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# The Black Question

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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The Black Question  
Nicole L. Butler  
SIT Spring Semester 2006

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## 1. Introduction

In April 2006, a 37-year old Ethiopian man was brutally attacked by two skinheads sending the country into a state of mourning. In the days to follow, the German press covered the attack extensively raising the question if whether or not race-based crimes had witnessed resurgence in Germany. For many people, the answer to such a question required a further analysis of the last few years in Germany. In 2005, Oury Jalloh, an immigrant from Sierra Leone burned to death while in a holding cell at the city jail in Dessau. The examiners labeled his death suicide although his hands and feet were handcuffed to the bed. Also in 2001, a Senegalese woman was shot to death by a police officer in Aschaffenburg. Similar attacks towards blacks have occurred in the past, yet they often go ignored by the general public.

Each year, the Black community continues to become more noticeable throughout Germany. It is comprised of mainly first and second generation Africans, African Americans and black Germans. However, to speak of a united black community would be inappropriate. Many Africans come to Germany seeking better economic opportunities for their families. Others applied for political asylum due to vicious dictators in their respective home countries. And despite what many historians and intellects report, Germany received its first wave of African Americans in the early years of the twentieth century. The second, larger wave of African Americans resulted then from the occupation of the allied troops after World War II. Black Germans, on the other hand, typically have a German mother and a black father either

from Africa or America. This group holds perhaps the most precarious position since they are socialized as Germans, but not accepted by their white German compatriots.

“The Black Question” is an inquiry into the lives of blacks in Germany. For many years, black people have become a focal point for scholars, politicians and the like. As a result several questions have continuously been raised over the last century. When did the first blacks arrive in Germany? For what reasons did they come? What does it mean to be a black person in contemporary Germany? With no instruction on black history in German schools, many Germans grow up unaware of the history of blacks in Germany. Consequently, they perpetuate several of problems blacks in Germany experience today. “The Black Question” seeks to address some of the most pertinent questions concerning the black community in Germany.

My ultimate goal is to provide the average German reader with solid information regarding black people and their lives in Germany both present and past. In order to capture the experiences of blacks around Germany, I traveled to various cities and conducted interviews with people of African descent. Too often, the experiences of one or two blacks are portrayed as the typical life of blacks in Germany everywhere. This discrepancy—along with a few others—created the motivation to conduct this Independent Study Project.

“The Black Question” is divided into two parts with corroborating objectives. The first section titled “First Contact” elaborates why the first blacks migrated to

Germany in the first place. Through a historical lens, I will attempt to chronologically narrate the history of blacks starting in the fifteenth century. This section becomes increasingly important when trying to understand the roots of problems faced by blacks in contemporary Germany. Since this project serves as an overview of all blacks in Germany, I tried to write about the various groups within the Black Community equally. However, this task itself proved to be a challenge at times. My main focus in the “First Contact” section lies in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century. During this time, black migration in Germany increased steadily.

The second part of “The Black Question” focuses on the current plight of blacks in Germany. In this section, I attempt to outline some of the main problems faced by black people in Germany. Since the 1980’s, various organizations have been established to address these problems and unite blacks. Yet in 2006, many still question their effectiveness. My project also explores some of the internal problems by these organizations. Hopefully, the reader will develop a better understanding of life as a black person in Germany at the conclusion of this project.

## 1. First Contact

Historically, it is common knowledge that the Spanish and Portuguese first ventured south towards West Africa in the 1440’s.<sup>1</sup> Searching for gold, minerals and spices, they “discovered” the unknown continent and returned to Europe with its commodities. Professor Chachage labeled this process as “a lust for riches... fired by

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<sup>1</sup> Chachage, C.S.L. “Can Africa’s Poor Inherit the Earth and all its Mineral Rights?” December 2005. p. 4.

the legendary myth of the Christian King, Prestor John, who supposedly ruled a vast empire in the interior of Africa, and lived in a palace of translucent crystal and precious stones.”<sup>2</sup> In 1448, a Portuguese historian by the name of d’Azurara, also listed six reasons for explorations to the Western coast of Morocco. <sup>3</sup> They include:

1. Scientific curiosity
2. Economic considerations
3. Military considerations
4. The diplomatic quest for allies
5. The urge to transfer European religious ideology to countries overseas
6. Astrological reasons

Whatever the exact reason may be, Spanish and Portuguese curiosity spilled over into the agendas of other European countries such as Germany. At the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, Germany took advantage of the economic opportunities ultimately creating two long-term consequences. First, it inevitably changed the relationship between the two continents. Secondly, it contributed to spread of the African Diaspora with its involvement in the slave trade.

### 1.1 The African Diaspora

In her book, *Rewriting the Footnotes*, P. Reed-Anderson defines the African diaspora as “the forced expulsion of Africans from their native countries caused by the European slave trade and the scattered communities that then developed as a result on the continents of North and South America as well as Europe” (the Greek word

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Debrunner, Hans. “Africa, Europe and America: The Modern Roots from a European Perspective.” In: *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa and Germany in the Modern World*. Edited by David McBride, Leroy Hopkins, and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay. (Columbia: Camden House, 1998), p. 3.

Diaspora: scatter).<sup>4</sup> As a result of the slave trade, which had been institutionalized by the eighteenth century, Germany played a role in the dispersion of Africans on the European continent. Similar to neighboring countries, members of German royalty began to employ Africans to work as domestic servants and soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Over time, Germany sent more slaves back home to work in various occupations. With the inability to consult records, no one knows the exact arrival of the first Africans in Germany. However, records indicate that in 1682 the Trade Society Brandenburg-African Company shipped slaves to Hamburg.

Ships from Africa continued to head towards Germany up until the abolishment of slavery. In 1884, Otto von Bismarck invited leaders from other European countries to discuss the future of Africa. The conference, which took place in Berlin, sought to ensure the equal distribution of the land to please all side involved. Africa became a playground for European capitalists. As a result of the Berlin Conference, Africa's resources, land and most importantly people became the victims in a vicious cycle of exploitation that would continue for several decades.

The Berlin Conference secured Germany four colonies: Cameroon, Togo, German East Africa (now Tanzania), and German Southwest Africa (now Namibia).<sup>6</sup> With increased connections to Africa, the presence of Africans in Germany became more common. Many Africans also began to take advantage of opportunities allowing them

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<sup>4</sup> Reed-Anderson, Paulette. "Rewriting the Footnotes." (Berlin: Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991. p. 30.



to migrate to their respective colonial powers. Africans came to Germany to study or work and at times settled with German women and started a family.

Despite regular contact with Africa, Germans—and Europeans in general—viewed Africans as inferior, uncivilized people. The nineteenth century gave way to the study of human beings starting with the publication of Charles Darwin’s “On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection.” Darwin put forth the idea of hierarchy among human beings. With the formation of such a “race theory,” other intellectuals began to study the continent of Africa verifying its inferiority to other races. The inquiry into the racial difference and origins of race, interested prominent European powers as well as the United States. M. Schueller, labels this process as a “Race to the Orient.”<sup>7</sup> Intellectuals began to question the origin of man ultimately creating a division among those who believed in monogenesis and polygenesis.<sup>8</sup>

During this time, having a fair white complexion meant holding a considerable advantage over those who were black. The development of ideology that made “being black” a burden effected the lives of people of African descent. In Europe, the development of bleaching creams helped to “deniggerfy” the black race.<sup>9</sup> Such creams have since continued to sell in markets across America, Europe and Africa.

Why not apply a cream and “become white?” Several blacks—even today—continue

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<sup>7</sup> Schueller, Malini. *U.S. Orientalisms*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997)

<sup>8</sup> Monogenesis argues that all human beings have the same origin as stated in the Bible with the creation of Adam and Eve. Polygenesis support the idea the hierarchical classification of races naturally ranking the Caucasian race at the top.

<sup>9</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991), p. 43.

to use such products, which many times cause major skin irritations if not applied appropriately. The Germans constructed a paradoxical policy towards blacks. On the one hand, average black workers and students received no special treatment. On the other hand, however, blacks in the entertainment industry continuously dazzled crowds across the country. Consequently, many blacks who migrated to Germany during this time took up careers in the entertainment industry.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Blacks in the Entertainment Industry

In 1887, a group of gospel singers from Fisk University traveled across Europe. The “Fisk Jubilee Singers” performed for a selected audience of bourgeoisie in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Also, the William’s Colored Singers of Chicago, the Utica Jubilee Singers and the Hampton Choir performed in Germany during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Many African Americans traveled to Germany in pursuit of better working condition and better pay. Christine Naumann in her article “African American Performers and Culture in Weimer Germany,” explains this phenomenon by illustrating the “artistic self-discovery and challenge” that Europe provided for African Americans.<sup>12</sup> Germany became a mecca for black entertainers who sought to start their careers. George Vaze, an African American performer, elaborated his preference to Germany in comparison to France or England in 1929. “The Germans look at you; but they do not mean you harm. A Negro to Germans is a novelty.... The

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<sup>10</sup> Reed-Anderson. Paulette. “Rewriting the Footnotes.” (Berlin: Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Naumann, Christine. “African American Performers and Culture in Weimar Germany” pg 97

people like you when you are clever and can do something that they are not accustomed to.”<sup>13</sup>

Although a Negro was viewed as novelty during this time, Africans still continued to endure inhumane treatment by the Germans. Beginning in 1896, Germans began to exhibit Africans in “Exhibitions of Exotic Peoples” (*Volkerschauen*).<sup>14</sup> Carl Hagenbeck, founder of Hagenbeck *Tierpark*, displayed Africans in Hamburg in the early twentieth century. Hans J. Massaquoi, an Afro-German from Hamburg, recalls visiting the zoo in his autobiography *Destined to Witness*. Massaquoi wrote:

After walking past spectacular exhibits of monkeys, giraffes, lions, elephants, and other African wildlife, we arrived at the ‘African Village,’ replete with half a dozen or so thatch-roofed clay huts and peopled, we were told by ‘authentic Africans.’ Like the animals exhibits, the ‘village’ was bordered by a chest-high wooden fence...All of the villagers were barefoot and dressed in tattered rags.<sup>15</sup>

The culture shows that appeared throughout Germany continued to exploit Africans whom they labeled half-civilized. Surprisingly, black Negroes received better treatment by the Germans compared to the Africans—despite both groups classification as black. However, that changed as well. The end of World War I heralded a new phase in German relations with blacks that would remain for several years.

### 1.3 The Rhineland Bastards

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Reed-Anderson. Paulette. “Rewriting the Footnotes.” (Berlin: Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Massaquoi, Hans J. *Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1999.

After World War I, Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles forcing the demilitarization of the Rhineland. French troops occupied the Rhine bringing some forty thousand African troops to Germany.<sup>16</sup> The German people viewed this as the “ultimate insult” labeling it the *Schwarze Schande*. The democratized Germany, under the leadership of Friedrich Ebert, ordered the immediate removal of the African troops.<sup>17</sup> The French African troops were portrayed as brutal sex fiends who would rape German women. A member of the Bayern *Volkspartei* even proposed to lynch blacks who had relations with German women following the practices in the United States.<sup>18</sup> During this time, German women gave birth to children by African men—27,000 over the course of fifteen years. When questioned, many blamed rape for the birth of their bi-racial children even if that was not the case. The idea to sterilize these children soon came into question by many. In 1928, Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

*Juden waren und sind es, die den Neger an den Rhein bringen immer mit dem gleichen Hintergedanken und klaren Ziele, durch die dadurch zwangsläufig eintretende Bastardisierung die ihnen verhasste weisse Rasse zu zerstören, von ihrer kulturellen und politischen Höhe zu stürzen und selber zu ihren Herren aufzusteigen.*<sup>19</sup>

The Mulatto children posed great concern for the German nation becoming the center of many discussions before and after Hitler came to power. In 1933, one of Hitler’s first priorities included sterilizing the black children of the Rhine. In public, German women who mothered Mulatto children were labeled “whores.” Along with Jews, gypsies and other minority groups, blacks in Germany suffered from defamation,

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<sup>16</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991), p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Reed-Anderson. Paulette. “Rewriting the Footnotes.” (Berlin: Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, 2000), p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991), p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

humiliation and even torture at the hands of the Nazi regime. By 1937, 400 Mulatto children were sterilized without further explanation as to why. Others were transported to concentration camps around Europe never to return. The exact number of deaths from the black diaspora is not exact. However, few lived to share their experiences regarding life under Hitler.

#### 1.4 Brown Babies or Mischlinge

After World War II, the occupation of Allied forces introduced a new chapter in Black-German relations. The United States with the French, Britons and Russians divided Germany into four zones. Once again the plight of brown babies or *Mischlinge* became the center of attention. Out of 94,000 occupation children born, blacks fathered around 3,000 by 1952. In a Parliament debate, a Christian Democratic Union (CDU) member noted:

*Diese Mischlingsfrage wird also ein innerdeutsches Problem bleiben, das nicht einfach zu lösen sein wird. Wir müssen die Aufmerksamkeit der deutschen Öffentlichkeit auf diese Frage zu lenken, das zu Ostern 1952 die 1946 geborenen Mischlinge eingeschult werden. Allerdings ist es völlig indiskutabel, die Aufmerksamkeit der Öffentlichkeit in der Form auf diese Frage zu lenken, wie es in der Karnevalzeit in einer Stadt geschah, in deren Rosenmontagszug man einen Wagen sah mit der Beschriftung 'Made in Germany.' Auf ihm standen deutschen, als Mulatten zurechtgemacht Kinder.<sup>20</sup>*

The existence of these children—approximately 4,000 by 1955—challenged the notion of “being German.” The effects of democratization soon came under scrutiny as well. At a time when segregation still existed in the United States, Germany attempted to deal with the brown babies. Germans quickly protested lessons of

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<sup>20</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991), p. 87.

democracy from a nation with Jim Crow laws and racial discrimination at home.<sup>21</sup>

Especially since the 1947 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights denounced racial classification, discrimination and inequality.

Throughout the 1950's, studies continually illustrated the integration difficulties black children would experience living in a dominant white culture.<sup>22</sup> Some believed black children should be adopted to the United States while others discussed the possibility of placing the children in foster homes in Germany. The ultimate response combined the aforementioned with raising the children in German households as Germans. Over the next five decades, German women across the country would continue to birth and raise black children who often times suffered from a series of problems associated with their skin color.

### 1.5 The Afro-German Movement

During the past ten years, more information has appeared due to help of organizations such as ADEFRA, an acronym for Afro-Deutsche Frauen. Members of ADEFRA published the book, *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, in 1984. This book is the first extended work on Afro-German history. That same year Audre Lorde, taught a class on African American female poets at the Free University in Berlin. Having heard prior of African-German women, the prospect of meeting some of these women excited her. "Wer waren diese Frauen der Afrikanischen Minderheit die Afro-Deutschen?" She wrote in 1984. "Wo kreuzten sich die Weg vons uns

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<sup>21</sup> Fehrenbach, Heide. *Race after Hitler*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991), p. 86-91.

farbige Frauen über die Abweichungen unserer Unterdrückung hinaus, wenn auch sicher nicht ausserhalb dieser Abweichungen?“<sup>23</sup> Over the next few months, Lorde met with Black German women in Berlin. Together with May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye and Dagmar Schultz, they coined the term “Afro-Deutsch” after the American term Afro-American.<sup>24</sup> For the first time, Afro-Germans played a direct role in what they wished to be called. Some never viewed the term in a positive manner since it connected them with Africa.

In 1986, the Initiativ Schwarze Deutsche und Schwarze in Deutschland (ISD) established a network for all black people in Germany. Although both of these organizations seek to unite black people in Germany, both have different mission statements. The focal points of ISD include:

- *ein schwarzes Bewusstsein zu fördern*
- *Rassismus entgegenzutreten,*
- *die Interessen schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland zu vertreten*

ADEFRA, on the other hand, prides itself on being a forum “in dem sich Schwarze Frauen mit unterschiedlichsten Themen wie Politik, Bildung, Lifestyle und Gesundheit beschäftigen.” When comparing both of the organizations, ISD seems to be more inclusive of all black people in Germany while ADEFRA focuses solely on issues effecting black German women. Despite differences both organizations united to create the Afro-German movement.

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<sup>23</sup> Oguntoye, Katharina, Opitz, May und Dagmar Schultz. *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauen Verlag GmbH, 1991), p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 10.

Since the 1980's, several works by Black Germans have been published. Each work attempts to raise the awareness of the existence of Black Germans. For many people, trying to combine "black" and "German" together in a meaningful way proves to be a challenge. Nevertheless, Black Germans and Blacks in Germany continue to partake in what is often called the Civil Rights Movement of Germany. This fight continued well through the 1990's ultimately changing the direction of the Afro-German movement. Some black people left the pioneer organizations, ISD and ADEFRA, to establish their own organizations while others simply quit attending meetings altogether. As a result, the Black community in Germany continues to face the same problems today as it did twenty years ago—overall unity with no common goal in sight.

## 2. The Black Experience in Germany

Each year the Black community in Germany continues to grow adding a new dimension to the Afro-German movement. Many blacks in Germany hold the same views regarding pertinent issues in the black community on the surface level. However, the diversity of members proves to be a challenge at times. "We're living in entirely different worlds," states Ekpenyong Ani. "Sometimes we speak the same language but we mean different things. That's because we come from completely different backgrounds, mindsets and mentalities."<sup>25</sup> Within the Black Community, the priorities of various groups differ. Africans, for example, strive to change immigration laws making it easier for loved ones to immigrate to Germany. Black-Germans seek to establish a threshold into mainstream German society. Nevertheless,

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<sup>25</sup> Poikāne, Aija. "African Diasporas: Afro German Literature in the context of the African American Experience." (Ph. D. Dissertation. University of Dortmund. 2004), p. 168.



the black community serves as a vital tool for exchange and communication among blacks in Germany. Perhaps this reason alone draws many blacks around Germany to attend workshops and yearly gatherings held by organizations such as ADEFRA and ISD.

## 2.1 Racism in Germany

In contemporary Germany, many Black Germans and Blacks in Germany continue to face a variety of problems that stem from the past. The scholar and author Clarence Lusane examines this notion in his book *Hitler's Black Victims*. Lusane states “unresolved issues of race and racism from World War II continue to drive racism, individually and institutionally, in contemporary Europe.”<sup>26</sup> Ironically enough, Germans claim to be the most liberal-minded people in terms of race relations. My studies over the past few weeks prove just the opposite. Germany yearns cultural homogeneity, which stems from its “legacy of romanticism.” However, in the future it will need high-skilled immigrants in order to maintain its economic status in the global world.<sup>27</sup>

At the present time nationalistic tension has increased largely because of a staggering economy and ever-increasing unemployment. Once welcomed, immigrant workers have recently experienced increased discrimination in Germany. It took decades before German politicians accepted Germany as a “country of immigrants” despite the large wave of guest workers in the 1950’s and 60’s. Even former African-

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<sup>26</sup> Lusane, Clarence. *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro- Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> “Thinning Blood.” *The Economist*. February 11, 2006. p. 15.

American soldiers, who once received favorable treatment from Germans, no longer hold the same status as in the past. “Most German people think every black dude is here because he married a German woman or has a thousand kids,” one black GI told me. “They think you don’t work and live off the system, which is funny because you have to work to be here.”<sup>28</sup>

In Germany, black people in particular suffer from attacks against foreigners due to their highly noticeable features. Several black people in Germany migrate from Africa, however it is a common misconception that all blacks are Africans. African-American writer, Gyavira Lasana agrees. “Africans are the most highly-visible in Berlin, basically because Germans see all blacks as African. A gray-haired *Frau* once stopped me at Alt-Tegel and asked what ‘tribe’ I was from. When I replied, ‘New York,’ she walked away baffled and befuddled, he recently stated.”<sup>29</sup> Such stereotypes continue to hinder Germany from becoming a more humane society.

The general consensus of racism today is no longer the “overt, crude, in-your-face form of racism of the past,” claims Dr. Charles Quist-Adade.<sup>30</sup> In a three part series of race and racism in the *New African* magazine, Dr. Adade explores the transition of racism in modern society. His studies show that all people harbor prejudices against other racial groups, however the real problem occurs when people “translate

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<sup>28</sup> Butler, Nicole, interview by author. 18 April 2006, Dortmund, Germany.

<sup>29</sup> Lasana, Gyavira. “Blacks in Berlin: Alienated Enclaves.” In *Ex-Berliner*. March 2006 edition. p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Quist-Adade, Charles. “What is ‘race’ and what is ‘racism’?” In *New African*. April 2006 edition. p. 46.

prejudices and stereotypes into acts of discrimination.”<sup>31</sup> Racism affects all parties involved—the victimized and victimizers. Germany is no exception; it plays the game of tokenism probably better than most other Western nations. In certain industries—such as hip-hop music—highlighting one or two blacks tends to bring an “authentic” flare. But racism transcends further than the boundaries of hip-hop music in Germany.

Too often, black people in Germany experience hateful stares while waiting at the train station or grocery shopping. Some Germans even go one step further by telling blacks to go home. What they fail to realize is that Germany is home to many blacks and will continue be their home in the future. “To go into a different culture will never be like your own,” a Ghanaian asylum-seeker told me. “The racist remarks pained me at first, but after a while you just get used to it.”<sup>32</sup> Some people argue that one form of racism is better than another, but as Dr. Quist-Adade metaphorically puts it “the snake under the grass is more dangerous than the snake under the tree, for you can see the snake on the tree...but you cannot avoid the snake under the grass since it cannot be seen.”<sup>33</sup> Many blacks living in Germany experience racism in the most subtle, yet noticeable ways. For example, an *U-bahn* ticket inspector will board the train just to check their ticket. At the University of Bochum, a student informed me how he was denied admittance at a popular hip-hop club due to the color of his skin. However, such acts of racism cannot be confirmed many times.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Butler, Nicole, interview by author. 23 April 2006, Dortmund, Germany.

<sup>33</sup> Quist-Adade, Charles. “What is ‘race’ and what is ‘racism’?” In *New African*. April 2006 edition. p. 47.

The claim can be made that in many of the *Bundesländer*, racism has become more institutionalized. In April 2005, a café in the Prenzlauer Berg region of Berlin denied black youth entrance in fear of drug dealings. The owner however made an exception for blacks students with “Klugen Augen,” black tourists and black men accompanied by a female.<sup>34</sup> Months later in Dortmund, a 23-year-old African native was shot to death by police in front of a *Kiosk*.<sup>35</sup> Since then relatives have distributed flyers and organized a protest in the city. In response to acts of racism and violence, many blacks share concerns. However some take a similar stance as Eki Ani who feels “it is the job of whites to deal with racism. It is their illness, their problem, not mine.”<sup>36</sup> Although correct to a certain degree, Ani fails to think of black children in Germany who experience the same humiliation from their white classmates. Some of Germany’s most beloved children stories—such as Der Struwwelpeter—depict life as a black person in a negative manner.

## 2.2 Children Stories

Written in 1904 by H. Hoffman, *Der Struwwelpeter* contains several short stories aimed to discipline young children. “Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben,” relates the story of three young boys (all white) who happen to laugh as a “Mohr” passes by. The story continues as follows:

*Da kam der grosse Nikolas, mit seinem grossen Tintenfass.  
Der sprach: “Ihr Kinder, hört mir zu und lasst den Mohren hübsch in Ruh”!*

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<sup>34</sup> Lasana, Gyavira. “Whites Only.” In *Ex-Berliner*. March 2006 edition. p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix

<sup>36</sup> Lasana, Gyavira. “Whites Only.” In *Ex-Berliner*. March 2006 edition. p. 27.

*Was kann denn dieser Mohr dafür, dass er so weiss nicht ist wie ihr?”<sup>37</sup>*

The question “What can the child do about not being white?” implies that a black person is unlucky due to his/her color. Nikolas assumes the same role as the children even though he does not laugh at the “Mohr.” Instead he feels sorry for his blackness. What sort of punishment does Nikolas find appropriate for the young boys? He turns them all blacker than the “Mohr.” The story concludes with the following words of wisdom:

*Du siehst hier, wie schwarz sie sind, viel schwärzer als das Mohrenkind!  
Der Mohr voraus im Sonnenschein, der Tintenbuben hinterdrein;  
und hätten sie nicht so gelacht, hätt’ Niklas sie nicht schwarz gemacht.<sup>38</sup>*

Although many would not agree, the racial undertone of this story affects black children in Germany. It will inadvertently compel them to connect “being black” with “punishment.” Instead of being proud of their color, black children will attempt to renounce any affiliation with black culture in fear of being labeled an “Other.”

### 2.3 Depiction of Blacks in the Media

While in Dortmund, I had the opportunity to speak with the owner of an Afro-Shop. The owner explained to me the present situation with his three young children. None of the children wanted to visit their relatives in Africa; instead they preferred to remain in Germany. The owner attributed this to negative portrayal of blacks in everyday life. “One day,” the owner said, “when my children are older and can

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<sup>37</sup> Hoffmann, H. Der Struwwelpeter

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix

understand, I will take them to Africa but right now there is just no reason to go.”<sup>39</sup>

The role of the media plays a large role in influencing the thoughts of many black children in Germany. Typically, Africa is shown as underdeveloped and ravished—a land of very primitive people who have the lowest I.Q on this earth with a score of 70. Dr. Frank Ellis, a professor at the University of Leeds in England went one step further to say, “In the West, an individual with an I.Q. of 70 would be regarded as being close [to], or within the range of, mental retardation.”<sup>40</sup> Through the use of the media, black children in Germany witness the degradation of other blacks.

The positive achievements of African countries seldom receive any recognition by the mainstream media in Germany. Instead attention is given to issues that plague the continent such as poverty and disease. Many German writers, such as Ursula Ackermann (*Mitten in Afrika*) tend to reinforce racist clichés.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, Germans continue to harbor racial stereotypes about blacks sometimes even strengthening them.

The *Braune Mob*, a non-profit organization based in Hamburg, works to combat the negative portrayal of blacks in media. Last year when an Augsburg Zoo intended to hold an African Cultural Show, the *Braune Mob* campaigned against it. “People are upset by the idea of placing the festival in a zoo between the baboons and zebras,”

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<sup>39</sup> Butler, Nicole, interview by author. 19 April 2006, Dortmund, Germany.

<sup>40</sup> “Sackcloth and Ashes.” *New African*. April 2006 edition.

<sup>41</sup> Poikāne, Aija. “African Diasporas: Afro German Literature in the context of the African American Experience.” (Ph. D.Dissertation. University of Dortmund. 2004), p. 156.

founder Noah Sow explained.<sup>42</sup> The historical significance of the show appalled blacks around the country. In an open letter to the zoo director, University of Cologne Professor Norbert Finsch, also stated “The way Africans and African Americans in Germany are perceived and discussed, the way they are presented on billboards and in TV ads prove that the colonist gaze is still very much alive in Germany.”<sup>43</sup> Since then many other black organizations, such as ADEFRA and ISD, have condemned the opening of the culture show, which was expected to draw a crowd of around 20,000.

In addition to Noah Sow, Femi Awoniyi also recognized the negative depictions of blacks by the media. In 1998, the Nigerian journalist founded the magazine *The African Courier*. While discussing the birth of the magazine, he shared “the realization that there were no press product reporting on issues that are of interest to people of African descent in Germany provided the impetus.”<sup>44</sup> *The African Courier* delivers news relating to politics in Germany as it relates to immigration and the job market. Its importance cannot be questioned since Germany’s black population continues to grow. In fact, its popularity caused Awoniyi to extend its circulation to Austria, Switzerland the Netherlands. Thus, *The African Courier* attempts to provide a common forum for blacks to network and unite despite differences.

## 2.4 The New Black Community

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<sup>42</sup> “Row over German Zoo’s Africa Show.” retrieved May 4, 2006, from [http://www.derbraunemob.info/shared/download/BBC\\_NEWS.pdf](http://www.derbraunemob.info/shared/download/BBC_NEWS.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Poikāne, Aija. “African Diasporas: Afro German Literature in the context of the African American Experience.” (Ph D. Dissertation. University of Dortmund. 2004), p. 156.

Since 2003, the Black Community in Germany has evolved into a highly successful network of intellectuals, entertainers, human rights activists, etc. Through conferences and workshops blacks in Germany unite to share their experiences and to discuss pertinent issues troubling the community. Each year, new members join amazed by the benefits of partaking in such social exchanges. The support offered by the black community proves to be a worthwhile commitment for many. It allows blacks to become part of the “in-group,” which seldom occurs. As a black person in Germany—even with fluency in the German language—being a part of the “out-group” is the norm. Black children especially suffer from wanting to be accepted by the majority or the “in-group.” Mentally, black children fit in with the majority having acquired German customs and traditions. However, they lack one trait that hinders their acceptance—whiteness.

Naturally, to live in Germany as a black person proves to be challenge at times. The general consensus among blacks I spoke with during my studies agree. Strategies of resistance prove to be a valuable tool in certain instances. For example, if one black employs a method that proves to be effective against racist altercations. Then it can be spread to other blacks as well. Thus making communication among blacks even more important. Failure to spread strategies of resistances can prove to be disastrous. During an email exchange with the ISD Director in Nuremberg, Nancy informed me about the situation there. “As a matter of fact, situation is so bad that I will get out of here soon. I am relocating to the USA in June.”<sup>45</sup> Apparently, Ms. Jones can no longer handle life as a black person in Germany. One can deduce that her strategies of

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<sup>45</sup> Email received on March 17, 2006 titled “Re: Interview.”



resistance proved to be ineffective leaving her no other option, but to move to America. Ms. Jones is part of a growing number of blacks that no longer desire to live in Germany.

In addition to external problems, the Black Community in Germany suffers from internal problems as well. During my research, I had the opportunity to observe two of these problems. First, organizations such as ISD are becoming to “Afro-centric.” Consequently, blacks unsatisfied with the direction of the established organizations loose faith in their effectiveness and quit attending meetings altogether. Secondly, many blacks are unaware of organizations for black people. These two problems hinder the Black Community from strengthening its contact base.

During an interview with the *African Courier*, Reverend Fagbola Austen-Peters Brandt, the first parish priest of African descent in Germany complained about the “Afro-centric” direction of the ISD. “I was once a spokesperson for *Initiativ Schwarze Deutsche* (ISD), he explained. “But now this organization is being gradually taken over by an extreme Afrocentric ideology and this is not good for our cause.”<sup>46</sup> Obviously, Reverend Brandt realizes the importance of the black community for he made remarks about “our cause.” Yet he could not find a meaningful way to change the direction of the ISD. Since then he has established Phoenix—a multi-cultural organization.<sup>47</sup> By loosing prominent black figures such as Reverend Brandt, the black community faces a challenge that will continue in the

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<sup>46</sup> Poikāne, Aija. “African Diasporas: Afro German Literature in the context of the African American Experience.” (Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Dortmund. 2004), p. 158.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

future unless a resolution is found. During my studies, one member of ISD informed me that our interview session could only be conducted if I was black as well.<sup>48</sup>

Startled and dismayed, I pondered over the notion of black racism. After a while, I began to wonder how much the ISD influenced her perception of race relations in Germany.

In addition to the aforementioned problem, many blacks in Germany are unaware of organizations such as ISD and ADEFRA adding to the difficulties faced by the black community. For many black Germans, in particular, contact with such organizations begins only later in life since these organizations operate by word of mouth. ISD and ADEFRA maintain functional websites, however, both organizations operate in close-knit circles. Without having a contact within each organization can prove to be a hardship at times. In order for more blacks to actively participate in the Black Community, organizations must increase their visibility around Germany. Many scholars and intellectuals are aware of the projects started by ISD and ADEFRA, but the average black person is not. While speaking with a member of ADEFRA, she informed me that her hair stylist mentioned joining ADEFRA to her.<sup>49</sup> To put it simply, the Black Community needs to recruit black people from all walks of life if it wants to grow. By not doing so, it will weaken its current state. Hopefully with a renewed direction, the Black Community will develop into a strong, effective organization that will address the concerns of blacks around the country.

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<sup>48</sup> Email received on March 17, 2006 titled "Re: Interview."

<sup>49</sup> Butler, Nicole, interview by author. 3 March 2006, Berlin, Germany.

### 3. Future of the Black Community

In Germany, the black population will continue to become a more visible minority group. Gradually, the public will begin to be re-educated regarding the history of blacks and present state of blacks throughout the country. This process will hopefully change the current plight of blacks in Germany. If not, blacks will continue to experience racism and marginalization from a dominant, white society. “The Black Question” aimed to help in this endeavor. Through an analysis of the historical presence of blacks in Germany, the reader should have developed a better understanding of black Germans, African-Americans and Africans in the past. In the first section titled “First Contact,” information presented ranged from black musicians to the so-called brown babies after World War II. This section laid the foundation for the second section titled “The Black Experience in Germany.” This section explored the main problems faced by blacks in Germany. The depiction of blacks in the media and internal problems within the established black organizations served as the focal point for this section.

In the future, with the establishment of more black organizations like *Der Braune Mob*, blacks will play a major role in their depiction by the mass media. In order to accomplish this feat, the established organizations—particularly ISD and ADEFRA—will need to restructure to meet the challenges of today. The perception of blacks in Germany has changed drastically over the past hundred years. However without restructuring, the Black Community will continue to weaken and loose members in the future.

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## 4. Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Zehn Kleine Negerlein

Refrain:

Ein klein, zwei klein, drei klein, vier klein,  
fünf klein Negerlein  
Sechs klein, sieben klein, acht klein, neun klein,  
zehn klein Negerlein

1. Zehn kleine Negerlein, die schliefen in der Scheun.  
Das eine ging im Heu verlorn. Da waren's nur noch neun.
2. Neuen kleine Negerlein, die gingen auf die Jagd.  
Das eine wurde totgeschossen. Da waren's nur noch acht.
3. Sieben kleine Negerlein, die gingen Kegel schieben.  
Das eine hat sich totgeschoben. Da waren's nur noch sieben.
4. Sieben kleine Negerlein, die gingen mal zur Hex.  
Das eine hat sie weggehext. Da waren's nur noch sechs.
5. Sechs kleine Negerlein gerieten in die Sümpf.  
Das eine ist drin stecken blieben, Da waren's nur noch fünf.
6. Fünf kleine Negerlein, die tranken gerne Bier  
Das eine hat sich totgetrunken. Da waren's nur noch vier.
7. Vier kleine Negerlein, die kochten einen Brei.  
Das eine hat sich totgegessen, Da waren's nur noch drei.
8. Drei kleine Negerlein, die machten gross Geschrei.  
Das eine hat sich totgeschrien. Da waren's nur noch zwei.
9. Zwei kleine Negerlein, die fuhren mal nach Mainz.  
Das eine ist in'n Rhein gefallen. Da waren's nur noch eins.
10. Ein kleines Negerlein, das war erstaunlich schlau.  
Es ging zurück nach Kamerun und nahm sich eine Frau.

## Appendix B

### Blue Chameleon

Like a chameleon, black Germans know how to change  
In order to do what's right  
We fight for equality and against discrimination  
We have experienced every emotion possible

Why do Black Germans live in alienated enclaves?  
Because they are not all the same  
Many shades of brown are amongst us  
As well as many attitudes too

Some change to be accepted  
Some fear not being "one"  
But in the end the race is over  
Yet the real battle has just begun

A lifelong struggle takes place inside  
To verbalize life in black  
But for what reason other than  
To avoid another attack

Black Germans stand united  
In experiences that have occurred  
Yet life in black is not that bad  
In fact it has benefits too  
Just stereotypes keep on going  
In different shades of blue