

German Settlement in the East (1930)

Abstract

This 1930 documentary film, *Deutsche Ostsiedlung* [German Settlement in the East], promoted the bounty, industriousness, and essential *Germanness* of the regions of Silesia and East Prussia, which marked the eastern edge of the post-1918 German state, but which held deep historical significance for the German nation. It aimed to entice Germans to settle in these sparsely populated areas, an effort referred to as “internal colonization” that earlier German states had pursued as well. As that term suggests, advocates hoped that these settlers would both contribute to the economic development of the region and further solidify German claims to territory in an increasingly contested part of eastern Europe. The film’s script came directly from the *Gesellschaft für innere Kolonisation* [GFK, Society for Internal Colonization], an organization founded in 1912 to promote rural settlements and expand agricultural production, and it included footage from earlier documentaries by the prolific filmmaker Erich Puchstein, who produced over three dozen films during the last half of the Weimar Republic that conveyed various aspects of the life and landscape of East Prussia in reverential terms. The film’s intertitles provided an explicitly nationalistic framing of those bucolic images by underscoring the fact that Germans had lived in this area since the Middle Ages and by making explicit reference to the Teutonic Order, a medieval fraternity of German knights that controlled eastern outposts of the Hanseatic League. That deep German heritage notwithstanding, much of East Prussia suffered from depopulation, as people left its isolated stretches in search of better prospects to the west. This film sought to counteract that rural exodus [often referred to as *Ostflucht* (flight from the east) or *Landflucht* (flight from the land)] that had reduced the German population and prompted shrill warnings of a subterranean Polish cultural takeover. Efforts in the Weimar Republic to encourage German settlement of the eastern provinces thereby blended economic interest with both nationalism and anti-Slavic prejudice, seeing potential migrants into the area as bulwarks against the newly founded states of Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Source

Part One. Germany's Beautiful East.

Intertitle: Where the Eastern Sea in its eternal beauty...

Intertitle: ...breaks against the German coast...

Intertitle: ...and borders Poland in Germany's east...

Intertitle: ...lies rich agricultural land: Mecklenburg-Pomerania, the Mark, West and East Prussia, Silesia.

Intertitle: Conquered for the Germans by the Teutonic Order in a centuries-long struggle...

Intertitle: ...the lands surrounding Königsberg...

Intertitle: ...the magnificent fields of East Prussia...

Intertitle: ...all the way to Silesia.

Intertitle: Agriculture and animal husbandry are flourishing here, in the east of our homeland.

Intertitle: The Silesian Cold-Blood Breeders' Association breeds strong horses.

Intertitle: Award-winning Silesian warmbloods.

Intertitle: The breeding of East Prussian “Hollanders” is well known, ...

Intertitle: ...the black-and-white cows bred at Insterburg,

Intertitle: and the *Edelschweine* [Large Whites] bred in Pomerania and East Prussia.

Intertitle: And yet, in this east, this land of industriousness and labor, ...

Intertitle: there are vast, vast areas without villages, houses or stables, a land without people!

Intertitle: In the west of our homeland industry reigns supreme.

Intertitle: The paths to healthy development are blocked for the offspring of old farming communities there. Nevertheless, these strengths can be preserved for our people if we transplant them from the west to the east, as they once were under the protection of the Teutonic Order.

Source: *Deutsche Ostsiedlung*, prod. Universum-Film AG for the Society for Inner Colonization, 1930.
Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv, Filmwerk ID: 545. <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/545/679717>

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