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German Emigration to the United States and Continental Immigration to Germany in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

KLAUS J. BADE

Up to the end of the nineteenth century Germany was a country of emigrants. Until recently the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century transatlantic migration of more than five million Germans, mostly to North America, has been largely forgotten in contemporary Germany, except by a few historians. That is all the more true for the mass movement of foreign migrant workers into the German labor market in the decades preceding World War I. Of immediate interest in West Germany today is the so-called "guest-worker question" (*Gastarbeiterfrage*) which is now becoming an immigration issue in contrast to the earlier "foreign-worker question" in pre-World War I Germany. In recent years West Germany witnessed the transition from a country hiring "guest workers" to one possessing a genuine immigrant minority. This ongoing experience has contributed to a new interest in the historical development of transnational migration in both of its manifestations, as emigration and as immigration. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Germany experienced alternating waves of the two forms of transnational mass migration, both of which were dwarfed by the internal migration streams.¹

1. References have purposely been kept short. For a more extensive discussion of the wide array of literature see K. J. Bade, "Massenwanderung und Arbeitsmarkt im deutschen Nordosten von 1880 bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Überseeische Auswanderung, interne Abwanderung und kontinentale Zuwanderung," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 20 (1980): 265–323; idem, "Politik und Ökonomie der Ausländerbeschäftigung im preussischen Osten 1885–1914: Die Internationalisierung des Arbeitsmarkts im Rahmen der preussischen Abwehrpolitik," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Sonderheft 6, 1980, pp. 273–99; idem, "Arbeitsmarkt, Bevölkerung und Wanderung in der Weimarer Republik," in M. Stürmer, ed., *Die Weimarer Republik—belagerte Civitas* (Königstein, 1980), pp. 160–87; idem, "Transnationale Migration und Arbeitsmarkt im Kaiserreich: Vom Agrarstaat mit starker Industrie zum Industriestaat mit starker agrarischer Basis," in T. Pierenkemper and R. H. Tilly, eds., *Historische Arbeitsmarktforschung* (Göttingen, 1981); idem, "Land oder Arbeit: Massenwanderung und Arbeitsmarkt im deutschen Kaiserreich" (unpublished *Habilitationsschrift*, University of Erlangen, 1979; forthcoming 1982). For their helpful criticism

Migration within imperial Germany and across its borders was intimately related to the transformation of the Reich from an agrarian state with a dynamic industrial sector into an industrial state with a strong agricultural base. This transformation was accompanied by the shift from a land of emigration—still producing more than one million emigrants during the 1880s—to one with a reserve army of foreign laborers, whose numbers were fast approaching the million mark in the decade preceding World War I. However, these laborers did not become immigrants in the sense of acquiring citizen rights, but remained “foreign migrant workers,” for Germany did not turn into a land of immigration, but rather became what contemporaries euphemistically termed a “labor-importing country.”²

The transition from an agrarian to an industrial state and from a land of emigration to a “labor-importing country” was in part the result of interrelationships in the complex of labor market, population trends, and migration. In turn, the framework of the migration process itself was characterized by the intrinsic coherence and mutual interactions of overseas emigration, internal migration out of agriculture, and continental immigration. The shift from agriculture to industry in imperial Germany at the turn of the century is clearly reflected in Figures 1 and 2,³ which show the changing sectoral shares of total labor force and national income. By the end of the 1880s the secondary had overtaken the primary sector in its contribution to the national income, and by 1905 it employed a larger share of the labor force as well. The trend lines of the two sectors cross, suggesting an inverse relationship. In terms of demographic trends late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany experienced the crucial period of demographic transition, shown in Figure 3.⁴ The combined effects of falling death rates and persisting

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2. I. Ferenczi, *Kontinentale Wanderungen und die Annäherung der Völker* (Jena, 1930), p. 21.

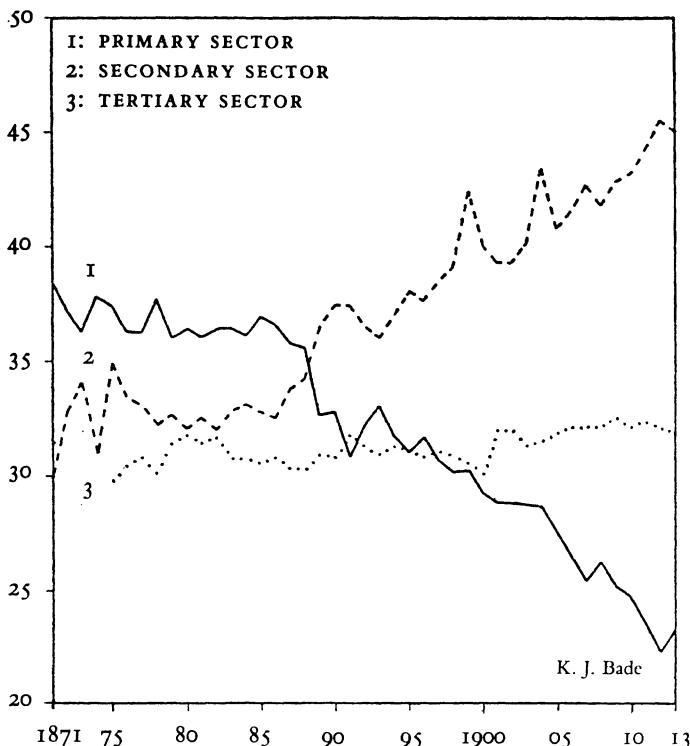
3. Source of data for calculating sectoral shares of total labor force and national income: W. G. Hoffmann, F. Grumbach, and H. Hesse, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 205, 454f.

4. Source of data: Statistisches Bundesamt, ed., *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft 1872–1972* (Wiesbaden, 1972), pp. 101ff.; compare the diagrams in G. Mackenroth, *Bevölkerungslehre* (Berlin, 1952), p. 56, and W. Köllmann, “Bevölkerungsgeschichte,” in W. Zorn and H. Aubin, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, 2 (Stuttgart, 1976): 24.

high birth rates swelled the population of Germany from 45 million in 1880 to 56 million at the turn of the century, an increase of nearly 25 percent. Up until that point birth rates had fallen only minimally. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw a decisive break, the transition to the demographic patterns of modern industrial societies.⁵

The extraordinary dynamism of mass migrations resulted from inconsistencies in the processes of modernization. The international and internal mass migrations during the decades of rapid industrialization before World War I were above all labor migrations and as such primarily "proletarian mass migrations."⁶ In imperial Germany mass mi-

FIGURE 1
SECTORAL SHARES (%) OF NATIONAL INCOME, 1871-1913

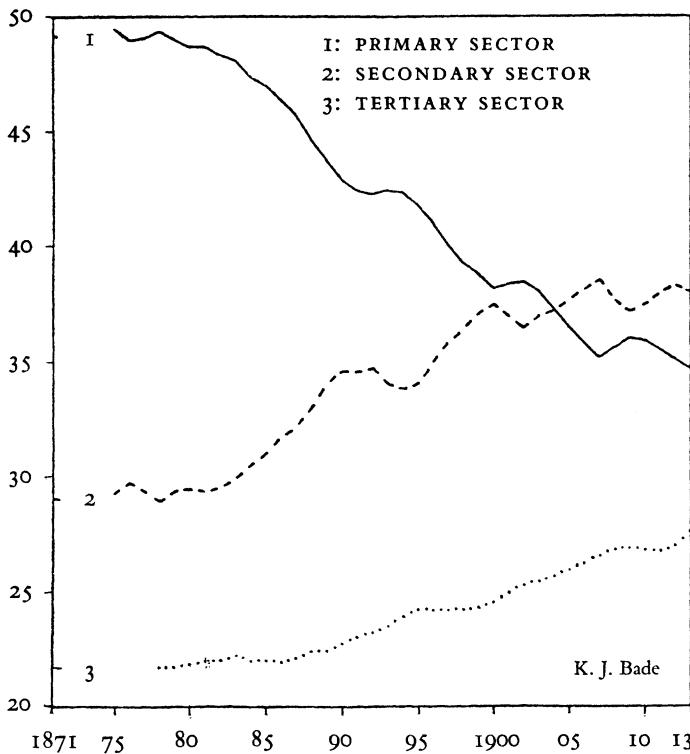


5. *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft 1872-1972*, pp. 101f.

6. I. Ferenczi, "Proletarian Mass Migrations, 19th and 20th Centuries," in F. W. Willcox, ed., *International Migrations*, 1 (New York, 1929): 81ff.

gration took three different forms: (1) overseas emigration, mainly directed to the United States, but also, less extensively, to Latin America; (2) internal migration within Germany, especially the long-term migration from rural to urban areas reaching its climax in the vast urban growth around the turn of the century, and the long-distance migration from east to west transforming millions of landless poor and small peasants into an industrial proletariat; and (3) continental immigration into Germany especially from eastern but also from southern Europe.⁷ Historically, the waves of overseas emigration, internal mi-

FIGURE 2
SECTORAL SHARES (%) OF LABOR FORCE, 1871-1913



7. On German overseas emigration see W. Mönckmeier, *Die deutsche überseeische Auswanderung* (Jena, 1912); F. Burgdörfer, "Die Wanderungen über die deutschen Reichsgrenzen im letzten Jahrhundert," *Allgemeines Statistisches Archiv* 20 (1930): 161-96, 383-419, 536-51; M. Walker, *Germany and the Emigration, 1816-1885* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); P. Marschalck, *Deutsche Überseeauswanderung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1973);

FIGURE 3
NATURAL POPULATION INCREASE IN GERMANY, 1872-1970
(per thousand)

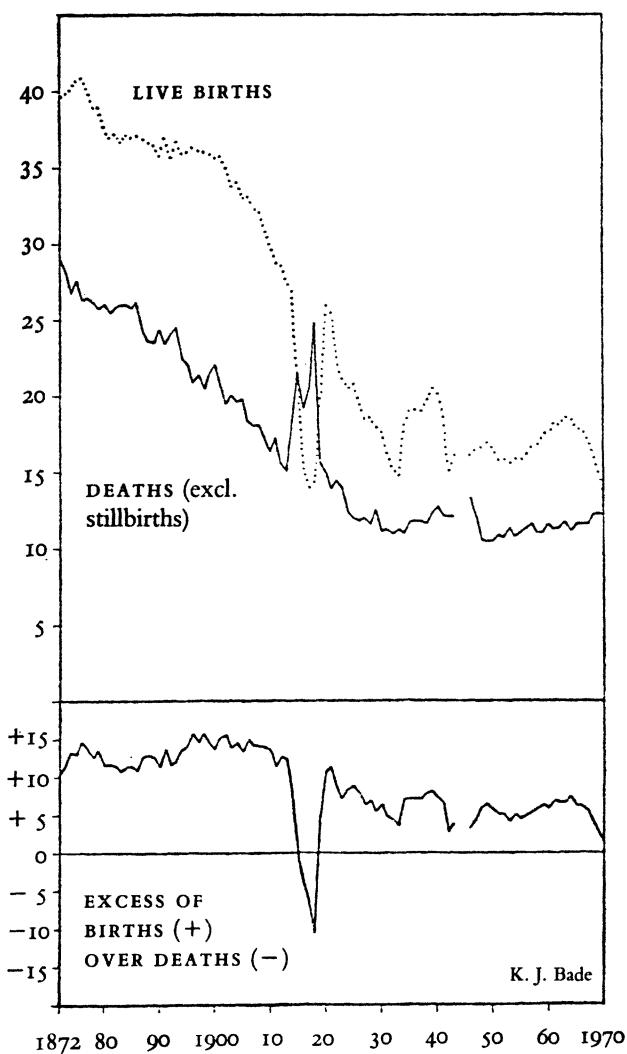
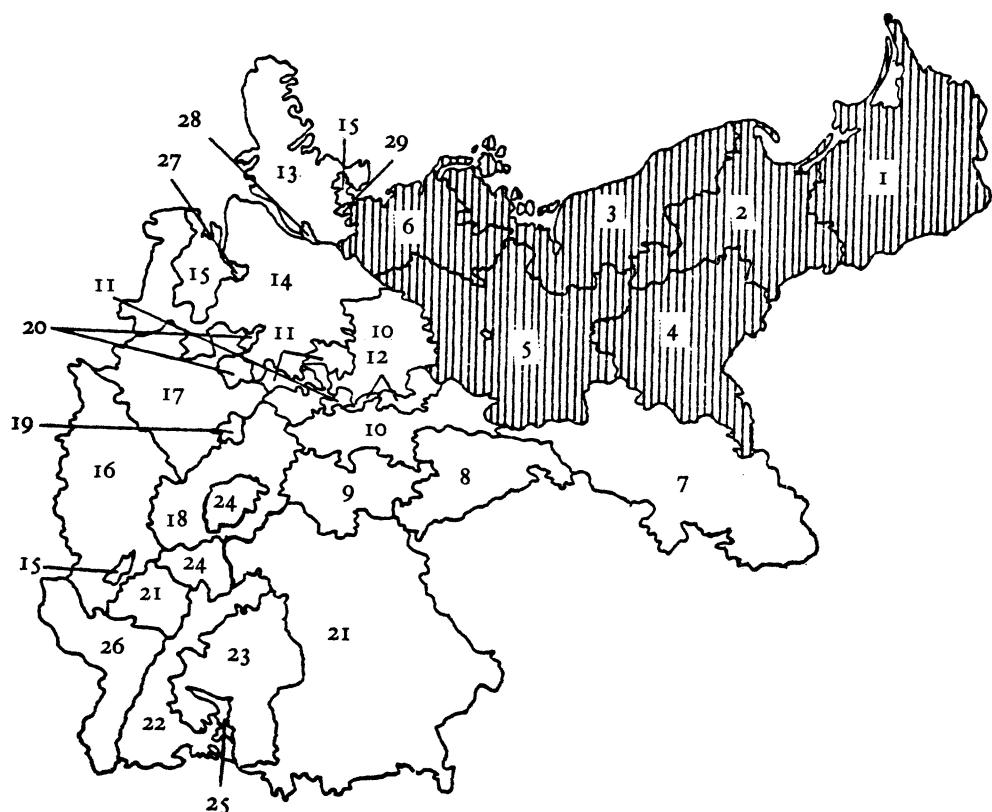


FIGURE 4
AREAS OF ORIGIN OF GERMAN OVERSEAS EMIGRATION



NORTHEAST GERMANY

1. East Prussia
2. West Prussia
3. Pomerania
4. Posen
5. Brandenburg
6. Mecklenburg

SOUTHEAST GERMANY

7. Silesia
8. Kingdom of Saxony

MIDDLE GERMANY

9. Thuringia
10. Province of Saxony
11. Brunswick
12. Anhalt

NORTHWEST GERMANY

13. Schleswig-Holstein
14. Hanover
15. Oldenburg

WEST GERMANY

16. Rhineland
17. Westphalia
18. Hesse-Nassau
19. Waldeck
20. Lippe

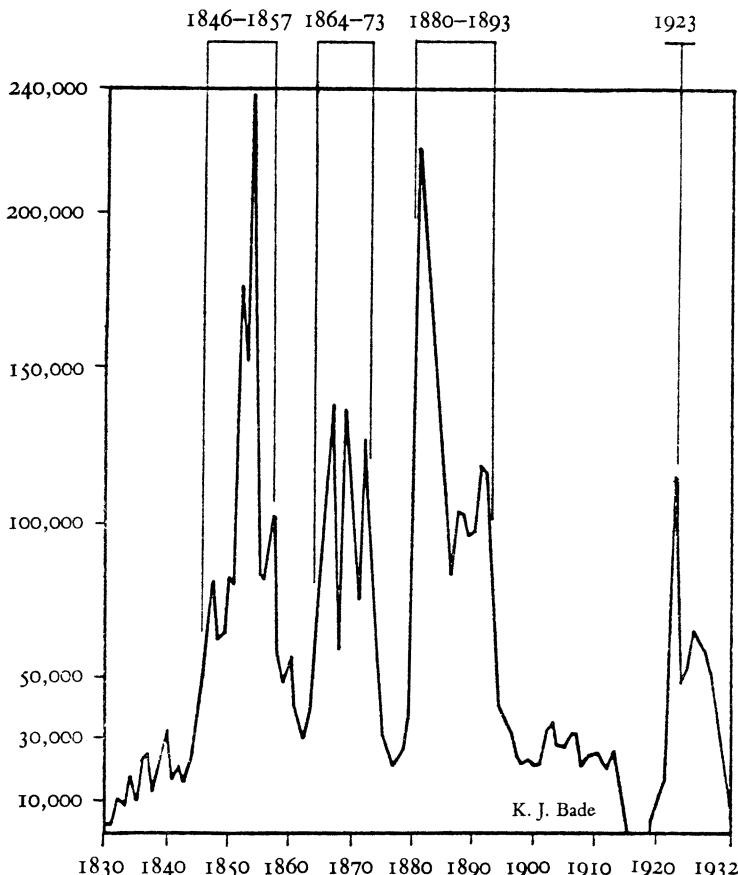
SOUTHWEST GERMANY

21. Bavaria
22. Baden
23. Württemberg
24. Hesse
25. Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen
26. Alsace-Lorraine

HANSE TOWNS

27. Bremen
28. Hamburg
29. Lübeck

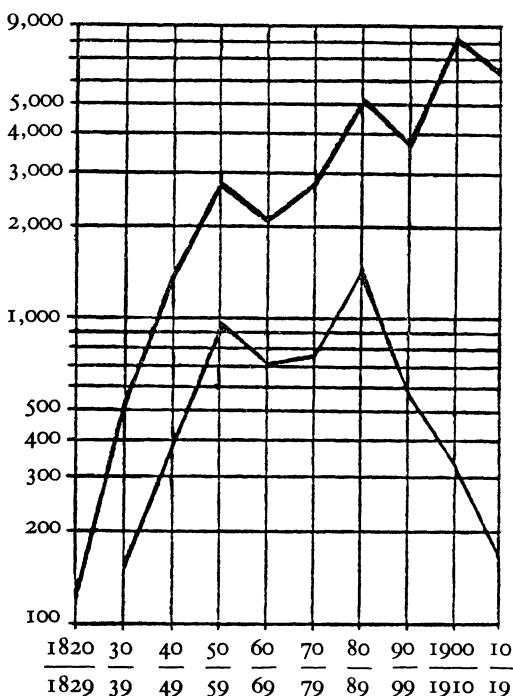
FIGURE 5
GERMAN OVERSEAS EMIGRATION, 1830-1932



W. Köllmann and P. Marschalck, "German Emigration to the United States," *Perspectives in American History* 7 (1974): 499-554; G. Moltmann, ed., *Deutsche Amerikaauswanderung im 19. Jahrhundert: Sozialgeschichtliche Beiträge* (Stuttgart, 1976); see also n. 31. On internal migration within Germany see W. Köllmann, *Bevölkerung in der industriellen Revolution: Studien zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte Deutschlands* (Göttingen, 1974); D. Langewiesche, "Wanderungsbewegungen in der Hochindustrialisierungsperiode: Regionale, interstädtsche und innerstädtische Mobilität in Deutschland 1880-1914," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 64 (1977): 1-40. On continental immigration into Germany see nn. 32 and 34.

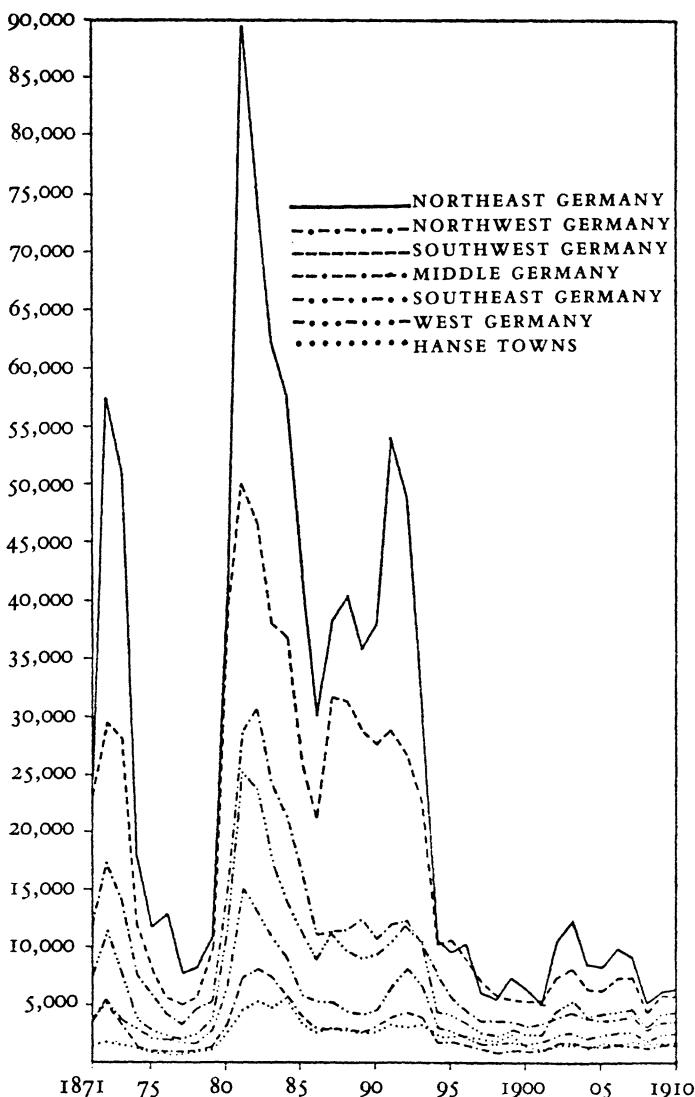
gration, and continental immigration developed differently and began at varying times. All of them, however, reached a climax before World War I and faded away or came to a temporary halt in the late 1920s. Together they formed a more or less interdependent system. The intensity, coherence, and interdependence of these mass movements were most noticeable in the predominantly agricultural areas of northeast Germany, shown in Figure 4.⁸ In the decades preceding World War I the northeast served as the main recruiting ground for overseas emigration as well as internal migration and, in addition, was the focus of con-

FIGURE 6
TOTAL IMMIGRATION AND GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO THE
UNITED STATES, 1820-1919
(in thousands; from American immigration statistics)



8. Figure 4 is modeled on J. Knodel, *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871-1939* (Princeton, N.J., 1974), p. 12. The division of Germany into economic regions on the basis of emigration patterns is based on Mönckmeier and Burgdörfer (above, n. 7).

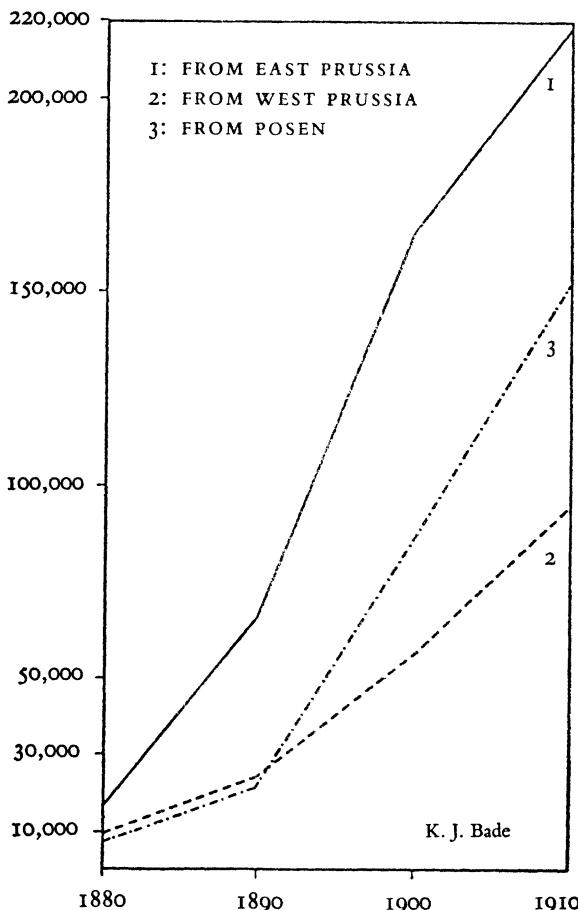
FIGURE 7
GERMAN OVERSEAS EMIGRATION BY AREA OF ORIGIN,
1871-1910



tinental immigration across the eastern borders of Prussia. This is why our analysis concentrates primarily on this region.

The correspondence of these three waves is shown in the accompanying figures. Figure 5,⁹ dealing with overseas emigration during a period of a hundred years, shows that the third emigration wave occurred be-

FIGURE 8
EAST-WEST MIGRATION WITHIN GERMANY: MIGRATION TO
RHINELAND-WESTPHALIA, 1880-1910



9. Source of data: Burgdörfer, pp. 189, 192; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das deutsche Reich* 52 (1933): 49. The second dip in the second emigration wave at the end of the 1860s results from a shortened fiscal year (for a corrected emigration curve see Moltmann, p. 201).

tween 1880 and 1893. In absolute numbers it was the greatest exodus from nineteenth-century Germany, and also the longest, directed almost entirely to the United States. At the end of this exodus Germany ceased to be a country of mass emigration. This is also confirmed by the development of German immigration within the total immigration to the United States, as shown in Figure 6. Accordingly the percentage of German immigrants within the foreign-born population of the United States declined from 30.1 percent during the third emigration wave (1890) to 18.5 percent in 1910 and to 11.3 percent in 1930.¹⁰ Figure 7¹¹ shows that the largest contingent of Germans during the third emigration wave came from the agricultural areas of the northeast. Figure 8¹² shows a rapid increase, since 1880, in the number of people going west within Germany. This stream, too, was fed mostly from the northeastern part of the country. Finally, Figure 9¹³ puts into focus the massive continental immigration which also showed up first of all in the northeast.

To explain why people in the northeast left their homes, heading overseas or going west, it is helpful to analyze (1) the structural "push"-factors responsible for creating a willingness to migrate and (2) the reasons why some headed overseas while others went west within Germany.

Up to the 1860s the agrarian regions of the northeast had contributed only minimally to overseas emigration and internal outmigration. The long-term structural push-factors operating in the northeast since the late 1860s were, in particular, continuing population growth, combined with the rigidity of the traditional form of land distribution. The distribution of land in the northeast was, as shown in Figure 10,¹⁴ almost the exact opposite of what it was in southwest Germany, the region which had been the main source of overseas emigration during the

10. N. Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children 1920*, Census Monographs, 7 (Washington, 1927), p. 47; *12th Census 1900, Population*, 1 (Washington, 1901): clxxi; *Statistical Atlas* (Washington, 1903), p. 57; *13th Census 1910, Population*, 1 (Washington, 1913): 718; *15th Census 1930, Abstract* (Washington, 1933), p. 129.

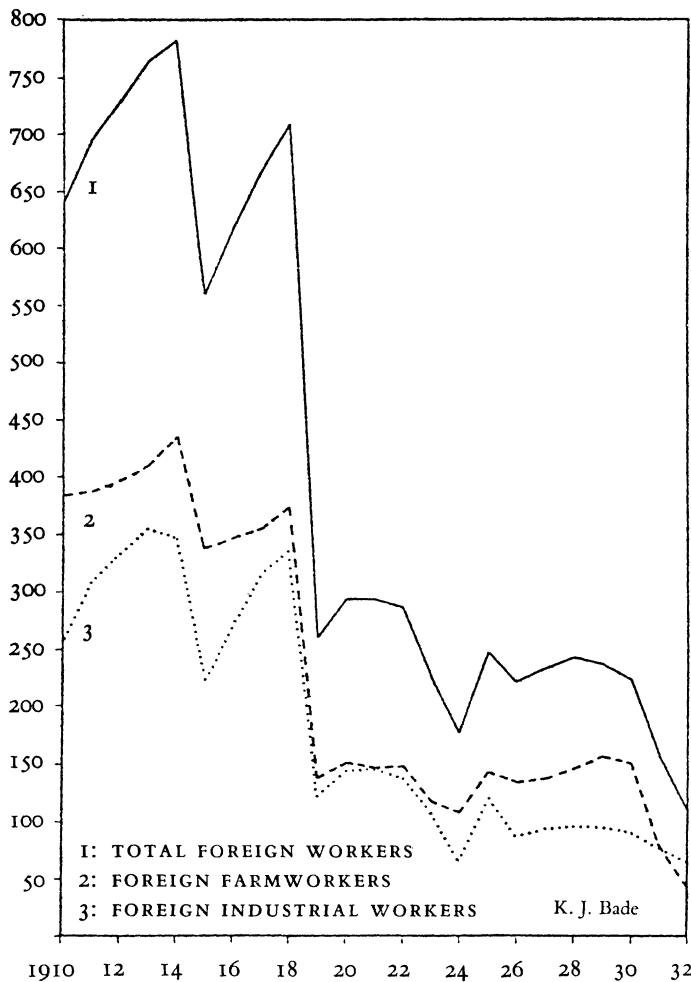
11. The data, from *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, and the diagram come from Mönckmeier, pp. 127-33.

12. Cumulative data from Chr. Klessmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet, 1870-1945* (Göttingen, 1978), p. 260.

13. The data, from *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, come from Burgdörfer, p. 542; *Statistisches Jahrbuch* 50 (1931): 305; 51 (1932): 295; 52 (1933): 294. The data were gathered by the German *Feldarbeiterzentrale/Arbeiterzentrale*.

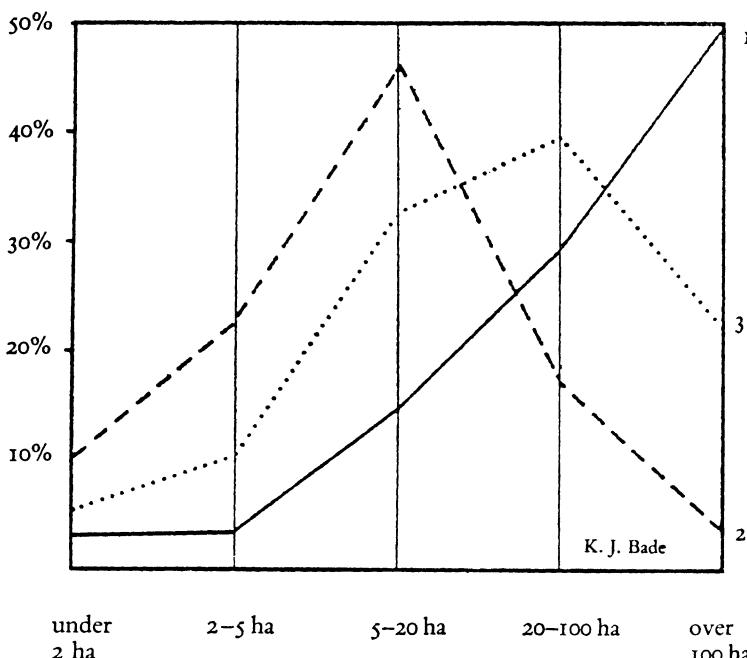
14. Calculated, from the data of *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, by Mönckmeier, p. 94.

FIGURE 9
REGISTERED FOREIGN LABOR IN GERMANY, 1910-32
(in thousands)



first and second emigration waves in the nineteenth century. In both regions the agrarian middle class was very small. In the southwest, the most important push-factor for emigration had been the constant splitting of farms due to customs of equal division among heirs. In the northeast, where the large estates were predominant and the right of inheritance among small farmers was completely different, the farmland was usually not divided, but taken over entirely by the oldest son. For the younger brothers who were not able to marry into another farm there were two possibilities. First, if the father's farm was large enough to pay out hereditary portions while remaining above the level of subsistence production, the younger brothers had the chance of buying a new, though smaller, farm. This opportunity, however, was limited by the high costs of buying or renting farmland. Otherwise there was only one way of maintaining the social status and economic way of life: the exo-

FIGURE 10
DISTRIBUTION OF FARMLAND IN NORTHEAST (1), IN
SOUTHWEST (2), AND IN ALL OF GERMANY (3)
(1ha=2.42 acres)



dus to the "New World." Frequently, entire families emigrated in order to preserve the family unit. Second, the farm might be too small to pay out hereditary portions. This was, as Figure 10 clearly shows, very often the case, given the fact that an independent existence as a farm in the northeast usually required about twenty acres of tillable land because of the climate and poor quality of the soil. In such a case, the younger brothers, who regarded industrial labor as social degradation, were left only with social descent into the class of farmhands or rural proletariat. Of course, this was often regarded as a mere temporary state of dependency in order to save enough money to buy a small farm at home or in the United States.

The driving force of population growth and land distribution in the northeast was reinforced by the crisis of agriculture since the late 1870s and the deterioration of the traditional economic and social way of life due to modernization of the agrarian structure. The living conditions of the farmworkers and small peasants, who earned additional income by working on the large estates in eastern Prussia, worsened. The decline of wheat prices due to competition on the world market induced a growing number of estate owners to convert from extensive cultivation of wheat to intensive forms of agricultural production. The advance of the threshing machine in the wheat-producing areas left the harvest hands without work in winter. The trend towards root crops, in particular sugar beets, did indeed increase the demand for seasonal workers during the summer, but at the same time it lowered the demand in winter. The combined result was a constant increase in seasonal employment on the agrarian labor market of the northeast. In the short summer season there was a lack of manpower despite higher wages and hard piece-work. In contrast, there was little work, with low wages, during the long winter. Thus, for anyone who could obtain a "prepaid ticket" from American relatives or afford at least the passage, the idea of emigration despite a lack of initial capital was not very farfetched. Many emigrated hoping they could earn enough money in industrial and urban employment in the United States to buy the farm they had unsuccessfully tried to obtain at home. For the same reasons, small peasants had difficulties maintaining their farms because of the lack of opportunities for earning additional income by working on the large estates. During the summer they could not leave their own small farms, and out of season they found no jobs. Many of them therefore sold their farms expecting they could acquire new ones in the United States with

the money earned from the sale. This would enable them to attain something they could no longer maintain in their own country: an independent existence as a farmer. Thus, during the 1870s and 1880s the alternatives were either social demise or emigration to the United States.

In the early 1890s German emigration dropped abruptly, as shown in Figure 5. For the following two decades it remained a trickle and was practically nonexistent after the outbreak of the war. Although emigration in the 1920s once again assumed significant proportions, this must be interpreted mainly as a consequence of the war. By 1930, the number of Germans returning to Germany even exceeded the number leaving the country, first as a result of the depression in the United States and then of full employment in Germany; and in the mid-thirties German emigration once again became numerically insignificant. The Jewish flight from Nazi Germany in the 1930s forms a unique—and tragic—chapter in German emigration history.

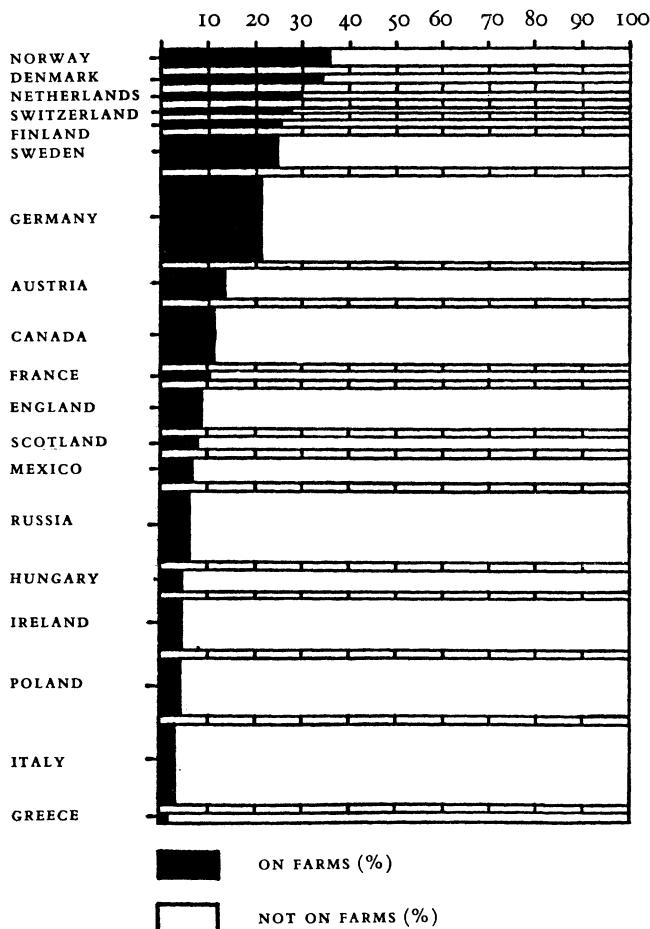
The debate on the question why emigration ceased so abruptly in the mid-1890s has emphasized several arguments. The most comprehensive explanation, although not entirely adequate, is offered by W. Köllmann and P. Marschalck. They argue that “since the frontier was practically closed by 1890” the surplus population of the agricultural eastern provinces of Prussia no longer had a chance of realizing the dream of peasant life without capital in the United States. Left with the choice between American and German urban industrial employment they opted more often for the more familiar environment. Hence the currents of migration, pointing overseas before, by the mid-1890s became part of the internal German migration streams, while Germany as a whole experienced the period of rapid transition to industrial mass society.¹⁵

The connection between the decline in overseas emigration and the increase in internal migration is obvious. This is especially true for the long-distance internal migration from the predominantly agricultural areas of northeast Germany to the industrial centers of the west, particularly the Ruhr district, as shown in Figure 8.

The German-style “frontier thesis,” however, has to be modified. In order to successfully establish a farm, even on free homestead land, a considerable amount of capital for supplies and machinery was required. Moreover, during the third emigration wave the pattern of settlement for the German-born population in the United States was already far

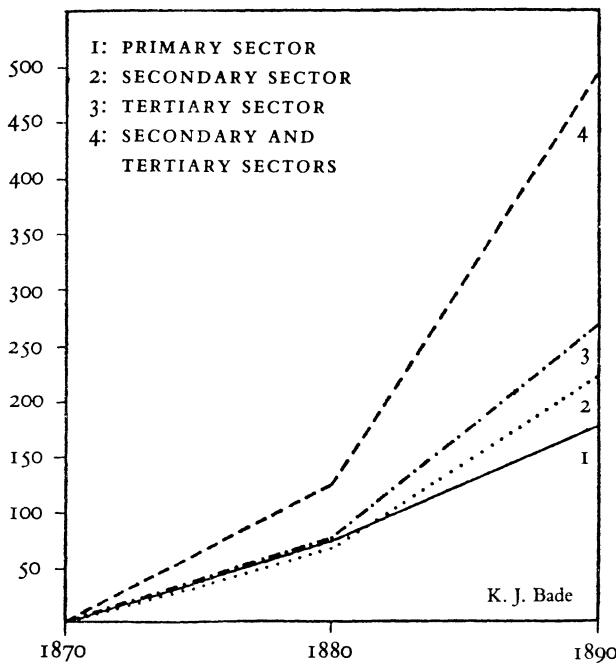
15. Köllmann, “Bevölkerungsgeschichte,” pp. 20, 31 (compare idem, *Bevölkerung in der industriellen Revolution*, pp. 39f., 115); Marschalck, pp. 10, 12, 44, 82, 97.

FIGURE 11
EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES BY COUNTRY
OF BIRTH AND PERCENTAGE LIVING ON FARMS, 1920



more extensively urbanized than the settlement pattern in Germany, despite the fact that a majority of German immigrants came from the country. According to the United States census, in 1900 more than 51 percent of all German-Americans lived in cities with a population of 25,000 or more, as compared to only 35 percent of all Germans in cities of more than 20,000.¹⁶ This seems to indicate that even during the third emigration wave the majority of the German emigrants from agricultural areas left their rural way of life, never to find it again. Instead they engaged in industrial and urban occupations in the United States. By 1920 this development had created a situation—as shown in

FIGURE 12
SECTORAL INCREASE IN OCCUPATIONAL MAKEUP OF
GERMAN-BORN POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1870-90
(in thousands; 1870=0)



^{16.} *Statistisches Jahrbuch* 53 (1934): 11; *13th Census 1910, Population*, 1 (Washington, 1913): 844, 902; compare *14th Census 1920, Abstract* (Washington, 1923), p. 318; *15th Census 1930, Abstract* (Washington, 1933), p. 131; and *Population*, 2 (Washington, 1933): 232. Compare Knodel, p. 193, who erroneously asserts that already in 1900 over 70% of all German-Americans lived in cities of more than 25,000.

Figure 11¹⁷—in which only slightly more than 20 percent of the German-born population in the United States lived on farms.

This tendency was already apparent in the 1880s. During the third emigration wave the number of German immigrants in the United States employed in all occupational branches, including agriculture, increased in absolute numbers. A look at Figure 12¹⁸ shows, however, that the rate of growth in agrarian occupations continually fell further behind the enormous increase in employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Also this transition in the occupational makeup of the German-born population in the United States during the third emigration wave took place earlier and more intensively than in Germany. There is some historical evidence that the decision to move to an urban area was frequently made in order to earn enough money to buy a farm. There is just as much evidence, however, that the intention remained unfulfilled and emigration ended with urban employment. Without doubt, many of the emigrants, particularly those from the predominantly agrarian areas of northeast Germany, migrated to the United States expecting to export their traditional form of agricultural existence and rural social status, that is, to reconstruct their old way of life in the "New World." By the time of the third emigration wave, however, this was a dream which, as the American statistics show, no longer corresponded to the reality in the promised land.

Obviously already in the 1880s most German newcomers in America by choice or necessity took employment outside of agriculture. Thus it appears that the precipitous drop at the end of the third emigration wave had more to do with the bust of the 1890s, especially the Panic of 1893 in America, and the simultaneous beginning of the prewar boom period in Germany, than with the alleged closure of the frontier.¹⁹ The

17. L. E. Truesdell, *Farm Population of the United States*, Census Monographs, 6 (Washington, 1926), p. 105.

18. 9th Census 1870, *Compendium* (Washington, 1872), pp. 578–602; 11th Census 1890, *Population*, 2 (Washington, 1897): cxlvi. It should be noted here that the strong gains of the secondary and tertiary sectors at the expense of the primary sector in the occupational makeup were even more dramatic than they appear in the diagram, since the American statistics aggregate the more agrarian German immigration of earlier decades with new arrivals. (For the method of calculation see my forthcoming book, cited in n. 1.)

19. For the United States see S. Resneck, "Unemployment, Unrest, and Relief in the United States during the Depression of 1893–1897," *Journal of Political Economy* 61 (Aug. 1953): 324–45; Ch. Hofman, "The Depression of the Nineties," *Journal of Economic History* 17 (June 1956): 137–64; R. Fels, *American Business Cycles, 1865–1897* (Westport, Conn., 1959), pp. 179–219. For Germany see J. J. Lee, "Labour in German Industrialization," in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, 7 (Cambridge, 1978): 442–91.

German mining industry had already begun to compete with the United States in attracting migrants during the 1880s. The prewar boom period starting in the mid-1890s not only enabled German industry to absorb most or all of the available skilled and unskilled labor, but demand even outgrew supply. The rapid rise of German industry allowed the rural migrants, especially from the northeast, to escape from their agrarian misery while still remaining in their native land. The declining margin of existence in the agriculture of the northeast had done its share in taking the stigma from joining the industrial proletariat. The rural proletariat of the northeast had in fact nothing to lose by moving from east to west.

With the growing attraction of the industrial labor market in the west, the pattern of migration from the northeast began to change during the 1880s. The more industry took the lead, the more internal migration from the east to the west turned into the domestic equivalent of overseas emigration. Besides the option of permanent internal migration, it was now also possible to earn enough money through temporary industrial employment to buy a small farm, or stabilize and expand the old one at home. This was particularly evident in the temporary migration of the Masurians to the Ruhr district.²⁰ Migrants from northeast Germany first went to the industrial center of Berlin, then, in the 1870s, to the industrial areas of central Germany such as Leipzig and Dresden and to a lesser extent already to the Rhineland and Westphalia. During the 1880s and even more so after 1890, internal east-west migration in Germany was characterized by the long-distance exodus from areas of economic stagnation in the agricultural northeast to the industrial centers of the west, especially to the Ruhr district. Disregarding the numerous regional differences within the northeast, we can say in general that not just towards the end of the third wave of emigration but already during the 1880s the currents of migration from the northeastern areas, formerly flowing overseas, became part of the internal migration streams from rural to urban areas and especially to the far west of Germany.

Decisive for the regional differences during this transition were the varying strengths in the traditions of emigration in the particular prov-

20. H. Linde, "Die soziale Problematik der masurischen Agrargesellschaft und die masurische Einwanderung in das Emscherrevier," in H.-U. Wehler, ed., *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte* (Cologne, 1968), pp. 456-70.

inces and the resulting degree of transatlantic communication. For example, in areas such as Mecklenburg, with a long tradition of emigration and therefore intensive transatlantic communication, overseas emigration and internal migration were both considered equal alternatives during the third wave of emigration.²¹ Many people had relatives, everyone had acquaintances in the United States, who could be asked to purchase a "prepaid ticket." Nevertheless, even in Mecklenburg the volume of internal migration during the 1880s was greater than that of overseas emigration. In East Prussia, the province with the lowest wages for farmworkers and the lowest standard of living for the small peasants, there was hardly any tradition of overseas emigration. Overseas emigration, therefore, offered little hope of escape from rural misery. Thus, during the third emigration wave East Prussia registered the lowest intensity of overseas emigration within the northeast, but an extremely high intensity of internal east-west migration. In East Prussia, the "prepaid ticket" did not come from the United States, but as early as the 1880s from the industrial areas of the German far west.²²

It should be noted that this internal east-west migration corresponded to transatlantic emigration not only in the sense that both movements took the same directions. We also find migrants exposed to similar problems of alienation and integration, partly balanced by the help of family and friends. The migrants from the eastern provinces faced a foreign environment when they arrived in the industrial melting pot of the Ruhr, even more so if they were Poles from the eastern provinces of Prussia, unable to speak German and isolated in the subculture of the so-called "Ruhr Poles" (*Ruhrpolen*).²³ There is a certain parallel between their situation and the formation of German-speaking "colonies" in the United States. But one would assume that a Polish-speaking farmworker from eastern Prussia found it even more difficult to adjust to the mining industry of western Germany than a German-speaking farmworker to one of the German agricultural settlements of the American Midwest. That is why one could call the internal long-distance

21. On the history of emigration from Mecklenburg see E. Czalla, "Die Auswanderung aus Mecklenburg nach Nordamerika in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Rostock, 1974).

22. E. Franke, *Das Ruhrgebiet und Ostpreussen* (Essen, 1936); W. Brepohl, *Der Aufbau des Ruhrvolkes im Zuge der Ost-West-Wanderung* (Recklinghausen, 1948).

23. See n. 12.

migration of farmworkers speaking Polish or Masurian a kind of internal emigration.²⁴

Except for the Masurians, however, the decision to go west was for most—in particular the farmworkers from the northeast—a road without return. Apparently, this was also true for those who had initially migrated in order to earn the money for buying a farm back home or in the United States. These migrants from the east found their “America” in Western Germany. They experienced the same fate as their counterparts who went to the United States without any financial resources expecting to earn the money for a farm there and then became bogged down in urban and industrial employment. For the majority of rural migrants from the northeast the dream of an independent life as a farmer was lost in the rising tide of the industrial mass society on both sides of the Atlantic.

Overseas emigration from Germany and internal migration within Germany were closely linked to the development of continental immigration into Germany, especially from eastern European countries. This linkage too was most noticeable in the German northeast. Despite all the differences in the intensity of overseas emigration and internal out-migration, all areas of the northeast had one thing in common: between the 1880s and World War I the northeast suffered the highest loss of population through migration, both overseas and internal. In areas where overseas emigration was less severe, internal outmigration was all the more devastating. Moreover, the internal “flight from agriculture” (*Landflucht*) took other forms besides interregional migration. Where urban employment was available nearby, as in Brandenburg, or where there was industrial employment, as for instance in the Upper Silesian mining district, part of the rural surplus population stayed in the area, but left agricultural jobs for urban and industrial employment. In Germany this pattern came to be known as “flight from agriculture without changing location” (*berufliche Landflucht*).²⁵

24. For a regional case study see K. Neils Conzen, *Immigration Milwaukee, 1836–1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); see also her study on the Germans in America, forthcoming in O. Handlin, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, which I was able to use in manuscript. For a comparative regional study with a more rural focus see W. D. Kamphoefner, “Transplanted Westfarians: Persistence and Transformation of Socioeconomic and Cultural Patterns in the Northwest German Migration to Missouri” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1978).

25. P. Quante, *Die Flucht aus der Landwirtschaft* (Berlin, 1933); L. Schofer, *The Formation of a Modern Labor Force: Upper Silesia, 1865–1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975);

Together, overseas emigration, the various forms of internal out-migration, and the "flight from agriculture" soon resulted in a transition from a relatively overpopulated northeast to an area plagued by a lack of agricultural manpower, a situation which was balanced from the 1890s on by the growing continental immigration of foreign migrant workers from across the eastern borders of Prussia. The Upper Silesian mining industry aside, this immigration headed first for the agricultural labor market of the northeast. In particular, laborers from central Poland, at that time under Russian domination, and workers from Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, took jobs in agricultural areas formerly held by German farmworkers. The rural proletarians from the overcrowded agricultural areas of central Poland and Galicia found the same living conditions that had driven away the Germans still highly attractive. What pushed one group pulled the other. Agrarian employers, plagued by labor shortage, welcomed the newcomers, who recommended themselves by being "undemanding," "willing," and "cheap" (*bescheiden, willig und billig*).²⁶

As early as 1906 the agricultural capacity of eastern Prussia had become directly dependent on foreign labor from across the eastern borders. The Prussian administration had to concede that the absence of foreign migrant workers in the northeast "would almost mean the death knell for agriculture."²⁷ That was also true for the Upper Silesian mining district, where, reportedly, the mining industry could "not continue to operate without foreign labor."²⁸ Beginning in the agricultural northeast the continental immigration from eastern Europe found its goal continuously further west and southwest, finally arriving at the industrial centers of the west. During the prewar boom period, industry in the western parts of Germany also offered jobs not only to German workers leaving the land but also to more and more foreigners. Because of political considerations, the employment of foreign laborers

R. A. Dickler, "Organization and Productivity Change in Eastern Prussia," in W. N. Parker and E. Jones, eds., *Economic Essays in European Agrarian History* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 269-92.

26. M. Weber, *Die Verhältnisse der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Deutschland*, Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik, 55 (Leipzig, 1892), passim; idem, "Die ländliche Arbeitsverfassung," in *Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik*, 58 (Leipzig, 1893), 62-86.

27. W. A. Henatsch, *Das Problem der ausländischen Wanderarbeiter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zuckerproduktion in der Provinz Pommern* (Greifswald, 1920), p. 17.

28. Zentrales Staatsarchiv, Historische Abteilung II, Merseburg, Rep. 120, VIII, 1. Nr. 106, vol. 10, pp. 109f.

from eastern Europe, especially from central Poland and Galicia, in the western provinces of Prussia was allowed only in exceptional cases. The rationale was to prevent a "polonization of the west," which it was feared would follow the "polonization of the east" if foreign Poles were allowed to mingle with their Prussian brethren in the Polish "colonies" of the Ruhr. As a result, laborers of other nationalities were recruited with all the more zeal. This was particularly true in the brick-works and the construction industries, where Italians made up the main contingent.²⁹

Figure 9 depicts the increasing influx of foreign migrant labor especially in the northeast. From 1910 to 1920 the annual average of foreign labor in Germany amounted to more than 700,000. Poles from Russia and Austria formed the biggest group (43.7 percent), while Ruthenians from Galicia were the second largest (11.8 percent). On the national level this must, however, be understood as a conservative figure, as foreign workers outside Prussia were not fully listed. Figure 13 gives the net migration balance in Germany.³⁰ It relates the natural population growth to the net gain or loss from transnational migration movements, which includes, of course, all the movements on the continent and across the Atlantic. This opened up the prospect, shocking at the time, that Germany might cease to produce large numbers of emigrants and instead be faced with growing numbers of immigrants. However, this tendency never materialized. The Prussian administration, being more upset by this prospect than any other authority in Germany, evolved a sophisticated system whereby insiders could get out, but outsiders from across the eastern borders could only temporarily get in.

Germany was liberal on emigration but, of course, not on immigration. This position had emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. The German debate on emigration³¹ had gathered some momentum in the 1830s and became heated in the following decade, culminating in

29. A. Knoke, *Ausländische Wanderarbeiter in Deutschland* (Leipzig, 1911); A. Sartorius von Waltershausen, "Die italienischen Wanderarbeiter," in *Festschrift für A. S. Schultze* (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 51-94.

30. Net migration balance, according to *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, from Burgdörfer, p. 539.

31. On the discussion of the emigration issue in Germany see H. Fenske, "Die deutsche Auswanderung in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Öffentliche Meinung und amtliche Politik," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 1973, pp. 221-36; K. J. Bade, *Friedrich Fabri und der Imperialismus in der Bismarckzeit: Revolution—Depression—Expansion* (Freiburg i.Br., 1975).

FIGURE 13
GERMAN NET MIGRATION BALANCE, 1871-1910

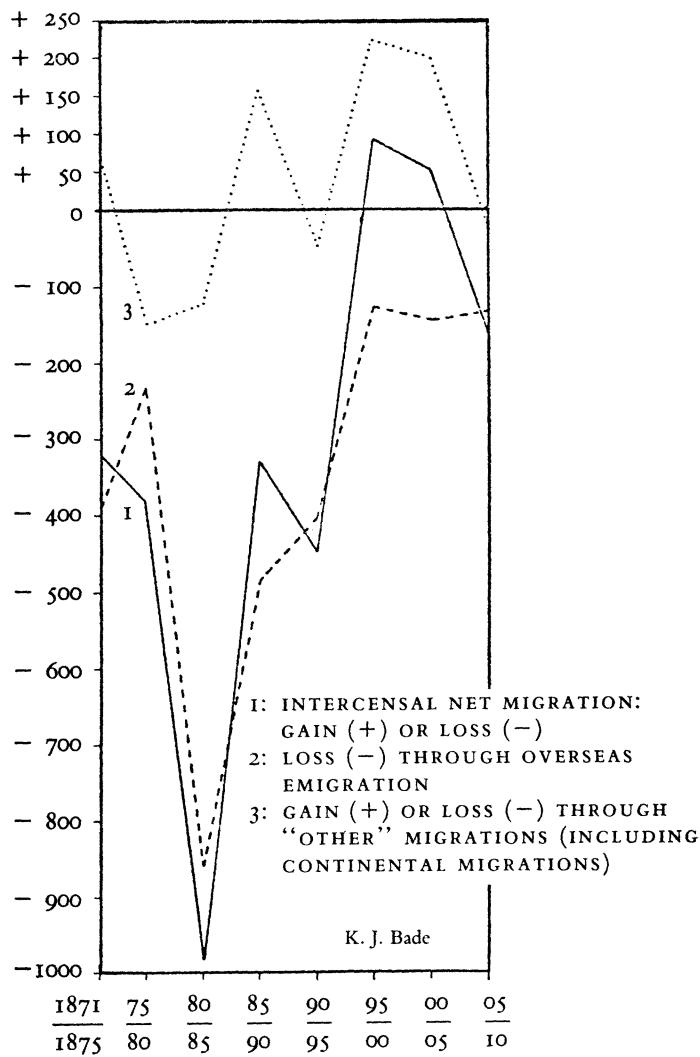
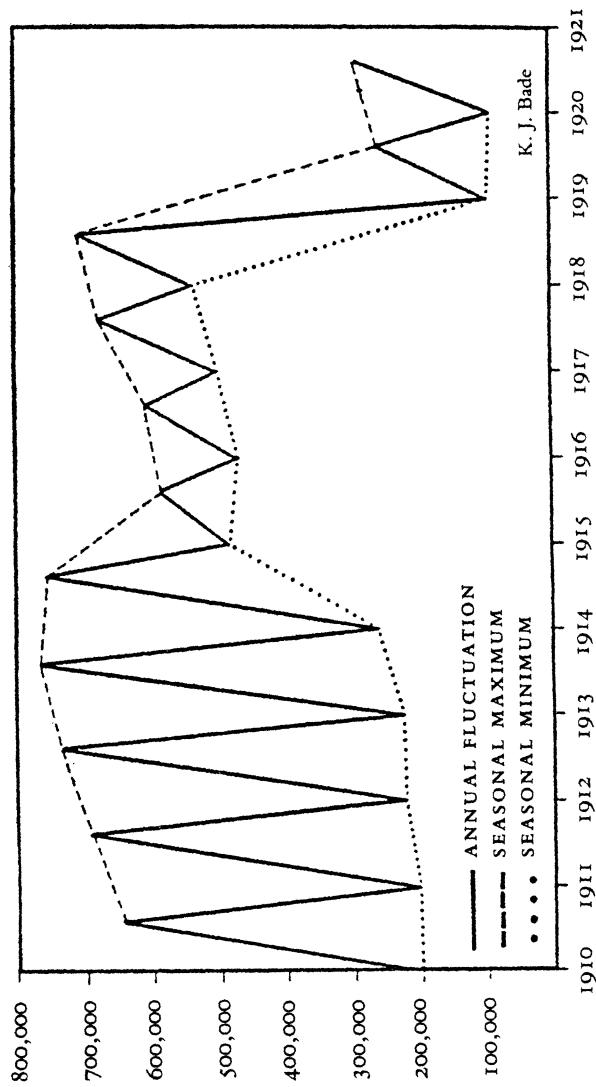


FIGURE 14
ANNUAL FLUCTUATION OF REGISTERED FOREIGN LABOR
IN GERMANY, 1910-20



the passage of the Emigration Bill (*Reichsauswanderungsgesetz*) of 1849, which even envisaged an emigration office. However, no emigration act on the Reich level came into legal existence before 1897. Even then, except for tight controls against young men escaping their military duties, German policy on emigration remained liberal, and the brakes that were applied were less important, as mass emigration by that time was a closed chapter. Apart from obstacles to immigration created by overseas countries during the immediate postwar era, German overseas emigration remained an essentially free and self-regulating movement determined by the forces of socioeconomic push and pull.

The contrary, however, was true when it came to continental immigration to Germany.³² This movement, too, was mainly determined by socioeconomic factors. But it was not left to the migrants from eastern Europe to decide whether they wanted to stay or come in temporarily. Immigration policies and alien legislation tended to curb permanent immigration and to favor the existence of a "reserve army" of foreign workers, responsive to the changing needs of industry and the seasonal demands of agriculture. The result was a highly mobile force of foreign labor which, when necessary, could be controlled by limited work as well as by residence permits. Foreign workers had to carry identity cards specially devised for that purpose. This practice was called *Legitimationszwang* (mandatory identification) and was directed, most of all, against Polish workers from across the eastern borders, who accounted for half of the foreign migrant labor force. Moreover, they were not allowed to come in with their families but only as single laborers. Their work permits were issued at the German border and expired every December. They tied the foreign worker to his employer, as both their names were entered into the foreign worker's passport. Special permits, mostly requested by industrial employers, were required for residence throughout the winter. Thus agricultural employers did not have to pay for their workers during unproductive winter months, whereas industrial employers were free to apply for an extension for their low-wage foreign workers whenever they needed them. Figure 14³³ shows

32. On political issues of foreign labor in Germany before World War I see J. Nichtweiss, *Die ausländischen Saisonarbeiter in der Landwirtschaft der östlichen und mittleren Gebiete des Deutschen Reiches* (Berlin, 1959).

33. Source of data: "Denkschrift über die Ein- und Auswanderung nach bzw. aus Deutschland in den Jahren 1910 bis 1920," *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des deutschen Reichstags*, 372 (1920): 4382ff.

the result of these state-imposed restrictions. They prevented Germany from becoming an immigration country by turning what would have been a permanent immigration into an annual ebb and flow of foreign labor crossing the eastern borders of Prussia. Thus the shift from permanent to temporary migration was not only a result of the general rise of temporary transnational labor migration in Europe. It was above all the result of deliberate government intervention into migration movements and the labor market in Germany and especially in Prussia ever since the 1890s.

In this way a dual labor market emerged. Foreign workers entered it on the internationalized lower-skill levels of employment like heavy manual labor and piece-work, in both industry and agriculture, where Germans preferred not to make their living. Here the reserve army of aliens, nearly one million people, operated as a buffer against structural changes and market fluctuations. Thus Germany did not have to conform to the tradition of classical immigration countries of eventually granting full citizen status to immigrants in return for their labors. By 1893 Germany ceased to be an emigration country; but rather than becoming an immigration country, it turned into a "labor-importing country." If, in spite of all this, a considerable number of immigrants from eastern Europe managed to stay, this was mainly a matter of illegal immigration which the Prussian Ministry of State tried to prevent with all the means at its disposal.

The system which had emerged by the turn of the century was bound to create serious conflicts among various economic, political, and social agencies on the national as well as on the international level. On the national level agrarian and industrial employers fought for a free-for-all admission of foreign workers, according to their specific needs and interests, while the trade unions vacillated between internationalism and their protective instincts. On the one hand trade unions failed to organize the unstable army of foreign workers and lost the battle for equal pay and equal rights; on the other hand they lamented the existence of foreign "strike breakers," "dirty competitors," and "wage-cutters." The same conflict existed on the international level, where collisions occurred between the trade unions of both sides, the respective employers in industry and agriculture, and the governments of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and, above all, Russia. On the national level, however, public discussion of the "foreign-worker question" in imperial Germany manifested sharp conflicts of interest to an extent

and intensity otherwise experienced only in the controversies over immigration policy in countries of immigration. World War I brought an abrupt end to this development.

When the war broke out, the eastern European workers who were in Germany at the time were forced to stay. That was especially true for the foreign migrant workers in agriculture. Without these foreign farmworkers (still 374,000 in October 1918), whose numbers were soon to be augmented by prisoners of war (900,000 in October 1918), the crisis of the German war economy would have culminated much earlier than it did in 1916. In the time of the Weimar Republic the number of foreign workers in Germany declined steadily. There were many reasons for this trend. The eastern borders of Germany had been moved west by the peace treaty of Versailles. Many Polish workers either returned to the new Poland or went further west to France. Even more important, however, was that, in view of mass unemployment in the Weimar Republic, the Prussian system of *Legitimationszwang* for laborers from across the eastern borders was expanded to a yearly work-permit system (*Genehmigungspflicht*) for all foreign laborers in Germany. Visas for foreign laborers were now given out only if the employment offices had confirmed that there was no equivalent native labor available for the job. Thus the reserve army of foreign workers was also legally restricted to a buffer function on the German labor market. Thus too, the curve on foreign employment, shown in Figure 9, serves as a sort of crisis barometer for Weimar Germany, indicating the changing supply-and-demand relationships in the labor market.³⁴

The contradictions between the policy of liberalism towards German emigration and protectionism with regard to continental immigration became even more crass. The protectionistic new quota system of the United States was sharply criticized in Weimar Germany. At the same time, however, the "labor-importing country" of Germany ran a

34. On the political issues of foreign labor in Germany during World War I and in the Weimar Republic see L. Elsner, "Die ausländischen Arbeiter in der Landwirtschaft der östlichen und mittleren Gebiete des Deutschen Reiches während des 1. Weltkrieges" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Rostock, 1961); F. Zunkel, "Die ausländischen Arbeiter in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaftspolitik des 1. Weltkrieges," in G. A. Ritter, ed., *Entstehung und Wandel der modernen Gesellschaft: Festschrift für H. Rosenberg zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 280–311; J. Tessarz, "Die Rolle der ausländischen landwirtschaftlichen Arbeiter in der Agrar- und Ostexpansionspolitik des deutschen Imperialismus in der Periode der Weimarer Republik, 1919–1932" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Halle, 1962).

restrictive system of entrance visas that went considerably further in its protectionistic intentions than the new American immigration policy. "Today the economy of international migration is on the road from liberalism to state-planned national economies," observed K. C. Thalheim in 1930. "Since the World War, the majority of states ruthlessly follow their own interests when it comes to regulating the right of their citizens to emigrate or of foreigners to immigrate," commented I. Ferenczi on the one-sided regulations of the labor market, "and their demands on other nations here stand in even greater contradiction to their own policies than in the case of tariffs."³⁵

The Great Depression brought a precipitous decline in the number of foreign workers in Germany. The few who remained in 1932 may have carried a foreign passport, but a third of those employed in agriculture and nearly all those in industry were of German descent and had lived in the Reich for years. Thus most of them had been freed from the restrictive Weimar work-permit system and were on an equal footing with German laborers. For a while, the time had passed when foreign migrant labor had helped to balance the German labor market and had served to secure growth in good times, and social peace in bad ones.

The "foreign-worker question" of imperial and Weimar Germany experienced a modified revival half a century later, though under different conditions, in the "guest-worker question" in the Federal Republic.³⁶ Again it was a reserve army of foreign workers, this time exclusively industrial workers coming mainly from southern and southeastern Europe, which assumed a buffer function on the internationalized lower level of the dual labor market of West Germany in times of boom and bust. They were brought into the country during the boom period of the 1960s and in the 1970s their numbers had to be reduced with the beginning of a recession caused by structural changes and market fluctuations; but their replacement function on the lower level of the dual labor market continued. Characteristic for this situation was the considerable number of unemployed, unskilled German workers de-

35. K. C. Thalheim, "Gegenwärtige und zukünftige Strukturwandlungen in der Wanderungswirtschaft der Welt," *Archiv für Wanderungswesen* 3 (1930): 47; I. Ferenczi, "Weltwanderungen und Wirtschaftsnöt," *Soziale Praxis* 36 (1927): 890.

36. For a sample of current discussion of this issue see E. Gehmacher et al., eds., *Ausländerpolitik im Konflikt: Arbeitskräfte oder Einwanderer? Konzepte der Aufnahme- und Entsendeländer* (Bonn, 1978); R. C. Rist, *Guestworkers in Germany: The Prospects for Pluralism* (New York, 1978); J. Blaschke and K. Greussing, eds., *Dritte Welt in Europa: Probleme der Arbeitsimmigration* (Frankfurt, 1980).

spite the large number of job opportunities on this lower level. These jobs had to be filled by foreign workers because the majority of unqualified German workers would rather receive unemployment compensation than enter into these employment areas. This system of a dual labor market rested on the shoulders of millions of foreign laborers, who worked in Germany without being able to become Germans.

In imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic the number of highly skilled and specialized foreign workers remained rather small. The mass of foreign laborers worked on the lower level of the dual labor market. In the Federal Republic and especially during the 1970s, the boundaries between these two levels have become more flexible for foreigners. Many of them moved upward through skills acquired in Germany, while others started out right away on the upper level as skilled workers. Many of them have been employed for more than one decade in Germany and have settled down with their families. This is one of the important differences between the "foreign-worker question" in imperial Germany and the "guest-worker question" in the Federal Republic. It also points up the shift from a "guest-worker question" to a genuine "immigration question." This is especially true for the hundreds of thousands of children of these families, who can't speak the native language of their parents any better than they can speak German. The so-called "guest-worker children" are in fact Germans with a foreign passport and constitute a new subculture in Germany. What will become of them when they have to compete with the last German baby boom on the overcrowded labor market of the next few years, only time will tell. To cope with this future it would be wise to recognize the historical consequences of "labor importing" and to enact them into law, and to risk the decisive step from a mere "foreigner policy" (*Ausländerpolitik*) to a genuine immigration policy.