

The German Sonderweg in Turnen and Sport, 1870-1914

What's so German about the Germans?

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At the time of German unification the diversity of physical exercises all called Turnen within Germany differed considerably. In spite unifying attempts with the help of the newly created Deutsche Turnzeitung different exercise traditions were active within the different German states. It will be attempted to show that the degree of modernization in the separate states has had an influence on the physical practice, this will be shown, e.g., in the rules of the various school manuals.

The emergence of Swedish Gymnastics and of sport as two distinct agents of modernization, of rationale and comparison, can be traced in this context. Sport, the

dominant form of body techniques for competitive societies with its obvious individualism started to replace the collectivism of Turnen particularly in the industrially progressed parts of Germany. The organized attempts to maintain a German Sonderweg by avoiding the internationalization of Swedish Gymnastics (Barrenstreit) and by integrating sports (Spielbewegung) will be shown by pointing out the different physical practices of men, women, and children of both sexes.

In addition to the exercise manuals of the various schools, the Deutsche Turnzeitung and the rules of the various school systems offer a look at the aesthetic literature of the time will show the shifting image of the corps légitime (P. Bourdieu). The attempts of the Imperial government to unify the various directions and invent a tradition of German Turnen (E. Hobsbawm) will be shown. In this way often contrasting forms of local, regional, and national identity were created and sharply contrasted with the non-German.

The paper will be original and based mainly on printed primary material. It will follow up work I have done with my A Horse Breeder's Perspective. Scientific Racism in Germany 1970-1933 for a German Historical Institute conference in Washington, DC., June 1994.