

Reasons For German Emigration Throughout History

By Roger Kennedy January 2003

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While there are a variety of reasons for German and German-speaking people to leave their lands and homes, there are a few which are most common.

Illegitimacy

For those living in poverty, many had children out of wedlock. Unfortunately this meant the child was not able to join a guild, own property, or hold citizenship. The lure of a new land where everyone is equal often played a hand in these peoples' choice of emigration.

Inheritance

Germanic Inheritance Law was based on Frankish Salic Law. Germanic Inheritance Law stated that women could not gain inheritance unless all sons were deceased and property (most commonly a farm) could not be divided between children, instead staying as one parcel of land for the oldest son. Younger sons were often left with little opportunity to own land and have a stable livelihood.

Poverty

Poverty was rampant throughout Europe for hundreds of years. Caused by war, famine, plague and natural disasters, people often left their lands in search of something better in the New World.

Religious Persecution

Many wars were fought over religion in Europe, and often one religion or another would be persecuted by local rulers. As an example, in the 1860s as Bismark rose to power in Prussia, he created an atmosphere which did not support Catholicism resulting in the mass exodus of many Catholics to other parts of the world.

***It should be noted, while I mention Emigration to the New World, especially the United States, Germans often emigrated to other countries as well. Hungary was a popular destination, and German immigration to the USA really picked up in the late 1720s.

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