

# The US frontier as rationale for the Nazi east? Settler colonialism and genocide in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe and the American West

JENS-UWE GUETTEL

Many scholars of German and Native American history and the field of genocide studies argue that during World War II the Nazis' genocidal attempt to turn vast portions of Eastern Europe into *Lebensraum* [living space] for Aryan settlers was connected to the near-extinction of America's Native Peoples during the 'conquest' of the American west by the United States. In their view, there exist direct historical continuities between settler colonialism and genocide in the American west and Eastern Europe between 1939 and 1945. This article denies the actuality of straight links between American west and Nazi Germany's eastward expansion and argues that the Nazis did not use the settlement of western North America as a model for their occupation, colonization and extermination policies. In addition, this study shows that at least on the ground in the Soviet Union, German soldiers were not under the impression that they were carrying out a colonialist land-grab exercise. As a result, this article also challenges the notion of the existence of straight links between Western colonialism and Nazi eastward expansion. By looking at both official documents and the writings of German soldiers, the following analysis shows how and why it was by and large impossible for the Nazis to utilize the American west as a concrete model for their regime's colonial plans in Eastern Europe.

## Introduction

Many scholars of German and Native American history as well as the field of genocide studies argue that the Nazis' genocidal attempt during World War II to turn vast portions of Eastern Europe into *Lebensraum* [living space] for Aryan settlers by 'cleansing' these lands of Slavs and Jews is linked to the near-extinction of America's Native Peoples during the conquest of the American west by the United States. One of the first to connect these two events, Hitler biographer John Toland argued in the 1970s that Hitler's exterminatory views 'owed much' to the genocidal violence against Indians in the American west. Following Toland, historian David E. Stannard notes that there are 'similarities of significance . . . between the Jewish Holocaust and the Euro-American genocide against the Indians of the Americas'. The scholar Lilian Friedberg has

made similar points, while historian of Nazi Germany Adam Tooze posits that ‘the American west provided Germany with the historical warrant needed to justify the clearance of the Slav population’. In turn, historian Mark Mazower argues that ‘America provided the settlement model’ for the Nazis’ dreams of creating an *Ostreich* [Eastern Empire] for Aryan settlers in Eastern Europe. Political scientist Norman Finkelstein, historian Norman Rich, genocide studies scholar Robert Cribb and others have made either exactly the same or very similar points, while historian Alan Steinweis has criticized that ‘only rarely are the motives behind German expansionism examined in connection with the history of the American westward expansionism’. Most recently, Carroll P. Kakel III has gone so far as to maintain that the ‘USA settlement model... was primary and determinant for Hitler and Himmler’ and that the ‘genocidal patterns, logics, and pathologies’ in Eastern Europe were modelled on the US template.<sup>1</sup>

There undoubtedly exist eerie parallels between the American west and the Nazi east. The subsequent analysis shows, however, that the many above-quoted claims for direct historical connections between these events or for the American west as precedent, model or template for Nazi expansion and extermination policies are highly problematic and based on an extremely limited and lopsided source base (several of the above-cited contentions use Toland as their sole reference point). In addition, the following examination also highlights that Nazi Germany’s campaign against the Soviet Union was not summarily perceived as a colonialist endeavour by the soldiers who carried it out, either along the lines of European imperialism or American westward expansion, although historians Mark Mazower, David Furber, Jürgen Zimmerer and others have argued that Nazi expansionism was a direct offspring of colonialism and imperialism as practised by Germany and other Western countries during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This article combines a ‘top-down’ scrutiny of the historical and intellectual backdrops of Nazi living space visions (and actions) with the examination of a source group—letters written by German soldiers fighting in the east—that has never been surveyed exclusively in respect to the Nazis’ ‘living space’ plans. The subsequent analysis thus provides us with insight into the links and disengagements between the goals embraced by the upper echelons of the regime regarding eastward expansion and genocide, and the way German soldiers—the supposed ‘spearheads’ of the Nazis’ expansionist plans—understood and justified their own actions in the east.<sup>2</sup>

### **The American west and Nazi *Lebensraum* plans in Eastern Europe: theses, arguments, sources**

Alan Steinweis, the first historian to author an exclusive analysis of the assumed phenomenon of uninterrupted trajectories from the American frontier to the Nazis’ attempts to gain living space in Eastern Europe, opens his study with the following section from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*:

I adopted the attitude of all those who shake the dust of Europe from their feet with the irrevocable intention of founding a new existence in the New World and conquering a new home. Released from all the old, paralyzing ideas of profession and position, environment and tradition, they snatch at every livelihood that offers itself, grasp at every sort of work, progressing step by step to the realization that honest labor, no matter of what sort, disgraces no one.

This quote is advanced to underscore the thesis that Hitler was ‘fascinated’ by the United States and to suggest that in *Mein Kampf* he repeatedly references the ‘opportunities offered to Aryan pioneers by the westward expansion of the United States’.<sup>3</sup>

Yet this passage does not refer to the frontier. Instead, it merely extols the New World’s greater freedom of opportunity in very general terms. It is indicative of the dearth of positive references by Nazi leaders to the American frontier that this particular one is used as evidence for the alleged importance of the notion of the American frontier in Hitler’s book. Given the length of *Mein Kampf* (almost eight hundred pages), it is hard to claim that either the US or the notion of the American frontier figures at all prominently in it. Instead, the work mentions the American west only once, and interpreting even this passage as referencing the actual American frontier requires quite a bit of effort: ‘during the time of the settlement of the American continent many Aryans fought for their livelihood as trappers, hunters, etc. . . . Aryans too were therefore also initially nomads and became sedentary as time passed, but simply because of this fact one can under no circumstances conclude that Aryans were ever Jews!’. This quotation only invokes an entirely fictitious image of the life of white settlers on American soil as meta-historical ‘proof’ that Aryans cannot be and never were Jewish. Another reference to North America in *Mein Kampf* also has little to do with the American west. Instead, it focuses on differentiating the Germanic from all other supposedly inferior races: ‘North America’s population consists overwhelmingly of Germanic elements . . . . The continent thus has a different humanity [*eine andere Menschlichkeit*] and culture than Central and South America’. Even the one, terse mention in *Mein Kampf* of the United States as ‘strong’ because of the country’s size represents hardly more than an inconsequential comment irrelevant to Hitler’s Eastern Europe-focused expansionist fantasies, which can be found on hundreds of pages in the same work (without any further references to the US).<sup>4</sup>

Mentions of the US are more extensive in Hitler’s so-called ‘Second Book’, which was written in 1928 but not published in his lifetime. On about five out of 180 typescript pages, Hitler describes the United States with its continental land base as a future world hegemon and thus as a potential threat, but just as in *Mein Kampf*, America is not evoked as an example for German eastward expansion. Moreover, during the 1930s, Hitler barely mentioned the United States at all, and Nazi propaganda organs spewed out almost exclusively negative evaluations of the US, including disapproving features about the American west. Finally, after the invasion of the Soviet Union, we can again find a mere four shallow and figurative references to the US as a vast or great space and the American

west in Hitler's so-called *Table Talk*, recorded on over four hundred typescript pages.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the United States played such a minor role in Hitler's dinner and late-night conversations during the war confirms observations about the relative insignificance of the United States for Nazi leaders after the Nazis had come to power. Historian Philipp Gassert has shown that after 30 January 1933, Nazi propaganda reacted angrily to US criticism of the new regime's curtailment of democratic rights, political arrests and the boycott of Jewish stores by the SA on 1 April 1933. In reaction, official Nazi publications printed fewer and fewer positive references to the United States or the American west after 1933. Mentions of the United States in German newspapers between 1933 and 1937 were critical and frequently almost pitying analyses of the impact of the Great Depression on the American economy and cultural and political life in the US; from the perspective of the Nazi-fied press, nothing about the United States was exemplary, not even the American west. Nazi broadsheets in fact tried to diminish the allure of American frontier individualism. In April 1935, for example, the *Völkische Beobachter* printed a short piece entitled 'The Wild West lives on', penned in the paper's typical frenzied and derisive manner. Naturally, the article did not focus on the appealing sides of 'Wild West romanticism', but instead told stories of lethal vendettas between the owners of cattle herds; these hostilities, despite 'the spread of modern, civilizing influences', still persevered in America's western states, an occurrence the *Beobachter* depicted as outrageous.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, scholars have found six off-hand references to Indians and/or the American west in relation to the Nazis' 'living space' plans between 1941 and 1944, made in an SS journal, by Hans Frank, the governor of the so-called General Government Poland, and Hitler himself. Hitler made two mentions in 1941 during the early months of the Russian campaign ('The Volga must be our Mississippi' and an equation of partisans with Indians), one in 1942 (again equating partisans with Indians) and the last one (concluding an anti-American rant with the remark that 'Americans were in touch with the emptiness of the vast, open spaces') in 1943. Given the breadth and depth of the pre-1914 use of the American frontier by German colonialists, the pervasiveness of imagery of the American west, Indian battles and pioneer life along the American frontier in American, European and German popular literature both before and after 1918, Hitler's own penchant for Karl May's western novels and, as historian H. Glenn Penny has demonstrated, the proverbial German fascination with 'all things Indian', it is hardly surprising that Nazi ideologues occasionally referenced these topics. It would be astonishing if they had not done so. However, the problem with assuming that Hitler or other Nazi leaders were 'obsessed' with the American west is that these allusions were entirely metaphorical and they occurred so rarely.<sup>7</sup>

Only one additional source has been used to delineate the presence of notions of the American west in the discussions surrounding the future plans for the, as Nazi leaders hoped, soon-to-be annexed territories on the soil where the German army was advancing eastward into the Soviet Union. The document in question is a

working paper likely written by Theodor Bühler, a member of the Arbeitswissenschaftliches Institut (AWI) [Institute for Labour Sciences] of the German Labor Front (DAF). Before the invasion of the Soviet Union, the DAF under its leader Robert Ley had been involved in planning occupation policies in Austria and the Sudetenland. Once the invasion began in June 1941, Ley also wanted his organization to be involved in the exploitation of the presumably soon-to-be acquired *Ostreich* [Eastern Empire]. Ley was a powerful figure within the Nazi regime, who, despite his steadily worsening alcoholism, never lost Hitler's trust even during the latter years of the war. Yet because Himmler shared the intensity of Hitler's obsession with *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe, by the time of the invasion of the Soviet Union Ley and the DAF had been somewhat sidestepped by Himmler's SS. During a conference on 30 October 1941, even Ley was surprised to learn about the magnitude of the annexations envisioned by Hitler and Himmler. Only after this October meeting did Ley ask the AWI to draw up plans for the use of the annexed territories (analysed below), while the actual Generalplan Ost [Master Plan East] that outlined specific annexation and settlement designs was an SS project written and frequently revised by Konrad Meyer. Nevertheless, Ley's organization 'wanted in' on the planning process during November and December 1941. Following the annexation of the Sudetenland, AWI planners had attempted to create conditions that would lead to social uplift opportunities for those German workers willing to move to the newly annexed Czechoslovakian territories. However, the AWI's schemes, which were of course limited to 'pure' Germans, were either roundly rejected or ignored by the army, the SS and by industrialists willing to invest in these regions.<sup>8</sup>

Ideas about creating opportunities for future German settlers in the new Eastern Empire also underwrote the three memoranda composed by the AWI in November of 1941. Because of the steadily increasing importance of the SS, and because the DAF failed to implement analogous designs in the Sudetenland, it appears unlikely that the SS Reichssicherheitshauptamt [Reich Main Security Office], which was in charge of the Master Plan East, paid much attention to concepts of the AWI planners, although they circulated among those responsible for the east. One of these papers, an essay entitled 'The formative influence of territorial space on social policy', references the United States three times on forty-eight pages. Initially the paper notes that it needed to be determined how Germans were to be attracted to the newly won territories, thereby admitting that the eastward-oriented expansionist fantasies espoused by many Nazi leaders were not necessarily shared by average Germans. It then posited that the annexed territories presented opportunities 'that are in no way inferior to those offered to the first generations of immigrants to the American continent'. In the final reference to the US, the paper maintained that the eastern territories, because they proffered similar prospects, would 'absorb cultivated humans to the same extent as America and Australia once did'.<sup>9</sup>

This particular AWI memorandum's allusions to the United States' westward expansion were thus far from tangible. Ultimately, Bühler merely used the American frontier as metaphor; his arguments were neither dependent on American examples, nor a call to reproduce the American experience in Germany's future

east. In fact, the planners working and researching for the AWI were quite capable of envisioning the colonization and exploitation of Eastern Europe without considering American examples. The second November 1941 AWI memorandum, entitled 'The penetration of the east in respect to raw materials and agriculture', thus mused about removing the local Slavic populations but did so without a single mention of American Indian policies or the American west.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the social uplift prospects that the AWI memoranda imagined German settlers would have in the east never materialized. At the end of the day, potential settlers would not be allowed to choose these opportunities freely, but would instead be forced to take them. AWI planners envisioned a compulsory resettlement in the newly conquered areas of German peasants who were 'superfluous' in the Reich. As far as actual settlement practices on the ground in the east were concerned, historian David Blackbourn concludes that 'the settlers were treated like laboratory rats, systematically deprived of the one quality that was central both to the frontier myth and to what German advocates of "inner colonization" always said was essential—self reliance'. In addition to the fact that Nazi leaders barely referenced the United States or the American west, and even when they did, then only in the most general and emblematic ways possible, the SS's actual settlement practices in Eastern Europe as well as the AWI's plans thus demonstrate decisively that the American west was not—and in fact could not be—a concrete model for the 'German east'. Instead, for a brief moment in 1941–42, the annexed eastern lands were turned into the antithesis of the American west. Both the American Free Soil movement and the US Homestead Act of 1862 were based on the supposition that possessing land in the American west would lead to the economic independence of future settlers and would thus turn these people, unlike southern slave holders, into autonomous and virtuous citizens of the American republic. These sentiments could not be more antithetical to the visions of Heinrich Himmler and his SS planners. The price that German settlers in Eastern Europe would have to pay for the apportionment of land was 'complete lack of autonomy . . . the Third Reich was the "giver" to whom they owed everything'. If the Master Plan East had ever been carried out to its full extent, millions of men and women deemed to be of acceptable racial stock would have been forced to leave their home regions in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in order to be transplanted into lands 'planned down to the last manure pile and labour-saving kitchen'. Their new home and their completely supervised and entirely state-dependent circumstances would have had nothing in common with the actual settlement of the American west a hundred years earlier or with the republican ideology that underwrote American westward expansion and provided it with federal political support.<sup>11</sup>

### **A 'duty . . . to look upon the natives as Redskins'? German soldiers in the Soviet Union, 1941–1944<sup>12</sup>**

The war against the USSR had always been among Hitler's ideological goals. Hitler and other high-ranking Nazis viewed the USSR's regime (and socialism/communism in general) and 'international Jewry' as two sides of the same coin. Nazi leaders



of course also coveted the Soviet Union's lands west of the Ural Mountains as 'living space' for Aryan settlers; as indispensable frontier regions needed to improve Germany's territory-to-population ratio. While it thus made sense for Hitler to privately and in an off-handed fashion remark that the German invaders of the Soviet Union had 'a duty . . . to look upon natives as Redskins', the question remains whether these invaders viewed this task as their duty too. Did German soldiers see themselves as conquering pioneers who pushed native Slavs (and Jews) further and further east (or killed them outright), just as American Indians had been driven further and further west by white American settlers?<sup>13</sup>

Soldiers' letters are a problematic source because the sheer volume of documents available makes it hard to reach conclusive evaluations about the frequency of certain viewpoints. In the early 1990s, based on this source group, historian Omer Bartov concluded that 'the vast majority of soldiers had taken to the Nazis' perverted ideology'. However, since then both Bartov's supposition and his handling of these sources have been criticized, most piercingly by historian Klaus Latzel. Latzel points out the difficulties of any attempt at a comprehensive analysis of soldiers' letters. Nevertheless, because of its sheer size, the German army, which was 2.7 million strong in 1939 and by 1943–44 had swelled to 6.5 million, was more of a cross-section of German society than almost any other German institution at the time. As a result, soldiers' letters can serve to both underwrite and broaden a number of points made in the previous section of this article, most notably that, like the AWI's planners, German soldiers were perfectly capable of justifying their actions without 'deep-historical' references to European and/or American colonial expansion.<sup>14</sup>

There was a good deal of confusion among German soldiers as to what they were supposed to accomplish in the east, especially during the first weeks of the campaign. As a result, soldiers often tried to make sense of their participation in the invasion, occupation and annexation of parts of the Soviet Union based on ad hoc impressions and information immediately available to them. Many Germans, undoubtedly influenced by Nazi propaganda, viewed the eastern campaign as ultimately inevitable; as an unavoidable conflict between German 'civilization' and the barbaric, communist, 'Jew-infested' Soviet Union. In one of the rare letters to a front soldier that survived the war (most of the archived notes are from soldiers writing home), a man named Eugen writes to his friend Hans, who is among the advancing German troops, and muses about the tasks with which Hans now has to cope: 'How massive are the lands that we, that you, are now facing, as you are entering old, mysterious Russia—and the modern, cruel Soviet state! Aside from all political and military considerations I am hoping that many people will now find their freedom from Bolshevik oppression, I am especially thinking of the Ukraine'. The letter actually continues with some veiled criticism of the Nazi regime's continuous warfare, but despite these sentiments it becomes clear that even for someone not entirely convinced by official propaganda statements, the Soviet Union presented enough of a perceived threat and source of fear that the invasion appeared to be justified. Many, maybe even most, Germans—civilians and soldiers alike—did not unreservedly believe everything

presented to them by official propaganda (soldiers at times mentioned their critical attitude towards official information in their letters), but there nevertheless existed a positive feedback effect between certain official propaganda statements and pre-existing (i.e. pre-Nazi) antisemitic, anti-communist, anti-Slavic and nationalist sentiments embraced by many (though of course not all) Germans. Heinz Rahe, a soldier whose letters are analysed below, could thus easily jump from expressing doubt over a propaganda piece that maintained that England's Anglican Church had been permeated by communist attitudes to uncritically accepting official claims that Soviet political commissars were shot only because they had previously ordered the killings of Ukrainians, or that aerial bombings of German towns were 'the Jews' revenge'. Rahe's letters reveal that he believed propaganda that confirmed already existing prejudices, while he could be quite fault-finding towards reports that conflicted with his views.<sup>15</sup>

One specific rationale is especially prevalent in letters written home during the early months of the war, namely the notion that the German invasion of the USSR was at least partially about liberating the Ukraine from Soviet tyranny. It can be found both in official propaganda and in private letters and conversations. First Lieutenant Manfred von Plotho, whose sentiments were those of a decided nationalist with strong Nazi leanings, thus used the massacre of thousands of political prisoners in Lemberg by the Red Army as justification for Germany's invasion (although these killings had occurred after the German advance had already begun):

The Soviets systematically killed everyone when Lemberg became untenable. When it came to reports from Bolshevist Russia or back then from Red Spain, I sometimes thought that what was said was hyperbole, a primitive appeal to sensationalist instincts. Now I know better. There is no pen that can contest [sic: *bestreiten*] what we saw. No publishing house, no newspaper in a civilized country would print an exact account, simply out of decency. And this underworld [*Unterwelt*] is allied with London. These Jewish-Asiatic hordes were supposed to be let loose against our old, cultured nation. How cynical, what crime against any belief in this world's goodness and beauty.<sup>16</sup>

The Lemberg massacre was duly exploited by German propaganda, which used the atrocities committed by Soviet forces as post-factum justification for the German offensive. Plotho accepted this sentiment and perceived the German advance as a battle of civilization against sub-human barbarity. Other soldiers were brutal in an even more literal manner and exploited 'Lemberg' to support their own ruthless and exterminatory treatment of prisoners of war and civilians: 'Well, these beasts will receive the punishment that is their due. Maybe you have already noticed that the battles have resulted in very few prisoners. Every one of them we have found before our rifles is no more'. Along similar lines, Hans-Joachim S. noted, utilizing the Nazis' equation of Soviets/communists/Jews, that 'the Russian [*der Russe*] burns down everything. One thousand five hundred Jews were shot today as retribution for the destruction of the city'. Two weeks later, he wrote: 'The town is full of Jews. Shots ring out constantly. They're all getting whacked'. For none of these men, however, was Germany's



incursion into the Ukraine tied to Nazi living space ideology. At the very least they did not think to mention it in their letters, although soldiers such as Hans-Joachim S. had no qualms penning other views linked to Nazi ideology and propaganda, for example exterminatory antisemitic sentiments. For Plotho in particular, the best educated and most socially situated writer among the ones cited above, the fight against the Soviet Union was sufficiently justified by the fact that the USSR was now ‘allied with London’—although just like the massacres in Lemberg this development was of course the result of Germany’s invasion and not its cause.<sup>17</sup>

The above-mentioned Rahe, who had been a Protestant minister and was not quite as unambiguously nationalist as Plotho, also used the ‘liberation’ of the Ukraine in order to overcome his surprisingly clear doubts about the invasion of the Soviet Union. In a long letter from July 1941, about one month after the beginning of the campaign, Rahe told his wife about the discussions he and his fellow soldiers were having about this war:

Yesterday and this morning I talked with fellow soldiers and our field chaplains about the purpose of this war . . . Why? . . . Sadly I did not have the chance to listen to the official statement of the government. Yesterday the most disparate reasons were discussed. One of us argued that the political commissars, who are often Jewish, were about to drive the faltering Red Army into battle. Another said that their reign finally needs to be broken . . . But is this goal worth the sacrifice of German blood? Yet another one therefore said that it would have been better to build a defensive wall in the east in order to be able to defend ourselves. Why should we care about the east? But we probably need the fertile Ukraine in order to secure our alimentation for the continuation of the war. . . . When we then passed by a former church, I began hoping again that in a free Ukraine Christian annunciation will be possible again. For me, this wish is also a goal worth fighting for. . . . My feelings are so different from those young volunteers of the Great War. This battle with Russia appears simply all too pointless. It also does not provide us with a clear purpose . . . It’s easier to fight for Alsace or a free Rhine, for a German Danzig and West Prussia than for a Russia free from Jewish influence. The sheer vastness of Russia is an additional worry for many. We have now advanced 500 km into enemy territory. Is this the beginning or the end?<sup>18</sup>

It is unclear whether Rahe describes his own thoughts, hiding them behind a fictitious discussion with fellow soldiers in order to protect himself from potential repercussions in case his letter was read by censors, or whether the viewpoints he recounts did indeed, as he states, represent different opinions of various soldiers. Be that as it may, Rahe was clearly confused, worried and doubtful about the purpose of this war, to the point of questioning it in its entirety. His attempts at imagining that this campaign was about destroying the anti-religious Soviet Union and thereby also about establishing freedom of religion in the Ukraine certainly helped him to justify his and Nazi Germany’s actions during the first weeks of the war. He also reflected on the usefulness of the Ukraine as a provider of food-stuffs, although his perspective on this matter was not identical to Nazi ‘living space’ ideology, as it linked the Ukraine’s usefulness merely to the ongoing war effort. Instead of being fascinated by the quality of the soil or the vast spaces Germany was occupying and still invading, Rahe was scared by the

land's immensity. Ultimately, all of the reasons Rahe initially pondered did not convince him. As he stated himself, he felt completely unlike the enthusiastic volunteers of the Great War in August 1914. At the same time, Rahe's letters, apart from his initial problems with the war in the east, contained no particularly critical views of the regime and he also frequently made antisemitic statements.<sup>19</sup>

By revealing himself as somewhat critical of the regime, at least regarding the Russian campaign, but overall also entirely loyal, Rahe's views were likely not those of an isolated outcast. His reflections on the temporary need for the grain-producing Ukraine can be interpreted both as a matter-of-fact way of making sense of the war and its logistics and as an effort to strip Nazi 'living space' ideology of its too grandiose and utopian overtones so as to make it fit Rahe's more 'moderately' nationalist worldview, which was, at least compared to the Nazis' hyper-nationalism, not only decidedly Protestant but also relatively un-dogmatic. During the first months of the war, for both Plotho and Rahe, two men with very different perceptions of the war and the Nazi regime, Germany's expansion into the Ukraine and Russia had ties neither to the history of European and American expansionism, regardless whether overseas or continental, nor to Nazi 'living space' notions. Instead, eastward expansion acquired its perceived necessity through the war itself.<sup>20</sup>

The overall impression gleaned from the letters scrutinized for this article is that remarks about the inferiority of Russians and Jews can be found quite frequently, whereas references to (not to speak of actual elaborations on) Nazi Germany's expansion and colonization plans are very rare. Many, if not most, of the scrutinized letters mention the authors' wishes to return home as quickly as possible; sentiments often undergirded by extremely disparaging comments about Russians as 'dirty', 'animal-like' and generally uncultured, although opposite views existed as well. Here and there, this common disgust with 'the east' and its inhabitants even resulted in veiled criticism of the Nazis' fetishization of Eastern Europe. In mid October 1941, the soldier Gerhard Kunde thus wrote to his mother: 'Otherwise I have nothing extraordinary to report. Today, it has been 17 weeks since we started living in this Promised Land, but I would be lying if I claimed that we thought that there was anything positive about this place. On the contrary, our longing for central-European culture is becoming stronger and stronger'. This statement is all the more relevant as far as the development of Kunde's views and opinions are concerned, as one of his letters (from 15 June 1941, one week before the invasion) does in fact contain specific references to Hitler's visions of 'living space' in the east, particularly in the Ukraine. Yet in all of his notes written after 22 June 1941, he never mentions this topic again. Instead, once he was in the Soviet Union, the 'Promised Land' did not seem at all promising.<sup>21</sup>

Noting the dearth of scholarship on regular soldiers' interest in and knowledge of Nazi colonization plans, historian Sven Oliver Müller points out that it is 'surprising' that some soldiers were discussing 'living space' ideas in their letters, thus insinuating that these plans were more widely known and accepted than commonly assumed. Yet given that ideas about 'living space in the east' underwrite large portions of *Mein Kampf*, of which almost eleven million copies had been

sold by 1944, it is indeed rather predictable that soldiers with at least some knowledge of national-socialist ideology would be familiar with the Nazis' fetishization of eastward expansion. Moreover, as younger and younger soldiers were drafted between 1943 and 1945, more and more soldiers had also been confronted with living space ideology in high school and the Hitler Youth. Rahe's and Kunde's takes on this problem provide us with two opposite glimpses into the sentiments of an older generation of soldiers regarding these expansionist plans (they were both around thirty years of age in 1941). Kunde's initial viewpoint was ideological: he had either read or heard of the long sections in *Mein Kampf* that celebrated Eastern Europe as necessary 'Lebensraum' for a revived Greater Germany ordered along racial lines. Before 22 June 1941, for Kunde these ideas were clearly sufficient to justify (by utilizing Hitler-like references to Germanic tribes no less) a potential invasion: '[I]t becomes obvious that beginning with the Cimbri and Teutons 2,000 years ago various nations have again and again invaded foreign lands because they were in desperate need for space [*Raumnot*]'. Yet it seems that for Kunde these ideological concepts lost their appeal during the war: Nazi ideology makes no appearance in any of his letters between 22 June 1941 and the end of the war. This absence is made especially glaring given his rather long disquisition on Hitler's expansionist ideas in his note from early June 1941.<sup>22</sup>

Kunde was eleven years older than the author of the only letter referencing eastern colonization from late in the war (August 1944) that could be found among the examined writings. Its author, Hans-Karl Schmidt, was nineteen when he wrote it. He had been drafted as a high school student in 1943. At the front, Schmidt clearly tried to reconcile the visions of eastern settlement propagated by the regime with the reality he encountered: the German eastern front was pushed further and further westward during Schmidt's service. Schmidt himself was disappointed by 'the east' and in a disheartened manner admitted that he 'understood that the settlement of the east is so hard. In Posen and Western Prussia, it kind of works because a certain part of the population is purely German. Yet the General Government can only be an area of exploitation, as long as Germany does not work with its own farmers there'.<sup>23</sup>

In Schmidt's case it is safe to assume that at least to some degree his views about the necessity of German settlements in the east (and the complete displacement of the native population) stemmed from his time in the Hitler Youth and from his high school geography classes. By the time the nineteen-year-old Schmidt arrived at the front, Kunde and Rahe had long since changed their minds on this matter, albeit in opposite directions. In both cases, it was the war itself that brought about this change. While Kunde moved away from ideological explanations and Hitler's reasoning for 'living space in the east', Rahe became increasingly fascinated by 'the politics of space', as he put it in October 1941. While very obviously uninterested in (even scared of) the annexation of the Ukraine, and/or parts of Russia and Belorussia in July 1941, he proclaimed in March 1943 that 'only the east is important for us!' There can be no question that by 1943 the well-educated Rahe had become intoxicated by the presumed possibilities for Germany in Eastern Europe, which included German settlements as

well as the alimentation of Germany with grain, although his March 1943 letter (written one month after the end of the Battle of Stalingrad) was also the last in which he mentions the importance of gaining land in the east. He clearly was realist enough to acknowledge that after the complete loss of the 6th Army, the territorial gains in the east would be difficult to hold. Overall it is hard to determine whether Rahe changed his mind from fear and scepticism to cautious enthusiasm for eastward expansion (and eventually to overall resignation after March 1943) because of propaganda, or because of an overwhelming need (as articulated in his letters from the early days of the 'Russlandfeldzug') to somehow make sense of the invasion. Rahe's early letters reveal a tortured mind, desperately searching for purpose. It therefore appears likely that Rahe's change of mind was, at least in part, the result of his own, independent thought processes. For both Rahe and Kunde the war brought with it its own set of rules, codes of behaviour and emotional and psychological challenges, the developmental dynamism of which shaped their views, changed their minds and made them either more or less receptive towards official propaganda, especially regarding the colonization of Eastern Europe. While this interpretation is supported by the materials analysed for this article, it cannot and should not be ignored that the intellectual and emotional changes undergone by Rahe and Kunde occurred after years of misinformation, indoctrination and propaganda, and also started to develop within a pre-Nazi nationalist, antisemitic, anti-communist and anti-Slavic intellectual framework.<sup>24</sup>

Under these circumstances, for a number of soldiers, invasion, expansion and annexation could be sufficiently explained against an immediate backdrop: the Lemberg massacre, the subsequent (and temporary) notion of liberating the Ukraine and the German military's need for foodstuffs were enough to at least momentarily overcome questions about the reasons for the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The history of Western imperialism and colonialism therefore played either insignificant or, in the case of the American west, non-existing roles for these soldiers. The complete absence of allusions to the American west, both in the letters used for this article and in those scrutinized by other scholars, is also highly indicative of the overall lack of such references in propaganda and other official statements.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

This article approaches the question of the existence of direct links between the American west and the Nazi east from both historiographical and source-analytical perspectives. It shows that because of the scarcity of evidence in official documents, conversations of high-ranking Nazi officials and the writings of those who fought at the eastern front, notions of straight historical trajectories from the American frontier to Eastern Europe under Nazi German occupation should be approached with great caution. The letters examined for this article indicate (in a frightening fashion) that German soldiers in the east did not need a 'broad' or 'deep' historical backdrop such as the American west in order to accept and/or justify both the invasion of the Soviet Union and the envisioned massive

annexations, along with the accompanying massacres of Jews, other civilians and prisoners of war. Ideological or historical-political factors were indeed all-important for the upper echelons of the regime, and the same factors were probably also more important for younger soldiers, who were drafted into the army straight out of school during the last two years of the war, than for older members of the Wehrmacht. Ultimately, however, the war the regime had forced upon Europe and the world in 1939 created an atmosphere so laden with tension and anxiety, both fostered and exploited by official propaganda, that in June 1941 even older German soldiers were willing to commit themselves to a campaign that, from the perspective of Hitler and his regime, was entirely about ideological war aims: the annexation of 'living space' as well as the destruction of Judaism and communism. Yet while a base level of both indoctrination and pre-existing antisemitic, anti-Slavic and anti-communist sentiments provided an important backdrop, for the soldiers this war was rarely ever rooted in their acceptance of living space ideology. In the end, for many the war created its own drastic (and often circular) logic. As a result, more proximate and 'smaller' considerations were often persuasive enough for soldiers to become accomplices in the Holocaust and participants in a war that was ultimately about clearing huge swaths of Ukrainian, Russian and Belorussian land of its inhabitants in order to make room for Aryan settlers. A soldier like Rahe did thus eventually become fascinated by *Raumpolitik* in the east, as he wrote to his wife. Yet it was the Russian campaign itself, not the idea that he was engaged in a land-grab enterprise modelled on the conquest of the American west or other Western colonial enterprises, that eventually led him to change his mind.<sup>26</sup>

While the American west was important neither for Nazi leaders nor for German soldiers in the east, Hitler's infrequent remarks on the United States have nevertheless been employed to argue for the 'primary and determinant' importance of the US frontier in the Nazis' *Lebensraum* plans. This notion may have taken on a life of its own because it provides critics of American historical myth-making with an especially stark point of reference for their condemnation of British colonial and US continental expansion. This is especially true in respect to the old and disproven notion of the benignity of American westward expansion and the illusion, widespread during the first decades of the Cold War, that the US, unlike the imperialist European nations, was not implicated in the subjugation and exploitation of colonial subjects and lands. The use by Norman Finkelstein, Ward Churchill, David Stannard, Lilian Friedberg and Carroll P. Kakel of American west/Nazi east connections is either very obviously or at the very least implicitly motivated by the objective of highlighting the brutality of American expansionism by establishing connections to the Holocaust: making the argument for direct links between the American west and the Nazi German east helps to emphasize those of their findings that show that the Euro-American conquest of the North American continent, both before and after the founding of the United States, rested at least partially on ruthless measures of expulsion and extinction.

Specialists in German history have of course also argued for links between the American west and Nazi eastward expansion, albeit, and this is an important

distinction, merely in short asides, which are meant to acknowledge the fact that Nazi leaders sporadically referenced the American West. In turn, Geoff Eley has recently argued that ‘National Socialism aspired to remake Germany’s social imaginary’. Eley defines this concept, which, according to historian A. Dirk Moses, has its ‘earliest and most systematic elaboration’ in Cornelius Castoriadis’s book *The imaginary institution of society*, as ‘the cognitive ground of thought, beliefs and assumptions from which human agency may materialize’. Clearly the US frontier as mythological space was anchored so deeply in the very social imaginary the Nazis were attempting to remake that even they could not quite escape the meta-historical purchase of the American west and thus included it at least occasionally among the historical precedents from which they drew inspiration.<sup>27</sup>

In early twentieth-century Germany, both the United States in general and the American west in particular were doubtlessly part of the social imaginary. The American west conjured up notions of spatial expansion, reservations, relocation, replacement and extermination in respect to its ‘inferior’ native population. At the same time, it invoked visions of individual liberty, freedom and economic independence and prosperity for white settlers—and the Nazis indeed attempted to remake these elements of the German social imaginary. Nazi propaganda, as indicated by the *Völkische Beobachter* article referenced above, tried to continuously chip away at these longstanding positive images of the American west in German popular culture. Yet everything that could potentially influence and/or determine any kind of thought and/or action was of course part of the German social imaginary. During the 1920s, the German Communists thus embraced a radical, consciously anti-racist and anti-imperialist internationalism, Social Democrats promoted still-current notions of a moderately socialist democratic republicanism, while liberals such as Gustav Stresemann worked towards peaceful, multilateral relations with Germany’s erstwhile western enemies. If we utilize the valid and very effective notion of a German social imaginary, we by necessity also posit, as Castoriadis himself recognized in more general terms, that the Nazis as well as all of these other very differently politicized groups and individuals had at least potential access to the same stockpile of concepts, ideas and intellectual frameworks. As a result, the processes through which some of the elements contained in this inventory either engendered or failed to engender agency in certain individuals and/or groups are as important for us as the necessary queries into what constituted this imaginary. The question therefore is not why, in rare instances, America had some meta-historical purchase for the Nazis—because the US and the American frontier were ubiquitous in pre-1933 Germany (this phenomenon has been analysed by H. Glenn Penny, myself and a host of other scholars)—but why it had so little.<sup>28</sup>

Especially considering the ubiquity of visions and images of America and the US frontier in early twentieth-century Germany, Hitler and other Nazi leaders were in fact remarkably successful at not referencing these topics. If indeed America was never far from Hitler’s mind, at the very least it was much further from his mind than cars, engines, civil engineering, architectural and religious questions, and even the virtues of vegetarian and unprocessed foodstuffs. All of these topics received significantly more attention (i.e. they repeatedly occupy



whole paragraphs or multiple pages in Hitler's *Monologues*) than the American west. After all, while Hitler ranted for hours about the future German *Lebensraum* in the east, in the space of more than two years he only dedicated four terse, sub-clause-length asides to the American west.

According to Geoff Eley, Nazi ideology has returned 'to the historiographical centreground of the Third Reich', and focusing on Nazi ideology reveals that Nazi leaders rejected nineteenth-century 'liberal-capitalist' colonialism—and therefore by necessity also the United States, which played a prominent role in pre-1914 liberal-imperialist discourses. Because of their scattered and entirely emblematic qualities, even the few pithy references by Hitler and other leading Nazis to the American west thus represent an obvious break with previous generations of German imperialist scholars who engaged with the US frontier in great detail and travelled the United States widely to do so. Among them were Friedrich Ratzel, the creator of the term *Lebensraum* (although his use of the term had little in common with the way the Nazis utilized it), the conservative economist Max Sering (who admired the American 'winning' of the west but at the same time explicitly recognized, despite claims to the contrary, that it could not serve as a model for internal colonization attempts in the eastern/Polish regions of Prussia), the national-liberal imperialist Carl Peters and the famed Max Weber. Before 1914, the United States was important for the German colonial enterprise in very practical terms as well: the American south served as a model for efforts to turn German-Togo into a profitable, cotton-exporting colony. German colonialists also travelled the American west, eventually recommending the state of Arizona as a tangible example for German Southwest Africa. While pre-1914 German colonialists thus looked for actual instruction in the American south and west, the Nazis' hatred of the 'liberalist' and 'Jew-infested' United States was so deep that they even disregarded US racial segregation measures—because they were 'liberalist' and 'casuistic'—instead of using them as (rather obvious) models.<sup>29</sup>

Along similar ideological lines, Nazi leaders intended their *Ostreich* to be the direct opposite of Imperial Germany's 'liberalist colonialism' before 1914: no more pointless adventures in faraway lands, no more diplomacy or cooperation with either natives or other European powers, and, unlike in the American west, no individual freedom for its future settlers. Instead, in Nazi-controlled Eastern Europe a radical ('revolutionary', according to Hitler) and entirely racialized way of maintaining newly conquered lands was to replace the traditional—and often politically liberal and *laissez-faire* practices (at least in respect to white settlers)—of German and European colonialism. To solve the 'space emergency' of the German people, a 'greater living space' had to be gained—but only in Eastern Europe and under tight state control and supervision not (Hitler made this very clear) 'based on liberal-capitalist notions through the exploitation of colonies'.<sup>30</sup>

The obvious tensions between Nazi ideology and pre-1914 liberal-imperialist traditions and their positive evaluations of the American west therefore suggest that a dialectical interpretation of the correlation between these two phenomena might prove to be a useful addition to the concept of a German social imaginary.

This approach reveals that pre-1914 imperialism and post-1918 visions of living space in the east existed as perceived opposites within a framework of ideological tension, and not as either contingent but nevertheless direct outgrowths of Germany's social imaginary, or as a straight line of gradual historical development. From the Nazis' point of view, Germany's defeat in 1918 demonstrated the rottenness of the German Empire's expansionism, which in their view had never been German or Aryan in the first place. Instead, pre-1914 German colonialism had been 'liberalist'. Nazi expansionism with its neglect of the American west was thus tied to the German Empire's liberal colonialism, which had glorified the US frontier and turned it into a concrete model for Germany's African colonies. Nazi expansionism thus needed pre-1914 German imperialism as an Other, as a vilified but necessary point of departure.<sup>31</sup>

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the editors of the *Journal of Genocide Research*, in particular A. Dirk Moses, who gave much-needed editorial input and patiently awaited the final manuscript version. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers, Sigrid Güttel for her indispensable research assistance, Sarah Paulu Boittin for her many editorial comments and Jennifer Boittin for her conceptual and editorial support.

### Endnotes

- 1 John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 702; Norman Rich, 'Hitler's foreign policy', in Gordon Martel (ed.), *The origins of the Second World War reconsidered: the A. J. P. Taylor debate after twenty-five years* (Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 136; Alan E. Steinweis, 'Eastern Europe and the notion of the "frontier" in Germany to 1945', *Yearbook of European Studies*, Vol. 13, 1999, p. 57; Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust industry: reflections of the exploitation of Jewish suffering* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 145; Lilian Friedberg, 'Dare to compare: Americanizing the Holocaust', *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2000, pp. 360–361; Ward Churchill, *Struggle for the land: Native North American resistance to genocide, ecocide and colonization* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2002), pp. 352–353; Mark Mazower, *Hitler's empire. Nazi rule in occupied Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 584; Carroll P. Kakel, *The American west and the Nazi east: a comparative and interpretive perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 2, 215–216; Robert Cribb, 'Genocide in the non-western world', in Steven L. B. Jensen (ed.), *Genocide: cases, comparisons and contemporary debates* (Copenhagen: The Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 2003), p. 137; Wendy Lower, *Nazi empire-building and the Holocaust in the Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 3, 19; David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: the conquest of the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 153; Adam Tooze, *The wages of destruction: the making and breaking of the Nazi economy* (London: Viking, 2007), p. 469. For a convincing and nuanced treatment of the role of the American west in the context of German colonialist visions of Eastern Europe, see Kristin Kopp, *Germany's wild east: constructing Poland as colonial space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012). Adam Tooze makes a brief reference to the similarities between the American west and the Nazis' activities in his *The wages of destruction*, but his actual argument for the importance of the United States for the Nazis has a different trajectory. He argues that beginning in 1928 the United States became significant for Hitler, yet this significance was not grounded in the United States' exemplary status for a future, eastward-expanding Greater Germany. Instead, the US was seen as a monstrosity, a nation that because of the large landmass it controlled was more advantageously situated than any European nation and was therefore a threat. This interpretation builds on historian Andreas Hillgruber's influential 'intentionalist' (meaning 'based on Hitler's intentions') explanation of Nazi foreign policy objectives. In the 1960s, Hillgruber posited that Nazi foreign policy goals rested on a stage-by-stage plan—*Stufenplan*—that envisioned an eventual

- showdown between the newly created 'world power' Germany with its vast eastern *Lebensraum* and the United States. Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German expansionism, imperial liberalism, and the United States, 1776–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 194.
- 2 Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at war* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 179–180; David Furber, 'Near as far in the colonies: the Nazi occupation of Poland', *International History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2004, pp. 541–542; Kakel, *The American west*, pp. 216–217; Ben Kiernan, *Blood and soil. A world history of genocide and extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 416–417; Benjamin Madley, 'From Africa to Auschwitz: how German Southwest Africa incubated ideas and methods adopted and developed by the Nazis in eastern Europe', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2005, pp. 429–464; Mazower, *Hitler's empire*, p. xxxix; Jürgen Zimmerer, 'The birth of the Ostland out of the spirit of colonialism: a postcolonial perspective on the Nazi policy of conquest and extermination', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2005, p. 199; Hannes Heer, 'Einübung in den Holocaust: Lemberg Juni/Juli 1941', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Vol. 49, No. 5, 2001, pp. 409–427; Walter Manoschek, 'Es gibt nur eines für das Judentum: Vernichtung': *Das Judenbild in deutschen Soldatenbriefen 1939–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995); Sven Oliver Müller, 'Nationalismus in der deutschen Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945', in Jörg Echternkamp (ed.), *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945. Zweiter Halbband: Ausbeutung, Deutung, Ausgrenzung* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005), pp. 9–92; Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, 'The pre-history of the Holocaust? The Sonderweg and Historikerstreit debates and the abject colonial past', *Central European History*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2008, pp. 477–503; Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, 'Hannah Arendt's ghosts: reflections on the disputable path from Windhoek to Auschwitz', *Central European History*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2009, pp. 279–300; Katrin A. Kilian, 'Kriegsstimmungen. Emotionen einfacher Soldaten in Feldpostbriefen', in Jörg Echternkamp (ed.), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft. Zweiter Halbband: Ausbeutung, Deutung, Ausgrenzung* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005), pp. 251–252; Michaela Kipp, 'The Holocaust in the letters of German soldiers on the eastern front (1939–44)', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2007, pp. 70–74, 79. See also Anatoly Golovchansky, 'Ich will raus aus diesem Wahnsinn'. *Deutsche Briefe von der Ostfront. 1941–1945: Aus sowjetischen Archiven* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993).
  - 3 Steinweis, 'Eastern Europe', pp. 56–57.
  - 4 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Zentralverlag der N.S.d.A.P., 1936), pp. 24/25, 153, 313, 33.
  - 5 Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Albrecht Knaus Verlag, 1980), pp. 78, 90, 91, 168, 398; Gerhard L. Weinberg (ed.), *Hitlers zweites Buch* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1961), pp. 128–132. See also Gerhard L. Weinberg, 'Hitler's image of the United States', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 69, No. 4, 1964, p. 1007; Ian Kershaw, *Fateful choices: ten decisions that changed the world, 1940–1941* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007), p. 38; Steinweis, 'Eastern Europe', pp. 56–57, 61–62, 65; Otto Maull, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika als Großreich* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1940), pp. 152–153. Klaus P. Fischer's very recent book *Hitler and America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) does not address the question of potential links between the American west and the German east. Compare Kakel, *The American west*, p. 35; Jens-Uwe Guettel, 'The American west and the Nazi east: a comparative and interpretative perspective (book review)', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 14, Nos. 3–4, 2012, pp. 514–519. Otto Maull's *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika als Großreich*, despite claims to the contrary, does not in fact promote the American west as a model for Germany's eastward expansion. See Guettel, *German expansionism*, p. 211. In English-language works, Hitler's Monologe [cursive] are often referred to as Table Talk [cursive].
  - 6 Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich. Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung, 1933–1945* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), pp. 87, 204; 'Der "Wilde Westen" lebt noch! "Weidelandgesetz" in den USA. Fehden mit Revolvern und Lasso zwischen Herdenbesitzern', *Der Völkische Beobachter*, 20 April 1935.
  - 7 Hitler, *Monologe*, pp. 78, 90, 91, 168, 398; Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich*, pp. 98, 247; Jens-Uwe Guettel, 'From the frontier to German South-West Africa: German colonialism, Indians, and American westward expansion', *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2010, pp. 523–552; H. Glenn Penny, 'Elusive authenticity: the quest for the authentic Indian in German public culture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2006, pp. 798–820; Andrew Zimmerman, 'A German Alabama in Africa: the Tuskegee expedition to German Togo and the transnational origins of West African cotton growers', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 110, 2005, pp. 1362–1398; Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Colin G. Calloway (ed.), *Germans and Indians: fantasies, encounters, projections* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). On Hitler's infatuation with Karl May, see esp. Hartmut Lutz, 'German indianthiasm: a socially constructed German national(ist) myth', pp. 167–185, in Calloway, *Germans and Indians*.
  - 8 Karl Heinz Roth, 'Das Arbeitswissenschaftliche Institut der Deutschen Arbeitsfront und die Ostplanung', in Mechthild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher (eds.), *Der 'Generalplan Ost': Hauptlinien der*

- nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1993), p. 218; Tooze, *The wages of destruction*, p. 530.
- 9 Ronald Smelser, *Robert Ley: Hitler's Labor Front leader* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), p. 263; Roth, 'Das Arbeitswissenschaftliche Institut', pp. 220–221.
  - 10 Roth, 'Das Arbeitswissenschaftliche Institut', pp. 215–226. See also Robert L. Nelson, 'The "Archive for Inner Colonization", the German east and World War I', in Robert L. Nelson (ed.), *Germans, Poland, and colonial expansion to the east* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 66.
  - 11 David Blackburn, *The conquest of nature: water, landscape and the making of modern Germany* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), pp. 284–287; Roth, 'Das Arbeitswissenschaftliche Institut', pp. 215–226; Tooze, *The wages of destruction*, p. 526; Eric Foner, *Free soil, free labor, free men: the ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Drew McCoy, *The elusive republic: political economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Daniel T. Rodgers, 'Republicanism: the career of a concept', *Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 1, 1992, pp. 11–38.
  - 12 Kakel, *The American west*, p. 1.
  - 13 See Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'Hitlers Entschluss zum "Lebensraum"-Krieg im Osten: Programmatisches Ziel oder militärstrategisches Kalkül?', pp. 83–111, in Gerd R. Ueberschär and Wolfgang Wette (eds.), *'Unternehmen Barbarossa': der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984).
  - 14 Bartov quoted in Klaus Latzel, 'Wehrmachtssoldaten zwischen "Normalität" und NS-Ideologie, oder: Was sucht die Forschung in der Feldpost?', in Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds.), *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), p. 577. For this article, eleven complete 'convolutes', i.e. a complete series of letters from one author, were analysed. Each convolute contained between ten and fifty letters from the time of the author's entry into the Wehrmacht until his death or capture. In addition, many odd pieces from other authors were analysed. Overall, around four hundred letters from the *Museumstiftung Post und Telekommunikation* were scrutinized. The vast majority of these letters contained no references to 'living space' ideas or plans, and not a single letter referenced the American west. See also Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: the German soldier in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 9; Walter Manoschek (ed.), *Die Wehrmacht im Rassenkrieg: Der Vernichtungskrieg hinter der Front* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 1996); Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten: Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis - Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998); Karl Heinrich Pohl (ed.), *Wehrmacht und Vernichtungspolitik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Robert Gellately, *Hingeschaut und weggesehen. Hitler und sein Volk* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002); Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's war of extermination in the east* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011). On methodological questions in respect to 'Soldatenbriefe', see also Martin Humburg, 'Feldpostbriefe aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg—Werkstattbericht zu einer Inhaltsanalyse', *H-Soz-u-Kult*, available at: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/beitrag/essays/feld.htm>; Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998). For statistics, see Michael Geyer, "'There is a land where everything is pure: its name is land of death": some observations on catastrophic nationalism', in Marcus Funck, Greg Eghigian and Matthew Paul Berg (eds.), *Sacrifice and national belonging in twentieth-century Germany* (Arlington, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 122.
  - 15 Eugen to Hans, 22 June 1941, *Museumstiftung Post und Telekommunikation* (hereafter MSPT), 3.2002.0210; Heinz Rahe to his wife, 29 June 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0985; Heinz Rahe to his wife, 7 September 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0985; Heinz Rahe to his wife, 11 March 1943, MSPT, 3.2002.0985.
  - 16 Manfred von Plotho to his wife, 30 June 1941, MSPT, 3.2008.2195.
  - 17 *Deutsche Wochenschau*, 9 July 1941, available at: <http://archive.org/details/1941-07-09-Die-Deutsche-Wochenschau-566>; Martin Meier to his wife, 7 July 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0904; Hans-Joachim S. to his wife, 8 July 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.1214; Hans-Joachim S. to his wife, 23 July 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.1214; Paul Wortmann to his parents, 12 June 1942, MSPT, 3.2002.0935.
  - 18 Hans Rahe to his wife, 18 July 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0985.
  - 19 *Compare Gustav Böker to his parents*, 27 June 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0966.
  - 20 Müller, 'Nationalismus', p. 75.
  - 21 Hans-Karl Schmidt to his parents, 8 August 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0251; Gerhard Kunde to his mother, 19 October 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.1941; Gerhard Kunde to his mother, 15 June 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0864; Müller, 'Nationalismus', pp. 73–74.
  - 22 Müller, 'Nationalismus', p. 74–80; Gerhard Kunde to his mother, 15 June 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0864; Gerhard Kunde to his mother, 20 February 1945, MSPT, 3.2002.0864.
  - 23 Hans-Karl Schmidt to his parents, 20 August 1944, MSPT, 3.2002.0251.

- 24 Heinz Rahe to his wife, 28 October 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0985; Heinz Rahe to his wife, 11 March 1941, MSPT, 3.2002.0985; Heinz Rahe to his wife, 11 March 1943, MSPT, 3.2002.0985; Heske Henning, '... Und morgen die ganze Welt': *Erdkundeunterricht in Nationalsozialismus* (Gießen: Focus Verlag, 1988); Fritz Brennecke, *Vom deutschen Volk und seinem Lebensraum: Handbuch für die Schulungsarbeit in der HJ* (Munich: Eher Verlag, 1937).
- 25 Müller, 'Nationalismus', pp. 79–80; Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, pp. 119–120.
- 26 Müller, 'Nationalismus', p. 76; Latzel, 'Wehrmachtssoldaten', p. 582.
- 27 Eley, 'Empire, ideology, and the east', in Claus-Christian Szejmman and Maiken Umbach (eds.), *Heimat, region, empire: spatial identities under National Socialism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 262–269; A. Dirk Moses, 'Redemptive antisemitism and the imperialist imaginary', in Christian Wiese and Paul Betts (eds.), *Years of prosecution, years of extermination: Saul Friedländer and the future of Holocaust studies* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), p. 237; Cornelius Castoriadis, *The imaginary institution of society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 23.
- 28 Geoff Eley, *Nazism as fascism: violence and ideology and the ground of consent in Germany 1930–1945* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 131. Compare also Moses, 'Redemptive antisemitism', pp. 237–238. For a detailed bibliography on the German fascination with Native Americans, see Guettel, *German expansionism*, p. 83.
- 29 Guettel, *German expansionism*, pp. 93–111, 164–171, 201–202; Eley, *Empire, ideology and the east*, pp. 262–275.
- 30 Hitler quoted in Guettel, *German expansionism*, p. 188; Roberta Pergher et al., 'Scholarly forum on the Holocaust and genocide', *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2013, p. 46. This reading of the relationship between Nazi ideology and colonialism highlights the continued importance of Klaus Hildebrand's analyses in his *Vom Reich zum Weltreich* (1969), to this day the most detailed and comprehensive study of the connections and, more importantly, ruptures between 'classic' colonialism and the Nazis' (specifically Hitler's) 'program' for German eastern expansion. Notably, Hildebrand's book is absent from the bibliographies of some recent American works on Nazi expansionism, among them Shelley Baranowski's *Nazi empire* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Carroll P. Kakel's *The American west and the Nazi east*. See Klaus Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich: Hitler, NSDAP und koloniale Frage 1919–1945* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1969), esp. p. 775.
- 31 For in-depth discussions and summaries of the colonialism-Holocaust debate, see Thomas Kühne, 'Colonialism and the Holocaust: continuities, causations, and complexities', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2013, pp. 339–362; Roberta Pergher et al., 'Scholarly forum on the Holocaust and genocide', esp. p. 46; Eley, 'Empire, ideology, and the east', p. 262. For Nazi expansionism as anti-imperialism and Hitler's 'eastern living space as anti-capitalist and -liberalist expansion', see Guettel, *German expansionism*, pp. 188, 222–223; Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich*, pp. 652–673; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936–45: nemesis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 47. See also Moses, 'Redemptive antisemitism', pp. 245–246, 248–249; Moses, 'Empire, colony, genocide: keywords and the philosophy of history', in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Empire, colony, genocide: conquest, occupation, and subaltern resistance in world history* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 36. In 'Redemptive antisemitism', Moses brilliantly elucidates the question of continuities and/or ruptures between Nazi ideology and its rabid antisemitism and European (and German) colonialism and imperialism, thus making an argument about the relationship between the Holocaust and European imperialism that is closely related to this article's argument about the relationship between German pre-1914 colonialism and the Nazis' eastward expansion schemes.

## Notes on contributor

**Jens-Uwe Guettel** holds a *Staatsexamen* degree in History and English from the Freie Universität Berlin and a PhD in History from Yale University. He is a faculty member of the Department of History at Penn State University. Recent publications include *German expansionism, imperial liberalism, and the United States, 1776–1945* (Cambridge, 2012); 'The myth of the pro-colonialist SPD: German Social Democracy and imperialism before the First World War', *Central European History*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2012, pp. 452–484; and 'From the American frontier to German South-West Africa: German colonialism, Indians, and American westward expansion', *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2010, pp. 523–552.

Copyright of Journal of Genocide Research is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.