

German Nationalism and Identity During the Age of Unification  
History 452: Senior Research Seminar  
November 22, 2005  
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The history of Germany is one of the most dynamic and complex in the world, telling the story of a unique country and people who have impacted the world tremendously. Although the whole of Germany's history is rich in power struggles, weighty ideas, and significant events, no century had helped define the country of Germany more than the nineteenth. In the nineteenth century alone Germans resisted Napoleon, formed two German confederations, experienced revolution, and for the first time in history, became a unified country in 1871. Although the unification of Germany as a nation-state for the first time was principally a political act forged largely through war, it was not solely those who held political power that formed the new state. The idea of a united German nation-state and a united German people that many were passionate about as well as an issue that concerned all levels of society. Although the idea of bringing together all of the German territories under the umbrella of one society had been thought of in some of the various kingdoms of what would later become Germany such as Silesia, Wurttemberg, Baden, Westphalia, Prussia, or Bavaria<sup>1</sup>, doing so was more than a political undertaking.

The task of creating the German nation-state was one that required the belief in a German people who transcended separate territories and different cultural norms. The primary tool for creating this identity was nationalism, and some of the great carriers of nationalistic ideas were academics, particularly historians. Those who embraced the idea of a unified German culture relied heavily upon the celebration of the study of German history. As such, historians played an integral role, therefore, in shaping the new German identity. Two of these historians, Heinrich

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Stefan Berger, *Inventing the Nation: Germany* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42

von Sybel and Heinrich von Treitschke, members of the small German school of historiography, had a significant impact on German identity and nationalism before, during, and after the unification.

### **German Historiography**

The study of history itself is one that played an essential role in nineteenth century German history. Schools of historiography that debated the way history should be written were emerging during this century, von Treitschke and von Sybel themselves belonging to the small German school of historiography, a collection of academics who argued that Germany should be united around a particular kingdom. The small German school overwhelmingly supported the idea that this prunedom be Prussia.<sup>2</sup> In an age in which ideas about what defined Germany and the Germans were being frequently considered and exchanged and historiographical schools were being formed, oftentimes around certain specific ideas, the way history was written was often significantly biased.

In German historiography, the period which is usually designated as being the period of unification is between the years 1866 and 1871, with the end of the Franco-Prussian war signifying the beginning of Germany as a unified nation-state.<sup>3</sup> Just as much as historians and academics of the nineteenth century sought to record the events of what had come before them as well as what was happening in their time, so have historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries sought to understand the powerful and complex events of the nineteenth century,

<sup>2</sup> Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110.

<sup>3</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Bismarck and the German Empire, 1871-1918* (New York: Pointing Green Publishing Services, 1995), 30.

including the roles that the historians of the nineteenth century played. One of the biggest trends in modern historiography when examining the nineteenth century has been to point to the events that caused and surrounded unification as being directly traceable sources of National Socialism and the Third Reich.<sup>4</sup> This is decidedly problematic, as in order to do this the historian must examine first Germany's history in the 1930s and 1940s before looking into Germany's history in the nineteenth century, coming to the subject with strongly fixed preconceptions of which similarities between the two eras to look for in order to argue that the rise of Nazism was the natural evolution of the German nation-state. Arguments such as this can be found in Hughes' *National Socialism and Society: Germany 1800-1945* and in Geoff Eley's *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past*.

Another trend that has arisen in historiography when examining nineteenth century German history, particularly German unification, is that of focusing on a specific aspect of the events surrounding unification as being its primary cause. These theses point to the political and military actions of the Prussian government as being deliberate motions intended to bring about unification, an autocratic monarchy acting to create a German Empire with minimal influence from the larger German society. Despite taking into account religious and sociocultural factors, these arguments focus primarily on Germany as an imperial, expansionist polity, very often focusing on the personality and actions of Otto von Bismarck as being the man without whose deeds unification could not have been achieved. Mommsen's *Imperial Germany 1867-1918:*

*Politics, Culture, and Society in and Authoritarian State, Abrams' Bismarck and the German*

<sup>4</sup> Steven Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 3.

*Empire, 1871-1918*, and Feuchtwanger's *Bismarck*, are examples of this method of examining and analyzing German unification.

A final historiographical trend is to reverse this emphasis, arguing that although it was indeed political action that officially created the country of Germany for the first time, the sociocultural and religious factors that contributed to that unification were more significant than the political unification itself. The argument from this approach is that the cause of unification was due to either an imagined or desired sociocultural German identity which was finally able to coincide with the intentions of the political realm in 1871. Schulze's *The Course of German Nationalism: From Frederick the Great to Bismarck, 1763-1867*, Blackbourn's *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918*, and Berger's *Inventing the Nation: Germany*, are works that focus heavily on sociocultural factors as being the primary igniters that sparked German unification.

Historians that have examined and analyzed the writings of Heinrich von Treitschke and Heinrich von Sybel have primarily concluded that the enormous bias of these historians towards support of Germany as a unified nation-state before and after the unification makes them far better rhetoricians than historians. By seriously criticizing Treitschke and Sybel for their writings, the emphasis on their contribution to the movement toward and preservation of the nation-state of Germany has often been deemphasized. Furthermore, examinations of what Treitschke and Sybel were specifically arguing have often been overshadowed by the argument that their works are so biased that they are hardly history at all and therefore should not be

studied when attempting to attain an accurate picture of what nineteenth century Germany was like. Smith's *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, and Politics, 1870-1914* and Green's *Fatherlands: State-building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* are both works that take this stance on Treitschke and Sybel.

None of these approaches can be counted as being incorrect. All have added to the historical conversation in an attempt to understand a people and an era which have been marked by nationalism and fierce competition at nearly every turn. In the political sphere as well as others, Treitschke and Sybel's contributions to this era were more than simply rhetorical argument intended to promote nationalism or the biased writing of history in order to achieve a certain gain. Both men were active participants in the movement for unification and supporters of Germany after unification had been achieved. Despite their bias, they were not academics out of touch with what was going on in German society with a fierce agenda, but key players in the nineteenth century just as much as the German politicians who controlled armies or the university students who spoke their opinions about the many different views on the methods of unification and what it meant to be German.

### **Treitschke and Sybel**

Both Treitschke and Sybel were university professors, Treitschke participating in several universities throughout his career such as Leipzig<sup>5</sup>, Freiburg, and Berlin<sup>6</sup>, whereas Sybel held a professorship at the University of Bonn<sup>7</sup>, and also served as a member of the Prussian

<sup>5</sup> H.W.C. Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke* (London: Constable and Company, 1914), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Davis, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 29.

Parliament.<sup>8</sup> It has been noted by several twentieth and twenty-first century historians that both Treitschke and Sybel allowed a great deal of their own views on the events of the nineteenth century to become part of their historical writings.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary academics considered Treitschke more of a publicist than a historian.<sup>10</sup> Despite all of their biases and faults, however, these historians employed their academic skills to produce works that nonetheless offer insight into the nationalist rhetoric and ideology that was prevalent in Germany in the nineteenth century.

### **Germany Before Unification: 1815-1849**

Although Germany as a nation-state was created in 1871, the idea of Germany and Germans was much older. The phenomenon of the nation-state as a sovereign country of people united under a centralized government in which that nation-state's people were able to participate as citizens was not originally a German idea, but a French one. The French Revolution of the late eighteenth century had changed the world forever, and although France had managed to keep the idea of the French people close to that of the French state (despite its attempt at European domination under Napoleon), the nation-state model was not readily adapted in the lands that were once the Holy Roman Empire and that had become the German Confederation in 1815." Whereas the trend in European countries before the emergence of the nation-state had often been either a disorganized combination of centers of authority or a centralized political body with absolute power, particularly an absolute monarchy, the nation-

<sup>8</sup> Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Bismarck* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2002), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Green, 109.

<sup>0</sup> Davis, 22.

<sup>1</sup> David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany 1780-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 93.

state model that had been cultivated during the French Revolution implied a society in which a large portion of the people were able to participate in some form or another in the political system, even if that system was monarchy. Kings and princes became cautious to define the people and land they ruled as constitutional monarchies, attempting to justify their rule by arguing that they were harmonious with their subjects. The nation, a body of people representing a certain culture and people, and the state, the concrete political entity of the country itself, were and are implied to be interconnected in the idea of a country defined as a nation-state. Until 1871, Germany had not attained this, still being a loose confederation of princedoms with no particular central authority.

After the establishment of the German Confederation in 1815, another attempt to unify Germany was combined with efforts to establish a liberal German constitution in the revolution of 1848. In many ways a revolution whose nature was similar to the one that had occurred in France in 1789, the revolution of 1848 was an uprising of lower and middle class Europeans against what was viewed as the oppressive elite, particularly royalty. This uprising took place throughout the German Confederation in addition to many of the areas in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The kingdom that would ultimately unify Germany, Prussia, experienced bloodshed all the way up to the palace lawn in Berlin.<sup>12</sup> Unlike France, whose revolution fifty years earlier had the principal aim of overthrowing an unfair monarch and attaining basic rights for all citizens, the 1848 revolution in Germany attempted to do this and more. Brought on by economic hardship throughout the German Confederation, the 1848 revolution attempted to establish basic rights of

<sup>12</sup>Ozment, 172.

German citizenship in addition to dissolving the disarrayed hodgepodge of plural centers of authority that had long reigned through divided princedoms.<sup>13</sup>

In May 1848 an assembly came together in Frankfurt to draft a new national constitution. Those present at the assembly representing the side of the revolutionaries were delegates derived mainly from university and bourgeois backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> Unlike French radical revolutionaries, however, who had been glad to lead their former king to the guillotine, the Frankfurt National Assembly saw a great deal of liberal cooperation with monarchical representatives due to the fact that full-scale social upheaval was a great fear amongst all classes bourgeois and above.<sup>15</sup> Over the next year the Frankfurt National Assembly worked on the drafting of a constitution that could be accepted by all the German territories, which conceded a significant amount of power to the already established royalty. In the spring of 1849, when the assembly offered William IV, king of Prussia, a crown, William refused, asking the assembly, which had already lost most of its revolutionary momentum, to gain the approval of the other kings and princes of the German Confederation first. At this point, the assembly disbanded, leaving the last of the delegates to resign by June.<sup>16</sup> Despite efforts on the part of the delegates assembled at the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848-49 to reconcile newer liberal ideas with the older royal power structure, the desires of the revolutionaries were far from met. Although the assembly was not entirely fruitless from the liberal perspective, because agrarian serfdom had been abolished, only a small portion at best of what had been desired was attained on the part of the revolutionary

<sup>3</sup> Berger, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Ozment, 172.

<sup>5</sup> Berger, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Feuchtwanger, 34.

This did not mean, however, that the desire to create a unified German nation-state had dissipated, it simply meant that that desire had not coincided with a Europe-wide movement to instigate a bottom-up revolution. This was particularly so because the great majority of politically conscientious Germans held the belief that sweeping liberal reform would more than likely launch the German-speaking lands into catastrophic disorder. This fear originated from a number of sources.

First, the German-speaking principalities of the Holy Roman Empire and German Confederation had for centuries been a splintered group of more or less independent political bodies who attained only rare and brief moments of significant centralized authority. Therefore, political authority had been not only royal, but plural. Secondly, spiritual authority was also fragmented. For the most part, the great majority of northern German-speaking lands had been Protestant almost as long as Protestantism had existed, whereas the great majority of southern princedoms had sustained their Catholic allegiance, particularly in Bavaria and in the Hapsburg Empire of Austria. Commoners as well as elite had become accustomed, therefore, to dealing and living with multiple and divided spheres of influence. Finally, a powerful source of the fear of widespread social revolution in the German Confederation lay in the fact that such a revolution would make it incredibly vulnerable to its neighbors. Being at the center of Europe, Germany's geography has played no small part in the shaping of its history. Because of this geographical centrality on the European continent, German speaking kingdoms and principalities were<sup>17</sup>

constantly surrounded by polities and cultures different from their own. As a consequence, xenophobia has played just as much a part in its history as its geography. The lands that were once the Holy Roman Empire had been conquered and disbanded by Napoleon only a few decades before the 1848 revolution. Foreign martial threat still weighed heavily on the minds of those who possessed political power in Germany. When Germany's unification as a nation-state was finally made into reality it was not accomplished by liberal reform or revolution from the left, but through far more conservative means, often labeled as a 'revolution from above'.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Frankfurt National Assembly's Impact**

One of the most important turning points in German history that emerged from the debates of the Frankfurt National Assembly that would shape the arguments for German national identity in the decades to come was the consolidation of two schools of historiography. One of these was the small German school of historiography of which Sybel and Treitschke became a part, and the other was the greater German school of historiography.<sup>19</sup> The essential idea behind the small approach to unification by the delegates of the Frankfurt National Assembly was to unite Germany around a specific kingdom or principality, whereas the greater German approach called for the unification of all the German speaking lands together as one, which included the whole of the Austrian Empire.<sup>20</sup> Whereas the debates of the Frankfurt National Assembly had begun with questions concerning basic rights, they had shifted by 1849 to questions of

<sup>18</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Otto Pflanze, *The Unification of Germany 1848-1871*, ed. Otto Pflanze (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1968),

<sup>20</sup> Berger, 62.

Germany's future.<sup>21</sup> When the National Assembly turned towards discourse of this nature, it became apparent that there were very different ideas among the delegates concerning what should define the boundaries of German territory and what should define the characteristics of "Germanness".

In a century in which the question of what defined a German person as well as a German territory, it is impossible to give an unquestionably accurate definition to the lands that were and were not a part of Germany in the nineteenth century. One of the biggest questions that arose in the attempt to define Germany before unification was whether or not Austria should be considered part of Germany, a heated topic in the Frankfurt National Assembly in 1848 and 1849, with Delegate Welker of that assembly gaining strong support by arguing that the possibility that Austria may not be included as part of Germany in the future was very strong.<sup>22</sup> The territory that became the North German Confederation and the German Empire around Prussia in 1871 did not include the whole Austrian Empire despite military victories over Austria, but did acquire territories that had formerly been Danish and French such as Schleswig-Holstein<sup>23</sup> and Alsace-Lorraine<sup>24</sup>, respectively. For Treitschke and Sybel's purposes, what could be thought of as German lands were the German-speaking principalities outside of the Austrian Empire.

There were several reasons behind why the small German historians and historiographers

<sup>1</sup> Blackbourn, 158.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor Welker, "From the Debates in the German National Assembly-Little Germany or Greater Germany?-1848-1849," trans. Sarah Hanbury Tenison and reproduced in *The Course of German Nationalism from Frederick the Great to Bismarck, 1763-1867*, by Hagen Schulze (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 131.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Ferris, *Germany and the German Emperor* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), 173.

<sup>4</sup> Ferris, 264.

held this definition of Germany. First, the Austrian Empire was held by the House of Hapsburg, longstanding rivals to the House of Hohenzollern which held the Prussian throne.<sup>25</sup> The suggestion to form the German nation-state around Prussia had been mentioned as the principality of choice by the delegates of the Frankfurt National Assembly due to its strong economy and military should the small German approach be taken. Furthermore, the Hapsburg Empire was Catholic, whereas Prussia was overwhelmingly Protestant.<sup>26</sup>

In the wake of the Frankfurt National Assembly, schools of historiography supporting both the small German and greater German approach began to arise. Being intellectuals who ultimately supported the small German path, Treitschke and Sybel worked to construct a German national identity that distinctly supported the characteristics of the small German approach. One aspect of this identity was Protestantism, which in turn meant that it was also anti-Hapsburg and anti-Catholic. Treitschke blames the House of Hapsburg for pursuing foolish policies, such as Austria's negligence in expanding towards a coastline, pointing out that having access to ports are tremendously beneficial to any country for military expansion.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Treitschke upheld in his writings that Protestantism was unquestionably the best religion suited to Germany, and that those who practiced Catholicism were inherently inferior.<sup>28</sup> Because Protestants held a majority in the German speaking lands<sup>29</sup> and represented the German status quo due to the fact that Prussia had been the kingdom around which Germany had centered itself,

<sup>25</sup> Blackbourn, 159.

<sup>26</sup> Ozment, 127.

<sup>27</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics*, trans. Blanche Dugdale and Torben De Bille, 2 vols, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 1:213.

<sup>28</sup> Treitschke, *Politics*, 1: 361.

<sup>29</sup> Ozment, 232.

Treitschke was able to champion Protestantism as the ideal faith of German national identity.

### **The Process of Political and Cultural Unification**

The principal figures in the revolution from above were prime minister Otto von Bismarck and King William IV of Prussia. This process began through a series of wars with Germany's neighbors in 1864, 1866, and 1870-1871<sup>30</sup>, a process completed through, (in Bismarck's own words), "blood and iron"<sup>31</sup>, a phrase chosen intentionally to criticize the debates and speeches of the Frankfurt National Assembly in 1848. Through a series of wars with Denmark, Austria, and France, Bismarck and William successfully expanded the German Empire under the governing leadership of the North German Confederation, unifying Germany around Prussia by othering their neighboring nations politically, simultaneously and inadvertently instilling nationalistic pride throughout the empire.<sup>32</sup> Bismarck also successfully managed to create a new bicameral legislative assembly, the two houses consisting of the Bundesrat and the Reichstag, the former being made up of fifty-four princes and the latter consisting of a freely elected parliament of 382 delegates.<sup>33</sup> Through political organization and critically calculated war, Bismarck had completed the monumental task of setting Germany down the path of nation-statehood.

Although the task of uniting Germany was highly daunting politically, the ideological fuel to run the engine of the nation-state was growing throughout the German-speaking lands, and that ideology was German nationalism. The concept of a German nation-state, when examining the

<sup>30</sup> Pflanze, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Otto von Bismarck, "Blood and Iron," in *Bismarck and Europe*, ed. W.N. Medlicott and Dorothy K. Coveny (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 31.

"Ozment, 211.

"Ozment, 212.

culture of German-speaking lands, is far from radical. Although cultural and religious differences may have arguably been the greatest hindrance to the unification of Germany, the very fact that a common language was shared amongst what was a confederation with the prefix "German" acknowledged in the very least a collection of Germanic peoples. Nonetheless, the common people of the principalities of the German Confederation before 1871 often regarded their own identity and therefore their nationalist beliefs as being first and foremost tied to the particular territory in which they resided. This means that sometimes the line between German nationalism and nationalism relating directly to that particular domain were muddled. Nevertheless, nationalism and the methods of its cultivation were widespread throughout the German Confederation in the years between its formation and the forging of the German nation-state around Prussia, in other words between 1815 and 1871.

Treitschke and Sybel were tremendous supporters of Bismarck and the Prussian government. Sybel mentioned the Prince of Prussia as a brave and heroic diplomat favored by God when he insisted that he go to France in 1866 to negotiate with Napoleon III.<sup>34</sup> Treitschke went even further, saying that King William IV of Prussia spoke for every German when praising a series of lectures in Berlin.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Bismarck was pleased to have a supporter as passionate as Treitschke. Treitschke wrote in an article in 1865 that he felt that Bismarck "was pursuing a clever, even a moral policy,"<sup>36</sup> and at one point referred to Berlin politicians as being

<sup>34</sup> Heinrich von Sybel, *The Founding of the German Empire by William I*, trans. Helene Schimmelfennig White, 6 vols. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 6: 423.

<sup>35</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, *Treitschke's History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, 7 vols. (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1919), 7: 194.

<sup>36</sup> Treitschke, "Briefe, ii. No. 476 27" , reproduced in *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke* (London: Constable and Company, 1914) by H.W.C. Davis.

omniscient.<sup>37</sup> This level of support put the Prussian government in a unique position, because its very existence was being praised and validated by academic intellectuals who were creating a German identity that corresponded with their ideals. It also showed that not only were Treitschke and Sybel associating that ideal with the Prussian status quo, but the identity they were making out to be the German ideal fit the majority population in Germany after unification. This could only serve to reinforce nationalism among the majority population with Prussia as its central German authority.

One of the most popular methods of participating in nationalist activity during this period was to join a club or organization that engaged in a particular group activity in addition to carrying with it some manifestation of nationalist ideology, from local territory to pan-Germanic. Examples of the most important of these organizations were gymnastic, student, choral, and gun societies.<sup>38</sup> Nineteenth century nationalism in Germany placed a serious emphasis on humanistic virtues, the ability of the individual to overcome obstacles, and the potential power implied in the combination of human motivation to achieve and take pride in one's own people. In Germany, specifically, masculinity was a highly valued trait. Enlisting in the military was common and in many places expected among men, and was even carried out by women who disguised themselves and enlisted under male names.<sup>39</sup> Joining a club or society showed members of the local community that one cared about a perceived national well-being, and further added legitimacy to one's own individual political views if one was known to belong to a participatory society.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Treitschke, *Treitschke's History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, 7: 462.

<sup>38</sup> Berger, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Berger, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Green, 135.

Some of the most overt and grandiose displays of nationalism occurred in large festivals organized through nationalistic societies and government funding, and centered around the unveiling a German national hero or mythological character. One example of such a festival centered around the unveiling of the Ernst August Monument in Hanover during September of 1861 included a procession of the Hanoverian royal family, high-ranking officials from the various departments of the Hanoverian government, the military, and forty-two guild representatives. Such processions were not uncommon throughout the individual German states.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the German provinces, statues were erected to both German mythological characters such as Hermann, as well as historical figures from Germany's past who were enshrined as heroes. Some of these heroes included the famous painter Albrecht Dürer, the inventor of movable printing type, Johann Gutenberg, and the German monk who began the Reformation in 1517, Martin Luther.<sup>42</sup>

Festivals of this kind did more than provide opportunities for the touting of nationalist emblems and ceremony, however. Whereas most politically conscious individuals were for the most part members of the bourgeoisie or upper class, nationalist sentiment at festivals could be communicated to and through lower classes as well. It was at patriotic festivals such as this that nationalist sentiment was engendered and transcended differences in wealth, allowing everyone to participate. As the nationalist movement picked up steam, it acquired symbols such as a flag, and its passionate and triumphal ceremonies festivals produced zealous converts. At the Stuttgart Schillerfest in 1839 in which the city celebrated one of the great German dramatists of the early

<sup>4</sup> Green, 132.

<sup>42</sup> Berger, 48.

nineteenth century, Friedrich Schiller, powerful and patriotic German symbols were paraded and exalted. "The black, red, and gold increasingly became the flag of the national movement: black standing for the dark present, gold for the bright future and red for the bloody struggle which lay in between. The nationalists would read out patriotic poems and speeches- all of this accompanied by renditions of national songs."<sup>43</sup> Despite the many manifestations and methods of engendering German nationalist pride, such notions of German nationalism were not disjointed or sourceless. In fact, perhaps the most powerful and influential of all the sources of nationalism at the time came from contemporary historical organizations and historians.

Of all of the societies that sought to promote a German nationalist ideal, none labored more so towards such an end than historical societies. These historical societies, which played a critical role in cultivating nationalist sentiment and belief, had been in place with growing memberships well before the revolution of 1848, and many with government funding.<sup>44</sup> Historical societies, therefore, often had very direct and specific political goals and aims, writing highly biased or slanted history in order to convey nationalist ideas and justify the existing political status quo, particularly with a heavily romantic twist on people and events. Such organizations often provided the support needed to fuel the German nationalist movement's rhetoric and propaganda. Although artistic and sporting societies carried with them nationalist sentiment and pushed for the instillment of patriotic German virtues, and festive and ceremonial displays of nationalism could be found throughout Germany, it was the intellectuals and academics who built

the wells from which nationalist fervor was principally drawn.<sup>45</sup> The ability to manipulate history and craft the written word had powerful effects at this time, for nationalist sentiment was on the rise all over Europe. This was especially true in the German Confederation because people who spoke German could also often read it as well, since the literacy rate in provinces in which German was the spoken tongue was higher than in most other European countries.<sup>46</sup> Treitschke and Sybel's writings, which supported the Prussian status quo and nurtured a German national identity were certainly significant contributions to the role history played, however biased it may have been, in the creation of that identity.

### **The Ideology for German Identity and Destiny**

These historians, both members of what was known as the small German school of historiography in the nineteenth century, were romantics who wrote histories of the events of nineteenth century German history for the purpose of promoting the German nation-state, its government's actions, and the nationalist pride that they believed should accompany such support.<sup>47</sup> These historians were very much products of their time, and as such, worked within the Hegelian academic tradition. Hegel, a German philosopher who embarked upon the great project to reconcile God's existence with an enlightened world, argued that man was inevitably moving towards the next highest human level of consciousness and understanding, and that the search for God coupled with rational understanding was man's destiny in discovering that next level of understanding.<sup>48</sup> Treitschke and Sybel's writings, therefore, are in no way lacking notions

<sup>45</sup> Green, 143.

<sup>46</sup> Green, 151.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ozment, 184.

of the natural and inevitable progress of mankind's destiny, and are often grafted onto contemporary events in order to justify those events as the realization of that destiny.

Treitschke's notion of destiny is a critical aspect of his construct of German identity. In his political doctrine, Treitschke outlines the history of German international relations as being a triumph of mankind's ability to overcome obstacles. He goes further still, arguing that it is absolutely necessary to have a unified nation-state with universal military service, especially because he views the Catholic Austrian Empire, at the time a part of the German Confederation, as a weaker link in the military should the Confederation be invaded. "This universal military service, if it is to preserve the existence of the State, must naturally presuppose unity in the nation as a whole...In Austria things are more serious, because there the officers in the Reserve are the weak point of the army. They are good Czechs, good Germans, and good Magyars, but not good Austrians; and this flaw may some day bring about disastrous consequences."<sup>49</sup> In addition to pointing out what he believes to be one of the most important extensions of the nation-state designed to preserve its people and territory, the military, Treitschke also warns why he believes it is vital. Treitschke warns that Germany must constantly be on its guard both on land and at sea, calling England's marine international law "nothing better than a system of privileged piracy."<sup>50</sup>

In Treitschke's writings it can be seen that in order to further nationalist sentiment in Germany and construct a patriotic German identity, he refers to non-German nations as being

<sup>49</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke and Adolf Hausrath, *Treitschke: His Doctrine of German Destiny and International Relations Together with A Study of His Life and Work by Adolf Hausrath* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 149.

<sup>50</sup> Treitschke, Treitschke, 165.

inferior or criminal. At the same time, he champions both the state of Germany and its people as inevitably progressing towards a great destiny as being inseparably intertwined. In doing this, he cultivates a vehemently argued position for German nationalism while also making the state into an organic entity. "The State is, itself, an object, like everything living; for who can deny that the State lives quite as real a life as each of its citizens? How wonderful, that we Germans, with our provincialism, have to admonish a Frenchman and an Englishman to think more highly of the State!"<sup>51</sup> To further create the idea that German identity superior to others, Treitschke turned unashamed to Social Darwinism. "Spoliation and conquest actuated the formation of larger States, which did not arise from the sovereignty of the people, but rather were created against their will, the State being the self-authorized power of the strongest tribe. There is nothing in this to deplore."<sup>52</sup> Treitschke was also a racist, honing in on the true German identity as being white Protestant, specifically defining all nonwhites as inferior to whites, separating Jews as inferior white people,<sup>53</sup> and Protestant Christian whites as superior to Catholics<sup>54</sup>.

Religion was one of the most powerful and crucial components of German identity according to Treitschke. Through the festivals, celebrations, and organizations that brewed nationalism throughout German speaking lands, an emphasis on the essence of true "Germanness" being an idiom that could only exist if one was Protestant was consistently reinforced.<sup>55</sup> Treitschke argued that although the affairs of Church and State were separate in that

<sup>51</sup> Treitschke, Treitschke, 322.

<sup>52</sup> Treitschke, *Politics*, 1: 108.

<sup>53</sup> Treitschke, *Politics*, 1: 276.

<sup>54</sup> Treitschke, *Politics*, 1: 330.

<sup>55</sup> Veit Valentin, *The German People: Their History and Civilization from the Holy Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 396.

the Church dealt with the spiritual realm and the State with the political, they were entwined, and furthermore, the Church should never be superior to that State, but the reverse.<sup>56</sup> This, in and of itself, was a way of expressing Protestant faith as being superior to Catholic because the Catholic church had been a powerful spiritual and political entity in Europe for thousands of years, and had managed to remain so in Germany even into the nineteenth century. This was felt throughout the lands that would become Germany even before 1866, when taking into consideration the population of German Catholics. Even in the later years of the German Confederation, Catholics were minorities, and kept that way by the governing territories into the years of German unification. Of the twelve million Catholics that lived in the lands that would become the North German Confederation in 1866, about half lived in Prussia, the other half scattered throughout the Confederation with a higher concentration in the south.<sup>57</sup> Treitschke, although not overtly confessing to be a supporter of a unified Germany under Protestantism, criticizes the actions of the Catholic Church in Germany.

The State cannot afford to surrender its share in the patronage of the highest offices of the Church. The episcopal function comprises the whole ecclesiastical jurisdiction, hence the inevitable demand of all European Governments for a voice in the appointment of bishops. Catholic princes make their own nominations, after consultation with the Curia, but the Pope has never yet made this concession to Protestant rulers. In this connection the State must particularly be on its guard against the list system. It is the undying honour of Barthold Niebuhr that he preserved Prussia from this dangerous method of selection.<sup>58</sup> By arguing that the Church should be subordinate to the State while simultaneously arguing for

separation of Church and State Europe as well as Germany-wide and criticizing the position of the pope in a Protestant dominated German Confederation, Treitschke strongly implied that Protestantism should be the faith of the land in Germany.

<sup>56</sup> Treitschke, *Politics*, 1: 335.

<sup>57</sup> George Windell, *The Catholics and German Unity 1866-1871* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 7.

<sup>58</sup> Treitschke, *Politics*, 1: 357.

Religious faith and devotion through a direct relationship with God were highly Protestant values, and values that Treitschke associated with Germany's past leaders to make a case for Germany being nation-state destined for greatness, just as so many German clubs "Let us hold fast in reverent recollection that which lends moral consecration to the tragic reign of Emperor Frederick. With a religious patience, whose greatness only a few of the initiated can thoroughly understand, with an heroic strength which outshines all the glories of his victories on the battlefield, he bore the tortures of his disease..."<sup>59</sup> While putting Protestantism on a pedestal, as well as bringing to the forefront what he viewed to be the problems of the Catholic Church, Treitschke also argued in favor of the German state taking an anti-Semitic stance. He states in one of his lectures on the relationship between Church and State in Germany: "Heaven preserve us from the fashionable vapourings of the present day, which would fain prevent Protestant children from hearing of the glorious deeds of Luther, and would suppress all open and honest mention of Jesus Christ out of consideration for a few Jews."<sup>60</sup> In Treitschke's histories of Germany, writings on which he maintains no personal political distance, Treitschke equates the German state, (as the state itself had)<sup>61</sup> as being the political embodiment of Protestant values. In doing so, he subtly criticized Catholicism, and overtly counted Jews as being irrelevant.

Although written in a slightly different manner, Heinrich von Sybel, a contemporary historian of Heinrich von Treitschke, engaged in similar historical and nationalist arguments. Like

<sup>59</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke and Adolf Hausrath, *Treitschke; His Doctrine of German Destiny and International Relations Together with A Study of His Life and Work by Adolf Hausrath* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 233.

<sup>60</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics*, trans. Blanche Dugdale and Torben De Bille (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 1:359.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 64.

Treitschke, Sybel wrote a history entitled *The Founding of the German Empire by William I*, concentrating heavily on justifying the methods of the emergence of the German nation-state between 1866 and 1871. Sybel implied that the government that had arisen due to German unification was far more competent than the governments of its neighbors, and that the leaders who had carried the new German government into existence were superior as well. "But apart from this, it was wholly impossible for the French to understand the nature of this powerful man[Bismarck], in whom was found the rare combination of perfect fearlessness in his undertakings, with coolness of calculation, and a masterly power of discernment."<sup>62</sup> Sybel also does not hesitate to imply that German identity that does not fit into the Protestant model is incomplete. Moritz Mohl, a Bavarian Catholic who protested against Prussian supremacy, is portrayed by Sybel as being a ridiculous annoyance to the German government, "His frenzied abhorrence of everything Prussian was, however, so great that the mere mention of Prussia excited him to a degree that made rational thought impossible; his logic deserted him, and the most inconsistent invectives were hurled broadcast in every direction."<sup>63</sup> Although the language used by von Sybel to promote nationalism, support the German nation-state, and forge a new German identity was more subtle than Treitschke's, the two historians nonetheless both worked to synthesize and organize nationalist notions that already existed in Germany, give this nationalism a personification through an exclusively new strong, white, Protestant, German identity, and tie this nationalism and identity in tightly with a more concrete political entity, the unified nation-state of Germany. For these historians, the celebration of the great people of

Sybel, 217.

Sybel, 321,

Germany and their inevitable destiny towards greatness, what precisely the essence of "Germanness" meant, and the state that represented this people were impossible to keep apart.

Heinrich von Sybel and Heinrich von Treitschke were historians that were as much products and participants of their own time as they were carriers of ideas that had come before them. In examining their works and lives, it becomes clear that they were more than simply biased formulators of destiny, ideology, identity, or nationalism writing to create what they perceived as their own personal ideal. They were historians grappling with what it meant to be German in an era in which that identity was still being made. What they wrote, despite its biases and flaws, was highly pertinent to the society in which they lived. Still, they had far from solved the problem of German identity. Other academics such as the greater German school continued to disagree with historians like Treitschke and Sybel, and the identity they created was far from one that every German speaker could relate to.

To say that the German intellectuals of the nineteenth century had not successfully created a new German identity, however, would be untrue. The idea of essential "Germanness" cultivated and created by them was indeed one that acknowledged a connection between all of the Germanic peoples through blood heritage, something that the great majority of Germans did in fact possess. However, historians such as Treitschke and Sybel overtly composed this identity as being a white Protestant one, failing to include the great majority of southern Germany's Catholic population, and at best ignoring Jews. In addition to this great flaw, their aim was clearly to tie in this identity with the newly formed nation-state of Germany. Viewing it as the

perfect opportunity to reconcile their theoretical rhetoric concerning the similarities and greatness of Germans with the more concrete realm of politics, these academics trumpeted their ideas of the German nation while simultaneously pouring them into the newly formed state. In this way, the highly abstract ideas of German identity, the arguments behind why Germany's past indicated a glorious future, and nationalist fervor celebrated largely by Protestant Germans coalesced into the concrete territory and political structure of a new country. Although Treitschke and Sybel's writings have never reached the level of fame attained by the political actions of Otto von Bismarck or King William IV of Prussia, their histories and writings nonetheless played a critical role in the creation of Germany as a nation-state, and the way Germans thought of themselves and would not have been the same without them and other people like them.

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