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***Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany.*
By David Ciarlo. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,
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One of the most difficult issues to pinpoint in German colonial studies is the degree to which formal German colonialism in Africa, the Pacific, and China was important to German citizens. Academics, as well as laypeople, have hastened to declare that German colonialism was only marginally important—a mistake, in my view, as I consider it to have been a phenomenon with an interesting history in its own right. Yet it would also be a mistake to assume that the German colonial empire holds the key to understanding all aspects of German racism and exoticism. How to define the specific impact of German colonialism on Germans, as opposed to the effect of colonialism, or exoticism, in general? After all, many Germans either worked for, or emigrated to, colonial empires other than their own, or else they became acquainted with neo-European states that harbored specific forms of racism of their own, such as the United States. What do pervasive images in German popular culture and commercial life, such as the "Sarotti Moor," which is still used to advertise chocolate bars, have to do with all those histories? David Ciarlo has written a wonderful book in which he finds connections among the colonial movement, the exoticism that both preceded and reached beyond the formal German colonial empire, and the commercial images of Africans that were circulated in Germany. His book is both innovative and comprehensively authoritative.

Ciarlo draws mainly from records in the trademark registry maintained by the Patent Office in Imperial Germany (1870-1918). The very nature of this source enabled him to circumvent the stubborn problem of figuring out how consumers perceived these images. Because the registry covers many years, enabling him to link dozens of images through shared elements, he can discern what illustrators believed would work and what in fact did not work. Ciarlo does not just evaluate these images but also brings various issues to bear on what he surveys, such as the technical requirements of reproduction and expense, the visions of individual artists, and the professional level of their work. He also reminds readers that these thousands of images were not

seen by contemporary consumers one by one—which is how scholars today examine them—but rather as tiny bits of a "visual cascade" (p. 3).

Still, he can show a clear evolution: between the mid-nineteenth century and World War I, images of Africans became a regular part of **[End Page 843]** pictorial advertising directed to German consumers. Indeed, the use of advertising to sell commodities arose coevally with the use of images of Africans in that advertising. He also points to a second clear development: racialization. That is, figures of Africans that in earlier years were somewhat realistic, if often rudimentary, came to be increasingly caricatured and exaggerated through the application of certain design elements. Ironically, these elements that, through repetition, made "the African" instantly recognizable to German consumers by the 1920s— earrings, turbans, high pant cuffs, large ears, among others—rendered the figures almost unrecognizable as humans. For example, odd proportioning (e.g., oversized head, short legs) made it hard for the viewer to tell whether a figure was an adult or a child. Often, the African figure was essentially an outlined cartoon, while other human figures in the frame that represented Europeans were drawn realistically. Ironically, while these repeated elements came to be seen as a coherent code for "the African," they emerged incoherently from widely dispersed historical sources, ranging from pre-1850 British or other European images of the orientalized "Tobacco Moor" to late-nineteenth-century U.S. advertisements containing images of minstrel shows and the "cakewalk." In one of Ciarlo's most fascinating narratives, he recounts how German consumers had to be coached to understand visual references to minstrelsy, which they subsequently embraced. The evolution of these stereotypes was no provincial story, for Germany was concurrently becoming globally preeminent in graphic design.

The sources and trends that Ciarlo reveals were more powerful than the images that emerged from the actual German colonial empire. Events in that empire, such as the war against the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa, did have an impact on advertising images but it was a counterintuitive one, intensifying the trend that represented Africans as (nonthreatening) children. Ciarlo explains why colonialists wanted to intervene in the commercialization of images of Africans and other colonial subjects, and he points out the reasons for their limited success in this attempt. Thus, the important insight that he contributes to German colonial studies was giving the colonialist movement a place in this history of advertising, yet not giving it the decisive place, for the colonialist movement did not occupy that place. The German colonialists were indeed part of the story, but they were not central to it, because they were so poor at advertising. Their advertising skills were amateurish, and their political messages were exclusive and traditional. Advertisers and colonialists talked past each other, and the advertisers prevailed among the German population at large because they "disseminated imagery of colonialism to an audience far broader than that ever reached by any institution" (p. 14). **[End Page 844]**

David Ciarlo has written a wonderfully complex, rich, and thoughtful history of advertising, race, and colonialism that sets a standard for future work.