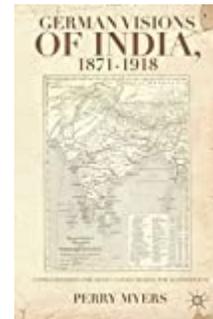


**David Ciarlo.** *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. xvi + 419 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05006-8.



**Perry Myers.** *German Visions of India, 1871-1918: Commandeering the Holy Ganges during the Kaiserreich.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 304 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-137-29971-0.



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## **The Wonders of Imperial Germany and Its Intertwined Discourses on Colonialism and Race**

These are two very different books that share an interest in Germans' interconnections with the world from 1871 to 1918. Both are focused on the production of images and ideas about non-Europeans in Imperial Germany, but they differ in subject matter, research methodology, geographical orientation, and historiographic implications. As a result, they can be read together quite productively. Indeed, as we read about the wonders in these pages—emerging tropes about Africans and Indians,

tantalizing *Kolportage* and melancholic spiritual crises, and the production of texts about exotic others and exotic selves—it is hard not to wonder about the ways in which such things took shape simultaneously and coexisted so easily with other German discourses about Africa, India, non-Europeans, and the wider world. It is also difficult not to wonder about the degree to which the *Kaiserreich* can be credited with having either produced or contained such discourses. The more one reads, the less likely that

seems.

David Ciarlo's award-winning book has received great praise, and with good reason. He demonstrates that the emerging cadre of professional advertisers who championed colonial products during the late nineteenth century did so within an age of ever more rapid mechanical reproduction of manifold images. Those images entered Germans' daily lives as "a visual cascade" (p. 3), but they were never simply German. Even the colonial images were drawn from a pool of productions that was international, or perhaps transcultural, except that, as he astutely points out, their resonances were always "adapted and articulated locally in markedly different ways" (p. 99).

This "empire of advertising," he explains, was "an enormous realm" with a "domain" that could "be mapped in countless ways." To negotiate it, Ciarlo focuses on "a single thread, the growing hegemony of a single visual construction of race" (p. 5). He maps out that construction across a shift from colonial exhibitions and *VÄ¶llkerschauen* during the last decades of the nineteenth century through the mass production and circulation of images of black Africans that became ubiquitous in Germany by 1900.

His topic turns around colonies and colonial products, but it is not bounded by the machinations of the German state. "Germany," he argues "may not have had official colonialism before 1884;" but it "certainly had a thriving culture of colonial engagement and colonialist heroism" that predated and persisted through the official period (p. 39). Moreover, there was no single agent behind that "thriving culture." Rather, as visual tropes began to take shape during the age of exhibitions, and as they came to fruition in the realm of advertising, they "emerged as an unintended consequence" of a "confluence of interests" (p. 46).

Colonial exhibitions that contained non-Europeans were critical to this process. Yet Ciarlo convincingly argues that they played a much smaller role than historians have assumed. Indeed, in one of the most insightful analyses of these events since Sierra Bruchner's work on the *VÄ¶llkerschauen* more than a decade ago, Ciarlo casts the *VÄ¶llkerschauen* as part of an age of experimentation from which tropes emerged that soon overwhelmed their organizers' intentions.[1] *VÄ¶llkerschauen* continued to take place well into the twentieth century, but they did not thrive. Quickly after their inception, they entered into a world in which "the future literally belonged to the images" (p. 64).

Thus the "surprising, curious explosion of the *VÄ¶llkerschauen*," Ciarlo contends, should be "reappraised in light of the first stirrings of a revolution—not a revolution in globalization, but a revolution in representation." While "the people shows and the illustrated journals grew in symbiotic fashion" (p. 79), chromolithography, he argues, "brought far more Germans a glimpse of exotic peoples than the steamship" (p. 106). Moreover, increasingly those glimpses were compilations—images produced and reproduced from a pool in which "contradictory allegorical markers of exoticism were often freely blended" (p. 72), and from which essentialized tropes of black Africans began to emerge.

This emergence of essentialized tropes is critically important. By examining both the interests behind the production of those images and the modes of production that facilitated their dominance, Ciarlo reveals that these tropes stemmed from the uncoordinated actions of Germans with varied concerns. Delving into two strikingly different "milieus," one of "advertisers" and another of "imperialists," Ciarlo shows how these "groups," which "remained profoundly separated from each other, not just in terms of their professional institutions, but even socially," jointly fashioned these essentialized tropes of black Africans. That happened despite the fact that "they seem to represent two completely different Germanys, presenting two very different paths to the future—and two different flavors of modernity" (p. 114).

Who, he has us wonder, ultimately became the "masters of the modern exotic" (p. 146)? The answer, it would seem, was no one, or perhaps everyone, because in the international world of advertising that took shape around the turn of the century "the image was not sold; rather the image was doing the selling," and the images that sold best, were those with the greatest resonance. Consequently, there was a marked shift in the packaging: "In the last years of the 1890s," he explains, "a few German advertisements and packaging trademarks began to symbolically show German dominion over African territory as a relationship of Africans to the German flag" (p. 177). By the turn of the century, however, "it was not symbols of sovereignty—flags, uniforms—but the preeminence of the commodity that would define the terms of the 'colonial relationship,' imaged again and again in commercial culture." Through that process, a generic figure of the African native became "the main means to demonstrate that preeminence *ad oculus*" (p. 187), and as this happened "the growing conventionality of the markers themselves fed into yet more standardization" (p. 192).

Advertisers, he explains, “increasingly saw themselves as needing to tailor their designs to the expectations of the public.” That, in turn, produced its own dynamic: “the more standardized images of Africans became, the more graphic artists had to adhere to these standardized depictions if they wanted to deploy the figure to generate a message that was broadly and instantaneously decipherable” (p. 192). The audiences became the authors; no one taught them to see.

Ciarlo finds this surprising, but enlightening: this “dynamic interplay between repetition and perception (in the visual, rather than cognitive sense)” (p. 192), which shifted the agency for the production of images away from the creators and toward their audiences, helps to explain why “this historical trajectory of racial imagery” remained “quite distinct from the history of intellectual theorizations of ‘race’ and their subsequent popularizations” (p. 192). The increased racialization of tropes of black Africans, he contends, did not happen “in lock-step with official or scientific colonialism.” Rather “the construction of a racial—and ultimately racist—imagery of colonialism in Germany can be traced instead to pre-occupations with a land far removed from the German colonial orbit. They flowed not from the established ideologies of race science or colonialism but rather from the new connections of commerce” (p. 215). They flowed into Germany from the United States.

This is stunning work. Noting that “American racism had long fascinated Europeans,” Ciarlo sketches out the influence of American entertainments and transatlantic packaging to show how and why images of “the American negro” began to blend with those of Africans (p. 227). Advertisers and journalists at the end of the nineteenth century eagerly borrowed all kinds of successful images for their illustrations, and through that general process, “racial images of American blacks were also transported to the framework of the German colonial project for commercial use (p. 235).”

The simplest images were the most useful; their applications were almost universal. Most astounding, he notes, is “the rapidity with which strategies of racial depiction became ubiquitous after 1905:” “The exaggeration of the lips, the enlarging of ears and bare feet, and the diminution of the body appeared with growing frequency and growing uniformity” (p. 291), with the result that blackness was “fused into an almost universal stereotype—a stereotype that sits in juxtaposition with the modern commodity.” That process “speaks a great deal about the normative and uniformity-producing po-

tential of mass culture” (p. 303). It also makes us wonder what, if any relationships existed between scholarship, sciences, colonial ideologies, and the popular cultures with which such tropes clearly resonated.

Given the breadth and decentered character of Ciarlo’s analysis, which identifies one racialized trajectory emerging within a modernist “visual cascade,” to create tropes that had a powerful, but always-unstable resonance, it is hard to know what to think about Myers’s portrayal of a strikingly linear discourse in Imperial Germany that quite literally gives National Socialism the last word (p. 200).

Myers opens and closes his book with Houston Stewart Chamberlain, positing a genealogy of German thinkers who engaged Indian religions in an effort to address what he terms a “sense of spiritual crisis” among Germans in the *Kaiserreich*. Citing Suzanne L. Marchand’s stunning work on German Orientalism, he acknowledges that “from the German Enlightenment forward, a remarkable collection of German intellectuals ... have turned to the Orient, frequently to India, in pursuit of poetic and philosophical inspiration, insights into the roots of Indo-Germanic languages, and religious rejuvenation” (p. 1).[2] India, he reminds us, “because of the unique philological linkage between German and Sanskrit, became for many thinkers in various ways a bountiful cultural mirror for navigating the era’s perceived crisis of identity that traversed a first and then a second Oriental Renaissance” (p. 2).

That predicament became particularly acute during the end of the nineteenth century, when “‘crises of religious belief and the dissolution of the humanities’ monopoly over cultural production’” drove many alternative modes of ontological inquiry and led to a breadth of “scholarly activity” that “cannot be so easily catalogued” (p. 8). From those crises emerged the “complexity and multivocal nature of Germany’s imagined India” (p. 9), and we know quite a bit about the “various formulas” and “diverse analytical blueprints,” which he notes emerged (p. 10). What we lack, he contends, is a “‘thicker description’ of Germany’s India” (p. 3).

It is hard not to wonder how that thick description could be so unitary when the formulas were so “various” and the blueprints so “diverse.” One way to ensure such an outcome is to focus, as Myers does, on a small number of the participants engaged in debates over religion from the period of the *Kulturkampf* through the age of imperialism, who harnessed “images of India” for pointed political purposes. This allows him to argue that “Protes-

tant images of Christian history, religious salvation, and moral progress during the 1880s and after remained tacitly entangled with the political dynamics of the era and found particular resonance in the reassertion of Christianity *vis-à-vis* Buddhism.” That, he claims, generated “a Christian apologetics” which would have “explicit political undertones in the age of empire” (p. 17). It was also something that many Catholics shared. “The German Catholic vision of India,” he contends, was “a manifestation of confessional nation building intended to reconstitute the degraded symbolic capital of Jesuit intellectuals in the *Kaiserreich*” (p. 67) just as the “German Protestant vision” was a nation-building project with similarly self-serving ends. There was, he claims, great unity in their difference.

The character of that unity becomes particularly apparent once the German state began engaging in official colonialism: he claims to have detected “a ‘colonialist mind-set’—consciousness—in the thought of several important Indologists after 1884, who at least in practical terms were far removed from any colonial designs in the political sphere” (p. 18). Indeed, “imperial mandates and colonial perquisites of the *Kaiserreich*,” became “explicitly entangled in more radical attempts at spiritual rejuvenation among other German India pundits” (p. 18). Most enticing for Myers is the racialization he has found in some of these texts. Those are important, he underscores, because they demonstrate that such ideas “did not appear out of nowhere in 1899 with Chamberlain’s magnum opus.” Rather they were already present in a set of “radical thinkers” whom he deems “credible forces with their own sociocultural context” who “shared traditions, concerns, and outlooks with their more mainstream counterparts” (p. 20).

We learn very little, however, about those “mainstream counterparts” from this book. That is because Myers quickly transforms the radicals themselves into representatives of a more general discourse, before arguing that they can provide us with “new perspectives on intellectual life and the practice of history in pre-Nazi Germany” (p. 21). Unfortunately, such “new perspectives” elude us, because the construction of his narrative is overdetermined, the insights terribly predictable, and his conclusions all too familiar. In the end, this is yet another book about “the failure of German intellectuals to engage in community renewal in ways that might have preserved democracy in Weimar and resisted the impending lure of Fascism” (p. 21).

What remains important about this book is My-

ers’s unequivocal demonstration that as some Germans sought to harness information about India and Buddhism for their own ends, it was possible for people such as Wilhelm Hildebrandt-Schleiden to “filter” their narratives of India “through the prism of his Darwinian model and German colonial mandates” (p. 156) to rationalize a superior German colonialism. They could, in short, blend the spiritual and the political as they saw fit, and they did so because the spiritual, the metaphysical, and religious concerns more generally had great significance in the political debates animating the *Kaiserreich*. That point is worth repeating, and repeating again, for historical analyses of those debates have too often overlooked it.

Nevertheless, the most striking point that emerges from reading these books together is just how narrow these racial discourses were. Ciarlo acknowledges that from the outset, while Myers plays it down. But narrow they were. It is quite difficult, to take just one example, to see either Myers’s instrumentalized India or Ciarlo’s tropes of the essentialized African having much resonance in the realm of German ethnology during this period. If one were to enter into the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin during the early twentieth century, for instance, the giant Indian gateway, or the huge statue of Buddha in the vestibule, would have been hard to overlook. So too would the similar statues of Buddha occupying the stairways in Leipzig’s Grassi Museum, or the collections of Indian objects in Lucien Sherman’s 1912 exhibit in Munich’s ethnological institution. India and Buddhism were given pride of place in many of these institutions, but few of the texts associated with them would have supported Myers’s “German imaginary.” Still, and this is the critical point: that does not make its existence any less likely.

Similarly, if we were to walk through the African collections in those same museums, we would have been hard pressed to find essentialized anything, and the racialized tropes of Africans which might, perhaps, have plastered the walls and curiosities in the streets along the way to those institutions, would have been absent from their rooms and displays. As for the texts written by the people in charge of these collections, they would not have supported the integration of the “American negro” and the generic African into a racialized trope; nor would they have given much credence to the racialized images Ciarlo examines.

One wonders too, just how much resonance those images actually had on the street before World War I, especially when one considers, for instance, the testament of

W. E. B. Du Bois. Having studied at the University of Berlin from 1892 to 1894, he famously wrote that his skin color made him, as an African American, feel like a persistent “problem” everywhere and always, “save perhaps in babyhood and Europe.”[3] Germany in the 1890s, Du Bois knew quite well, was nothing like America, where race was often black and white. Indeed, Du Bois only had this conviction confirmed when he attended the First Universal Races Congress held in London in 1911. There, he “heard Felix von Luschan, the great anthropologist from the University of Berlin, annihilate the thesis of race inferiority.”[4] He might easily have heard von Luschan do that elsewhere as well, or he could have read it in von Luschan’s writings. For in addition to producing a set of canonical tomes on the famous Benin Bronzes, and a series of notable ethnological essays on African cultures, von Luschan also wrote *V  lker, Rassen, und Sprachen* (1922), which ended with a list of ten declarative statements which argued, among other things, that there is only one human species, no savages, and no inferior races.[5] It might not have been a best seller, but a second edition was published in 1927.

What thus becomes most notable when reading these books alongside others is not only the disconcerting fact that a cacophony of essentialized images in the public arena can easily overwhelm the sophisticated and complex writings of scholars, or that even the best of scholarship, like that produced by von Luschan, can be easily undermined by polemics with political appeal. It is

the number and breadth of discourses on topics such as colonialism and race that can easily coexist, overlap, and intertwine across a period and space (i.e., Imperial Germany) regardless of their inherent contradictions.

#### Notes

[1]. Sierra Ann Bruckner, “The Tingle-Tangle of Modernity: Popular Anthropology and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Imperial Germany” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1999).

[2]. Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[3]. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1907), 2, 13.

[4]. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), p. 5; cited in John David Smith, “W. E. B. Du Bois, Felix von Luschan, and Racial Reform at the *Fin de Si  cle*.” *Amerikastudien* 47, no. 1 (2002): 1-37.

[5]. Felix von Luschan. *V  lker, Rassen, Sprachen: anthropologische betrachtungen* (Berlin: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1922). See also W. Rusch. “Der Beitrag Felix von Luschan’s f  r die Ethnographie,” *Ethnographisch-Arch  ologische Zeitschrift* 27 (1986): 430-453.

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