MARINERS AND MASCULINITIES: GENDERING WORK, LEISURE, AND NATION IN THE GERMAN-ATLANTIC TRADE, 1884-1914

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

In the decades around 1900, Wilhelmine Germany embarked on a quest for world power status. This endeavor included the acquisition of overseas colonies and a naval arms race with Great Britain, but it also encompassed a broader effort to achieve global presence and economic might through a rapidly expanding merchant fleet. Accordingly, many Germans began to view the maritime community as an extension of the nation and its empire on and over the seas. Based on original archival research, this study argues that, between the advent of German expansion in 1884 and the outbreak of world war in 1914, a variety of German groups reconceived merchant mariners as emblems of the nation at home, on the oceans, and overseas. Consequently, state authorities, liberal intellectuals, social reform organizations, Protestants, and nautical professionals deployed middle-class constructions of masculinity in their attempts to reform civilian sailors’ portside leisure and shipboard labor for the nation. A broader “crisis of masculinity” around 1900 informed this focus on mariners’ bodies, sexualities, comportment, and character. Reform groups portrayed their efforts to mold model seamen as essential to the success of German overseas expansion and Weltpolitik. They created highly-gendered programs designed to channel mariners’ transnational mobility into steady flows of national power, capital, and culture around the world.

This investigation situates its analysis of archival documents, published primary sources, and secondary literature in a transnational framework. It follows merchant mariners on a journey across the Atlantic, where most German shipping was engaged,
focusing on the ports of Hamburg, Bremen, New York, and Buenos Aires. This structure allows me to consider the tensions between sailors’ urban leisure practices, both at home and overseas, and reformers’ attempts to anchor these men in marriage, family, *Volk*, and *Heimat*. It also allows me to consider how masculinity and *Weltpolitik* shaped conflicts between traditional notions of skill, training, and command at sea and attempts to instill “soldierly” values among civilian seamen in the context of maritime industrialization.

Because a variety of groups and individuals participated in debates about the “German seaman” before the First World War, this study draws upon documentary evidence from government sources (particularly consular records), shipping firms, journalists, social reformers, pastors, trade unionists, as well as sailors’ personal accounts.

In analyzing this evidence, the study employs theoretical insights of such scholars as Joan Scott and R.W. Connell about the intersection between gender and power in human history and societies. It is thus primarily concerned with how masculinity was both a product and a constituent of power dynamics in Wilhelmine Germany. Consequently, rather than providing a static list of “masculine” characteristics this dissertation investigates how different groups and individuals used ideas, rhetoric, and representations of masculinity to further their specific political, socio-economic, or cultural aims and interests. It therefore contributes to the recent multidisciplinary project to “give masculinity a history” rather than assuming the implicit universality of the male subject. Thus far, most work on the history of German masculinities has focused on martial contexts: soldiers, militaries, and warfare. The present study changes course to examine how masculinities interacted with Germany’s growing global entanglements around 1900. It looks at the intertwining of masculine constructs and understandings of German economic might through a case study of the merchant marine. In doing so it asks...
how and why powerful groups attempted to choreograph mariners’ performance of masculinity at home and on the world stage.
Dedicated to Bryan.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea for this project took shape six years ago during my first visit to the 
Wasserkante, set against the contrasting backdrops of Hamburg’s boisterous St. Pauli 
district and Bremerhaven’s more tranquil waterfront. Somehow it seems fitting that, as I 
write these last few lines, I’ve returned to the water and the sea (this time in Boston) to 
begin a new phase of career and life. The journey has been long, at times exhausting, but 
ultimately well worth it. Along the way, numerous institutions, archivists, colleagues, 
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I can only hope that this dissertation has borne out his faith in me as a scholar. He is a
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VITA

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<td>DGBG</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten (German Society for Prevention of Venereal Disease)</td>
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<td>DNV</td>
<td>Deutscher Nautischer Verein (German Nautical Association)</td>
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<td>DSM</td>
<td>Deutsche Seemannsmission (German Mission to Seamen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSSV</td>
<td>Deutscher Schulschiffverein (German Training Ship Association)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAL</td>
<td>Hamburg-America Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGV</td>
<td>Hansische Geschichtsverein (Association for Hansa History)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGL</td>
<td>North German Lloyd</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBG</td>
<td>Seeberufsgenossenschaft (Maritime Employers’ Liability Insurance Board)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)</td>
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<td>VDKOH</td>
<td>Verein Deutscher Kapitäne und Offiziere der Handelsmarine (Association of German Captains and Officers of the Merchant Marine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDSV</td>
<td>Verband Deutscher Seeschiffervereine (Federation of German Shipmaster Associations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VfSP</td>
<td>Verein für Socialpolitik (Association for Social Policy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VHR</td>
<td>Verein Hamburger Rheder</td>
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In October 1907 Gustav Stresemann stood up to speak to a crowded auditorium in central Dresden. The room was filled with a cross-section of Wilhelmine Germany’s most powerful and influential groups, including regional princes, hanseatic Senators, Reich officials, Imperial Navy representatives, army officers, industrialists, shipping interests, bankers, lawyers, professors, and journalists. They had all gathered for the annual meeting of the Deutscher Schulschiffverein (German Training Ship Association), an organization dedicated to improving the “quality” of merchant mariners. Stresemann, a Saxon manufacturer, industrial lobbyist, and rising political star within the National Liberal Party, had developed a vision of Weltpolitik (world politics) that emphasized Germany’s need to master and expand its global economic entanglements. Only in this way, he believed, could the Reich hope to become a twentieth-century Weltreich (world empire) to compete with Britain and, especially, the United States, which he saw both as a model for Germany and a looming economic rival.  

Smoothly flowing sea transport was essential to his vision. He came to the podium with the firm conviction that the

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German merchant marine and the men who served aboard its ships had an essential role to play in German world politics in the age of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Stresemann’s speech framed the Handelsmarine (merchant marine) in terms of its historical legacy, economic power, and national symbolism on the world stage. He began by connecting the Wilhelmine merchant fleet to the storied past of the medieval Hanseatic League of seafaring traders. He proclaimed that the birth of a new steam-driven Hansa had created a commercial “nexus” for the “flows” of Germany’s local and national economies into the “world economy.” As a unifying cultural and economic symbol, this new Hansa, Stresemann argued, had transcended the particularism and social divisions within Germany. At the same time, it had created conduits for German culture on and over the oceans:

> German shipping has recognized the need to place commerce between our ports and the New World under the German flag. It has seen fit to create openings for the German merchant and the German industrialist and therewith our language and our culture out in the world, in distant lands and zones where earlier the German language barely had been heard.

Stresemann’s emphasis on Atlantic trade was purposeful; he was well aware that it was the center of emerging global economic flows. This was the place where an expanding merchant fleet was transforming Germany’s “feeling of humiliation”—due to the lack of national maritime power and presence—into a “feeling of pride” among the nations.²

For Stresemann, merchant mariners who traveled along these saltwater conduits were (highly gendered) emblems of German national identity. With an air of triumph he praised the Handelsmarine for showcasing Germany’s global presence, but warned that

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the merchant fleet’s reputation rested on the “right conduct of the crewmen that we send out into the world.” Upholding respectable behavior among merchant mariners, he believed, was especially urgent due to the “frenzied” social transformations he associated with steamship technology. He warned his audience that they must act to keep foreigners, socialists, and men who were “failed existences” from the decks, corridors, and engine-rooms of German ships. Instead, he called for a new kind of seafaring man to represent the nation. The task at hand, he told them, was to “awaken the love and interest” in the sea among the respectable classes, so that “sons of good German families, men of Bildung” would represent the nation on the seas and in foreign ports.3

The vision that Stresemann outlined was part of broader Wilhelmine efforts to reform and reframe merchant mariners as bearers of national identity at home, on the oceans, and overseas. Articles 53 and 54 of the 1871 Constitution of the German Empire had previously defined the “Handelsmarine” and its workforce as a national institution, but this legal formulation became a cultural reality only with maritime labor reforms after the mid-1880s. This study argues above all that rhetorical constructions of masculinity guided a host of new reform initiatives designed to appropriate maritime labor for the nation before World War I. An array of state and private groups and actors provided the momentum behind this process of cultural redefinition, but its most ardent supporters could be found among the liberal middle classes, Protestants, professionalizing nautical experts, and the “new right” of naval populists. These overlapping groups applied highly gendered understandings in their attempts to reform civilian sailors’ portside leisure practices and shipboard labor discipline. Their focus on sailors’ bodies, sexualities,

manly comportment, and masculine character was part of a much broader “crisis of masculinity” that worried European contemporaries in the “nervous age” around 1900.

In addition, the preoccupations of Wilhelmine maritime labor reform groups reflected the gendering of Germany’s global ambition as a masculine event. They consistently portrayed their efforts as vitally necessary to ensure the success of German overseas expansion and Weltpolitik. From this vantage point, mariners’ conduct abroad and their disciplined labor at sea reflected German power and prestige among the nations and guaranteed the continuous flows of people, goods, and culture necessary for Germany’s global ambitions. In a sense, they sought to channel mariners’ unruly transnational mass mobility into steady flows of national power, capital, and culture around the world.

1.1 Masculinity in Crisis, c. 1900

Masculinity was a much-discussed and debated topic in Wilhelmine Germany and the broader Western world around 1900. In hindsight, scholars such as Michael Kimmel and George Mosse have termed this obsessive preoccupation with male bodies, minds, sexualities, behaviors, and character a “crisis of masculinity.” During much of the nineteenth century, nations forged by increasingly confident and dominant middle-classes

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had determined the course of European history. Across the continent, processes of national formation were underpinned by such bourgeois masculine ideals as bodily hardness, duty, honor, industriousness, independence, self-restraint, and (heterosexual) marital respectability. Toward the century’s end, fin-de-siècle modernity challenged many of the basic cultural assumptions upon which middle-class masculinity and national identities had been built over the preceding century or so.

The interweaving of nationalism and middle-class ideas about gender began over a century earlier during the late Enlightenment and Revolutionary periods. Enlightenment thought implicitly equated masculinity with the universal subject, timeless and sexless. In a similar manner, revolutionary societies of the early nineteenth century defined national citizenship as part of a brotherhood that claimed to be the bastion of universal liberty and equality. By contrast, for much of this period, male doctors, jurists, and politicians defined women categorically as “the sex,” the embodied other whose biology limited her political rights and confined her to the domestic sphere despite ideals of universal equality. Therefore, although there were many attributes associated with nineteenth-century bourgeois masculinity, its most important features were its assumed universality and its studied invisibility.

At the end of the nineteenth century the universality and invisibility of middle-class masculinity threatened to unravel. During this period of rapid social and cultural

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change, manliness became a much discussed topic, as contemporaries focused on, worried about, and debated manhood on a far greater level than they had earlier in the century. The crisis of masculinity had its roots in a variety of historical developments. First, new ideas about biology, medicine, and psychology began to re-conceive men as individuals defined by their sex. In the wake of new evolutionary theories men no longer appeared as “godlike” and universal; instead they increasingly assumed embodied forms far closer to nature. In other words, men discovered that they too were a “sex.” In a related development, medical authorities began to debate “male” diseases, such as “enervation” or “male hysteria.” They attributed the phenomenon of male nervousness to the “new speed of time” and restlessness of the modern age, symbolized prominently by railroads and steamships. The new fields of sexology and psychology also began to classify men according to a host of new “pathologies,” including a new psychological understanding of men as “homosexuals.” Such ideas about an embodied masculinity informed the cultural pessimism of thinkers like Max Nordau who postulated that modernity led to “degeneration.”

Second, the masculine crisis around 1900 was also a response to the emergence of new social movements among women. In the German context, Louise Otto and her

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10 Mosse notes that contemporary medical authorities around 1900 believed that restlessness and uncontrolled bodily movement, which they associated with modern forms of transport like railway travel “shattered men’s nerves” leading to degeneration and decadence. See Mosse, The Image of Man, 82. On the cultural impact of railroad travel, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space (Berkeley & Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1986 [1977]), esp. 113-49.
12 Max Nordau, Entartung (Berlin: C. Dunker, 1892); Mosse, The Image of Man, 81-83.
supporters founded the first German women’s rights movement, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein* (ADF), in 1865 in Leipzig. This organization and others like it worked to secure educational, property, and political rights for German women. After the turn of the twentieth century, the membership of feminist groups expanded dramatically and they encountered modest successes. In 1908, for example, the Reich finally granted women the right to political organization, although German feminists continued to demand the right to vote without success before the First World War. Young, single middle-class women moved into the workforce, as secretaries or telephone operators for example. A curious and often hostile press labeled these women in the singular: “the New Woman.”¹³

Since middle-class masculinity and femininity operated in a rigidly interlocking gender system, these women’s demands shook bourgeois manhood to its core. In 1912, right-wing military leaders, professors, Pan-Germanists, and businessmen founded the *Deutscher Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation* (German League for the Prevention of Women’s Emancipation), which vehemently opposed women’s rights.¹⁴

Third, urbanization and the greater visibility of urban sexual subcultures also played a role in fostering a sense of masculine crisis. Urban growth was dramatic in Imperial Germany; Berlin, for instance, more than trebled its population between 1880 and 1910 from 1.1 million to 3.7 million. The Reich’s main port, Hamburg, experienced a similar rate of population increase from around 300,000 inhabitants in 1871 to 1.0

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¹⁴ The fact that conservative women also joined the organization did not change its cultural orientation as a reaction against changing definitions of masculinity and femininity. See, Ute Planert, *Antifeminismus im Kaiserreich. Diskurs, soziale Formation und praktische Mentalität* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).
million in 1913.\textsuperscript{15} Urban anonymity allowed for the increasing visibility of homosexual subcultures in cities like Berlin and Hamburg around the turn of the century. In addition, Berlin became the site of the world’s first “homosexual emancipation” movement, Magnus Hirschfeld’s \textit{Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee} (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee), which was founded in 1897.\textsuperscript{16} The supposedly unbounded sexual opportunities that cities seemed to offer induced a moral panic among religious groups concerned about prostitution and homosexuality. In 1890 Protestant ministers and women’s religious organizations established the \textit{Allgemeine Konferenz der deutschen Sittlichkeitsverein}, to fight against these “vices” in German cities. This moral purity movement reflected both religious concern about morality and a masculine crisis.\textsuperscript{17} In a far more secular context, the German Youth Movement, the \textit{Wandervogel}, which emerged in 1901, also sought to provide middle class boys an escape from urban decadence. Part teenage rebellion and part nationalist romanticism, the youth groups (temporarily) rejected bourgeois values, morally “polluted” urban life, and adult authority, escaping to a \textit{Männerbund} (society of men) in the countryside.\textsuperscript{18}

Finally, the social and technological changes that accompanied industrialization placed additional strain on the gender order. During the nineteenth century, work had emerged as a key element in masculine identities, not only for middle class men but also


\textsuperscript{18} Mosse, \textit{The Image of Man}, 95-98; Bruns, \textit{Politik des Eros}.
for their lower-middle and craftsmen counterparts. Large scale industrialization, however, transformed how, where, and which kinds of people worked, expanding the crisis of masculinity down the social scale to include lower-middle class clerks and traditional male artisans. These groups were most affected by the entry of women workers into jobs previously reserved for men and the undermining traditional, highly masculinized notions of skill and experience.\textsuperscript{19} In the context of this study, industrialization’s gendered effects were particularly relevant for men who trained to be traditional seafarers, whose identity as skilled sailing craftsmen was thoroughly embedded in their identities as men.

\textbf{1.2 Historiography}

A study of merchant mariners in the era of \textit{Weltpolitik} contributes to recent efforts to write a history of masculinities.\textsuperscript{20} As such it relies on theoretical and empirical understandings of gender as a construct which varies across different historical periods, cultures, and social constellations, rather than a naturally occurring, biological attribute.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Although masculinity has long been the implicit subject of history, a recent multidisciplinary project has sought to foreground historical constructions of masculinity. Drawing on earlier feminist critiques, the project seeks to “give masculinity a history,” rather than assuming the universality of the male subject. It therefore investigates masculinity’s historically contingent meanings, subjectivities, and performances, as well as their deployment in support of the social and political order. See Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, eds, \textit{Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History} (New York: Palgrave, 2004), xii-xv; Robert A. Nye, “Review Essay: Western Masculinities in War and Peace,” \textit{American Historical Review} 112, no. 2 (2007): 417-438; Jürgen Martschukat and Olaf Stieglitz, eds., \textit{Geschichte der Männlichkeiten} (Frankfurt & New York: Campus, 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{21} The list of literature on the “social,” “cultural,” or “historical” construction of gender is exhaustive. A good overview of the historical work on this topic can be found in Laura Lee Downs, \textit{Writing Gender History} (New York & London: Hodder Arnold/Oxford University Press, 2004), 73-105. Although views of
Consequently, rather than providing a static list of “masculine” characteristics this dissertation investigates how different groups and individuals used ideas, rhetoric, and representations of masculinity to further their specific political, socio-economic, or cultural aims and interests. In Germany at the turn of the twentieth century, powerful groups, particularly among the liberal, Protestant middle classes, deployed specific understandings of masculinity in efforts to reform merchant mariners for the nation. Although this study incorporates autobiography as one source among many, it does not aim to undertake a comprehensive literary or psychoanalytic analysis of merchant mariners’ gender identities. Instead it is concerned with how their masculinities became the focus of power dynamics in Wilhelmine Germany.

During the last decade and a half, the history of masculinities has become a vibrant subfield within modern German history. Following the lead of historian Joan Scott and sociologist R.W. Connell, scholars have considered the intersection of masculinity and (national) power in a variety of German contexts including scientific knowledge, associational life, colonialism, bodies, sport, and gymnastics.

gender’s constructedness owe their genesis to a variety of sources, the ideas of poststructuralist philosopher, Judith Butler, have been extraordinarily influential on constructivist thought. See Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

22 This approach has informed a number of masculinity histories, including Klaus Theweleit, Männerphantasien, 2 vols, (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Roter Stern, 1978-79); Michael C.C. Adams, The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of the Great War (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and Gerald N. Izenberg, Modernism and Masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky through World War I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2000).


sexuality, sexuality, and emotion. Given Germany’s pivotal role in the world wars of the twentieth century, however, the overwhelming focus of masculinity history in the German context has been on soldiers, militaries, and warfare. The present study changes course to examine how masculinities interacted with Germany’s growing global entanglements around 1900. It looks at the intertwining of masculine constructs and representations of German economic might through a case study of the merchant marine. In doing so it asks how and why powerful groups attempted to choreograph mariners’ performance of masculinity on the world stage.

R.W. Connell’s theory of “hegemonic masculinity” provides a useful way of explaining why rhetorical constructions of masculinity were essential to Germany’s first encounter with such global entanglements as Weltpolitik and Welthandel (world

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commerce). Connell explains how in the face of historical change, certain dominant forms of masculinity tend to uphold an interconnected gender, social, and political order. According to Connell, “hegemonic masculinity” solidifies patriarchal relationships between men and women, as well as subordinate relationships among different categories of men along lines of sexuality, class, occupation, race, and age. Connell’s theory thus illuminates a hierarchy of masculinities and reminds us that gender distinguishes not only women from men, but also among women and among men. Critics of Connell’s approach have noted its problematic abstraction “of a society as a whole” instead of analyzing clearly defined institutions, actors, and historical circumstances. With careful contextualization, however, the theory remains useful in analyzing constructions of masculinity and their relationships to structures of power. Because merchant mariners lived and worked on the front lines of Wilhelmine Germany’s encounter with the world, they provide an ideal case study of how and why Germans deployed “hegemonic” forms of masculinity to stake claim to the flows of global power and capital.

This study also contributes to the history of Germany’s rise as a world power. Wilhelmine Germany’s turn toward an expansive Weltpolitik cast the sea as an outlet for those who were concerned about the quality of German men and the respectability and strength of the nation. Colonialism, naval construction, and a broader sense of establishing Germany’s position and dominance both on and over the oceans seemed to be good antidotes to perceived effeminacy or to the boredom of middle-class male

32 R.W. Connell, Masculinities (Berkeley, 1995); for a critical overview of theoretical debates within masculinity history see John Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History,” in Masculinities in Politics and War, 41-58.
existence. Seafaring therefore provided a key element of the national imaginary in Wilhelmine Germany. The ascendance of Weltpolitik in its statist, naval, populist, and economic forms raised national awareness of the maritime world to unprecedented levels. Seafaring was a critical element of government forms of “social imperialism,” which sought to rally a deeply divided nation around the acquisition of colonies, the construction of a new battle fleet, and an increasingly hostile rivalry with Great Britain.  

The naval construction program under the administration of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, in particular, played a crucial role in introducing the maritime world to the German public.  

Seafaring also provided the focus of a new kind of right-wing populism, which emerged along with mass politics in the 1890s and attracted considerable support among the German Protestant middle-classes. Increasingly radical nationalist groups like the Flottenverein (Navy League) and the Alldeutscher Verband (Pan-German League) challenged government figures like Tirpitz and Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow with intemperate demands to speed up naval construction, which they viewed as the key to German world power.  

In this context, it makes sense that naval personnel, as citizen

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soldiers, might appear as symbolic representatives of the nation. Indeed, cultural anthropologist Timo Heimerdinger has argued that Imperial Navy propaganda did precisely that beginning in the late 1890s. Naval propaganda, however, usually had little to say about civilian sailors, most of whom were casual laborers in an increasingly transnational market, and who served ostensibly economic rather than military imperatives.37

To understand why civilian sailors became national figures we must look at a broader understanding of Weltpolitik that included, but went well beyond, colonialism and navalism. In defining this kind of world politics, writ large, it makes sense to keep in mind Jan Rüger’s point that, in the Wilhelmine era, “the nature of ‘overseas’ and Germany’s mission abroad remained unexplored, as if the projection of the kleindeutsche nation onto the sea was more important than the formulation of any concrete colonial aims or purposes.”38 In many ways this national awareness of the maritime world had to do with its essential role in the era’s growing global interactions.39 By the late nineteenth century, Germans encountered the world via the ocean in mundane ways, from the imported food they ate and the electrical equipment they exported to the toy ships their children played with. They crossed oceans as tourists, travelers, and immigrants; and they knew that maritime commerce was crucial in maintaining ties with family members who had emigrated overseas. They read seafaring novels, consumed painted seascapes, and attended meticulously staged launching ceremonies, arrivals, and departures of

37 Heimerdinger’s cultural analysis of naval propaganda is particularly insightful. Nevertheless, his failure to distinguish between civilian and military seafaring, which had separate legal, social, organizational, and cultural contexts limits the explanatory power of his broader study. See Timo Heimerdinger, Der Seemann: Ein Berufsstand und seine kulturelle Inszenierung (1844-2003) (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 132-174.
luxury liners and battleships alike. And they were the targets of professional shipping firm advertising, which inserted the (middle-class) German traveler into a modern, luxurious, and global setting. It therefore should come as no surprise that the Handelsmarine and its workforce also played a major role in showcasing Germany’s “place in the sun.”

With the new Imperial Navy still under construction, a much larger and industrializing merchant fleet became the leading edge of German overseas ambitions, grand and small. Between 1884, when German expansion began to gather steam and the outbreak of world war in 1914, the Handelsmarine tripled in size to over 3.2 million net tons.\(^{40}\) This growth largely reflected the emergence of a vibrant and rapidly expanding import/export economy that had become a major player in economic globalization. Germans imported foodstuffs and other raw materials and exported chemicals, electronics, machine tools, and other finished products of the “second industrial revolution.”\(^{41}\) At the same time, the merchant fleet became essential to the maintenance of Germany’s formal empire, but the reverse was not true. Germany’s economically unattractive colonies drew only a small fraction of the fleet’s net tonnage. Instead, the overseas activities of the merchant marine gravitated primarily toward the rich transatlantic trade with the Americas. As Wolfgang Mommsen put it, the “main thrust” of German “informal economic imperialism” before the First World War was directed at markets in established economies rather than the exploitation of colonial monopolies.\(^{42}\) This economic orientation was an element of what


Wilhelmine liberals referred to as “peaceful dominance at sea.” It was part and parcel of Gustav Stresemann’s economic vision of *Weltpolitik* outlined above.

The accelerating transnationality of maritime labor around the turn of the twentieth century also increased public awareness of mariners’ “Germanness.” A vibrant and growing merchant marine required the labor of a large and highly mobile group of workers. Annual counts of employees in the *Handelsmarine* approached 85,000 in the years immediately before World War I. This figure is complicated by the presence of relatively high numbers of foreign workers in the German fleet (one-fifth of the total workforce by 1901), many of whom were Scandinavians, Dutch, Italians, and other Europeans. While it is true that growing numbers of Chinese, Indian, and African workers served aboard German ships, racist and economic nationalist policies confined these so-called “colored seamen” (*farbige Seeleute*) to trade routes in tropical zones or near their home countries. By and large, the dominant German-Atlantic trade remained the preserve of European seafarers (along with a handful of North and South Americans) before the First World War. In addition to the workforce reflected in Reich statistics on the *Handelsmarine*, tens of thousands of ethnic Germans worked all or part of the year aboard foreign vessels. All in all, it would be safe to estimate annual flows of over 100,000 ethnically German seafarers around the world by 1914.

Sebastian Conrad, among others, has demonstrated how forms of transnational mass mobility often heightened nationalist understandings of work and workers. At the

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43 *Kölnische Zeitung*, 30 May 1913.
end of the nineteenth century, the accelerating speed of transport combined with its falling cost to produce the world’s first era of mass mobility. In Germany, the mass mobility of cross-border labor resulted in the widespread proliferation of a discourse of “German work” particularly among social hygienicists and such left-liberal reform groups as the Verein für Socialpolitik (Association for Social Policy, VfSP). This “nationalization of German work” provides a significant example of the “exogenous constitution of the nation in the context of globalization.”

The present study shows that constructions of manhood in the merchant marine were essential to the development of notions of the “German seaman” in a transnational context.

The precondition for accelerating mass mobility at sea, the steamship, radically changed the social composition of maritime labor. The changeover from wind to steam accelerated during the final decades of the nineteenth century as a series of technological innovations made ocean-going steam travel much cheaper and more profitable. The regular schedules allowed by steam travel at sea also allowed for the rise of passenger and luxury liner business. Steamships introduced new classes of seafaring workers such as stokers, trimmers, stewards, and stewardesses, undermining traditional forms of shipboard community and casting doubt on the skill and experience that had traditionally defined a seaman.

Increasing emphasis on the passenger trade created space for women to work as paid maritime laborers in steam liners’ “domestic sphere” of passenger areas. Although women had long been involved in German maritime communities either

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dressed as men, as workers on board family-owned coastal vessels, or as captains’ wives and daughters, the paid recognition of their shipboard labor challenged traditional conceptions of seafaring as the preserve of men.49 This study therefore also argues that Wilhelmine maritime labor reformers responded to the changeover to steam technology and novel labor patterns by valorizing the masculinity of wind and sail at the expense of new categories of maritime workers.

1.3 Sources and Organization

A variety of groups and individuals participated in efforts to define and reform the “German seaman” before the First World War. Consequently, this study draws upon evidence from government sources, shipping firms, journalists, social reformers, pastors, trade unionists, as well as sailors’ personal narratives. The records of the Reich Foreign Ministry’s Trade Policy Department (Auswärtiges Amt Abt. II - Handelspolitische Abteilung) provide a rich source of documentation. German consuls, who were tasked with supervising German sailors abroad, reported regularly on issues surrounding maritime labor, and therefore had considerable leverage in influencing Reich policy. Foreign Ministry files also hold numerous documents from the Reich Interior Ministry, which played a coordinating role in developing maritime labor policy at the Reich level. These sources are supplemented by government files from the three most important federal coastal states within Germany: Hamburg, Bremen, and Prussia. Furthermore,

although personnel files from major German shipping firms remain either lost to the historical record or inaccessible, I use a number of surviving documents, particularly from Germany’s two largest shipowning companies, the Hamburg-American Line (HAL) and North German Lloyd (NGL). Additionally, this study draws upon published investigations, conference proceedings, and annual reports from social reform organizations such as the Verein für Socialpolitik, which conducted the only thorough inquiry into the state of maritime labor in Wilhelmine Germany, as well as the Deutscher Schulschiffverein. Moreover, the records of the Protestant Deutsche Seemannsmission (German Mission to Seamen), as well as the socialist maritime labor union, the Seemannsverband (Seamen’s Federation), offer two ideologically and politically contrasting views on efforts to “raise” the social standing of merchant sailors. Finally, these sources are supplemented by thirty published and unpublished personal accounts from German merchant mariners.

The chapter structure of this dissertation follows mariners on a journey across the Atlantic, focusing on the ports of Hamburg and Bremen, on one end, and New York and Buenos Aires on the other. Chapter two begins in Germany, surveying the economic, cultural, and political history of the Handelsmarine, or the “new Hansa” as the merchant marine appeared in contemporary liberal formulations. Chapter three narrows the focus to the home ports of Hamburg and Bremen. It examines efforts to tie merchant mariners to a domestic context, both geographically and as a reflection of the middle-class family. Specifically, it looks at middle-class reformers’ discursive anchoring of the “German Seaman” in marriage and a coastal Heimat, as well as the valorization of the traditional “seaman-farmer” along the German coasts. It then proceeds to examine how these ideals
influenced initiatives to reform and restrict sailors’ leisure practices in port, focusing on Hamburg’s St. Pauli district.

Chapters four and five follow German merchant mariners out onto the ocean, to examine debates about maritime labor, skill, education. Chapter four, in particular, looks at how constructions of masculinity informed a variety of responses to industrialization and the growing division of labor at sea. The “disappearance” of the sailing ship destabilized established definitions of skill and manhood at sea. The traditional community of seamen (*Fahrensleute*) understood this as a process of deskilling and painful emasculation. Labor unions and socialists, in contrast, attempted to unite traditional seafarers and steamship engine-room workers in a “suffering brotherhood” rather than through any particular definition of skill. But these efforts were overshadowed by nautical professionals’ (captains, officers, and navigation instructors) romantic rhetoric of the “real seaman,” a sailing-trained, patriotic, and anti-socialist man. This latter image appealed to shipping firms, state officials, and middle-class reformers, who were anxious to reign in labor unrest and uphold the social order at sea in the context of German *Weltpolitik*.

Chapter five picks up where the previous chapter left off and explores how Germans put the “real seaman” rhetoric into practice through new schemes of maritime education. Above all, it follows the story of the *Deutsche Schulschiffverein* (DSSV), the most politically powerful organization devoted to maritime labor issues. The DSSV, which had close ties to the Imperial Navy and the *Flottenverein*, adopted nautical professionals’ “real seaman” rhetoric to legitimate its military-style program of training aboard sailing vessels. In this way the DSSV began a process whereby soldierly forms of
masculinity infiltrated the Handelsmarine before the First World War. Ironically, the outbreak of war in 1914 cut short this process just as it began to accelerate and have a real impact on maritime education in Germany’s civilian fleet.

Chapter six follows merchant sailors across national boundaries to the “foreign” seaports of New York and Buenos Aires. It considers how Wilhelmine reformers responded to issues of mariners’ desertion, illegal immigration, and vice overseas. Its main focus is on the story of the Protestant Deutsche Seemannsmission, a national-religious charitable organization that was inspired by earlier Anglo-American efforts and founded in Great Britain. During the Wilhelmine period, sailors’ missionaries cooperated with German diplomats, shipping companies, and émigré communities to establish a world-wide network of missionary stations, which they imagined as a “Brücke zu Heimat” (bridge to home). Here they offered a variety of practical services and respectable entertainment through which they hoped to attract ethnically German mariners. The Seemannsmission developed a Protestant-nationalist vision of redemptive masculinity through which they hoped to reconcile Germany’s “prodigal sons” to their Fatherland.

The concluding chapter provides an epilogue that traces developments through the First World War and the Weimar periods, before turning to consider the broader historical significance of the “German seaman” as a (gendered) national figure.
CHAPTER 2
THE NEW HANSA

At the end of the eighties, a great excitement for the seaman’s profession arose among the boys of my [landlocked] hometown, Essen. The reason for this was that the son of the local mining company director had become a seaman and been shipwrecked on his first voyage. When he and part of the crew were finally saved after weeks adrift in a life boat on the Atlantic Ocean, he became a hero envied by everyone. Later, when he returned home after passing the merchant marine officer examination, he caused a great sensation—also among the girls—with his ornamented uniform as a one-year volunteer in the Imperial Navy. For many of the boys, the desire to become seamen grew even stronger. In fact, in those years a number of Esseners went to sea, and many more would have gone too but for their parents’ opposition. – Oscar Schulz

During the 1880s, commercial seafaring in Germany became not only an economic enterprise or an exercise in cultural imagination, but also a preeminent national-political imperative. Although this development coincided with the acquisition of formal overseas colonies in 1884 and the installation four years later of a new emperor obsessed with building a world-class navy, it encompassed a phenomenon that went further afield than purely imperialist or navalist goals. Germany’s “turn toward overseas” reflected a growing awareness of the tremendous political, economic, and strategic benefits afforded to “seagoing nations” in an era of accelerating global interaction.1 This awareness extended across sections of German society, but liberal intellectuals, the middle classes, Protestants, professionalizing nautical experts, and naval

populists (which represent often overlapping social groups) provided its basis of support. These groups generated much of the popular pressure for imperialism, naval building, and expansionist policies in general.\(^2\) They were also keenly aware that the national economy had become dependent on maritime commerce. After 1880, German agriculture could no longer sustain the Reich’s soaring population, necessitating food imports, and German industry became increasingly reliant upon foreign export markets. The *Handelsmarine* thus became essential to conceptions of *Weltpolitik*.

Seafaring also became a cultural space onto which these groups projected their version of an emerging German national identity. Political unification in 1871 left the project of defining Germany and Germans an open question. For supporters of *Weltpolitik*, mastering the sea through maritime trade and naval prowess was the standard for a thriving and powerful nation. The lack of a national maritime tradition, however, presented conceptual problems for their efforts to recast Germany as a seagoing nation. They solved these problems of place and memory by conceptually anchoring the nation’s “overseas” goals in the local history of the medieval Hanseatic League—an erstwhile trading confederation of seafaring city states along the Baltic and North Sea coasts. A re-imagined “German Hansa” not only justified the creation of a new battle fleet, it also signified Germany’s grasp of global economic trade and showcased its presence in the world. The “new Hansa” idiom built upon local, coastal memories but became a way in which Wilhelmine Germans could imagine their nation in the world.

\(^2\) Eley, *Reshaping the German Right*, 68-84; and Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, 53-62.
Kaiser Wilhelm II’s “place in the sun”³ speech has become emblematic of the expansionist new course that the German Empire set during his reign. Historical accounts often cite his 1901 speech to illustrate the imperialism and naval build-up which so clearly marked the era that bears his name. Rarely, however, do they mention the Kaiser’s invocation of Germany’s merchant marine. *Kolonialpolitik* (colonial policy) and *Flottenpolitik* (naval policy) comprise only part of the story that the Kaiser told that day about a “new Hansa.” A close reading of the speech in context illuminates what he intended this “new Hansa” to be and do for Germany. The occasion was a regatta on the Elbe River in Hamburg. The emperor, his entourage, and dozens of dignitaries from Hamburg—shipowners, merchants, and politicians—had gathered to watch the race on board the *Prinzessin Victoria Luise*, the Hamburg-America Line luxury steam yacht named for the Kaiser’s daughter. As a personal favor to the Kaiser, HAL director Albert Ballin had granted use of the yacht, which was the world’s first purpose-built cruise liner.

The emperor’s speech cast Germany as a maritime nation, celebrating its “Hanseatic spirit,” as well as “German” seafaring in its many forms. Referring to Hamburg-America’s recent acquisitions in China after the Boxer Uprising, Wilhelm proclaimed that Germans “had conquered for [themselves] a place in the sun” despite lacking a sufficient battle fleet. In other words, the *Handelsmarine* had given Germany its place in the world, but an enhanced *Kriegsmarine* (Imperial Navy) was needed to assure that place. Paraphrasing early-nineteenth century economist Friedrich List, the Kaiser declared that if “more Germans [were to] go out upon the waters” they would learn “to direct [their] glance upon what is distant and great.” He claimed that the

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³ While the Kaiser’s utterance of the phrase in 1901 has captured popular memory, it actually originated with (then) Foreign Minister Bernhard von Bülow in his *Weltpolitik* speech to the Reichstag on 6 December 1897. See Mommsen, *Imperial Germany*, 81.
“pettiness” of everyday life—the regional, class, and confessional conflicts that marked Wilhelmine Germany—would “disappear” into this “larger and freer outlook” exemplified by the “enterprising Hanseatic spirit” of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck. He called for a “new Hansa,” the Handelsmarine, to “open new paths and create and conquer new markets.” At the same time, he promised that “[his] Hansa,” the Kriegsmarine, would ensure its protection. The Kaiser’s double formulation of the Hansa—civilian and military—captured a sense growing in the broader German public, particularly among the middle-class groups mentioned above, that perceived seafaring as the engine of “world” phenomenon. For these globally-conscious Germans, ships and sailors of all sorts were essential for national development through Welthandel, Weltverkehr, Weltmacht, and Weltpolitik.

The dichotomy of “nation” and “world” was thus a constitutive element of nationalism in Wilhelmine Germany. Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson have rightly identified this period as a turning point in the history of globalization, which they define as “the history of worldwide integration, its development and erosion, its intensity and effects.” After 1880 European states and publics became increasingly conscious of their particular nation’s ability to extend its reach around the globe, in what Osterhammel and Petersson call a “politicization of globality.” The Welt- concepts that characterized Wilhelmine political discourse were simply the German variants of a growing awareness in various national settings of the tremendous power, status, and wealth to be gained from

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5 World trade, world commerce, world power, world politics.
worldwide integration. Sebastian Conrad also demonstrates this mutually constitutive relationship between globalization and nationalism through his study of transnational mass mobility in Wilhelmine Germany. For Conrad, German national identity was “not the endangered relic of a pre-global world order, but rather itself an effect of the process of transnational circulation.” Put another way, globalization worked not only to transcend the nation but also to consolidate a sense of being German.

Merchant shipping was the indispensable engine of globalization around 1900. The introduction of profitable ocean-going steamships at the end of the nineteenth century significantly reduced the time and cost of sea transport, which in turn increased European global entanglements. Accelerating globalization brought “overseas” into the newspapers, salons, cafes, school rooms, dining rooms, and daily lives of many Germans. In the process, “Übersee,” or “overseas,” came to connote a zone of international competition onto which national power and presence could and must be projected. William Scholz, chief of HAL’s engineering division, captured this sentiment in the introduction to his 1910 inaugural dissertation on merchant shipping and Weltwirtschaft:

But today we must also make sure that measures required to secure the development of the merchant fleet be regarded as a national task. This will guarantee the nation its proper place in the world market and provide our country in its hour of danger with a trained stock of crewmen for the Imperial Navy.

Along these lines, a nationalist understanding of world trade extended to the Handelsmarine. As a result, the “new Hansa” became a cultural representation of the nation and a reference point for Wilhelmine nationalism.

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8 Conrad, Globalisierung und Nation, 8-10.
Wilhelm II’s formulation of a “new Hansa” capped a century of far-reaching economic, cultural, and political transformations in German merchant seafaring. Before the Atlantic Revolutions of the late-eighteenth century, maritime commerce along the German coasts had been a rather sleepy local affair that did not stray far from the medieval Hansa’s old European trade routes. Initially, the revolutionary period devastated the coastal economies in German-speaking Europe, but the political, economic and cultural changes it set in motion resulted in a century of mercantile expansion that moved German economies toward worldwide integration. Economic expansion coincided with the cultural discovery of the sea among the educated German middle-classes. As the maritime world became more important in German daily life, it found new avenues of expression through art, literature, travel, and tourism. In addition, German liberals and nationalists found a vital political metaphor in seafaring. In the 1830s economist Friedrich List became the prophet of maritime nationalism when he proclaimed:

In the sea nations take strengthening baths, refresh their limbs, enliven their spirit, and become receptive to great things; they accustom their physical and spiritual eyes to focus on the far distance, wash from their bodies the philistine ignorance that is so detrimental to all national life and national growth.11

These developments—economic, cultural, and political—reached their zenith in the Wilhelmine fascination with the sea and with sea power. During this period national liberals and middle class intellectuals, such as Gustav Stresemann and Ernst Levy von Halle, claimed the Handelsmarine as site for national identity. These groups were the

10 This is a term of convenience for the period before German unification 1871, when German-speaking ports and their fleets were divided among a number of independent states.
primary targets of the Kaiser’s 1901 speech. As he sought to build support for a new battle fleet, he knew that they already believed in the merchant marine as Germany’s “new Hansa,” a site of collective memory that tied together coastal and national identity in a narrative of Germany’s global expansion.

2.1 Toward Worldwide Integration

The Wilhelmine Handelsmarine built upon almost a century of efforts to link German shipping with the emerging world economy. In the early twentieth century, Walther Vogel, the first historian of German seafaring, declared emphatically that “the decades from 1815 to 1880 stand out in economic history as the era during which a modern world economy emerged.”¹² Merchant shipping, he argued, had produced “Germany’s” primary points of access to the new global economy. Until 1871, however, Germany was merely a term of convenience—a cultural rather than political entity. Before unification that year, German seafaring was divided among eight sovereign states: Prussia, Mecklenburg, Danish Schleswig and Holstein,¹³ Lübeck, Hamburg,¹⁴ Bremen, Oldenburg, and Hanover.¹⁵ During the middle decades of the century, the commercial fleets of these coastal states, particularly those with access to the North Sea, began a sustained period of integration into overseas trading networks. In order to do so, they incorporated a series of innovations in business models, labor practices, and

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¹³ Schleswig and Holstein were Danish territories until the 1864 war between Denmark and the German Confederation.
¹⁴ The enclave of Altona within Hamburg was also Danish-ruled from 1640 to 1864.
¹⁵ The British monarchy ruled Hanover between 1714 and 1837.
technological capabilities, collectively known as maritime industrialization. This mid-century integration and industrialization set the economic stage for the unprecedented expansion of German shipping from the mid-1890s through the outbreak of war in 1914.

Before the nineteenth century seafaring in German-speaking Europe rarely departed from the well-worn patterns handed down from the medieval Hanseatic League. It remained largely a circumscribed affair, limited to coastal and intra-European trade and fishing, and German states played no substantial role in early modern European colonialism.\(^{16}\) Their merchant fleets were almost entirely shut out of direct colonial trade, which the mercantilist Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, and British empires jealously guarded.\(^{17}\) The series of revolutions that occurred between the 1770s and the 1820s in the Atlantic World, however, began to transform economic relationships on the Atlantic Ocean. They provided German merchants opportunities to establish lasting commercial networks outside of Europe.\(^ {18}\)

As Europe recovered from the Napoleonic Wars, merchants from German-speaking North Sea ports began to look for commercial opportunities in newly created American states. In 1822 the Hamburg Commerce Deputation triumphantly proclaimed a “new epoch in mercantile history” in response to successful Latin American revolutions and their promise of freer trade. This new epoch, the Deputation believed, would bring forth a heretofore unseen level of “*Welthandel.*” “Outdated commercial policies” would disappear and “new outlooks” would emerge that would “set new paths through the

\(^{16}\) Whaling expeditions to Greenland, which became common in the mid-seventeenth century and declined in the late eighteenth century, constitute the one exception to this rule.

\(^{17}\) Brandenburg-Prussia’s short-lived attempt to establish a colony on the West African coast between 1683 and 1716 is a rather insignificant exception to German states’ lack of participation in colonialism before the nineteenth century.

course of changing times.”

This optimism and free-trade ideology became a staple of the Hanseatic Bürgertum in commercial ports like Hamburg and Bremen. The Deputation’s proclamation foreshadowed elements that would frame the development of German seafaring trade over the next century: an emphasis on free trade, a desire to create new and far-reaching commercial networks, and an emerging conception of trade as a “world” phenomenon.

Four major economic developments contributed to the fundamental transformation of merchant shipping during the mid-nineteenth century. First, *laissez-faire* ideology gradually came to prevail among European maritime powers, the most important of which was Britain. Among the German states, free trade ideology also contributed to the creation of the Zollverein (customs union) in 1834, which eliminated many river tariffs and encouraged more export and import trade. Second, new and growing railway networks linked coastal ports with interior regions, facilitating relatively cheap and fast transport of goods and people to and from the sea. During the nineteenth century, “modern” port cities evolved into endpoints on railway networks. They developed increasingly complex harbor infrastructures that functioned to integrate...

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21 In 1825, the British government began a process of lifting restrictions on foreign trade that culminated with the repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849. For German shipping concerns this development was initially far more important in broadening trade with the British Isles than with British overseas colonies.

22 The role of the Zollverein should not be exaggerated, since most German seafaring states besides Prussia did not join until the 1850s or later. Hamburg and Bremen joined only in 1888.

23 The first railway connecting Berlin with a major seaport, Stettin, opened in 1842. A line between Hamburg and Berlin, originally championed by Friedrich List, was finished four years later. Gisela Schütte, “Die Anfänge der Hamburg-Berliner Bahn,” in Übersee, ed. Plagemann, 58-60.
land and sea transport. Ports left without railway connections had little chance for a
prosperous future.\textsuperscript{24} The final and most important development was a complex
transformation of seafaring “from wind to steam.”\textsuperscript{25} Maritime industrialization involved
not only the application of new technologies like fuel-burning propulsion and metal ship
construction; it was also interconnected with new capitalist modes of seafaring.

Intensified business and labor practices in search of greater profits and the concentration
of capital in large shipping firms accompanied the implementation of steam technology at
sea and extended to sailing ships as well.\textsuperscript{26}

These developments produced a variety of significant changes in German
seafaring over the course of the nineteenth century. Shipowners and merchants began to
override seafaring customs that stood in the way of greater profit and the search for new
markets. In so doing attempted to economize time and expenditure at sea. So, for
example, they introduced maritime labor contracts, or “muster rolls,” that bound sailors
to remain on board without specifying duration or destination. This undermined the
seafaring custom whereby captains hired sailors for one round-trip voyage to a specified
destination.\textsuperscript{27} The search for profit and markets also “intensified” sailing ship commerce.
Concerted efforts to map weather patterns at sea allowed for “harder sailing” that
emphasized quick voyages and shorter stays in port.\textsuperscript{28} Even before the introduction of
steamships, firms from Bremen and Hamburg led the way in establishing regularly-

\begin{itemize}
\item Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}.
\item Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 13-20.
\item Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 112-24.
\end{itemize}
scheduled liner service across the Atlantic during the 1830s, 1840, and 1850s in order to attract emigrants and cargo with relatively predictable departure and arrival times.  

Industrial technologies accelerated the ongoing changes within maritime commerce during the nineteenth century. German shipping firms first used steamships for ocean-going trade around 1850. The incorporation of new technologies was a slow and complex process; steel-hulled steamships did not immediately replace wooden sailing vessels in commercial shipping. Early steamships were inefficient and not reliably profitable until engineers developed a series of technical improvements between 1870 and 1890. At first, reliable coaling stations were also hard to find in many areas of the world. Steamships thus proved to be more profitable on shorter or transatlantic voyages, whereas sailing ships continued to dominate on longer routes, especially around the southern tips of Africa and South America. Measured by carrying capacity (net tonnage), steam surpassed sail in the German merchant fleet only in 1892. Still, compared with wind power, steam promised larger profit margins through greater independence from the weather, enhanced predictability, and much faster voyages. Metal hull construction also improved profitability, allowing dramatically larger ships with bigger cargo bays relative to their overall weight. Steam ultimately trumped wind in all kinds of commercial shipping. The massive expansion of the German merchant marine

31 More efficient engines, better access to coaling stations in imperial colonies, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the Panama Canal in 1914 eliminated wind-power advantage on these longer voyages. Miller, “Steamships,” 977.
32 For a contemporary comparison of German sailing- with steamship tonnage see RAdI, *Handbuch für die deutsche Handelsmarine* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1900), 145.
that began in the late-1890s involved, almost exclusively, the construction of larger and faster steel-hulled steamships. 33

These nineteenth century transformations also produced a geographical realignment within German maritime commerce. Development and expansion took place in a regionally divergent manner, which, roughly speaking, distinguished Baltic from North Sea ports. Baltic seaports such as Stettin, Rostock, and Danzig experienced a robust upswing during the middle decades of the nineteenth centuries, but their fleets generally continued to operate in trading patterns limited mostly to intra-European voyages. Above all, they engaged in the export of grain and timber from their Prussian or Mecklenburgian hinterlands to industrializing Britain. During the mid-1850s, Hamburg and Bremen overtook their Baltic neighbors as the primary bases for commercial shipping in German-speaking Europe. After unification, Germany’s Baltic ports entered a tailspin of decline in terms of absolute numbers of ships and sailors. 34 By 1914 the Baltic fleet represented only a tenth of the entire German merchant marine. 35

Geographic, economic, and political factors help explain the relative and absolute decline of Baltic seaports. The Baltic’s geographical situation was unfavorable to world markets. Before the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal provided a more direct route in 1895, all but the smallest vessels traveling between the Baltic and the North Seas had to sail through a stormy passage around the Jutland peninsula. Additionally, industrialization and population growth within Central Europe reoriented Prussian grain exports toward urbanizing zones closer to home such as the Rhineland. This trend continued so that, by the late-1870s, the German Empire became a grain-importing rather than grain-exporting

33 Radl, Handbuch für die deutsche Handelsmarine (1914), 217.
34 Moltmann, Geschichte der deutschen Handelsschifffahrt, 131-36.
35 Radl, Handbuch für die Deutsche Handelsmarine (1914), 217.
state. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s protective tariff of 1879 accelerated the absolute and relative decline of the Baltic fleet. The new tariff ensured the eclipse of the Europe-centered Baltic by the Welthandel-oriented North Sea.

The dramatic rise of Hamburg and Bremen as centers of commercial shipping during the nineteenth century thus constitutes an essential story in modern German seafaring history. These two river ports with relatively direct access to the North Sea developed a sophisticated and dense network of connections to overseas markets. In all of their ventures, the two Hanseatic cities were—at times bitter—rivals. Merchants and shipowners from both cities pioneered the implementation of regular transatlantic lines. The capital-intensive nature of regular liner services inspired the formation of increasingly large corporate shipping firms. In 1847, venture capitalists in Hamburg created the Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt Aktien Gesellschaft (HAPAG), otherwise known as the Hamburg-America Line (HAL). Ten years later, merchants and bankers from Bremen and Berlin responded with North German Lloyd (NGL), a new shipping company with a fleet made exclusively from steamships. These firms were only the most impressive examples of the capital concentration in a small number of large shipping concerns based in Hamburg and Bremen. In 1885 about half of all German

36 Fitger, Die wirtschaftliche und technische Entwicklung der Seeschifffahrt, 14-15.
37 Technically, Hamburg and Bremerhaven, rather than Bremen proper, were Imperial Germany’s premier seaports. Unless specifically referring to Bremerhaven, I use the term “Bremen” to connote both Bremen proper and its port of Bremerhaven, which was and continues to be administrated by the state of Bremen.
38 Both cities also took steps to ensure that their geographical position remained favorable to overseas trade. Hamburg lies on the Elbe River about seventy miles upstream from the North Sea. In the 1840s, the city-state’s authorities initiated a the first in a series of massive dredging projects designed to deepen the river’s shipping channel and make it navigable for larger ships. Southwest of Hamburg, Bremen lies on the Weser River only forty miles from the North Sea. In the 1820s, Bremen officials also grew concerned about river sedimentation, a potential threat to the city’s seagoing trade. To solve the problem, Bürgermeister Johann Smidt’s administration purchased land at the mouth of the Weser from the Kingdom of Hanover in 1827. There the city-state built the enclave of Bremerhaven as a seaport directly on the North Sea coast in order to bypass the Weser. Despite repeated initiatives and attempts beginning in the 1840s, the Lower Weser, between Bremen and the sea, was not deepened until the 1890s. See Hartmut Müller, “Die Weser Korrektion,” in Übersee, 61-63.
shipping tonnage was shared equally between the two Hanseatic cities. On the eve of the First World War, Hamburg-based ships accounted for a stunning 57% of the merchant fleet’s total carrying capacity, while Bremen-based ships represented 28%, for a combined total of over 85%.39

Led by the shipping giants of Hamburg and Bremen, the carrying capacity _Handelsmarine_ tripled to over 3.3 million net tons and its workforce doubled to over 83,000 workers during the Imperial period.40 These statistics suggest an even level of growth that simply did not exist. Before 1897, the carrying capacity of the entire German shipping fleet grew at an annual rate of around 20,000 net tons per year—a rate that had remained relatively steady since national statistics were first compiled in 1871. The total number of maritime workers also remained relatively stable around forty thousand. From 1897 until the outbreak of world war, however, tonnage growth rates averaged over five times what they had been during the preceding decades and the workforce added an average rate of 2,500 workers per year, doubling within a decade and a half (Figures 1 & 2). This unprecedented growth owes much to the rapid expansion of the German economy after the so-called “Great Depression” of 1873-96 and German shipping firms’ deliberate cultivation of the Eastern European emigrant market. During the first decade of the twentieth century, HAL and NGL emerged as the world’s two largest shipping firms. Such stunning expansion gave contemporaries reason to celebrate the German merchant marine’s status as a “world-class fleet” second in size only to that of the British.41

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39 RAdI, _Handbuch für die deutsche Handelsmarine_ (1885), 481; (1914), 216-17.
40 RAdI, _Handbuch für die deutsche Handelsmarine_ (1885), 481; (1914), 217.
Figure 1. Source: Handbücher für die deutsche Handelsmarine (1878-1914).

Figure 2. Source: Handbücher für die deutsche Handelsmarine (1878-1914).
This new “world-class” *Handelsmarine* profited from the expansion of the German import/export economy during the Wilhelmine period. By 1914 foreign trade had reached 34% of the German gross national product, a figure that would not be surpassed again until the 1960s.\(^{42}\) With an exploding population and industrial capacity, Germany became dependent on foreign imports of foodstuffs and raw materials. Homeward bound German ships carried refrigerated Argentine beef, Brazilian coffee, Chilean nitrates, South African and Australian wool, American tobacco, cotton, and wheat. Foreign markets also became essential for German industrial exports. Outward-bound ships carried such finished and semi-finished products as electrical equipment, machine tools, dies, and chemicals for sale around the world, but particularly in the Americas.\(^{43}\) Above all, German shipping firms profited enormously from human cargo in the immigrant trade. Firms from Hamburg and Bremen had made their fortunes transporting millions of Germans across the Atlantic between 1830 and 1890. As German emigration slowed after 1890, they turned to the trade in Eastern European immigrants. Most of these immigrants were bound for North America or the southern cone of South America, which meant that German passenger ships became a regular sight in ports like Santos, Valparaiso, Buenos Aires, as well as Baltimore, Philadelphia, and—above all others—New York.\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) Conrad, “Transnational Germany,” 227.


\(^{44}\) Between 1830 and 1910 at least eight million emigrants from Central and Eastern Europe departed from Hamburg and Bremen/Bremerhaven. Although destination statistics are not readily available, the vast majority of these emigrants were bound for North America followed by South America at a distant second. For 1832-1900 figures see Fitger, *Die wirtschaftliche und technische Entwicklung der Seeschifffahrt*, 18-19; for 1894-1910 see Klaus J. Bade, *Migration in European History*, trans. Allison Brown (Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 94.
The Wilhelmine *Handelsmarine* therefore depended on the global, and especially the Atlantic, economy as none of its predecessors had before. Wilhelmine statisticians divided the maritime world into three spatial categories: Germany, non-German Europe, and the non-European world—each of which was composed of smaller regional or national units. They tracked net tonnage, or carrying capacity, as well as the number of ships to various destinations, since the former figures more accurately reflect the capacity for trade along any given route. They also singled out ships by nationality. These numbers thus provide a helpful way to examine the global distribution of German shipping during the period. The following statistics reflect German-owned shipping tonnage only, which, in any case, had come to dominate traffic to and from German ports on almost all maritime trade routes by the late-nineteenth century.

Throughout the Imperial period traffic between Germany and almost all global regions increased, but some routes saw significantly faster rates of growth than others. Between 1880 and 1908, intra-German coastal traffic as a share of all cargo-laden German shipping tonnage remained steady, hovering around one third of the total. Traffic between German and foreign ports within Europe experienced a relative decline from 39% to 29%. Non-European destinations, by contrast, gained ground, up from 30% to 38% over the same period. In other words, the fastest growing German trade-routes during this period involved non-European ports. Even in 1908, however, three-fifths of

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45 The RAdI used this formulation to organize its statistical data, which was published yearly after 1876 in the *Handbuch für die Deutschen Handelsmarine*. In the late 1880s they added a fourth category, the *Schutzgebiet*.

46 France and the Atlantic Coast of Canada were the only two regions that experienced absolute declines. See Walther Vogel, *Die Grundlagen der Schifffahrtsstatistik* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn, 1911), Appendix Table III.
the German merchant marine’s total carrying capacity was still engaged in trade within European waters.\textsuperscript{47}

Turning to focus on developments within German shipping to the non-European or “overseas” world, Atlantic routes continued their predominance, despite movement toward global diversification. During the three decades after 1880, the share of total overseas traffic on routes between Germany and the Americas declined from 85% to 70%. This decrease was almost entirely localized along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States, although shipping to the West Indies lost some ground to other regions as well. The Atlantic coast of South America, led by Buenos Aires, constitutes the major exception in the Western Hemisphere, increasing its share of overseas traffic from 13% to 16%. Shipping routes to Asia, including the Middle East, doubled their share of overseas traffic, rising to 15% in 1908. African routes showed a three-fold increase to almost 9%. Australian routes also gained ground, but had barely a 4% share by 1908.\textsuperscript{48}

Imperialism played a key role in this trend toward global diversification. The Reich government subsidized Imperial Mail Steamship lines for East Asia and Australia (from 1886) and for East Africa (from 1890).\textsuperscript{49} The subsidies were aimed at bolstering formal colonies and creating economic spheres of influence. But they also remind us that Germany’s formal colonies, the \textit{Schutzgebiete}, were commercially unattractive compared with other parts of the globe. In 1895, German merchant vessels bound for destinations in the formal empire represented less than 1% of all \textit{Handelsmarine} traffic outside of Europe. Ten years later, at the height of the 1904-07 Herero and Nama uprisings in

\textsuperscript{47} Vogel, \textit{Die Grundlagen}, Appendix Table III.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
German Southwest Africa, the figure had risen to a little over 5%. The German military’s reliance on Hamburg’s Woermann Line—the only major German shipping firm that specialized in trade with West Africa—for troop and prisoner-of-war transport, accounts for much of this “growth” in commercial shipping to Africa. By 1912, well after the German military had brutally crushed the uprising, shipping to the Schutzgebiete had declined to about 3% of all German overseas shipping.\(^5\)

In summary, during the long nineteenth century, the shipping industry emerged as a driving force behind the worldwide integration of the German economy. The geographical distribution of the German merchant marine and its change over time gives us a picture of quickening, if ultimately incomplete, integration into global trading networks. After 1880 overseas destinations gained tremendously at the expense of European ones. Among non-European destinations, a clear pattern of differentiation emerged whereby German shipping expanded outward from Atlantic routes to include growing connections with Asia, Africa, and Australia. Nevertheless, Intra-European and transatlantic trading networks remained the two bright centers of German shipping until the outbreak of the First World War. The vast majority of German overseas transport in this era occurred within a transatlantic triangle with one endpoint lying between the North Sea ports of Hamburg and Bremen, another at New York City on the North Atlantic, and the third at Buenos Aires, which became the busiest site for German traffic on the South Atlantic.

2.2 Maritime Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany

According to Oscar Schulz, an officer with North German Lloyd, the late nineteenth century marked a definitive shift in German popular attitudes toward seafaring. During the late 1880s, Schulz recalled, a great excitement about the sea swept through the youth of his landlocked hometown of Essen. The son of a local mine director had gone off to sea and been shipwrecked on his first voyage across the Atlantic. He survived to be welcomed home as a hero, admired by boys and girls alike. The young idol’s sleek uniform, in particular, caused a stir as he walked around town. Schulz, who came from a middle-class family, reported that in those years many young Esseners clamored to go to sea, only to be held back by concerned parents. Regardless of what his family thought, the headstrong teenager insisted that he would leave behind the boarding school he abhorred for the freedom of the sea. When his mother begged him to join the Imperial Navy he refused, preferring instead to try his hand at a career as a merchant captain. Schulz’s recollections reminds us that maritime culture in Wilhelmine Germany was not simply a product of navalist or imperialist propaganda; it also had a much broader base, rooted in romanticism and everyday life.

The thoroughgoing politicization of seafaring during the Wilhelmine period built upon romanticist conceptions of the sea from earlier in the nineteenth century. For the landlocked majority of German-speakers, maritime worlds continued to be almost exclusively realms of the imagination rather than experience. Maritime motifs first became significant in German culture during the early nineteenth century. Romantic

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thinkers, poets, and artists celebrated the sea as an emblem of the powerful, mysterious, and providential forces of nature vis-à-vis the helpless insignificance of human beings. They transformed the maritime world into a blank canvas onto which Germans could project their hopes and fears about modernity and change. Their styles and themes influenced later Wilhelmine representations of seafaring.

No other field of artistic expression exemplifies this better than painting. In 1810 Heinrich von Kleist coined the term “Seelandschaft,” literally “sea-landscape,” to capture growing fascination with the sea among German painters. Caspar David Friedrich, whose work Alain Corbin deemed “the culmination of Romantic representation of the shore,” played a leading role in popularizing maritime elements among German painters. Like his English contemporary William Turner, Friedrich chose seascapes to reflect “the elemental powers of nature, fire and water, light and dark, storm and the demise of human artifice.” While Friedrich, Johan Christian Dahl, and other notable painters produced maritime art for the consumption of educated elites, lesser known German sailor-artists pioneered the more popular style of ship portraiture around the same time. This type of painting remained a coastal phenomenon, although it was the stylistic forerunner of the popular and commercial ship portraits and photography of the Wilhelmine era.

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By the end of the nineteenth century, German maritime painting reflected the growing influence of navalist and imperialist ideologies. No other maritime painter was more associated with Wilhelmine politics than Willy Stöwer, a ship-building draftsman turned artist and naval propagandist. Stöwer’s maritime style appealed to Kaiser Wilhelm II, who discovered the young artist in the mid-1890s. His work became a vital part of German naval propaganda. From 1895 onward the Reich Naval Office enlisted Stöwer’s art in its fleet-building efforts. He was also an early activist within the Flottenverein and became a frequent contributor to Überall, the association’s gossily illustrated magazine. He perfected the art of ship portraiture. At their most bombastic, Stöwer’s paintings feature vivid yet predictable scenes of foam-churning naval maneuvers and warfare. His illustrations also reflected German imperialism. The advertisements he created for the Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie and the Woermann Line, for example, rely on tropes of the modern, technological German vs. the rustic African.

Still, Wilhelmine maritime painting was not limited solely to imperialist or navalist themes. Even Stöwer’s paintings went beyond simple naval propaganda, despite his preeminent position within naval propaganda efforts. As the son of a Mecklenburg merchant shipowner and captain, he was fascinated with all aspects of seafaring. Before taking a job as a draftsman at the Vulcan Shipyard in Stettin, he worked briefly as a stoker on a transatlantic merchant steamer. Stöwer’s work reflects his familiarity with seafaring in multiple forms, featuring not only warships and sea battles, but also, luxury liner portraits, busy harbor scenes, middle-class beach-goers, and the daily life of

57 Ibid., 49-66
58 Ibid., 36, 43.
merchant sailors. Other notable Wilhelmine artists also celebrated the civilian uses of the sea through painting. Emil Nolde, one of German Expressionism’s most prolific painters, experimented with maritime themes from a very different political and aesthetic perspective than did Stöwer. Seafaring and coastal scenes constitute one of the major veins in Nolde’s work, including the fantastical watercolor, Schiff im Dock (1910), which features in vivid color a distorted view of the era’s classic black-and-red hulled merchant passenger liner set against blues and greens and browns of the harbor. Nolde’s other works include motifs like ocean waves, fishing boats, mermaids, and sailing ships.

Romantic novels were particularly important in developing gendered ideas about the seas and about seamen among a growing German middle-class public. Before the late-eighteenth century, the literary genres of seafaring, discovery, and overseas adventure were almost entirely absent from German literature. Around 1800, translators introduced German readers to romanticized maritime worlds that were almost entirely derived from foreign and, above-all, English-language sources. Joachim Heinrich Campe’s 1779 translation of Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe—which quickly became an essential part of the bürgerlich children’s library—represented the emergence of popular maritime literature in Germany. Romantic seafaring novels like those of American James Fenimore Cooper and Englishman Frederick Marryat, which were translated into German during the 1830s and 1840s, likewise played a significant role in shaping German views of the sea and of sailors. The romantic “illusions” of popular maritime literature targeted an all-male readership. They cultivated a masculine

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59 Ibid., 9-13, 19-46.
60 Plagemann, “Kultur, Wissenschaft, Ideologie,” 299-300.
subjectivity that associated the sea with adventure, danger, heroism, and the exotic. In essence they defined the sea as the realm of tried and tested manhood.  

Richard Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer*, the best-known nineteenth-century German representation of maritime culture, staged seafaring as a rootless masculine enterprise. The opera tells the story of a mysterious Dutch ghost ship that enchants a Norwegian ship captain, his daughter, and their coastal village. The ghostly captain of the Dutch ship had been condemned to wander the seas forever, spatially uprooted and socially limited within an all-male crew. Ultimately, even a woman’s love cannot break the spell of eternal placelessness in Wagner’s sea opera. Written in Paris in 1841, *Der fliegende Holländer* premiered two years later in Dresden for a brief and disappointing run of four performances. Despite this underwhelming start, the opera gained a following over the following decades. At the height of German maritime enthusiasm in 1901, the composer’s heirs staged a successful revival of the opera at Bayreuth.

The figures that populated romantic maritime novels and opera were the antecedents of masculine characters in Wilhelmine maritime literature. The 1890s witnessed a flood of popular literature devoted to the subject of seafaring that continued unabated into the early war years. Many of the most popular examples like Hans Graf

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61 Ibid., 300.
62 Although scholars contest the opera’s precise origins, Wagner clearly owes his inspiration to numerous sources—chiefly British and German ghost ship legends. Most directly, the opera retells a legend from Heinrich Heine’s short story, *Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski* (1834), which Heine based on *The Flying Dutchman; or the Phantom Ship*, an Edward Fitzball play that he likely saw during a trip to London in 1827. Heine never directly attributed his version of the ghost ship story to Fitzball and was almost certainly familiar with other British and German versions of the Flying Dutchman story. The debate over the Fitzball-Heine-Wagner progression turns on whether Heine arrived in London before Fitzball’s play ended its run on 7 April 1827. Most recent scholarship agrees that it is likely that he either saw the play or read a version of it that was published between 1827 and 1829. Helga, Gerndt, *Fliegender Holländer und Klabautermann* (Göttingen: Otto Schwartz, 1971), 36-39; Barry Millington, “The Sources and Genesis of the Text,” in *Richard Wagner Der fliegende Holländer*, ed. Thomas S. Grey, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25-29.
von Bernstorff’s *Auf grosser Fahrt. Erlebnisse eines Fähnrichs zur See* (twelve editions by 1912) and or Georg Wislicenus’s richly illustrated *Deutschland’s Seemacht Sonst und Jetzt* (three editions by 1909) were little more than propaganda for the Imperial Navy. Other popular books focused primarily on merchant seafaring. Bernstorff’s *Willi der Schiffsjunge*, for instance, which had gone through three editions by 1914, served as an illustrated guide to promote the option of a merchant marine officer career among middle class boys. His narrative packaged romantic seafaring adventure, danger, and heroism within a nationalistic appraisal of the *Handelsmarine*. Other popular Wilhelmine maritime novels were far less overtly political and instead continued to celebrate the sea as a realm of romantic mystery and adventure. The folklorist works of naval pastor Paul Gerhard Heims—a prolific writer on maritime themes—depicted the sea through fables, superstitions, and sailor’s yarns as the setting for ghost ships, sea monsters, and mermaids. The popular novels of Hamburg’s Gorch Fock (Johann Kinau), sought a more realistic approach, translating regional Lower German-speaking sailors into national figures with words made accessible through a dictionary of *Plattdeutsch* terms. They illustrate a strand of Wilhelmine maritime fiction that celebrated coastal seamen and their dialects as bearers of German national identity.

As with art, daily life in Wilhelmine Germany was also increasingly infused with maritime themes and experiences. German boy’s and women’s fashions followed the transnational vogue of the sailor’s outfit. Observers also noted the growing use of

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maritime imagery in everyday figures of speech. In 1913, the Kölnische Zeitung, a leading liberal newspaper remarked on the growing prominence of seafaring in the German everyday: “a milder but nonetheless widespread sense of a peaceful Seegeltung [prestige at sea] of a world-trading Germany has conquered the hearts and minds of the nation.”

Sea tourism provided an important link between middle-class German experience and the sea. Here too, the romantics were pioneers. They constructed a “new harmony between body and sea” that built on earlier European associations between bathing and health but was also suffused with a heightened eroticism. During a visit to his friend’s coastal Neapolitan villa in 1787, Goethe wrote, “After dinner a dozen young boys swam in the sea, and it was a handsome sight. How many different groups they formed, and all the poses they struck in their games!” Heinrich Heine, poet and avid travel writer, spent much of 1826 sea-gazing on the East Frisian island of Norderney. As he did so, he reflected on the mysteries of the human soul:

I love the sea as my soul. Often, it seems to me that the sea really is my soul … When I go for a stroll at night on the sea-shore, and I listen to the song of the waves that awakens in me all kinds of memories and forebodings, it seems to me that I once stood in such a way on high looking down, but that, seized with dizziness and fright, I then fell down to earth.

These poetic formulations foreshadowed the phenomenon of mass sea-tourism that emerged in the late nineteenth century.

68 Kölnische Zeitung, 30 May 1913.
69 Corbin, The Lure of the Sea, 57-96.
70 Ibid., 85.
71 Ibid., 169.
One way to illustrate the growth of sea tourism in nineteenth-century Germany is to look at the growing popularity of the Helgoland islands\textsuperscript{72} in the North Sea as a destination for tourists and sea-bathers. In 1826 the islands first became a tourist destination with 100 visitors. Ten years later their number had risen to around a thousand. Around mid-century yearly guest totals for the islands remained around 2500. By 1887 the number of guests had surpassed 10,000. Over the next two decades steamship companies used mass advertising and the promise of comfortable and quick steamship service to the islands to attract tourists. By the early 1910s Helgoland received over 100,000 visitors annually.\textsuperscript{73} German beach culture became such a popular phenomenon that the popular satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* devoted an entire issue to the topic in 1907.\textsuperscript{74}

During the 1890s German shipping firms began to experiment with cruises that made the sea a tourist destination in and of itself for the first time. Early cruise-liners emphasized luxury paired with an exotic, yet mastered, destination. They took their well-to-do guests to the Mediterranean, the Orient, or to Scandinavia. Summer “Nordlandfahrten” grew particularly popular among wealthy Germans, who hoped to catch a glimpse of Wilhelm II or his yacht on his annual holiday sailing among the Scandinavian fjords. In 1900, HAL launched the luxurious *Prinzessin Victoria Luise* as the world’s first ever purpose-built cruise liner, followed four years later by a second ship, *Meteo*. Albert Ballin dubbed them “dream ships,” emphasizing their fantastical

\textsuperscript{72} These islands were ruled by Denmark from 1714 to 1807 and by Great Britain from 1807 until 1890, when the British traded them with Germany in exchange for parts of the East African coast near the Sultanate of Zanzibar.

\textsuperscript{73} Giesela Schütte, “Helgolandfahrten und Seebäderdienst: Uneingeschränkter Genuß der frischen Seeluft,” in *Übersee*, ed. Plagemann, 186-88.

\textsuperscript{74} Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 63.
nature and exclusive devotion to leisure. Shipping firms also began to integrate tourist services within their corporate structures in order to support these new forays into sea tourism. This was the case in 1905 when HAL acquired *Carl Stangen’s Reisebureau* of Berlin, Germany’s largest and most respected travel agency.75

Everyday encounters with seafaring in Wilhelmine Germany were shaped as much by advertising as they were by actual travel and tourism. Shipping companies advertised heavily through placards, brochures, and even educational materials. Beyond selling the safety and luxury of a particular firm’s ships, these materials emphasized the modernity, global connectedness, and national prowess of Germany’s merchant fleet. Around the turn of the twentieth century, passenger liners became preeminent symbols of European modernity. These “modern wonders” were essential for the belief that *fin-de-siècle* Europeans shared in the “exceptionality of their historical present.”76 This image represented a cultural shift in popular attitudes toward the sea that was driven, above all, by commercial interests. As shipping companies like HAL, NGL, and their British competitors aimed to create new markets among bourgeois travelers and tourists, they launched a series of advertising campaigns that profoundly reshaped popular understandings of the maritime world. These campaigns revolved around the trope of the “floating palace,” emphasizing steamships as spaces of luxury, glamour, and preeminent artistic design. They downplayed the social malaise and squalor that had so marked emigrant transport for most of the nineteenth century, stressing instead the rigid physical barriers between first, second, and steerage classes as guarantors of social stability and

order. For the most part, the liberal and conservative press in Germany and Britain uncritically reproduced the self-aggrandizing pronouncements found in shipping company ads.\(^{77}\)

Nationalism provided a major thematic element of luxury liner advertisements. More specifically, they projected a sense of the nation’s mastery of global space through modern technology. One Hamburg-America Line placard, which advertised “the best route to Chicago” (by way of New York), relies on a montage of illustrations including a triumphant German steamship plowing through ocean waves, a birds-eye view of busy American urban docklands, and a bustling harbor scene of steam tugboats. Alternatively, such posters combine the steamship image with transnational imagery. In another HAL poster, the female figures of Germania and Liberty look on beneath German and U.S. flags as one of the firm’s express steamers speeds by. The two figures rest at ease, surrounded by a collection of objects that includes a globe. The advertisement evokes Germany’s status as a national and cultural equal to the United States in the pursuit of world trade. In a third poster by North German Lloyd, a globe featuring the North Atlantic hangs in the center of four scenes depicting various stops along the overseas journey of a four-funneled steamer from Bremerhaven. White lines cover the ocean, expanding outward from Germany around globe and graphically depicting German preeminence in interconnected global space. These images affirm Germany’s place, importance, and ambition in the world.

German shipping firms also staged their ship launches, departures, and arrivals as public spectacles. Beginning in earnest in 1897 when NGL launched the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, at a mass ceremony led by Wilhelm II, tens of thousands of Germans turned

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 158-92, esp. 160-75.
out to watch as this “modern wonder” slid into the sea. HAL’s *Vaterland*, which was the largest ship in the world when it was launched, drew a crowd of nearly 100,000 spectators. As with naval launches, politicians also sought to use these events to promote German nationalism. Headlining the launch of HAL’s *Deutschland* in January 1900, Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow used the occasion to embrace Germany’s new clout in marine engineering as the fundament of colonial and world politics. But steamship spectacles were not always overtly nationalistic. An equally enthusiastic New York press and public turned out for the arrival of the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* at the company’s pier in Hoboken after the completion of its first voyage. Journalists marveled at its speed, size, and luxury. The *New York Chronicle* reported that the ship was met by “such a mass of humanity” that had “never before been seen in Hoboken.”

As steamships became symbols of national pride, German and British firms engaged each other in a competitive “race for superliner supremacy.” Above all, the quest for the titles of largest or fastest transatlantic steamer marked this form of national rivalry. The press in both countries stoked the fires of competition after NGL’s *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* claimed the prestigious Blue Riband prize for fastest transatlantic crossing, a designation previously held exclusively by British ships. The ship’s engineering feats were even more significant to nationalists because Stettin’s Vulcan Shipyard had designed and built it. Almost immediately, the British press reacted with skepticism mixed with alarm at the prospect of German marine engineering dominance. Although slower to catch on, the German press and politicians eventually embraced these

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78 *Berliner Tageblatt*, 10 January 1900 (evening edition), 4; see also Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, 243.
“triumphs” of the *Handelsmarine* with enthusiasm. The symbolism of the superliner race, however, extended below the national level. It also reflected local competition between Hamburg and Bremen as “their” emblematic shipping companies, Hamburg-America and North German Lloyd battled each other for the Blue Riband. It was no accident that artist Hans Bohrdt’s famous rendering of the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* shows it in relation to the “*Roter Sand*” lighthouse at the mouth of the Weser, an emblem of Bremen’s seafaring might.

Imperialist culture also figured prominently in German understandings of seafaring, particularly as Germany acquired an overseas empire after 1884. Although formal colonies counted for little in the German merchant marine, at least in economic terms, what Susanne Zantop and others have called the “imperialist imagination”—the empire’s cultural support system—mattered a great deal. During the Wilhelmine era, ships and sea-going travel provided quintessential motifs in the German imperialist imaginary. Few contemporary symbols of imperial power were as salient as the mighty steamer with its keel plowing through the water featured as the title emblem for the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, the propaganda mouthpiece for the Colonial Society.

Steamship imagery had a dual role in representing the relationship between colony and metropole. On one hand, the steamship symbolic emphasized the alterity and exoticism of the colonial region through technological and cultural difference. One common configuration in shipping company placards and postcards envisioned a

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81 Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, 227-29, 243-44.
gleaming, modern German steamship arriving or anchored in an exotic tropical bay, surrounded by rarified symbols of pre-industrial indigenous culture. These messages fall into a longer tradition of European cultural imperialism whereby machines are featured “as the measure of men” creating a technological hierarchy of cultures with Europe at its pinnacle. The colonial voyage was also a common motif in Wilhelmine colonial travel literature. This literature represented ocean travel between metropole and colony as a “nursery of the unfamiliar and an initiation into colonial power relationships.” On the other hand, steamships and ocean travel also elevated familiarity and closeness over alterity and exoticism. Thin black lines covered the oceans in Reimer’s Deutsche Kolonialatlas, the standard in German colonial geography since 1896, representing the integrative role of shipping routes between colony and metropole. The same year that Reimer first published its colonial atlas, the Reich postal service unveiled a new line of stamps for mail to the colonies, highlighting connectedness without a trace of exoticism. Instead of images of the “other,” the new stamps featured a gleaming white Imperial Mail Steamer cutting rapidly through the waves under the name of each German overseas colony.

Naval enthusiasm was also a key element of maritime culture in Wilhelmine Germany. Navalists argued that neither Germany’s overseas empire nor its seagoing commerce would be safe and secure without a world-class navy. Scholars have debated exhaustively the origins, development, and implications of Wilhelmine navalism. A

86 Ibid.
central point of contention in this debate involves differing explanations for popular naval and, by extension, imperialist enthusiasm. In other words, historians have focused on the question of why so many Germans supported the efforts of Imperial Navy Secretary Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and his allies to build a powerful battle fleet.⁸⁸

On one hand, a number of historians, including Eckart Kehr, Hans Ulrich Wehler, Volker Berghahn, and George Mosse, have emphasized the origins of Flottenpolitik as a strategy of social “manipulation” from above. Eckart Kehr is often credited with proposing this interpretation in his interwar thesis on the German battleship construction program. For so-called “Kehrites” the Tirpitz Plan was essentially an instrument of domestic politics. In their view, German elites sought to use the naval build-up as part of a broader strategy of “social imperialism” that aimed to divert popular attention away from domestic social conflicts, most notably the stunning electoral rise of the Social Democratic Party.⁹⁰ Even when Kehr proposed it in 1930, however, this critique was not new. Already in the mid-1890s, the German left had begun to equate contemporary navalism with Roman “bread and circuses.”⁹⁰

Geoff Eley and Roger Chickering, on the other hand, reject the manipulative explanation for naval enthusiasm and read it instead as part of a broader right-wing “self-mobilization” from below at the dawn of the age of mass politics. Eley in particular has argued that a radical form of naval populism emanating from middle-class nationalist pressure groups, most notably the Alldeutscher Verband (1891) and Flottenverein (1898),

⁸⁸ Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German, 14.
⁹⁰ On Flottenpolitik as “bread and circuses” see Vorwärts, 27 June 1895; and Rüger, The Great Naval Game, 93-94.
eclipsed and, at times, frustrated the efforts of officials in the Imperial Navy. At first, the *Flottenverein* in particular operated as little more than a thinly veiled extension of the navy’s propaganda machine. But over time it took a more independent stance, particularly when naval officials moved too cautiously in their attempts to expand the fleet. Growing assertions from the radical right after 1900 that it should set the pace and tenor of the naval build-up exasperated Tirpitz and his allies. This more bellicose position interfered with their painstaking efforts to shepherd naval bills through the Reichstag, while holding together a fragile parliamentary coalition and trying to minimize British alarm.91

Neither approach, however, fully explains why naval issues in particular became the object of “enormous popular receptivity”92 or “public thunder.”93 More recently, historians have posed a different set of questions that asks how maritime culture interacted with contemporary politics to make seafaring an object of popular enthusiasm and official policy. Jan Rüger’s insightful comparative study of what contemporaries called the “cult of the navy” in Germany and Britain has begun to uncover the cultural framework for Wilhelmine maritime enthusiasm. Echoing Admiral Tirpitz, who described the sea as a “cultural space,” Rüger understands it as a site for a “great naval game” between the two nations, a venue of powerful “naval theater.”94 In particular, he demonstrates how fleet reviews and ship launching ceremonies became highly orchestrated public spectacles in both Germany and Britain. Professional stage management, political pageantry, and the entertaining technological modernity of giant

91 There were five naval bills: 1898, 1900, 1906, 1908, and 1912. Eley, *Reshaping the German Right*, 68-84; and Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, 53-62.
92 Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, 56.
93 Eley, *Reshaping the German Right*, 70.
steel warships illuminated for the first time by bright electric spotlights contributed to the sea’s allure. New media like film and the illustrated popular press captured these public spectacles and reproduced them as accessible objects of visual culture. As part of popular leisure and entertainment, this naval theater proved difficult to control, often resulting in the “intrusion of the masses” against the will of authorities. Ship launchings and fleet reviews reflected local and commercial interests in seaports like Hamburg and Bremen as much as they did nationalist or imperialist agendas. The naval theater, therefore, was not simply the product of “manipulative” government propaganda or “self-mobilizing” right-wing associations. Instead, it was also a cultural “arena in which power was in flux” driven by diverse actors, “local and national, official and private, commercial and governmental.”

In summary, popular enthusiasm for seafaring in Germany grew out of a broader cultural turn toward the sea that emerged during the nineteenth century and accelerated towards its end. After the developments of the 1880s and 1890s, however, the sea was no longer simply a reflection of romanticist culture; it became a preeminent and contested “theater” for national politics. Imperialism and naval enthusiasm were essential in politicizing the meanings of “overseas” and seafaring, but they shared the stage with far more mundane elements of experiences and meanings of maritime culture. Germans encountered the sea in numerous ways: through adventure literature, newspapers, postage stamps, travel and tourism, advertising, naval propaganda, regattas, and ship launching ceremonies. Wilhelmine Germany thus had a multifaceted relationship with the maritime world. Although Germans began to re-imagine the sea as a means to Weltmacht, that

96 Ibid., 139.
vision remained rather vague. The Handelsmarine voyaged within this conceptual space alongside the Kriegsmarine as a symbol of modernity, nation, and empire in an increasingly interconnected world.

2.3 Politics, Memory, and the “New Hansa”

The politicization of seafaring in the German Empire unfolded through the historical metaphor of the medieval Hansa. Kaiser Wilhelm II’s invocation of a “new Hansa” in 1901 was actually the capstone of a century during which poets, architects, historians, and statesmen had discovered a usable past in the old trading confederation. While this process of selective remembering (and forgetting) of medieval history encompassed a variety of disparate political, as well as social, economic, and cultural projects, it became entangled, above all, in questions of German national identity. After historians began to study the Hanseatic League in the early nineteenth century, German liberals and nationalists found the perfect model for a commercially and politically unified nation in the “German Hansa.” Although the medieval Hansa became a contested site for national memory, it was constructed upon local, coastal memories of the past.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the martial aspects of the “German Hansa,” but the concept never lost its commercial and economic meanings, even at the height of Flottenpolitik. Different actors highlighted civil, military, or both meanings of the term, depending on their particular aims or perspectives. In general, however, invoking the

Hansa remained tied to a broader vision of German presence and power at sea, both commercial and military. Indeed, a clearly demarcated line between these two aspects of seafaring emerged only as the functional differentiation between merchant and naval seafaring began to take hold in the early nineteenth century. Because the medieval Hanse Kogge, a trading vessel, was also armed and participated in sea battles, nineteenth century Germans could read it as a predecessor of both imposing passenger liners and powerful battleships. Wilhelmine Germans did distinguish between the Kriegsmarine and the Handelsmarine, but they understood the Hansa as the forerunner of both.

Recent scholarship on collective memory has focused on how social groups—from villages and associations to nations and world religions—symbolically construct “their” pasts and appropriate them for political purposes. The basic assumption behind this line of inquiry is that the collective memory of the social group in question is greater than the sum of the individual memories that constitute the group. A major set of questions within this literature, therefore, relates to how collective memories of the past are transmitted among members of the group and to succeeding generations. Scholars emphasize a variety of transmission paths for memory, including rituals and ceremonies (Maurice Halbwachs), bodily practices (Paul Connerton), physical spaces or “sites” (Pierre Nora), and, for the modern period, commercial and mass media (Alon Confino).

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98 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 405.
These observations have led to the exploration of national memory. The production and reproduction of a shared past is an integral part of cultural nation-building, related to what Eric Hobsbaum called the “invention of tradition.” In order to constitute themselves as “imagined communities,” nations require some sort of common understanding about their collective past, a unifying tale of origins that also bears upon conceptions of their present and future. Nations, however, are always also conglomerations of social, cultural, and political groups, each with their own collective memories that diverge along boundaries of class, gender, religion, and ideology. The construction of national memory is thus a deeply political, always contested process about “who wants whom to remember what.” Various social groups compete to define their version of national memory as the version of national memory. Dominant social groups are therefore in a powerful position to define how nations remember their pasts, but they do not do so in a political vacuum.

Nineteenth-century middle-class Germans had selective memories when it came to remembering the Hansa as part of the nation’s past. The actual Hanseatic League never constituted a nation, a people, or even a political entity. Instead it was a loosely affiliated trading federation of independent city states along the Baltic and North Seas. If anything, it was supranational involving cities within the borders of Sweden and the

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Netherlands, among others modern states. Indeed, identifying precisely who belonged
to the League continues to be a matter of controversy among medieval historians, and
estimates of its maximum membership range from seventy to over two-hundred cites.
The word “Hansa” itself originally meant “band” (Schar) or “community”
(Gemeinschaft). From the twelfth century, it acquired a narrower definition as a
“community of traveling merchants,” although it also could refer to the dues required for
membership in such mercantile groups. The problem of periodization is also vexing.
Current scholarship provides no clear answer on precisely when the Hansa began,
although most historians agree that it emerged sometime during the late thirteenth or
early fourteenth centuries. Scholars are more unified on an end date for the federation.
The Hansa barely survived the chaos of the Thirty Years War, reduced to a loose care-
taker alliance among Lübeck, Hamburg, and Bremen in 1630 (this is the major reason
that these three cities became known as “Hanseatic” in the nineteenth century). After the
last Hansetag took place in Lübeck in 1669, the confederation slipped largely into
oblivion.  

Around 1800 Germans “rediscovered” the medieval Hansa. The upheavals of the
French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Eras intersected with the era’s growing romantic
preoccupation with the past to revive interest in the old seafaring federation. The
political uses of the Hansa’s memory during this period took a variety of forms, which
nonetheless remained relatively confined to the tensions between local identity and Great
Power conflicts. The city-states of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck found it useful to
invoke medieval independence in defending their sovereignty and trading rights during

Bracker, Volker Henn, and Rainer Postel (Lübeck: Schmidt Römhild, 1999), 14-23.
the wars that ravaged Europe from 1792 to 1815.\textsuperscript{107} During the French occupation, Napoleonic officials similarly found it useful to invoke the Hansa in its attempts to bring order to the north German ports.\textsuperscript{108} Likewise, during the Wars of Liberation, local patriots invoked the name of the Hansa in their regiments that marched against Napoleon’s forces.\textsuperscript{109} And at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, representatives from the three “Hanseatic” cities again invoked their medieval pasts to convince Prussia, Austria, and Britain that they should retain their sovereignty.\textsuperscript{110}

In contrast, during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, German liberals and nationalists began to appropriate the medieval Hansa as a site for national memory. The 1848 revolutions and their disappointing aftermath mark a particularly important moment in this process of selective remembering and forgetting. Liberals from northern Germany were the most vocal advocates of the Hansa as a venerable part of German tradition, but they were not alone. The construction of a “German Hansa” crossed regional divides, finding supporters both along the coasts and far inland. Middle-class liberals from a variety of regions commemorated the Hansa in history books, literature, poetry, art, and architecture. They discovered an ideal Bürgertum in the Hansa, a constitutional model which they contrasted with the resurgent Vormärz absolutism in


\textsuperscript{108} When the region was absorbed into the French Empire in 1810, French authorities were the first ever to used the designation “ville libre et hanséatique” [“Free and Hanseatic City”], which many northern German ports still used today. See Postel, “Die Wiederentdeckung der Hanse,” 237-38.

\textsuperscript{109} When French forces withdrew from Lübeck and Hamburg during the spring of 1813, local patriots formed the “Hanseatic Legion.” Although the Legion operated under British financing and Russian command, it was made up of Lübecker and Hamburger volunteers from the ranks of the Bürgertum, as well as from artisan and laboring families. After Napoleon’s return in 1815 Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck once again mobilized for war, this time in a “Hanseatic Brigade.” See Alexandra Ortmann, “‘…mit den Tugenden eines echten Hanseaten.' Zur Konstruktion einer Identität um 1900,” M.A. thesis, Georg-August University Göttingen, 2005, 24-27, 50-52.

Central Europe, and a free-trade ideal that suited their self-image as champions of industry. They reformulated older ideas about Hanseatic cosmopolitanism into a globally-conscious German nationalism. As Volker Henn observed, this mid-century admixture of German national consciousness and hanseatic civic pride showed “how much the Hansa theme accommodated the self-conception of a liberally and, especially, national liberally-minded Bildungsbürgertum, who saw themselves as the cultural elite, as defenders of a superior civilization, and inasmuch the real German people.”

During the 1840s and 1850s, the Hansa thus evolved into a politically charged symbol of constitutional, republican, or even radical democratic traditions. Its appeal remained largely confined to groups that were unhappy with the neo-absolutist consensus that had emerged after 1815. For these mid-century radicals, the Hansa was a symbol of commercial and national might through seafaring. Revolutionary poet, literary scholar, and journalist Georg Herwegh formulated one of the earliest call for a German commercial fleet based on the historical model of the “German Hansa.” Herwegh, born the son of an innkeeper in Stuttgart, remained active in radical German politics throughout his life. His poem, “Die deutsche Flotte. Eine Mahnung an das deutsche Volk,” delivered to an 1841 meeting of the Hanseatic League Foundation, was a poetic appeal for a world-class German merchant fleet:

Awake, my people, with a new awareness,
Look into Fate’s golden book,
Read from the stars the following message:

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111 Henn, “Wege und Irrwege,” 397.
112 Herwegh spent time in Paris during the 1840s, moving in the same radical exile circles as Karl Marx and becoming president of the German Democratic Legion, an association of German exiles and artisans that participated in the revolutions of 1848. In the 1860s he became an important figure in the coalescing political world of German socialism and has been celebrated posthumously as a hero of early working-class literature. See Michail Krausnack, Die eiserne Lerche. Die Lebensgeschichte des Georg Herwegh (Weinheim: Beltz und Gelberg, 1993); Ulrich Enzensberger, Herwegh. Ein Heldenleben (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1999).
You have a world to win!
Awake, my people, call your daughters to spin!
We need German linen once more
For German sailing cloth

Away with cowardly servile manners
Break free from the shell of Heimat
Go forth boldly in the world
So that it becomes your own!
You are the shepherd of the great herd of peoples,
You are mankind’s great hope,
So throw out your anchor!

Pluck the fruit of the world from swaying decks
It’s yours for the taking
When the salt first wets your rudder
Your goal is finally met.\(^{113}\)

Like Herwegh, Hamburg Professor Christian Friedrich Wurm emphasized national economy in his understanding of Hanseatic history. In an opening lecture to the 1847 Assembly of Germanists at Lübeck, Wurm expounded upon “the national element in the history of the German Hansa,” comparing the medieval trading confederation favorably to the contemporary Zollverein.\(^{114}\)

In the wake of the 1848 Revolutions, liberal nationalist discourse on the “German Hansa” also took on martial overtones. Organizations tied to the Frankfurt Parliament organized Germany’s first navy in 1848. These revolutionaries named the flagship of the tiny navy they built the “Hansa.”\(^{115}\) Their martial reading of the medieval past echoed into the 1850s and 1860s, although commercial connotations remained. Friedrich Wilhelm Barthold, whose popular two-volume history, Die Geschichte der deutschen Hanse (three editions: 1853/54, 1862, and 1909), opened his first volume proclaiming

\(^{113}\) Georg Herwegh, Die deutsche Flotte. Eine Mahnung an das deutsche Volk (Zürich & Winterthur: Verlag des Literarischen Comptoirs, 1841).
\(^{114}\) Quoted in Ortmann, “…”mit den Tugenden eines echten Hanseaten,” 27.
that “as long as there was a powerful German Hansa, there was also a formidable German sea-power.” Commercial law expert and Danzig native Levin Goldschmidt also used Hanseatic history as the basis for his 1862 call for a unified German navy.

Mid-century popular literature also took up the medieval Hansa as its subject. Between 1840 and 1870 the most celebrated literary representation of the Hansa revolved around the story of the sixteenth-century Protestant mayor of Lübeck, Jürgen Wullenwever: In the early 1500s, Dutch merchant ships had expanded into the Baltic Sea with the permission of the Danish crown, who controlled the passage around Jutland. The Dutch presence threatened the livelihoods of Hansa merchants, particularly those from Lübeck. When the Danish king refused their demands to deny Dutch ships access to the Baltic, Bürgermeister Wullenwever, a popular political figure and staunch supporter of Martin Luther, initiated a policy of privateering in hopes of driving them out. For many German nationalist writers and playwrights, Wullenwever, the popular mayor who challenged a king on the high seas, became a hero and Leitmotiv for the revolutions of 1848. Poet, forty-eighter, and kleindeutsch supporter Emanuel Geibel, viewed Wullenwever as Germany’s “hope” for the future—a patriot who upheld German trading prowess on the sea. Successive writers embellished Geibels’ vision of Wullenwever, interpreting him as a man of the people, a “democrat” who fought for Germany and the Hansa.

Politicizing the Hansa in the name of German unity went hand in hand with historicizing the subject. While the League’s first modern historian, Georg Friedrich

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Sartorius, emphasized its adherence to universal Enlightenment principles, later historians increasingly interpreted it as a historical precursor for a unified German nation state.\(^{119}\) Sartorius’s chosen successor, Hamburg state archivist Johann Martin Lappenberg, freighted the medieval Hansa with a mixture of local, liberal Bürgerstolz and German nationalist sentiments. Over the next half-century Lappenberg became the most influential expert on Hansa history. Other scholarly and popular works of Hansa history followed his lead, emphasizing the Germanness of the Hansa.\(^{120}\) In 1859 Lappenberg found an institutional home for Hansa history with the Historical Commission at the Royal Bavarian Academy of Science. He convinced the Commission to fund a series of primary source collections that he planned to edit. This Bavarian connection makes clear that Hansa history had a wide appeal among intellectuals beyond the confines of the coasts.

The founding of the Hansische Geschichtsverein (HGV) in May 1870 solidified the nationalist appropriation of Hansa history. After Johann Lappenberg’s death in 1865, a new group of historians led by Rostock archivist Karl Koppmann established the HGV to continue the publication of Lappenburg’s primary source collections. The association was created as an umbrella group for local historical societies from Hamburg, Bremen, Lübeck, Rostock, and Pomerania.\(^{121}\) The choice of date corresponded to local celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Peace of Stralsund, a classic victory for the Hanseatic League over Denmark. Liberal nationalists quickly came to dominate the HGV’s ranks and it became the “hub” of scholarly study of Hanseatic history. In 1871,

\(^{120}\) Postel, “Die Wiederentdeckung der Hanse,” 241-42
\(^{121}\) Henn, “Wege und Irrwege,” 399-401.
the association began publishing the *Hanseatische Geschichtsblätter*, which remains to this day the most important forum for research on the Hansa. After the mid-1880s, growing public interest in seafaring opened the floodgates for academic and popular histories on the Hansa. These works confirmed the prominent place of the medieval Hanseatic League within the narrative of German national history.122

Politics intersected with Hansa history again during the Wilhelmine period. Dietrich Schäfer, the era’s foremost authority on the League’s history, devoted his work to the promotion of radical nationalist and imperialist causes. Schäfer belonged to the group of historians whose careers matured around 1900, and who saw themselves as “heralds of policy.”123 For him, the Hansa was no simple trading federation; instead it was “medieval Germany on the seas,” worthy of national honor.124 He became convinced that his task was to “bring into the present” (*vergegenwärtigen*) the “lessons” of Hansa history. Navalism and imperialism were the two major lessons he hoped to teach the public through the history of the Hansa. He tirelessly promoted the cause of naval build-up through public lectures, sponsored by the *Aldeutscher Verband* or the *Flottenverein*, on the relationship between national and maritime power.125 After 1903

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123 As a student he had enthusiastically attended nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke’s lectures at Heidelberg and completed his studies under Georg Waatz at Göttingen. Matthew Jeffries, *Contesting the German Empire, 1871-1918* (Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 9.


125 Henn, “Wege und Irrwege,” 402-04; Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, 146.
when Schäffer was elected president of the HGV, he had yet another platform for the promotion of German expansion.

Like his mid-century predecessors, Schäfer also emphasized the economic aspects of the Hansa. He opened an 1885 lecture on the commercial politics of the Hansa with a bellicose plea of support for the Handelsmarine:

> Germany fights for a place on the ocean in the overseas commerce of nations. The conviction is widespread that this constitutes a question of our future existence and that Germans cannot do without power and prestige in international commerce if they intend to claim a place among the leading nations of the world.\(^{126}\)

The lecture also made clear the “lesson” of the Hansa’s failure: economic greatness among the peoples of the world could only be won through the political power of a strong, unified German nation, that is, through a powerful navy.\(^{127}\) Images from the merchant marine figure prominently in Schäfer’s popular illustrated history, *Die deutsche Hanse* (1903). The book’s last chapter, which suggested continuities between the Hanse and the Wilhelmine seafaring, depicted two modern commercial steamers—the first German transatlantic postal steamer and a grand luxury liner—rather than warships.

Schäfer also interwove national and local identities in his narrative of the “German Hansa.” He concluded that the Hansa was a “forbearer” of the nation that had “brilliantly represented the German people and German labor at sea.” His work depicted a bright future for modern Germany based on its incorporation of the “economic, moral, and martial powers of the urban and rural populations of our coastal regions” within the framework of the Reich. It lauded the combination of the coastal “spirit of enterprise”


\(^{127}\) Ibid., 24, 32.
with the power of the new German state, claiming that this would allow Germany to exceed the accomplishments of its Hanseatic forbearers.\textsuperscript{128}

Schäfer used his position as president of the HGV to push the association toward a broader focus on German maritime history. Although the executive board rejected his proposal to change its name to the \textit{Verein für deutsche Seegeschichte}, it nonetheless approved the publication of a new series he had promoted entitled “Essays in Commercial and Sea History.”\textsuperscript{129} One of Schäfer’s doctoral students, Walther Vogel, set out to write a comprehensive history of German seafaring. The First World War, however, cut short Vogel’s planned multivolume project. He barely managed to finish the first volume before heading off to fight at the front.\textsuperscript{130}

As the medieval Hansa evolved into a prominent subject for professional historians in Wilhelmine Germany, it also became an essential part of primary and secondary school curriculum. As early as the 1880s, schools in places as far from the coast as Württemberg were already teaching the history of the medieval Hansa as a reflection of contemporary Germany’s overseas expansion.\textsuperscript{131} One of the most prominent changes in school history textbooks in Imperial Germany involved a shift in regional emphasis from south to north. Texts from earlier in the century had emphasized the medieval imperial cities of the south as urban reflections of pre-industrial social harmony. After 1890 they increasingly focused on the northern cities of the Hansa, not only as model urban centers, but also and more importantly as representatives of

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\textsuperscript{128} Schäfer, \textit{Die deutsche Hanse}, 134-36.
\textsuperscript{129} Henn, “Wege und Irrwege,” 403.
\textsuperscript{130} Walther Vogel, \textit{Geschichte der deutschen Seeschifffahrt}, vol. 1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1915); a condensed version of Vogel’s planned multivolume history of German seafaring appeared in 1949 as a single volume edited by Günter Schmölders and published posthumously. See Vogel, \textit{Die Deutschen als Seefahrer}.
\textsuperscript{131} Confino, \textit{The Nation as a Local Metaphor}, 47.
\end{flushleft}
Germany’s *Seegeltung* and *Welthandel*. Many textbooks began to devote entire chapters to the history of the Hansa. In doing so, they frequently ignored historical facts, presenting instead a distorted image of the trading federation as a political entity with a clear governing organization and navy. Accompanying pedagogical materials instructed teachers to connect lessons about the Hansa to contemporary issues. They suggested that classroom discussion should involve contemporary issues like the naval build-up and world commerce. The image of an armed merchant seafarer was one of the most common Wilhelmine textbook images of the Hansa, capturing the dual sense of commercial and military seafaring. This figure of the German merchant could “hold his head up high with a sword or long knife at his side and his merchant’s belt … Foreigners noticed him, but they knew that in a moment of distress, the entire power of his league stood behind him.”  

The Hansa also became the subject of local and national commemoration. In coastal architecture it served as the inspiration for a “Hanseatic vernacular” that blended elements of *Heimat* with a bourgeois modernist agenda. Hanseatic revival architecture featured the Northern German “red-brick Gothic” that was most closely associated with the flowering of the Hanseatic League. Architects used it for Hamburg’s new warehouse district during the major port overhaul of 1888, and it remained a staple of bourgeois buildings, both public and private, throughout the Wilhelmine period. Symbolically, the Hanseatic vernacular evoked Hamburg’s and Bremen’s claims to be Germany’s gateways to the world. Lübeck also received recognition, but more for its

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historical role as the site of the Hanseatic League’s annual meetings than for its contemporary commercial prowess. As self-appointed heirs of the maritime power of the Hansa, these “Free and Hanseatic Cities” erected monuments in its honor such as Arthur Bock’s statue in front of the Hanseatic High Court in Hamburg. The statue celebrates the three cities’ role in maritime commerce through a triad of female figures situated in relation to a merchant ship.\textsuperscript{134}

Middle-class Hamburger also memorialized the Hansa in new projects to preserve the city’s architectural history during the major urban renewal projects of the 1880s and 1890s. The gradual demolition of St. Catherine’s parish—the heart of the old medieval port during the harbor reconstruction—and slum-clearing after the cholera outbreak of 1892, evoked particular concern for the past. In 1885, Justus Brinkmann, a leader in the local Denkmalpflege movement began a project to record the disappearing traces of the city’s architectural history. His “Collection of Sources for Hamburg’s Architectural History” was housed at Hamburg’s Museum for Art and Industry. Brinkmann’s acts of preservation were part of urban middle-class sensibility whereby “[c]ollecting the past could be a hobby, a mission, or a business; in all three forms it was an effort to extend custodianship over the objects and narratives of local history.”\textsuperscript{135}

The memory of the Hanseatic League was also part of the post-unification construction of local identity in Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck. Through veterans’ and students’ associations, as well as memoirs and literature, coastal urban-dwellers constructed a distinct Hanseatic identity—which was Protestant, middle-class, and masculine—based on their affiliation with the medieval trading federation. They most

\textsuperscript{134} Umbach, \textit{German Cities}, 42, 68-69, 131.
associated the modern figure of the “Hanseaten” with the medieval merchant or seaman. His core characteristics included daring, perseverance, a sense of duty, industry, tenacity, social ambition, as well as modesty, levelheadedness, far-sightedness, and a lack of prejudice.\footnote{Ortmann, “‘... mit der Tugenden eines Hanseaten,’” 77-82.} As Jennifer Jenkins and others have shown, Hanseatic identities in Imperial Germany revolved around an urban, modernist idiom of Heimat, distinct from the anti-urban connotations associated with the mid-nineteenth century musings of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl or leading National Socialists’ more ominous “blood and soil” vision.\footnote{Jenkins, \textit{Provincial Modernity}, 146-76; Umbach, \textit{German Cities}, 64-88.}

Among local identities in Germany, the Hanseatic variant was uniquely suited as a symbol for the project of global expansion in the name of the nation. As inland Württemberger Georg Herweg had done in the 1840s, middle-class nationalists from all over the Empire invoked the memory of the Hansa as a symbol of Germany’s prowess in the world. Inland cities like industrial Cologne scrambled to emphasize their historic participation in the Hanseatic League. Gustav Stresemann exemplified the national memory of the Hansa that developed among geographically diverse bourgeois liberals. In his 1907 speech Stresemann found a lesson against particularism and disunity in Hansa history:

\begin{quote}
The might of our Hansa cities was a ray of hope: in that age when our internal divisions were a laughing stock among foreigners, we were still dominant at sea. On the one side Venice was queen of the Adriatic, while on the other side our sea trading cities were the queens of the North and Baltic Seas.
\end{quote}

Stresemann rejected the notion that seafaring was just a coastal concern, proclaiming instead that “our sea cities” over which “the Hansa flag once waved and still waves” had carried out “world trade” in a time “before [our] household and territorial economies had developed into world economies, before trade, industry, and transport had flowed
together as they do today.” Others echoed Stresemann’s formulation. In his speech, “Schwabia and the Sea,” Otto Güntter, director of the Schiller Museum in Marbach, noted the growing appreciation for the merchant marine in “the German Reich and all its parts.” He claimed that this “immense national treasure on the oceans” was the fulfillment of local son Georg Herweg’s dream of a new German Hansa. Political scientist Karl Thieß called the merchant marine a “linchpin (Stütze) of the German national economy,” arguing that the Hansa cities had prepared the way for the rapid expansion of the German economy long before unification in 1871.

Liberals associated with the Verein für Socialpolitik (VfSP) also understood the merchant marine as a new Hansa. The VfSP was conceived among left-liberal academics as a response to the growing presence of the socialist worker’s movement in German political life after 1890. Its leading members, particularly sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, had taken note of the growing unrest among seafaring workers, during the massive Hamburg port workers’ strike. In March 1901, Tönnies, along with Werner Sombart, Ernst Francke, Siegfried Heckscher, and others, initiated a major study of German seafaring labor, publishing the results in several volumes over the next two years. The introductory volume cast the sea as “the great highway of world commerce” and seafaring as the primary “instrument” in the “development of a community of production and consumption among all peoples of the earth.” As a “new Hansa,” the introduction

assured its readers, Germany’s merchant fleet would guarantee its place in that
globalizing world.¹⁴²

The VfSP study’s results provided the main topic at the association’s 1903 annual
meeting, which took place in Hamburg. At the meeting, chief editor Ernst Francke
provided an overview of its findings that went beyond sociological analysis. Instead his
remarks imbue the Handelsmarine and merchant mariners with a forceful and expansive
economic nationalism:

Here at the water’s edge [Wasserkante], the gateway to world commerce, lives
and works the population that has grown together with seafaring: Germany’s
future upon the water! Through farsightedness and daring, under genial
leadership, and by their own power, German shipowners have won their awe-
inspiring position and have encircled the globe with a wide-branching network of
routes. Germany’s image in the world is, in part, due to our Handelsflotte. But
none of this would have been possible without the availability of excellent ship’s
crew members: German captains, officers, and sailors enjoy on all the oceans the
best reputation for their able-bodiedness, manly comportment [Manneszucht], and
service. The economic and cultural elevation of our seafaring population is in the
interests of the shipping industry, which, in the growing competition of world
commerce, requires the best ships and the best men.¹⁴³

This formulation reflects Wilhelmine liberals understanding of the “new Hansa” as an
essential part of a new political and economic constellation in which the Handelsmarine
and its male workforce reflected German identity in the world.

2.4 Conclusion

After a century of economic development, cultural imagination, and political
memorialization, the Handelsmarine became a potent national symbol in Wilhelmine

¹⁴² Fitger, Die wirtschaftliche und technische Entwicklung der Seeschifffahrt, 8-9.
¹⁴³ Verhandlungen der Generalversammlung des Vereins für Sozialpolitik über die Lage der in der
Seeschifffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter, Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik, 113 (Leipzig: Duncker und
Humblot, 1904), 43-44.
Germany. Liberal nationalist visions of presence and power on the world stage synthesized ideologies of imperialism and navalism with a powerful economic component embodied in the merchant marine as a “new Hansa.” Around 1900 the German middle-classes became keenly aware that both empire and navy were meaningless propositions without a substantial merchant fleet. These groups therefore actively promoted the merchant marine and its workforce as nationalist symbols. As the following chapters will show, the projection of national identity onto the merchant marine inspired a host of plans and programs to reform seafaring labor. “Hegemonic” bourgeois masculinity provided the yardstick by which reform groups began to measure merchant mariners. Ernst Francke’s call for “the best men” to fill the ranks of the Handelsmarine was indicative of the gendered ideas behind these maritime labor reforms. He was not alone in his conviction that instilling middle-class virtues among merchant sailors was essential to German ambitions in the world.
CHAPTER 3

DOMESTICATING THE GERMAN SEAMAN

In 1885, a series of articles appeared in *Hansa*, the leading trade journal for the German shipping industry. They defined merchant sailors as particularly troubled men and cast their “moral uplift” as an urgent national question. Their author, an “old shipmaster,” compared Germany’s maritime workforce to a medical patient in great danger and in dire need of doctors’ attention. He lamented the rootlessness of seafaring life and the exploitation of sailors by urban waterfront labor procurers, or “Baase” as they were known in coastal Lower German dialects. He claimed that months or years of separation from home weakened the “roots” of sailors’ “moral force,” making them unable to defend themselves against “blood-sucking” Baase. The end result of this sad state of affairs, he argued, would be a gender-less “person” (*Menschen*), who would “collapse when he was most needed,” instead of a reliable “man” (*Mann*). Comparing sailors to unruly children in desperate need of paternal concern, he called upon authorities to act. Only mariners’ reintegration into settled familial relationships, he believed, would be able to prevent their emasculation.¹

These articles exemplify calls to domesticate the “German seaman” around the turn of the twentieth century. Diverse individuals and groups—above all liberal and Protestant middle class reformers—offered suggestions and created initiatives designed

to anchor maritime labor in a model home and familial environment. Failing that, they fashioned plans and programs that aimed to insulate merchant sailors from port-city vice. In doing so, they constructed a masculine ideal that emphasized integration into respectable gender relationships and rootedness along the German coasts. This ideal highlighted married men who had familial ties to the Wasserkante as the best men for Germany’s merchant ships. It ran counter to the economic and demographic realities that were rapidly transforming the maritime labor force. Symbolically, it excluded from seamanhood the majority of mostly young, working-class merchant mariners, for whom setting up a household along the coasts was either impractical or undesirable.

Wilhelmine efforts to create homes for sailors in Germany allow us to see how middle class liberal and Protestant reformers interjected conceptions of domestic masculinity into ongoing transformations within the Handelsmarine. They also demonstrate these groups’ belief that Germany’s “proper place” on the world’s oceans required a respectable and rooted maritime labor force at home.

Visions of domestic manhood departed from domestic womanhood in significant ways. In nineteenth-century Europe, on the one hand, reputable middle-class women were supposed to limit their activities to marriage, motherhood, and the household. Engaging in paid labor was considered a blemish on a reputable woman’s character precisely because it was an inescapable necessity for most working-class women.²

Respectable middle-class men, on the other hand, were expected to establish a household and support it financially. They had the freedom to transcend the boundaries between private family life and the public realms of work and politics, but their status as men depended on being heads of households. In this sense, domestic manhood encompassed the maintenance of a household and the assertion of authority over it. By this standard, men who were not heads of their own households could not claim the autonomy necessary for masculine status. This was an important yardstick that German middle-class reformers used to measure merchant sailors.³

Wilhelmine reform efforts also reflected attempts to respond to maritime labor conditions around 1900. These efforts were underpinned by highly gendered and distinct spatial conceptions of ship, port, and home. Reformers conceived of ships as dislocated homosocial spaces deprived of the heterosocial stability of home. They could do little, however, to change the geographical mobility and long absences of weeks, months, or years that were enduring features of work at sea. It is true that steamship technology, which came to dominate shipping during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, greatly reduced travel time between ports of call. Still, even labor contracts for common workers aboard the fastest German transatlantic liners could last for months. Because liners’ turnaround periods were quick, time for family visits in port was short.⁴


⁴ BA-BL, R 901/75883, Kaiserlich-Deutsche General Konsulat in Genoa to Ausw. Amt, 27 Sept. 1912.
on sailing freighters or tramp steamers entailed even longer periods of separation from home for years at a time. 

Around 1900, ordinary sailors were causal laborers. Workers below the officer ranks were rarely hired as long-term employees, at least in a formal contractual sense; instead labor contracts were signed for the voyage, for a set amount of time, or for “unspecified duration.” Further complicating this picture, seafarers frequently ended their service before the contractually appointed time, either with their captain’s permission or through desertion. Whether or not they completed their contractually bound service, maritime workers tended to move from ship to ship. There was also a high degree of mobility between sea and casual land-based jobs such as dock work. This system of casual labor worked to the economic benefit of shipowners, preserving flexibility in times of economic uncertainty and lowering labor costs.

Informal hiring practices in the merchant marine framed the discontinuous nature of seafaring work. Common sailors often found themselves in port between jobs for weeks or months at a time, particularly during the slow winter months or during economic slumps. For most mariners in large ports like Hamburg or Bremen, this meant that they were jobless and far from home. During these periods, job searches, portside housing, and living expenses became pressing issues. Mariners in-between jobs typically had to visit the offices of Heuerbaase, informal agents upon whom captains and shipping firms relied to hire crewmen. While sailors waited for a “chance” at work, other Baase—

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5 Rather than follow set routes and time stables tramp ships followed profitable cargos from port to port, often not returning to their home ports for a year or more. For a general introduction to the topic of tramp shipping see Robin Craig, *British Tramp Shipping, 1750-1914*, Research in Maritime History 24, ed. Lewis R. Fischer (St. John’s: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2003).

lower-middle class tradesmen who operated waterfront businesses catering specifically to sailors—provided for their room, board, supplies, and entertainment. Not only *Heuerbaase*, but also boarding house proprietors (*Schlafbaase*) and sailors’ outfitters (*Zeugbaase*) stood to profit from mariners’ time in port. In practice, the various economic roles of the *Baase* overlapped in a single person, in a single business, or through partnerships. The inns, taverns, shops, and brothels that filled Germany’s harbor districts set the scene for the portside operation of maritime hiring practices.⁷

German reform narratives cast such urban waterfront districts as a dangerous transition phase between the masculine society of the ship and respectable heterosexual family life at home. Wilhelmine concerns about port city life revolved around unsupervised leisure time and, especially, the relationships among mariners, their dissolute comrades, exploitative *Baase*, and female prostitutes. This gendered reading of waterfront spaces was certainly not limited to Germany. Highlighting a growing transnational consensus on port city vice, Wilhelmine Germans imported the English term “crimp” as a synonym for “*Baas.*”⁸ In condemning the activities of these waterfront businessmen they used the same inflammatory rhetoric, including references to “shanghaiing,” “blood money,” and “white slavery,” which had emerged along the west

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coast of North America during the mid-nineteenth century Gold Rush.⁹ For German reformers, local Baase and their associates represented the same threat as crimps around the world: they stood between the all-male shipboard society and the rootedness of family life.

Reformers were convinced that the changing demographic profile of Germany’s maritime workforce also made matters worse. Urbanization and regional displacement alarmed them. In particular, they grew concerned about the social effects of the decline of Germany’s Baltic ports and the concentration of shipping in the North Sea trading centers of Hamburg and Bremen. This shift, they believed, undermined traditional recruitment patterns, whereby German ships staffed their crews primarily from local, coastal villages and towns. Interior Ministry statistics from the 1870s onward testify to the decimation of maritime employment along the Baltic coast and the corresponding concentration of seafaring labor along the North Sea. In 1871 employment levels were roughly equal between the two regions. During the Imperial period, the Baltic fleet workforce experienced both absolute and relative declines compared to its North Sea counterpart. By 1914, 90% of all personnel in the Handelsmarine worked in the North Sea fleet (Figure 3). More specifically, almost all of the dramatic growth of maritime employment along the North Sea occurred in Hamburg and Bremen. In 1871, the two cities already had the highest share of seafarers, although Baltic ports like Rostock, Stettin, and Danzig were not far behind. On the eve of the First World War, labor

opportunities in Hamburg and Bremen dwarfed those in Baltic cities, accounting for 48% and 30% respectively of Germany’s total maritime labor force (Figure 5).

Of course, knowing where sailors signed on with a ship tells us little about their origins. If birthplace records were kept for the Wilhelmine merchant marine, they have not survived in the historical record. The data we do have for individual regions suggests a growing degree of regional mobility created by the rapid expansion of shipping in the urbanizing centers of Hamburg and Bremen. Records from the Seemannsamt (Seamen’s Office) in Hamburg show that during the most dramatic decades of expansion, between 1890 and 1910, the proportion of local residents employed aboard Hamburg vessels declined vis-à-vis Germans from other regions and foreigners (Figure 4). Although this data does not tell us precisely where the “other Germans” came from—they could have come from other coastal regions—it lends credence to contemporary observations of the rising regional mobility of Germany’s maritime workforce. Records from Bremen also support the idea of increasing regional mobility. In the 1900 census, three-fifths of all Bremen residents who listed ordinary seafarer (including deck, engine-room, and service personnel) as their occupation had been born in Bremen, Bremerhaven, or the neighboring areas of Hanover and Oldenburg. Fully two-fifths, however, were born in other parts of Germany mostly in inland regions. This general pattern for Hamburg and Bremen, however, does not

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10 These figures include only those sailors who had set up their own households, belonged to a parent’s or relative’s household, had rented a room in Bremen or Bremerhaven, or were local lodgers or hospital guests at the time of the census. It did not include unattached workers who were at sea or those that lived in the suburbs outside Bremen’s jurisdiction. Furthermore, they do not reflect the birthplaces of ship officers, who showed a greater tendency to come from Bremen or the surrounding areas. Böhmert, “Die Lage der Seeleute im Wesergebiet,” in Die Lage der in der Seeschifffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter, vol. 2, ed. Ernst Francke, Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik, 104.1 (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1903), 492-93.
Figure 3. Source: *Handbücher für die deutsche Handelsmarine*, 1878-1914.

Figure 4. Source: *Statistik des Seemanns-Amtes zu Hamburg 1890-1910* (Staatsarchiv Hamburg).
Maritime Employment in the German Empire: Major Port Cities, 1871-1914

Figure 5. Source: Handbücher für die deutsche Handelsmarine, 1878-1914.
hold for other port cities. Reports from Stettin, for instance, estimated that around 1900 over three-quarters of crewmen aboard locally based ships came from the city and its immediate surroundings.\textsuperscript{11} Similarly, Flensburg statistics for 1902 show that a large majority of the city’s maritime workforce were local Schleswig-Holsteiners and the most of the rest came from other coastal regions; inlanders made up only a tiny proportion.\textsuperscript{12} Contemporary observations of growing regional mobility among merchant sailors were therefore reliable, although claims that industrial workers from inland cities were the primary group driving these changes are impossible to verify.

Wilhelmine reformers were also convinced that marriage and paternity rates—and with them the social order—among German seafarers were eroding during the late-nineteenth century. Reliable statistics on husbands and fathers in the Handelsmarine are rare for the Wilhelmine period. In 1901 the Seeberufsgenossenschaft commissioned the first major demographic survey of sailors as part of its effort to establish a social insurance fund to cover disability, widows, and orphans in the merchant marine.\textsuperscript{13} The results allow for a rare snapshot of marriage, paternity, and average age rates among Germany’s maritime workers. They paint an overall picture of an overwhelmingly young, unmarried, and childless labor force. Taken as a whole (without regard to rank or occupation), merchant mariners in the Handelsmarine were on average 27.9 years old. Only one quarter of them were married and they had an average paternity rate of less than half a child per man. Differentiation by rank and occupation, however, reveals a


\textsuperscript{12} Tönnies, “Die Ostseehäfen Flensburg, Kiel, Lübeck.” 564-65.

strikingly different picture (Table 1, Figures 6, 7, & 8). These statistics show divergent marriage and paternity rates along the lines of age, rank, and income that stratified the maritime workforce. Significantly, reformers interpreted this data as evidence of the distressing dissolution of the traditional coastal seafaring family.

As Wilhelmine reformers reflected on how best to turn seamen into rooted husbands and fathers they looked for guidance in what they viewed as an untroubled pre-industrial past; a time when family and communal bonds had anchored sailors within a stable pattern of existence along the coasts. Before the mid-nineteenth century, they believed, German mariners had come overwhelmingly from small coastal peasant communities and thrived in a hybrid seafaring and agricultural existence. Earlier generations of German seafarers were supposed to have sailed for much of their adult lives in the company of shipmates from their own villages, towns, or regions. German seafaring, in their view, had been a seasonal and largely European affair, so men had been able to spend more time at home. They had married and left their wives and children to tend a small plot of land while they were at sea. The resulting social stability, reformers believed, had had positive effects on shipboard discipline and social order on land. They held maritime industrialization, urbanization, and the concentration of German shipping in Hamburg and Bremen responsible for eroding this idyllic past. Masses of unruly, proletarianized workers from the interior were supposedly displacing the stable, married seaman-farmer who hailed from the coasts. Young and single inlanders, reformers suggested, were precisely the demographic group upon whom waterfront Baase and their accomplices preyed.

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14 The Seeberufsgenossenschaft categorized its survey results according to a new classification scheme drafted by the Reich government in 1900, which grouped workers at sea along a sliding scale of rank and occupation (Appendix: Figure 4).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Description of Occupations Belonging to Classification</th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Ship Captains (Schiffer)</td>
<td>... of steamships and metal-hulled sailing ships in overseas traffic (&quot;großer Fahrt&quot;)</td>
<td>1,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.a.</td>
<td>... of steamships and metal-hulled sailing ships in overseas traffic (&quot;großer Fahrt&quot;)</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.b.</td>
<td>... of wooden sailing ships in overseas traffic (&quot;großer Fahrt&quot;) and of large coastal steamers</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.c.</td>
<td>... of smaller coastal steamers and sailing ships in regional traffic (&quot;kleiner Fahrt&quot;)</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.d.</td>
<td>... of small coastal craft and barges (&quot;Wattenschiffen, Torfschiffen, Marktschiffen und Seekähnen&quot;)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Deck Officers and Mates</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.a.</td>
<td>First officers of transatlantic passenger steamers</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.b.</td>
<td>Second officers of transatlantic passenger steamers, first officers of passenger steamers in European traffic and of large cargo steamers, as well as doctors, administrators, pursers, and other officers of similar status</td>
<td>1,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.c.</td>
<td>Third officers of transatlantic passenger steamers, second officers of passenger steamers in European traffic and of large cargo steamers, first officers of small cargo steamers and of sailing ships, chief mates and single-mates of steamships. Additionally, senior cooks and senior stewards</td>
<td>1,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.d.</td>
<td>Fourth officers of transatlantic passenger steamers, third officers of passenger steamers in European traffic and of large cargo steamers, second officers of small cargo steamers and of sailing ships, sub-mates, as well as single mates on sailing ships</td>
<td>761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Ship Engineers</td>
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<tr>
<td>III.a.</td>
<td>... in positions for which a Class I. Patent is required</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.b.</td>
<td>... in positions for which a Class II. Patent is required</td>
<td>952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.c.</td>
<td>... in positions for which a Class III. Patent is required</td>
<td>1,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.d.</td>
<td>... in other positions</td>
<td>669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Boatswains, Carpenters, Purser’s Assistants, Engineer’s Assistants, cooks and stewards of middle rank, and other sailors in petty officer positions</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Stokers, Donkeymen, Doctor’s Assistants, and Quartermasters</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Able-Bodied Seamen [Vollmatrosen], Sail Makers, Blacksmiths, Metalworkers, Butchers, Backers, Schlächter, Bäcker, Confectioners, Barbers, and Other Craftsmen</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Coal-Trimmers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Ordinary Seamen [Leichtmatrosen], Half-Men [Halbmänner], Young Men [Jungmänner], as well as Cooks and Stewards of low rank, Cook’s Assistants, Stewardesses, and Other Lower Level Employees</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Ship’s Boys</td>
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<td>2,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>42,952</strong></td>
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</table>

Table 1. Source: Verwaltungsbericht der See-Berufsgenossenschaft sowie der Versicherungsanstalt derselben für das Geschäftsjahr 1902. Hamburg: Persiehl, 1902, 29.
Figure 6. Classification numerals refer to occupations listed in Table 1. Source: Verwaltungsbericht der See-Berufsgenossenschaft sowie der Versicherungsanstalt derselben für das Geschäftsjahr 1902. Hamburg: Persiehl, 1902, 28-32.

Figure 7. Classification numerals refer to occupations listed in Table 1. Source: Verwaltungsbericht der See-Berufsgenossenschaft sowie der Versicherungsanstalt derselben für das Geschäftsjahr 1902. Hamburg: Persiehl, 1902, 28-32.
Figure 8. Classification numerals refer to occupations listed in Table 1. Source: Verwaltungsbericht der See-Berufsgenossenschaft sowie der Versicherungsanstalt derselben für das Geschäftsjahr 1902. Hamburg: Persiehl, 1902, 28-32.
3.1 A Coastal *Heimat* and Sound Family Relations

In the Western literary tradition, the narrative trope of the lone seaman struggling against nature and living apart from society is at least as old as Homer’s *Odyssey* and likely older still.\(^\text{15}\) When nineteenth-century romantics discovered the sea as a literary device, they built upon this long narrative tradition that emphasized the masculinity of the sea and the femininity of society on land. In this way gender provided an essential element in the sea/land dichotomy that structured nineteenth-century European views of seafaring, as well as more recent studies in maritime ethnography.\(^\text{16}\) The specter of gender separation stands out clearly, for example, in Richard Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer*. The ghostly captain of the *Holländer*, “the sea’s barbarous son,” had been condemned to spend eternity sailing the earth’s oceans in the company of his equally ethereal crewmen. In the opera’s first act, he laments to Daland, a Norwegian captain, “I have neither wife nor child, and I’ll never find my *Heimat*”—his home, locality, or place of belonging. The unhappy ghost offers all of his riches if the captain would only give him a “new *Heimat*” and the hand of his daughter, Senta, in marriage.\(^\text{17}\) The story’s dramatic tension arises from the contrast between stable domesticity, embodied by Senta, and the ever-changing sea, in the ghostly form of the *Holländer*’s captain. Wagner’s tragic ending suggests, ultimately, that even a woman’s love could not save the lone seaman from eternal rootlessness. A half-century after Wagner wrote his sea opera, Wilhelmine reformers constructed their own narratives of maritime labor using a


\(^{16}\) Heimerdinger, *Der Seemann*, 77-81.

\(^{17}\) Richard Wagner, *Der fliegende Holländer*. 
similarly gendered constellation that contrasted *Heimat* and the sea. However, their outlook was far more hopeful than Wagner’s tragedy. They believed they could reconcile the German seaman to home and family.

Over the past three decades, *Heimat* has become a key analytical concept in modern German history. The term is difficult to render precisely in English, although its historically contingent meanings tend to fall in the spaces between “home” and “homeland.” It is essentially about place and belonging. Much recent scholarship has focused on the concept’s role in mediating tensions among German local, regional, and national identities. Celia Applegate and Alon Confino, among others, have shown how *Heimat* culture—local history, museums, monuments, traditions, landscapes, and townscapes—reconciled diverse local identities with an emerging German national identity in the Imperial period.¹⁸ These spatial identities of *Heimat* were also interwoven with highly gendered connotations of emotional attachment to home and family. Confino suggests that the term is closely associated with wife, child, and family and that men do not appear as a key symbol.¹⁹ This proposition makes a certain amount of sense—women are frequently represented as the bearers of *Heimat* in the same way that they appear as bearers of the domestic. Still, it leaves unexplored the conceptual relationships between masculinity and *Heimat*.


At the end of the nineteenth century, *Heimat* and family became key concepts in German debates over maritime labor. In 1903 Karl Thieß, who was a political theorist and regional director for the Hamburg-America Line, wrote that the best men for the *Handelsmarine* would hail from a “rural *Heimat*” along Germany’s coasts and have “sound family relations.” Thieß’s formulation captured a general sense among many Wilhelmine social reformers that stabilizing place and gender was essential in order to produce the right men for the job. Applying their own bourgeois conceptions of masculinity, they defined seafaring manhood in a way that connected work at sea with domestic life in a coastal *Heimat*; in order to be good workers, sailors also had to be stable husbands and fathers.

Rising concerns about the regional background of mariners reflected a growing sense that modern forms of urban mass mobility had displaced the German seaman from his proper coastal environment. A stark divide between coastal dwellers and inlanders pervades German discourse on the subject. This view was a variation of the discomfort many Germans felt about the unprecedented internal and external migrations resulting from nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization in Central Europe. It should thus come as no surprise that the national, as well as the local, press echoed concerns about transient merchant mariners. In 1884, the *Deutschen Volkswirtschaftlichen Correspondenz* warned of the immanent disappearance of the “seafaring population of the German coastal regions.” The nationally-circulating newspaper—which had ties to German industry—blamed this supposed decline on maritime industrialization,

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21 The classic study is Klaus Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft* (Meisenheim: Anton Hain, 1970).
emigration, and Germans who worked for higher pay on American or British ships.

Citing a “well-known complaint of old seafarers [i.e., ship captains]” as its source, the article contended that “the old race [Geschlecht] of able-bodied, weather-hard seamen, who had grown up on sailing ships, was gradually dying out.” Evoking a tribal view of Germany’s past, it posited the existence of a “good Stamm” of German sailors from “old stock” along the coasts. Germany, it argued, had a vital interest in preserving this Stamm by giving it “new roots” and “new blood.”

In a similar vein, during the early 1890s in Hamburg, a debate broke out over the best ways to maintain the German maritime labor force. Editorials warned of the immanent “decline of the seafaring population,” again blaming industrialization and labor mobility. Many expressed fears that rising wages among land industries had drawn potential seamen away from the coasts forcing ship owners to hire “elements who can make little or no claim to seamanship.” The only “real seamen” were those who had grown up among the “seafaring population” of the coasts. One widely-circulated proposal suggested that governments require all vessels to carry a certain number of inexperienced ship’s boys from the local Heimat. Calls for this so-called “ship’s boy dictate” built in the press and among local officials until the powerful Verein Hamburger Reeder, felt the need to weigh in. The shipowners’ association rejected a state mandate for shipping firms to train ship’s boys. This position, however, was less a repudiation of the value of a local, coastal workforce than it was a demand for ship-owner autonomy in hiring practices.

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22 Deutsche Volkswirtschaftliche Correspondenz no. 18, 5 Mar. 1884.
23 Hamburger Nachrichten, no. 80, 3 Apr. 1890; Hamburger Börsenhalle, no. 422, 10 Sept. 1890; see also Hamburger Börsenhalle, no. 88, 21 Feb. 1893
24 Jahresbericht des Verwaltungsrats des Vereins Hamburger Rheder (1892), 7.
Figure 9. “Seaman with Child.” Deutsche Seemannsmission. Seemanns-Kalendar (1897). Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.
The sense that Germany’s “seafaring population” was disappearing was not limited to Hamburg. During the 1890s *Heimat* researchers began to turn their attention to coastal seafaring populations. Richard Wossidlo, in particular, was most influential in opening up maritime labor to ethnographic and folklore scholarship. After abandoning a career as a philologist, Wossidlo taught Greek and Latin at a *Gymnasium* in the provincial Mecklenburg town of Waren. Beginning in 1883, he traveled to villages throughout his home region seeking to capture local dialects, folklore, and history. Departing from well-established philologist traditions that privileged a cannon of written texts as the source of knowledge about a given people, Wossidlo’s methodology emphasized detailed recording of local oral traditions through fieldwork. As his biographer Karl Gratopp noted, the nascent folklorist tuned away from “book learning” to focus on the “soil from which his *Stamm* had arisen.”

He became not only an influential figure in the Mecklenburg *Heimat* movement but also a pioneer of German folklore scholarship. His lecture at the first national conference of the *Vereine für Volkskunde* in 1905, which emphasized technical aspects of ethnographic field work, became one of the most important texts for early German folklore scholars. Wossidlo viewed himself not only as a scholar, but also as a political educator of the *Volk*. For him, folklore scholarship was an important pedagogical tool for politically conservative ends.

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Around 1900 Wossidlo began a two-decades-long project recording the oral traditions of seafarers from small coastal Mecklenburg villages, bringing together *Heimatkunde*, or local knowledge, with maritime labor. Wossidlo’s project on the “seaman’s life” aimed to “keep alive the memories of a world that has disappeared forever.” In particular he focused on those “old seafarers” from coastal towns like Wismar, Dändorf, and Warnemünde who had worked as deck hands on sailing ships between 1850 and 1870. This period, in his view, captured the essence of what it meant to be a German seaman before maritime industrialization. In Wossidlo’s rendering, the seafarer who spoke coastal Plattdeutsch, differentiated himself from the “land rats” of the German interior, learned his trade on sailing ships, and embedded himself in a costal *Heimat*, represented in the “authentic” German seaman.²⁸

Although Richard Wossidlo approached the issue of place and gender in maritime labor from a politically conservative standpoint, the coastal and familial ideal was not limited to the right of the political spectrum. In many ways, liberal social scientists went even further in promoting a coastal *Heimat* and stable family structure. Gustav Schmoller’s left-liberal *Verein für Socialpolitik*’s 1901-03 study of seafaring labor resulted in numerous proposals to domesticate the German seaman. The immediate political context for the association’s “Inquiry into the Situation of Maritime Workers” was the hotly contested reform of German maritime labor laws. The Reichstag passed a revised *Seemannsordnung* (Seafarers’ Law) in 1902 after six years of intense debate. Authorities hoped the new law would counter labor unrest in a rapidly industrializing and expanding merchant fleet, which the Hamburg port-workers’ strike of 1896-97 had put

spectacularly on display. The VfSP opened its study of maritime labor citing not only a
dearth of scholarly research on the subject, but also “developments of extraordinary
significance” over the previous decades in German shipping. According to the
Socialpolitiker, three developments in particular necessitated seafaring labor reforms: the
shift from regional seafaring centered in the Baltic to “world commerce” focused on
Bremen and Hamburg, the concentration of capital in large shipping firms, and the
decline of sailing ship vis-à-vis steamship technology. The inquiry sought to answer a
number of major questions about maritime workers through a series of reports that were
both thematic as well as comparative along regional and national lines.29

Interrelated issues of place and gender stand out as one of the major topics of the
VfSP reports.30 These themes emerge particularly in responses to the study’s questions
about the “moral condition” and “personal relationships” of sailors.31 The consensus at
the VfSP’s conference on maritime labor reflected a nostalgic view of a settled, coastal
past in which married seamen-farmers staffed German merchant ships, an ideal that
industrial modernity threatened to erase:

In the past our best seamen came not only from the coastal population but also
from the ranks of peasants in the coastal hinterland. Today, the connection
between seafaring and agriculture is, in many cases, completely demolished;
where it still exists it is weak. In this way, the element of ordinary sailors that is
solidly rooted in home soil is pushed even more into the background vis-à-vis the
fluctuating masses, as required by the natural consequences of technical
development in seafaring. At the same time, replacements for [officer] positions
are also becoming insecure.32

29 Fitger, Die wirtschaftliche und technische Entwicklung der Seeschifffahrt, iii-xi.
30 They also looked at pay, working conditions, and union activities, among other issues, which I address in
subsequent chapters.
31 Fitger, Die wirtschaftliche und technische Entwicklung der Seeschifffahrt, ix-x.
32 Verhandlungen der Generalversammlung des Vereins für Sozialpolitik über die Lage der in der
Seeschifffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter, 38-39.
According to this view, a pre-industrial ideal had allowed sailors to “set up a family and a small domestic household in the [rural, coastal] Heimat.”

The *Wasserkante* had indeed declined in importance as a recruitment site for German maritime labor. Until the end of the eighteenth century, seafaring along the Baltic and North Seas drew almost exclusively from coastal populations. It was, moreover, largely a seasonal endeavor based on the religious calendar. Traditionally, ships wintered in port and their crewmen spent the months between Martinmas (November 11) and St. Peter’s Day (February 22) at home with their families. In many cases, this seasonal pattern of maritime work allowed men from the coasts to supplement family earnings from a small plot of land, which would have been tended by wives or other family members in their absence. During the nineteenth century, the seasonal pattern began to break down as German merchants and ship owners sought to economize time and resources to profit from longer and further voyages overseas. As the century came to a close, new maritime technologies accelerated the shift away from seasonal, coastal seafaring. With sparse statistical evidence, observers inside and outside the VfSP insisted that ongoing changes within the merchant marine favored the “fluctuating masses” from inland areas. The terms “coastal” and “inlander,” however, remained rather vaguely defined. The city of Hannover, for instance, which lies over one-hundred miles from the North Sea coast, could have counted as “coastal” because the province of Hannover had a coast line.

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33 Thieß, “Die Seeschifffahrt in ihren Beziehungen zur bäuerlichen Bevölkerung in Deutschland,” 287.
Germany’s *Socialpolitiker* went beyond sociological analysis of these structural changes and interpreted them in ways that created a two-part dichotomy through which they evaluated seafaring manhood. The key criteria were regional origin (coastal vs. inland) and marital status (married vs. single). In general the association’s reports assumed not only that growing up around seafaring made coastal boys into better recruits, but also that maritime ability depended on family heritage. Belonging to Germany’s ancient coastal “tribes” (*Stämme*) or inheriting a more amorphous coastal “inclination to the sea” appeared as measures of quality among seamen.\(^{36}\) The reports also emphasized married life as a guardian of coastal heritage: a “good basis” for reliable workers or a bond of stability holding “thoroughly solid” seaman into place.\(^{37}\) They represented fishing villages or small towns in the coastal hinterland as the ideal spaces for the “German seaman” and as reproducers of a traditional seafaring *Standesbewustsein* (corporate identity) rather than a proletarian *Klassenbewustsein* (class consciousness).\(^{38}\) The lack of coastal and familial rootedness thus appeared as a cause for class consciousness and labor unrest, particularly among the industrialized engine-room personnel: “One finds among them former masons, butchers and factory workers … a mish-mash [*bunt zusammengewürfelt*] society.” Engine-room stokers and trimmers, they argued, “live in the [socialist] conceptual world that rules among factory workers on land,” constituting the “actual herd of discontent” among seafaring workers.\(^{39}\) For the *Socialpolitiker*, who compared with shipowners had conciliatory views of union

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organization, *Heimat* and marriage seemed to provide the perfect bulwarks against revolutionary forms of socialist or labor politics.

In contrast to married seaman from the coasts, the reports took the view that “the great stream of young people from inland areas” filled with personal failures flowed into Germany’s larger port cities. These “inlanders” included boys and men who had failed in their schooling or careers, those with disciplinary problems at home, and petty criminals.40 Speaking at the VfSP’s annual meeting in 1903, Captain Albert Polis, a Hamburg-America manager, declared that the inlanders that shipping companies were compelled to hire constituted “an inferior and rapidly-fluctuating personnel.”41 Ultimately, the VfSP reports represented unmarried inlanders, who were “as inclined toward drink and licentiousness as any factory worker on land,” as more vulnerable to the port-city seductions of *Baase* and prostitutes than their rooted, married colleagues. Only domestication could prevent sailors from moral and financial ruin.42

Responding to anxieties about the “fluctuating masses” of unmarried inlanders, the *Socialpolitiker* proposed a number of domestication schemes. HAL regional manager Karl Thieß, for instance, argued that steps were necessary to recreate the “special relationship” between seafaring and the coastal peasantry. Rather than rebuilding this “former, preferable, and almost exclusive” relationship along traditional lines, however, he called for new, more active forms of recruitment among coastal peasants. He conceded that seafaring labor in a powerful, industrializing Germany could never again

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41 *Verhandlungen der Generalversammlung des Vereins für Sozialpolitik über die Lage der in der Seeschifffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter*, 46.
be limited to coastal populations. Instead, rooted individuals from the coasts would constitute the core working population of Germany’s merchant marine, resulting in “good economic and moral consequences” for the shipping industry as a whole. In effect, they would be edifying examples for the rest of the workforce to follow. Such a position accommodated the financial realities that shipping companies could not or would not afford breadwinner wages for their entire workforces. Thieß’s practical program, nonetheless, remained rather vague, apart from suggesting that recruitment organizations station agents among the coastal peasantry to procure “capable” men and boys for the seafaring profession.\(^{43}\)

Despite such critiques of urbanization and mass mobility, the VfSP’s reform proposals took a complicated view of modernity. Instead of a wholesale rejection of sweeping changes, they sought to put a rural ideal in service of Germany’s industrial progress and overseas expansion. For the case of Bremen-Bremerhaven, Wilhelm Böhmert advocated a two-pronged domestication program. First, he called for the reintegration of sailors into family life. Acknowledging the difficulties of setting up a household with the meager pay of a common seaman, Böhmert promoted a more active economic role for sailors’ wives. This, he suggested, meant utilizing wives’ labor potential—working from home for those who lived in the city and working in agriculture for those who lived in the countryside. He even called upon shipping firms to hire sailors’ wives as stewardesses before they had children. The second part of his domestication scheme involved attracting “colonists” from Germany’s rural coastal regions to Bremerhaven. East Frisians, Schleswig-Holsteiners, and other coastal folk

\(^{43}\) Thieß, “Die Seeschifffahrt in ihren Beziehungen zur bäuerlichen Bevölkerung in Deutschland,” 288-308.
would constitute the hard core of a reliable seafaring workforce in Germany’s second largest port.

Böhmert was even more imaginative than Thieß in his combination of rural peasant ideals with industrial modernity. As an example of how his colonization scheme would work, he cited a group of stokers and trimmers who worked for North German Lloyd. Most of these men, he noted approvingly, were married and had settled around the marshlands of Wursten, a rural, coastal area in northwest Germany situated between the mouths of the Weser and Elbe Rivers. Because they worked on the firm’s relatively quick transatlantic express steamer lines, he reasoned, they could return home to their families with relative ease, especially during the planting or harvest seasons. The fresh air and healthy activity of farm work, he continued, would help the men recover from the dirty and dangerous labor in the steamship boiler-rooms. He praised NGL’s shore-leave policy for fostering this kind of relationship and dubbed these men the “core” of the company’s engine-room personnel and, quoting a ship engineer, the “best stokers in the world.”

Other Socialpolitiker offered entirely different solutions. Sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies saw questions of gender and place among sailors fundamentally as an issue that required urban, rather than rural, solutions. Tönnies noted that a common maritime worker’s pay simply could not cover the expenses of supporting a family, and that the promotion of domestic relationships would have to begin with wage levels. He also gave, by far, the most positive reading of the “moral effect” of the Seemannsverband. He applauded the socialist union for keeping young seamen away from the bad influences of “superficial comradeship” and other port-city “pleasures” and for providing them with a

sense of collective “honor.”

Siegfried Heckscher, a lawyer and major proponent of Hamburg reform efforts among urban workers, took a similar position. On one hand, he agreed with the general consensus that coastal “seafaring families” and marriage provided the *Handelsmarine* with its “best seamen and its most able-bodied officers.” On the other hand, he had little hope that wage levels for the majority of seafaring workers would ever rise to breadwinner levels. Instead of rural farming, he advocated an urban solution which focused on providing alternatives to dockside bars, boarding houses, and brothels.

German authorities never implemented any sweeping plans to reconstitute a relationship between seafaring labor, marriage, and a coastal *Heimat*. Indeed, the significance of the VfSP proposals lies not in whether they were implemented, but rather in their reflection of middle-class reformers’ ideas about seafaring manhood. Middle-class domestic masculinity similar to that which John Tosh has identified for nineteenth-century Britain played a role in fashioning these ideas about the ideal seaman. Like the middle-class men in Tosh’s study, the *Socialpolitiker* emphasize marriage, self-discipline, hard work, independence, and domestic authority as markers of true masculine status.

Their reports also reflect middle-class paternalism toward the working poor, hence their repeated reference to the “foolish seaman.” Heedless of their own acknowledgement of the tremendous economic difficulties that regular sailors faced in setting up a household, the VfSP reports held to the ideal that the “best men” for the *Handelsmarine* were married and rooted in a coastal *Heimat*.

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Instead of sweeping programs, Wilhelmine authorities used less invasive social insurance legislation to encourage marriage and rootedness among mariners. The public welfare system created during the 1880s and 1890s as part of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s anti-socialist program singled out merchant sailors as a special occupational group. 48 In 1887 the Reichstag passed the Seeunfallversicherungsgesetz (Maritime Workers’ Accident Insurance Law). This legislation initially mandated compensation only for on-the-job injuries. It also created of the Seeberufsgenossenschaft (SBG), a maritime employers’ liability insurance board responsible for managing social insurance programs. The social safety net for German mariners culminated in 1907 with the creation of an Invaliden-, Witwen-, und Waisen Versicherungskasse (Invalids’, Widows’, and Orphans’ Insurance Fund). The SBG had the responsibility of administering the Insurance Fund, popularly known as the Seekasse (Sea Fund), which required matching contributions from maritime employees and employers.

These maritime social insurance schemes institutionalized overlapping hierarchies of race, nationality, and gender in the Handelsmarine. Essentially, they created three categories of seamen: Germans, white non-Germans, and “coloreds” (Farbige). In

48 Even before the landmark social welfare laws of the 1880s, the Seemannsordnung of 1873 had required shipping firms provide sailors with medical care while employed, as well as free return voyages from foreign ports. In 1887 the Reichstag passed the Seeunfallversicherungsgesetz. This legislation initially mandated compensation only for on-the-job injuries. It also created of the Seeberufsgenossenschaft (SBG), an employers’ liability insurance board responsible for managing maritime social insurance programs. Shipowners’ constant efforts to shrink the definition of what counted as an on-the-job injury made clear the limitations of such accident laws. The national Alters- und Invalidenversicherungsgesetz of 1889 sought to widen the social safety net to include old-age and disability pensions, but the new law fell short for sailors, who had extraordinarily high mortality rates and who rarely worked at sea until the mandated retirement age of seventy. For the next decade and a half, the Seeberufsgenossenschaft negotiated with shipowners’ associations and government agencies over how to fix the pension system for sailors. After resolving sharp disagreements over funding, negotiators approved the creation of an Invaliden-, Witwen-, und Waisen-Versicherungskasse, popularly known as the Seekasse, for sailors and their dependents. This disability, widows’ and orphans’ fund was administered by the SBG beginning in January 1907. See Schauseil, Die Invaliden-, Witwen- und Waisen-Versicherungskasse; and Max Schauseil, Zur Geschichte der See-Berufsgenossenschaft. Erinnerungen (Hamburg: Hermann’s Erben, 1925).
theory, white European sailors such as Danes or Britons who served aboard German ships qualified for limited access to social benefits. In practice, however, the lack of family ties to Germany often excluded them from coverage. “Colored” sailors—Asians or Africans—who worked aboard German ships were expressly prohibited from social benefits. Authorities justified their exclusion from the Seekasse in particular on the racialized and sexualized grounds that “polygamy was in their blood.”

For German shipping firms this practice had the added benefit of keeping labor costs low. They employed small but increasing numbers of Asians and Africans for whom they did not have to pay matching insurance contributions.

Among German seafarers, manhood was the essential qualifier for the Seekasse’s benefits. Women who worked as stewardesses or other service personnel in the Wilhelmine Handelsmarine were eligible only for disability coverage. If a woman seafarer died, her husband could not collect compensation and her children could receive benefits only if their father was also deceased. While the Seekasse was designed for men in general, it privileged domestic manhood in particular. Legislators tied the Fund’s disability insurance to coverage for sailors’ widows and orphans. In practice, this meant that all merchant seafarers, whatever their marital or paternal status, paid the same monthly contribution into the Fund. In order for an unmarried, childless sailor to remain eligible for disability benefits, he also had to pay for widows’ and orphans’ coverage. Tellingly, in the event of a seaman’s death, only his widow and legitimate children were eligible for compensation.

49 Max Schauseil, Die See-Unfallversicherung (Hamburg, 1913), 63; quoted in Küttnert, Farbige Seeleute, 105.
50 Küttnert, Farbige Seeleute, 103-06, 155-61.
The Seekasse also privileged men who maintained family ties in Germany and demonstrated commitment to the seafaring profession. Around the turn of the twentieth century, it was not uncommon for German sailors to work aboard foreign vessels and vice versa. In 1909, for example, over six-thousand German citizens (not counting immigrants) worked on United States merchant vessels.\(^{52}\) The Seekasse refused to extend coverage to German seamen who had “turned their backs” on German ships. Those who chose to sign on “under a foreign flag” were eligible for coverage only if they maintained a familial household in Germany. Even in that case they could extend their coverage only for a year while serving aboard foreign ships.\(^{53}\) Although the law did not expressly favor seafarers from the coasts, it did exclude so-called “Überarbeiter,” a nebulous designation for men who worked in steamship boiler rooms allegedly in exchange for transatlantic passage. In practice, this stipulation denied coverage to precisely those groups of migrant workers that the Socialpolitiker had lumped under the designation of “fluctuating masses.” The Seekasse was intended only for “real” seamen who were committed to their profession. Echoing the VfSP’s calls for maritime labor reforms, Max Schauseil, who directed the SBG from 1900 to 1922, declared that the Fund’s ultimate aim was “to secure a steady stock \[fester Stamm\] of reliable and permanent crewmen” for the German merchant marine.\(^{54}\)

In the context of this expanding public welfare system, hiring practices among German shipping firms reflected tensions between profit margins and the belief that domesticated seamen made for better workers. Many of the men who were involved in

\(^{53}\) Schauseil, Die Invaliden-, Witwen- und Waisen-Versicherungskasse, 21.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 25.
the Verein für Socialpolitik’s study were also influential managers in Germany’s largest shipping firms. Karl Thieß and Albert Polis both held major positions with the Hamburg-America Line at the time of the study. Siegfried Heckscher later advanced to the top of the company’s social-political division in 1912. The labor demand created by the massive growth of German shipping between the late 1890s and the outbreak of First World War made it impractical to limit hiring to coastal-dwellers. Likewise, it would have been economically disadvantageous for shipping companies to insist that all of their employees be married, since this would have required them to pay higher wages. On the whole, shipping firms tended to hire single men, particularly for the lower ranks. Only 14% of ordinary crewmen (below the petty-officer ranks)—who accounted for two-thirds of the entire maritime workforce—were married in 1901 (Table 1 & Figure 6).

Still, shipping companies also made clear their hiring preferences for stable husbands and fathers from the coasts. Expectations of stable domestic manhood, which industry insiders like Theiß, Polis, and Heckscher shared, defined hiring practices for two groups in particular: officers and long-term “core” workers. More than half of all officer-level crewmen—captains, deck officers, and ship engineers—were married. For the top-ranked jobs in each of the three officer categories, marriage rates rose to 82% among captains qualified for overseas voyages, 62% among first officers on high-profile transatlantic steamers, and 78% among chief engineers. These high rates were not simply products of age and income; they also reflected cultural expectations for the elite mariners in Germany’s merchant marine. Instructors at Germany’s navigation schools emphasized sexual propriety, with an eye to the requirements of managing modern passenger liners. They advised officer aspirants to leave behind the debauchery of
ordinary sailors for the refined middle-class respectability of a first-class dining saloon aboard a luxury liner.\textsuperscript{55}

Below the officer ranks, Germany’s most prestigious shipping firms sought to create “core” groups of loyal long-term workers. The Hamburg-America Line preferred to recruit its “core crewmen” (\textit{ständiger Mannschaft}) among the “very desirable and able-bodied” men from the rural areas of Mecklenburg and Pomerania, seamen-farmers whose wives worked a small plot of land in their absence.\textsuperscript{56} Company management believed that these married seamen would have a “good influence” on shipboard discipline.\textsuperscript{57} North German Lloyd’s directors took a similar stance, favorably contrasting settled, married seamen, who “live a structured life,” to transient, unmarried seamen, describing the latter as “physically and morally corrupt” and singling them out as suicide-prone.\textsuperscript{58} Indeed, since the late-1880s, major German shipping firms like HAL and NGL had tried to build such “core” groups of faithful employees through new company-controlled employment agencies (\textit{Heuerbüros}). These agencies favored sailors with “legitimation cards” used by firms to identify “reliable” workers, which meant first and foremost political conformity and the avoidance of union activity.\textsuperscript{59} As the attitudes reflected above show, however, gender and regional origin also defined managerial visions of who best fit the definition of reliable employee.

\textsuperscript{55} Schulz, \textit{Im Strom der Gezeiten}, 205-09.
\textsuperscript{56} Thieß, “Die Seeschifffahrt in ihren Beziehungen zur bäuerlichen Bevölkerung in Deutschland,” 293.
\textsuperscript{57} Heckscher, “Die Lage der in der Schifffahrt Hamburgs beschäftigten Arbeiter,” 237.
\textsuperscript{58} Staatsarchiv Bremen (hereafter StAB), 3-S.2.b.4.a. – 303.1, letter from NDL to Senator F.A. Schultz, 7 Apr 1883.
3.2 Land Sharks

Although Wilhelmine reformers valorized coastal husbands and fathers as the best men for the Handelsmarine, the impracticality of recruiting solely from among their ranks moved reform efforts in another direction. In their attempts to domesticate German seamen, they found it far more practical to take action against port city vices. In the decades around 1900 a variety of individuals and groups, ranging from Hanseatic senators and pastors to socialists and union leaders, campaigned to end crimping in German ports. Although these would-be reformers had a variety of motives and agendas, they all agreed that the activities of so-called “land sharks”—Heuerbaase, Schlafbbaase, prostitutes, and their associates—were exploitative and resulted in sailors’ moral and financial ruin. In Germany, anti-crimping efforts resulted not only in local ordinances, but also national legislation in 1902 and 1910 that curtailed the crimping system in home ports. Although the activities of Baase diminished significantly after 1910, they continued to play a role in waterfront life until the prohibition of informal maritime hiring practices after the First World War.⁶⁰

More than any other, Hamburg’s waterfront district of St. Pauli came to symbolize the dangers that land sharks posed to mariners. Long a site for popular entertainment, the area experienced the dramatic growth of theaters, cinemas, beer halls,

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and brothels after Hamburg’s new port opened in 1888. Its main drags such as the
Reeperbahn and public squares like the Spielbudenplatz emerged as enduring symbols of
limitless pleasure or perilous debauchery, depending on one’s perspective. Although the
area already had a reputation as a red-light district, Hamburg’s 1876 prostitution reforms
concentrated sex work along a number of its thoroughfares. Contemporary sources
referred to the area as a “society of sailors and prostitutes.”

St. Pauli thus became
Germany’s archetypal “sailortown”—an urban area marked economically, socially, and
culturally by the presence of maritime workers. It was also home to Hamburg’s Baase.
Johannes Meyer’s popular 1891 history of St. Pauli located the “empire of Schlafbaase”
along the streets surrounding the Spielbudenplatz. Wilhelmine travel guides reinforced
the association between St. Pauli, sailors, and debauchery. Evoking eroticism from a safe
distance, Baedeker’s 1913 guide to Hamburg told middle-class travelers that the district
was the “showplace of the sailors’ life.”

In Wilhelmine narratives of port-city life, Baase and prostitutes in areas like St.
Pauli preyed upon pleasure-starved sailors luring them with alcohol and sex to steal their
hard-earned pay. As the “old shipmaster” complained in the 1885 Hansa articles, “[the
seaman aboard ship] is left to socialize wholly and completely with a few shipmates; it is
thus only natural that the harbor, with its pleasures and delights, appears to him as a
paradise.”

Alfred Tetens, long-serving head of the Hamburg Seemannsamt, echoed

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61 Jörg Haspel, “Vergnügungsviertel St. Pauli. Ich höre noch das heitre, lang hingezogene Hoih der
62 Isaac Land, “The Humours of Sailortown: Atlantic History Meets Subculture Theory,” in City Limits:
Interdisciplinary Essays on the Historical European City, eds. Glenn Clark, Judith Owens, and Greg Smith,
63 Johannes Meyer, St. Pauli, wie es leibt und lebt. Ein heiteres culturhistorisches Lebensbild (Hamburg:
64 Koshar, German Travel Cultures, 44-45.
this view in 1890 stating that “after a long voyage full of exertions and privations, the seaman is particularly inclined to let himself go and give himself over to pleasure.” Ferdinand Tönnies was far more direct about the disreputable sexuality hazily referred to in the press as “seduction” or “temptation.” Repeating a familiar formulation, he connected sailors’ portside “sexual debauchery” with their “long depravation” aboard ship, claiming that it reduced their inclination to get engaged or married. He argued that, instead of marriage, sailors often developed a “type of relationship to female prostitutes” who “exploited” these “foolish and childlike” men. These narratives share a common assumption that seafarers were “men apart” who lacked a rooted home and family environment, resulting in their moral and economic debasement as they moved from ship to land.

Crimping lay at the heart of this narrative. By the late nineteenth century, captains’ and shipowners’ reliance upon intermediaries for hiring regular crewmen had become a well-established practice in merchant shipping around the world. Because of the preeminence of British seafaring at the time, the English term “crimp” became a synonym not only for “Baas” but also for the “Jobber” of Chinese and Indian ports, the “Serang” of the Arab world, and the Spanish “enganchador.” Crimping was a complex system, with both local particularities and global interconnections. It had developed in response to the transformation of maritime labor during the nineteenth century. Customarily, captains or ship owners had hired their crews in person, something they had

66 Before the Seemannsordnung of 1872 established a national system of Seemannsämter, this office was locally known as the Wasserschout in Hamburg. The term Wasserschout continued to be applied to Tetens, even into the 1880s and 1890s.
67 Quoted in Gerstenberger and Welke, Vom Wind zum Dampf, 147.
70 Küttner, Farbige Seeleute, 31-34.
to do prior to every voyage.\textsuperscript{71} Over the course of the nineteenth century, changes driven by the expansion of maritime capitalism made unmediated hiring difficult or impractical. The unprecedented growth of world shipping, the economic pressure for faster turnaround times in port, and the growing size of steamship ship crews created profitable opportunities for informal hiring agents. Crimps, who were often former sailors themselves, maintained business ties in the shipping world, kept well-informed of ship arrivals and departures, and extended portside services and credit lines to mariners.\textsuperscript{72}

In Germany, crimping was most common in the bustling North Sea ports of Hamburg and Bremen. Here the growing size of ships, shipping firms, and crews provided opportunities for profit and exploitation. Crimping was far less common in smaller ports, particularly those on the Baltic, and practically unknown in coastal shipping. In 1894, for instance, Hamburg had almost three-hundred registered maritime “placement agents” (\textit{Stellenvermittler}), the legal designation for \textit{Heuerbaase}, but as late as 1903, Flensburg had only three.\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Heuerbaase} made their living most directly from fees that they charged sailors to secure positions aboard merchant ships. In most cases, these hiring middlemen owned or worked closely with a variety of small dockside enterprises, including boarding houses, taverns, sailors’ outfitter shops, or brothels.

Beyond hiring fees, \textit{Baase} found a variety of ways to profit from the time sailors spent in port. One way involved attracting new recruits for the merchant marine. As early as the 1880s \textit{Baase} from the large North Sea ports regularly advertised job

\textsuperscript{71} GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 91 Bd. 2, report from Seemannsamt Geestemünde to Reichskanzler, 31 Jan 1894.
\textsuperscript{73} For the number of Hamburg \textit{Heuerbaase} see Winkens, "Soziale Lage," 275; for Flensburg see Tönnies, “Die Ostseehäfen Flensburg, Kiel, Lübeck,” 533.
procurement, lodging, and outfitting services in inland newspapers. Secondly, they competed for the business of sailors from incoming vessels as soon as they neared land, sending their agents, or “runners,” in small craft to board the ships and advertise their services. Finally, during periods of low demand for seafaring labor, Baase found that they could profit from sailors’ extended stays in port. During such periods, sailors often found themselves in debt to one or more of these waterfront businessmen. As numerous complaints testify, all three of these business strategies could and did become exploitative. The realities of port city life, however, were more complex than nineteenth-century anti-crimping campaigns’ image of abject exploitation would have it. The ties between sailor and crimp were potentially exploitative, but recent studies have emphasized that sailors also benefited economically and emotionally from the relationship. German sailors provide similarly conflicting accounts, condemning crimping’s excesses, while explaining how local Baase helped them fulfill their needs or desires.

74 *Berliner Politischen Nachrichten* no. 211, 11 Sept. 1884.
Figure 10. Willy Stöwer. “Vor dem Kontor eines Heuerbaas in Hamburg” (Outside a Heuerbaas’s Office in Hamburg). *Das Buch für Alle*, no. 9 (1895), p. 225. Private Collection.
Anti-crimping measures were not entirely new in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. The earliest known references to *Heuerbaase* as such appeared in the late-eighteenth century, but these intermediaries evoked little official concern until the 1850s. Even then, the regulations that German states enacted were half-hearted. Moreover, the *Gewerbeordnung* of 1869 overturned all such local regulations. Consequently, by the era of German unification, crimming could be practiced freely along the German-speaking coasts. During the 1870s there were minor examples of anti-crimping sentiments, but no concerted efforts to reform maritime hiring practices appeared until the following decade. A spontaneous protest among Hamburg seamen in 1872 followed the next year by a largely unenforced Hamburg city ordinance barring anyone from boarding merchant ships before they docked remained isolated instances.

After 1880, anti-crimping campaigns took on the tone of an urgent moral imperative. They owed much of the fervor that they evoked across class and political divisions to a common narrative of how villainous *Baase* and their associates imperiled seafaring manhood. Set in a moralizing discourse, which drew from the same cultural repertoire as contemporary economic antisemitism, these reform efforts ultimately saw

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78 Winkens, “Soziale Lage,” 274.
79 Most of these simply required *Heuerbaase* to register with or obtain a license from the local police. Bremen was the first German state to limit crimming activities, subordinating hiring middlemen to the authority of the local harbor master in 1854. See StAB 4,24 – B.1.n, “Verordnung, die Anstellung von Heuerbaasen betreffend,” 2 June 1856. Oldenburg, Lübeck, and Hamburg all followed suit, typically requiring *Heuerbaase* to obtain a license to practice their trade from the local police. These mid-century regulations were relatively mild compared to those crafted around 1900. The early Bremen law, for example, explicitly allowed *Heuerbaase* to own boarding and public houses while procuring jobs for mariners. See also, Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 146.
81 Judith Fingard reminds us in her study of mid-nineteenth century crimps in Quebec that any critical analysis of anti-crimping sentiments should take cultural “images” into account. Fingard, “Those Crimps of Hell and Goblins damned,” 323-33.
the elimination of crimping as a step toward domesticating the German seaman.\textsuperscript{82} Reformers from the left, middle, and right of the political spectrum mobilized this kind of rhetoric. Still, there were real political and economic conflicts at stake. The following analysis aims to keep these conflicts in mind while showing how they interacted with a shared set of cultural and gendered assumptions.

Perhaps the best place to start is with the men at the center of the crimping controversy—the Baase themselves. One way to identify when concerted efforts against crimping began is to look at when German crimps first organized to defend themselves, which happened in 1885. That year a group of Baase from Hamburg created the \textit{St. Pauli Heuer- und Schlafbaasen Verein} to defend their businesses from attacks on all sides.\textsuperscript{83} Little documentation from the association survives, apart from regular reports and newspaper clippings from the watchful Hamburg police. Much of its activities appear to have focused on petitioning authorities to allow its members or their agents continued access to a variety institutions frequented by merchant seamen.\textsuperscript{84} Tellingly, the organization’s by-laws read as a defensive attempt to counter the common narrative of port-city vice in which they were the primary villains. Statutes warn members that they could be disbarred if they “harm the image of the Verein through untoward behavior in business or moral matters, through financial overreach, encouragement or inducement to drink, toleration of immorality, etc.” They also declare support for “all moral and

\textsuperscript{82} The images of crimps as global conspirators, greedy capitalists, blood-sucking financial vampires strikingly resemble one side of what Derek J. Penslar has called the “double helix” of European economic antisemitism, the self-contradictory view of Jews as “clannish but eager to assimilate, a teeming mass but an esoteric cabal, capitalists and communists, plutocrats and paupers.” See Penslar, \textit{Shylock’s Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe} (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2001), esp. 11-13.

\textsuperscript{83} In February 1895 the St. Pauli group renamed their association the “Hamburg Altonaer Heuer- und Schlafbaasen-Verein.” See StAH 331-3-V 362, “St. Pauli Heuer u. Schlafbaasen Verein (seit 5.2.1895: Hamburg-Altonaer Heuer- und Schlafbaasen-Verein) (1885).”

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Hamburger Fremden-Blatt}, no. 292, 15 Dec. 1895.
charitable endeavors created for the wholeness of the seaman” and praise religious organizations that sought to bring social order and to counteract socialism among seamen.85

Many of the first anti-crimping initiatives came from socialists and union leaders. The Hamburg-Altonaer Seemannsverein, one of the earliest sailors’ unions in Germany, made crimping an early target of protest in the mid-1880s. For German socialists, Baase were part of a broader system of exploitation that included ship officers and shipping firms. Crimps, in their view, could not help but be exploiters since they were “people who stood between Labor and Capital.”86 Many shipping firms did indeed rely on Heuerbaase to hire their crews.87 The elimination of crimping became one of the fundamental demands of German sailors’ unions and socialists during the 1890s. Striking sailors insisted that crimping be eliminated during the Hamburg port workers’ strike of 1896-97, a demand that continued to inform Seemannsverband activities after the turn of the century.88 Local socialists and sailors unions, as well as the national SPD contingent in the Reichstag called repeatedly for the elimination of crimping and its replacement by state-mandated maritime employment agencies under shared union and shipping firm control.89

In order to achieve these aims, socialist rhetoric drew from a common repertoire of highly gendered and, at times, antisemitic imagery. Union leaders called crimping a

85 Hamburger Echo, no. 21, 26 Jan. 1897.
86 Hamburger Echo no. 8, 10 Jan, 1891.
87 Schröder, Fernweh und Heimweh, 78.
88 Paul Müller, Ein Notschrei der seemännischen Arbeiter in Deutschland gerichtet an den Deutschen Reichstag und die Reichsregierung. Denkschrift des Seemanns-Verbandes in Deutschland (Hamburg: Verlag Seemanns-Verband in Deutschland, 1901), 17-18.
89 Müller, Ein Notschrei der seemännischen Arbeiter in Deutschland, 18; Verhandlungen der Generalversammlung des Vereins für Sozialpolitik über die Lage der in der Seeschifffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter, 18; Winkens, "Soziale Lage," 276; Christine Keitsch, Landgang: Der Flensburger Hafen um 1900 (Flensburg: Flensburger Schifffahrtsmuseum, 2000), 57-63.

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“the greatest cancer on seamen” and accused Heuerbaase of being “traders in human flesh.”

The socialist daily Hamburger Echo sarcastically dismissed the efforts of Hamburg Baase to portray themselves as respectable citizens, comparing their taverns and boarding houses to “stag parties that have become public scandals.” Their business practices, the newspaper continued, were built on robbery, incitement to drink, and sexual immorality. It also compared crimping to the “slave trade” and crimps to “vampires” who would “suck dry” their victims.

In a more explicitly antisemitic turn, the Seemannsverband’s newspaper roundly condemned the “exploiter clique” of “vampire-Heuerbaase” and their “parasitic appendage of Schlafbaase, boatmen, and business Jews.”

Global conspiracy also featured as part of the union’s view of crimping: “The tentacles of these Herren Landsharks … reach all regions of Germany and stretch around the world.”

Through this narrative, the German left hoped to implicate shipping firms with morally dubious prostitutes and crimps in a grand system designed to exploit the “homecoming seaman.”

Liberal reformers objected to socialists’ association of crimping with shipping firms, but they shared a similar gendered narrative of its danger to seafaring manhood.

The Socialpolitiker begin their accounts of sailors’ “moral condition” with an indictment of port city life. As Wilhelm Böhmert put it, “lying about in port cities” represented “the greatest detriment to the seamanly [seemännisch] life.” The villains in the VfSP’s reports were invariably the crims and prostitutes who preyed on “foolish” (leichtsinnig)

90 Bürgerzeitung no. 201, 28 Aug. 1886.
91 Hamburger Echo, no. 21, 26 Jan. 1897; see also Hamburger Echo no. 286, 8 Dec. 1897.
92 Der Seemann, no.3, 1 Dec. 1897.
93 Der Seemann, no. 13, 1 Oct. 1898.
94 Der Seemann, no. 14, 1 Nov. 1898.
seamen. This “shameless exploitation” was most dire, so the story went, for those unmarried seamen who had lost their jobs or were seeking work in the port city and could not “wait for work in [their] Heimat.” Alternatively, the Socialpolitiker lamented, as soon as merchant vessels reached coastal waters, crimps’ agents boarded them in order to entice seamen to desert or to stay at a particular boarding house. “Disordered” sexuality stood at the heart of the VfSP’s view of sailors and the port city. Echoing a very typical nineteenth-century narrative about sexual vice, women appear as seducers and men as their victims:

It need not be stressed here that the seaman is particularly susceptible to feminine charms. Among his exploiters, the willing prostitutes of the harbor areas should be named first and foremost. They often work together with Schlafbase, going in and out of their premises. There have been cases, in which foolish sailors have partied away 1-2000 Marks, the fruit of multi-year voyages, in a few days of their company. Only a few of the Socialpolitiker noted the sailors’ responsibility for their own actions often contradicting earlier statements about the men’s child-like foolishness. Instead of individual agency, they emphasized a paternalistic program to “re-conquer seamen for family life” and to “recreate the relationship between the coastal population and the sea.”

In his VfSP report Siegfried Heckscher advocated a private charitable solution to the problem of waterfront vice. He was a founding member of the Hamburg Volksheim (People’s Home) which aimed to provide Bildung to the masses through a series of “cultural community centers” in the city’s slums. Modeled on England’s Toynbee Hall, the Volksheim was conceived as a “bridge” between Hamburg’s bürgerlich elite and the city’s growing, and increasingly vocal, working class. These centers offered access to art exhibitions, concerts, sports festivals, and lectures, among other activities, to Hamburg’s working poor. Liberal reformers like Heckscher viewed them as a way to revive a sense of civic community among the various social classes that had been torn apart by industrial class conflict.  

In his report, Heckscher reminded readers that “the seaman is just as amenable to nobler pleasures as other workers.” He called for the establishment of a Volksheim in St. Pauli devoted exclusively to merchant mariners, predicting that it would compete well with the crims, prostitutes, and “rank seaman’s taverns” there.  

Like socialists and liberals, conservatives framed anti-crimping measures as a moral imperative to save seafaring manhood. By the end of 1880s, a number of Berlin newspapers with close ties to government circles had begun to alert a broader German public to the dangers that crimming posed to the nation. An extensive front-page article in the conservative Neue Preußische Zeitung reflected growing concern at the Reich level about merchant mariners’ precarious position in the nation’s port cities:  

The dangers and temptations which our sailors encounter in port cities have already been pointed out repeatedly in the columns of this newspaper. Hardly another profession is more exposed to the seduction and swindle of soul-sellers as that of the seaman. Separated from friends and family, thrown onto land at this or that harbor, the seafarer is forced to deliver himself into the hands of some waterfront tradesman, a so-called Schlafbaas or Heuerbaas, through whose

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100 Jenkins, Provincial Modernity, 79-101.  
101 Heckscher, “Die Lage der in der Schifffahrt Hamburgs beschäftigten Arbeiter,” 228, 238.
procurement he has to find another job, but not before his hard earned pay is wasted. 102

The conservative paper agreed with socialists on one point: the solution to the problem should come from the state. Instead of state-mandated employment agencies, however, it insisted on regular subsidies for the Protestant Deutsche Seemansmission (German Mission to Seamen, DSM), a demand that became reality in 1899. 103 This was the best way, the paper argued, for the state to protect “Heimatlose” (Heimat-less) seamen who were subject to exploitation at the hands of “profiteering human traffickers.” 104

The Seemansmission sought to combat crimping by creating an ersatz home for seamen that brought Heimat to the urban milieu of the port city. Already in 1874 the Hamburg City Mission had opened a section for sailors in its “Herberge zur Heimat” (Hostel in the Heimat) in St. Pauli. 105 In a similar but far more systematic manner, the DSM, which was founded in 1884-85, began to create a far-reaching network of seaman’s missionary stations, at first along the east coast of Great Britain. Within ten years, local DSM affiliates had opened mission stations in all the major German ports, including Hamburg, Bremerhaven, and Stettin and begun a process of expansion across the Atlantic and around the world. 106 As part of the Innere Mission (Inner Mission), the social work arm of German Protestantism, the Seemansmission espoused a form of German Christian Socialism, based on the theology of Johann Hinrich Wichern. 107 DSM operatives described their mission as a “patriotic work of Christian love for the uplifting,

102 Neue Preußische Zeitung, no. 297, 10 August 1888.
103 BA-BL, R 901/8381, Staatssekretär des Innern to Ausw. Amt, 30 Jul. 1899.
104 Neue Preußische Zeitung, no. 297, 10 August 1888.
106 Chapter Six contains a more detailed history and Protestant-nationalist vision of the Seemansmission, as well as an in-depth discussion of its role in foreign ports.
107 Thun, Werden und Wachsen, 12-14; Reinhard Freese, Geschichte der Deutschen Seemansmission (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1991), 9-38; Heimerdinger, Der Seemann, 84-97.
preservation, and support of our able-bodied German Seemannsstand.”

During the nineteenth century, the institutional “sailors’ home” became a preferred method among various Protestant-national missions to merchant sailors. Sailors’ missionaries believed that these homes would provide alternatives to what were in their view corrupt systems of crimping, boarding houses, pubs, and brothels that flourished in the world’s port cities.

DSM literature portrayed urban waterfront districts—through the example of St. Pauli in Hamburg—as sites of vice and ruinous emasculation. A series of articles appearing in the organization’s broadsheet, Blätter für Seemann, depicted St. Pauli through the experiences of a fictional young seaman named Jonnie. After a few years of sailing around the world, Jonnie returns to Hamburg and is discharged from his ship’s crew. He immediately falls into the hands of devious Schlafbaase and into the bad company of fellow seamen. They introduce him to a violent male world constituted by heavy drinking, brawling, and sex with prostitutes. When Jonnie hesitates to sleep with a prostitute, his comrades make fun of him and the prostitutes accuse him of “unmanliness.” From the perspective of seaman’s missionaries, however, the reverse was true—actual emasculation could result only from bowing to such insults. Jonnie, imagined here as a victim of Baase, peer pressure, and disreputable women, acquiesces and ends up lying helpless in a local hospital sick with venereal disease. He embodies a striking example of the DSM’s call to reform seafaring manhood along the lines of

109 Roald Kverndal, Seamen’s Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth (Pasadena, CA, 1986).
Figure 11. The cover of the Deutsche Seemannsmission’s Seemanns-Kalender (1897) illustrates the kind of “wholesome” comradeship the organization advocated for German mariners. Bundesarchiv Berlin-Licherfelde.
middle-class Protestant virtue. His story suggests that the only path for mariners to true masculine status is through the doors of the organization’s sailors’ homes.

German Protestants structured their sailors’ homes to provide what they hoped would be an ersatz family for merchant mariners. Each home fell under the supervision of a sailors’ pastor, who raised funds, led services, and ministered to the needs of his maritime flock. The pastor also coordinated his activities with the organization’s local and national governing boards. The home’s daily functioning, however, was carried out by the “housefather” often accompanied by his wife, the “housemother.” These house parents were trained religious social workers and were paid a salary. The DSM’s 1912 handbook colorfully depicts a housefather’s responsibilities as follows:

Good beds for those shaken by many storms, for arms and legs used to a damp bunk. Good meals after drab food at sea. Friendly welcome and willing care. This is what the sailor can expect from the housefather. He comes to the German Christian seaman’s home because he knows that here he will not be cheated, exploited, despised, or led astray, but rather will find heartfelt fatherly love. Yet at the same time the house father shall uphold discipline. He shall defend the home against drinkers, fornicators, and swindlers.\footnote{Paul Oehlkers, “Seemannsmissionare und Hausväter,” in Handbuch der Deutschen Seemannsmission, ed. Reinhard Münchmeyer (Stettin: Hessenland, 1912), 428.}

Sailors’ missionaries thus intended their homes to be institutions that reestablished social control within the transitory spaces of Germany’s port cities via a new family and home. The homes’ entertainment evenings, lectures, reading-room libraries, architecture, and décor emphasized loyalty to family, Protestantism, state, and Kaiser. Sailors’ pastors actively sought to immunize their flocks against “atheistic” socialism, although some,
including the head of the Hamburg mission, took a more conciliatory approach to socialist union members.¹¹² For a variety of reasons, however, a number of groups objected to the seaman’s home idea. For some the homes too closely resembled barracks and failed because they did not provide mariners enough contact with (respectable) women and children.¹¹³ Secular observers like Siegfried Heckscher expressed concerns that the religious orientation and the designation of “mission” would drive away all but the small minority of religious sailors.¹¹⁴ Above all, the Seemannsverband, the socialist sailors’ union, viewed the DSM as its primary rival, noting that “where the sailors are now stirring, so too is the Seemannsmission.”¹¹⁵ Such doubts notwithstanding, by 1900 the DSM had become one of the most important advocacy groups on matters of maritime labor, gaining institutional support from various business, church, and state authorities, as well as favorable coverage in the conservative and liberal press.

Impassioned calls to reform the crimping system from across the political spectrum began to effect local and national policy as early as the late 1880s. Reich officials had already considered reforms in the wake of British anti-crimping measures enacted during the early 1880s, although these discussions produced no policy changes.¹¹⁶ As calls for reform grew louder, local governments took up the issue. In 1889, Hamburg officials drafted new regulations prohibiting crimps’ agents from boarding harbor-bound vessels on the Elbe River. The following year officials in the

¹¹⁵ *Der Seemann*, 1 Dec 1898.
¹¹⁶ GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 91 Bd. 1, see communiqués between RAdI and Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe (Prussia), 22 Jan. 1881, 25 Jul. 1881, 29 Nov. 1882, 10 Jan. 1883.
three German states bordering the Weser River—Bremen, Oldenburg, and Prussia—agreed upon similar regulations.\textsuperscript{117} Still, reformers continued to call for more radical measures to limit or end the practice of crimping. Hamburg Senator Gustav J. Kirchenpauer complained that river control measures did not go far enough and would simply drive the “core of the evil” onto land and into the boarding houses, bars, and brothels.\textsuperscript{118} So in 1893 Hamburg authorities forbade boarding house proprietors or tavern owners from running a maritime hiring agency out of their places of business.

Anti-crimping legislation at the Reich level was modeled after the 1893 Hamburg ordinance. In June 1902, the Reichstag enacted the \textit{Gesetz betreffend die Stellenvermittlung für Schiffsleute} (Law Concerning the Procurement of Ship Crews) as part of its overhaul of national maritime labor laws. The new law ignored socialist and union demands for state-sponsored maritime employment agencies. Instead it prohibited \textit{Heuerbaase} from simultaneously running a variety of establishments including boarding houses, taverns, outfitter shops, money exchanges, or pawn shops. In this way, the law addressed the moral imagery of anti-crimping campaigns, while accommodating shipowners’ demands to maintain their prerogative on how they hired crewmen. The informality of crimping provided labor flexibility and insured that shipowners did not have to hire clerks to perform the same function.

The law’s official commentary justified its measures by pointing to the “peculiar lifestyles” that made sailors particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Repeating a familiar story about pent-up desires, exploitation, and financial ruin it described the shipboard “deprivation of life’s pleasures,” which predisposes seamen to living “an unbound life”

\textsuperscript{117} GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 91 Bd. 1, protocol of meeting between Bremer, Oldenburger, and Prussian officials, 26 June 1890.
\textsuperscript{118} Quoted in Winkens, “Soziale Lage,” 34.
after their arrival in port. Additionally, the commentary blamed the maritime payment system through which sailors received a lump-sum wage payout at the end of every voyage which was relatively large compared to the incremental wages of his social peers. These two factors, it argued, made the “foolish seaman” into the perfect target for exploitation by Heuerbaase and Schlafbaase, who conspired to keep him in their boarding houses and taverns until they could not extract any more money from him.\textsuperscript{119}

After the law was put into practice, it quickly became clear that it was not having the desired effect. By 1907, the number of Heuerbaase in Hamburg had expanded to over five-hundred. That same year, a fresh debate broke out on how to revise the law. A variety of groups, including the Berlin Gewerbegericht argued that the Reich should ban maritime job procurement outright. Officials in the Interior Ministry rejected this approach and instead proposed a stronger licensure system that it hoped would reign in crimping’s excesses. Representing Germany’s most powerful shipowners, the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce spoke out against licensure, fearing that it would result in the disappearance of Heuerbaase and that shipping companies would be left footing a greatly enlarged bill for recruitment and hiring.\textsuperscript{120} Despite such opposition, the revisions of 1910 required all Heuerbaase to obtain public work permits and expanded the list of prohibited side-businesses they could run.

The revised law in combination with the dramatic upheavals of the First World War finally eliminated the criming system. By 1916 only thirteen registered Heuerbaase were left in Hamburg. In 1919, under the greatly altered conditions of the Weimar Republic, long-standing socialist demands for state-sponsored maritime

\textsuperscript{119} “Entwurf eines Gesetzes, betreffend die Stellenvermittlung für Schiffseute,” 6.  
\textsuperscript{120} Winkens, “Soziale Lage,” 275-76.
employment agencies controlled jointly by union and shipping representatives became a reality.  

3.3 Syphilitic Sailors

Wilhelmine reformers who aimed to domesticate the German seaman not only sought to eliminate the crimping system, they also hoped to cure the nation’s “syphilitic sailors.” The most far-reaching of these efforts was a program in Hamburg involving the forced treatment of merchant mariners who had contracted venereal disease. The forced treatment program, which began in 1894, resulted from the confluence of local events with new national concerns about public health. Hamburg’s high profile 1892 cholera epidemic reignited concerns about disease, even as it resulted in a series of new public health initiatives and a general reorganization of the city’s government structures. In the epidemic’s wake, the newly created position of Hamburg Port Physician considerably expanded state powers of quarantine for ships, cargo, passengers, and sailors. These urgent local concerns about public health in Hamburg coincided with a heightened national awareness of venereal disease, which redefined “syphilis”—at the time, a popular catch-all term for various forms of VD—as a national epidemic. Given previous cultural associations between sailors and disorderly sexuality, they became an early target of German public health campaigning.

122 The terms “syphilitische Seemann” or “syphilitische Seeleute” were common in both medial and lay discourse of the period. See, for instance, Bernhard Nocht, “Zur revision der deutschen Seemannsordnung,” Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik 12, no. 12 (1898): 177; and “Hafen und Schiffahrt. Nautischer Verein, Hamburg,” Hamburger Fremdenblatt 272, 18 November 1908.
The cultural association of sailors, sex, disease, and an external “other” was
certainly nothing new in late-nineteenth-century Europe. As early as 1539, the Spanish
physician Diaz de Isla published a book, in which he explicitly blamed sailors from
Columbus’ voyage for bringing the “great pox,” as syphilis was then known, to
Europe.\textsuperscript{123} During the nineteenth century, sexual disease increasingly came to be
associated with “loose women” in general and prostitutes in particular. European
medical literature began to represent men primarily as the victims of sexualized disease
and women as its carriers.\textsuperscript{124} As German medical authorities increasingly viewed sailors
as a potential danger to national health, they built on these existing cultural associations.
Despite acknowledging the presence of venereal disease in Germany, doctors, continued
to understand it primarily as a malady spread from an external source to the homeland
and from female prostitutes to their male clients. They emphasized how sexualized
disease spread to Germany from “overseas,” “tropical,” or “exotic” locations and to
German men from foreign women.

Of course, venereal diseases were not the only “seaborne” diseases that provoked
concern among German medical and governmental authorities. Before the 1890s, VD
appears not to have stirred much concern at all. From the 1860s onward the Prussian
Ministry of Trade and Commerce began formulating policies to prevent sailors from
bringing a variety of non-sexualized diseases into Prussian ports. An 1883 ordinance
focused on preventing the introduction of cholera, plague, and yellow fever by ships

\textsuperscript{123} Historians of medicine continue to debate the oft repeated claim that syphilis originated in the Americas. The idea that syphilis spread from there to Europe appears to have originated in Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes’ \textit{History of the Indies} (1526). See Claude Quétel, \textit{History of Syphilis}, translated by Judith Braddock and Brian Pike (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 35-36; see also John Parascandola, \textit{Sex, Sin, and Science: A History of Syphilis in America} (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2008), 5.

arriving at Prussian harbors. By the turn of the century merchant sailors had been so thoroughly linked with the introduction of disease into Germany that a special essay prepared for the participants at the annual Convention of German Natural Scientists and Doctors in 1901 concluded, “It stands to reason that merchant seamen pose a particular danger for the unnoticed introduction [heimliche Einschleppung] of infectious diseases, and therefore must be seen as a special category of travelers who, in times of epidemics, must be observed more closely than other through-traffic.” Terms like “Einschleppung” or “Hinschelppung” (which connote the introduction of disease from an external source) pervade the medical and official discourse from the period, highlighting the common assumption that sailors always carried disease to, rather than from, Germany. Thus “syphilis” was not the only disease that German medical professionals and state authorities associated with sailors, but beginning in the mid-1890s it evoked the most anxiety.

Mariners who contracted sexualized diseases fell into a special legal category between 1873 and 1902. The Seemannsordnung of 1872 obligated ship owners to pay for medical costs associated with any sickness or injury that occurred while a sailor was under contract and guaranteed his pay during treatment and recovery. But it explicitly exempted sailors who contracted a “syphilitic disease” from these benefits on the grounds

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125 GSTA PK Rep. 120.C, Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe, XII 1 Nr. 9 Bd. 1, “Verordnung, betreffend die gesundheitspolizeiliche Kontrole der einen preussischen Hafen anlaufenden Seeschiffe,” 1 Nov. 1883. This ordinance would have covered not only the Prussian ports on the Baltic Sea but also the busy Prussian enclaves of Altona in Hamburg and Geestemünde across from Bremerhaven.


127 Seemannsordnung of 1872, §§ 48-49. The ship owner’s obligation to pay was limited to a prescribed length of time, depending on the circumstances of the sickness or injury.
the disease was “self-inflicted” due to “prohibited activities.” In practice this meant that between 1873, when the law went into effect, and 1902, when it was revised, any German seaman who was diagnosed with venereal disease could be legally fired without receiving back-pay. The revised Seemannsordnung of 1902 did away with the syphilis exemption, although there is evidence that in practice officials continued to treat venereal disease among sailors as a self-inflicted illness.

The syphilitic sailor was not simply the product of medical or legal discourse. This gendered image was rooted in existing conditions and experiences among some seafarers. Official statistics from the period indicate that only a relatively small minority of sailors contracted sexually transmitted diseases. Records from the Hamburg Port Physician’s office show that the absolute number of reported cases of venereal disease among merchant sailors in Hamburg averaged just over 1000 per year between 1902 and 1906. While the average number of cases per year rose to over 2200 for 1913 and 1914, the proportion of total cases of reported illness hovered around 11%, relatively unchanged from the previous decade. Moreover, less than a quarter of these cases involved actual syphilis; over half were far less serious cases of Gonorrhea. Even if accurate, these statistics are of limited value in interpreting the meaning and experience of venereal disease among merchant mariners. First, they tell us very little about the men

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128 Seemannsordnung of 1872, § 50; see also Allgemeines Deutsches Handelsgesetzbuch of 1869, Article 550.
129 Staatsarchiv Hamburg (hereafter StAH) 352-7I-126 Bd. 1, 1894-1911. In the late 1890s a Hamburg court had already limited the use of the syphilis paragraph of the Seemannsordnung of 1872. Because of a general confusion of the term “syphilitic disease” with all venereal diseases (which was common before the development of the germ theory of disease in the late nineteenth century), even sailors who had merely contracted Gonorrhea could be fired without treatment or back-pay. The court held that the law was not meant to punish “licentious lifestyles,” but rather served to limit syphilis itself because the disease represented a particular danger to public safety.
who were treated; we do not know their nationality, or even if they worked on board a
German vessel. Nor do they tell us where and how the men contracted the disease.
Sailors’ letters, diaries, and memoirs from the period provide little help in deciphering the
statistics either. Since sexualized diseases were commonly seen as shameful, discussing
them was rare among those who wrote about their experiences as seafarers.

One letter from the files of the Reich Foreign Ministry, however, is surprisingly
frank in its discussion of the topic. In 1908 a crewman from a merchant steamer wrote
directly to Reich Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, requesting help after his captain had
refused him “adequate treatment” for VD. The crewman’s letter shows no hint of shame
or reticence, but rather an expectation that this disease should be handled just as any
other, an attitude which corresponded to the legal prescriptions of the Seemannsordnung
of 1902. The captain responded to the charge by calling the crewman a “good-for-
nothing” who had been negligent in performing his duties on multiple occasions.
Furthermore, he labeled him a “deserter” who had held up the ship in port while he
“amused himself” and acquired a “self-inflicted” disease. The German consul who
handled the case sided with the captain on the charge of inadequate treatment, despite
warning other ships not to use the services of the unqualified “doctor” whom the captain
had hired to treat the crewman. Although the consul agreed to grant the crewman his
back-pay he insisted on wiring it to the Seemannsamt in Hamburg because the man was
in a foreign port accompanied by “suspicious sailors.”¹³² We cannot be sure if this case
was representative of general conditions in the Handelsmarine, but it does suggest that,
even after the revision of the Seemannsordnung in 1902, the stigma attached to
“syphilitic sailors” continued to affect their economic livelihoods.

¹³² BA-BL, R 901/17759, Paul Siebert to Reichskanzler, 30 March, 1908.
Although only a minority of merchant sailors contracted venereal diseases, after the cholera epidemic of 1892 these men greatly alarmed medical and state authorities in Hamburg. Bernhard Nocht, Hamburg’s first Port Physician, was the most influential figure behind the city’s forced treatment program for merchant sailors. After studying under Robert Koch in Berlin and serving as a naval doctor, Nocht became Port Physician in 1893. The position was one of many new public health measures Hamburg officials took in response to the cholera epidemic. The Hamburg Senate appointed Nocht because he had distinguished himself as a Reich official sent to help organize the medical response to the epidemic. During his tenure as Port Physician he wrote numerous articles on sailors’ health, edited a major medical journal, the *Archiv für Schiffsf- und Tropen-Hygiene*, and in 1900 founded the *Institut für Schiffsf- und Tropen Hygiene* (Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases) in Hamburg. Conceptual associations of sailors, disease, and public hygiene figured prominently in Nocht’s work. He opened his Institute in an empty wing of the local sailor’s hospital, and shortly thereafter began offering courses in tropical medicine for maritime doctors. After working exclusively in maritime and tropical medicine the ambitious doctor left his post as Port Physician to become Hamburg’s chief medical official in 1906.

As Port Physician, Nocht was an early and vocal advocate of forced treatment for syphilis and other venereal diseases among merchant seamen. Barely a year into his tenure, he successfully petitioned in 1894 to have Hamburg’s medical police escort every

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134 In honor of Nocht’s eighty-fifth birthday in 1942, the Institute officially changed its name to its current designation, the “Bernhard Nocht Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases.” See *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, 3 Nov. 1942.
civilian mariner who reported himself or was reported to be “sexually ill” (geschlechtskrank) from his ship to a local hospital and ensure that he remained there until cured. Nocht feared that, if left unsupervised, these men would “disappear” into the streets of Hamburg and “roam about” [herumtreiben], spreading the disease they had presumably picked up abroad.\textsuperscript{136} Forced hospitalization, according to Nocht, “must apply to syphilitic sailors for their own self-interest as well as for the public interest.”\textsuperscript{137} He also suggested that merchant ship crews be regularly and forcibly screened for venereal disease, although the lack of legal authority, as well as a shortage of ship’s doctors meant that any efforts along these lines were left to the discretion of ship owners.\textsuperscript{138}

The policy of forced treatment continued in Hamburg until the outbreak of the First World War. While statistics for the number of civilian sailors affected are not available for each year, for 1902-05 the police commissioner estimated that forced treatments averaged around one hundred per month.\textsuperscript{139} The city’s Old General Hospital in the working-class district of St. Georg, which had a ward devoted exclusively to syphilis and skin diseases, was the primary facility to which the medical police brought sailors who were suspected of being “sexually ill.” After a decade of experience, police authorities expressed concerns that the hospital did not possess the infrastructure they believed was necessary to sequester the men until they were cured.\textsuperscript{140} Around 1905-06 some members of Hamburg’s medical community also began to complain that sailors—the “major contingent of sexually ill men”—were responsible for overcrowded conditions at the hospital. Such reservations about the adequacy of the St. Georg hospital led to a

\textsuperscript{136} StAH 352-3 III-H-4 Bd. 1, Nocht to Hamburg Medizinalrat Reincke, 20 Nov. 1894.
\textsuperscript{137} Nocht, “Zur revision der deutschen Seemannsordnung,” 177.
\textsuperscript{138} StAH, 352-71-126 Bd. 1, Nocht to Hamburg Medizinalrat Reincke, 11 Nov. 1894.
\textsuperscript{139} StAH, 352-3 III-H-4 Bd. 2, Senator Schröder to Medizinalkollegium Hamburg, 7 Mar. 1907.
\textsuperscript{140} StAH, 352-3 III-H-4 Bd. 2, Senator Schröder to Medizinalkollegium Hamburg, 7 Mar. 1907.
variety of attempts to create alternative treatment facilities, all of which, however, proved unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{141}

As legal observers noted, this program evoked earlier Hamburg policies toward women sex workers, which required them to submit to regular examinations and mandatory treatment. Such anti-prostitution schemes, for which the city’s medical police had primary responsibility, set a highly gendered precedent for state intervention in the sexual lives of civilians.\textsuperscript{142} Until the 1890s only women and soldiers had been subject to this kind of medical policing. By focusing on civilian men, Nocht’s program of forced treatment thus represented a significant departure. There were, of course, significant differences between the forcible treatment of merchant sailors and Hamburg’s policing of prostitution—differences that reflected general patriarchal assumptions. Whereas all female prostitutes in the city were subject to regular examinations, the medical police took into custody only those mariners whom their officers suspected of being “sexually ill.” Furthermore, nothing came of the police proposal for setting up a ward for sailors with venereal disease next to the prostitutes’ ward in the local Police Hospital. Nevertheless, the forced hospitalization of merchant seamen represented a gender shift in the exercise of legitimate state control over civilian sexuality and health. A series of legal opinions commissioned by police authorities admitted as much after questions arose in 1905 among Hamburg officials about the legality of forcibly treating civilian men. In reference to the city’s medical policing of prostitutes, the jurists defended forced


\textsuperscript{142} Keitsch, Landgang, 77-78.
treatment arguing that “these necessary measures … are just as permissible among males as among female persons.” 143

It might stand to reason that Hamburg’s legal establishment would have compared merchant mariners with sailors in the Imperial Navy in order to justify the forced treatment program. German naval sailors, like soldiers in the army, were subject to regular mandatory screenings and proscribed treatment for venereal disease. 144 But Hamburg authorities did not base their case on a military model. Instead, they differentiated merchant sailors from other German men by defining them as transients. Thus the police commissioner characterized merchant sailors as a “fluctuating population of sexually ill men.” Legal scholars and policemen compared civilian mariners to “vagrant” and “homeless” men. A “foolish” and transitory lifestyle rather than patriotic duty to the fatherland, justified their subjection to treatment that had previously applied in the civilian world solely to women who lived and worked outside the bounds of sexual propriety. 145

Beyond Hamburg, a growing public debate over venereal disease was taking shape across Germany around the turn of the century. The “shocking” results of the first large-scale statistical survey of venereal disease released by Prussian authorities in April 1900 was in many ways a catalyst for conversations about venereal disease and efforts to treat it. 146 It sparked a major push within the German medical community to isolate the disease-causing microorganisms and develop effective treatments for sexually transmitted

143 StAH, 352-3 III-H-4 Bd. 2, Senator Schröder to Medizinalkollegium Hamburg, 7 Mar. 1907.
144 Reichs-Gesundheitsrat Kirchner, “Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten im Deutschen Reich” (1908), 13.
146 Lutz Sauerteig, Krankheit, Sexualität, Gesellschaft. Geschlechtskrankheiten und Gesundheitspolitik in Deutschland im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999), 72
diseases. Alfred Blaschko, dermatologist and cofounder of the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten (German Society for Prevention of Sexual Diseases, DGBG), warned fellow Germans that if they did nothing, a “syphiliticized” nation would be a real possibility.\textsuperscript{147} The new national focus on venereal disease, which Blaschko’s organization helped drive, ultimately proved to be a medical success. In 1905 German scientists isolated the microorganism that caused syphilis, and in 1910 Paul Erlich discovered the first effective treatment for syphilis patients and marketed it under the trade name Salvarsan.\textsuperscript{148}

In this context of growing concern, German medical discourse constructed the syphilitic sailor as a gendered disease vector. He contracted venereal disease from foreign women and imported it into the nation. In an 1898 article, Bernhard Nocht linked sailors to “exotic forms” of venereal disease contracted overseas in support of his forced treatment argument.\textsuperscript{149} The Zeitschrift für Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, the mouthpiece of the DGBG, called for a campaign to educate merchant sailors about the dangers of shore-leave sex with prostitutes. The author of the article, a doctor who worked at the German hospital in Naples, singled out Mediterranean ports for being particularly hazardous.\textsuperscript{150} Three years later the DGBG published a pamphlet written in a realist style to teach sailors about dockside perils, Kurze Freud’, langes Leid. Eine Seemannsgeschichte (Brief Happiness, Long Sorrow. A Seaman’s Story). In the pamphlet, which the DGBG promoted among port-city doctors, shipping firms, and government officials, an old syphilitic seaman tells his younger shipmates about a night

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{148} Quétel, History of Syphilis, 140-141.
\textsuperscript{149} Nocht, “Zur revision der deutschen Seemannsordnung,” 177.
\textsuperscript{150} C. Graeser, “Bemerkungen über die Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten in der Handelsmarine,” Zeitschrift für Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten 5, no 5 (1906): 175-78.
of youthful, drunken debauchery in Cape Town. He explains how his life was ruined that
night after he contracted syphilis from an unwanted prostitute’s “kiss” and spread the
disease unknowingly to his pregnant wife and innocent son back home in Germany. The
illustrations that accompanied Kurze Freud’, langes Leid present two contrasting images.
The first picture, framed by the pamphlet’s title, depicts a rough seaman fondling a
prostitute whose dark hair and dark complexion mark her as a racial other. Below this
scene a skeletal figure of death waits with hour glass in hand. The second illustration, in
contrast, depicts an idyllic seaman’s family at Christmastime: the father with his young
son playing with a model sailing ship, the mother with a baby holding the German flag,
all enjoying the ambience of a candle-lit German Christmas tree. Here one set of
concepts—foreign, prostitute, and disease—contrasts with another—Heimat, family, and
health. This contrast vividly demarcates a boundary between the disreputable, transitory
sailor and the ideal of a settled, married seaman.  

In this context, a vocal debate over venereal disease erupted at the 1909 national
convention of shipping industry trade groups held in Berlin. Participants disagreed
strongly over whether or not forced examinations on board merchant ships would be cost-
effective countermeasures. The distribution of condoms and other prophylactics also
proved controversial. The majority of high-ranking officials argued against it, claiming
that any such initiative would “violate morality” by encouraging extramarital sex. Instead they favored holding shipboard lectures and supplying merchant crews with
educational pamphlets. Even the use of the DGBG’s Kurze Freud’, langes Leid stirred

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151 C. Graeser, Kurze Freud’, langes Leid. Eine Seemannsgeschichte, Flugschriften der Deutschen
Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 20 (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth), 1909.
152 Verhandlungen des ersten gemeinsamen Vereinstages des Deutschen Nautischen Vereins und des
Verbandes Deutscher Seeschiffer-Vereine am 22. und 23. März 1909 (Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1909),
194.
debate. Max Schnauseil, director of the *Seeberufsgenossenschaft*, called the pamphlet’s story “abrasive” and “tasteless,” despite its frequent use among some of the larger shipping firms.\(^{153}\) Nevertheless, broad agreement among conference-goers defined venereal disease as an external problem imported by sailors into Germany. One Hamburg doctor insisted that venereal disease was primarily an issue of tropical and subtropical regions.\(^{154}\) The president of the *Reichsgesundheitsamt* (Imperial Health Office), who delivered a special address at the conference, summed up this viewpoint stating that “only with serious cooperation from captains and shipping firms can we warn sailors regularly and effectively about the menacing dangers they face in foreign ports.”\(^{155}\)

### 3.4 Conclusion

Around the turn of the twentieth century, middle-class Germans highlighted the need for domestic manhood as they earnestly sought to reform merchant seamen. The dramatic expansion and transformation of German shipping into a national endeavor had cast a glaring spotlight on the less savory aspects of casual maritime labor, port city life, and informal hiring practices. In response, reformers hoped to transform profligate seamen into heads of stable, rooted households. They idealized the coastal seaman-farmer, who married early and kept a small plot of land with his wife and children. Shipping firm managers and state officials agreed in principle, but opted for less extensive policies. Promoting marriage and a coastal *Heimat* among all maritime

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\(^{153}\) Ibid., 195.  
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 185.  
\(^{155}\) Ibid., 199.
workers proved to be too costly. Less expensive measures to reform Germany’s harbor districts gained more support and had more successes. In the dominant narrative of port city vice, so-called land sharks—*Baase*, prostitutes, and their agents—stood menacingly between mariners’ homosocial life aboard ship and a stable family life on land. This narrative drew broad support from across the political spectrum. The fears that crimps and prostitutes emasculated sailors ultimately provided a vital and successful moral component of anti-crimping campaigns. It also informed the medical and legal steps that German authorities took to cure the nation’s “syphilitic sailors.” All of these efforts shared a common assumption that the transience of seafaring workers—whether within or beyond German borders—threatened the social order within. They reflected the belief that the national economic and imperial power contained within the *Handelsmarine* required a “steady stock” of German seamen, stabilized by respectable ties of family and place.
CHAPTER 4

FROM FAHRENSMANN TO GERMANY’S “REAL SEAMAN”

The Wilhelmine period encompassed the twilight of the sailing era in maritime history. Rapid acceleration of industrialization at sea during the last decades of the nineteenth century exposed the precarious position of sailing commerce. In a wave of unprecedented growth and capital concentration from the 1880s, and especially the 1890s, onward, German shipping companies, like their primary competitors in Great Britain, invested heavily in expensive steamship technology. Consequently, by 1914 wind-driven vessels and their crews had been reduced to the economic margins of the German merchant fleet (Figures 12 & 13).¹ Sailing ships and the men who sailed them had become a statistical afterthought in a modernizing, steam-driven Handelsmarine.

In terms of maritime culture and gender, however, sailing loomed far larger around 1900 than it had fifty years before. The “disappearance” of the commercial sailing ship, along with the social and technological arrangements it entailed, profoundly disrupted masculine identity within the seafaring trade. As growing percentages of maritime workers, some of whom were women, served the needs of passengers or toiled

¹ Hamburg’s fleet (like Bremen’s) was ahead of the Handelsmarine as a whole in the disappearance of sailing ships and crewmen. As early as 1890, sailing crewmen were already statistically irrelevant in the Hansestadt, even though they still made up a slight majority in the Empire as a whole. The disappearance of sailing happened more gradually in the smaller German seaports, particularly on the Baltic Sea. (Appendix: Figures 2 & 4).
Figure 12. Source: Handbücher für die deutsche Handelsmarine (1878-1914).

Figure 13. Source: Handbücher für die deutschen Handelsmarine, (1878-1914)
in roasting boiler-rooms, the time-honored definition of “seaman” unraveled. Traditional seamen (“Fahrensleute” in the German context) had conceived of themselves as a community of craftsmen, joined together through the attainment of manhood, skill, and sailing experience. Shifts in maritime technology and everyday labor at sea seemed to undermine their gendered concepts of seamanship and Tüchtigkeit (able-bodiedness or capability). Maritime industrialization thus interrupted the deep and symbolic nexus of manhood, technology, and skill at sea. This process paralleled the disruption of traditional identities among blacksmiths, coopers, weavers, and other master artisan groups in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century.²

Gender upheaval in the Handelsmarine corresponded to a broader reconfiguration of gender, work, and skill brought on by the waves of industrialization that broke across Europe and North America in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In navigating this period’s wrenching social changes, workingmen brandished skill—defined here as the reservoir of experience, knowledge and dexterity required to master workplace technology—in defense of their gender, class, and political identities. As feminist critic Cynthia Cockburn colorfully put it:

A skilled craftsman may be no more than a worker in relation to capital, but seen from within the working class he has been a king among men and lord of his household. As a high earner he preferred to see himself as the sole breadwinner, supporter of wife and children. As artisan he defined the unskilled workman as someone of inferior status …³

Cockburn and other theorists have highlighted the myriad ways through which industrial(izing) societies have gendered “technical skills and artifacts” as a masculine preserve. In other words, recognition of skill was always as much a gendered social

designation as it was a technical category. It did not simply provide access to higher wages; it also reinforced patriarchal power dynamics between men and women and elevated certain men above others.⁴

Working-class manhood became particularly strained in the Western world toward the end of the nineteenth century as skilled male workers felt increasingly threatened by the entry of women and unskilled men into new realms of industrial enterprise. From industrialization’s beginnings in Britain around 1800, women had been industrial workers, although typically they toiled in so-called unskilled, lower paying, and lower status positions. Gender conflicts over skill, pay, and status thus constituted a central theme in the story of industrial working class formation.⁵ These conflicts intensified with the introduction of wide-scale electric power generation, chemical technologies, and machine tools during the last third of the nineteenth century, what historians have termed a “second industrial revolution.” New technologies, among them electrified oceangoing steamships, exacerbated the disruption of gendered ideas about labor and skill.⁶ New kinds of skilled groups, such as electricians and steamship mechanics, appeared along with these new technologies

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⁵ Kathleen Canning, “Gender and the Politics of Class Formation: Rethinking German Labor History,” The American Historical Review 97, no. 3 (1992): 736-68; Rose, Limited Livelihoods; Clark, The Struggle for the Breeches.

The precise historical path that such upheavals took varied among different trades and diverse national contexts, but invariably they shared a common language of masculine insecurity and disruption.\(^7\) Kathleen Canning has illustrated the spread and power of this “language of grievance” through cases studies of German textile workers before the First World War. As growing numbers of female workers entered textile factories during the 1880s and 1890s, male weavers complained that these women were replacing them and undermining their status as “*Familienvater*” (breadwinners) and their claims to (male) citizenship. This “crisis of female labor” went beyond the confines of textile workers, alarming liberal, Social Democratic, and Catholic reformers in the Reichstag, who worked to shape the German state’s response to female labor. Their efforts, which ignited impassioned opposition from middle-class feminists and their allies, culminated in a new set of restrictions on women’s work in 1891 and multiple (yet ultimately unsuccessful) attempts to enact a ban on married women’s labor.\(^8\)

The gender crisis within Western industrial labor around 1900 was not confined to conflicts between men and women workers; it also played out in debates over who constituted the “right kind” of man for the job. Men who had defined themselves as skilled workers sought to defend their status from the “deskilling” that often accompanied

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technological change. The seafaring trade offers a particularly well-suited case study to explore this aspect of the industrial gender crisis. Although small numbers of women took up shipboard work—primarily as stewardesses—before the First World War, maritime workers remained overwhelmingly male. The major issue that preoccupied traditional seamen, therefore, was the loss of sailing skill, a process they associated with emasculation. From their perspective, male steamship workers simply did not qualify as true seamen and, by extension, as real men. During the second half of the nineteenth century, observers in Britain, the United States, Germany, and elsewhere began to warn the public that the large-scale introduction of steamships would undermine the national “quality, skill, and supply” of seamen. Paraphrasing David M. Williams, the ways of traversing the seas were changing, but the old definition of manly abilities required to do so remained the same.

In Wilhelmine Germany the profound disruption in seafaring masculinity ran headlong into politically fraught questions of national identity and power. As Germans re-imagined themselves as a seafaring nation, the masculine figure of the seaman became a symbol of the nation. Consequently, issues of quality and skill among merchant mariners became a national issue. Nautical professionals, shipowners, state officials, observers in Britain, the United States, Germany, and elsewhere began to warn the public that the large-scale introduction of steamships would undermine the national “quality, skill, and supply” of seamen. Paraphrasing David M. Williams, the ways of traversing the seas were changing, but the old definition of manly abilities required to do so remained the same.

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9 Maynard, “Rough Work and Rugged Men,” esp. 162-64; Connell, Masculinities, 55.
10 In 1854, for example, a British captain wrote to the Times of London warning that “we have neither seamen nor seamanship.” During the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of voices—including seafarers, reformers, and state officials—bemoaned “the deterioration of the British Seaman” and debated what contemporaries referred to as the “manning question.” See, David M. Williams, “The Quality, Skill and Supply of Maritime Labour: Causes of Concern in Britain, 1850-1914,” in Merchants and Mariners: Selected Maritime Writings of David M. Williams, ed. Lars U. Scholl, Research in Maritime History no. 18 (St. John’s Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2000), 273-76. On responses to maritime industrialization in the U.S.-American context see the contributions to Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds., Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
middle-class reformers, socialists and labor unions competed to redefine who and what a seaman was.

Leftists played a significant role in debates over sea-manhood and skill. During the 1890s the German working class movement “went out upon the oceans,” although this was certainly not what Kaiser Wilhelm II had had in mind in his famous speech. In addition, Social Democrats in the Reichstag prominently took up the cause of maritime labor reform. As trade unionists and socialists called for new labor laws and participated in crippling sea-transport strikes, they also took up the debate over sea-manhood. They advocated a brotherhood between traditional sailing men and steamship workers based less on any particular set of skills than on the intense physicality of their jobs. Theirs was a big-tent definition of “the seaman” that emphasized breadwinner status, visceral masculine energy, suffering male bodies, and selfless acts at sea.

Contrasting sharply with left-wing rhetoric, professionalizing nautical “experts”—captains, officers, and navigation instructors—expressed an urgent need to preserve the “real seaman” of wind and sail. In a flourish of romanticization, they transformed sailing into a much-discussed manly virtue; the “real seaman” embodied the masculine character, values, knowledge, and experience that seemed to be disappearing along with wind-driven vessels. Moreover, in their view, the “real seaman” was a loyal German patriot, and the love he felt for his profession supposedly made him impervious to Social Democracy. Most of these nautical professionals belonged to the Wilhelmine Mittelstand, the broad group of master artisans, shopkeepers, and other lower middle-class Germans, who felt threatened by rapid industrialization, deskilling, or the rise of “proletarian“ wage work in traditional trades. The virulent anti-socialism that nautical
professionals expressed in their journals and correspondence conforms to broader patterns of political conservatism and interest group mobilization in the *Mittelstand* at the end of the nineteenth century. Their assertions that sailing skill distinguished them as “real seamen” aimed to create cultural and social distance between them and the growing number of steamship workers under their command. This image also served to assuage occupational insecurities as officers and captains in *Handelsmarine* struggled to reconcile older definitions of sea-manhood with their newfound (lower) middle-class professional status.

At the same time the image of the “real seaman” held tremendous appeal for shipowners, German officials, and liberal reformers. Influenced by economic concerns and the ideology of *Weltpolitik*, these groups worried about rising labor unrest in an industry that suddenly appeared central to national and imperial goals. In effect, the “real seaman” provided them with a conceptual dam against the “fluctuating masses” of men (and women) who worked in steamship engine rooms, staterooms, kitchens, dining rooms, or laundry rooms. Instead, they hoped to anchor the prevailing social order at sea in a masculine character forged by sailing experience. In doing so, these groups refashioned the *Fahrensmann* of custom and tradition into Germany’s “real seaman,” laboring for the nation and superior to proletarianized steamship workers of all sorts.

Before considering the rhetorical construction of the “real seaman,” this chapter examines two alternatives. Using a wealth of ethnographic observations and seamen’s

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own accounts, it looks first at what it meant to be a traditional *Fahrensmann* from the German coasts. This masculine identity originated in pre-industrial conditions, but remained salient into the early decades of the twentieth century, nurtured aboard sailing freighters that continued to ply commercial trade routes. Second it examines the alternative vision of a “seamanly proletariat” put forward by socialists and the *Seemannsverband* in response to industrialization. Ultimately, however, the vision of Germany’s professionalizing nautical experts proved to be most influential in setting the terms of the national debate over manhood, work, and skill at sea.

### 4.1 *Fahrensleute*

Pre-industrial merchant seafaring along the German coasts had involved an informal process whereby boys became seamen by mastering the art and dangers of sailing. They learned to climb in the ship’s rigging, to face privation and bad weather with composure, and to work as a team. For traditional merchant sailors, sailing was their craft. Being recognized by one’s peers as a full seaman was akin to earning honor among craftsmen ashore. German sailors had a variety of names for this seafaring masculine identity. Wilhelmine ethnologist Richard Wossidlo called these men *Fahrensleute*, which translates as traveling men who had experienced the sea. *Fahrensleute* had long defined themselves vis-à-vis women and men who worked on land. As steam and passenger traffic became the norm they also set themselves above all steamship workers. Until German sailing freighters ceased operating on bulk cargo routes in the early twentieth century, the *Fahrensleute* identity continued to be part of
social practice in the German merchant marine, although in an increasingly diminished and romanticized form.\textsuperscript{13}

*Fahrensleute* tended to be strongly identified with their coastal region of origin. They referred to themselves by a variety of names that were always rendered in Lower German dialects. Some expressed the idea of experience at sea directly, including “*Fohrensmann*,” “*Fohrenslüd*,” “befohrter Mann,” “seebeforhren Mann,” “*Seefohrensman*.\textsuperscript{14}” Others emphasized water, aquatic animals, and other elements of nature like “*Watermann*,” “*Waterslüd*,” “*Waterhöhner*,” “*Seelöwen*,” “*Seevoegel*,” “*Seehasen*.” Still, others took on a more literary form, above all “*Janmaat*,” the popular literary figure of Northern European seafaring, and its derivations “*Johannmaat*,” “*Hannmaat*,” and “*Johann Klatt*.\textsuperscript{14}” Into the twentieth century, Lower German was the lingua franca aboard German sailing ships. Language provided a significant marker of belonging in the ranks of experienced seamen. Crews almost always spoke in the particular dialect of the ship’s home port. New crewmembers who spoke only High German had to learn quickly or face humiliations that frequently turned violent.\textsuperscript{15}

These emotionally intense local identities show how *Fahrensleute* were shaped by their coastal communities and families. Despite literary stereotypes, found in such works as Wagner’s *Der fliegender Holländer*, they maintained affective ties to shore-based society. Before the middle of the nineteenth century most had gone to sea with relatives or other men from their own districts, ensuring a high degree of social continuity. Boys


\textsuperscript{14} These terms come from ethnologist Richard Wossidlo’s interviews with older Mecklenburg seafarers around 1900. See Wossidlo, *Reise, Quartier, in Gottesnaam*, 47-50.

typically went to sea after confirmation at the age of fourteen, following the Protestant male life-cycle that dominated along German-speaking coasts. There were also cases where boys as young as ten or eleven accompanied older male relatives to sea.\textsuperscript{16} Fahrensleute sailed seasonally and spent the winter months at home with their families. It was not uncommon even for regular crewmembers to carry a small amount of their own freight aboard ship, which they sold for a profit. The pathway to command—becoming a mate or shipmaster—was relatively wide; ambitious young mariners had the option of private training at home under navigation instructors who were usually retired shipmasters. The ultimate goal for a determined shipmaster would have been to inherit or purchase his own ship, with the financial help of family and friendship circles within coastal communities. Such an achievement was never the rule along the German coasts, but it also was not uncommon.\textsuperscript{17}

Nineteenth-century German coastal communities were patriarchal societies, in which one basic cultural assumption was that men sailed and women did not. This did not mean that coastal women were absent from maritime life or work. They were always involved in maritime life as mothers, wives, daughters, and shore-based workers.\textsuperscript{18} At times they even worked aboard ship as seamen in disguise or with their shipowner husbands on small coastal craft.\textsuperscript{19} Manhood, however, remained the primary cultural yardstick for seamanship. Going to sea represented an intensely gendered moment in the life of a boy from the German coasts. When he embarked on his first voyage he was supposed to become a “hardened” seaman through separation from his mother and

\textsuperscript{16} Jens Jacob Eschels, for example, went to sea in 1769 at the age of eleven. See Eschels, \textit{Lebensbeschreibung eines alten Seemannes}, ed. Albrecht Sauer (Hamburg: Convent, 2006 [1995]), 27-40.
\textsuperscript{17} Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 11-23, 124-61.
\textsuperscript{18} Kirby and Hinkkanen, \textit{The Baltic and the North Seas}, 231-253.
\textsuperscript{19} Feldkamp, “Frauenarbeit in der deutschen Seeschifffahrt bis 1945,” 18-23.
repudiation of feminine “softness.”  

German maritime communities had customs to mark such occasions, where mothers gave their sons specially knitted clothing, religious objects, or other tokens to protect them while they were at sea.

In addition to its location in German coastal regions and communities, the *Fahrensleute* identity was also embedded in an all-male shipboard community. Boys and men practiced their sea-manhood in the social, technological, and spatial conditions of daily life and work aboard sailing vessels. Here manhood, experience, and sailing skill operated as implicit referents for an individual’s worth and place within the informal shipboard hierarchy. *Fahrensleute* expressed these three interlocking ideas through the concept of *Tüchtigkeit*, cognate of the English notion of “being able-bodied.” A *tüchtiger* seaman was one who had mastered seamanship, or the art of sailing. On one level, seamanship reflected the ability to trim sails, tie knots, or climb in the rigging. It also implied composure, self-confidence, and reliability in the face of the sea’s privations and dangers. Reputation and a craftsman-style honor were everything; a boy could not become a man at sea without being accepted as such by the community of experienced mariners.

The traditional shipboard community consisted of three more or less distinct social groups. The spatial location of each group’s sleeping quarters aboard ship signified its relative position in the social hierarchy: ordinary seamen occupied the spaces “before the mast,” that is, at the front of the ship where the sea’s movements were most perceptible. Mid-ranking foremen or specialists typically occupied berths further aft, and mates and shipmasters had the most sizable quarters at the rear of the ship. The language

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20 See, for example, Schulz, *Im Strom der Gezeiten*, 21; Friedrich Koch, “Die lange Reise,” in *Von Seglern und Dampfern*, 133.

21 Wossidlo, *Reise, Quartier, in Gottesnaam*, 23.
of seniority aboard ship was highly gendered. Among ordinary seamen, one rose up through the ranks from *Schiffsjunge* (ship’s boy) to a middling category as *Jungmann* (young man), *Halbmann* (half-man), or *Leichtmatrose* (light sailor), finishing at the top of this level as a *Vollmatrose* (full sailor) or simply *Matrose*, a fully capable seaman.  

Depending on a sailing ship’s size, construction, and destination, it also would have sailed with a variety of mid-ranking crewmen and specialists who stood above ordinary crewmen, but who were not recognized navigator-commanders. These included boatswains, sail makers, cooks, carpenters, and blacksmiths.  

Above the specialists stood those responsible for navigation and command—the *Steuermann* (mate) and the *Schiffer* (shipmaster).

Maritime career advancement was traditionally an informal process, structured around a specific progression from boyhood to manhood and governed by a principle of seniority. Time at sea was the most important factor for determining seniority. A ship’s boy could hire on as a *Leichtmatrose* after a few years experience and, after another year or two, as a *Vollmatrose*. Once a seaman had sailed as a *Vollmatrose* for a considerable amount of time, he could attain the mid-ranking positions of sail-maker or boatswain, although becoming a sail-maker typically marked the end-point of one’s career.

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22 In popular usage, the term “Matrose” has become a generic term for all seafaring workers since the mid-twentieth century, but it originally referred to a fully capable, ordinary crewman aboard a sailing ship. On the term’s etymology see Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 91. Late-nineteenth-century standardization in seafaring legal and administrative practices simplified the old designations into a progression of *Schiffsjunge—Leichtmatrose—Vollmatrose* corresponding generally to the Anglo-American sequence of ship’s boy—ordinary seaman—able-bodied seaman. Older designations, however, continued to be used informally into the twentieth century. See Hans Wilhelm Hoffmann, *Matrosen—Schiffsmechaniker—Schiffsoffiziere: Berufsbildung der Seeleute im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Köster, 2006), 7.

23 On merchant ships, a boatswain was analogous to a foreman among the regular crew (in naval hierarchies boatswains are petty-officers). Boatswains and sail makers were almost always drawn from the ranks of experienced *Matrosen*, while carpenters and blacksmiths often had trained on land. Blacksmiths were introduced in the nineteenth century along with metal ship construction. Cooks had an ambiguous status that varied over time and place, at times ranking above and at times below *Matrosen*. 

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aspirations. *Vollmatrosen* with considerable experience at sea could also become a *Steuermann*, and after a few years of navigation and command experience, a *Steuermann* could become a *Schiffer*. In practice, personal and family connections or ship-owning were just as important for advancement into the command ranks as experience or reputation. Still, the legitimacy of a shipmaster’s authority was based on the time he had spent and the skills he had learned among ordinary crewmen “before the mast,” following the progression in his craft from ship’s boy to shipmaster.24

Daily life aboard sailing ships involved a great deal of drudgework like deck scrubbing, galley cleaning, painting, or loading and unloading cargo. The lower a sailor was in the hierarchy the more likely he would be or more frequently he would have to do these kinds of tasks. So, for example, ship’s boys almost always started their careers either as an assistant to the cook in the galley or as the captain’s personal servant. It was a rare and coveted moment when a boy got to start out on deck, keeping watch with the rest of the crew.25 *Vollmatrosen* (who were at times referred to as “*Herren Matrosen*”) refused to perform drudgework they considered to be an affront to the privileges they had earned to perform honorable skilled work on deck.26 Loading and unloading cargo in port, for example, was no measure for a “*tüchtiger* man;” only mastery of the art of sailing could win a seaman the esteem of his superiors and shipmates.27

Having a body conditioned to perform sailing techniques was the most important marker for a *Fahrensmann*. *Fahrensleute* defined their shipboard status through the qualities of being quick (*fix und fertig*), nimble (*flink*), and able bodied or capable

24 Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 93-96.
26 See, for example, Schulz, *Im Strom der Gezeiten*, 290-91; Gustav Schröder, *Fernweh und Heimweh* (Potsdam: Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1943), 84-87.
qualities relating to bodily motion and time-tested practice at sea. In the 1830s, North Frisian shipmaster Jens Jacob Eschels wrote his memoir as a guide to the profession for his sons and grandsons, advising them to “always be nimble and diligent in your career.” He admonished them to focus early in their sea careers on developing the “good name of an active and diligent man” and “an attentive man,” so that their peers and superiors would overlook any mistakes that they later might make. Physical size and strength were also important characteristics among Fahrensleute, but experience, skill, and reputation carried equal weight. Bruno Heise recalls that he was “not exactly herculean built” when he first hired on as a Vollmatrose at the age of 17. Despite his disadvantage in size, he was “the most skillful and nimble of all” and therefore could “hold [his] own among the stronger men.” Still, size mattered. Gustav Schröder, who remained a diminutive man throughout his life, found it difficult (although not impossible) to secure places aboard German sailing ships. The motivation to overcome other mariners’ perceptions of his “boyish” physique provides a major theme in his autobiography.

Becoming a Fahremsmann also involved demonstrating dexterity at a variety of specific sailing tasks. To be fully a man at sea in the nineteenth century was to know how to climb through the rigging with ease; to know what a yardarm and a square rigged sail were; to be able to quickly and efficiently tie down a topsail that had broken free in rough weather. German sailors’ diaries, letters, and memoirs from the long nineteenth

28 Eschels, Lebensbeschreibung, 111.
29 Ibid., 124.
31 Schröder, Fernweh und Heimweh, 22-23, 115-17.
32 Above all, seamanship required reflexive knowledge of the sailing machine. The primary mechanism of a wind-driven vessel, known as the rigging, is the interconnected system of cordage (lines and cables), sails, masts, and other support beams used to harness wind power. In practice, sailing requires frequent
century bear out the close connection between collective work in the rigging, “the most distinguished work,” and manhood. For Franz von Wahlde, his first time up in the rigging accompanied by a Vollmatrose was a rite of passage into the world of experienced men at sea. He associated the rigging with feelings of power and accomplishment, expressed through an aesthetic appreciation of the bird-eye view of the ship and its crew below. For Oscar Schulz, prowess and skill in the rigging as well as the speed and quality of knot tying and splicing were matters of manly competition with another ship’s boy, a race toward “Tüchtigkeit.” Heinrich von Kralik’s diary records that a more experienced Vollmatrosen accompanied the boys on their first trips into the rigging. He reports that controlling his fear of heights made him feel proud, powerful, and happy about his work.

adjustment and maintenance of the rigging’s moveable parts in order to maneuver sails into favorable positions vis-à-vis the wind. The second major component of the sailing mechanism, the rudder and wheel system, also require extensive coordination of human and mechanical motion, embodied in the person of the helmsman. In order to steer the ship, the helmsman has to match his operation of the wheel with his crewmates’ operation of sails. Sailing maneuvers, particularly in heavy seas, are complex and required a mixture of individual effort and collective coordination through specialized knowledge, physical strength and reflexes, and communication through short-hand commands. Aboard traditional merchant sailing ships, seamen gained such knowledge through experience, which they passed from generation to generation through informal training. Sailing knowledge and its associated movements had to become, through regular practice, part of a seaman’s bodily memory, carried out below the threshold of consciousness. See, Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 55-66; and John Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1984).

Jens Jacob Eschels proudly recalls that his captain thought of him as a “nimble young man,” made him his personal deck assistant, and gave him “the most distinguished work” in overhauling the ship’s rigging. Eschels, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 66


Figure 14. Working in the rigging aboard the Bremen-based sailing freighter *Magdalena Vinnen*, c. 1920s. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven.
Figure 15. Crew photo aboard the Hamburg-based sailing freighter *Lilla*, 10 Dec. 1899, Santos, Brazil. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven.
Personal accounts express similar sentiments about learning to steer a ship. As with the rigging, steering was usually part of informal training aboard sailing vessels. The position of helmsman was highly desirable, and it was expressed through the concept of “manning” the helm.\textsuperscript{37} Paul Mewes’ description of his first time steering the ship illustrates this connection between informal training, steering, and manhood:

On the return voyage I learned to steer and use the compass. As soon as [the first mate] found out, he shouted “Paul to the helm!” I went there cockily, being sure that I could handle things. Nevertheless, it went quite well. At first, of course, [he] stayed to keep an eye on me and how I conducted myself. Afterwards, as he was walking away, I heard him say to the first mate, “The boy steers like a man [Kerl].” From then on I got to steer our ship everyday for two hours.\textsuperscript{38}

Competence at manning the helm was something that required constant practice and, more importantly, demonstration. If a Vollmatrose failed to impress the captain with his steering skill during the first few days of the voyage he could be demoted in both rank and pay.\textsuperscript{39}

Helmsmen, who had to develop a keen sense of direction and a feel for how the ship moved at sea, were well positioned to advance into the ranks of navigators: Steuerleute (mates) and Schiffer (shipmasters), the groups that would later be called “officers” and “captains.” On a traditional merchant vessel, navigation and command typically went hand in hand, although this was not always the case. Traditional navigational knowledge was transmitted informally among sailing craftsmen. Legitimate claims to knowledge were therefore more accessible for experienced crewmen in the lower ranks before the introduction of formal navigation schooling in the nineteenth

\textsuperscript{37} Depending on the size and experience level of a ship’s crew, a boy might experience the first time being “man at the helm” early in the voyage or not at all. See, Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 62-66.


\textsuperscript{39} Schulz, \textit{Im Strom der Gezeiten}, 185.
century. Younger *Matrosen* were often able to spend the winters at home learning navigation from retired shipmasters. In 1780, for example, Jens Jacob Eschels was serving as a *Matrose* aboard a ship that lost its *Steuerleute* to yellow fever in Granada. Luckily he had learned navigation from a retired shipmaster in his home village. Because the captain did not know how to navigate he asked Eschels to teach him.40

_Fahrensleute_ also expected each other to master their emotional and physical reactions to the perils of illness, accident, and weather at sea. Such unforeseen events were all the more hazardous aboard oceangoing sailing ships due to limited technology, poor medical facilities, and lengthy voyages. In the nineteenth century it was taken for granted that men alone should face these perils and, conversely, that these perils created seamen. When one captain, for example, prepared for a late-season transatlantic crossing in 1861, he abandoned plans to bring his wife along after receiving news of a large storm brewing in the North Atlantic. From his point of view, only men were suited to weather the winter storm.41 When captains’ wives and children did accompany their husbands and fathers on the high seas, the work they did was usually limited to domestic tasks. They were rarely allowed to participate in dangerous sailing maneuvers, and they typically had to stay below deck during stormy weather.42

Enduring illness with composure was a test of manhood at sea. Seasickness in particular was regarded as a boy’s first test at sea.43 Almost without fail, sailors’ accounts discuss whether or to what degree they experienced seasickness on their first

41 Mewes, _Grüßt alle, nächstens mehr_, 53.
43 The general improvements in diet and sanitary conditions at sea made during the nineteenth century reduced but did not eliminate serious illness at sea. See Klaus Volbeh, _Gesundheit an Bord. Kleine Geschichte der Hygiene und Arzneimittelversorgung auf Schiffen_ (Hamburg: Kabel, 1987).
voyage. Overcoming seasickness bestowed the status of being “sea-steady” (seefest).

Less fortunate boys who could not help their seasickness had to endure humiliation from experienced seamen until they too could master their bodies. It was also common for older crewmen to threaten or beat a seasick ship’s boy for his inability to work. This was one way of instilling an informal, communal sense of labor discipline aboard merchant vessels where every hand counted. A few days into Franz von Wahlde’s first voyage, when he became seasick, he was forced to work, remarking stoically in his diary “what use is whining, I’m not allowed to be idle.”

Sailing ships were also accident-prone spaces. A misplaced foot could mean serious injury or death for sailors working high up in the rigging. Ships could roll unexpectedly and throw a man into a bulkhead or, worse, into the sea. Railing and decks were often slippery from overflowing waves. Vessels navigating coastal waters were always at risk of running aground and maritime history is full of instances of shipwreck. Nonetheless, Fahrensleute expected each other to meet such perils with collective calm and resiliency. Tales of mishap appear frequently in these men’s diaries, letters, and memoirs. Indeed, the incidence of “man overboard” was so common that it was remarkable when a whole voyage passed without its occurrence.

44 Eschels, Lebensbeschreibung, 27.
45 In 1874 on his first voyage, Johann Georg Frölich recalls that the shipmaster, mates, and his fellow crewmen beat him as often as three times a day for being seasick over most of the four-month-long trip. “Erinnerungen des Heinrich Johann Georg Fröhlich,” DSB.
46 Von Wahlde, Ausgebüxt, 36. Later, he became so ill that he could not move while the ship lay in port at Buenos Aires, writing: “As I lay in my bunk, I heard the first mate let loose a barrage of nasty words about my sickness and laziness. That’s the seaman’s lot, to be used up … and thrown away,” 74.
47 Wolfgang Steusloff, “Als Junge und Matrose auf Hamburger Rahsegtern. Erinnerungen eines Warnemünder Kap Hoornlers,” Deutsches Schifahrtarchiv 11, (1988): 169-70; Another sailor blithely describes a deadly case of “man overboard” before turning matter-of-factly back to the task at hand: “While we were repairing the sails, Leichtmatrose J.H. Benidt from Cranz-Neuenfelde ran up the shrouds to the big yardarm. Just as he reached it, there came a strong gust of wind and both topsails broke above the cap. Benidt fell out into the ocean, but he couldn’t be saved, mainly since the lifeboat wasn’t in order. While sailing in the trade winds we’d been too busy with painting, laying matting, etc.” Sabine Hanno-Weber,
*Fahrensleute* also expected each other to face dangerous storms with composure, steadfastness, and teamwork. The centrality of weather in seafaring accounts arises from its everyday importance in how and whether a ship would make it to shore. Weather prediction on the ocean improved during the nineteenth century, but it retained its essentially unpredictable nature, particularly for wind-driven vessels.\(^{48}\) Being a man at sea meant to reliably do the work necessary to keep the collective crew and the individual crewman safe from harm. Jens Jacob Eschels captured mariners’ expectations of behavior during dangerous weather. He valued silence and modesty in the face of danger, claiming that “those who are the greatest cowards during emergencies talk loudest afterwards.”\(^{49}\) Silent reliability and teamwork were central.

Challenging and stormy passages provided the ultimate test of manhood at sea. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Cape Horn, which lies at the southernmost tip of South America, became the archetypal test of manhood under sail. Due to its geography, the passage around the Cape is one of the stormiest and most hazardous in the world.\(^{50}\) Before the Panama Canal opened in 1914, thousands of sailing freighters made the trek around Cape Horn every year, carrying such bulk cargos as nitrates from Chile or Peru, wheat from Australia, or wood from the Puget Sound. The passage stands out among the experiences and memories of *Fahrensleute*. Heinrich von

\(^{48}\) European and North American naval and merchant vessels began collecting and sharing hydrographic knowledge in the late 1840s. See Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 113-14.  
\(^{49}\) Eschels, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 55.  
\(^{50}\) The weather along the passage is often very cold since the Cape lies at fifty-six degrees south latitude. It is located within the “screaming fifties,” the belt of trade winds blowing from east to west around the lower regions of the globe without any land mass to slow it down. At the tip of South America, these conditions produce towering waves and treacherous storms. The passage also takes ships well below the southern iceberg belt. Cape Horn has thus become a graveyard for both ships and men. See, Ursula Feldkamp, *Rund Kap Hoorn. Mit Frachsegeln zur Westküste Amerikas* (Bremen: Hauschild, 2003).
Kralik’s diary records one of the most vivid and poetic accounts of this struggle with the Cape. In between violent nature—“house-high waves”—and mastery of the ship during a storm—refastening the topsail—we find von Kralik working as part of a team of men, thinking of home, love, parents, and a girl, all of which are “far, far away.” He symbolically distances himself, and the storm, from overlapping images of land, childhood, and femininity. In this way, working against the storm with his crewmates signifies his passage into manhood at sea.51 These so-called “Caphoornsailors” counted as “men with excellent seamanly qualifications, formed through many sailing ship voyages and roundings of Cape Horn—honest, helpful, and comradely.”52

Initiation ceremonies, violence, and complex sexual dynamics also shaped manhood within the community of Fahrensleute. Line-crossing ceremonies were the most important initiation rites for German and other European sailors. Among German-speaking seafarers, these ceremonies originated in the medieval practice of “hānseln,” rituals of initiation into communities of merchants, artisans, and students. It is no coincidence that “hānseln,” which means “to razz” or “to pick on” in modern German, shares a common root with “Hanse”—the community of seagoing merchants. Into the early nineteenth century, sailing past Skagen at the northern tip of Denmark or through the straits of Gibraltar counted as symbolic rites of passage among German seafarers.53

As German vessels began to engage in trans-oceanic commerce, the equator replaced

geographic lines in European waters as the most important spatial marker of initiation.\textsuperscript{54}

These ceremonies marked a novice’s passage into the ocean’s vastness, as well as his initiation into the circle of experienced seafarers. They were moments of pageantry, pain, humiliation, and often violence.\textsuperscript{55} They mixed spectacle and the inversion of shipboard social relations with a test of physical and emotional endurance to symbolize the passage into manhood at sea.\textsuperscript{56}

The humiliations that the uninitiated might encounter when sailing freighters crossed the equator ranged from simple dunking with a pail of water to tarring, head-shaving, and beating.\textsuperscript{57} Franz von Wahlde’s 1884 account describes how other crewmen dunked him in a barrel and showered him with water until he could hardly breathe. Once

\textsuperscript{54} German seafarers inherited this custom from French, British, Dutch, and Spanish mariners who had been practicing equator-crossing ceremonies since the sixteenth century. The first recorded line-crossing ceremony aboard a German-speaking vessel occurred aboard a Prussian ship bound for China in 1752. See, Steusloff, “… Inseipt, afrasiert und rin na’t Küben,” 360-63.

\textsuperscript{55} By the second half of the nineteenth century, equator baptism aboard German ships had assumed typical contours. Neptune/Poseidon—played by an experienced member of the regular crew—arrived on board followed by a boisterous procession, including sailors dressed as a variety of colorful characters, most commonly priests, barbers, doctors, and Neptune’s wife, Salacia/Amphitrite. The entire crew assembled on deck to watch the show. After giving a speech, which often listed the crew’s grievances against the captain and officers, Neptune commanded that all those on board who had never before passed into the southern hemisphere be brought to him. Once the victims were assembled, they had to endure greater or lesser forms of pain and humiliation before being “baptized” in a large vat of water. A celebration with drinking and smoking—funded by the victims out of their own pay—usually followed the ceremony. For first-hand accounts of the ceremony during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries see “Briefe und Schriften des Adolf Pfaffert, 1878-1889” in Deutsches Seefahrtsmuseum Collection; von Wahlde, Ausgebüxt, 52-54; Carl Kircheiß, Wasser, Wind und weite Welt. Als Schiffsjunge um die Erde (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1953), 88-92. This informal ritual was common, but not always practiced, and was always left to the captain’s discretion. Bruno Heise recalls that on a voyage to Chile in 1913, the captain decided that the equator baptism was a waste of working time and did not inform the crew that they had crossed the line until much later after the fact. See Heise, “Windjammerzeiten,” 19.

\textsuperscript{56} Henning Henningsen shares the view that the equator baptism was a “sort of test of manhood.” See Henningsen, Crossing the Equator, 106.

\textsuperscript{57} Around 1900, a gentler version of equator baptism became popular on passenger liners. This “show tradition” had much more in common with new forms of commercial entertainment aboard luxury liners than it did with actual seafaring customs. Oscar Schulz’s memoirs explain the differences in narrative detail. As a Fourth Officer aboard a number of passenger liners, he was responsible for provisions and entertainment. He staged an “equator baptism” that was suitable for children, involving the “best costumes” and “ornate baptismal certificates” for the passengers. This description is a far cry from his own experience with the ritual as a ship’s boy aboard a sailing freighter, which he describes as being “right on the borders of brutality.” See Schulz, Im Strom der Gezeiten, 49, 269-70; the phrase “show tradition” [Schaubrauch] belongs to Wolfgang Steusloff. See Steusloff, “… Inseipt, afrasiert und rin na’t Küben,” 366.
the water stopped, he was tarred with a foul-smelling mixture of soot and oil and then shaved roughly until his face hurt. One of his fellow initiates tried to escape the same treatment, but was caught and brutally punished for not “running with the pack.” In what were probably rare cases, humiliation could turn into sexual violence. One such case occurred in 1911 aboard the Nereide, a German sailing freighter bound for Chile. During the “equator baptism” crewmembers sodomized a ship’s boy with a funnel. The case became a national scandal, playing out on the floor of the Reichstag, in the press, and in courtrooms. German courts ultimately condemned the behavior of individual perpetrators as “obscene and insulting torture” but exonerated equator baptism as “a time-honored seaman’s merriment.”

Beyond ritual hazing, violence of the everyday variety functioned as part of an informal disciplinary regime that reinforced the shipboard hierarchy. One Bremer captain summed up this attitude in an 1852 letter to state authorities defending the beating of a ship’s boy under his command: “[Beatings] always perform a good service because they better [the boy] over a long period of time … How many experienced hands are there in Bremen who have left the fo’c’sle without getting a beating? I think very few.” Customary discipline on civilian ships operated in a more informal, diffuse, and spontaneous manner than aboard military vessels. The shipmaster was first among

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58 von Wahlde, Ausgebüxt, 52-54.
60 Forecastle, or common crew quarters; the area “before the mast.”
equals. Under medieval hanseatic law he had the right to hit an insubordinate man once, but thereafter the man could defend himself. Nineteenth century reforms, which sought to imbue merchant captains with the disciplinary powers of the state, only partially succeeded in changing social praxis aboard German merchant sailing ships. Informal violence continued to define everyday discipline and status on sailing freighters into the twentieth century. It was directed not only from commanders to subordinates but also occurred among men and boys within the common ranks. The “law of the fist” provided the surest way for a seaman to “stand his man” aboard ship. Being able to endure was a mark of manly honor.

Same-sex sexuality aboard ship played a complex role in customary manhood at sea: it was simultaneously a silent practice and a public shame. On a communal level, coerced homoeroticism occurred in some initiation rites. Although rarely mentioned in seafaring accounts there is evidence that seafaring traditions involved “inspection” rituals at particularly important moments along the path to manhood at sea. These were similar to initiation rituals that were part of male peasant culture in Northern Europe. At the beginning of the voyage, during line-crossing ceremonies, or before disembarking at ports known for their prostitutes and brothels, novices were forced to expose their penises as the rest of the crew looked on. Depending on the circumstances and particular tradition, their genitals might be “rubbed,” smeared with tar, or measured as a kind of sign post along the path to manhood.

62 Welke, Der Kapitän, 109-12; Gerstenberger and Welke, Vom Wind zum Dampf, 67-69.
63 See, Schulz, Im Strom der Gezeiten, 16, 31, 192-93; Schröder, Fernweh und Heimweh, 86; BA-BL, R/901/76375, Letter from Paul Ochs to Ausw. Amt, 18 Apr. 1912. Ferdinand Tönnies also noted the prevalence of the “law of the fist” aboard German ships into the early twentieth century. See Tönnies, “Die Ostseehäfen Flensburg, Kiel, Lübeck,” 563.
64 Henningsen notes the similarities between “inspection” ceremonies among traditional seafarers and those among male peasants and farmhands. Although he presents a fair amount of evidence of homoerotic
On an interpersonal level, the historical record of same-sex sexuality aboard ship, which is made up entirely of disciplinary and legal documents, mainly reflects instances of sexual coercion. Forced intimacy among two or three sailors almost always involved lines of authority and subordination. Of the four sodomy cases in the Handelsmarine reported to Reich authorities during the Imperial period, all involve ship’s boys and their direct supervisors: a cook, a first mate, and two captains. All took place aboard sailing vessels. In all but one case, the boys appear to have been coerced through violence, threats, or alcohol into having sex with the higher-ranking crewman. These cases also highlight the centrality that spatial privileges aboard ship played in providing sexual opportunities. Galleys and officers’ quarters afforded more privacy than other spaces aboard sailing ships.\(^65\) Still, as recent research on the British navy suggests, there also would have been ample space for consensual intimate encounters.\(^66\) The lack of documentation for consensual relationships among crewmen of equal status in the Handelsmarine suggests that those that occurred remained undiscovered, ignored, or unofficially tolerated. It is also important to note that there is no evidence that either the crewmen involved or German authorities linked these activities to the novel medical and psychological concept of “homosexuality” that emerged at the end of the nineteenth

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\(^65\) The four cases can be found in the following files (in chronological order by ship name): The Emma case (1878), BA-BL, R/901/63232, KDGK Caracas to Ausw. Amt, 11 Dec. 1878. The Sophie Marie case (1881), BA-BL, R/901/63232, telegram from KDGK Riga to Ausw. Amt, 1 Jun. 1881. The I.D. Bischoff case (1896), see BA-BL, R/901/7091, KDK Vancouver to Ausw. Amt, 25 Feb. 1896. The Carla case (1914), BA-BL, R/901/76359, KDGK Valparaiso to Ausw. Amt, 10 Jul. 1915.

\(^66\) The recent work of B.R. Burg has convincingly challenged N.A.M. Rodger’s assertions that sailing ships simply did not have the kinds of spaces necessary for private sexual encounters. If opportunities for both coercive and consensual sexual intimacy existed in the relatively crowded quarters and under the stricter discipline of eighteenth and nineteenth century British naval ships, then it stands to reason that less crowded and disciplined merchant vessels would have provided at least as many if not more opportunities. See, N. A. M. Rodger, The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy (New York: Norton, 1986), 80-81; B. R. Burg, Boys at Sea: Sodomy, Indecency, and Courts Martial in Nelson’s Navy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
In sum, homoeroticism among *Fahrensleute* occurred for a variety of reasons: as part of communal initiation ceremonies, as a matter of simple convenience in a homosocial space, or out of feelings of desire or love for one’s shipmates.

*Fahrensleute* defined their community in opposition to a variety of other groups. Since they thought of themselves as masters of the craft of sailing, they looked down upon their naval counterparts. Shipowners’ emphasis on profit in commercial sailing held down crew numbers to low levels. This basic social fact is, perhaps, the most defining difference between merchant and naval sailing. Nineteenth-century commercial sailing vessels always had a fraction of the crewmen than did comparable naval vessels. Unlike naval vessels or merchant steamships, where a strict division of labor ruled, merchant sailing required sailors who had mastered all aspects of their trade. Because naval crewmen learned only the tasks assigned to their division, they did not count as “full” seamen among *Fahrensleute* who referred to them disparagingly as “commission boys.”

In addition to naval sailors, other groups such as women, men who worked on land, and steamship workers provided the principal “others” for *Fahrensleute*. It was a self-evident from the gendered language of seafaring that a woman could not qualify as a *Fahrensmann*. As we have already seen, women—particularly mothers—provided a symbolic counterpoint to a man at sea. *Fahrensleute* also distanced themselves from land-based men, referring to them pejoratively as “peasants,” “land rats,” and a variety of

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other names. From the late-nineteenth century, however, steamship workers increasingly came to stand for everything that a Fahrensmann was not. German sailing men referred to their steam-based counterparts in emasculating terms. On the one hand they infantilized seafaring workers who had not learned the profession aboard a sailing ship: “In earlier times there were more men—now there are mostly just boys who can’t even fasten one cord.” Fahrensleute also feminized steamship workers, referring to them at times as “sailors with a petticoat.”70

4.2 A Seamanly Proletariat

The dizzying pace of industrialization in Wilhelmine Germany extended into German ports and out onto the sea. It accelerated the division of maritime labor, shifting the balance from traditional Fahrensleute to a host of new shipboard occupations that accompanied steam and passenger service. Around 1900 German trade unionists heralded the birth of a new “seamanly proletariat” that was oppressed and exploited by maritime capitalism.71 This new social and cultural group became the focus of maritime strikes, socialist-leaning seamen’s unions, and heated debates over maritime labor in the Reichstag. Actual labor practices, working conditions, and political power were all at stake in the seafaring labor conflicts that erupted in Wilhelmine Germany. Culturally, however, the definition of “seaman” was also subject to renegotiation. German leftists cast a wide net in their understanding of the “German seaman,” including not only sailing-trained men but also male steamship workers. They constructed a vision of

70 Ibid., 47-50.
manhood at sea that encompassed a suffering brotherhood of traditional *Matrosen* and so-called “firemen” (boiler room workers). These two groups, they argued, were bound together by the intense physicality of their jobs and their bodily suffering, which also set them apart from maritime service workers. Class duty, honor, and breadwinner status obligated *Matrosen* and firemen to engage in a courageous struggle against shipowners for better working conditions, economic independence, and (male) political equality.

In contrast to declining work opportunities aboard sailing vessels, the proliferation of steamships in Germany opened up tens of thousands of new positions within a growing division of shipboard labor. In 1871 less than 5,000 people worked aboard German steamships, compared to almost 35,000 on sailing vessels. In 1890 the numbers were almost even—around 20,000 workers for each branch of the *Handelsmarine*. By 1914, the figures are strikingly lopsided: 70,000 workers served aboard German steamers compared to only 13,000 on sailing ships (*Figure 12*). In other words, sailing crews experienced both a relative and absolute decline vis-à-vis their steamship counterparts. Recognizing the significance of steamship work and its division of labor, the Reich Interior Ministry introduced a new classificatory scheme for “seamanly workers” in 1897, dividing them into three groups: deck crew, engine-room personnel, and service workers. The deck crew class included *Matrosen* and deck officers from both steam and sailing ships.

Service workers aboard large steam liners—including doctors, cooks, confectioners, bakers, butchers, stewards, stewardesses, laundry workers, and others—were responsible for passenger care and therefore worked and lived near the liner’s passenger areas. A few of these occupations such as doctors and head chefs enjoyed

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72 StAH 132-II-2123, RAdl to Hamburg Senate, 7 Sept. 1897.
relatively high status and were therefore well paid. These individuals, however, were exceptional cases. The vast majority of service workers—stewards and stewardesses—constituted the lowest-paid group of workers at sea. These low-status jobs were also the fastest growing occupations in the Handelsmarine. Among Hamburg-based crews, their numbers jumped from a little over 6,000 in 1890 to almost 19,000 in 1910. The relative increase of service personnel from 19% to 30% of Hamburg’s entire maritime workforce reflects the growing emphasis on hotel-like luxury liners in the Handelsmarine (Figures 16 & 17).

Figure 16. Data for the years 1895-98 appear anomalous because the Hamburg Seemannsamt imposed a minimum ship size in its workforce tallies, excluding seafarers aboard smaller coastal craft, many of which were sailing ships. In 1899 it abandoned the minimum ship size requirement and returned to prior statistical methods. Source: Statistik des Seemanns-Amtes zu Hamburg 1890-1910 (Staatsarchiv Hamburg).

73 Wiborg & Wiborg, The World is Our Oyster, 162.
Figure 17. Data for the years 1895-98 appear anomalous because the Hamburg Seemannsamt imposed a minimum ship size in its workforce tallies, excluding seafarers aboard smaller coastal craft, many of which were sailing ships. In 1899 it abandoned the minimum ship size requirement and returned to prior statistical methods. Source: Statistik des Seemanns-Amtes zu Hamburg 1890-1910 (Staatsarchiv Hamburg).
Passenger areas constituted the *fin-de-siècle* steamship’s domestic sphere, and stewards and stewardesses were not so different from domestic servants on land.\(^{75}\) The low status of male stewards aboard passenger liners was in many respects a holdover from traditional sailing ship practices, whereby ostracized cooks and low-status ship’s boys carried out the tasks of cooking and cleaning. The small yet growing number of stewardesses on board, however, was new. Statistics on women workers in the *Handelsmarine* are difficult to come by, largely because authorities did not usually track them as a separate category. Still, from a *Seeberufsgenossenschaft* report in 1897, we know that the numbers of women workers in the German merchant fleet increased from 157 in 1888 to 234 ten years later.\(^{76}\) We can safely assume that these numbers continued to increase along with the growth of passenger service before the First World War. Nonetheless, they represent only a tiny fraction of Germany’s entire maritime workforce—less than 1% in 1897. From a cultural perspective, however, female shipboard labor appears far more significant. Shipping company regulations assigned stewardesses the responsibility of serving women and children passengers, a task considered ill-suited for men. Contemporary depictions of passenger service featured images of strong matronly or motherly figures. Maritime illustrator Christian Wilhelm Allers depicted and described stewardesses as the “housewife on board.”\(^{77}\) Such connotations of domesticity also reflected upon male stewards. The domestic tasks they performed and the highly symbolic presence of women workers in their ranks increasingly gendered this type of steamship work as feminine.

\(^{75}\) Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, 172.
Figure 18. Stewardesses aboard the Hamburg-America Line steamer, *Auguste Victoria*, c. 1900. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven.
Steamship deck crews, by contrast, were most closely related to, and drew many of their men, from traditional sailing crews. They were made up of deck officers, petty officers, pursers and other administrators, such as craftsmen as carpenters or coopers, quartermasters, Matrosen, Leichtmatrosen, and ship’s boys. Steamship companies strongly preferred to hire deck crewmen who had trained aboard sailing vessels, considering sailing-trained men “real seamen,” but the decline of sailing in the decades around 1900 made this increasingly difficult.\(^7\) Besides administrative functions carried out at the higher levels, deck crewmen aided in nautical tasks, performed look-out duties, cleaned the deck, and operated its equipment. As aboard sailing vessels, ordinary deck crewmen lived “before the mast,” in separate quarters that were typically placed directly under the rather bumpy bow of the ship.\(^8\) In Hamburg, this group grew from around 12,000 to almost 20,000 workers between 1890 and 1910, but their share of the entire maritime workforce dropped five percentage points to 31% over the course of the period \(\text{(Figures 16 & 17).}\) The relative decline was simply a reflection of the increased presence of service workers.

The third branch of steamship work involved engineers, engineering assistants, stokers and trimmers. By the late nineteenth century most steamship engine rooms were separated into at least two main compartments: one for the engines and one for the boilers.\(^9\) Engineers—who won a hard-fought battle for officer status by the end of the

\(^7\) Heckscher, “Die Lage der in der Seeschiffahrt Hamburgs beschäftigten Arbeiter,” 143.
\(^8\) Gustav Schröder, who spent a year aboard the HAPAG liner Deutschland in 1903-04 describes a comradely mood in the otherwise physically jarring deck crew quarters: “Despite [the swaying quarters] everything was friendly. Well, ‘friendly’ is probably a bit of a stretch, but it was jolly in any case. The Matrosen were all ‘good guys’ and had an irrepressible sense of humor.” Schröder, Fernweh und Heimweh, 25.
\(^9\) Large steam liners had multiple boiler rooms. HAPAG’s massive Vaterland, for instance, had four.
nineteenth century—were in charge of all areas related to mechanical propulsion. Along with their assistants, they kept watch over the engines. Engineers also supervised the boiler rooms, where most mechanical workers (77% aboard Hamburg ships in 1910) toiled as “firemen” (Feuerleute), that is, stokers (Heizer) and trimmers (Kohlenzieher). Stokers shoveled coal, maintained fires, and regularly cleaned the boilers. Despite the assertions of sailing men, their jobs required a certain amount of skill; they had to carefully regulate the fire’s intensity in order to produce the correct level of steam pressure and run the engines efficiently. Trimmers, who ranked below stokers, transported coal in buckets or carts from cavernous bunkers to the boiler room. Between 1890 and 1910 engine-room personnel, most of whom were firemen, made up largest single group of maritime workers aboard Hamburg-based ships. Over these twenty years, their numbers increased from around 13,000 to almost 23,000, although their relative percentage declined slightly from 40% to 36% (Figures 16 & 17).

Firemen’s jobs were physically taxing under the best of conditions, and conditions were rarely optimal. Stokers shoveled an average of 2.4 tons of coal during a standard four-hour watch, although the amount varied with the ship’s size, desired speed, and route. Even more dreadful, they had to work in temperatures that averaged around 40° C (100° F) and could reach as high as 60° C (140° F) in the tropics. Although some efforts were made to improve ventilation during the pre-war era, most German merchant ships continued to have woefully inadequate means of cooling their boiler rooms. In a

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81 Gerstenberger and Welke, Vom Wind zum Dampf, 221-31.
82 Jürgen Rath, “Heizer und Trimmer,” in Übersee, ed. Plagemann, 265; Gerstenberger and Welke, Vom Wind zum Dampf, 188.
Figure 19. Boiler room aboard an express steamer, c. 1920. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven (Hapag-Lloyd AG).
much celebrated article published in 1914, reporter Egon Erwin Kisch vividly described his decent into the industrial bowels of HAL’s *Vaterland*, the largest ship afloat in the world and the pride of the German merchant fleet:

The ladder came to an end and we stepped onto the floor, where the two colors of the inferno surrounded us with a hellish glow, making us almost fearful. Our tormented eyes caught sight of black devils, which appeared from behind shadowy bulkheads and then disappeared again. From time to time a red beam of light cruelly lashed our eyes. From a hellish craw a wave of heat hissed upwards, reminding us, that we roasting ones still weren’t desensitized to the heat. Woe to the poor soul who roasts here in the boiler room.\(^{84}\)

To make matters worse, firemen usually lived in quarters far below deck, often uncomfortably near to the raucous and scorching engine room.

Heat was not the only problem that firemen faced in the bowels of the steamship. Abuse and violence from superiors and colleagues were also common. Shipping firms and captains put tremendous pressure on ship engineers and chief stokers (*Oberheizer*) to run the engines as quickly and efficiently as possible. They routinely pushed their subordinates to the boundaries of human capabilities. Under these conditions, reports of abuse that bordered on brutality were not infrequent. Overseers often refused to believe stokers or trimmers who reported themselves sick or injured, accusing them of simulating illness and ordering them to return to work. At times, men who complained of illness or who sat out a shift were beaten by angry peers who resented having to make up their work load. From the 1880s and well into the twentieth century these conditions resulted

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in a much-discussed epidemic of suicides among the lower charges of mechanical workers in the *Handelsmarine*.\(^{85}\)

The issue of suicide among steamship stokers and trimmers engaged the German public and politicians in one of the most visible debates over maritime labor. It first appeared in an 1883/84 dispute that preoccupied the local press, citizens’ assembly, and senate in Bremen. A number of high-profile suicides among firemen aboard North German Lloyd ships led to accusations that the shipping firm’s draconian labor discipline and inhospitable boiler room environments were driving men to jump overboard into the ocean. The issue subsided after the city’s senate dismissed the charges as unfounded. Five years later, after a new round of publicized suicides, SPD leader August Bebel revived the issue as a national problem on the Reichstag floor. He focused on the case of Wilhelm Busch, a stoker and son of a metalworker from Munich, who had stepped out on deck and jumped into the South Atlantic as his ship neared Buenos Aires. Bebel insisted that stokers like Busch killed themselves because the grueling labor had “absorbed the men’s energy to a point where they were no longer able to perform the work demanded of them.”\(^{86}\) Wilhelm Busch’s story spread through Germany’s socialist press, which portrayed him as a heroic yet tragic character in a well-trodden seafaring narrative: he was a young man, possessed with a longing to see the ocean and experience the wide world. He had hoped to become a “trained seaman” in the merchant marine, after which he would have joined the Imperial Navy. He had performed his duties well and had made it through “considerable exertions” as a steamship stoker. But the brutal boiler room heat and a cruel engineer had led


\(^{86}\) Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstages. *VII. Legislaturperiode. IV. Session 1888/89*, vol. 1, 19 Jan. 1889 (Berlin, 1889), 507
him to despair and take his life by jumping overboard.87 From this point of view, Busch and his fellow suffering stokers never counted for anything less than seamen, despite the fact that they worked with steam power instead of wind.

Bebel’s impassioned plea for better steamship working conditions came at the head of a new wave of labor organization in Germany. After the lapse of Bismarck’s anti-socialist law in 1890, maritime workers, like their counterparts in other branches of German transport and industry, renewed earlier impulses toward labor organization. The first lasting union organizations for German mariners were founded by steamship firemen in Bremerhaven (1888) and Hamburg (1890). A separate union for Matrosen also appeared in Hamburg in 1890. These organizations were relatively small and their activities remained circumscribed by local concerns. The fall and winter of 1896-97, however, proved to be a major turning point. A well-publicized eleven-week port workers’ and sailors’ strike in Hamburg provided the catalyst for union organizing in the Handelsmarine. Strike leaders demanded a fundamental revision of the Seemannsordnung, the elimination of Heuerbaase, limited working hours at sea, improved accident prevention regulations, better care for sailors’ widows and orphans, and the installation of a union representative on every merchant ship as mediator between the crew and the officers.88 The strike failed after shipowners brought in strikebreakers, but within months it resulted in the formation of a national German seamen’s union.

Representatives of local unions from Bremen, Bremerhaven, Flensburg, Hamburg, Kiel,  

87 The same story was reprinted in multiple newspapers. See, for example, Bayerische Kurier, 26 Jan. 1889; Berliner Volksblatt, 27 Jan. 1889.
Lübeck, Rostock, and Stettin met in a tavern in St. Pauli, where they formed the new, centralized *Seemannsverband in Deutschland*. The *Seemannsverband* communicated its message to German mariners through flyers, pamphlets, and a biweekly newspaper, *Der Seemann*, which reached a circulation of 4,000 copies by 1902 and expanded to nearly 30,000 over the next decade.  

At its peak in 1907, membership in the *Seemannsverband* stood at nearly 8,000. Nautical professionals and shipowners constructed an anti-union narrative that labeled *Seemannsverband* members as outsiders: industrialized stokers and trimmers and political radicals from inland cities. In actuality, the membership included both firemen and traditional *Matrosen*, the two groups that had first organized in Hamburg and Bremerhaven around 1890. The Bremerhaven chapter of the *Seemannsverband* started a section for stewards, but it operated with little success and was dissolved after three years. Stewardesses were conspicuously absent from union meetings and were not targeted in union propaganda.

Like its membership, the organization’s leadership also came largely from the ranks of *Matrosen* and firemen. Out of seven key leaders in the *Seemannsverband*, four had more or less traditional backgrounds at sea: one had sailed as a ship’s cook on a sailing freighter, two had attained the rank of *Matrosen*, and one had been a sea-captain.

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90 Schneider, “Begleitet den Seemann auf seinem Lebenspfade.”

91 A number of nautical professionals interviewed by Ferdinand Tönnies recounted the basic outlines of this anti-union narrative. The data he gathered on the *Seemannsverband* in Flensburg, Kiel, and Lübeck, however, ran counter to the narrative, showing that the majority of union members in those ports hailed from the surrounding regions and had been trained as *Matrosen*. See Tönnies, “Die Ostseehäfen Flensburg, Kiel, Lübeck,” 569, 578.

Of the remaining three, two had been to sea as firemen, and one was a waterfront barkeeper. In addition, four of the leaders had been born in coastal regions, while only three were inlanders. Still, it is important to note that all but one of the union leaders gave up their trade before assuming leadership roles in the union, taking jobs as dock workers, shopkeepers, or publicans. The following biographical sketches of union leaders further complicate the depiction of the Seemannsverband as a collection of outsiders to the seafaring trade.

The union’s chairman, Paul Müller (1875-1925), had a background that was not far removed from that of a traditional Fahrensmann. He was born to an unmarried domestic servant in Kolberg (Kolobrzeg) on the Pomeranian coast. After leaving Volksschule, he went to sea, rising up through the traditional ranks from ship’s boy to Matrose. Although he began his career aboard sailing freighters, he came to work as a deck crewman on steamships owned by HAL, Hansa Bremen, and Hamburg-Süd, as well as British companies. During the mid-1890s he joined the local Hamburg Matrosen union and was elected chairman of the Seemannsverband in 1900.

Müller’s co-chairman, Albert Störmer (1847-1922), fit the profile of a traditional Fahrensmann almost perfectly. He was the son of a shipmaster from a small town also located on the Pomeranian coast. After confirmation at the age of fourteen, he went to sea, becoming a Matrose and then following in his father’s footsteps to obtain a sea-captain’s patent. He worked for several years as a captain and then retired from maritime life to become a navigation instructor in the Pomeranian port of Stralsund. In 1884,

93 All seven entries can be found under “Seeleute. Seemannsverband in Deutschland,” in Biographisches Lexikon der ÖTV. http://library.fes.de/fulltext/bibliothek/tit00205/00205r.htm#E11E35 (accessed 12 Apr. 2011).
however, he was fired because of his political affiliation with left-liberals in the Prussian Landtag. After a series of failed jobs, he settled in Hamburg in the late 1880s where he worked as a tallyman on the docks and became a convinced leftist. In 1890 he returned from a failed utopian-communist “workers’ colony” in Kenya, to help found Hamburg’s Matrosen union.\footnote{Störmer, Albert (1847-1922),” in Biographisches Lexikon der ÖTV. \url{http://library.fes.de/fulltext/bibliothek/tit00205/00205k06.htm}, (accessed 12 Apr. 2011).}

In contrast, Wilhelm Drescher (1867 - 1949), the head of the union’s Bremerhaven chapter, had an entirely different background. He was an inlander from a small village in Silesia. As a teenager he left his hometown for Bremerhaven, where he served aboard Norddeutscher Lloyd’s Imperial Mail Steamers as a trimmer, stoker, and chief stoker. In the mid-1890s, after a long illness, he gave up the seaman’s trade for the more settled life as a dock worker. Later he bought a small tobacco and cigar shop in Bremerhaven, but he remained focused on seafaring labor politics. In 1901 he was elected president of the local chapter of the Seemannsverband.\footnote{Drescher, Wilhelm,” in Biographisches Lexikon der ÖTV. \url{http://library.fes.de/fulltext/bibliothek/tit00205/00205c12.htm}, (accessed 12 Apr. 2011).}

From its beginnings, the Seemannsverband was affiliated with the free trade unions and political socialism in Germany. Carl Legien, the chief trade unionist in Germany, along with three SPD Reichstag members attended its constitutive meeting. Following the 1896-97 Hamburg Strike, Legien also authored a widely-read panegyric on striking dock workers and seamen.\footnote{Carl Legien, Der Streik der Hafenarbeiter und Seeleute in Hamburg-Altona, third edition (Hamburg: Verlag der Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands, 1897).} The Seemannsverband coordinated its activities with the Hafenarbeiterverband (German Dock Workers’ Association), which had assumed a leading role in the Hamburg strike. It also participated in the massive wave of
strikes that rocked Germany from 1905 to 1907. After this period of labor unrest, which was largely perceived as a failure in working-class circles, membership in the sailors’ union began to stagnate. In 1910, it joined the newly formed Deutscher Transportarbeiterverband, which organized maritime, harbor, shipbuilding, and railroad workers in Germany.98

A complex rhetoric of masculinity—based on the tropes of brotherhood, bread-winning, suffering, courage, and heroic service—permeated Seemannsverband literature. Through this rhetoric, the union hoped to redefine what a seaman was and who qualified as a seaman. The issue of brotherhood was significant, in that it set the cultural boundaries for rightful claims to sea-manhood. A phrase commonly used in union fliers asked mariners to “join in, man for man, in the Seemannsverband.”99 Maritime workingmen who did not join were not only “enemies,” they were also “idiotic” and “dishonorable.”100 At the beginning of their efforts to organize maritime workers, German unions offered a rather expansive view of who could belong to the brotherhood of seamen. In March 1896 a pamphlet from the Hamburg sailor’s union, for example, circulated widely among maritime workers passing through the port. This “Wake-up Call to Action” (Weck- und Mahnruf) contained a relatively far-reaching vision of brotherhood, including “all who carry the toughest yoke of ship’s work, whether deck hand or fireman, whether carpenter or boatswain, whether steward or cook.”101 In other words, the wake-up call was meant for all ordinary (male) seafaring workers. Time and experience, however, whittled down union visions of the seafaring brotherhood to include

98 Grüttner, Arbeitswelt an der Wasserkante, 147-244; Rath, “Gewerkschaftliche Ansätze und der ‘Seemannsverband,’” in Übersee, 268-70.
100 StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 1, “Was macht der Seemanns-Verein?” (1897).
101 Quoted in Schneider, “Die rote Flagge unter den Seeleuten,” 2.
only those who performed the most physically exacting labor: deck crewmen (whether from sailing or steamships) and firemen. Despite the rhetoric of unity, union leaders could not help but hide their disdain for those who performed domestic tasks aboard ship. They viewed stewards as corrupt “sycophants” or “toadies” who groveled for tips and promotions. For them, service workers simply did not count as full members of the brotherhood of seamen.

Even as the Seemannsverband imagined itself as a fraternity of Matrosen and firemen, it also defined itself as a suffering brotherhood. The first issue of Der Seemann published in 1897 ushered in this particular trope under the rousing headline, “Suffering Brothers and Comrades!” (Leidensbrüder und Kollegen!). The article reminded its readers that “with every step during our service we all find ourselves not far from the grave’s edge.”¹⁰³ The notion of a suffering brotherhood appears repeatedly in Seemannsverband literature. A 1906 strike flyer calls upon “suffering brothers” to “defend our honor” and “practice solidarity.”¹⁰⁴ A poem published in Der Seemann in 1910, echoes the suffering brotherhood trope with remarkable continuity: “Look, how your brothers agonize / Hardship and misery run through the land / Only one thing can bring you freedom / Rise up, give us your hand / Join in with the (Seemanns-) Verband!”¹⁰⁵ One of the most common formulations in sailors’ union literature depicted “the seaman” as a suffering male body subject to extreme physical hardship. Der Seemann sustained this particular image in its recurring column, entitled the “Chronicle of Seamen’s Suffering,” which reported “real life” stories of pain and misery at sea. The

¹⁰² StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 3, “An die Stewards von Hamburg! Ein ernstes Wort in ernster Zeit!” (c. 1907).
¹⁰⁴ StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 3, “Streik-Aufruf an die Seeleute in Hamburg-Altona!” (1906).
¹⁰⁵ Der Seemann, no. 3 (first supplement), 5 Feb. 1910.
column focused mainly on deck crewmen and firemen. These stories depicted male bodies that were subject to physical dangers, hard labor, sickness, dirtiness, heat, cold, deprivations, degradations, and punishments. Union literature therefore transformed suffering male bodies into both an appeal for seafaring brotherhood and a political charge against capitalism, shipping firm policies, and lax maritime labor laws.

This suffering brotherhood of seamen was also linked together by their common status as breadwinners (Familienväter). For example, an early strike appeal from the “organized seamen of Hamburg and Bremerhaven” gave the following description:

German seamen! You stand there indifferent to [inhuman] treatment. With arms folded you look on as they reduce your pay, as they torment and exploit you, as they increasingly diminish the pittance of bread for your women, your children, your fathers and mothers, and finally, when your vigor slackens, as they wantonly abandon you to your fate. Rheumatism, gout, and tuberculosis are by and large the reward for our tireless exertions in the service of Capital [sic].

Similarly, an invitation to “seafarers’ galas” in 1897 depicted seamen as breadwinners whose status was threatened by capitalism at sea. It urged them to bring their wives in order to join in the fight for maritime labor rights, reminding them that “our wives suffer with us.”

The Seemannsverband’s definition of “seaman” did not end with fraternal bonds based on physical hardship and imperiled breadwinner status; they were also based on manly duty, honor, independence, and courage that could be demonstrated only through energetic union activity. Der Seemann reminded its readers in large block script that it

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106 See, for instance, Der Seemann, no. 1 (1 Nov. 1897): 4-7; Der Seemann, no. 2 (15 Nov. 1897): 5-7; Der Seemann, no. 3 (1 Dec. 1897), 5-9; Der Seemann, no. 10 (1 Jul. 1898): 3-9; Der Seemann, no. 12 (1 Sept. 1898): 4-5.
107 StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 1, “An die deutschen Seeleute!” (1894).
108 StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 1, “Was macht der Seemanns-Verein?” (1897).
was their “duty” to join the union and recruit new members for the brotherhood.109 Joining the union reflected sailors’ “honor.”110 Those who did not join the union were “wretched cowards.”111 Paul Müller, the head of the Seemannsverband, published an appeal to “the unorganized, the lukewarm, the indolent, and the fence-sitters” in 1909, whose title urged them to “be men instead of sissies [Memmen]” by joining the union. Müller proclaimed that his mission was to remind German mariners “to think, to judge, and to act independently as men.” He insisted that “no servitude is more degrading or destructive that the servitude of ignorance and indolence.” Again, Müller admonished mariners that it was their manly duty to work against the seamen’s “enemies and exploiters” with “all their energy.”112

The Seemannsverband also projected a vision of the “seaman” whose heroism at sea legitimated his claim to the rights of full citizenship in the German Empire. This patriotic image coexisted uneasily with the organization’s internationalism and Marxist-socialist leanings. Officially, the organization called for “fraternal solidarity” among international maritime workers.113 It also cooperated with seamen’s unions in other national contexts (although not always without national tensions).114 Nonetheless, the

110 StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 1, “Was macht der Seemanns-Verein?” (1897); StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 3, “Streik-Aufruf an die Seeleute in Hamburg-Altona!” (1906); StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 3, “An die Stewards von Hamburg! Ein ernstes Wort in ernster Zeit!” (c. 1907).
111 Der Seemann, no. 1, 8 Jan. 1910; see also Der Seemann, no. 7, 2 Apr. 1910; StAH, 331-3 S 2686 Bd. 3, “Streik-Aufruf an die Seeleute in Hamburg-Altona!” (1906).
114 In August 1910, for example, the Seemannsverband participated in an international conference among maritime unions in Copenhagen, whose task was to plan a “world seamen’s strike.” The German union backed out of the strike after Havelock Wilson, head of the British Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union, alleged that Paul Müller and the Seemannsverband were too friendly with shipowners. See Die Post, no. 384, 18
union’s literature also cast the “German seaman” in more patriotic tones. An 1898 article in Der Seemann, entitled “Our Faithful Seamen,” offered a vision of citizenship based on heroism in moments of danger at sea. Ordinary German seamen, it maintained, were “honest,” “hard-working,” and “peaceful” men, who were ready to save passengers in moments of danger with “sangfroid, energy, and courage.”

This heroic, selfless patriotism also framed the Seemannsverband’s memorandum on seafaring labor law reform that it published and presented to the Reichstag in 1901. It cited the valiant efforts of ordinary German sailors in a number of recent, well-publicized maritime accidents, including the catastrophic Hoboken pier fire in the summer 1900, which crippled or destroyed four docked NDL liners and cost the lives of several hundred sailors:

At each of these occasions the foreign and domestic press, along with German shipping firms and leading officials of our Fatherland took the opportunity to bestow a wealth of praise on our seamen in general. At home and abroad German seamen were recognized as the pride of the German nation. Now those same German seamen, whose significance in cultural and economic life has been generally recognized, cannot understand why their modest and rightful demands have been rejected with such bitter injustice.

In the eyes of the Seemannsverband, the bravery demonstrated by ordinary deck crewmen and firemen as their ships burned or sank entitled them to a greater share in the commonweal.

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115 Der Seemann, no. 13, 1 Oct. 1898.

Figure 20. Destruction of the North German Lloyd steamers, *Bremen* and *Main* in the Hoboken pier fire of 30 June 1900. Hoboken Historical Collection.
4.3 Nautical Professionals

Industrialization and maritime capitalism also transformed the nature, source, and meaning of authority in the German merchant marine. At the urging of shipowners and merchants, command on civilian German vessels became increasingly backed by state authority during the second half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, captains, officers, and navigation instructors began to stake claims to be professionals (sachverständige Seeleute)\(^{117}\) with the sole legitimate monopoly on nautical knowledge (the technical, social, and organizational know-how required to move a ship safely across the sea). They formed their own associations and created their own professional journals. This process of professionalization was reflected in a shift within German maritime vocabulary from "Schiffer" and "Steuermann" to "Kapitän" and "Offizier."\(^{118}\)

Increasingly, these freshly minted "captains" and "officers" became employees of large shipping firms, charged with ensuring the successful and profitable voyages of large passenger liners or steam freighters across the ocean. As their place within the maritime world changed, these men found their professional identity in an idealized vision of the sailing ship. For them, working with wind and sails was the sole way to acquire the masculine characteristics necessary for command, even, and especially, aboard a steam-driven vessel.

\(^{117}\) Maritime writer Georg Wislicenus used the term "sachverständige Seeleute" to describe this group. See Wislicenus, Schutz für unsre Seeleute! Ein Aufruf an deutsche Menschenfreund (Leipzig: Grunow, 1894), 20-21.

\(^{118}\) Gerstenberger and Welke, Vom Wind zum Dampf, 124-40.
Beginning in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, German states gradually asserted a primary role in determining command status aboard merchant ships. They began to require patent certification through state exams. They also created state-funded navigation schools or incorporated existing private schools into state structures. Until the late 1880s, however, the requirements diverged greatly among coastal states. The city-states of Hamburg and Bremen stressed practical experience while Prussia stressed extensive theoretical instruction. The North German Confederation’s Gewerbeordnung of 1869—which came into effect in all of the future Reich’s coastal areas and remained law after unification—required officers and captains to obtain some kind of state certification but left the details in the hands of individual states. After years of debate among nautical professionals, shipowners, and governments, the Bundesrat in 1887 created a uniform national certification process for merchant marine command ranks. Although not formally required until 1925, navigation school attendance became a practical necessity for command aspirants who hoped to sit for state exams. The examination system thus restricted advancement possibilities to men who could afford to pay for or take time off for navigation school. Whereas once seamen could have advanced into the upper ranks through experience, reputation, connections, or ship-owning, now the process went through the state.\textsuperscript{119}

In Wilhelmine Germany the pathway to command aboard a merchant ship involved a mixture of practical experience and theoretical knowledge. At the insistence

\textsuperscript{119} The impulse toward navigation schooling for German merchant ship commanders originated among middle-class educational reformers during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Gradually, German coastal states incorporated these initiatives as part of state-building programs in the mid-nineteenth century. The 1887 regulations were known as the “Bekanntmachung, betreffend den Nachweis der Befähigung als Seeschiffer und Seesteuermann auf Kauffahrteischiffen” (RGBl, p. 395); see Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 93-96, 140-45; Welke, \textit{Der Kapitän}, 140-78.
of German nautical professionals, Reich regulations specified a set amount of practical sailing experience for command eligibility. Officer aspirants faced a daunting set of requirements in order to sit for the state exam. They had to have completed forty-five months at sea after their sixteenth birthday. More than half of that time had to be completed as a *Vollmatrose*. They were also required to serve at least one full year aboard a sailing vessel at the rank of *Vollmatrose*. Requirements were similar to sit for the captain’s exam in coastal traffic (*Küstenfahrt*) or in regional traffic (*auf kleiner Fahrt*). Those who wished to obtain a patent for overseas traffic (*auf großer Fahrt*), however, required an additional twenty-four months experience after the successful completion of the state officer exam. In addition to practical experience, state exams tested candidates’ theoretical knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, and German and English language, among other topics, which necessitated taking navigation school courses.\(^\text{120}\)

Navigation schools inserted middle-class ideals of male education and socialization into the craftsman society of *Fahrensleute*. Like other contemporary educational institutions, they were venues of all-male socialization that afforded students opportunities to join fraternal organizations and engage in career networking. Education reformers intended for navigation schooling to increase the social standing of the seafaring profession through *Bildung*. Daniel Braubach, an early German advocate of maritime education reform and founder of Bremen’s first navigation school, made this point early in the nineteenth century, suggesting that the school’s purpose was to provide

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\(^\text{120}\) The requirement of twelve-months sailing experience as a *Vollmatrose* originated with the *Gewerbeordnung* of 1869. It remained more or less unchanged until a 1925 revision required double the amount of time, twenty-four months sailing experience. The sailing requirement remained in effect until well after the Second World War. See Hoffmann, *Matrosen—Schiffsmechaniker—Schiffsoffiziere*, 107-11.
“people of lower origins” a “typical bürgerlich education.”\textsuperscript{121} Changing masculine ideals were also a part of navigation schooling. Oscar Schulz recalls that his instructor insisted that officer aspirants had to discard the disreputable “manners” of “Janmaat” to become respectable men of “\textit{Bildung}.”\textsuperscript{122} Nevertheless, command aspirants spent only a few months at navigation schools out of a years-long process of career socialization, most of which continued to take place informally and according to custom. This hybrid form of socialization remained in place until around 1900. Traditionalists continued to insist that captains and officers in the \textit{Handelsmarine} spend time “before the mast” among common crewmen, in order to understand their perspective. Thus, as long as candidates were legally required to train first aboard sailing freighters, the new social and cultural identity promised by navigation schooling remained incomplete.

The expansion of passenger-focused maritime capitalism also transformed command in the German merchant marine. The concentration of shipping capital into a small number of large firms gradually transformed captains and officers into employees. Expensive new technologies gradually placed shipowning beyond the means of most captains. Moreover, captains, officers, and common crewmen alike lost the traditional right of "\textit{Führung}"—carrying their own cargo for profit—as shipping companies and the state redefined such practices as “smuggling.”\textsuperscript{123} Perhaps most dramatically, the rise of luxury passenger travel at the end of the nineteenth century required the installation of “gentlemen on the command bridge.”\textsuperscript{124} Shipping firms expected captains and officers aboard these larger ships to be able to interact with high-society passengers. The officer

\textsuperscript{121} Welke, \textit{Der Kapitän}, 145.
\textsuperscript{122} Schulz, \textit{Im Strom der Gezeiten}, 205-09.
\textsuperscript{123} Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 20-23.
\textsuperscript{124} Schulz, \textit{Im Strom der Gezeiten}, 290.
staff became the public face of image-conscious passenger lines that competed in the lucrative passenger trade. At the same time, the men on the command bridge of modern luxury liners were still expected to be “tüchtiger” seamen. As a tract promoting Norddeutscher Lloyd’s new cadet training ship put it in 1900, the company’s officer contingent had the difficult task of “proving seamanly decisiveness and authority in one moment and appearing as a gentleman from head to toe the next.”126 NDL’s 1910 service regulations required that officers demonstrate Tüchtigkeit even as they conduct themselves as “cultivated [gebildete] men” in interactions with passengers, foreigners, peers, and subordinates.127 At the dawn of the twentieth century, many captains and officers in the Handelsmarine lived in two worlds, suspended between the traditional atmosphere of the sailing freighter and the more refined, middle-class respectability of navigation colleges and passenger liner dining rooms.

Associational life and publications played a major role in the nautical professionalization. The leading German organization for nautical professionals was the Deutscher Nautischer Verein (DNV). The Nautischer Verein, which was founded in 1864, extended membership to shipowners and merchants, as well as nautical professionals. Through publications and annual meetings, the DNV provided an economically liberal point of consensus for German maritime elites on issues ranging from ship safety and private property at sea to maritime education and labor relations. As such it carried particular weight among German government officials concerned with

125 During the early decades of the twentieth century, image-conscious steamship companies carefully staged an image of their passenger liners as “floating palaces,” emphasizing safety, comfort, luxury, and social harmony. See Rieger, Technology and the Culture of Modernity, 160-75.
126 Friedrich Purlitz, Das Kadetten-Schulschiff des Norddeutschen Lloyd (Bremerhaven: Georg Schipper, 1900), 9.
seafaring issues. As early as 1888, Reich ministries began sending representatives to the
Nautischer Verein’s annual meetings.128

In addition to the DVN, German nautical experts created a variety of other professional groups and associations, the two most important of which were the Verband Deutscher Seeschiffervereine (VDSV, founded 1894) and the Verein Deutscher Kapitäne und Offiziere der Handelsmarine (VDKOH, founded 1892). The former association of merchant captains and officers generally took a conciliatory stance toward shipowners, but the latter actively sought to negotiate for better wages and working conditions for its members. German shipowners fought back against the more radical VDKOH during the first decade of the twentieth century, forcing many of its members to choose either the organization or their jobs. As a result, the more business-friendly Seeschiffervereine emerged as the leading organization for sea captains and officers; its annual meetings drew not only shipping firm representatives, but also government and naval observers.129

The business-friendly Nautischer Verein and Seeschiffervereine shared an official mouthpiece, the maritime journal Hansa.130 Hansa was the most recognized forum for Germany’s nautical professionals, particularly captains and navigation instructors. Government officials charged with overseeing maritime policy regularly consulted Hansa to ascertain expert opinion. Shipowners had influence over the viewpoints published in the journal; yet it published more than mere “shipowner propaganda,” as union members

130 From 1864 to 1891 the journal was called Hansa. Zeitschrift für Seewesen (HZfS). After 1891 its name changed to Hansa. Deutsche Nautische Zeitschrift (HDNZ).
Such accusations were true only to the extent that nautical professionals and shipowners were unified in their opposition to the *Seemannsverband* and to socialism.

The evolution of the title emblem of *Hansa* provides striking testimony to the cultural elevation of sailing among German nautical experts. The original emblem (1864-69) featured a harbor scene with a ship at full sail, gliding under a German nationalist banner held by a sailor. The next emblem (1870-72) features a montage of two scenes, one in port busy with vessels under steam and sail and one of a sailing ship in rough seas, separated by a lighthouse. The third incarnation (1873-83) features a simplified scene of two sailing ships calmly gliding over the ocean. The fourth version (1884-91) made a major departure, placing a steam-sail hybrid cutting quickly and powerfully through the waves in a stylized manner that evoked contemporary steamship company advertisements. In the early 1890s, however, all references to harbors, lighthouses, and especially steamships disappear from the journal’s emblem. From 1892 onward it features just one image: a single ship with wind in its sails. In this way, the journal positioned the sailing ship as an object of collective identity for nautical professionals.

### 4.4 The Real Seaman

Germany’s nautical experts adamantly insisted that the sailing ship was the only suitable space for the cultivation of true manhood at sea. The more the sailing ship era receded into the past, the louder their concerns grew about the quality of the men who worked at sea. In their organizations, in *Hansa*, and in the coastal press, they lamented

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the emasculation and social disorder that they believed accompanied the decline of the sailing ship. In the late 1890s these debates intersected with nationalist and anti-socialist visions of Germany’s power and presence on the seas, capturing the attention of state officials and a broader national audience. Although these groups hoped to preserve tradition—or at least adapt it to modern technology—their self-conscious valorization of what they called variously the “genuine,” “true,” “actual,” or “real” seaman looked quite different from the Fahremsmann of custom and tradition. Unlike the local and politically complex Fahremsmann, the “real seaman” they imagined labored for Germany and represented a bulwark against socialism.

Generational dynamics shaped the viewpoints of Germany’s nautical experts. Most of these men, who stood at the pinnacle or the end of their careers around 1900, had trained as seamen during the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. They had come of age in the sailing world of Fahremsleute but had seen that world slip into the past. They absorbed the sense of malaise reflected in Richard Wossidlo’s interviews with Fahremsleute about the quality of seamen in the age of steam.

Royal Prussian Navigation Instructor Theodore Lüning, wrote that a steamship was no place for the development of a “seamanly point of view” (seemännische Anschauung). Eugenie Rosenberger recorded that her husband Jürgen, a sailing ship captain, refused to work aboard a steamer because

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he considered such a move to be a “desertion” of his craft.\textsuperscript{135} Captain Albert Polis, director of the Hamburg-America Line’s nautical division, spoke for many captains of his generation when he complained that “the stock [\textit{Stamm}] of real sailing ship \textit{Matrosen}, which distinguishes itself through \textit{Tüchtigkeit}, through discipline, and through occupational pride, has decreased year after year.”\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, many merchant captains came to consider the “moral qualities” of steamship stokers and trimmers “inferior” to those of “real seamen.”\textsuperscript{137}

Such attitudes also affected the next generation of command aspirants who came of age around 1900. Gustav Schröder, who attended navigation school in the late 1900s, recalled how this “conservative” outlook dominated among his fellow students who “spoke with contempt about every steamer.”\textsuperscript{138} Even though Schröder did not share his peers’ hostility toward steamships, he still considered his first job aboard a sailing ship as the moment when his “proper seafaring” career began.\textsuperscript{139} Likewise, Oscar Schulz, who gladly served as a steamship officer and captain, still considered sailing a necessary precondition for becoming a seaman. He remembered his first voyage as a ship’s boy on a sailing vessel with pride, noting that “under the press of sail” he had become a seaman “in the true sense of the word.”\textsuperscript{140}

The trope of the “real seaman” first appeared in \textit{Hansa} during the 1870s. Only months after German unification in 1871, \textit{Hansa} printed a series of articles calling for seafaring education reform in response to the “deep and incurable tear” that steam

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{135} Rosenberger, \textit{Auf Großer Fahrt}, 15; compare also to Schulz, \textit{Im Strom der Gezeiten}, 212.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} \textit{Verhandlungen der Generalversammlung des Vereins für Socialpolitik über die Lage der in der Seeschifffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter}, 46.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Tönnies, “Die Ostseehäfen Flensburg, Kiel, Lübeck,” 556.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Schröder, \textit{Fernweh und Heimweh}, 116.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Schulz, \textit{Im Strom der Gezeiten}, 24.
\end{itemize}
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shipping had made in the operation of commercial sailing. The journal’s editors insisted on sailing’s primacy in equipping seamen with the right kind of skills and character:

We have repeatedly declared in this journal that the steamship as such, for which a sailing wind is hardly relevant, is incapable of bringing up a seaman with all the required characteristics of his trade; the foundation [of a seafaring career] can only be laid on board a sailing ship, where more demands are placed on the functioning of his senses and the practice thereof.

Nevertheless, in a pragmatic turn, the editors demanded a new “nautical culture on a positive basis,” that combined the practical skills of sailing with the scientific knowledge of steam mechanics, in a “rebirth” of seamanship. They proposed a series of innovations that they believed would adapt the best aspects of “real” seafaring, sailing, to the inevitability of “progress,” proposing an “economic combination of steam and wind power”: sailing ships with auxiliary engines. For the moment this proposal went nowhere; it was well before its time.

_Hansa_ continued to issue dire warnings about the declining supply of “quality”—i.e., skilled at sailing—German seamen through the 1870s. This concern also became a major issue at the _Nautischer Verein_’s annual meetings in 1875, 1876, and 1877. Delegates debated a proposal to create a system of state-sponsored training ships based on the British model, which combined seafaring education aboard stationary ships with charitable initiatives for the urban poor. Indeed, German concerns about the quality

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141 “Reform der Schiffahrt. III.,” _HZfS_ 8, no. 18 (1871): 158.
142 “Reform der Schiffahrt. IV.,” _HZfS_ 8, no. 22 (1871): 190-91.
143 “Reform der Schiffahrt. II.,” _HZfS_ 8, no. 14 (1871): 123.
145 Since the founding of the philanthropic Marine Society in 1756, private groups and local officials in Britain’s coastal cities had developed charitable networks that placed large numbers of poor or orphaned boys aboard stationary school ships, where they were trained for service in the merchant marine or the Royal Navy. See, Michael A. Lewis, _A Social History of the Navy, 1783-1815_ (London: George Allen,
and quantity of seamen echoed a similar controversy that had raged in Britain since the 1850s. The Reichstag took up the training ship proposal upon the recommendation of the Imperial Navy chief, Albrecht von Stosch, but it failed to garner enough support for passage. This early training ship proposal failed because of opposition from shipowners, who would have been required to finance the program, and traditionalists in the DNV who did not want to disrupt informal shipboard instruction. The training ship debate of the mid-1870s produced no real policy changes. It did, however, prompt the Reich Chancellery to commission the first official statistical study of German maritime labor. The study’s results, published in 1878, offered the preliminary conclusion that the number of ship’s boys annually taking up the profession was insufficient to ensure the

146 In 1854 a British captain wrote to the Times of London warning that “we have neither seamen or seamanship.” During the second half of the nineteenth century, a variety voices—including seafarers, reformers, and state officials—frequently bemoaned “the deterioration of the British Seaman” and debated what contemporaries referred to as the “manning question.” See, Williams, “The Quality, Skill and Supply of Maritime Labour,” esp. 273-76. This debate dealt, first and foremost, with merchant mariners and, second, with the Royal Navy, in so far as Britons viewed the merchant marine as the “nursery of seamen.” See, Williams, “Mid-Victorian Attitudes to Seamen,” 105.

147 The editors of Hansa called for training ships to be funded through a tax on ship owners proportional to the amount of tonnage they owned. Supporters framed their project as “a national endeavor.” They insisted, however, that German school ships would not be correctional institutions, as some were in Britain, but rather institutions dedicated to raising the respectability of the seafaring profession and engendering “self-confidence and self-respect” among their disadvantaged trainees. Proposed school ships would be “paternal” spaces where “the highest form of order reigned” and “diligence and activity were demanded.” Education, religious instruction, and gymnastic exercises like swimming and climbing in the rigging would define the boys’ daily routine. See, Hansa; “Ein schwimmendes Waisenhaus,” HZS 6, no. 7 (1874): 51-53; “Schulschiffe. I. Geschichtliche Entwicklung des Instituts der Trainingships in England” HZS 6, no. 26 (1874): 206-07; “Schulschiffe. II. In Amerika, Russland, Deutschland,” HZS 7, no. 2 (1875): 12-13; “Die Schulschiffe und die nautischen Vereine,” HZS 7, no. 3 (1875): 18-20; Otto Sjöström, “Schulschiffe. I.” HZS 7, no. 9 (1875): 73-74; Otto Sjöström, “Schulschiffe. II. Ihre Einführung in Deutschland,” HZS 7, no. 19 (1875): 159-61.

continuity of the traditional sailing workforce. It was among the first German
government documents to define men who trained aboard sailing ships as “real”
seamen. The Reich statistical office continued to publish annual counts of first-time
ship’s boys and Vollmatrosen hired by German merchant ships, but the issue receded into
relative obscurity over the next decade or so.

In the early 1890s, as steam surpassed sail in the Handelsmarine, grim
prognostications about the impending disappearance of the “real seaman” returned in full
force. It became a much-discussed subject in maritime journals, on the editorial pages of
coastal newspapers, and in career guides for the maritime profession. An 1890 editorial
in the Hamburger Börsenhalle opened the decade, lamenting the “decline” of Germany’s
“real seamen.” Nautical experts collected and published statistics in Hansa, showing
the imminent end of commercial sailing. In 1893, the journal published a series of
articles summing up these renewed concerns about the declining quality of skilled
seamen. Their author wondered how “Jan Maat” could call himself a “real seaman”
without concerning himself with “wind and rigging.” Career guides for the

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149 Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, “Die Anheuerungen von Vollmatrosen und Schiffsjungen und die
Entweichungen von Seeleuten bei der Deutschen Handelsmarine,” Monatshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen
150 The Reich’s statistical survey of seafaring labor in the mid-1870s used the term “eigentliche Seeleute” to
describe mariners who worked aboard sailing ships or as deck crewmen aboard steamships. See
151 Hamburger Börsenhalle, no. 422, 10 Sept. 1890.
152 “Die Lage der Seeschifffahrt,” HDNZ 31, no. 1 (1894), 5; “Einiges über die Lage der deutschen Gross-
Segel-Schifffahrt,” HDNZ 39, no. 25 (1902), 292-93.
Articles on the subject of sailing and seamanship appeared frequently in the journal, including, among
others: “Unsere Matrosen. II. Theil. Von Th. Lün
ing, Königl. Navigationslehrer,” HDNZ 30, no. 2 (1893),
14-16; “Segelschiffahrt und Dampferfahrt. Eine Studie von Theodor Lün
ing,” HDNZ 31, no. 6 (1894), 62-
63; no. 7 (1894), 74-77; “Schiffspersonal der Vergangenheit Gegenwart und Zukunft,” HDNZ 34, no. 47
(1897), 558-59. “Auf dem Ausguck,” HDNZ 36, no. 26 (1 July 1899), 302-03; “Ein Word für die
Segelschiffahrt HDNZ 36, no. 19 (1899), 219-21; “Auf dem Ausguck,” HDNZ 37, no. 26 (1900), 301-02;
“Ein Beitrag zur Bemannungfrage deutscher Kauffahrteischiffe,” HDNZ 37, no. 26 (1900), 303-04;
Handelsmarine that proliferated around the turn of the century echoed this cultural elevation of sailing over steam in making “quality” seamen. De Mèville’s popular and richly illustrated guide begins its chapter on a sailing ship career proclaiming, “This is one of the most important chapters of our book, as the sailing ship is not only the Heimat but, also and above all, the school of the seaman.”

Gender disruption was a central component in the story German nautical experts told about the real seaman’s decline. Steam technology, one Hansa article claimed, had disrupted and disordered the true pathway to manhood at sea. It destroyed the “respect” that a “fully experienced” seaman had traditionally enjoyed. It inverted the relationship between boyhood and manhood, since on steamships “one sees [ship’s] boys, fully grown men as tall as a tree, who could be petty officers had they gone to sea … at the appropriate time between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.” Steam, the article continued, disrupted the earnings and career aspirations of captains, who were no longer able to feed their families. It interrupted the “true,” “beautiful,” and “honorable” task of the seafarer to bring his ship through the storms and dangers of the sea, safely to its destination. A steamship-trained man, the editors of Hansa maintained, would never face a true “hour of danger” in a stormy sea that would transform him into “a dutiful and decisive man” and “a model of unbending manly courage [Mannesmuth]. From this view point, the preservation of sailing was the only way to safeguard the true path to sea-manhood.

Another Hansa article, entitled “Ship’s Crews: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” framed the introduction of steam technology as a progressive emasculation

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154 De Mèville, Die Handelsmarine und ihre Laufbahnen. Ein Handbuch alles Wissenswerten über die Handelsflotte (Rostock: Volckmann & Wette, 1905), 27; similar formulations, for example, can be found in Mein künftiger Beruf. Ratgeber für die Berufswahl. Der Seemann der Handelsmarine (Leipzig: C. Bange, [1903]); and W. Döring, Der Seemann und sein Beruf, 2nd ed. (Papenburg: H. Rohr, 1904).
155 “Einst und Jetzt II,” HDNZ 30, no. 36 (1893), 422-25.
of the seafaring profession. It tells the story of an “old seaman” from the past, a model of virtue from the glory days of sail in the mid-nineteenth century. In the narrative, he appears with a beard, signifying his sea experience and virility. The old man travels forward in time to the 1890s and visits a “modern” merchant steamship. The kinds of people he finds working there surprise and bewilder him:

Instead of crewmembers formerly recognizable as seamen through their poise, comportment, and distinguished man’s beard, today he sees a crew made up partially of faces covered beyond recognition with dirt or smoke and partially of light-footed youthful figures running around in checkered blouses and blue trousers, carrying on light-hearted conversations or looking around for a supervisor with their hands in their pockets.

The old seaman is even more surprised by the uniformed men strolling about the decks at leisure. After learning that they are the ship’s “officers” he scoffs. When he asks incredulously if all of these people are really seamen, a well-meaning and “ultra-modern” expert explains to him that the definition of “seaman” had changed with the times. The author of the article then sarcastically dismisses the modern expert’s explanation. Instead, he raises the specter of women in captain’s or officer’s uniforms by the year 1950 and warned ominously about “social-democratic” women in Britain and France who were already trying to obtain officers’ patents. From this viewpoint, modern technology and socialism were steadily taking the man out of “seaman.”

Nautical experts also cast the preservation of the “real seaman” as a national task. During the 1870s debate over training ships, supporters had already defined his preservation as a “national endeavor.” In the debates that erupted two decades later, participants on all sides again emphasized the national significance of sailing-skilled

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156 “Schiffspersonal der Vergangenheit Gegenwart und Zukunft,” *HDNZ* 34, no. 47 (1897), 558-59.
seamen. Theodore Lüning argued that the Handelsmarine was at the forefront of Wilhelmine Germany’s “national-economic” upswing. At the same time, he maintained that the nation’s successes had disrupted the customary path to becoming a ship commander. For Lüning, solving the problem of sailing skill was essential for the economic future of the nation. In 1901 the editors at Hansa insisted that the decline of the real seaman was not simply a technical nautical issue, but rather a “national economic question of very significant proportions” that concerned all Germans, inlanders as well as coastal dwellers. Where the Fahrensmann’s spatial horizons had been his local port and coastal region, the “real seaman” was a self-consciously German identity.

Most of Germany’s nautical experts also agreed that the disappearance of sailing and the “real seaman” would drown the nation’s maritime workforce in a sea of labor unrest and socialism. They were distressed that steamship labor was transforming the profession into a “seafaring proletariat.” Social Democracy, they suggested, was incompatible with the worldview of the true seaman. In particular, they blamed inlanders who worked as stokers and trimmers for the introduction of socialism and the union activity into the German merchant marine. These industrialized “workers,” they feared, were undermining the craftsman ethos of the seafaring profession. One article in Hansa went so far as to suggest that the common ranks of engine-room personnel had spread the “social-democratic poison” among real seamen. Preserving sailing skill, nautical professionals insisted, would inoculate Germany’s maritime workforce against socialism and labor unrest. As the profiles of Seemannsverband leaders show, Fahrensleute were

158 “Segelschiffahrt und Dampferfahrt. Eine Studie von Theodor Lüning,” HDNZ 31, no. 6 (1894), 62-63; no. 7 (1894), 74-77.
159 “Die Schulschiffe und ihre rechtliche Bedeutung in der Handelsmarine,” HDNZ 38, no. 52 (1901), 615.
not necessarily unreceptive to unions or to socialism, but the “real seaman” that nautical experts constructed was hostile to both.

The “real seaman” as a model of sea-manhood, a national imperative, and a bastion of anti-socialism proved to be highly attractive beyond the ranks of nautical experts and their journals. Following the great Hamburg strike in 1896/97, shipping firms and their employers’ associations went on the defensive against labor unrest and the Seemannsverband. Many of the larger firms began to keep the names of known union members on “black-lists” to block them from working.¹⁶² They also thoroughly revised their position on the issue of disappearing skill in the Handelsmarine. As late as 1893 the Verein Hamburger Reeder maintained that there was no lack of skilled seamen in the merchant marine.¹⁶³ After the Hamburg strike, however, its official attitude had changed, recognizing the “paucity of tüchtiger seamen” as a pressing issue.¹⁶⁴ William Scholz postulated in his 1910 doctoral thesis that sailing ships were indispensable in creating a “skilled supply of crewmen” which would allow Germany to compete in the “world economy.”¹⁶⁵ He articulated the link between sailing and the nation through a vision of what manhood at sea should look like:

Expert opinion is less divided today than ever before that sailing ship experience alone constitutes the appropriate basis for the education of a full-fledged [vollwertig] seaman. Courage, decisiveness, composure, and dauntlessness, the first demands to be placed upon a usable seaman, can be acquired only by facing the danger of the stormy seas and surging waves.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Jahresbericht des Verwaltungsrats des Vereins Hamburger Rheder (Hamburg, 1900), 8.
¹⁶⁶ Scholz, Die Stellung der Segelschifffahrt, 196.
Likewise, North German Lloyd’s 1914 yearbook took the position that “real seamanly” (\textit{echt seemannich}) training aboard a sailing ship was required to instill “qualities of decisiveness, of personal courage, and of discipline, as well as adaptability to wind and weather” among its officer aspirants.\footnote{Jahrbuch des Norddeutschen Lloyds 1913/14, 215.}

This emphasis on the “real seaman” accompanied a concerted effort among public-relations departments in large shipping firms to keep the realities of labor conditions in steamship boiler rooms from the traveling public. The unbearable heat, grime, and exhaustion that shaped everyday labor below decks were anathema to the leisurely and luxurious images of sea travel that passenger liners wished to project for middle-class consumers. Like their British competitors, German steamship firms produced pamphlets and “documentary” photographs for public consumption that focused on the hugeness and technological modernity of steamship machinery. Stokers and trimmers either remained absent or stood near their machines in conspicuously staged photos to eliminate any hint of exertion. This purposeful “abolition of work” in representations of heavy machinery was common in photographic documentation of European heavy industries around 1900. As Bernhard Rieger and others have argued, it amounted to a “production of ignorance” about steamship labor.\footnote{Rieger, \textit{Technology and the Culture of Modernity}, 171-75.}

State officials in Wilhelmine Germany also adopted nautical professionals’ rhetorical construction of the “real seaman,” particularly when dealing with complaints about labor unrest. The wave of strikes in the middle years of the 1900s escalated the rhetorical battle between \textit{Hansa} and \textit{Der Seemann} over labor conflicts at sea. The editors of \textit{Hansa} began to publish a constant stream of captains’ complaints about growing

\footnote{Jahrbuch des Norddeutschen Lloyds 1913/14, 215.}

\footnote{Rieger, \textit{Technology and the Culture of Modernity}, 171-75.}
indiscipline in the merchant fleet.\textsuperscript{169} These editorials were particularly embarrassing for German officials, because they accused state agencies of not doing enough to reign in unruly mariners, particularly while they were abroad. As one Prussian official put it, the issue of indiscipline was becoming a “deplorable trend for German-national interests” overseas.\textsuperscript{170}

In response to the \textit{Hansa} articles, the Reich Foreign Ministry ordered reports from its consulates, which supervised German merchant mariners abroad. Some of the reports laid part of the blame on the extension of command authority from the captain to “young, insecure intermediaries” in the officer ranks. Even these, however, focused on the “modern trends” in the division of labor and the “enlargement” of ships’ crews.\textsuperscript{171} The reports were also unanimous in blaming indiscipline on Social Democracy and the “agitation” of the \textit{Seemannsverband}.\textsuperscript{172} In addition, the majority held stokers and trimmers primarily responsible for labor unrest. The German consul in Copenhagen, for example, claimed that most violations were caused by “drunken stokers,” and that “real seamen” rarely gave cause for complaint.\textsuperscript{173} Similarly, the consul in Amsterdam blamed cases of shipboard disobedience on stokers and foreigners.\textsuperscript{174} The Rotterdam consulate was particularly harsh in its assessment of engine room workers:

[Complaints of indiscipline] pertain mostly to engine-room personnel aboard steamships, the stokers and trimmers. This group is composed for the most part of people who have failed in other careers on land or criminals who went to sea to

\textsuperscript{169} See, for example, \textit{HDNZ} 45, no. 21 (1908): 501-04; \textit{HDNZ} 45, no. 26 (1908): 633; \textit{HDNZ} 45, no. 29 (1908); \textit{HDNZ} 45, no. 30 (1908): 733; \textit{HDNZ} 45, no. 34 (1908): \textit{HDNZ} 46, no. 14 (1909): 337; \textit{HDNZ} 47, no. 15 (1910), 373-74; \textit{HDNZ} 47, no. 28 (1910): 689-91.
\textsuperscript{170} BA-BL R 901/17491, Regierungsrätsel Schleswig to MfHuG, 5. Sept. 1908.
\textsuperscript{171} BA-BL, R 901/17491, Seemannsamt Antwerp to Reichskanzler, 21 Oct. 1909.
\textsuperscript{172} These reports can be found in BA-BL, R 901/17491, “Verwaltung der Seemannsämter – Allgemeines.”
\textsuperscript{173} BA-BL, R 901/17491, Seemannsamt Copenhagen to Reichskanzler, 26 Oct. 1909.
\textsuperscript{174} BA-BL, R 901/17491, Seemannsamt Amsterdam to Reichskanzler, 3 Nov. 1909.
escape their problems. They form a class of seafarers who are particularly inclined to insubordination and are thus difficult to handle.\textsuperscript{175}

The German consul in Genoa laid out an extensive explanation, in which he agreed with local representative of the Hamburg-America Line that disciplinary problems in the merchant marine could be traced back to the “decrease in sailing ships and increase in steamships.” This development, he claimed, had “essentially” transformed the composition and training of ship crews. The “real seamanly part” of the crew had become a minority vis-à-vis machine, kitchen, and service personnel. Among the latter groups were many “elements” that were unfamiliar with seafaring. Without “seamanly training” aboard sailing ships, these groups lacked both the technical skill and the character needed to respond to “tight discipline” at sea. They also had lost the “communal feeling” of traditional seamen.\textsuperscript{176}

These consular reports resulted in secret conversations among Reich ministries about how to respond to the problem of unruly mariners. Like the reports, these conversations conflated deskilling with insubordination and emasculation. The Foreign Ministry concluded that the “cultivation of manhood” (\textit{Manneszucht}) aboard German vessels no longer existed in the same measure as it previously had. There were a variety of causes for this emasculation at sea. On one hand, small shipowners and tramp ships had difficulties attracting and keeping “\textit{tüchtige} personnel” and were forced to make do with “inferior material.” On the other hand, the shift from sailing to steam had resulted in a “marked decrease in real seamanly duties on board.” Aboard steamships people from all sorts of land-based careers, who had not been subjected to the “cultivation of manhood” aboard sailing vessels, were increasingly supplanting Germany’s “real

\textsuperscript{175} BA-BL, R 901/17491, Seemannsamt Rotterdam to Reichskanzler, 22 Nov. 1909.
\textsuperscript{176} BA-BL, R 901/17491, Seemannsamt Genoa, 20 Dec. 1909.
seamen.” The Foreign Ministry also singled out “social democratic agitation” as well as the temptations of foreign Baase as primary causes for insubordination in the merchant marine. Still, the Ministry implied that this general malaise held true only for engine room and service personnel. Those who had trained aboard sailing ships upheld the “quality of the German seaman.” Such training imbued these men with “good seamanly characteristics, feelings of duty, obedience, and valor,” which showed themselves in “manly behavior” during accidents at sea. The Interior Ministry responded in agreement, adding only that “modern” seafaring had undermined previous “patriarchal relationships” between superiors and subordinates that had existed aboard sailing ships. It linked this process to the wider effects of industrialization in all branches of German economic life.

Reform-minded Sozialpolitiker also reproduced nautical professionals’ “real seaman” rhetoric, although not always without modification. Echoing his sources among nautical experts, Siegfried Heckscher bemoaned the steamship’s inadequacy as a training ground for seamen: “In general, one can hardly speak of real seamanly activity for ship’s boys on steamships. It consists almost entirely of swabbing the decks and cleaning crew quarters. Especially on the larger steamships [ship’s boys] bring to mind young hotel bell-hops.” Ferdinand Tönnies took a more nuanced view of the matter. He agreed with the basic proposition that engine room workers’ “proletarian class consciousness” was increasingly replacing the “seamanly corporate identity” (seemännischer Standesbewußtsein) that he associated with “real seamen.” Moreover, Tönnies argued,

Germany’s seafaring workforce appeared to be losing the traditional character of a “tradesmen’s society” and becoming, instead, the preserve of the “working class.” Still, he concluded that this change was due to social developments rather than union agitation. He also countered nautical professionals’ anti-union narrative of deskillings and emasculation. Instead he saw the union as a potential way to recreate a communal feeling of honor and pride that had allegedly been lost with the sailing ship.¹⁸⁰

Journalistic accounts were far less critical of the “real seaman” rhetoric. As the Berliner Tageblatt put it in 1909, the “hard school” of sailing ships could be used to instilled “character” into otherwise troubled boys.¹⁸¹ An article appearing in the Schlesische Zeitung that same year celebrated sailing-ship trained seamen, who demonstrated “love and appreciation” for their profession and were men of “national feeling.”¹⁸² In 1913, the Kölnische Zeitung noted that the great technological progress represented by the steamship had simultaneously “hollowed out” the conditions necessary for the “formation of the real seaman of the old school.” Only service aboard sailing ships could instill the “manly values” of “sangfroid, decisiveness, agility, self-confidence, courage and simplicity.” A steamship’s independence from “wind and weather” made it a poor site for training the “real seaman.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Berliner Tageblatt, no. 398, 8 Aug. 1909.
¹⁸² Schlesische Zeitung, no. 664, 22 Sept. 1909.
¹⁸³ Kölnische Zeitung, 30 May 1913.
Traditionally, *Fahrensleute* had shared an ideal of seamanship that emphasized the interwoven values of manhood, honor, experience, and skill that they associated with the craft of sailing. For them, becoming a seaman was, in the last measure, an informal, yet essential, test on the path to sea-manhood. And they—the community of seafarers—were the ultimate arbiters of success or failure. Theirs was a masculine style defined by the practiced motions, known techniques, and physical dexterity required for sailing on sparsely staffed merchant vessels. It was embedded in both local, coastal identities and a shipboard social structure of informal rank and experience. For *Fahrensleute*, the sailor who had mastered the art and dangers of his craft was truly a man at sea.

As social and technological changes in the *Handelsmarine* accelerated during the 1890s and 1900s, the seafaring trade faced a deep-seated crisis of identity. Many *Fahrensleute* exhibited a powerful sense of hostility toward steamship workers, emasculating them through comparisons with women or boys. Others participated in socialist and union efforts to define a “suffering brotherhood” of firemen and *Matrosen*, joined together by the physicality of their jobs, by their status as breadwinners, and by manly courage and honor in the fight against Capital on the ocean. This “suffering brotherhood,” however, was ultimately overshadowed by the rhetoric of nautical professionals. In other words, *Fahrensleute* exhibited a range of possible political and cultural responses to industrialization. In striking contrast, nautical professionals elaborated a close connection between sailing skill and the “real seaman,” a figure they defined by the hardening of his character through sailing, by his national patriotism, and
by a sense of corporate honor that immunized him against labor unrest and socialism. Shipowners, Reich officials, liberal reformers, and the middle-class press all reproduced this vision of the “real seaman” in various efforts to reintroduce social order in an industry that had became central to the program of Weltpolitik at the same time that it was wracked by labor unrest.

Ultimately, one particular organization, the Deutscher Schulschiffverein, came to the fore in efforts to solve the crisis of skill, masculinity, and social order in the Handelsmarine. The organization, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, claimed to preserve Tüchtigkeit among German mariners aboard its system of sailing school ships. In promoting its goals of military style training in the merchant marine, the Schulschiffverein co-opted and reformulated nautical professionals’ rhetoric of the “real seaman,” claiming that “true seamanly spirit, cheerful audacity, as well as iron decisiveness in moments of danger can only be won and matured aboard sailing vessels.”

Under the influence of the Schulschiffverein, the “real seaman” drifted further and further from the point of continuity that nautical claimed him to be. Efforts to reify seafaring manhood meant that now outside groups, rather than the community of Fahrensleute, claimed the right to define what it meant to be a man in the Handelsmarine.

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CHAPTER 5

MADE OF THE SAME STUFF? SEAMEN AND SOLDIERS

On a sunny spring morning in 1911, sixteen-year-old Bruno Heise arrived in the small German port town of Elsfleth to begin his career at sea. At first glance Heise might have seemed out of place walking with his father down to the docks along the Weser River. He was an inlander, from Berlin, the son of a well-to-do and well-connected family whose uncle had arranged a position for him aboard one of Germany’s most prestigious training ships. Heise had no prior connections to the sea except for the imagined worlds he had read about in seafaring adventure stories. Years later he described how the world he actually encountered that first day was quite different from the fabled one he had imagined:

It was a very rough beginning among very rough people, who already thought they were seamen. Naked and lost among the ship’s compartments, I tried to find my way back from a medical examination in the fourth division’s room. I asked a crewmember clad in drill-ready white, “Please sir could you tell me how to get to the second division room?” After responding with friendly directions, he added, “You can use ‘du’ with me.” He was an older boy, one who’d already spent a half-year on board. But since the way was too complicated I had to ask someone else for directions. This man wore white trousers with a blue jacket. I addressed him informally, of course. He promptly boxed my ears, adding, “You will address with me with ‘Sie.’” He was a Vollmatrose. Practically a demigod. The short walk back was very educational for me. In the future I avoided getting my ears boxed for this kind of violation.¹

Heise’s description—with its sterile nudity, medical examinations, division rooms, coded uniforms, and strict hierarchical command structure—reads like a recruit’s account of his first day in the military. But he was no naval recruit and this was not a training ship in the Imperial Navy. He had come to train for the German merchant service aboard a gleaming new sailing ship operated by the Deutscher Schulschiffverein (DSSV).

Ostensibly created to safeguard Germany’s “real seaman,” the Schulschiffverein built an educational program to instill soldierly forms and values among civilian mariners. With help from the Imperial Navy and the Flottenverein, the association was founded in 1900 to preserve the training of “tüchtige German seamen” aboard sailing rather than steamships. It was a semi-private association, made up of a coalition of aristocratic houses, local governments, shipping firms, and export-oriented industrialists. Between 1900 and 1914 the Schulschiffverein built a fleet of three training ships, each with the capacity to train 150-200 mariners per year. In addition, the DSSV worked closely and shared many of its board members with North German Lloyd’s training ship program, which operated two ships for a smaller and more exclusive number of officer aspirants. These five ships sailed as the most exclusive venues in a broader training ship movement for the Handelsmarine. The movement also included other so-called “wild” training ships that smaller shipping firms operated on their own, typically with little state support.² None of these ships was directly operated by the Imperial Navy, which had its own separate fleet of training ships.³ Nevertheless, Tirpitz’s navy and the Reich government had vested financial interests in the Schulschiffverein. Consequently, this

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² Precise numbers for these “wild” training ships remain unavailable.
organization represented a line of development toward militarized education in the merchant marine that emerged—but remained incomplete—in the Wilhelmine era. This chapter therefore focuses on how constructions of soldierly masculinity shaped seafaring pedagogy in the DSSV.

The Schulschifffverein (as well as its NGL partner program) claimed to uphold traditional manhood at sea. In actuality, its pedagogy departed considerably from the ideals of Fahrensleute. Its recruitment strategies sought to give German merchant mariners a more respectable and national composition. Middle-class inlanders like Bruno Heise therefore became ideal targets for the organization’s recruitment efforts. In an equally significant shift, the DSSV’s training methods imported masculine forms and styles from the Imperial Navy. Heise’s first day experience would have been rather different had he joined the crew of a German sailing freighter, where informal training, coastal dialects, a craftsman ethos, and casual violence still ruled. The DSSV thus enshrined its vision of masculinity at sea in military readiness, middle-class respectability, and national patriotism. This is what the organization meant when it claimed that its sailing program would foster “[the German seaman’s] concern for moral values, the strengthening of his self-confidence, the strengthening of his will and his character, his growth to be a man.”

The Schulschifffverein became, in the words of economist and naval propagandist Ernst Levy von Halle, an important “point of contact” between Germany’s merchant and

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4 It is particularly interesting to compare Heise’s experience in the DSSV with that of Wolfgang Ochs, who went to sea in the same year aboard a sailing freighter from Bremen. Ochs was also a middle-class boy from Berlin. The crew of the sailing freighter, who resented his class and regional differences, were horribly brutal toward the young Ochs. See BA-BL, R/901/76375, Paul Ochs to Ausw. Amt, 18 Apr. 1912.

The relationship between the merchant marine and the Imperial Navy belonged to a set of key naval policy questions that gripped Wilhelmine Germany after 1897. The protection of German commercial vessels and therein the national economy provided Tirpitz and his followers a core justification for naval expansion. This economic argument appealed to a growing number of liberal intellectuals and politicians, among them Levy von Halle, who believed a strong navy was essential for Germany’s integration into world commerce. In a 1906 lecture he charted the historic, economic, and technical, and personal “points of contact” between civilian and military seafaring in Germany. In his view, naval and merchant mariners were essentially “made of the same stuff.” Still, he worried about the war-readiness of civilian mariners and warned that a hands-off approach to training in the Handelsmarine would be insufficient. He praised the training ship movement—singling out the DSSV—for its educational efforts. The installation of training ships for the Handelsmarine, he argued, would create the kind of

6 Ernst (Levy) von Halle (1869-1909), an expert on cotton production and trust formation in the United States, was one of the most prominent intellectual supporters of German naval expansion. From 1897 until 1908 he worked for the Imperial Navy’s Propaganda Bureau as the chief advocate for the economics of Flottenpolitik. He was also the scion of an established Jewish merchant family in Hamburg. In 1894 he converted to Protestantism and dropped Levy from his name. After joining the Imperial Navy’s Propaganda Bureau in 1897 he also edited the Navy-sponsored Nauticus. Jahrbuch für Deutschlands Seeinteressen, published numerous works on naval and maritime matters, and obtained an academic appointment at the University of Berlin. From this position he became one of the main links between Tirpitz and the so-called “Flottenprofessoren,” academic advocates of naval-building. He also worked to develop funding mechanisms for Tirpitz’s battle fleet construction programs that would appeal to a broad cross-section of middle-class liberal opinion. In 1908 he was named director of the Economic Policy Office in the Imperial Treasury, where he continued to pursue pro-Tirpitz economic policies. But within months, conservative opponents of the Tirpitz plan unleashed an antisemitic campaign against him, forcing his resignation. He died shortly thereafter at the age of forty. See Kehr, Schlachtfлотенbau, 101-03, 185; Peter-Christian Witt, Die Finanzpolitik des Deutschen Reichs von 1903 bis 1911 (Lübeck & Hamburg: Matthiesen, 1970), 224-25, 276; Ekkehard Böhm, Überseehandel und Flottenbau. Hanseatiscche Kaufmannschaft und deutsche Seeerüstung 1879-1902 (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1972), 103; Peter G. J. Pulzer, Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933 (Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 180-81; Guenther Roth, “Der politische Kontext von Max Webers Beitrag über die deutsche Wirtschaft in der Encyclopedia Americana,” Zeitschrift für Soziologie 36, no 1 (2007): 65-77.

seamen who could be called upon to serve the nation in a time of war. In other words, he believed that the *Schulschiffverein* and its NGL partner program would align the course of merchant marine training with the pedagogy of the Imperial Navy.

Scholarly work on the “points of contact” between civilian and naval seafarers in Wilhelmine Germany is practically non-existent. Indeed, naval historians have largely ignored Admiral Albrecht von Stosch’s maxim that “men fight, not ships.” This absence is surprising given that the Imperial Navy’s personnel question was unavoidable at the time. On the eve of *Flottenpolitik*, the number of men serving in the Imperial Navy was still relatively small. In 1897, only about 26,000 men served in all ranks and positions either as officers, petty officers, or ratings (ordinary naval crewmen).\(^8\) In comparison there were some 42,000 workers in the *Handelsmarine*.\(^11\) The dramatic expansion of both fleets over the next decade and a half made the supply of reliable personnel into a pressing question for naval administrators and nautical experts alike. This question was not entirely new. It had appeared in maritime circles at least as early as the formation of the North German Confederation in 1867.\(^12\) But German naval expansion and its political significance after 1897 were orders of magnitude greater than they had been before. Not only did administrators have to find enough qualified seamen to fill ever-greater needs in the present, under the Tirpiz Plan they also had to prepare for decades of future growth and the creation of a large and war-ready contingent of mariners.

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\(^10\) More precisely there were some 1330 officers of all corps, 1,058 “deck officers” (a kind of non-commissioned officer unique to the Imperial Navy), 4,740 petty officers, and 19,378 ratings. See Herwig, “*Luxury*” Fleet, 111.
\(^11\) *Handbuch für die Deutsche Handelsmarine* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1900), 145.
\(^12\) See, for example, “Über das Bemannung underer Kriegsflotte,” *HZfS* 4, no. 81 (1867): 647-50; no. 82 (1867): 655-58; no. 83 (1867): 665-67.
German law gave civilian mariners a prominent place in naval recruitment and reserve formation. Article 53 of the 1871 Reich Constitution mandated that “all seafaring men of the Reich, including machinists and shipwrights, are free from service in the land forces but, conversely, are bound to serve in the Imperial Navy.” The structure of peacetime service in the Imperial Navy largely corresponded to that of the German land forces. Naval conscripts served three years—unless they attained the coveted one-year volunteer status—followed by four years in the Marinereserve (naval reserve) and then in the Seewehr (maritime defense force) until their thirty-ninth birthday.

In 1888, German authorities created a new category, the Marine-Ersatzreserve (naval replacement reserve), which included civilian mariners who had been exempt from normal service for minor or temporary physical “defects” or for familial reasons. The Marine-Ersatzreserve was designed to supplement the crew strength of the Imperial Navy in case of wartime mobilization. In addition, maritime labor laws gave Reich authorities a relatively straightforward means of keeping track of civilian mariners’ military status. They required all male citizens who worked aboard German vessels to carry a Seefahrtsbuch, or seafaring pass. The pass, which had to be surrendered to the ship’s captain at the beginning of each voyage, functioned simultaneously as a labor record, an identification card, and a military service record.

13 Although I have made a number of relevant changes, this translation is based on the English translation found in Elmar M. Hucko, ed., The Democratic Tradition: Four German Constitutions (Oxford & New York: Berg, 1987), 119-45. This relationship was first defined in the 1867 Constitution of the North German Confederation and kept with almost identical wording in the 1871 Reich Constitution. The requirement of naval service for civilian seamen underwent a minor revision in 1893 but continued largely unaltered through end of the First World War.
15 Based on a Scandinavian model, German coastal states like Bremen, Hamburg, and Prussia had adopted Seefahrtsbuch requirements earlier in the nineteenth century. After German unification, authorities added
The naval personnel question was not just about placing bodies on ships or filling reservist ranks; it also involved masculinity and education at sea. On a symbolic level, steps toward the militarization of the “German seaman” involved a new style of masculine performance that borrowed potent naval symbols such as flags and uniforms. A second aspect can be found in the soldierly styles of discipline and training advocated by groups such as the Deutscher Schulschiffverein. Finally, as civilian seamen increasingly were seen as a vital force for national defense, mercantile training ships and their cadets became bearers of national pride in Germany and around the world. Naval administrators were not the only supporters of these social and cultural shifts; Germany’s shipping firms and export oriented industrialists also saw the introduction of soldierly values into the merchant marine as a way to counter rising seafaring labor unrest.

Attempts to make civilian mariners into soldiers, however, were fraught with conflicts over social status, geographical origin, and manhood. The naval-oriented “training ship movement” sparked a wrenching debate among German nautical professionals, which divided traditionalists who favored informal training aboard sailing freighters from supporters of training ships. The Schulschiffverein and its supporters co-opted the “real seaman” rhetoric, giving their militarized educational program an air of tradition and legitimacy. In the process, they redefined naval-style training ships as the ideal “schools of manliness” for civilian seamen like Bruno Heise (although most merchant mariners continued to train at sea informally).16 During the same period, a combination of Reich policies, shipping company regulations, and professional self-

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16 Frevert, A Nation in Barracks, 162.
interest recast merchant marine officers in military style. A self-conscious officer corps in the Imperial Navy, however, jealously guarded its status and prerogatives from internal and external encroachments. Despite these tensions, clear lines of development emerged during the decade and a half before the First World War toward a convergence of civilian and naval masculinities at sea.

5.1 The Training Ship Question

Few among Germany’s nautical professionals and shipowners doubted the essential necessity of sailing for the production of genuine seamen. Rather than questioning sailing’s preeminence, disagreements revolved around how Germany would safeguard its “real seamen” and who would pay for it. As we saw in the last chapter, German nautical circles had discussed the training ship idea since the 1870s. Still, the issue remained on the margins of maritime discourse until the 1890s when the disappearance of commercial sailing seemed certain. During the maritime educational debates that played out in the years around 1900 participants gravitated toward two opposing camps: traditionalists favored the so-called Schiffsjungenzwang, or ship’s boy mandate, and reformers favored training ships. These debates involved more than just differences in pedagogy; they reflected deep social and cultural divisions between the masculine style the prevailed aboard customary sailing freighters (Figure 15) and that which came to dominate on training ships (Figure 21).

In many ways, Hamburg’s 1892 cholera epidemic renewed the debate over maritime education. The epidemic left over eight-thousand of the city’s residents dead,
most of whom were poorer denizens of the harbor districts. One of its major demographic effects was the creation of a large group of orphaned, working-class children within the space of a few weeks, overwhelming the city’s public and private social services. In response, the governing council of the city’s orphanages, the Waisenhaus-Collegium, joined forces with nautical experts who were already concerned about the impending disappearance of the merchant sailing ship. In a series of articles and editorials in the fall of 1892 and the winter of 1893, the Collegium and its allies pushed for new public programs to channel orphaned boys into the seafaring profession. Some revived the failed training ship proposals from the 1870s, advocating a system of stationary training ships for orphans and poor youths based on the British model. Others brought up the possibility of reinstating the Schiffsjungenzwang. Advocates of the ship’s boy mandate looked for inspiration to local, pre-unification ordinances that Hamburg and Bremen had enacted during the 1850s. They called upon the Reich

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17 Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 470-90.
18 One of the most extensive pleas for the Waisenhaus-Collegium’s proposal can be found in “Unsere Waisenknaben und der Seemannsberuf,” *Hamburger Börsenhalle*, no. 88, 21 Feb. 1893.
19 Hamburg already had a training ship program for officer cadets, but it had a very different purpose from the one proposed by the Waisenhaus-Collegium in the wake of the cholera epidemic. A consortium of Hamburg ship owners created the Deutsche Seemannsschule Hamburg in 1862. They sought to train “morally irreproachable, healthy boys” on a permanently moored training ship in the city’s harbor. But this was an elite institution, dedicated exclusively to the practical and theoretical preparation of boys from well-off families to be “not only useful, but also learned officers and captains.” See Maria Möring, *Die Geschichte der Deutschen Seemannsschule Hamburg* (Hamburg: Kabel, 1992); Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 144; Hoffmann, *Matrosen—Schiffsmechaniker—Schiffsoffiziere*, 11-12.
20 As early as 1883, the head of Hamburg’s Seemannsamt, Alfred Tetens had called for the reintroduction of the Schiffsjungenzwang. See Rath, “Seeleute an Bord,” in *Übersee*, ed. Plagemann, 253-54. In 1890 a number of editorials appeared in Hamburg’s major newspapers echoing Tetens’s plea. See “Den Seemannstand betreffend,” *Hamburger Nachrichten*, no 80, 3 Apr. 1890; and “Zum Rückgang der Seemannischen Bevölkerung. (Eingesandt),” *Hamburger Börsenhalle*, no. 422, 10 Sept. 1890. The authors of these editorials referenced the ship’s boy mandates that Hamburg and Bremen had introduced during the 1850s. The Gewerbeordnung of 1869 had done away with these mandates on the eve of German unification. See Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 143. Hamburg’s and Bremen’s Schiffsjungenzwang ordinances echoed British “seamen’s apprenticeship laws” which date to the Navigation Acts of 1703. Ironically, state-mandated apprenticeship aboard British merchant vessels ended with the repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849, just a few years before Hamburg and Bremen introduced similar
government to require each German sailing vessel to carry a certain number of ship’s boys according to the vessel’s size.

Despite this public campaign, opposition from Hamburg’s powerful shipping interests, represented by the *Verein Hamburger Rheder*, effectively shut down the *Collegium*’s plan. Shipowners rejected both the training ship idea and the reintroduction of the ship’s boy mandate. The VHR feared that these proposals would cut into its members’ bottom line, either through training ship taxes and fees or through the increased cost of feeding and housing more ship’s boys, who they viewed as unproductive crewmembers. The association insisted that no shortage of ship’s boy applicants existed and that no special preparations for the seaman’s profession were necessary apart from bodily and emotional “hardening.”

For the time being, Hamburg shipowners’ had largely ended the public debate over changes in maritime training.

German navalism of the early twentieth century reset the terms and scope of the debate over education in the *Handelsmarine*. In January 1900, a coalition of aristocrats and industrialists founded the *Deutscher Schulschiffverein* (DSSV), under the active sponsorship of Friedrich August II, Grand Duke of Oldenburg. The DSSV proclaimed its intention to educate “real seamen” for the *Handelsmarine* aboard its training vessels. It had crucial backing from the *Flottenverein*, the Imperial Navy, and Kaiser Wilhelm II and embarked on a national publicity campaign to build support for its sailing school ship program. In a parallel move the same year, North German Lloyd created its own training

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21 Jahresbericht des Verwaltungsrats des Vereins Hamburger Rheder (1892), 7; and Jahresbericht des Verwaltungsrats des Vereins Hamburger Rheder (1893), 6.
ship program, using ocean-going sailing ships to train its officer cadets. A variety of other groups also created their own training ships, all of which valorized sailing.\textsuperscript{22}

The very public intervention of the \textit{Schulschiffverein} into what had previously been a relatively confined local debate over maritime education unleashed a bruising controversy among Germany’s nautical experts. It hardened the lines between traditionalists who adamantly demanded the return of the \textit{Schiffsjungenzwang} and reformers who supported the DSSV and other training ship programs. The controversial “training ship question” created heated, and at times personal, exchanges in Germany’s nautical associations, maritime journals, and the coastal press. Both sides claimed to be upholding the right kind of manhood at sea. As one observer noted at the time, the controversy represented nothing less than a cultural struggle over the definition of “seaman.”\textsuperscript{23}

Traditionalists believed that the only way to sustain sailing ship education was to preserve the customary informal path toward manhood at sea aboard a sailing freighter. To do so, they demanded a national \textit{Schiffsjungenzwang}, which would subsidize places for ship’s boys on sailing freighters either through state contributions or through a new tax on steamship companies. They rejected training ship programs, believing that these would disrupt the cultural, social, and economic order of the seafaring profession. In particular, they doubted that such programs could instill the manly character they thought necessary for seafaring. As one traditionalist captain from Hamburg argued, training ships produced only boys who were “fragile flowers” (\textit{Treibhauspflanzen}), instead of

\textsuperscript{22} Gerstenberger and Welke, \textit{Vom Wind zum Dampf}, 144.
\textsuperscript{23} “Die Schulschiffe und ihre rechtliche Bedeutung in der Handelsmarine,” \textit{HDNZ} 38, no. 52 (1901), 614-17.
capable seamen trained “according to old custom.”

Such arguments assumed that the regimented exercises aboard training ships could not facilitate the individual craftsman-style learning necessary to make “nimble and ready” (fix und fertig) seamen. Because each training ship carried large contingents of boys in naval fashion, many experienced seamen, who had trained in the customary way, viewed them as “sailor factories.”

The director of the Royal Prussian Navigation School in Danzig, a traditionalist, provided one of the most detailed critiques of the Schulschiffverein’s training program. In general, he was sympathetic to the DSSV’s cause, agreeing that training aboard steamships could not produce men with the “presence of mind and physical skill, with which the real sailing ship Matrose distinguishes himself in such outstanding ways.” He also allowed that men trained aboard sailing ships might offer a better workforce for steamers, particularly among deck officers and crewmen. Nevertheless, he ultimately rejected the Schulschiffverein’s methods, noting that “in my experience, boys can be trained best and in a relatively short time aboard sailing freighters.”

The Danzig school director proceeded to list two core problems with DSSV training methods, which he believed were insufficient for the development of seamanly character and skill. First, he found fault with the large number of trainees that DSSV ships carried. Rather than the usual fifteen to twenty men aboard a deep-sea sailing freighter, DSSV vessels carried around one hundred fifty trainees plus an instructional crew. This fact, he argued, would significantly reduce the amount of “bodily activity and exertions” that each boy had to perform. A reduction of activity meant that even after a

24 “VII. Verbandstag Deutscher Seeschiffer-Vereine,” HDNZ 37, no. 8 (1900), 90.
25 Rhein-Ems-Zeitung, 10 Dec. 1901.
26 Schulz, Im Strom der Gezeiten, 26-27.
year of service, many of the trainees still would not have found their “sea legs” (*seefest werden*). In other words, they would not have developed the fortitude to withstand seasickness. In his view, overcoming seasickness was not just about recovering from an illness; it was, more importantly, about developing masculine character: “Having one’s sea legs is the first condition for becoming a seaman; in the struggle with seasickness the boy learns from the first moment to subordinate himself to the constrains placed upon him.” Without his sea legs, a boy could not be counted upon to perform more difficult tasks in the rigging. On a sailing freighter, by contrast, he estimated that boys typically became *seefest* within the space of one to two weeks. 

Second, the director argued that training ships failed to expose their trainees to sufficient physical dangers in order to cultivate true seamanship. He worried that training ships, which did not sail for profit, would head for the nearest bay at the first sign of bad weather. If a safe haven could not be found, “the boys will likely be sent below decks and therein be robbed of the opportunity to test and steel their courage.” Real seamanship, he continued, could only be developed aboard profit-earning sailing freighters, where boys would be forced to learn how to sail in “every weather and in every possible condition at sea.” From this viewpoint, the concern for profit would minimize the number of crewmen and maximize the dangers, thereby create an environment in which a boy would develop true seamanship. Still, the director had little hope that his preferred methods would survive. With more than a hint of fatalism, he chided that “[w]henever the last sailing ship is sunk or wrecked, the old seamanship will die, and it would be a pointless endeavor to try and artificially revive it.”

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
accusations that training ships were poor imitations of sailing freighers followed the
Schulschiffverein over the next decade. As late as 1909, the DSSV had to defend itself on
this point in a letter to the Interior Ministry. The letter drew upon “real seaman” rhetoric
to paper over the real changes training ship pedagogy represented, expounding once
again that the practice of sailing preserved the “seamanly values of courage, decisiveness,
and dexterity.”

Maritime traditionalists also warned that tuition requirements of training ships
would create a “social cleft” running through the seafaring profession, denying boys from
poorer families the opportunity to rise up through the ranks. One editorial in Berlin’s
Der Reichsbote magazine framed training ship programs in drastic terms as an attack on
the social fabric of the seafaring profession. It warned that “once the way to the
command bridge can be found only with money and fine gloves it will be a grim day
indeed in our ordinary crew quarters.” In response, the DSSV constantly had to fight
the perception that it was training “Herren Seeleute,” or snobby seamen. These social
concerns also had an economic dimension: traditionalists claimed that training ships
would produce an over-supply of merchant marine officers and captains, suppressing
wages at the higher end of the profession.

Other critics were concerned that the Schulschiffverein’s methods had too much in
common with military training. On the eve of the DSSV’s creation, Hansa published an
op-ed critical of the Flottenverein’s role, insisting that “all instructional personnel on

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30 BA-BL, R/901/17776, letter from DSSV to RAdI, 14 April 1909.
31 Rhein-EmS-Zeitung, 3 Jan. 1902.
34 “Verband Deutscher Seeschiffer-Verein,” HDNZ 40, no. 19 (1903), 228.
board must come exclusively from the merchant marine." The Verein Deutscher Seestuereule zu Hamburg-Altona also attacked the idea for a training ship association, claiming that it would serve the interests of the Imperial Navy over those of the merchant marine. The perception that the DSSV represented a militarization of the Handelsmarine persisted, forcing the organization to disingenuously insist in 1903 that its training took place "without taking on the serious character of military forms." When maritime traditionalists attacked the organization again in 1907 it reiterated that its primary objectives were civilian rather than military.

All of these doubts notwithstanding, a majority of nautical experts endorsed the Schulschiffverein from the outset or were convinced along the way. With majority support, training ship advocates carried the day in Germany’s major nautical organizations. At the 1900 meeting of the Verband Deutscher Seeschiffervereine, training ship supporters defeated a resolution for a national ship’s boy mandate. Instead, the organization approved a statement of support for the introduction of training ships as "a useful means for eliminating the shortage ... and for raising the inferior seamanly quality of ship personnel." Similarly, a majority of delegates to the Deutscher Nautischer Verein’s annual conference ignored the concerns of their traditionalist colleagues, passing

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39 For evidence of early support among navigation school instructors, see Theodor Lüning, "Einige Bemerkungen über Schulschiffe," HDNZ 36, no. 46 (1899): 547-48; and GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 40 Bd. 1, Königl. Navigationschul-Direktor für die Provinz Schleswig-Holstein (Altona) to Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe, 5 Jun. 1900; see also an account of the DSSV’s history in Kölnische Zeitung, 30 May 1913.
40 "VII. Verbandstag Deutscher Seeschiffer-Vereine," HDNZ 37, no. 8 (1900), 91.
a resolution of support for the DSSV and other training ship programs. In both cases training ship supporters received vital endorsement from representatives of the Reich Interior Ministry and the Imperial Navy.

The *Schulschiffverein* and its allies won the debate over the “training ship question” among nautical professionals and beyond for four principle reasons. First, many *Handelsmarine* captains and officers saw the social changes and military style that training ships offered as beneficial to their corporate status and honor. Second, the training ship idea had overwhelming political support from key political actors, including the *Flottenverein*, the Imperial Navy, and the Kaiser. Third, with the political winds against them, shipowners lifted their opposition to the training ship solution. In 1900, the *Verein Hamburger Rheder*, for instance, awkwardly announced its support for training ships. The organization, however, continued to oppose a subsidized *Schiffsjungenzwang*, which would have been the only way to make enough sailing freighters economically viable to handle the training needs of the merchant and naval fleets. Around 1900, Germany’s major shipping firms fell in line behind the training ship idea and joined the DSSV or created their own training ship programs. Finally, the DSSV’s co-optation of the “real seaman” rhetoric proved successful in a national campaign to popularize maritime education. Using the “poetics of the seaman’s life” as cultural cover, the organization began to introduce rather sweeping social changes and military forms into the *Handelsmarine*. Each of these developments will be explored in greater detail below.

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41 “XXXI. Vereinstag des Deutschen Nautischen Vereins,” *HDNZ* 37, no. 10 (1900), 114-18
Figure 21. Crew photo from the Deutscher Schulschiffverein’s training ship, Großherzogin Elisabeth, c. 1902. Note the military-style staging and uniforms, as well as the large number of trainees. Compare with the crew photo from a commercial sailing freighter (Figure 15, Chapter 4). DSSV brochure (1902), p. 26. Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.
5.2 Status, Honor, and Manhood among Officers

The terms “officer” (Offizier) and “captain” (Kapitän) were freighted with military connotations that did not easily fit with the traditional navigation and command roles of mates (Steuerleute) and shipmasters (Schiffer) aboard German merchant vessels. This conceptual distinction, marked by divergent terminology, blurred considerably during the imperial period (although it did not disappear). As a process of cultural redefinition, it involved a shift toward an ideal of military manhood in merchant marine command that nevertheless remained incomplete. The automatic extension of the coveted one-year volunteer status to merchant mariners who had passed the officers’ examination (Steuermannsprüfung) was a major contributing factor. But the militarization of manhood was also supported and reflected through symbolic markers such as uniforms and flags that bestowed an air of military authority to civilian command. Although a merchant marine officer never attained the same status and honor as an executive officer (Seeoffizier) in the Imperial Navy, he moved closer toward this soldierly ideal.

In Imperial Germany, peacetime conscription was built into the fabric of male social life. Most German men began their required military service at the age of twenty. Essentially, there were two classes of conscripts: one-year volunteers and everyone else. Men who did not have the right social, educational, or financial backgrounds—the overwhelming majority in the Empire—had to perform three years (two years after 1893) of military service. For middle-class men, the attainment of the one-year volunteer
certificate (*Einzjährig-Freiwilliger-Zeugniss*) became a much desired marker of manhood. Eligibility for one-yearer status required the completion of higher education. In the land forces, one-yearers also had to pay for their own equipment, room, board, and other living costs, which amounted to considerable expense. Despite these difficulties, middle class men pursued one-yearer status because it provided them not only with social standing, but also a sense of masculine honor. One-yearer status was the surest way to attain the aptness certificate for reserve officer status. Military reserve officers stood at the pinnacle of the middle-class male world in Imperial Germany, and they were held to the same standards of appearance and conduct as professional officers. Still, reserve officer status was difficult to achieve, even for one-yearers. Only about half of them ended up with the reserve officer certification; another third ended their service as an NCO in the reserve, while a smaller group of men were discharged as lance-corporals. As Ute Frevert has shown, this peacetime conscription system constituted the prevailing “school of manliness” in Imperial Germany.\(^4^4\)  

The successful completion of the merchant marine officers’ examination automatically qualified sailors for one-yearer status in the Imperial Navy. Unlike the German land forces, however, the Navy provided its one-yearers with uniforms, room, and board free of charge. A seaman who intended to take the officers’ examination also had the option to defer his service until the age of twenty-four.\(^4^5\) As we have already seen, the professionalization of command in the merchant marine had limited access to the officers’ examination largely to middle-class circles. But compared with conditions in the army, the special allowances in the Navy extended the possibility of one-year

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\(^4^4\) Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks*, 157-70.  
service in the Navy further down the social scale. These allowances also fostered personnel linkages between the merchant marine officer corps and the naval reserve. During the decade before the First World War, such connections appear to have been increasing. In 1906, 17.8% of all HAL officers were naval reserve officers. Six years later that number had climbed to 21.1%. In 1912, almost one-third of HAL captains were reserve officers, but the increasing proportion of naval reserve officers was particularly apparent among the company’s younger first, second, and third officers, each of which gained around 8%. Although company records do not list percentages of non-officer reservists, most of those who did not have naval reserve officer status instead would have had NCO or lance-corporal status in the reserve.\(^{46}\)

Attaining one-yearer and reserve officer status were marks of personal or collective masculine honor among merchant marine officers. Oscar Schulz recalls how a fellow Essener, who had just passed his Steuermannsprüfung walked around town showing off his one-yearer uniform to the delight of the city’s youth. Suddenly a career in the Handelsmarine was the latest craze among Essen’s teenage male population, inspiring many like Schulz to go to sea. When his anxious family suggested he go directly into the Navy he informed them that the his career path to the merchant marine would be quicker and would be a much surer way to get one-yearer status.\(^{47}\) Regarding his entry into navigation school, Schulz recalls feeling a sense of social ascent, manly pride, and hope for the future. Once he attained his “hard-earned” one-yearer status, he would “no longer have to bow before anyone.”\(^{48}\) When he had the Steuermannsprüfung and one-yearer status under his belt, he felt like a real man: “Full of good cheer I looked


\(^{47}\) Schulz, Im Strom der Gezeiten, 13-14.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 120.
to the future; I had become a strong man, who could be proud of himself.” Bremer Historian Friedrich Purlitz projected similar sentiments regarding North German Lloyd’s officer staff:

Our Lloyd captains and officers may pride themselves on having been promoted to the most select of social circles. A great number of them also belong to the reserve officer corps of our Kriegsmarine, which guarantees that they will maintain their [social] level and thus also attract men to the seafaring profession from [higher social] circles that have thus far avoided it.

In Purlitz’s view, the growing connections between the merchant and naval fleets benefitted the collective honor and status of merchant marine officers. Such sentiments were reinforced by the naval-style uniforms and comportment that Germany’s major steamship companies required of its officers.

Kaiser Wilhlem II’s controversial Flag Decree of May 1896 put the collective honor of naval reserve officers in the Handelsmarine spectacularly on display. Since 1871, all German merchant vessels had flown the Reich’s national flag of simple black, white, and red stripes. The Kaiser’s Decree, however, allowed any German merchant ship whose commander was a naval reserve officer to fly a special merchant flag overlaid with the iron cross. This symbol of distinction in the Prusso-German military created a privileged class of merchant captains for the whole world to see. Although many of Germany’s major shipping firms welcomed the added prestige that came with the new flag, it created simmering resentment among captains and officers in merchant marine who were not reserve officers. These men complained privately that the new measure

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49 Ibid., 202.
50 Purlitz, Das Kadetten-Schulschiff des Norddeutschen Lloyd, 10.
52 The decree was revised in 1903 to ensure that only ships “whose outer appearance is consistent with the flag’s importance” were allowed to fly the flag. See Böhmert, “Die Lage der Seeleute im Wesergebiet,” 496-97.
created a distinction that was not based on “seamanly Tüchtigkeit,” and therefore threatened the competency of command at sea. In response to these concerns, some shipping firms forbade their captains from flying the iron cross flag.\(^{53}\) Siegfried Heckscher sparked an unusually divisive controversy when he spoke out against the Flag Decree at the Verein für Socialpolitik’s conference on seafaring labor. To cheers in the audience he condemned the Decree for its presumption that “a man who is a reserve officer is a totally different sort of man than he who isn’t one.” In other words, the Flag Decree had created a distinction in masculine status that “had nothing to do with a man’s Tüchtigkeit” and therefore should be rescinded.\(^{54}\) A defensive Captain Albert Polis retorted that his company, the Hamburg-America Line, did not require its officers or captains to be reserve officers but that it gladly allowed those who had gained such a distinction to fly the iron cross flag. He argued that the “cross in the flag is not the only measure for the Tüchtigkeit of a captain,” implicitly admitting, however, that it was one such measure.\(^{55}\)

One yearer status, naval-style uniforms, and the Kaiser’s Flag Decree may have moved merchant marine officers closer to the social status and manly honor of the professional naval officer corps, but they were by no means equal. By the Wilhelmine period, professional officers in the Imperial Navy came overwhelmingly from middle- and upper middle-class families.\(^{56}\) They were divided into six major corps: Seeoffiziere (executive), Marineinfanterie (naval infantry), Marineingenieurkorps (naval engineer corps), Torpedo-Ingenieurkorps (torpedo engineer corps), Feuerwerks- Zeug-, und

\(^{53}\) Heckscher, “Die Lage der in der Seeschifffahrt Hamburgs beschäftigten Arbeiter,” 237.


\(^{55}\) Ibid., 114-15.

\(^{56}\) Herwig, “Luxury” Fleet, 118-19; Frevert, A Nation in Barracks, 158.
Torpedo-Offiziere (ordinance, supply, and torpedo officers), and Sanitätsoffizierkorps (medical officer corps).

Executive officers formed the Imperial Navy’s premier officer corps. In terms of honor and status, they placed themselves above the fleet’s other corps. They dominated the Navy’s courts of honor (Ehrengerichte). Additionally, they alone among naval officers qualified as hoffähig, giving them the right to appear at the Kaiser’s court. Along with naval infantry and medical officers, executive officers also enjoyed the honor of the Kaiser’s “marriage consent.” Having to obtain the Kaiser’s permission to marry was as much a mark of distinction as it was an element of social control. Executive officers also developed a strong sense of group identity, aspiring to an equivalent military and social status as elite cavalry officers in the Army. Encouraged by the Kaiser’s naval enthusiasm, they claimed the position of Germany’s “first estate.”

Furthermore, they were overwhelmingly Protestant with a small Catholic minority. Antisemitic policies excluded unconverted Jewish applicants from their ranks. Most of them hailed from rural northern coastal regions; surprisingly few came from the Hanseatic cities of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck. Applicants were also carefully screened to make sure that they did not come from socialist or union households. The cost of an executive officer career was prohibitively expensive, limiting accessibility to the upper ranks of the Bürgertum or to the nobility.

When other groups within the Imperial Navy—notably engineering officers and deck officers—tried to raise their status and claim some of the privileges reserved to executive officers, the latter group fought back energetically, although not

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58 Ibid., 116-19.
59 The rank of “deck officer” was unique to the Imperial Navy and connoted an intermediary position between full officers and NCOs.
entirely successfully. 60 Given this context, Handelsmarine officers, even those with reserve officer status, would have hardly qualified as social or military equals in the eyes of Navy Seeoffiziere. Still, the pedagogical changes pursued by the Deutscher Schulschiffverein promised to place them that much closer in honor and status to Seeoffiziere.

5.3 Making the Deutscher Schulschiffverein

In 1898, retired naval captain and maritime painter Lüder Arenhold published an article that dramatically shifted the course of the German debate over training in the merchant fleet. His influential "Good Seamanship—A Nonnegotiable Standpoint" marked the public premier of a campaign to create a uniform training system for officers and crewmen in the Handelsmarine. 61 It was published in Marine Rundschau, the Imperial Navy’s primary propaganda mouthpiece, signaling that the Navy and its political allies had decided to weigh in on the debate in favor of the training ship solution. 62 Arenhold’s tone was far more stridently nationalist and expansionist than that of previous training ship supporters. It was “very shameful,” he thought, that Germany’s merchant vessels might possibly be manned with foreigners. He claimed that a training ship system for the Handelsmarine was necessary for Germans to claim their rightful place as

60 Herwig, “Luxury” Fleet, 120-36.
61 A variety of sources confirm the influence of Arenhold’s article, as well as its significance for the creation of the Schulschiffverein. See “Deutscher Nautischer Verein. Drittes Rundschreiben.” HDNZ 36, no. 41 (1899), 489-91; and Kölnische Zeitung, 30 May 1913.
62 Deist, Flottenpolitik und Flottenpropaganda, 31-45; Eley, Reshaping the German Right, 206-12; Hobson, Imperialism at Sea, 132, 179-80.
a “seafaring race” (Seevolk) to rival the British, Dutch, and Scandinavians.63

Furthermore, he located this system within German goals of Weltpolitik: “Germany’s flag is expanding upon the world’s oceans in astonishing ways, thereby raising our interests at sea extraordinarily. Soon enough the English saying, ‘the defense of the nation is multiplied by each man who is more or less a seaman,’ will apply to our situation!”64

The retired captain envisioned a two-part solution to the training question, pointedly segregated by social class. First, he argued, Germany needed more dependable boys for the common ranks of the Handelsmarine. This task would be accomplished best with training ships that combined private charity with public financial support based on the British model. There were countless charitable foundations and orphanages in Germany, he reminded his readers; why not create an “orphanage on the water?” Echoing plans that had been around since the 1870s, Arenhold called for permanently moored school ships in each of Germany’s major sea ports that would be filled with orphan boys and boys from “poor, child-rich families.” He believed impoverished parents would happily give up their sons to school ship institutions that would proceed to make them into “orderly people and tüchtiger men.” Once aboard school ships, Germany’s disadvantaged youths would become “fresh, ruddy boys, hardened, bristling with health.” Following the British model, their instructors would be former executive officers and NCOs from the Imperial Navy.65

The second part of Arenhold’s solution called for training future merchant marine officers separately from common crewmen. Large modern steamers and iron-hulled

64 Ibid., 1747.
65 Ibid., 1745-47.
sailing ships, he maintained, demanded officers “of higher educational level and intelligence” and, therefore, recruits from among the “better classes.” He surmised that wealthier parents would be more willing to send their sons to sea, if they could be assured that the boys would never face the rough and tumble atmosphere of life “before the mast,” that is, in the company of ordinary crewmen. This class division was, by far, the most radical break with seafaring tradition contained within Arenhold’s plan. In many respects, however, it represented the logical conclusion of the professionalization of merchant marine officers that had begun with the introduction of state-mandated courses and exams earlier in the nineteenth century.66

In a pattern that the Schulschiffverein would later follow, Arenhold co-opted the “real seaman” rhetoric for military purposes. As he put it, work in a sailing ship’s rigging was required to fashion “complete men” (ganze Männer) at sea.67 He repeated the much-discussed definition of seamanship through a variety of capabilities associated with sailing, including the ability resist seasickness, endurance for the physical stresses of bad weather, and abilities to perform certain tasks like steering, splicing, and knotting. Ultimately, however, he argued that seamanship involved the cultivation of manly characteristics through daily struggle aboard a sailing vessel:

It is not the sailing exercises, in and of themselves, that create these good seamanly characteristics, but rather the entirety of life and experience aboard a sailing ship. The steady struggle with wind and weather, the feeling of being dependent solely on one’s own power, and having to struggle through it all—that is what forms a good seaman and calls for a legitimate pride of occupation.

A steamship deck hand had no chance of developing these “essential characteristics,” since “he’s not interested in the weather,” and since he was “more of a worker.”

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66 Ibid., 1748.
67 Ibid., 1741.
Compared with him, a seaman on a sailing vessel was a “tough guy [fixer Kerl], a whole seaman.”

Arenhold’s call for systematic training in the Handelsmarine was part of a larger campaign to support merchant marine training ships among naval circles and their political allies. In September 1899, the Flottenverein weighed in, appealing to shipping companies to support a training ship system, or in its words, “a crewmen depot” for German civilian and naval fleets. The naval pressure group’s appeal reproduced Arenhold’s rhetorical vision of the ideal merchant sailor, albeit with a greater focus on labor discipline:

That which reports for service as a sailor [Matrose], often hasn’t earned the name, and we hear animated complains about such alleged seamen from shipowners and ship commanders. Real seamen—i.e., seamen who embody seafaring knowledge and skill, a love of what they do, and a feeling of duty—are uncommon.

In an attempt to calm industry fears about the costs of systematic training ships, the Flottenverein suggested that the executive board of the as yet unnamed institution would include a large number of shipping company representatives. Later, the organization claimed credit for solving the training ship question, although this was more self-promotion than historical fact.

Of all the supporters of systematic training in the Handelsmarine, the most important individual was the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, Friedrich August II (r. 1900-1918). Friedrich August’s seafaring enthusiasm surpassed even that of his cousin, the Kaiser. He was the only sitting German prince to be named an admiral in the Imperial...

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68 Ibid., 1749-50.
69 Letter from the President of the Flottenverein to German shipowners, reprinted in “Auf dem Ausguck. Deutschen Flottenverein,” HDNZ 36, no. 38 (1899): 446.
Navy. He also dabbled in marine engineering and earned a merchant marine captain’s patent at Oldenburg’s main navigation school in Elsfleth, with which he captained his own yacht. He was known in German maritime circles as “one of the most rigorous and experienced experts” from the North Sea coastal region. The economic interests of his small realm overlapped with his personal passion for seafaring. Maritime commerce along the Weser River, along with coastal shipping and fishing, was a significant part of Oldenburg’s economy. Friedrich August took an active role in promoting maritime economic activity along the rivers and coasts of his realm. Compared with his mostly conservative peers among the German princes, he was relatively liberal, comfortable among industrialists and the shipowners of the Hanseatic Bürgertum.

Friedrich August helped create a number of initiatives toward a training ship system for the Handelsmarine. In early 1900, shortly before his installation as grand duke, he helped North German Lloyd found its own officer training ship program, along with Bremer politicians, navigation instructors, and directors of the shipping firm. The firm’s two training ships allowed for the annual schooling of around sixty cadets, in what was essentially an inside track for some of the most prestigious jobs in the German merchant marine. North German Lloyd training ships, however, were not stationary hulks, but rather sailing freighters that operated for profit on overseas routes with actual cargo. NGL’s prohibitive tuition fees of 1000 RM per year (roughly the equivalent of an average annual salary including the cost of meals for a Vollmatrose) over three years of

\[71\] Purlitz, Das Kadetten-Schulschiff des Norddeutschen Lloyd, 12.

instruction, meant that only the wealthiest German families could guarantee their sons a place on the bridges of the nation’s fastest and grandest passenger liners.\textsuperscript{73} Friedrich Purlitz, chief propagandist for NGL’s training ship program, wrote that its goal was “closer contact” between the Navy and the merchant marine, “without giving up or interfering with the independence and freedom of development of the latter.”\textsuperscript{74} In essence the NGL program fulfilled the officer training aspect of Arenhold’s proposal.

Of far greater importance, at least politically, was the creation a few weeks later of the \textit{Deutsche Schulschiffverein}. For Friedrich August and the DSSV’s other organizers, the decline of sailing was an imminent threat to the national economy and the Imperial Navy. In late 1899 he wrote to the Kaiser seeking his support, financial and otherwise, for the nascent training ship association:

\begin{quote}
Germany’s power on the sea must be supported through all means—\[the nation’s\] future is closely connected with its development. Whatever fosters merchant shipping likewise serves the Navy, whose powerful protection is required for trade, etc. Due to a lack of understanding for seafaring interests in Germany, the endeavors of the \textit{Verein} would be of particular use.
\end{quote}

He also sent a proposal that laid out the association’s goals and the means it would use to achieve them. It bluntly spelled out the problem, reiterating the consensus among nautical experts that had developed during the previous decade: “With the decline of sailing commerce the quality of seamen has deteriorated extraordinarily.” Compounding the problem, the proposal continued, Germany suffered from an unfavorable geographical position vis-à-vis the sea and a relatively small coastal population, compared to other European nations. The new association’s primary goal was to “foster future generations of able-bodied seamen” (\textit{tüchtige Seemänner}) through systematic training aboard sailing

\textsuperscript{73} Wiborg and Wiborg, \textit{The World is Our Oyster}, 156-58; Hoffmann, \textit{Matrosen—Schiffsmechaniker—Schiffsoffiziere}, 12.
\textsuperscript{74} Purlitz, \textit{Das Kadetten-Schulschiff des Norddeutschen Lloyd}, 11.
ships. The use of the unusual plural form, “Seemänner,” rather than the standard “Seeleute” emphasized that the cultivation of manhood was a central part of the DSSV’s task. Friedrich August and his backers planned to recruit from among the urban poor, “young lives which otherwise would decay morally and physically on the streets of big cities.” They envisioned boys ranging in age from thirteen to fourteen training for up to two years. Aboard stationary hulks, endangered urban youths would learn, in addition to seamanship, reading writing, arithmetic, religion, “patriotic” history, and geography. The Kaiser concurred, granting his political patronage and a yearly contribution out of his personal funds.75

Over the next fourteen years, the Schulschiffverein expanded its operations through a well-orchestrated publicity campaign, becoming Germany’s most visible and politically powerful reform organization focused on civilian mariners. It received largely favorable reviews from the liberal and conservative press in Germany, which covered its activities on a regular basis.76 The organization covered its operating costs with grants from Reich and federal state sources, membership dues, private contributions, and tuition.

75 In October 1899, when Friedrich August wrote his letter to the Kaiser, the proposed title for the association was “Verein zur Ausbildung junger Seeleute” [Association for the Training of Young Seamen], and it was supposed to be based out of Flensburg. At some point between when the proposal was written in late 1899 and the association’s constituent meeting in January 1900, its backers changed their name to the “Deutscher Schulschiffverein” and relocated their base of operations to the Lower Weser region. Although the documentary record has little to say about the reasons for the last-minute name revision, it was probably chosen to emphasize the association’s nationalist goals and outlook. The Flensburg plan involved a permanently moored hulk, but this was abandoned in favor of sea-going school ships after seafaring experts objected that a stationary ship was insufficient to instill seamanship. Instead of Flensburg, the DSSV chose Oldenburg and Emsfleth as home ports for its ships in honor of Friedrich August. It also set up an office in Bremen. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (hereafter BA-MA), RM2/1893, Großherzog Friedrich August II to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 14 Oct. 1899; Kaiser Wilhelm II to Reich-Schatz-Amt, 13 Jan. 1900. See also, “Zur Schulschiffsfrage,” HDNZ 37, no. 21 (1900): 250.

fees. Support from the Kaiser, the Imperial Navy, and the *Flottenverein* were instrumental in securing public funds for the DSSV. Still, the majority of its financial support came from private sources, with around one-third coming from state grants in 1907-08, for example.\(^77\) Between 1906 and 1913, the *Schulschiffverein*’s annual income tripled to almost a million *Reichsmarks*, testifying to its growing profile and influence.\(^78\) Although its membership remained, on the whole, relatively small, it grew to include some of Germany’s most influential politicians and businessmen. Shipping company managers, like Albert Ballin (HAL), Andreas Rickmers (Rickmers AG), and Christoph Leist (NGL), as well as industrialists like Carl von Siemens and Gustav Krupp von Bohlen sat on its governing board. By 1913 the organization counted over 1100 members, including aristocratic rulers, federal states and cities, shipping firms, and individuals.\(^79\)

The Imperial Navy played an active role in supporting and participating in the *Schulschiffverein*’s activities. Kaiser Wilhelm II, the supreme commander, followed the organization’s activities with interest. He not only contributed financial support; he also personally inspected DSSV ships to witness their crews in action.\(^80\) In addition, representatives of the Admiralty frequently attended the organization’s events. In 1902, Admiral August von Thomsen, senior commander at the North Sea Naval Station in Wilhelmshaven, along with a host of executive officers, attended the ceremony marking the end of a DSSV training ship’s annual voyage. They carried a message from navy

\(^77\) BA-BL, R/901/17776, DSSV to RAdl, 14 April 1909.
\(^79\) *Jahresbericht des Deutschen Schulschiff-Vereins. 1. April 1912 bis 31. März 1913*
chief Tirpitz recognizing the organization for its contributions to the “patriotic defense capabilities at sea.”

Over the years, it became customary for representatives of the Imperial Navy to attend the DSSV’s annual meetings. Starting in 1912, however, the institutional cooperation between the training ship organization and the Navy reached a new level. From that point onward, the Reich Naval Office gained a permanent seat on the Schulschiffverein’s governing board. This agreement was solidified by Vice Admiral Max von Grapow’s keynote speech at the DSSV’s 1912 annual meeting. Grapow praised the organization for ensuring that Germany had an adequate naval reserve and announced that Admiral von Tirpitz had arranged to increase the Reich’s annual financial grants for the organization.

The Schulschiffverein presented itself as a national organization and set its sights on building local chapters from the coasts to the Alps. By purposefully holding its annual meetings in inland cities—Düsseldorf (1902), Dresden (1907), Munich (1908), Stuttgart (1910), and Mannheim (1912)—the organization sought to recruit inlanders, particularly among industrialist circles. This is precisely what occurred in 1907 when Gustav Stresemann, at the time a lobbyist and rising star in the National Liberal party, brought his Saxon Manufacturers’ Association into the DSSV fold. At the Dresden meeting, Stresemann gave a speech linking the Schulschiffverein’s mission to the well-being of Germany’s world commerce and to the local Saxon economy. He admonished his audience that neither Saxony nor Germany could afford to forget that the success of the Handelsmarine rested on much more than the horse-power of its steam engines; it was

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“first and foremost about the human power we need for our ships need.” The DSSV’s blend of national and local politics as a public relations strategy also had its downsides. This became blatantly clear at the 1908 meeting in Munich where Bavarian Prince Ludwig used the organization’s annual meeting to berate the “men from the north” for a lack of reciprocity. He pointed out that while Bavarians had supported the Schulschiffverein, northerners had blocked efforts to build a canal network that linked southern Germany to the flows of “world commerce.”

The DSSV’s pedagogical methods evolved significantly over the course of its pre-war existence. As early as 1901, when its first school ship, the Großherzogin Elisabeth, went to sea, the profile of its trainees and its pedagogy looked significantly different than what Friedrich August’s proposal to the Kaiser had envisioned. First of all, the school ship was sea-going rather than stationary. During the months surrounding the Schulschiffverein’s founding, nautical experts had attacked its plans for a British-style stationary school ship system, insisting that only sea-going ships could offer the right kind of praxis to instill seamanship and Tüchtigkeit. Second, the organization had largely abandoned its original promise to train orphans and working-class urban youths. Instead, it introduced a two track-system, one for ship’s boys and one for officer cadets. Boys in both tracks typically came from “respectable” families. Those on the ship’s boy track had more of a lower middle-class profile and they were meant to become a Leichtmatrose in the merchant marine after a year of training. Cadets, whose social

84 “Der Deutsche Schulschiffverein in München,” Berliner Börsen Courier Nr. 396, 21 Aug. 1908.
background would have been a bit more prestigious, trained for three years in preparation for the officers’ examination, which they would take in their fourth year.\textsuperscript{86}

The launch of the DSSV’s second ship, the \textit{Prinzess Eitel Friedrich}, in the spring of 1910, deepened its hierarchical approach to training, even as it allowed broader access to some training ship positions. The newer ship was intended mostly to train officer aspirants, while the original \textit{Großherzogin} was given the task of training ordinary sailors. The older vessel henceforth would take “only poor boys with less schooling from honorable families” whose career goals aimed no higher than a job as a petty officer on board a steamer.\textsuperscript{87} A third ship, the \textit{Großherzog Friedrich August}, was launched in the spring of 1914, doubling the DSSV’s training capacity. Because of pressure from German steamship firms, it was built exclusively to train ordinary steamship deck crewmen. The \textit{Friedrich August} therefore was equipped with the most modern technology, including an auxiliary engine and wireless telegraphy, in order to augment sailing education. Finally, after a decade of operation, the DSSV’s pedagogy began to resemble Lüder Arenhold’s original dichotomous blueprint for systematic hierarchical training in the \textit{Handelsmarine}.


\textsuperscript{87} Jahresbericht des Deutschen Schulschiff-Vereins. 1. April 1908 bis 31. März 1909. 9-10.
5.4 The “Poetics” of Seafaring Life

Just as Arenhold had done, the *Schulschiffverein* cast its mission as the only way to salvage “real” seafaring manhood. The organization insisted that it was preserving the “poetry of the seaman’s life” found in “higher measure” aboard sailing ships, where, “above all, the seaman lives among seamen.”\(^88\) It claimed to offer “real education for a merchant seaman” by placing him on a sailing ship and, thereby, “instilling in him those characteristics and nurturing within him the energy which he needs for the independent practice of his difficult trade.”\(^89\) Only a sailing education could teach boys “seamanly values like courage, decisiveness, and skill.”\(^90\) The DSSV’s primary job was to make boys into men at sea, according to:

> the perennially recognized and observed principle, that a good education for seamen—above all, his concern for moral values, the strengthening of his self-confidence, the strengthening of his will and his character, his growth to be a man—can be better and more quickly realized aboard a sailing ship than on a steamer.\(^91\)

In particular, *Schulschiffverein* literature emphasized two major rhetorical tropes on becoming a man at sea: through the “agility and occupational joy”\(^92\) learned by working in the rigging and through the “struggle with wind and water.”\(^93\) These tropes

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\(^{90}\) BA-BL, R/901/17776, letter from DSSV to RAdI, 14 April 1909.


romanticized the traditional practices of *Fahrensleute*, as examined in Chapter Four, and reformulated them to serve a military ethos.

Although the DSSV (like its North German Lloyd counterpart program) claimed to be preserving traditional seamanship, its program abandoned the customary informality of maritime training and emulated naval style instead (Figures 24, 25 & 26). It placed between one and two-hundred trainees aboard each of its ships in a formal system of divisions in imitation of naval structure. Trainees were required to wear hierarchically coded uniforms that the Imperial Navy provided free-of-charge, departing from the customary principle of practicality in seafaring outfits. They also slept in naval-style crew quarters, side-by-side in neatly ordered rows of hammocks.\(^94\) Additionally, DSSV ships did not carry cargo; instead exercise, drill, and instruction in subjects such as astronomy, mathematics, English, and German structured daily life aboard. Furthermore, the organization also recruited naval personnel to command its ships and train its recruits.\(^95\) Its vessels routinely conducted “warship-like” maneuvers on the open ocean, at times in friendly competition with the Imperial Navy’s own training ships. DSSV trainees also participated in rowing and other competitions with Imperial Navy cadets.\(^96\)

\(^{95}\) BA-MA, RM2/1893, Reichsmarinekabinett to DSSV, 4 Jan. 1900.
\(^{96}\) BA-BL, R/901/17776, Captain Lauran, Imperial Navy Training Ship Commander, to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 2 Jan. 1908; Gustav Schröder, *Fernweh und Heimweh* (Potsdam: Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1943), 16.
Figure 24. Cadets aboard the *Großherzogin Elisabeth*. DSSV Brochure (1902), p. 27. Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.
Figure 25. Crew standing at attention aboard the North German Lloyd training ship, *Herzogin Cecilie*, c. 1904. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven.

Figure 26. Helmsman drill aboard the *Herzogin Cecilie*, c. 1904. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven.
The naval style that ruled aboard DSSV ships was intentional. At the launching ceremony for the *Prinzess Eitel Friedrich* in 1909, Prince Eitel Friedrich gave a remarkable speech comparing its future trainees, “a picture of youthful power,” to the vessel’s “sturdy” hull “of hard iron,” evoking images of military manhood. The *Schulschiffverein* also emphasized its role in molding “dutiful and honorable characters” that “would never fail in the hour of danger.” It assured its members that a “thoroughly military discipline” ruled aboard its vessels. And it promised to make civilian seamen who always also could be “capable soldiers in the Imperial Navy.”

The *Schulschiffverein* was not only interested in defining the appropriate characteristics of a man at sea; it also usurped the power to select the “right kind of boys” for the seafaring profession. Despite stated intentions to recruit “endangered” urban, working-class youths, the majority of trainees had middle-class backgrounds. Between 1901 and 1909 the overwhelming majority of its trainees came either from upper middle-class (39.7%) or lower middle-class families (38.8%). The sons of farmers (8.6%), sailors (6.1%), and industrial workers (5.1%) accounted for the remaining fifth of recruits. Orphans and illegitimate sons were nowhere to be found among the first decade’s cohorts. With the introduction of a second school ship in 1909, the percentage of boys from working-class families grew. Lower class boys, however, were concentrated almost entirely aboard the older *Großherzogin Elisabeth* and, for a brief moment in early 1914, aboard the newer *Großherzog Friedrich August*, whose trainees

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97 Prince Eitel Friedrich was the son of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the son-in-law of Friedrich August II. *Jahresbericht des Deutschen Schulschiff-Vereins. 1. April 1909 bis 31. März 1910*, 4-5.
were bound for low-status deck crew jobs aboard steamships. Statistics on family background for the period between 1909 and 1913 reflect the changing social make-up of DSSV trainees. During these four years, sons of lower middle-class families (42.6%) were most heavily represented, followed by those with upper middle-class (23.8%), industrial working-class (22.6%), agricultural (3.7%), and seafaring (3.6%) backgrounds. Orphans and illegitimate sons (2.8%) made their first appearances during these years, but not a single one made it aboard the elite *Prinzess Eitel Friedrich*. Thus, even though the social composition of the DSSV’s fleet changed with the introduction of more ships and a new, more hierarchical division among trainees, the organization’s program remained largely a respectable way for the middle classes to send their sons to sea.\(^{101}\)

Political and ideological factors played a key role in generating a solidly middle-class social profile in the DSSV. Coming from a “respectable” or “honorable” family was a crucial requirement for acceptance into the program.\(^{102}\) As recruitment numbers show, it was incredibly difficult for orphaned or illegitimate sons to get an assignment aboard a training ship. Johann Friedrich Jensen, for example, recalled in his memoirs that, as the son of a poor widow from Flensburg, securing a place aboard a training ship would have been impossible for him, so he had to find other ways to advance in his

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\(^{101}\) DSSV statistics recorded paternal occupation for each incoming class of trainees in categories ordered by increasing social status. Here I group the following categories under the heading “lower middle-class”: (1) Unterbeamte, Handwerker, Kleingewerbe; (2) Subalternbeamte, Volksschullehrer; and (3) “kleinere Kaufleute.” Similarly I group the following categories under the heading “upper middle-class”: (1) hohere Beamte, Pastoren, Ärzte, Oberlehrer; (2) Kaufleute, Fabrikanten; and (3) Gewerbetreibende. The other categories I used here—sailors, farmers, industrial workers, and “orphaned or illegitimate boys”—were also used by the DSSV. In addition, the DSSV recorded negligible numbers of retirees’ and military officers’ sons. These statistics can be found in the *Jahresberichte des Deutschen Schulschiff-Vereins*, 1901-1913.

seafaring career. Furthermore, although the DSSV’s literature never mentions political affiliation, the sons of union members or Social Democrats who made it through the selection process would have almost certainly been assigned to one of the lower status ships. As Gustav Stresemann noted in 1907, the *Schulschiffverein*’s ultimate task was to convince middle class families that sending their sons to sea was in their own and in the nation’s interest: “[W]e must therefore take care, to send sons from good families, people with good *Bildung* out in our ships, in order to raise the quality of our crews.”

Wilhelmine maritime children’s literature reflected similar sentiments. *Willi der Schiffsjunge* by Hans Graff von Bernstorff, for instance, tells the story of a teenage boy from a good middle-class family whose parents come to realize his “inclination” for the sea and set about guiding him through countless boyhood adventures toward the goal of becoming a merchant ship captain. Willi’s father proudly declares:

> We Germans have finally found our way over the ocean; the German merchant flag is one of the most recognized around the globe … When I think that our son Willi could become a captain of a large steamship, voyaging proudly over the ocean, then I have nothing against him becoming a young seaman and pursuing this profession.

These kinds of messages aimed at middle-class families across Germany sought to reassure them that the seafaring profession had social potential and national meaning. Becoming a steamship officer could be a legitimate, even patriotic middle-class pursuit.

One of the surest paths to command on the bridge of a large passenger liner was through the *Schulschiffverein*’s training programs, but the costs of around 400 RM per year for tuition, room and board, and equipment would have been impractical for most

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German families below the upper reaches of the middle class. Applicants from families with fewer financial resources had to rely on scholarships. Before the DSSV revamped its training program in 1909, scholarships sponsored by the organization’s members provided around a third of the available positions free of charge or at a reduced rate.\footnote{36 out of 131 trainees, or 27.5\% of the class of 1907-08, received full or partial scholarships. See, \textit{Jahresbericht des Deutschen Schulschiff-Vereins. 1. April 1907 bis 31. März 1908}, 5.} After the addition of the higher status \textit{Prinzess Eitel Friedrich} in 1910, only applicants who were admitted to that ship had to pay, while all the trainees aboard the two lower-status ships received full scholarships. Clearly this was a crucial factor in encouraging more boys from working-class families to apply.\footnote{\textit{Jahresbericht des Deutschen Schulschiff-Vereins. 1. April 1910 bis 31. März 1911}, 9.}

The stark division in status and career possibilities on the various training ships was perfectly clear to potential recruits. Bruno Heise, who came from a well-heeled and well-connected Berlin family, began his seafaring career aboard the \textit{Prinzess Eitel Friedrich} in 1911. The ship sailed with a professional band director and a nicely-equipped band, while the \textit{Großherzogin Elisabeth} had to suffice with an unqualified crewmember to direct its poorly organized band. When offered the latter position, upon completing his year of training, Heise adamantly turned it down.\footnote{Heise, “Windjammerzeiten,” 11.} Despite such differences, the organization’s training ships on the whole gained a reputation for respectability and improved career prospects, compared with tradition sailing ship training.\footnote{\textit{BA-BL, R 901/76375}, Paul Ochs to Ausw. Amt, 18 Apr. 1912. In a 1912 letter to the Foreign Ministry, Paul Ochs, a Prussussian \textit{Baurat} from Berlin, defended his decision to allow his son to sign on with an ordinary sailing freighter rather than a DSSV ship; Jensen, “Berufsangang mit Hindernissen,” 179.} Positions on board \textit{Schulschiffverein} vessels became so popular and coveted that German boys or their parents from places as far away as Brazil wrote directly to Kaiser Wilhelm II to ask for his help in the application process, often mentioning the
association’s ships by name.\textsuperscript{110} In one letter, a teenage boy from Mannheim wrote to the Kaiser asking for him to override his father’s objections to his plan to become a “real seaman” aboard a merchant marine training ship.\textsuperscript{111}

The “right kind” of boys came from all regions in Germany; national integration was the Schulschiffverein’s ultimate goal. The DSSV claimed to value the desirability of sailors’ sons and coastal boys.\textsuperscript{112} Nonetheless, it recruited throughout Germany and placed special emphasis on recruiting applicants from the country’s middle and southern regions. At the 1910 annual meeting in Stuttgart, held in the presence of King Wilhelm II of Württemburg, local supporters celebrated the “sons of our narrower Heimat” who had trained to be seamen with the Schulschiffverein.\textsuperscript{113} Inland newspapers called for local governments to support the organization and for local families to use its services to send their sons to sea.\textsuperscript{114} Through such promotional campaigns, the DSSV aimed to take advantage of the “great enthusiasm [for seafaring] among our German youth.”\textsuperscript{115} This national recruitment strategy proved to be successful with some reservations. The organization’s statistics do not allow a more detailed regional break-down, nor do they define which precise locations their categories designate. Nonetheless, it is instructive to note that between 1901 and 1913 the majority boys admitted to DSSV ships came from “middle Germany” (50.1%), followed by “coastal states and provinces” (39.2%),

\textsuperscript{110} BA-BL, R 901/76371, Rudolf Kemnitzer and Rudolf Steinbrecher to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 11 July 1908; Fritz Kienast to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 14 Oct. 1913.
\textsuperscript{111} BA-BL, R 901/76368, Adam Glaser to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 2 Aug. 1915.
“southern Germany” (10.1%), and a small number of Auslandsdeutsche (0.6%)

The national strategy thus worked well in Germany’s middle regions, but efforts to recruit southerners did not fare as well as the association had hoped.

Religious identity may have played a role in the smaller number of recruits from southern Germany, where the majority of the population was Catholic. The Schulschiffverein faced a huge recruitment gap between Protestants (86.4%) and Catholics (13.3%) before 1909. During its entire pre-war history only one trainee was officially registered as Jewish. Documentary evidence does not make clear the reasons for the religious gap. It is likely that both anti-Catholic and antisemitic prejudices existed in the DSSV, much as they did in the Imperial Navy. It is also possible that Catholic and Jewish families were simply less willing to send their sons to sea. As the work of the Deutsche Seemannsmission shows, popular and official perceptions in Wilhelmine Germany associated seafaring with Protestantism. Nevertheless, statistical evidence does demonstrate that the revamped application and training procedures after 1909 drew in growing numbers of southerners and Catholics. By 1913 they accounted for 19.7% and 37.7% of trainees respectively. This trajectory suggests that the national recruitment strategy was working and was contributing to greater confessional diversity, at least in regard to Catholics.

Globally speaking, training ships and their crews became projections of the nation overseas and signifiers of Imperial Germany’s world power. The German Foreign Service treated the arrival of DSSV or NGL training ships in a foreign port much as they would a vessel of the Imperial Navy. In 1901, the Reich Chancellery ordered German consulates abroad to keep track of DSSV and NGL training ships’ itineraries. It also
instructed them to request that foreign officials free DSSV ships from port taxes and other fees (NGL training ships were for-profit and thus ineligible for such treatment). In 1905, for example, on a visit to Antwerp, NGL’s training ship cadets performed sailing exercises for the local German consul and Belgian officials. The consul reported that the Belgians were particularly impressed by the “appearance of the officers and cadets, the practical facilities of the ship, and the meticulous order, cleanliness, and above all the devotion and discipline of the young men.” He attributed this positive image to the rising “corporate identity” (Standesgefühl) among German seamen, which had resulted from “[our] growing interest in the sea, the respect for [our] flag, the significance and world reputation of [our] shipping firms, and the more intimate relationship of the merchant officer corps to the Imperial Navy.” Similarly, when an NGL training ship visited Valparaiso, former Chilean president and naval admiral, Jorge Montt, came on board for an inspection tour. During his tour, he arranged for a number of Chileans to be installed as cadets aboard the ship. The German embassy in Santiago wrote to the Foreign Ministry, recommending they press NGL for further cooperation with Chilean authorities, since this would be “of considerable benefit to our general interests in Chile.”

Reich officials also took swift action when German training ship crews engaged in embarrassing behaviors abroad. During a voyage to the Dutch East Indies, embarrassing disciplinary problems developed aboard the independently-owned “wild” training ship, Furst von Bülow—named for the sitting Reich Chancellor. Citing poor management and bad training practices, the Chancellor revoked his permission for the

116 BA-BL, R 901/8797, DSSV to Reichskanzler, 17 Nov. 1901; DSSV to Reichskanzler, 12 Dec. 1901.  
118 BA-BL, R 901/76440, Kaiserlich Deutscher Gesandtschaft in Chile to Reichskanzler, 2 Nov. 1911.
ship to bear his name. The incident also inspired proposals for the state to take over administration of Handelsmarine training ships, particularly the so-called “wild” (independently-owned) ones. But opposition from shipowners worked against the implementation of such policies.

Internationally embarrassing incidents also occurred aboard training ships. In 1906 authorities in Galveston, Texas accused a crewmember from the Großherzogin Elisabeth of smuggling liquor and held the ship in harbor pending investigation. The incident became a press event in the U.S. and Germany. The front page of the New York Times proclaimed, “We Seize a German Ship. Training Vessel Elizabeth Accused of Wholesale Smuggling.” The Berlin Lokal-Anzeiger remarked that the incident “is even more embarrassing because the training ship had been welcomed as a guest” in Galveston harbor. Within hours, the Reich Foreign Ministry cabled the German ambassador in Washington to investigate what had happened. His investigation showed that the whole episode had been a misunderstanding between the crew of the Großherzogin Elisabeth and U.S. customs agents. More importantly, however, the swiftness with which German diplomats reacted indicates how they had begun to think of merchant mariners as bearers of national reputation overseas.

119 BA-BL, R 901/17777, Kaiserlich Deutsches Generalkonsulat für Niederländisch-Indien to Reichskanzler, 2 Dec. 1907.
120 BA-BL, R 901/17776, clipping of Jahresbericht des Vereins Hamburger Rheder 1909/10.
121 German newspapers covering the incident include Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 2 Feb. 1906; Weser Zeitung, 20 Feb. 1906; Tägliche Rundschau, 21 Feb. 1906; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 22 Feb. 1906.
123 Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 2 Feb. 1906
5.5 Conclusion

Many of the changes initiated by the *Deutsche Schulschiffverein* did not come to fruition until the interwar period. The two thousand plus seamen it trained before war broke out in 1914 remained in the minority among German merchant seamen.

Nevertheless, like Gerhard Schröder (class of 1902) they often ended up in prestigious command positions in the merchant fleet during the first half of the twentieth century.\(^{125}\)

Before the War, most merchant mariners continued to learn their trade in the far more informal atmosphere aboard sailing freighters or, increasingly, aboard steamships. Still, the DSSV’s significance lies more in the trajectory it represented toward closer “points of contact” between the German civilian and military fleets. If war had not come in 1914, the organization likely would have come to dominate training in the merchant marine.

With the addition of a third training ship in the spring of 1914, the DSSV had doubled its program capacity to five-hundred trainees per year.\(^{126}\) In the final measure, the militarization of manhood in the *Handelsmarine* before the First World War was an incomplete endeavor. Seamen and soldiers were not yet fully “made of the same stuff.”

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\(^{125}\) Gustav Schröder (1885-1959) is almost certainly the best known graduate of the *Deutscher Schulschiffverein*. Under the Third Reich, he captained some of Germany’s largest passenger liners, working at times as a commander for private companies and, in the mid-1930s, as a commander of National Socialist “Strength through Joy” cruise liners. His most notable command, however, was Hamburg-America’s *St. Louis*, which famously steamed across the Atlantic in May 1939 with over 900 German Jewish refugees. The Cuban government had promised a safe haven for the refugees, but declined to take them at the last minute. Schröder then turned his ship toward the United States, which also refused to let his passengers land. With few options left, he stalled on the voyage back to Europe, and even considered running the ship aground on the English coast. Finally the governments of Britain, France, and the Low Countries agreed to take in the *St. Louis*’s destitute passengers. For his role in the *St. Louis* episode, Yad Vashem posthumously recognized Schröder as “righteous among the nations.” Schröder’s account of the voyage of the *St. Louis* can be found in Schröder, *Heimatlos auf hoher See* (Berlin: Beckerdruk, 1949).


CHAPTER 6

REDEEMING GERMANY’S PRODIGAL SONS

In an 1889 lecture held in Berlin, pastor Paul Gerhard Heims called attention to what he saw as a lack of national affinity among merchant sailors:

The seaman lives in a closely confined community, which is held together by no common sense of nationality. Germans and Englishmen, Spaniards and Chinese, Japanese and Negroes are often thrown together in a colorful mess—and not a single commonality to bind them together.  

Heims and other advocates of the Protestant Deutsche Seemannsmission were profoundly troubled by the transnationality of the seafaring profession. During the period of German overseas expansion, the merchant fleet became the leading point of contact between Germany and the world. Annual flows of German seafarers around the globe, which climbed to well over 100,000 before the First World War, presented both opportunities and challenges to a nation that was newly self-conscious of its global position and reputation.  

On the one hand, sailors’ labor sustained national wealth and power and their comportment abroad impinged upon German’s international reputation. On the other hand, they enjoyed disreputable port-city pleasures and crossed national boundaries with ease, seeming to threaten Wilhelmine nation-building at sea. They participated in an 

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1 Parts of this chapter have been published as David Brandon Dennis, “Seduction on the Waterfront: German Merchant Sailors, Masculinity, and the ‘Brücke zu Heimat’ in New York and Buenos Aires, 1884-1914,” German History 29, no. 2 (June 2011): forthcoming.
3 This estimate represents not only those who worked aboard German ships, but also the tens of thousands who worked in foreign fleets, particularly the British, U.S.-American, and Scandinavian.
increasingly global labor market, which afforded opportunities to work aboard foreign vessels or to desert in foreign ports where wages were better and immigrant life beckoned. Led by the *Seemannsmission*, a variety of German groups at home and abroad took steps to channel the fluidity of seafaring labor for the nation. Guided by a biblical metaphor steeped in Protestant nationalism, they sought to redeem Germany’s prodigal sons and reconcile them to the Fatherland.

Seamen’s missionaries and their supporters depicted the foreign port as a space of uniquely unfettered pleasures and ominous dangers. In many ways this picture represented general anxieties about modern urban spaces; as we have already seen, the *Seemannsmission* was a major player in efforts to domesticate German mariners in home ports like Hamburg. Still, the organization lavished particular attention on German seafarers who visited, lived, or worked abroad. In part, the missionary organization’s orientation toward foreign ports owed much to its origins among overseas German émigré communities, but it was also influenced by ideas of Wilhelmine *Weltpolitik*. In the politically charged atmosphere of the 1890s, the DSM’s image of the foreign port city hardened into a specific national threat: simultaneously a liminal space—devoid of the disciplining powers of family, community, and state—and a showcase of German world presence and power as reflected through German mariners’ personal behavior, economic utility, and national loyalty.

DSM operatives and their supporters were most concerned about desertion, immigration, and uncontrolled sexuality, which they viewed as overlapping phenomena.

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Desertion rates remained consistently high in the German merchant marine during the late-nineteenth century and rose to unprecedented levels after 1900, prompting constant complaints from shipping firms, merchant captains, and German consuls. The reasons that seafarers jumped ship were diverse, but one of the most powerful motivations was the much higher pay aboard American and British ships. Most Wilhelmine observers, however, viewed the issue through the Seemannsmission’s narrative, which emphasized the loss of Heimat through sexual debauchery and foreign exploitation. At times they also blamed desertion on young men’s desire to escape the Reich’s three years of required military service. Either way, government, industry, and religious authorities were firmly convinced that the unchecked flow of maritime labor threatened not only sailors’ souls and pocketbooks, but also, and far more existentially, their national identities. Around 1900 German officials at home and abroad began to support the Seemannsmission as a charitable endeavor, a bulwark against vice and desertion, and as an emblem of German influence around the world.

6.1 Daily Life on the Waterfront in New York and Buenos Aires

We have already seen how around 1900 German shipping was a globalizing enterprise, whose center of activity nonetheless remained focused on the Atlantic World. On the eve of the First World War, the two most economically important ports for German sea commerce outside of European waters were New York City and Buenos Aires. Because of New York’s position as the primary immigrant gateway to the United

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5 In 1912, more cargo-laden net tonnage arrived in Germany from the East Coast of the United States—dominated by New York—and the La Plata River estuary—dominated by Buenos Aires—than from any
States, it had long been the most common destination for German ships outside European waters. On average, over 90,000 German sailors passed through the city each year. In comparison, Buenos Aires was a relative newcomer. Until the late 1870s the Argentine capital had been of little interest to German commercial shipping. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, it had surpassed the ports of southern Brazil to become the leading venue for German commerce in the South Atlantic. During the decade before World War I an average of nearly 20,000 German crewmen visited the city per year.

Because of the centrality of the immigrant trade, regular steam liner traffic dominated German commerce with both ports. Yet tramp ships, which followed cargo and profit from port to port without a set route or schedule, also hailed at both ports. Buenos Aires, in particular, was an intermediary stop for German sailing ships that remained quite active during this period in the nitrates trade with the west coast of South America. The relatively rapid turn-around times of steam liner schedules often meant that many crewmen had limited time to spend wandering, enjoying, or lodging in the cities or their entertainment districts. Still, thousands of Germans deserted in the two ports each year and thousands more who sailed under a foreign flag became short-term residents of the two cities while they were between jobs. Mariners looking for temporary lodging, food, or entertainment thus made up a major contingent of the transient waterfront population in both cities.

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6 These estimates do not represent numbers of unique sailors; they also count repeat visits. See Münchmeyer, Handbuch für die deutsche Handelsmarine, 241; and BA-BL, R 901/17715, Verein zur Fürsorge für deutsche Seeleute im Hafen von New York to RAdI, 18 Oct. 1911.
8 Jahresbericht des Verein “Deutsches Seemannsheim” zu Buenos Aires für das Jahr 1909, 10; RAdI, Handbuch für die deutsche Handelsmarine (1914), 241-42.
Figure 28. “Locations of German Ships and Seamen’s Missions in the Harbor of New York.” Blätter für Seemannsmission, no. 1 (1907): 8. Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD.
New York, in particular, was a center of nineteenth-century German immigration. In 1890, Germans-Americans accounted for almost a third of New York’s population making them the largest ethnic group in the city. Despite regional, confessional, political, and social divisions, the city’s relatively prosperous and established German community was marked by a “strong adherence to cultural continuity.” It encompassed a flourishing associational and cultural life with organizations such as the Deutscher Verein and a wide variety of newspapers, the most influential of which was the liberal New Yorker Staats-Zeitung. Not surprisingly, the community had an abiding interest in and deep connections with the Handelsmarine. This was particularly true among the city’s Protestant business elite. Emil L. Boas best exemplifies the interconnections between elite German New Yorkers and the merchant marine. He rose through the ranks of a German-American shipping agency to become the director of the Hamburg-America Line’s New York office between 1897 and 1912. At the same time he was also a well-heeled member of the city’s Deutscher Verein and the founder of its Germanistische Gesellschaft. Frequent stories about merchant shipping and sailors in the local German press reflect the community’s interest in seafaring. The Staats-Zeitung in particular often prominently featured maritime news.

Navigating New York’s waterfront districts would have been quite challenging for a sailor who had just arrived from Europe. The city’s harbor was massive, stretching from the Hudson River in the west to the East River around Brooklyn (Figure 28).

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11 For example, New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 4 Jan. 1889; 6 Jun. 1904; 24 Nov. 1907; 2 Nov. 1908; 7 Dec. 1908.
Around 1900 it had three major areas that would have counted as “sailortowns,” neighborhoods marked socially, economically, and culturally by the presence of sailors.\textsuperscript{12} New York’s most famous sailortown occupied districts in the Bowery and on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. At the turn of the twentieth century, these areas were working class and immigrant milieu, filled with saloons, beer gardens, theaters, brothels, tenements, and boarding houses. They intersected with Manhattan’s “\textit{Kleindeutschland},” the original center of German immigration to New York City. The cultural contours of \textit{Kleindeutschland} had emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and continued to exist, albeit in diminished form, into the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{13} The Bowery and the Lower East Side were also popular among sailors for shore-leave or for temporary lodging between jobs. Not surprisingly, these districts were home to many American charitable institutions for seafarers such as The Mariner’s Church, run by the Society for Promoting the Gospel among Seamen in the Port of New York, and the Sailor’s Home of the American Seamen’s Friend Society.\textsuperscript{14} An 1891 article in \textit{Century Illustrated Magazine} noted the intersection of German and maritime popular culture in the Bowery:

\begin{quote}
More numerous than all others on this great East-Side parade are the people of German origin. There is little about them that is peculiar to us, but they maintain one notable resort, which is known and almost familiar wherever German is spoken. It is the largest of the beer saloons—the Atlantic Garden. It is not only the resort of the Bowery Germans, but it is the rendezvous for the officers and crews of all the German vessels that come to the port, and for a great many German tourists and travelers who are passing through the country.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Land, “The Humours of Sailortown,” 325-47.
\item \textsuperscript{14} ADW, SM / I152, Directory of seamen’s charity organizations in New York, c. 1902.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Julian Ralph, “The Bowery,” \textit{Century Illustrated Magazine} 63, no. 2 (Dec. 1891), 236.
\end{itemize}
Although the German stamp on these districts began to vanish after the turn of the century, they remained popular destinations for mariners well into the twentieth century.16

Around 1900 the city of Hoboken, New Jersey on the west bank of the Hudson River contained the highest concentration of German sailors in New York Harbor. Home to the massive Hamburg-America Line and North German Lloyd piers, the city was simply the closest and most convenient site for the hundreds or thousands of workers who staffed each of these companies’ passenger liners (Figure 27). The city also had a thriving German community. German immigrants comprised its largest ethnic group from the 1880s through the 1920s. They worked as merchants, hoteliers, tavern keepers, brewers, as well as construction and dock workers. Hoboken was also home to numerous German churches, social clubs, and charitable organizations.17 On the opposite side of New York Harbor from Hoboken, the third and final sailortown was located in the neighborhoods surrounding the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

By the late nineteenth century, New York had become fixed in the popular German imagination as a tumultuous center of multi-ethnic immigration.18 No doubt the millions of German immigrants who stayed in the city or passed through on their way

into the American interior transferred this image to families, friends, and neighbors back home. It was also popularized through the press and literature. The writings of authors like Caspar Stürenburg, for example, provided an introduction to New York for a broader German-language audience. Stürenburg, the chief editor of the New Yorker Staatszeitung, presented the city and its inhabitants through the lens of social realism. In particular he elaborated themes such as cosmopolitanism, cultural mixing, and immigrant life. His work often emphasized the city’s grittier side, focusing particularly on the tenement houses of the Lower East Side.\(^\text{19}\) As a result of such cultural constructions of New York, German concerns about “their” merchant mariners in the city tended to emphasize issues of illegal immigration. The executive board of the German seamen’s home in New York, for example, distributed a “fact sheet” to inbound German sailors, warning them that “no deserting seaman can become an American citizen.”\(^\text{20}\)

The German community in Buenos Aires was much smaller than its counterpart in New York, but it was disproportionately influential among the city’s merchant elite. A tight circle of well-to-do German families in the Argentine capital built their wealth on overseas commerce, banking, and utilities. The passenger trade between Germany and Argentina was not as prevalent as it was in U.S.-German commerce. In the 1870s and 1880s the four major German shipping firms—Hamburg-Süd, Hansa, NGL, and HAL—set up regular steam liner routes between Germany and Buenos Aires. Although immigrants constituted part of the cargo they carried, most German shipments to the Argentine capital consisted of finished industrial goods like electrical components from

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\(^{20}\) EZA, B600/22401, “Wer sich vor Schaden bewahren will, lese folgende Tatsachen,” Apr. 1910.
Siemens or AEG or armaments from Krupp. In exchange, Germans imported large quantities of grains and beef from the *pampas*. Like their counterparts in New York, German *porteños*, as citizens of the Argentine Capital called themselves, depended on the sea to maintain economic, political, and cultural ties with the fatherland. Not surprisingly, they also demonstrated an abiding enthusiasm for maritime issues. Local notables, like shipping agent Hermann von Frieden, founded the *Verein “Deutsches Seemannsheim” zu Buenos Aires*, which affiliated itself with the broader German seamen’s missionary movement.\(^{21}\)

The largely Protestant German merchant class in Buenos Aires also formed their own associations, like the *Deutscher Club*, and published their own newspapers, like the conservative *Deutsche La-Plata Zeitung* and the liberal *Agentinisches Tageblatt*. During the 1880s, the social diversity of Buenos Aires’ German community increased as thousands of workers and socialists immigrated to the city to escape Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Laws. In 1882 they founded *Vorwärts*, the Argentine capital’s third major German-language newspaper. In this way, German socialism greatly influenced the development of socialist politics in Argentina. In addition to newspapers, the German community in Buenos Aires created their own gymnastic groups, singing societies, health insurance funds, mutual aid societies, a hospital, churches, and synagogues. Although a small number of German Jews immigrated to Buenos Aires before the First World War, the major wave of Jewish immigration came during the Interwar period.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) Newton, *German Buenos Aires*, 3-31.

Buenos Aires’ sailortown was the district of La Boca, named after its location at the mouth of the Riachuelo, the river which marked the southern boundary of the federal district. The neighborhood was home to the city’s main gateway to the sea before 1897. That year, new and larger port facilities that were situated closer to the city center were completed under the direction of developer Eduardo Madero. Even after the opening of the new Puerto Madero, La Boca remained the most popular destination for sailors in Buenos Aires, because of its cheap lodging possibilities, taverns, tango halls, and brothels (Figure 29). Unlike the New York’s Lower East Side or Hoboken, there were relatively few Germans in La Boca, which was populated overwhelmingly by Italian immigrants. Most German porteños lived in the northern suburbs of Palermo and Belgrano. On a visit in 1884, German ship’s boy Franz von Wahlde described his impressions of the waterfront in La Boca with a mixture of sensual delight and ethnic chauvinism:

> Ha! How it teemed with people. Magnificent wagons rolled by in alternating streams with beautiful Spanish women, cavaliers on horseback, shabby Italians, vaqueros (Span. cowboys) with gigantic spurs and a poncho around their shoulders, and proud-looking Spaniards. In between were many foreigners, mostly seamen in their distinctive dress, at times Negroes, and everywhere sellers of southern fruits.

His judgment of the neighborhood’s Italian immigrants was particularly harsh, calling them an “overrepresented race [Volksstamm],” a “proletariat” that increased with each arriving steamer from Genoa.

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25 Ibid., 72.
Figure 29. Map of La Boca showing the location of the German Seamen’s Home in Buenos Aires (1905). Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD.
Although Buenos Aires was a city of immigrants, its popular image in German culture around 1900 stresses its connection to exotic or illicit sexuality. This vision found expression through German participation in an international campaign to stop an alleged flow of “white slaves” from Europe to Argentina. Anti-white slavery campaigners believed that prostitution rings—typically portrayed as Jewish—sold young, white European women to bordello operators in Buenos Aires. These lurid and often antisemitic tales were based largely on half-truths, but they nonetheless shaped contemporary European attitudes toward the Argentine capital.²⁶ German sexologist Ivan Bloch’s highly influential book, Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit (1907), cast Buenos Aires in the starring role of this already familiar narrative of dangerous sexuality. He described the city as the headquarters of an international ring of white slave traders and as the main destination for the young women, predominantly from Eastern Europe, whom they sold into prostitution.²⁷ Given these attitudes, it should come as no surprise that German authorities were concerned about the effects that the city’s sexual allure might have on sailors. In a letter the Kaiser Wilhelm II, Julius Scheringer, founding pastor of the local German mission to seamen, described Buenos Aires as a leading example of the “seduction and immorality of a Latin [südländisch] city.”²⁸ Similarly, a memo from the Reich Chancellery to the Kaiser emphasized that German sailors who landed at Buenos Aires would be “particularly exposed” to the “temptations of the big city.”²⁹

²⁷ Iwan Bloch, Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seiner Beziehung zur modernen Kultur (Berlin, 1907), 374-76.
²⁸ BA-BL, R 901/17719, Julius Scheringer to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 5 Sept. 1901.
A paucity of records makes it difficult to reconstruct mariners’ experiences on the waterfront in New York and Buenos Aires. Their diaries and memoirs have little to say about sex. References to sexuality are typically brief and purposefully obscured through vague terminology—describing New York’s waterfront, for example, as a “wonderland” with tremendous “powers of attraction” (*Anziehungskraft*). In other personal narratives, sensuality is implied through a description of the overseas port. Franz von Wahlde, for instance, records his excitement as he walked the streets of Buenos Aires hoping to catch a glimpse of Spanish women peering out of their windows from behind trellised blinds; he seems equally taken with the “beauty” of “wild” (male) *vaqueros*. A few do provide more candid accounts. One German sailor guiltily recalls a night of drunken sex with a prostitute, but later suggests that “the seaman has no use for love” when he can “hold a fleet harlot in his arms during shore leave.”

Like other working-class men of the period, sailors likely were not limited by a strict hetero/homosexual dichotomy. George Chauncey has demonstrated that they belonged to a “bachelor subculture” whose sense of masculinity was less concerned with the object of desire than with being the dominant partner in a sexual encounter. For New York, the investigative reports of the Committee of Fourteen provide a rare glimpse into the popular culture in the city’s waterfront districts around 1900. The Committee was founded in 1905 by prominent New Yorkers whose primary goal was to stamp out the “vice” of prostitution. Its undercover investigative reports describe a world of

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31 Von Wahlde, Ausgebüxt, 69-72.
sociability involving workingmen and sailors, as well as prostitutes and fairies—male youths who dressed and acted in a “feminine” manner and slept with “real men” like sailors. The Committee of Fourteen reports record a number of encounters with German sailors, particularly in the neighbourhoods surrounding the Brooklyn Navy Yard. One location, Sands Street, was apparently a popular place for German seafarers to meet up with prostitutes. The reports also suggest that these men were willing to traverse the hetero/homosexual divide. One mentions a group of American and German mariners who were gathered in a “disorderly” saloon near the Navy Yard where they took turns dancing provocatively with each other and with women. The potential for sensationalism inherent in middle-class anti-vice campaigns should caution us when reading these documents. Life in a foreign port city was certainly not all sex all the time. Indeed, for many sailors, time off could be difficult to come by since average duration of a ship’s stay in port was decreasing throughout this period. When sailors managed to get shore leave, they also must have spent more sedate evenings, playing cards, sightseeing, or simply drinking a few beers.

Quite possibly, many German sailors worried more about the problems of destitution or violence while they were abroad. Whether they had deserted or simply found themselves on the wrong side of seafaring’s casual labor system, mariners often had to deal with poverty or joblessness while overseas. Many, like Oscar Schulz, were able to find work in local establishments run by German immigrants or aboard foreign vessels.

34 “Investigators’ Reports, 1910-1915,” Committee of Fourteen Papers, New York Public Library; see also Chauncey, Gay New York; Thomas C. Mackey, Pursuing Johns: Criminal Law Reform, Defending Character, and New York City’s Committee of Fourteen, 1920-1930 (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 20.
vessels. They often relied on each other, in pairs or in groups, while making their way through unfamiliar and dangerous urban spaces. Schulz befriended and roamed the streets of New York with another young German seaman who was lodging in the same boarding house, which gave him “a great feeling of security, especially during [his] expeditions in the world-renowned … Chinatown.”

The young shipwrecked Johann Friedrich Jensen found a trusted companion in a Danish shipmate as he searched for work in New York. When the German consul refused to help them because they had last worked on a Norwegian ship, they found themselves on the streets with limited means. After walking through the city, they ended up in a Salvation Army soup kitchen with hundreds of other sailors. Jensen notes that, at first, the other sailors suspected them of being deserters and would have nothing to do with them. Once they could prove they had been shipwrecked, however, they witnessed the “charity of sailors among each other.” They were welcomed into the community, served cake and coffee, and directed to the right contacts for finding work aboard a ship.

Officially, the German consular service was responsible for overseeing German merchant seamen in New York, Buenos Aires, and other port cities outside of Germany. The Seemannsordnung of 1872 had set up seamen’s bureaus, or Seemannsämter, in order to register, supervise, and adjudicate conflicts among merchant mariners at home and abroad. In German ports the seamen’s bureaus were constituted as independent offices administered by regional governments. Abroad, they were always attached to German

38 Ibid., 182.
In this way, German consulates became the most important state agencies for sailors while they were abroad. German consuls had the task of guaranteeing that destitute seamen stranded abroad were shipped home. They also settled conflicts among German crews and approved discharges or hiring aboard German ships docked within their jurisdiction. The consulate therefore provided the most important legal resource for common sailors who were destitute, who believed they had suffered an injustice at the hands of their superiors, or who wanted to leave or enter into service aboard a German ship while abroad. But it was not always so easy for a regular seaman to find help at the consulate. Consuls tended to side with captains and regulations prohibited them from helping mariners who had deserted their ships.

6.2 Desertion

Over the course of the nineteenth century, German authorities increasingly redefined the merchant seaman who unilaterally cancelled his labor contract by jumping ship as a “Deserter.” Traditionally, coastal Germans had described such acts by civilian mariners using the verbs *entlaufen* (to run away) or *entweichen* (to abscond). These actions originally may have been on the margins of acceptability, but they did not necessarily imply a betrayal of duty, honor, or the nation. Traditionally, unspoken rules of honor had shaped cultural views of the practice of jumping ship in German-speaking

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40 Departments for commercial shipping in both the Foreign and Interior Ministries were introduced during the Reich’s administrative reorganization in the late 1870s. “Seemannsamt,” in *Wörterbuch des Deutschen Verwaltungsrechts*, vol. 2, ed. Karl Freiherr von Stengel (Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1890), 444.

41 Gesetz, betreffend die Verpflichtung deutscher Kauffahrteischiffe zur Mitnahme hülfsbedürftiger Seeleute, vom 27. Dezember 1872; Gesetz, betreffend die Verpflichtung der Kauffahrteischiffe zur Mitnahme heimzuschaffender Seeleute, vom 2 Juni 1902.

42 BA-BL, R 901/75133, Runderlass des Reichskanzlers an sämtliche Kaiserlichen Konsularbehörden in Hafenplätzen, Nov. 1913.
lands, but this had always been a matter of personal rather than public honor. Well into the nineteenth century mariners often cited the injury of their honor as grounds for jumping ship, and coastal courts routinely overlooked such behavior as long as the runaway did not take unearned pay with him.\(^{43}\) As we have already explored, traditional seamen’s sense of duty and honor derived from the experience they had accrued as skilled sailing men, rather than from patriotic service to the nation. The shift toward a terminology of “desertion,” involved a cultural redefinition of the kind of duty, honor, and manhood that were at stake. “Desertion” was freighted with military and national connotations, including cowardice, a betrayal of duty, and a lack of patriotism.\(^{44}\) When the editors of *Hansa* described desertion as a mark against the collective “honor” of seamen in 1899, for example, they implied a far more public kind of duty and honor and a national vision of manhood at sea.\(^{45}\)

Wilhelmine authorities inherited a variety of anti-desertion measures from previous reform efforts. The most potent reform, the criminalization of desertion from merchant vessels, was pioneered in German maritime states during the middle decades of the century. Coastal jurists and lawmakers redefined the act of jumping ship from a breach of civil contract to a criminal act that was subject to state fines and imprisonment. The specific paths toward criminalization varied among the maritime Länder. In 1825 Bremen became the first German state to criminalize desertion in practice, if not by law. Prussia followed Bremen’s example with a law in 1841 explicitly making desertion a

\(^{43}\) Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 32-33.

\(^{44}\) It is important to note that “*Fahnenflucht*”—literally “flight from the flag”—which has stronger connotations of national betrayal, was rarely if ever applied to desertion in the *Handelsmarine*. Still, officials used the Latinate “Desertion” in to describe unauthorized ship-leaveing in both the Imperial Navy and the merchant marine. BA-BL, R 901/22526 – R 901/22529, “Die Maßregeln zur Wiederergreifung der von Schiffen der Kaiserlichen Marine desertirten Matrosen, 1887-1912.”

\(^{45}\) “Auf dem Ausguck,” *Hansa. Deutsche nautische Zeitschrift* 36, no. 7 (1899), 74.
criminal offence despite resistance from runaway sailors and their legal champions, who cited customary practices in their defense. By the time of German unification most coastal states had followed suit. The expansion of German shipping into global markets and the corresponding economic interests of shipowners and merchants constituted the driving force behind these early criminalization reforms. As German merchant capitalists expanded into overseas commerce, where wage levels varied unpredictably from port to port, they came to see crew retention abroad as vital to the economic success of the voyage.\(^{46}\)

The second major anti-desertion reform involved the introduction of mandatory seafaring passes, or *Seefahrtsbücher*. Bremen again led the way among German states in 1837 requiring all merchant sailors who worked under its flag to carry a seafaring pass which was a combination work record and identification card. The claim made in 1849 by the Hamburg-Altona Captains’ Association that the *Seefahrtsbuch* would contribute “to the morality of the seamen” makes clear that these new measures represented a melding of economic utility and regulatory function with cultural concerns.\(^{47}\) Under such requirements, a mariner was required to surrender his seafaring pass to the captain allegedly for safe keeping as soon as he took up service aboard a ship. If he decided to abscond he would have to leave his pass behind, making it difficult in the future to find work aboard vessels hailing from the state that issued the pass.

Both the criminalization of desertion and the seafaring pass requirement became maritime policy under the unified German Empire. The *Seemannsordnung* of 1872 and its revision in 1902 punished “mere” desertion—absconding without pay—either with a

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\(^{47}\) Quoted in Gerstenberger and Welke, *Vom Wind zum Dampf*, 150.
maximum fine that equaled about six months’ wages or with imprisonment of up to three months. Sailors who deserted with pay faced up to one year in prison. These laws also mandated seafaring passes for all sailors working under the German flag, along with the additional requirement to track the military service of those who were Reich citizens. Furthermore, they solidified the German merchant captain’s position as an agent of state power, requiring that a merchant sailor who had signed a contract had to obey all orders from his superiors and could leave the ship lawfully only with the permission of the captain or an officer.

The formation of a unified German nation-state placed greater emphasis on the national and military implications of “desertion” from merchant vessels than had previously existed. Both Seemannsordnungen during the imperial period cast the act of leaving a civilian ship without permission in patriotic and militaristic terms, defining it as a “gross injury of official duties.” On the one hand, officials viewed the maintenance of discipline aboard German merchant ships as a matter of diplomatic and national economic interest. As a disciplinary breach with national implications, desertion was therefore also a matter suited for state intervention. On the other hand, authorities sought to ensure that German men fulfilled their required period of military service and that the naval reserve was well supplied with capable seamen. Desertion, they believed,

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48 In 1872 the maximum fine for “mere” desertion was one hundred Thaler and the 1902 revision set the maximum at three hundred Reichsmarks. Although pay varied by port and by rank, the average monthly pay for a Vollmatrosen in the Handelsmarine hovered between 45 and 55 Reichsmarks for much of the Imperial period. See Seemannsordnung of 1872, § 81; Seemannsordnung of 1902, § 93.

49 Seemannsordnung of 1872, §§ 79-103; Seemannsordnung of 1902 §§ 84-127.

50 The phrase in German is “gröbliche Verletzung seiner Dienstpflichten.” Seemannsordnung of 1872, §§ 81-84; Seemannsordnung of 1902, §§ 93-96.

51 BA-BL, R 901/75133, Runderlass des Reichskanzlers an sämtliche Kaiserlichen Konsularbehörden in Hafenplätzen, Nov. 1913.
threatened these goals. Although national and military concerns played a greater role after 1871, such policies were also driven by the German shipping industry’s lobbying efforts. The Verein Hamburger Reeder, for example, bluntly stated in 1908 that desertion in foreign ports caused “considerable damage to shipping enterprise since the procurement of crew replacements abroad involves particular trouble [for captains] and high costs.” In sum, anti-desertion efforts in Imperial Germany reflected a variety of national, military, and economic interests.

International extradition agreements provided additional means to fight desertion overseas. These agreements, most of which date from the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, allowed German consuls to request the help of local authorities in apprehending runaway seamen. In this way, they placed consuls on the front lines of the fight against desertion abroad. By 1914 Germany had reciprocal treaties with nineteen nations, guaranteeing the extradition of Handelsmarine deserters. Although these treaties involved many of the fin-de-siècle era’s most important maritime empires, including Great Britain, France, and the United States, there were still broad zones outside the jurisdiction of mutual extradition treaties. Argentina was one such zone, at least for German mariners. During the early 1880s, when German diplomats concluded extradition treaties with other Latin American countries including Mexico and Brazil, they failed to reach a similar agreement

54 The nineteen states were: Belgium (1863); Brazil (1882); China (1861); Columbia (1854); Denmark (1881); France (1862); Greece (1882); Great Britain (1879); Honduras (1887); Italy (1868); Korea (1883); Mexico (1882); Nicaragua (1896); The Netherlands (1851, 1854, 1856, 1872); Russia (1874); Sweden (1911); Siam (1854, 1862); Spain (1868, 1872); and the United States (1871). See, RAdI, Handbuch für die Deutschen Handelsmarine (1914), 16-18.

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with Argentina.\textsuperscript{55} An extradition treaty for civilian mariners conflicted with long-standing Argentine policies that aimed to attract “civilized” northern European immigrants.\textsuperscript{56}

The United States, on the other hand, had no qualms about signing an extradition treaty with Germany.\textsuperscript{57} The years around 1900 witnessed the growth of nativism within the United States as growing numbers of “undesirable” groups, particularly Asians and southern and eastern Europeans, began to arrive on American shores. This sentiment translated into local and national legislation, which restricted certain classes of immigrants based on racial, hygienic, or political grounds and imposed a head tax for shipping companies on each immigrant. Although weak compared to the anti-immigration laws of the 1920s, this legislation sought to slow the influx of immigrants that challenged the political or racial status-quo in the U.S.\textsuperscript{58} As part of this legislation, foreign shipping firms were required to report and pay a head tax for each deserting seaman. They filed suit, and the resulting 1907 Supreme Court ruling weakened the

\textsuperscript{55} Officially, the Germans balked at Argentine requests for completely new negotiations on the matter that did not take previous treaties into account, but such an agreement also would have gone against Argentine population policies. BA-Bl, R/901/8485, Kaiserlich Deutsche Gesellschaft bei den La Plata Staaten to Reichskanzler, 14 Aug 1884.


\textsuperscript{57} Konsularkonvention zwischen Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika vom 11. Dezember 1871, \textit{Reichs-Gesetzblatt} 1872, 95.

enforcement mechanisms regarding deserters. The matter or “alien seamen” remained unsettled, however, reappearing in the hearings of the Dillingham Commission (1907-1911). The Commission Report took a dim view of maritime deserters:

Unless the situation is remedied, large numbers of criminals, persons afflicted with tuberculosis or with a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease, aliens rejected at foreign ports, and those who for any other reason are ineligible to land will continue to find in this role of bona fide seaman an easy and effective way of evading the immigration law and securing admission into the country.

It singled out North German Lloyd steamers as particularly prone to desertion.

Nevertheless, the report concluded that in practice it was incredibly difficult and costly to apprehend “alien” seamen who deserted their ships along American coasts.

Ultimately, anti-desertion measures in Germany and abroad failed to achieve their goals. The sheer numbers of desertions among civilian mariners, combined with the inability or unwillingness of German shipping firms or the Reich government to pay to have them found and incarcerated, made the extradition treaties all but meaningless.

German captains and shipowners continued to complain to state officials about the problem, particularly in North America. In the mid-1870s the Reich government began to track annual desertion rates for the Handelsmarine. From 1890 onward, officials

61 Ibid., 23.
62 Ibid., 7-15.
63 German consuls were far more willing and able to invoke extradition treaties to apprehend deserters from the Imperial Navy. For one thing, naval sailors stood under stricter disciplinary practices. Their desertion rates were also lower, allowing consuls to track individual cases. Most importantly, the Reich Naval Office was far more willing to pay the costs associated with apprehending deserters than were profit-driven shipping firms. See BA-BL, R 901/22526 – 22529, “Die Maßregeln zur Wiederergreifung der von Schiffen der Kaiserlichen Marine desertirten Matrosen, 1887-1912.”
compiled more complex statistics, charting desertion by global region and nationality. While the total workforce in the merchant marine remained relatively static between 1880 and 1897, the percentage of annually reported desertions oscillated between a high of 11.9% in 1888 and a low of 6.6% in 1894. The unprecedented growth of the German merchant fleet after 1897, which resulted in the doubling of its workforce (Figures 1 & 2), brought more turbulent fluctuations from a highpoint of 16.3% in 1907 followed the next year by a low of 6.7% (Figure 30). As contemporaries were well aware, these numbers reflected only reported desertions and are therefore likely skew somewhat lower than the actual numbers. Economically overextended and harried captains often had little time for a trip to the local consulate to report every case of desertion before leaving port. Furthermore, when a seaman deserted overseas many captains waited to make a report until their ships docked in European transit ports such as Antwerp or Rotterdam or in German home ports. Available statistics therefore almost certainly over-represent the number of desertions in European harbors, while under-representing those that occurred overseas.

These statistics also tell us little about the complex motives that lay behind desertion in the Handelsmarine. Sailors from German merchant vessels jumped ship for a variety of overlapping reasons. Economic factors and working conditions constituted one major set of motivations. Many German seamen hoped to take advantage of significantly higher wages paid aboard merchant ships in the Western Hemisphere.

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65For 1890-1907 see GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 7; and for 1908-1920 see BA-BL, R 901/76261.  
66GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 6, RAdI to Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe (Prussia), 2 Jun 1880.
particularly aboard U.S. vessels. Labor unrest also played an important role in influencing decisions to jump ship. The largest spike in the desertion rate coincided with the massive wave of German maritime strikes in 1905-07 (Figure 30). In response to this spike in desertions, shipping industry associations and numerous editorials in Hansa demanded draconian punishments for “insubordination” and attacked German consulates for being “too soft” on deserters. After ordering extensive reports from consulates around the world, Reich authorities concluded that a combination of foreign vice and socialism lay behind the supposedly rising indiscipline in the ranks. They decided that the Deutsche Seemannsmission offered the best remedy for union activism among mariners, raised state funding for the organization’s overseas sailors’ homes, and called for greater consular oversight of DSM activities.

Cases handled before German consuls indicate that desertion often followed abuse or the withholding of food by supervisors or peers. In 1889, for example, Ernst Heider, a ship’s boy, secretly left his ship after it arrived in New York because the captain and first mate had beaten him almost daily and had frequently refused him rations during a voyage from South Africa. Reporters from the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung interviewed Heider as he convalesced at a local hospital and published his story, provoking outrage among German New Yorkers. Because of the case’s public profile he was ultimately released

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67 Reich officials, shipowners, and sailors themselves frequently attributed desertion to the lower wages paid on Germans ships than on comparable British and American ships. GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 7, Kaiserlich Deutsche General-Konsulat New York to Reichskanzler, 6 Jun 1904. For comparative pay tables for German, British and American merchant fleets for the years between 1875-1907 see Annual Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of Commerce and Labor, 1907 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 48-68. For a sailor’s viewpoint see Schulz, Im Strom der Gezeiten, 174.

68 See Chapter 4.

69 BA-BL, R 901/17597, Zentralverein Deutscher Rheder to Auswärtiges Amt, 9 Jun 1908; for a partial list of the Hansa editorials see BA-BL, R 901/17491, MfHuG to RAdl, 21 Sept. 1908.

into the custody of relatives who lived in New York. Heider’s case, however, was exceptional; most deserters received little community support or sympathy from officials. Although extreme, Johann Förstl’s experience with German authorities was far closer to the norm for those who deserted. On a tramp steamer voyage in 1908, the boy—who was doubly marginalized as physically small and as a “land rat” from Munich—deserted after his shipmates severely beat him. After several German consuls refused to help him return home, a weak and emaciated Förstel contracted malaria and died. The Seemannsordnung and German consular regulations expressly disqualified deserters from the financial help that consulates were legally required to offer destitute German sailors abroad. In extenuating circumstances, however, individual consuls could make exceptions even for those who admitted desertion. The consul in Porto Allegre, Brazil, for instance, used Reich funds to send ship’s boy Alexander Scherbarth back to Germany on account of his young age and disability. Scherbarth reported that he had deserted because he could no longer bear the abuse he had been subject to aboard his ship. He worked for a month in a canning factory in southern Brazil until he injured his hand so badly that no one would hire him. Desperate to get back to his family in Berlin, he turned to the local German consulate for help. Cases like Scherbarth’s were, nonetheless the exception; most consuls simply followed regulations.

71 See the original report of Heider’s abuse in “Grausame Behandlung eines Schiffsjungen,” New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 4 January 1889. Trial proceedings of the case can be found in BA-BL, R/901/7090.
72 BA-BL, R 901/76367, deposition of Wilhelm Lewerenz before the Königlich Preussische Gesandtschaft in Mecklenburg und den Hansestädten, 24 Jan. 1908.
73 The exception that proves the rule can be found in BA-BL, R 901/75133, Kaiserlich Deutsches Konsulat Porto Allegre to Reichkanzler, 5 August 1913. Most records indicate that consuls followed the letter of the law concerning maritime deserters, including BA-BL, R 901/76371, Regierungs-Präsident Stettin to Auswärtiges Amt, 6 Jun. 1908; BA-BL, R 901/76375, Kaiserlich Deutsches Konsulat Valparaiso to Reichskanzler, 24 Jun. 1912; BA-BL, R 901/76379, Kaiserlich Deutsches Konsulat Taltal to Kaiserlich Generalkonsul Valparaiso, 4 Jun. 1913; BA-BL, R 901/76368, Richard Gotthans to Auswärtiges Amt, 17 Oct. 1913.
Figure 30. Annual Number of Reported Desertions in the *Handelsmarine* as a Percentage of the Entire Maritime Workforce, 1880-1913. Sources: (1880-1888) “Die Entweichungen von Seeleuten der Deutschen Handelsmarine im Jahre 1888,” in *Monatsheft zur Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, no. 12 (Dec 1889), 1-6; (1890-1907) GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 7; and (1908-1913) BA-BL, R 901/76261.

Figure 31. Share of Reported Desertions in the *Handelsmarine* by Region or Country, 1890-1913. Sources: (1890-1907) GStA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 7; and (1908-1913) BA-BL, R 901/76261.
The transnationality of maritime labor also influenced decisions to abscond from German vessels. Desertion’s legal risks were not as high for foreign nationals working in the *Handelsmarine*. Consequently, they were more likely to desert than their German shipmates. In 1901, foreigners, made up around 18% of Germany’s seafaring labor force but accounted for over 32% of reported cases of desertion. For German nationals, evidence suggests that desertion could have been connected with the desire to immigrate. The geographical distribution of desertion in the *Handelsmarine* shows a marked preference for regions of high European immigration. Between 1890 and 1913, North America, Latin America and the West Indies, and Australia and New Zealand were the most common zones of desertion outside Germany. Indeed, North America accounted for over half of all reported desertions (51.4%). Together, Latin America and the West Indies had the third highest rates (8.4%), followed by Australia and New Zealand (6.5%) (Figure 31). Furthermore, detailed statistics from the Hamburg Seemannsamt for 1890-1910 indicate that mariners deserted in high numbers in cities with large populations of European immigrants. New York was by far the most popular place to jump ship with over 14,500 reported cases followed at a distant second by Buenos Aires.

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74 This percentage of foreigners in the *Handelsmarine* includes those the SBG classified as both “white” and “colored,” which in 1901 accounted for 8.1% and 10.2% of the workforce respectively. Among “white” foreigners the largest groups were Scandinavians (3.0%), Dutch (1.4%), and Italians (1.2%). Among “colored” foreigners the largest groups were Chinese (6.5%) and Indians (2.5%).

75 Although Chinese and Indian mariners made up a considerable portion of foreigners serving in the *Handelsmarine*, the 32% figure mostly reflects desertion among “white” foreigners in the transatlantic or trade. Racial anxieties in the *Handelsmarine* largely excluded Chinese, Indians, African, and other so-called “colored” mariners from the transatlantic trade, where most reported desertions occurred. Instead they were largely confined to a small number of ships (207 out of 3,420 in 1912) that plied trade routes in the “tropics” or in the coastal trade near their countries of origin. See Küttner, *Farbige Seeleute*, 10-11. It therefore stands to reason that most “colored” seamen would have deserted in Asian or African ports. Between 1891 and 1913, however, desertions among non-Germans in African or Asian ports averaged around 4% of all reported desertions in the *Handelsmarine*. See *Handelsmarine* desertion reports: (1890-1907) GSTA PK I. HA Rep. 120 MfHuG, C XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 7; and (1908-1913) BA-BL, R 901/76261.

76 Desertion in domestic ports Germany was the second most significant zone for desertion at (14.1%).
at around 1,200 cases (Appendix A: Figure 39). Sailors’ diaries and memoirs also associate immigration and desertion. Franz Krapohl, for example, noted in 1898 that two of his friends secretly left their ship because they wanted to make new lives for themselves. In another example, Heinrich Fröhlich followed his German fiancé to New York, hiring onto a Bremer ship and deserting once it reached the United States, where they married and settled down.

Many Handelsmarine deserters must have been working their way across the Atlantic, either as immigrants or migratory workers. These so-called “Überarbeiter” took low-skilled jobs aboard steamships in order to obtain cheap passage over the ocean. They frequently hired on as coal trimmers—the least skilled, most physically taxing, and most dangerous job in the engine room—or laundry personnel in the passenger service. Once their ship reached its destination, these men would “desert” in order to evade border or immigration controls. Little first-hand documentation on the numbers or experiences of Überarbeiter has survived in the historical record. German authorities and middle-class observers regularly displayed hostile attitudes toward this group, often portraying them as criminals or racial or ethnic outsiders. Siegfried Heckscher, for example, cast them as a criminal element that sought not only cheap passage to “try their luck in the new world,” but also an easy escape from German police authorities back home. The German consulate in New York described Überarbeiter as “mostly Slavs, who want to get back to Europe cheaply and hire on for the passage in exchange for nominal pay.”

78 „Erinnerungen des Heinrich Johann Georg Fröhlich,” DSB.
79 Heckscher, “Die Lage der in der Seeschifffahrt Hamburgs beschäftigten Arbeiter,” 201.
North German Lloyd director Johann Georg Lohmann was even less charitable in his account of Überarbeiter, describing them variously as “perpetually unemployed,” “alcoholic and work-shy,” or “physically and mentally degenerate.” Lohmann’s description appears especially disingenuous in light of evidence that big German steamship firms like NGL knowingly hired Überarbeiter as cheap labor for transatlantic voyages.

Comradeship and peer pressure also played a role in mariners’ decisions to jump ship. Johann Förstl’s only shipboard friend and fellow cabin boy, Wilhlem Lewerenz, deserted with him in 1907. The account that the latter boy provided to German officials indicates that feelings of loyalty and friendship played a role in his desertion. He stated that the two had become good friends during the voyage. Although the other crewmen largely left Lewerenz alone, they both “secretly left” the ship because of the frequent abuse Förstl suffered at the hands of his shipmates. After deserting they stuck together, working odd jobs until Förstl died four months later. Peer pressure, like comradeship, also influenced decisions to desert. In a diary entry, Franz von Wahlde noted the tremendous pressure he felt from shipmates to desert while his ship was docked in Buenos Aires. Had a ship’s officer not caught him packing his belongings he would have been among the majority of the ship’s crew who deserted together that day. Surviving consular records indicate that desertions were far more likely to occur in pairs, as with Förstl and Lewerenz, or in larger groups, as aboard von Wahlde’s ship. A rare surviving desertion register from the German consulate in Santos, Brazil—the main port for São

81 StAB 3-S.2.b.4.a. – 303.1, Lohmann to Bremen Senatskommission für Schifffahrtssachen, 20 Apr. 1889.
82 StAB 4,89/1 – 388, Staatsanwaltschaft Bremen to Seemannsamt Bremerhaven, 7 Apr. 1891.
83 BA-BL R 901/76376, deposition of Wilhlem Lewerenz before the Königlich Preussische Gesandtschaft in Mecklenburg und den Hansestädten, 24 Jan. 1908.
84 von Wahlde, Ausgebüxt, 73-76.
Paulo—records, among other things, the deserters’ name, ship, place, and day of
desertion. The entries show a marked tendency toward group desertion from the same
ship on the same day.\textsuperscript{85}

Despite the complex and overlapping causes of desertion in the *Handelsmarine*,
Wilhelmine Germans constructed an overarching narrative that located its origins in the
pleasures and dangers of the foreign waterfront. The most common stories they told
about desertion focused on the temptations of unsupervised leisure activities in non-
German spaces. Foreign crimps and prostitutes provided the stock villains who
threatened to rob gullible seamen of their health and hard earned pay and, in so doing,
deprive Germany of its seamen. In many ways this narrative resembled the one Germans
told about their own urban waterfront districts like Hamburg’s St. Pauli. What was
different was the sense of foreignness—the notion that disorderly sociability and
sexuality in a foreign setting stripped German mariners of their national identities and
Germany of a vital national workforce and naval reserve.

Although there were countless versions, the general outlines of this story were
clear. After German ships arrived at an overseas port, local crimps or their agents used
every opportunity to tempt their crewmen to desert. They boarded incoming ships or
sought out mariners while they were portside and tried to entice them to desert with
promises of alcohol, women, and better pay. Such accounts assumed that once a sailor
deserted he would have little reason to return home and face the legal consequences for
his actions. Moreover, he was exposed to violence, venereal disease, and financial ruin.
In this way the “German seaman” was physically and financially ruined and lost forever

\textsuperscript{85} BA-BL R/901/17542, Kaiserlich Deutsches Konsulat Santos to Reichskanzler, 12 Mar. 1908.
to the Fatherland. Although this narrative of vice, desertion, and the foreign waterfront proliferated during the Wilhelmine period, it appeared in German sources as early as the 1860s. In 1867, for example, the Prussian consul in New York wrote to the Minister of Trade in Berlin, recommending that the government take measures to track the number of local desertions from Prussian ships. He claimed that desertion “demoralizes seamen making them worthless” and leads to their “roaming around with base and disreputable characters” in New York’s waterfront entertainment districts.⁸⁶ Concerns about “Heuerbaase” abroad, like those at home, grew during the 1890s and came into focus after passage of the 1902 law limiting their operations in Germany.⁸⁷

Government and industry authorities typically portrayed the Deserter as a gullible and sexually vulnerable man, easily victimized by foreign exploiters. They expressed little concern about the women who worked service jobs in the Handelsmarine, conceiving of desertion an all-male phenomenon. The desertion of a stewardess in 1907 was considered odd enough that the consular staff took special note of it.⁸⁸ The Verein Hamburger Reeder, Germany’s most powerful organization of shipowners, argued that desertion exposed seamen to “the enticements of unscrupulous Heuerbaase and the dangers of unsafe foreign ports.”⁸⁹ The association also seriously claimed that desertion in foreign ports could lead to an increase in venereal disease among sailors.⁹⁰ Government authorities shared similar understandings. According to the Bremen Senate, crimps induced pleasure-deprived seamen, who were “inclined to drinking strong spirits,”

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⁸⁶ GStA PK, Rep. 120.C, MfHuG, XVII 3 Nr. 20 Bd. 5, Ministerium für Auswärtigen Angelegenheiten (Prussia) to Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe (Prussia), 19 Feb. 1867.
⁸⁸ BA-BL R 901/17542, Kaiserlich Deutsches Konsulat Bordeaux to Reichskanzler, 30 Jan. 1907.
⁸⁹ Jahresbericht des Verwaltungsrats des Vereins Hamburger Rheder für 1907/08, 15.
⁹⁰ Jahresbericht des Verwaltungsrats des Vereins Hamburger Rheder für 1908/09, 14.
to desert using alcohol and sex with prostitutes. After the turn of the century, this narrative had become so pervasive among Wilhelmine officials that frustrated German consular officials in New York wrote several times—apparently with little success—in an attempt to shift the focus of the desertion question to economic causes, particularly to the higher wages paid aboard vessels in the Western hemisphere.

The voices of middle-class reformers, particularly those involved with the Verein für Socialpolitik’s study of maritime labor, echoed this basic construction of the Deserteur. Sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’ description encapsulated predominant Wilhelmine views of the German seaman abroad: “the state of the crimping and boarding house system in foreign ports … is dangerous and ruinous for the economic and moral wellbeing of the seaman.” Siegfried Heckscher described desertion in foreign ports a “true plague for [German] shipping,” placing the blame partially on sailors’ own “foolishness,” partially on shipboard abuse, and partially on the “deceitful temptations” of foreign Heuerbaase. The VfSP’s 1903 conference on seafaring labor provided a slightly more complex account of desertion’s causes. In his introductory address, Ernst Francke listed back-breaking engine-room labor, shipboard abuse, inadequate provisions or living quarters, and immigration or migration as potential motivations for desertion abroad. But the main role he reserved for waterfront temptations and exploitation: “foolishness, licentiousness, drunkenness, and debauchery also play a large role and

91 GStA PK, Rep. 120.C, MfHuG, XVII 3 Nr. 91 Bd. 1, Bremen Senate to RAdI, 22 Nov. 1889.
likely too the easy acquiescence toward the temptations and pretences of crimps in foreign ports, who deceive and exploit the gullible seaman.”

There were also alternative interpretations of desertion in the Handelsmarine. The Seemannsverband and its socialist allies advocated interpretations of desertion that emphasized such socio-economic factors as low pay, abusive supervisors, and poor shipboard working conditions. An 1898 article in Der Seemann, entitled “Who’s to Blame?,” summed up the view on the German left:

The gentlemen of the ruling parties cannot ascertain precisely how seamen are mislead into desertion. But for us that puzzle is easy to solve. Considering the low pay aboard German ships, a large number of seamen prefer to earn their keep on the ships of other nations, since there manpower is better compensated at the moment … Wages fit for dogs, abuse from supervisors, and poor provisions are the reasons that force them to take this step. So you shipowners and supervisors, make sure there’s better compensation and treatment and desertion will decrease on its own.

Sailors and their family members also espoused alternative views of desertion. For one thing, they rarely used the term “desertion.” In consular and court records, they often described their actions as “leaving,” “secretly leaving,” or simply “swimming to shore.” Many such accounts cited shipboard abuse as the cause for desertion. Others referred to family circumstances such as a parent’s illness. Still others pointed to untenable economic conditions, such as long waits in port while their ship was undergoing repairs. These counter-explanations for desertion—whether from union newspapers or in sailors own words—remained on the margins of official debates. The narrative of seduction and

96 BA-BL R 901/76376, deposition of Wilhelm Lewerenz before the Königlich Preussische Gesandtschaft in Mecklenburg und den Hansestädten, 24 Jan. 1908; BA-BL R 901/76375, written statement of Wolfgang Ochs, 13 Apr. 1912.
97 BA-BL, R 901/76368, letter from Richard Gotthans to Auswärtiges Amt, 17 Oct. 1913.
98 BA-BL R 901/76365, letter from Georg Davidson to Auswärtiges Amt, 28 Dec. 1909.
exploitation on the foreign waterfront dominated Wilhelmine views of desertion in the 
_Handelsmarine._

6.3 The _Brücke zu Heimat_

The Protestant _Deutsche Seemannsmission_ took the leading role in defining the Wilhelmine narrative of temptation and exploitation in foreign ports and crafting its resolution. The organization aimed to provide an alternative to waterfront crimps, boarding houses, taverns, and brothels. Its alternative would be anti-socialist and generally supportive of the policies of German rulers and the shipping industry. More precisely, the DSM hoped to refashion dissolute sailors into reliable German men by exporting the nation overseas along a metaphoric “_Brücke zu Heimat._” This “bridge to the homeland” consisted of a global network of seamen’s homes and missionary stations, sponsored by DSM affiliates around the world and run by German Protestant clergymen and laypeople. Officials in government and the shipping industry turned increasingly to the DSM and its growing network of missionary stations to reign in unruly merchant mariners. A broader public, concerned about _Weltpolitik_ and _Welthandel_, supported the _Seemannsmission_ and its claim to ensure the stability of Germany’s overseas expansion. This was particularly true of German overseas émigré communities. Refracted through the Protestant-nationalist prism of the DSM, the prodigal son bore only a passing resemblance to actual merchant mariners of the period. Nevertheless, a considerable number of sailors took advantage of the services that German seamen’s homes provided in foreign and domestic ports.
When German pastors and laymen first organized a national mission to seamen it was no accident that they did so along the eastern coast of Great Britain. Paradoxically, the *Seemannsmission* originated within a “global network of the religious”—its methods were transnational despite its nationalist outlook.\(^9\) British and North American Protestants had developed the first national-religious social work organizations geared towards merchant sailors in the 1820s and 1830s. Their organizations—collectively known as the Bethel Movement—focused their activities not only on religious conversion but also on the moral, social, and national aspects of seafaring labor. They viewed their primary task as “sailors’ emancipation,” hoping to make them respectable and fit for national citizenship.\(^10\) English pastor George Charles Smith, the most influential figure in the early seamen’s missionary movement, strongly advocated the establishment of seamen’s homes as alternatives to what he saw as a corrupt system of boarding houses, pubs, and brothels that flourished in Anglo-American ports. Smith’s ideal home would house religious services, lodging, wholesome entertainment, educational lectures, legal aid services, as well as a labor exchange for sailors.\(^11\) In 1833 he suggested a far more ambitious and utopian scheme, in which passing through a seamen’s home would be compulsory. This “moral hospital,” he claimed, would lead to the creation of a “new race of seamen.”\(^12\) Although Smith’s “moral hospital” never materialized, his vision of the seamen’s home became an established method in Protestant efforts to redeem merchant sailors.


\(^{10}\) Kverndal, *Seamen’s Missions*, 327.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 339.
During the 1840s, the efforts of the Bethel Movement attracted the attention of Hamburg theologian and pedagogue Johann Hinrich Wichern. Wichern’s “new social ethic” was one of the most influential German Protestant responses to the emergence of a modern industrial society in Central Europe during the mid-nineteenth century. His ideas found institutional form in the *Innere Mission* (Inner Mission), which became the social work arm of German Protestantism in the wake of the Revolutions of 1848. Broadly speaking, Wichern conceived his *Innere Mission* as an effort to reclaim the restive lower classes in Germany for the Protestant Church and for the prevailing social order. It was a mission to counter what he viewed as the secularizing and disruptive forces of modern urbanization and industrialization.103

As a native of Hamburg, Wichern was also quite familiar with maritime issues. In his 1849 *Denkschrift auf die Nöte des Seemannsstandes*, he issued the following call for a German mission to seamen based on the Anglo-American model:

> We should well remember the relief of sailors, which is so necessary in the port cities of the North and Baltic Seas. The great results that the English and, especially, the American Societies in New York, etc. have achieved in this area through the construction of seamen’s homes encourage emulation without delay.104

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Two years later he visited Hull, England and toured a Bethel seaman’s home to observe its everyday operation. As German seamen’s missionaries would later do, Wichern expressed concerned about German sailors’ leisure time in foreign ports:

In the foreign land, among foreign people, observed by no one, led astray by his comrades, the youngling [sailor] is exposed to great temptations; who will dare to warn him, who will reach out a saving hand to free him from temptation and protect him so that he will not sink into calamity and ruin.

Wichern’s broadsheet, the *Fliegende Blätter aus dem Rauhen Hause*, published intermittent appeals for a mission to seamen over the next few decades. Despite these calls, no organization emerged until 1884, one year after the theologian’s death. Still, proponents of the *Seemannsmisison* venerated Wichern as the progenitor of their movement.

In 1884-85, under the leadership of Pastor Friedrich Martin Harms, a group of German pastors from *Gemeinden* in Great Britain created a federation out of independent local committees dedicated to religious-based social work among German sailors. This group of German expat clergymen had been inspired by the evangelical program of Dissenting circles in Britain. Harms’ exposure to the English Wesleyan movement, for example, proved to be a watershed moment in his support for a mission to sailors. The Rostock native originally went to England in the mid-1860s to take a position as a business clerk. His evangelical sensibilities found little resonance in German émigré

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105 Ibid.
107 A total of eleven articles related to the question of a mission to seamen appeared in Wichern’s newsletter between 1850 and 1869. See *FBRH* (1850): 231-32; (1853): 11-12; (1854): 220, 225-35; (1855): 204-208; (1858); 104-20; (1867), 129-48; (1868), 45-50, 93-94, 241-47; (1869): 115-19.
circles, so he turned to local Wesleyans, who put him up for seminary training. In 1869 he was appointed pastor of a small German Wesleyan Gemeinde in the port city of Sunderland, England. There he developed a passion for German sailors who worked in the bustling trade between Germany and the east coast of Great Britain. Although Harms later chose to affiliate his church with the Prussian Landeskirche he retained his Wesleyan-style zeal and turned it toward building a mission to German sailors.109

During the 1880s and 1890s, Harms and other DSM supporters initiated a publicity campaign to promote its cause in Germany. A travelling lecture series in 1888-89 popularized the Seemannsmission within Germany, inspiring the formation of local chapters from coastal Hamburg to inland Stuttgart.110 Articles about the DSM appeared in German newspapers from the beginning, although the mainstream press became much more supportive of missionary activities after 1900. Coastal papers like the Hamburger Nachrichten, as well as the overseas German-language press, most frequently reported on the activities of the DSM.111 But national dailies like the Frankfurter Zeitung also carried stories about such major events as the opening of a new DSM building in Buenos Aires in 1912.112

110 Heimerdinger, Der Seemann, 103-106.
111 For example: Hamburger Nachrichten, 15 Dec 1909; New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 2 Nov 1908; Deutsch-La Plata Zeitung, 31 July 1912.
112 Frankfurter Zeitung, 24 Nov 1912.
Figure 32. “Annual Report of the Berlin Committee for the German Protestant Mission to Seamen” (1912). Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.
Over time, seamen’s missionaries developed a pattern of financial and institutional support that involved a mixture of grassroots organizing at home and abroad with collaboration from above by religious, state, and industry figures. After 1895 the Seemannsmission consisted of three separate national committees—the original one in Great Britain, a committee in Hanover, and a committee in Berlin—as well as numerous local affiliates. They coordinated their efforts through yearly missionary conferences and joint publications, most notably a newspaper, *Blätter für Seemannsmission*, which was established in 1892. In doing so they were supported by a number of Landeskirche, particularly in Hanover and Prussia, and, above all, by the Innere Mission.113 As the DSM built its worldwide network of missionary stations during the 1890s and 1900s, its support grew beyond Protestant circles at home and in Britain to include German émigré communities around the globe, consuls, and shipping firms. This pattern emerges clearly whenever we look at the examples of two of the largest overseas missionary stations located in New York City and Buenos Aires.

Seamen’s missionaries benefited tremendously from German communities in both Atlantic port cities. An 1896 request from the head pastor of the Buenos Aires Gemeinde inspired the creation of a mission station there three years later.114 Following a similar pattern, the New York station opened its doors in 1907. DSM committees typically sent seamen’s pastors abroad to fund-raise, organize, and run each mission. Donations came in from diverse sources including individuals, church groups, and women’s charitable committees, among others. But the financial support of prominent German-Americans, like brewery tycoon Adolphus Busch in the United States or industrialist Ernesto

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114 ADW, SM / I 1 154 Bd. 1, Pastor Bussmann to Berliner Komitee für Seemannsmission, 7 Dec. 1896.
Tornquist in Argentina, impressed German officials and increased their willingness to sponsor the missions. Additionally, overseas mission stations provided opportunities for émigré communities to take part in charity events, such as concerts and balls, which allowed them to display the German character of their community. In 1912, for instance, prominent German New Yorkers turned out for a benefit concert at Carnegie Hall that the German consul had sponsored to raise money for the New York seamen’s home.

Diplomatic officials not only supported the fund-raising efforts of the *Seemannsmission*, they also contributed their resources, connections, and prestige to the cause. The German general consul in New York, Carl Bünz, was honorary president of the local DSM affiliate and its monthly meetings took place in his office on Broadway. In Argentina, Imperial Ambassador Julius von Waldthausen was instrumental in securing Reich funds for a DSM home in Buenos Aires. He also used his influence to convince the Argentine government to donate land for the project. In a feat of diplomatic maneuvering, German diplomats reminded Argentine officials that they had previously granted land for the British to build their seamen’s home in Buenos Aires. When considering the level of state assistance to the DSM, it is clear that the overwhelming cooperation from German diplomats was much more essential than the modest annual funding granted by officials in Germany.

The German shipping industry also played a key role in supporting the *Seemannsmission* abroad. The New York directors of the Hamburg-America and North German Lloyd lines sat on the board of the local DSM seamen’s home and helped secure

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117 BA-BL, R/901/17719, Waldthausen to Bernhard von Bülow, 10 Sept. 1901.
significant yearly and one-time contributions from their management. Hermann von Frieden, shipping agent for the Hansa Line, was president of the DSM affiliate in Buenos Aires and used his position to leverage more funding from shipping companies when he decided they were not contributing their fair share. In the late 1890s, the *Deutscher Nautischer Verein* began lobbying Reich officials to subsidize DSM seamen’s homes in foreign ports, praising their “moral and material benefit” for seamen.

Building upon the considerable backing they had gained at home and abroad, seamen’s missionaries successfully petitioned for regular funding from state authorities. From the 1890s onward, state agencies at the Reich level and below guaranteed modest but regular and growing contributions to the DSM. The organization also found an enthusiastic patron in Kaiser Wilhelm II, who, for example, made the largest personal donation to the building fund of the Buenos Aires home. The Kaiser was equally moved by the creation of a seamen’s home in New York. The margins of the consular report detailing the opening of the New York home are filled with his comments enthusiastically praising the DSM’s fight against the “seductions” of the American city. By 1900 numerous officials in government and industry had begun to put their faith in this network to guard against the labor unrest, disease, moral decay, and national disintegration they associated with “temptations of the foreign port city.”

Seamen’s Missionaries made clear time and time again that their missions and homes served not only charitable or religious goals; they also signified Germany’s

119 BA-BL, R/901/17719, Kaiserlich Deutsche Gesandtschaft in den La Plata Staaten to Reichskanzler, 13 Nov. 1908.
120 BA-BL, R/901/8381, Staatssekretär des Innern to Auswärtiges Amt, 30 July 1899.
122 BA-BL, R 901/17726, Kaiserlich Deutsches General-Konsulat New York to Reichskanzler, 8 Jun. 1907.
123 BA-BL, R 901/17714, Ausw. Amt to RAdI, 14 Jun. 1911.
growing status and power in the world. An 1890 letter from the Central Committee of the Innere Mission to the Reich Interior Ministry laid out this vision of the role that the Seemannsmission would play in German Weltpolitik. The Committee cited the “growing significance of the German merchant fleet in world commerce” as a central justification for the DSM. It connected the mission’s “private charitable” task with its “German-national purpose.” It claimed furthermore that the mission would not only protect the well-being of thousands of “threatened” seamen, it would also demonstrate Germany’s place in the ranks of the world’s major seafaring powers, thereby raising Germany’s reputation abroad.\textsuperscript{124} Seamen’s missionaries also linked Weltpolitik to the maintenance of Heimat overseas:

\begin{quote}
To our great joy, the national significance of the Seemannsmission has been increasingly recognized and valued among our German Volk. In its homes, which are spread out over the entire world, the mission aims to maintain the love of God and Heimat among German seamen, who are so often surrounded by foreign races and dangers of all sorts.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

Over the next two decades this vision won advocates and benefactors for the DSM in the Reich government. The Foreign Ministry was particularly supportive, arguing that “there can be no doubt of the importance which is to be attached to the German seamen’s homes abroad for upholding a healthy, disciplined, and patriotically-minded seafaring profession.”\textsuperscript{126} The Reich Interior Ministry agreed that “strengthening and supporting” the Seemannsmission was in the national interest and threw its support behind Friedrich

\textsuperscript{124} BA-BL, R 901/8381, Central-Ausschüff für die innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche to Staatssekretär des Innern, 8 Nov. 1890.
\textsuperscript{125} BA-BL, R 901/76205, Komitee für Deutsche Evangelische Seemannsmission zu Berlin-Dahlem to Kaiser Wilhelm II, 14 Jul. 1914.
\textsuperscript{126} BA-BL, R 901/17714, Ausw. Amt to RAdI, 14 Jun. 1911.
Harm’s 1910 proposal to centralize the DSM’s unwieldy organizational structure.\(^{127}\) German authorities saw the DSM as a way to strengthen government oversight of mariners in foreign ports; informal seamen’s homes would supplement formal consular authority.\(^{128}\)

By 1911 the DSM’s network extended to over 200 ports, including 52 main stations, 52 reading rooms with 240,000 yearly visits, and 31 seamen’s homes with over 17,000 annual guests.\(^{129}\) Although there were numerous missionary stations in domestic ports, the majority lay outside of Germany, particularly in ports along Atlantic trade routes. The placement of mission stations depended largely on the urban geography of port cities. They were usually built in sailortowns. Around 1900, New York Harbor was so large that the DSM built a home on its western edge in Hoboken, New Jersey, location of the massive North German Lloyd and Hamburg-America piers, and opened an additional reading room on its eastern edge near the Navy Yard in Brooklyn (Figure 28).

In Buenos Aires, the DSM built its home in the center of the waterfront district of La Boca (Figure 29). These neighborhoods were largely working-class and immigrant milieus filled with boarding houses, tenements, gambling joints, taverns, and brothels. They commonly featured female and male prostitutes who drew their business primarily from sailors.\(^{130}\)

German seamen’s homes provided a number of practical services for civilian mariners, designed to attract them away from waterfront bars, brothels, crimps, and

\(^{127}\) BA-BL, R 901/17714, RAdI to Ausw. Amt, 23 Nov. 1910. The plan for centralization was interrupted by the First World War and was not implemented until the formation of the Zweckverband Deutsche Evangelische Seemannsmission in 1923. See Freese, Geschichte der Deutschen Seemannsmission, 39-48.


\(^{130}\) Guy, Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires, 45; Chauncey, Gay New York, 76-86.
prostitutes. Wherever a DSM home had been built, it offered room and board at a reduced rate or free of charge if the sailor could not afford to pay. The homes also offered shower facilities, reading rooms, Protestant religious services, and savings banks with low cost transfers to family back home, as well as “German” entertainment and a labor exchange. In places where no seamen’s home had yet been built, the activities of the mission were focused around stand-alone reading rooms. Here mariners could write letters to family and friends in Germany on free stationary. They could read German language books and newspapers that had been carefully screened to conform to conservative religious, national, and monarchical sentiments, and they could socialize with other Germans. In this way the DSM overlaid its vision of German culture onto the physical spaces of the seamen’s home. A letter from “a colleague” to mariners published in the Buenos Aires mission’s monthly newsletter best captures these cultural mappings:

But also here [in the seamen’s home], far from home and family, loving and devoted hands are hard at work to recreate Heimat for the seaman. Now we are men … and many among us are still unthankful for what has been given to us today in faithfulness and love. Therefore, dear seamen, bring the defectors back to the right path, so that Germandom’s reputation is preserved through devotion and love! Then we can say with pride: “I am a German,” and our esteem among foreigners and among ourselves will not fail!

In this way, the love of Heimat and Germany’s international reputation intersected with a redemptive vision of manhood in the home’s physical spaces.

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131 There was a separate (and much smaller) hostel network for active duty sailors in the Imperial Navy who typically remained aboard ship while in harbour. See BA-BL, R/901/8381, Rundschreibung vom Mai 1895.
132 ADW, SM / I 154 Bd. IV, list of approved reading materials from Berliner Komitee für Seemannsmission, 29 October 1909.
133 “Aus der Seemannskecke,” Deutscher Seemannsgruss vom La Plata 1, no. 6 (December 1909).
6.4 The Prodigal Son and Redemptive Masculinity

Seamen’s missionaries and their supporters advanced a particular vision of the “German seaman” that was structured around the Biblical allegory of the “prodigal son” (*verlorener Sohn*).\(^{134}\) They transformed the classic New Testament message of estrangement and reconciliation into a narrative in which seafaring masculinity was situated precariously along national and racial boundaries. They worried that the temptations of the foreign port city could seduce a careless mariner away from his fatherland. But they hoped to prevent such a calamity through reintegration into an ersatz family structure and a spatially demarcated *Heimat* abroad, set off against a foreign, urban environment. In doing so, they constructed a redemptive masculinity upon long-standing cultural associations among Protestant nationalism and middle-class sexual restraint.\(^{135}\) Redemption in this case had little to do with the spiritual message of Christ’s parable in the Book of Luke; instead, it meant reconciliation to the *Volk* and to the fatherland through wholesome, racially bounded behavior. The DSM’s image of the seafarer as prodigal son was therefore ultimately constituted by his crossing of national boundaries. As a transnational figure, the prodigal son can be interpreted as a counter-image for a more stable, rooted “German” ideal of manliness.

In the typical portside story told by the DSM and its supporters, “the seaman” was caught up in a world of sensual dangers. Youthful naïveté was his core characteristic,


\(^{135}\) Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality, 2, 4-6, 20-22, 25-27, 183.
since “the sailor is and remains a big child without much understanding.”

He lived in a moral world where “drunkenness to the point of unconsciousness is a delightful amusement, spectacle-making and nocturnal disturbances are innocent fun, and association with licentious harlots is something completely natural and necessary.”

Arriving on land after a long voyage he was like a “chained dog … who, being suddenly let loose, careens around the yard in meaningless jubilation.”

Within days or even hours of going ashore, the prodigal son “[spent] his entire earnings in disreputable houses,” money urgently needed back home by his wife, children, or parents.

Nonetheless, he was not entirely responsible for his moral and financial ruin, but rather the victim of foreign crimps and prostitutes, who “during a few hours of sensual pleasures [Sinnenrausch] steal many months of hard-earned pay and leave him lying helpless with empty pockets on the street.”

In this very typical nineteenth-century narrative about sexual vice, women appear as seducers and men as their victims.

Alternatively, they show up as pawns in the Heuerbaas’s devious scheme to steal mariners’ livelihoods. In either case, as a potential victim of women, the prodigal son threatened to undermine the patriarchal gender order.

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137 BfSM, no. 4 (1894): 68.
The DSM’s narrative of seduction in the foreign port city was never simply one of religious failing or social degradation. It was also one of national loss. Although a few ecumenical voices among seamen’s missionaries rejected the organization’s focus on having a “national effect on sailors,” most continued to foreground their mission’s “national task.” They believed that a separation from family, community, and fatherland was the root cause of intemperance, profligacy, sexual vice, desertion, and labor unrest among mariners:

Just as [the merchant seaman] lives outside the spell of the church, apart from its blessings, solace, and admonitions, so is he equally detached—to his great ruin—from the bonds of family and his broader circle of peers. Neither the disciplining arm nor merciful word of his father, nor the sustaining love of his mother can reach over the ocean. Their eyes cannot see across the great waters. … For him the joys and sufferings of the fatherland are news that he receives after landing somewhere, not something he himself experiences.

In other words the German sailor was alienated not only from his “father’s house” but also from his “fatherland.” The DSM believed and German authorities agreed that, if the prodigal son could be reminded of his fatherland, then desertion, indiscipline, and labor unrest would decrease.

DSM operatives responded to anxieties about the dissolution of familial, communal, and national bonds with a global network of mission stations, a “Brücke zu Heimat” (bridge to home). They reasoned that visiting a German seamen’s home would “maintain Heimat for sailors and sail for Heimat,” which would be accomplished through “its friendly and inviting environment and its religious and social

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142 In 1901 a short debate on the national question played out on the pages of the DSM’s journal. See BfSM, no. 2 (1901): 28-32; BfSM, no. 3 (1901): 51-52.

143 Heims, Seemanns-Noth, 7-8.

144 Ibid., 13.

145 BArch R/901/17719, Pastor Julius Scheringer to Reichkanzler von Bülow, 5 Sept. 1901.

events.” As a specifically German “site for idea exchange and cultural stimulus [geistige Anregung],” the home would be a “refuge” for sailors against the “manifold dangers and miseries of the foreign port city.” The DSM thus took part in a broader project whereby Germans attempted to adapt the Heimat idea to global settings, tying together home, nation, empire and diaspora.

Seamen’s missionaries elevated the national meaning of Heimat above any particular local or regional identity. A German flag almost always flew prominently over the DSM’s homes. Patriotic images such as portraits of the Kaiser or national heroes like Frederick the Great decorated common areas. A common room wall in the Buenos Aires mission was a pastiche of patriotic imagery including the German flag, the Reich’s coat of arms, and the DSM’s life-preserver emblem (Figure 34). Holidays, particularly Christmas, Sedan Day, and the Kaiser’s Birthday, were special occasions at DSM stations. Missionaries considered “Weihnachten in der Fremde,” (Christmas in foreign lands) which drew the largest numbers of sailors, particularly significant for the maintenance of family, community, and Heimat. Additionally, the homes had an “aesthetic mission,” defined by the rule that “the milieu of a place determines the behavior of its occupants.” Without a “sense of beauty” encompassing order and cleanliness, the homes could not provide the essential feeling of comfort or Heimat. 

147 BA-BL, R/901/17719, Julius Scheringer to Wilhelm II, 5 Sept. 1901.
149 BfSM, no. 1 (1893): 15-16; Jahresbericht des “Verein Deutsches Seemannsheim” zu Buenos Aires für das Jahr 1908 (Buenos Aires, 1908), 13; and Deutscher Seemannsgruss vom La Plata 1, no. 6 (December 1909): 2.
150 BfSM, no. 2 (1902): 51-56.
Figure 33. “The Future German Seamen’s Home in Buenos Aires.” Fundraising Postcard, c. 1907. Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD.

Figure 34. Patriotic Décor in the German Seamen’s Home in Buenos Aires, c. 1901. Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD
Figure 35. Common Room in the German Seamen’s Home in Buenos Aires, 1909. Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD.
Figure 36. Common Room in the German Seamen’s Home in New York (Hoboken), 1914. Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes der EKD.

Figure 37. Bedroom in the German Seamen’s Home in Bremerhaven, c. 1900. Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven.
Within the walls of its seamen’s homes, the Seemannsmission aspired to provide an substitute (middle-class) family to redeem German mariners for the nation. Seamen’s missionaries linked the maintenance of merchant mariners’ national identity to traditional family roles. This strategy allowed opportunities for German women to get involved in the sort of patriotic or religious charitable work that has been the subject of recent historical scholarship on nineteenth century conservative women’s activism in Germany.\textsuperscript{151} As wives of seamen’s pastors, as house mothers, and as community volunteers, women contributed to the daily functioning of missionary stations. The women’s auxiliary of the DSM, organized by a prominent pastor’s wife, knitted socks, scarves, and gloves for mariners, held fund-raisers, and helped organize Christmas festivities.\textsuperscript{152} Reports from the Buenos Aires mission lauded the participation of mothers and children from the local German community in Christmas festivities at the seamen’s home. They hoped that maternal interaction would reconnect sailors with “their beloved Heimat, their father’s house, and their mother’s love,” as well as “old childhood memories.”\textsuperscript{153} Echoing this sentiment, Hermann Brückner, head pastor of the New York mission, called for more motherly volunteers to offer each seafaring guest a “friendly word” in order to rekindle the “memory of his mother and Heimat.”\textsuperscript{154}

A sense of order, cleanliness, and beauty within the German seamen’s home extended to its gendered spaces. Women volunteers could be present in common areas, and were encouraged to participate, but only in carefully circumscribed roles designed to

\textsuperscript{151} Jean Quataert, \textit{Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813-1916} (Ann Arbor, 2001); Lora Wildenthal, \textit{German Women for Empire, 1884-1945} (Durham, N.C., 2001).
\textsuperscript{152} BJSM, no 1 (1908): 10-13.
\textsuperscript{153} Jahresbericht des Verein “Deutsches Seemannsheim” zu Buenos Aires für das Jahr 1908 (Buenos Aires, 1908), 13.
\textsuperscript{154} BJSM, no. 2 (1909): 35-36; on the gendering of Heimat see Confino, \textit{The Nation as a Local Metaphor}, 170-72.
evoke family and *Heimat* in respectable ways. This observation reminds us that the *Seemannsmission* was, in the last analysis, an endeavor run by men for men. DSM operatives choreographed the presence of women in hopes of redeeming a wayward masculinity. While they meant for older women volunteers to be motherly figures for errant sailors, they cast younger women as alluring, yet ultimately unattainable, objects of desire. Missionaries aimed to redirect merchant sailors’ sexual desires from foreign prostitutes to respectable young German women, who sang, played the piano, and otherwise entertained sailors under strict supervision (Figure 35). They insisted that events at seamen’s homes should be well attended by “young ladies” from the local German community, “since otherwise the [young sailor’s] patriotism cannot come into its own.”155 Apart from the carefully staged presence of women, the common areas of the seamen’s home were designed to be spaces of homosocial *Gemütlichkeit* among men as countless photos attest (Figure 36). Sleeping facilities, however, were another matter. While a lack of space often necessitated multi-bed dorms, ideal homes were supposed to have single-occupant rooms, suggesting discomfort with too much homosociality, particularly in private, unsupervised spaces (Figure 37). DSM leadership in Berlin advised the Buenos Aires pastor in 1908 that future homes should be built along the single-occupant model whenever possible, arguing that on board ship “sailors always have to sleep among others and would be glad to have their own space.”156

As part of their redemptive program, Seamen’s missionaries also sought to provide respectable forms of sociability as alternatives to popular waterfront entertainment. They created spaces for shared meals, games, and lectures. Outings that

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156 ADW, SM / I 1154 Bd. 3, Komitee für deutsche evang. Seemannsmission in Berlin to Olbricht, 30 June 1908.
inserted *Heimat* into a foreign landscape were also commonplace. On the occasion of the Kaiser’s birthday in 1908, the Buenos Aires mission took 115 sailors on a picnic excursion to the Rio de la Plata in the “beautiful countryside” near the “endearing” town of Quilmes, home of a large German community and a successful German brewery. There sailors and “Quilmes Germans” played games, took walks along the river, ate together, and drank lots of “good German beer.”¹⁵⁷

Alcohol consumption was a complex matter for seamen’s missionaries. They frequently warned sailors against the dangers of *schnapps* drinking. They linked hard liquor consumption with emasculation, arguing that it could turn “a powerful young man” into a “man without strength or energy bound for an early death.”¹⁵⁸ More importantly, they argued, *schnapps* drinking was the vice that reduced independent seamen into victims of crimps and prostitutes.¹⁵⁹ Despite such concerns, the importance of drinking in seafaring culture necessitated a more practical outlook. DSM seamen’s homes usually served beer to their guests, although not without controversy. Most seamen’s missionaries interpreted beer drinking, under supervision and in moderation, as a manifestation of German character.¹⁶⁰ Still, a few tried to take a harder line. When a new pastor took over the Buenos Aires mission in 1912 and suggested that the home eliminate beer service entirely, the DSM committee in Berlin advised against it, voicing concerns that such a move would drive sailors into “corrupt taverns” that were full of prostitutes.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *BfSM*, no. 3 (1896): 53-55.
¹⁵⁹ *BfSM*, no. 1 (1898): 14-17.
¹⁶⁰ This outlook lines up well with the focus on moderation rather than abstention that defined the German temperance movement. See James S. Roberts, *Drink, Temperance and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984).
¹⁶¹ ADW, SM / I 154 Bd. V, Scheffen to Babick, 26 Apr 1912.
The prodigal son was almost always imagined as heterosexual in seamen’s missionary narratives. The DSM was most concerned about contacts between German sailors and foreign female prostitutes. Same-sex sexuality among mariners was a very rare topic among Wilhelmine sailor’s missionaries. It appears that only one DSM publication from the period before 1914 refers explicitly to homoerotic relationships, claiming that periods of boredom on board ship caused men to “lose all modesty in front of one another” which “opens the flood-gates to corruption.”\textsuperscript{162} This essay, nonetheless, brackets same-sex desire with shipboard boredom—the real sexual danger remained female prostitution. It goes on to emphasize that the sailor’s relationship to the fatherland should be upheld by fostering his relationship with his German bride. In promoting the racially homogenous, heterosexual family, sailors’ missionaries believed they were redeeming German identity abroad.

Seamen’s missionaries also assumed that the prodigal son was ethnically German and Protestant. Despite the presence of large numbers of foreigners in the Handelsmarine, the DSM’s vision of the “German seaman” always connoted an ethnic German. Still, the organization allowed a sizeable number of foreign sailors to use its services (\textit{Appendix A: Table 3}). Seamen’s missionaries also hoped to reconcile the prodigal son to the Protestant church. When pressed by Catholic Centre Party deputies in the Reichstag and officials in the Foreign Office, mission representatives maintained that they operated their stations on an “inter-confessional” basis and that “proselytizing was strictly forbidden.” Nevertheless they insisted that the \textit{Seemannsmission} would retain its

\textsuperscript{162} Heims, \textit{Seemanns-Noth}, 6-7, 13.
Protestant outlook, claiming that German seamen were “almost exclusively of the Protestant confession.”

Youth also defined the contours of the prodigal son. In order to promote the Seemannsmission among German-speaking porteños, the founding pastor of the Buenos Aires mission, Julius Scheringer, published a series of articles from the fictional perspective of a young German sailor on his first voyage. These articles are typical in their portrayal of the prodigal son as a young, naïve teenager (much like the DSM story that we examined in Chapter Three of the young mariner who contracted venereal disease in Hamburg’s St. Pauli district). After a harsh transatlantic crossing, full of abuse and deprivation, the teenager seeks out “amusements” on the streets of La Boca. To the dismay of his parents back home he succumbs to the waterfront neighborhood’s “dangers and temptations.” The young mariner is “seduced” on the waterfront, leading him to desert his ship and forsake his fatherland. In Scheringer’s view, only a specifically German seamen’s home in Buenos Aires could provide a space of redemption, based on values that would keep the young man from “losing his health, good conscience, and Heimat.”

The prodigal son was also a reflection of middle-class reformers’ distaste for workers’ culture, as well as the reformist zeal so popular among the German middle classes during the nineteenth century. The pastors and social workers who filled the DSM’s ranks came mostly from middle-class circles and believed that their work fulfilled

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an important social function by “hindering the growth of a useless seafaring proletariat.” Their outlook was framed by middle-class values of hard work, independence, family, and Bildung. These were the principles to which they hoped to reconcile merchant mariners. As Julius Scheringer noted, the DSM seamen’s home was supposed to look like “a house lived in by a good bürgerlich family.”

Missionaries also promoted the seamen’s home as a way to “regulate military status” among merchant sailors. State officials responded well to this line of argument, hoping that these institutions would engender “patriotically minded, well-disciplined, healthy, [and] able-bodied” seamen that Germany needed “not only for the Handelsmarine, but also and, above all, for the Kriegsmarine.” These efforts, however, should not be seen as an attempt to militarize civilian seafarers’ experiences in port. Instead, the focus of both the DSM and Reich officials was on maintaining a ready naval reserve and discouraging desertion among merchant mariners, who were subject to the Reich’s peacetime conscription laws. Despite the DSM’s promise to uphold Germany’s “school of manhood,” seamen’s missionaries were far more concerned about maintaining domestic gender relations encoded in Heimat and family. Although the DSM reminded sailors that some day they might be expected to defend their Heimat, it never intended its seamen’s homes to be barracks.

It is far more difficult to ascertain the effects that missionary strategies had on the identities and behaviors of German seamen. The few existing sailors’ diaries and

167 Heimerdinger, Der Seemann, 90-97.
170 BA-BL, R/901/17719, Reichschatzamt to Wilhelm II, 18 Aug. 1909
171 Frevert, A Nation in Barracks, 220-21.
memoirs from the period have little to say about the *Seemannsmission*. Nonetheless, records indicate that German sailors took advantage of DSM services in large numbers. The DSM homes in both New York and Buenos Aires expanded their services and grew in popularity during the years leading up to the First World War (Appendix A: Tables 2 & 3). Statistics from the 1913 annual report for the New York mission illuminate the types of services that were popular among its visitors. The reading room was far and away the most popular with 40,000 recorded visits for the year. Mail service was also quite popular with over 13,000 letters and postcards sent and received. Almost 1,900 seamen stayed an average of 5-6 nights in the home and 3,100 used the shower facilities. Christmas festivities drew over 1,400 men from German vessels. And the station’s bank handled over $146,000—a considerable sum for the time—in savings and money transfers to Germany. The number of attendees at the Christmas celebration makes clear that many sailors preferred to spend holidays in the company of other Germans. And the large volume of correspondence with Germany indicates that many endeavored to maintain ties with home. But we should not overestimate these statistics’ usefulness in reconstructing the DSM’s impact on sailors’ identities. In large part, these numbers represent the practical convenience of services such as cheap lodging, showers, or money transfers. There were clear limits to what the redemptive goals of the *Seemannsmission* could accomplish. After all, walking through its door was always voluntary.

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6.5 Conclusion

During the Wilhelmine period, Germans grew increasingly concerned about the transnationality of seafaring labor and its implications for the nation’s power and esteem abroad. They worried that the “German seaman” would lose his health, discipline, and Heimat along foreign waterfronts in places like New York and Buenos Aires. They associated desertion in the Handelsmarine with alcohol consumption, sexual excess, and a loss of national identity. In the process, they believed that Germany stood to lose an essential national workforce and faced potentially embarrassing incidents in the untoward behavior of “its” mariners abroad. Merchant mariners thus became “German seamen,” bearers of national honor overseas. By 1900 at the latest, authorities in government and industry had turned to the Protestant Deutsche Seemannsmission and its global network of missions and homes to help manage unruly merchant sailors abroad. German seamen’s missionaries conceived of their network as a metaphoric bridge to the Heimat, through which they hoped not only to reconcile mariners to the nation, but also to demonstrate Germany’s world power and international esteem.

In its endeavors, the Seemannsmission elaborated a vision of seafarers as Germany’s prodigal sons. Theirs was a redemptive ideal of masculinity. Missionaries and their supporters hoped that wayward seamen could be reconciled to a manhood based upon monogamous family life, financial responsibility, Protestant belief, and middle-class values. Although DSM operatives reminded merchant seafarers that they had potential military obligations to the nation, ultimately they hoped to fashion domesticated, rooted civilian seamen. In their opinion, the seamen’s home was the site
where the prodigal son could become a “real” man, reconciled to the nation while out in
the world. Their narrative thus suggested a spatial ordering of masculinities emanating
outward from the nation: men who maintained national roots (family, community,
property) had socially recognized masculine status; transient men did not. The DSM’s
vision of redemptive masculinity, which emphasized Heimat and family, was built into
the gendered spaces of its seamen’s homes. Seamen’s home environments constructed a
national German identity in—and against—a foreign, urban setting. The history of the
Seemannsmission is thus a “story of repulsion, rather than attraction” to the outside
world.\footnote{173} It allows us to see that national identity formation in the Wilhelmine era was
shaped by globalization, as well as how gender played a key role in that process.\footnote{174}
Germany’s “Brücke zu Heimat” circumscribed the nation in a global context through a
vision of redemptive masculinity.

\footnote{174} On the interconnections between the wave of globalization that extended from 1880 to 1930 and the
formation of German national identity, see Jürgen Osterhammel and Sebastian Conrad, eds., \textit{Das
Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt, 1871-1914} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,
2004); Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, \textit{Globalization: A Short History} (Princeton, 2005);
As in many areas of German life, the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914 marked a stunning caesura for the *Handelsmarine*. The Great War proved that Britannia still ruled the waves; the controversial and much touted German Imperial Navy could not guarantee the safety of German shipping beyond the limited confines of the Baltic Sea. During the War, the Navy re-commissioned sixteen merchant ships as auxiliary cruisers, whose primary task was to disrupt enemy commerce.\(^1\) These few commerce raiders notwithstanding, the overwhelming majority of German civilian vessels and their crews were confined to home waters, forced to languish in neutral ports, or captured by the British Royal Navy and its allies. During the War, the Entente powers confiscated around one-fifth of the merchant marine’s net tonnage in hostile ports or on the open sea and the British blockade trapped a further two-fifths in neutral ports.\(^2\)

The case of Hamburg-America’s *Vaterland* illustrates how the *Handelsmarine* had won a “place in the sun” that the Imperial Navy was unable to secure. The ship was the largest passenger vessel in the world and the pride of the German merchant fleet. Its launch in 1913 had been a national and international event. When war broke out, the vessel was stranded at the company pier in Hoboken, New Jersey. It sat in port, manned

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\(^1\) These ships were hardly effective as commerce raiders and, like regular Imperial Navy vessels, suffered from a lack of provisions and fuel outside of German waters. Burgess, *Seize the Trident*, 194-223.

by a skeleton crew, until the U.S. government seized it in on the same day it declared war on Germany in April 1917. Renamed *Leviathan*, the ship whose launch had been celebrated as a national event in Germany spent the last years of the war as an American troop transport to the dismay of the German press.\(^3\) In many ways, the fate of the *Vaterland* presaged that of the entire German merchant fleet. Under the reparations clause of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), the victorious powers confiscated all remaining German vessels over a certain size, reducing the *Handelsmarine* to a fleet of small ships.\(^4\)

The First World War was also a difficult period for German merchant mariners. During the early days of August 1914, merchant sailors, the majority of whom were in the naval reserve, received orders to report for military duty. Mobilization orders instructed those who were outside German waters to return home as quickly as possible, but the ability to carry out those orders was a matter of luck, place, and timing.\(^5\) Instead, a bewildering set of possibilities confronted German seafarers during the war. Mobilization became reality for those at home or nearby. Those abroad faced internment, long stays in neutral ports, or unemployment and economic hardship. It was nearly impossible for them to return home. The British navy routinely searched neutral ships for German men “of fighting age.”\(^6\)

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\(^3\) After its conversion to a U.S. Navy troop transport, the ship was renamed the *U.S.S. Leviathan*. See *History of the U.S.S. Leviathan Cruiser and Transport Forces United States Atlantic Fleet. Compiled from the Ship’s Log and Data Gathered by the History Committee on Board the Ship*. (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Eagle Job Department, [1920]).

\(^4\) All vessels over 1,600 and half of all vessels between 1,000 and 1,600 GRT were confiscated. This meant, for example, that HAPAG lost 178 of its ocean-going ships. See Wiborg and Wiborg, *The World is Our Oyster*, 210-11.

\(^5\) In an exceptional case, the captain of the Imperial Mail Steamer *Gneisenau*, which was docked in Antwerp, Belgium at the outbreak of war, managed to send most of his crewmen to Germany by rail before the Belgians seized the ship on August 4, 1914. See BA-BL, R 901/75269, Captain of the *Gneisenau* to Norddeutscher Lloyd Directors, 8 Aug. 1914.

Figure 38. The Hamburg-America Line’s *Vaterland* in April 1917 shortly after it had been confiscated by the United States Government. Hoboken Historical Collection.
Precise statistics on the numbers of interned or stranded German merchant mariners have not survived in the historical record. In 1917 the British foreign ministry counted 6,215 sailors among German civilians interned in metropole Britain alone. This figure does not include crews detained in British dominions or those interned by other Entente powers such as Russia or France (Germany also interned thousands of civilian mariners from Britain and other Entente countries). In addition to the internees, the blockade made jobless thousands of ethnic Germans serving aboard neutral ships, who could no longer work due to the risk of being picked up by the British Navy. Tens of thousands more languished aboard German vessels in neutral ports, mostly in the Americas. These included 3,365 crewmen in Baltimore, 1,339 in Buenos Aires, and many thousands more in New York Harbor. The crew of the Vaterland alone numbered around 1,400. All told, the War caught 552 German ships, including 124 medium- to large-sized passenger steamers, in neutral ports. With these figures in mind, it would be safe to estimate that at least 35-40,000 German merchant mariners found themselves either prisoners or stranded overseas.

German sailors in neutral ports faced a variety of challenges during the War. Those who had worked on foreign ships lost their jobs almost immediately in the fall of 1914. Others who worked aboard stranded German vessels were let go as nonessential

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7 British Foreign Ministry documents record 808 officers and 5,407 ordinary crewmen for a total of 6,215 internees from the German merchant fleet. See National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK), FO 383/295, “Return of Interned German Ships’ Officers and Seamen,” 25 May 1917.
9 New York Observer, 13 Mar. 1917.
11 In 1917 the Deutsche Seemannsmission put this figure at 15-20,000. Given that around sixty percent of the fleet was confiscated or trapped, not to mention those Germans who worked aboard foreign vessels, the DSM’s estimate seems very low. “Die deutsche Handelsflotte im Kriege,” BfSM, no.3/4 (1916): 61-62.
By 1917, for example, Hamburg-America had retained only 300 officers and crewmen aboard the *Vaterland*. In other cases, however, German firms forced their crewmen to stay aboard ship or choose desertion. Everyday conditions aboard stranded German ships in neutral harbors consisted of tremendous boredom and, as the war dragged on, worsening conflicts among officers and crews. In official tallies, desertion rates in neutral ports declined sharply, but much of the decline was the result of underreporting by overwhelmed German consulates abroad. The reports that did come in suggested that desertion still occurred regularly, but in smaller numbers than before the war. Heinrich von Kralik, for instance, remained dutifully aboard his harbor-bound ship in Iquique, Chile for almost two years before frustration and boredom drove him to desert in July 1916. He traveled southward and ended up apprenticing as a farmer on several German estates in Fundo Coronille. Those sailors who successfully petitioned local German consuls to let them out of their duties faced an uncertain economic future, often taking whatever local jobs they could get. Hans Seiffert, who was also trapped in Valparaiso, received permission to leave his ship from the consul, but only after he agreed to return to his duties after the War was over. He worked a variety of jobs along the Chilean coast. At various points he was a seaman aboard coastal vessels, a gardener,

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14 BA-BL, R 901/76359, Kaiserlich Deutsches Generalkonsulat Valparaiso to Reichkanzler, 10 July 1915; Alfred Scherffig, Johannes Martens, and Ernst Thiele to Ausw. Amt, 30 Apr. 1916; Archiv des Deutschen Schifffahrtsmuseum, Tagebuch des Hans Georg Seiffert.  
a domestic servant, and a mill worker.  

In the context of war, Reich officials responded with heightened concern that the “disgraceful” desertion of merchant sailors would “damage the reputation of the Reich in neutral countries.”

Despite the complex and bewildering choices that German mariners faced during World War I, the Deutsche Seemannsmission portrayed the “German seaman” in the uniform terms of heroic, soldierly masculinity. The Berlin Committee’s 1914/15 report epitomized this view: “German seamen all over the world were surprised by the shocking news of the planned war of annihilation against Germany. Only one thought blazed through their hearts: To war in the homeland as soon as possible!” The organization also depicted interned merchant sailors as men who had “fought heroically” before they “fell into the hands of the enemy,” writing a valorous narrative of capture. These constructions made the reality more palatable to middle-class DSM pastors and supporters that so many thousands of sailors (along with pastors and other DSM staff) had to sit out the War. For the War’s duration, the Seemannsmission spent most of its time and resources feeding, housing, and finding jobs for destitute mariners, contacting internees on behalf of their families in Germany, and serving as a rallying point for German émigré communities in neutral countries. In Britain, its colonies, and (later) the

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17 Archiv des Deutschen Schifffahrtsmuseum, Tagebuch des Hans Georg Seiffert.
21 Missionaries more readily admitted these realities in their private correspondence. See ADW, SM / I 154 Bd. V, Kirchenvorstand der Deutschen Evangelischen Gemeinde zu Buenos Aires to Pastor Scheffen in Berlin, 18 Nov. 1914.
United States, the organization and its missionaries also had to contend with the crippling effects of confiscation and internment.\footnote{Achter Jahresbericht des Vereins für deutsche Seemannsfürsorge im Hafen von New York (1914), 1-13; ADW, SM / I 154 Bd. V, “Bericht über die Arbeit in der Seemannsmission in Buenos Aires in den Jahren 1914 bis 1919,” 1 Nov. 1919.}

Wilhelmine cultural constructions of the “German seaman” as a respectable and war-ready national figure unraveled quickly in the events that accompanied Germany’s surrender in the fall of 1918. The war had mobilized tens of thousands of civilian seafarers for the German navy, men like Karl Artelt, a socialist who had served previously as a stoker aboard HAPAG ships. By September 1918 the German Army had begun to disintegrate and it was clear to military leaders that Germany had lost the war.\footnote{Roger Chickering, \textit{Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918}, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [1998]), 180-85.}

In late October the General Staff of the Imperial Navy decided to defend its honor in a romanticized last stand against the British navy in the North Sea. Realizing it was a hopeless mission, ordinary crewmen (particularly stokers) of the High Seas Fleet mutinied. On November 3, under the leadership of Artelt, the sailors’ mutinies turned into a full-fledged political revolution in the seaport of Kiel. The revolution spread through sailors from one coastal city to the next, gathering support among soldiers and workers along the way. The sailors’ revolution intersected with other revolutionary events unfolding across Germany in early November 1918, culminating in the SPD’s proclamation of the Weimar Republic on November 9. Revolutionary sailors swept aside the masculine ideals of national respectability, duty, and patriotism that the \textit{Seemannsmission}, the \textit{Schulschiffverein}, and other middle-class reform groups had tried to instill in Germany’s maritime workforce.\footnote{Pierre Broué, \textit{The German Revolution, 1917-1923}, ed. Ian Birchall and Brian Pearce, trans. John Archer (Chicago: Haymarket, 2006 [1971]), 139-46; Daniel Horn, \textit{The German Naval Mutinies of World War I}}
Despite the ruptures of the First World War and the Revolution of 1918, there were also continuities between maritime labor reform efforts in the Kaiserreich and those in the Weimar Republic. Many of the initiatives begun during the 1890s and 1900s expanded or became official state policy under Weimar. The new Republic, for example, ushered in sweeping anti-crimping measures and finally met union demands for state-regulated maritime employment agencies. In 1919 the newly formed German Shipping Commission issued guidelines that created the new employment agencies and enshrined the principle of parity between unions and shipowners in their administration. Weimar officials also agreed to the International Labor Organization’s Genoa Convention of 1920, which resolved to end international crimping. Both of these measures resulted in final regulations in 1924 that made all forms of crimping illegal in Germany and endorsed the already functioning maritime employment agencies.

The romanticization of sailing manhood, along with the training ship movement, also continued during the interwar period. In the 1920s and 1930s scores of German novels and first-hand accounts celebrated a mythos of wind and sail. The “real seaman” image also continued to inform maritime educational requirements. In 1925 Weimar authorities doubled the required time that merchant marine officer aspirants had to spend aboard sailing ships from twelve to twenty-four months. The new sailing requirement insured that the Deutscher Schulschiffverein would remain an essential part of maritime

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25 The ILO was created at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 under the aegis of the League of Nations.
26 Kiendl and Nagel, “Is’ Chance Da?,” 225.
27 Gerstenberger and Welke, Vom Wind zum Dampf, 8-10; Heimerdinger, Der Seemann, 181-90.
28 Hoffmann, Matrosen—Schiffsmechaniker—Schiffsoffiziere, 107-11.
education in Germany, since by this time only a very small number of for-profit sailing freighters continued to operate. The DSSV spent the 1920s and 1930s rebuilding its fleet of training ships, which the reparations terms of the Treaty of Versailles had reduced to a single vessel. Eventually, the organization created spaces for up to two-thousand trainees. At the same time it maintained its conservative-nationalist political leanings which translated easily into the political and cultural context of the Third Reich.29

The “real seaman” narrative was not the only option in Weimar’s “paradoxical” politics and culture.30 Paul Müller, who had headed the pre-war Seemannsverband, was elected head of the new socialist-leaning Aktionsausschusses seemännischer Berufsverbände (Action Committee of Seamanly Professional Associations), which claimed over 28,000 members at its founding in 1921.31 With state-mandated representation in Weimar’s maritime employment agencies, this new union had far more power to shape labor policy than its Wilhelmine processors had had. Likewise, in the realm of literature, B. Traven’s best-selling novel about an American mariner who loses his identity papers, Das Totenschiff. Die Geschichte eines amerikanischen Seemanns (1926), provided Weimar’s exceptional counterpoint to the Interwar boom of sailing romanticism. In a radical critique of maritime capitalism, it portrays both the horrors of statelessness and the terrible working conditions in steamship boiler rooms aboard a decrepit “coffin ship”—an unseaworthy vessel that continued to operate solely for the sake of shipowners’ profit. Traven’s narrative drew upon the suffering brotherhood motif

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from the Wilhelmine left, and, indeed, his descriptions were uncannily similar to (and probably inspired by) the *Seemansverband’s* “Chronicle of Seamen’s Suffering.”\(^{32}\)

The *Seemannsmission* also rebuilt and consolidated its organizational structure during the Weimar period. In 1923 the two national committees in Berlin and Hanover joined together in a new *Zweckverband der Deutschen Evangelischen Seemannsmission* (Administrative Union of the German Protestant Mission to Seamen). Two years later the committee in Great Britain, which had lost all of its assets in the War, joined the *Zweckverband*, effectively centralizing the German national mission to seamen.\(^{33}\) The new members of the *Zweckverband* elected Wilhelm Thun, who had founded the New York mission station, as their president.

When the National Socialist regime came to power in 1933, the *Zweckverband* greeted it as a rebirth of Germany’s standing in the world and seafaring as a national task. Referring to the black, red, and white of the Nazi flag, the DSM proclaimed, “[Once again] our ships carry the old colors [of the Imperial German flag] in the wide world and connect the memory of five decades of German greatness with a newly strengthened will to a vigorous advancement and a better German future.”\(^{34}\) The organization quickly associated its concept of a *Brücke zu Heimat* with the new Nazi terminology of the “racial community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*).\(^{35}\) Within months, however, the DSM was engulfed in the broader debates that divided German Protestantism between Nazi-leaning

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 49.
German Christians and the independent Confessing Church. Additionally, the organization soon faced the pressures of \textit{Gleichschaltung}, or “bringing into line,” that the Nazi state applied to almost all private groups. After 1936 the National Socialist \textit{Deutsche Arbeiter Front} (German Labor Front) and the \textit{Auslands-Organisation der NSDAP} (Foreign Organization of National Socialists) latched onto the sailors’ home idea and either opened their own “National Socialist Sailors’ Homes” or pressured many local DSM committees into turning their homes over to Nazi administration. Despite such attempts at political control, the \textit{Seemannsmission}, like the German Catholic and Confessing Churches, was able to retain a small measure of independence under the Third Reich.

In conclusion, a history of masculinities in the Wilhelmine \textit{Handelsmarine} tells us a number of things about the operation of gender, power, labor reform, and global entanglements in the German Empire. First, it demonstrates that the “crisis of masculinity” around 1900 had a global dimension. Middle class liberals and Protestants, who comprised two major dominant groups in the late imperial period, responded to the transnationality of maritime labor and the global interconnections that it represented with concerns about mariners’ masculine comportment. New ideas about male bodies, sexuality, as well as shifting notions of skill and experience in the context of industrialization, contributed to the crisis in sea-manhood set against a backdrop of the broader transnational “instability” of seafaring labor. Anti-crimping campaigners and medical authorities concerned about syphilitic sailors, as well as nautical professionals,

\begin{footnotesize}
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training ship advocates, and sailors’ pastors all had one thing in common: they believed that Germany’s new global position required reformed merchant mariners who were solidly tethered to the nation through the virtues of “hegemonic” middle-class masculinity.

Second, this history tells us that masculinity was a core part of German nationalist self-presentation in the era of *Weltpolitik*. Most German liberals and Protestants viewed merchant mariners as emblems of the nation and its power in the world and therefore expected them to aspire to the middle-class masculine virtues of sexual self-restraint, industriousness, and patriotic duty and honor. In order to carry out this vision, they created a host of reform projects and programs that sought to engender a new kind of national seaman. The private charitable contexts of these projects show that naval propaganda—as part of the Wilhelmine state’s agenda—was not the sole force behind the construction of the seaman as a national figure in Wilhelmine Germany. Nor were naval soldiers the sole objects of this rhetoric; the comportment of civilian sailors also came to reflect the honor of the nation abroad.38 The broad participation of private and semi-private groups, alongside the state, in this process testifies to a wide base of support that *Weltpolitik*, broadly defined, enjoyed among the Empire’s middle classes.

Ultimately, the nationalization of German merchant mariners between 1884 and 1914 had unintended and unfortunate consequences for maritime commerce in the twentieth century. Since the 1856 Declaration of Paris a growing body of international law had sought to eliminate attacks on merchant shipping during times of war.39 In part,
these laws were justified by ideologies of private property, but they also rested on humanitarian concerns about the loss of civilian lives. As Germans transformed merchant mariners into emblems of the nation they also became wartime targets, undermining the sense that they were peaceful civilians in the proper sense. In other words, the nationalization of merchant mariners meant that they appeared much more like soldiers whose work benefitted the national cause. The positive nationalist interpretation of maritime labor that German reform groups created during the Wilhelmine period could be easily reversed: foreign sailors also labored for the nation and therefore were legitimate targets for destruction. Of course, Germans were not alone in this project. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the British public also came to view “their” merchant sailors as representatives of the nation.40

These cultural conceptions worked against the limited warfare model of the Paris Declaration, resulting in devastating consequences during the world wars of the twentieth century. During the First World War, both sides interned merchant mariners as “enemy aliens” and, more ominously, the German Empire opened the door to unrestricted warfare against civilian shipping. The Second World War proved to be far more brutal as German submarines once more sought to obliterate Allied merchant shipping. The idea that merchant mariners were emblems of the nation fit easily within a much broader and radically nationalist ideology which took root in Nazi Germany and legitimated a merciless and bloody war against civilians.

40 Williams, “The Quality, Skill and Supply of Maritime Labour.”
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R 43 Reichskanzlei
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R 4322 Technische Kommission für Seeschifffahrt
R 901 Auswärtiges Amt

Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (BA-MA)

RM 2 Kaiserliches Marinekabinett
RM 3 Reichsmarineamt
RM 5 Admiralstab der Marine

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B5 Kirchliches Aussenamt
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132 Auswärtige Angelegenheiten
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352-3 Medizinalkollegium
352-7 I Hafenarzt I
352-8/9 Bernhard-Nocht-Institut
362-5/5 Seefahrtschule Altona
373 Schifffahrtsaufsicht
621-1 Firmenarchiv - HAPAG-Reederei
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APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTAL FIGURES AND TABLES

Desertion from Hamburg-Based Vessels Outside European Waters, 1890-1910

Figure 39. Reported Desertions from Hamburg-Based Vessels Outside European Waters, 1890-1910. Source: Statistik des Seemanns-Amtes zu Hamburg 1890-1910 (Staatsarchiv Hamburg).
# German Seaman’s Home in New York (Hoboken, NJ)

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Table 2. Activities and Attendance at the German Seamen’s Home in New York Harbor (Hoboken, NJ). Sources: *Jahresberichte des Vereins fuer deutsche Seemannsfiuersorge im Hafen von New York*, 1907-1915. Certain categories of statistics did run through the entire series of annual reports. In a number of places (notably reading room visitors for 1912-14) the figures appear to be estimates rather than actual records.
### German Seamen’s Home in Buenos Aires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>German Crewmen Visited by Pastor</th>
<th>Religious Service Attendance</th>
<th>Seamen Using Hiring Agency</th>
<th>Total Lodgers</th>
<th>German Lodgers</th>
<th>Foreign Lodgers</th>
<th>Lodging Nights</th>
<th>Christmas Attendance</th>
<th>Financial Transactions on Behalf of Sailors (Reichsmarks)</th>
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Table 3. Activities and Attendance at the German Seamen’s Home in Buenos Aires. Sources: *Jahresberichte des Verein ‘Deutsches Seemannsheim’ zu Buenos Aires*, 1901-1915. Certain categories of statistics did run through the entire series of annual reports due to a variety of reasons including personnel changes and tensions between the clergy that operated the mission and the businessmen who ran the local chapter. In a number of places (notably pastoral visits for 1905-09) the figures appear to be estimates rather than actual records.