtd. Drekonja-Kornat 314).<sup>27</sup> Beyond the historical significance of the Welsers and Fuggers, the National Socialists actively looked at South America as a place for possible colonization. Likewise, as Christian Leitz has argued, the Nazi *Auslandsorganisation* (AO) was very active in southern Brazil and Argentina. Whereas the Wilhelmine imperial politicians had been interested in the idea of forming colonies as *Neudeutschland* [New Germany], “Hitler referred very explicitly to conquest with the help of the *Auslandsdeutschtum* [expatriate Germans]” (187).

As a signal of the importance of the conqueror figure, a *Hitlerjugend* group chose Georg Hohermuth von Speyer (also known as Jorge de [E]spira), a Welser governor, as a “patron” in 1933 (Armani 105-06). They embraced the myth of the grandiose German conquistador and knight—who fell victim to Spanish nationalism—as an embodiment of the ideals of National Socialism. His reputation as a brave and just conqueror had already been established by the Spanish *cronistas* Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas (in his “General History of the Deeds of the Castilians on the Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea Known As the West Indies”—known in Spanish as the *Décadas*).

Arnold Federmann, a descendant of Nikolaus Federmann, the Welser governor, chose to present his forefather as a true national hero. To do so, he compared Nikolaus Federmann to Simón Bolívar. Arnold Federmann published his *Deutsche Konquistadoren in Südamerika* which reprinted Nikolaus Federmann’s *Indianische Historia* in 1938. The text’s epigraph, Johann Filchart’s “Ernstliche Vermahnung an die lieben Teutschen” [Serious Admonition to the Beloved Germans] (1573),<sup>28</sup> reveals the younger Federmann’s

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<https://archive.org/stream/Abteilung-fuer-Volksbildung-der-Stadt-Berlin-Verzeichnis-der-auszusondernden-Lit/AbteilungFuerVolksbildungDerStadtBerlin-VerzeichnisDerAuszusonderndenLiteratur1946187S.Scan>

<sup>27</sup> While I will not engage here at length in the polemics surrounding the veracity of this account, I would like to record that Rauschning dates this conversation to 1933 when an envoy had just returned from South America and Hitler was very interested in colonizing Brazil (Rauschning *The Voice of Destruction*, 62).

<sup>28</sup> Johann Filchart (circa 1545-1589)’s “Ernstliche Vermahnung an die lieben Teutschen” [Serious Admonition to the Dear Germans]:

Gott stärke dem edlen deutschen Geblüt  
 sein anerbttes Adlersgemüt  
 Seht, das hab als Deutscher ich  
 aus deutschem Blut treuherziglich  
 euch, die ihr Stammel her von Helden,  
 bei diesen Helden müssen melden,  
 wenn ich dies deutsche Bild blick an.  
 Gott gebe, dass ihr’s könnt verstahn,  
 und beides, treu seid euern Freunden  
 und ein Schrecken allen euern Feinden.

[God, make the German blood strong  
 its inherited eagle nature  
 See, as a German I have, out of German blood, naively [trusted]  
 that you descend from heroes

agenda in republishing the travel narrative: He wished to re-embed his forefather’s story in the lineage of German heroes. It contains a prayer to God to strengthen “edlen deutschen Geblüt” [noble German blood] and the German “Adlersgemüt” [eagle nature]. The poem’s narrator “als Deutscher” [as a German] “aus deutschem Blut” [of German blood] looks back at “vielen Helden” [many heroes] when he “dies deutsche Bild blick an” [looks at this German picture]. The 1938 publication uses the poem to link German identity to the rebel nature of *El Libertador* Simón Bolívar (who as a Venezuelan-born member of the criollo elite rebelled against the Spanish Royal colonists). Simón Bolívar and particularly, Alexander von Humboldt’s influence on Bolívar, were of interest to German scholars during the 1930s. For example, the epithet inscribed on the statue of Humboldt outside of the Humboldt University in Berlin at the bequest of the University of La Habana, mentions Humboldt as the “second discoverer” of the Americas, a term purportedly employed by Bolívar to describe the Baron.<sup>29</sup>

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[we] must ask these heroes  
 when I look back at this German picture [of German heroes]  
 God grant that you all can understand  
 and both, you all be faithful to your friends  
 and a terror to all of your enemies]

<sup>29</sup> Karl Panhorst wrote an article in 1930 in the *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* about the links between Simón Bolívar and Alexander von Humboldt in which he complained about the lack of a biography on Bolívar in German even when there was interest in finding out more about the connections between both men; after all, the Baron’s conversations with the young would-be liberator in Paris and Rome would be remembered later as having inspired Bolívar to recognize that he was ready to throw off the yoke of Spanish colonialism in Venezuela. Panhorst’s article in effect reviews the literature written in Spanish and French about the encounters for a German public. Panhorst also discusses at the time recent findings from his archival research including a letter from Vicente Rocafuerte, Humboldt’s friend who would become the first president of Ecuador, written on 17 December 1824 from London reporting Bolívar’s victories and how Bolívar always treasured the advice Humboldt had given him in Paris. This letter was discovered in the *Humboldt-Nachlaß der Dokumenten-Sammlung der Preußischen Staatsbibliothek*. A second find of significance to Panhorst was seven pages of handwritten notes about Simón Bolívar (without a date or signature) that were most likely used by Humboldt as a template for a lecture. These were located in the *Humboldt-Nachlaß der Autographen Sammlung Darmstaedter der Preußischen Staatsbibliothek*. Panhorst’s article signals an increasing interest in Bolívar that may have begun in 1929 when the *Hamburger Überseejahrbuch* published an article on Bolívar by Dr. Warhold Drascher. The decade of the 1930s also maintained an interest on Bolívar and his relationship with Humboldt. More recently, Oliver Lubrich has also discussed the epithet inscribed on the statue of Humboldt outside of the Humboldt University in Berlin at the bequest of the University of La Habana. The epithet reads: “Al Segundo descubridor de Cuba. La Universidad de la Habana 1939” [To the second discoverer of Cuba. The University of La Habana, 1939]. The origin of this quote is generally ascribed to Cuban José de la Luz y Caballero (1800-1862) (74). See also Andrea Wulf’s recent *The Invention of Nature* (7) as well as Rippey and Brann (701).

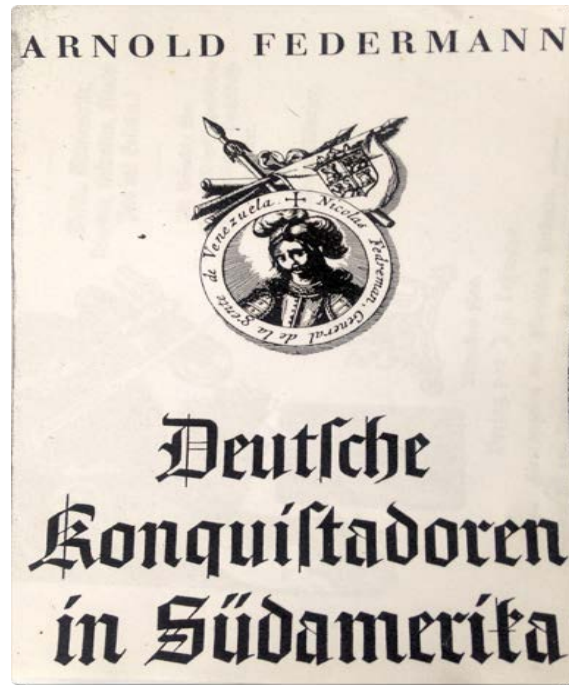


Fig. 7 Book Cover: Arnold Federmann's *Deutsche Konquistadoren in Südamerika* [German Conquistadors in South America] (Berlin: R. Hobbing 1938).

In 1939, Arnold Federmann saw his own ancestor Nikolaus Federmann, rather than Humboldt, as paving the way for Simón Bolívar's campaign for independence in Venezuela and Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. (His preface to his work is titled "Vergessene Deutsche" [Forgotten Germans] (7). Indeed, Arnold Federmann claims, without further evidence, that Nikolaus Federmann's expedition through the marshes and the cordillera enabled Bolívar's eventual quest for independence from Spain:

Und wenn man den Zug Bolívars würdig eines Livius gennant hat, so verdiente erst recht der Zug Federmanns der Vergessenheit entrissen zu werden, der als erster das Innere Venezuelas durchzog und der—hätte man ihm mehr vertraut und mehr geholfen—wohl auch schon damals den Grund gelegt hätte zu einer Vereinigung von Venezuela und Columbien, dem Traum Bolívars.

[And if Bolívar's tour would have been deemed worthy of a Livius, then Federmann's expedition truly deserves to be restored from oblivion, he who was the first to explore the interior of Venezuela, and if he had been trusted more and had received more help, he would have paved the way for unification between Colombia and Venezuela—Bolívar's ultimate dream.] (80)

Federmann insists that his relative was the first European, and most importantly, the first German, who entered the Venezuelan jungle, and more preposterously, the first politically-minded conquistador who tried to unify Venezuela and Colombia. Clearly, Arnold Federmann's attempt to recast Nikolaus Federmann as Bolívar's spiritual forefather was rooted in an attempt to reestablish his position as a hero worthy of national praise in light of the renewed German interest in Bolívar.

## Rereading the Welser Colony Against German Colonialism and the Holocaust

The Welser governors’ failure in Venezuela prompted a yearning for the fulfillment of nineteenth-century colonial fantasies in Africa that prefigure the ambitions of the Third Reich. Anti-miscegenation laws in place in the German colonies attempted to regulate the purity of the German colonizers’ blood, reflecting the anxieties of unfulfilled colonial ventures; these sanctions barred Germans from having children with black Africans or indigenous Pacific Islanders.<sup>30</sup> The Nuremberg anti-miscegenation laws or the *Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre* [Protection of German Blood and German Honor Act], enacted on 15 September 1935 prohibiting German and Jewish marriage and sexual relations, evoking prior laws enforced in Germany’s colonies. Germany’s late re-arrival and hasty departure from the colonial scene prompted Hitler and his architects of the Final Solution to search for a colonial realization of the racial state in the homeland itself during the Third Reich, and while “there is always a danger in reading German history backward from the Holocaust” (Zantop 16), the employment of racist and expansionist policies provide a direct link between Germany’s colonial past and its National Socialist agendas, specifically in the context of the Holocaust.

It is impossible to ignore the way works of the Third Reich reconfigured the Welser Venezuela colony through a teleological perspective. Literature of the Third Reich portrays the Welsers as benevolent caretakers of the Venezuelan province, and their engagement in the slave trade as a charitable endeavor. Ernst Wilhelm Bohle (1903-1960), leader of the *NSDAP Auslandsorganisation*, was one of the main Nazi propagators of the notion of colonial *Lebensraum*,<sup>31</sup> claiming that the Welsers took slaves in order to protect them from other slave traders; in Zantop’s interpretation, Bohle portrays the Welsers as “kind white men who did not rob slaves and did much good to the natives” (qtd. in Zantop 29).<sup>32</sup> Schmölz-Häberlein also discusses the way that the first German woman, the wife of one of the miners that came with Hans Seissenhofer to Venezuela in 1530, was depicted in 1939 Germany in ways that accentuated her ‘pure’ German blood abroad (339).

Faber’s *Deutsches Blut in fremder Erde* and Filchart’s poem praising the “edlen deutschen Geblüt” feature prominently in Arnold Federmann’s edition of the *Indianische Historia*, further reiterating the symbolic value of the purity of German blood on “foreign” soil vis-à-vis the racialized depictions of natives as well as other foreign powers such as the Spanish.

Many scholars including Shelley Baranowski, Jürgen Zimmerer, Pascal Grosse, Dirk Moses, Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salamma have grappled with the continuity theory that links German colonialism to the Holocaust. In a sense, scholars have debated various assumptions of a German *Sonderweg* [special path], bridging Germany’s

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<sup>30</sup> See Frank Becker’s *Rassenmischehen, Mischlinge, Rassentrennung: Zur Politik der Rasse im Deutschen Kolonialreich*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> *Lebensraum* was an ideology used by the National Socialists and while it literally means “living room” it refers to the habitat necessary for the successful development of a nation. In practice, the theory was that racially superior peoples had the right to expand territorially over racially inferior peoples.

<sup>32</sup> Ernst Wilhelm Bohle, chief of the NSDAP, state secretary of the Foreign Office, foreword to Pfeiffer, H. E. (1941), *Unsere schönen alten Kolonien*.

experience of colonialism and the Holocaust. Grosse contends that German colonialism was not necessarily the precursor to National Socialist racial politics, but rather, that it was simply in line with prevailing nineteenth-century theories of eugenics. Fears of miscegenation and the rightwing policies of colonialists on the German mainland cannot, by themselves, account for German policies to exterminate those deemed "undesirable" on racial grounds.

Hannah Arendt's readings of the connections between racism and empire, though at times problematic, emphasize the fact that Germans viewed themselves as "legitimate" settlers in their conquests of indigenous peoples. The links between colonialism and genocide may not be unequivocal, but the racial and ethnic component of the Herero genocide, the Holocaust, and, more recently, the Rwandan genocide, also suggests links aggravated by colonialism. Christopher J. Lee and Mahmood Mamdani respond to Arendt's claims, suggesting that the race branding by German colonizers in the Herero genocide set a group apart as an enemy and allowed bureaucrats to exterminate that group with a guiltless conscience (80). Likewise, during the Third Reich, Germans saw themselves as the "original settlers" of Europe at the expense of the Slavs and Jews (Baranowski "Against" 64). More recent explorations of Rwanda reveal justifications of violence including how the Hutus considered themselves an 'indigenous' group and the Tutsis as Rwanda's "invaders," suitable for slaughter.<sup>33</sup> Dirk Moses defends Arendt's project for its tracing of the roots of modern projects of extermination (33); in doing so, he proposes the thesis that the period from 1850-1950 can be viewed as the "racial century" in which the processes of nation-building and "people-making" culminated "in the Holocaust of the European Jewry and other racial minorities in the 1940s" (33). Whether or not we follow the continuity theory that links German colonialism to the Holocaust, one cannot ignore the prevalence during the National Socialist era of re-imaginings of the Welser colonists as pure "Germans" fighting bravely against illegitimate native peoples to colonize a 'virgin' land.

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<sup>33</sup> Mamdani's (2001) *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* builds upon the ideas of his first book to argue that the legacy of colonial violence informed genocidal violence between the Tutsis and Hutus (79). Lee and Mamdani investigate how British forms of colonial governance present within Africa—a type of dual mandate that relied on locals to exert the will of the colonizer—given rise to a "decentralized despotism" (78). In comparison to Arendt, Mamdani views apartheid not as unique by any means, but rather as a continuation of a colonial governance that primarily relied on distinctions between "race" and "ethnicity." The latter method became popular throughout the continent, dividing black political majorities. In turn, this colonial violence informed later genocidal violence between the Tutsis and Hutus. In particular, Mamdani traces how Belgian colonial authorities fomented a division between "settlers" and "natives" by assigning Tutsis as racially superior and non-indigenous (79). As Lee writes "Tutsis, who had occupied positions of power under colonial rule, found themselves resented and perceived as an 'alien' presence in the postcolonial period" (79).



Fig. 8 Screenshot from the website: [Fugger-und-Welsersraeften.decolonisieren!](http://fugger-und-welsersraeften.decolonisieren!)

## Conclusion—The Implications of Memory

Projects of German empire-building during the Prussian Empire invested in mythical histories of German conquest, resurrecting memories of the Welser Venezuela colony. In the Weimar era, these lost colonies would be lamented alongside the memories of more recent territorial losses, while during the Third Reich, authors glorified the vision of these first German conquerors. Similar to the ongoing debates in the United States surrounding Confederate monuments, since the turn of the twenty-first century, there have been attempts in Germany to “decolonize” the history of the Welsers and Fuggers in the Americas and re-present their legacies in a less glorifying light. The WordPress site [Fugger-und-Welsersraeften.decolonisieren!](http://fugger-und-welsersraeften.decolonisieren!) documents this process, following other attempts to decolonize street names within Berlin referencing colonialists such as Carl Peters. The site states:<sup>34</sup>

Im Gegensatz zur Lüderitzstraße oder der Petersallee gibt es zu der Fugger- und der Welserstraße bis dato noch keine Ambitionen auf dieses Stück weißgewaschener Geschichte aufmerksam zu machen und die glorifizierte Darstellung der beiden Familien als große Kaufleute besteht fort. Dieser Blog ist nicht nur eine Intervention gegen diese Geschichtsschreibung, sondern auch gegen die Leerstellen, die wir selbst Tag für Tag durch die nicht- Auseinandersetzung mit solchen Orten des kollektiven Gedenkens produzieren und somit implizit zu der Verdeckung und Bagatellisierung der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte und ihrer selektiven Weitergabe beitragen.

In contrast to the debate on Lüderitz Street or Peters Boulevard, there has been no attempt to do the same [decolonize] with Fugger- and Welser Streets and draw

<sup>34</sup> Go to <https://fuggerandwelsersstreetdecolonized.wordpress.com>

attention to this piece of *white*-washed history and the persistence of a glorified presentation of both families as great merchants. This blog is not only an intervention against this writing of history, but also against the empty spaces where we ourselves on a daily basis, through the absence of debate on these places, produce collective thought and are implicit in the concealment and trivialization of German colonial history and its selective dissemination. (2018)

Specifically, the blog’s authors describe how despite the way in which recent attention to other colonial figures such as Carl Peters has sparked activism to change street names that bear his name, the Fuggers and the Welsers continue to be remembered in a positive light due to their historical connection to early venture capitalism.

Young Germans are reengaging with their colonial history, emphasizing a postcolonial turn that aims to critique, and, at the same time, inform the larger public about Germany’s colonial past. The project [Freedom Roads: Koloniale Straßennames. postkoloniale Erinnerungskultur](#) started by the Berlin Postkolonial group aims to take street names, or at times whole neighborhoods, named after German colonial figures and provide them with new context about the legacy of the German Empire. In Munich, “Von Trotha Street” was renamed *Hererostrasse* to commemorate the agents of the anti-colonial rebellion, rather than the commander of the German Schutztruppe, Lothar von Trotha, who was responsible for their genocide. In 2006, in Bielefeld, a group performed a recreation of the German colonial experience in East Africa at *Karl-Peters Straße*. Likewise, the project [Afrika-Hamburg.de](#) archived more than 5600 votes and compiled more than 800 responses from Hamburg’s citizens debating the future of the statue of German East Africa’s bloody governor Hermann von Wissmann. Between 200,000-300,000 people have walked by the monument and read the information about its historical context.



Fig. 9 Picture from [Berlin-Postkolonial](#).

The recent turn in the last twenty years of scholarship to uncover Imperial Germany’s role in slavery, mass violence, and resource extraction (mostly on the African continent) has led to investigations of earlier colonists—particularly the forgotten Welsers and Fuggers. In contrast to earlier historiographic rediscoveries such as those from Hantzsch, the recent unearthing of German colonization in the New World serves as a concrete reminder of a more nuanced approach to the study of German colonial history. A group of students from the Humboldt Universität Berlin have created the [decolonize.hu](https://decolonize.hu) WordPress site which went live in 2016, after participating in a seminar on German colonial history, due to their feelings of shock about how little the subject has been taught in the past.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps this need to revisit the Welser period in Venezuela and the desire to decolonize German cities exemplifies a new investment in the historical record, one with potential to facilitate new conversations about Germany’s history of anti-Semitism and racism through a reengagement with Germany’s oft-forgotten colonial legacy.



Fig. 10 From Decolonize HU’s [website](https://decolonizehu.wordpress.com).

<sup>35</sup>[#Decolonize\\_HU](https://decolonizehu.wordpress.com/2016/02/16/wer-wir-sind/). 16 February 2016. WordPress.com  
<https://decolonizehu.wordpress.com/2016/02/16/wer-wir-sind/>

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