

“Exploring White Germanness in Wilhelmine Adventure Novels”

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In a 1912 speech in the Reichstag, the secretary of the Reichskolonialamt Wilhelm Heinrich Solf called for the banning of interracial marriages in the German colonies and declared, “We are Germans, we are whites, and we want to remain whites.” But how did “we” get there? How did Germans become white? Or better said, how did Germanness become synonymous with whiteness in this period? My paper—part of a larger project on the cultural meanings of whiteness in Wilhelmine Germany—will examine German whiteness as an intersectional identity. By analyzing diverse examples of colonialist and imperialist adventure novels set in Africa, the American West, and South and Central America from authors such as Carl Falkenhorst, Friedrich Pajeken, Sophie Wörishöffer, Karl May, and Friedrich Meister I will show the messages that young people in Wilhelmine Germany read about what it meant to be German and white around the turn of the previous century. I will build on the work of scholars such as Katharina Walgenbach, Anette, Dietrich, Lora Wildenthal, and Robbie Aitken and show that debates and concern about the meaning of German whiteness moved beyond the realm of colonial authorities and colonialist newspapers and became part of the cultural fabric of the metropole, turning young readers into what Susanne Zantop called “armchair colonizers.” By focusing in particular on narrative literature for young readers, I will be able to explore not only the intersectional aspects of race and nation identity but of gender and age, as well.