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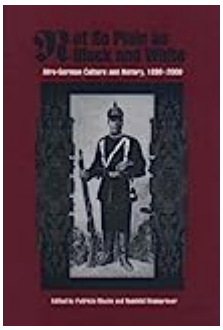

Patricia M. Mazón, Reinhild Steingröver, eds. *Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005. xvii + 247 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58046-183-2.

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A Defiant "We" Announces Its Birth: Understanding the Complexity of Black German Identity

Given the long and varied history of cultural interactions between Africans and Germans–from the 1400s, when Africans populated Europe as slaves and court servants, to the pinnacle of German colonization in Africa in the late 1800s, to the post-World War I Rhineland occupation–the dominant German culture, perhaps understandably, has always viewed Africans as foreigners. This multifaceted collection interrogates the difficulty of categorizing the experience of Afro-Germans, a new organizing term in its own right. In each essay, the authors seek to expand the relatively limited current base of knowledge about the black German experience and to rectify the oftentimes ill-informed German and international reaction to that tradition. As a whole, the collected essays represent, as Sander Gilman puts it, a "major confrontation between the German image of Blackness and the reality of the Black" (p. 83). Gilman's "confrontation" materializes in each essay's distinctly articulated challenges to the common notion that racism toward blacks never existed in Germany. The book's authors and editors not only dispute that comfortable assumption, they also sharpen the markedly German angle of the examination by claiming that attention paid to *VergangenheitsbewÃ¤ltigung*, or coming to terms with the National Socialist past, has consistently overshadowed the German colonial legacy and historical attitude about Africans. A vital reading given its multicultural approach to German studies, the book demonstrates that, despite the widespread cultural eclipse of this theme, historians, writers, and filmmakers have successfully exploited their talent to display a new self-confidence while educating others on overt acts of prejudice and racism in Germany.

Building upon previous research in the field and combining disciplines and methodologies, the editors have organized the volume into two thematic sections that will appeal to Afro-German readers as well as scholars with varying degrees of interest in and knowledge about the subject. The first subdivision, "Afro-Germans in Historical Perspective," traces African intersections with German history from the colonial period through 1945. The second portion, "Cultural Representations and Self-Representations of Afro-Germans," offers specific exam-

ples from various disciplines of the ever-changing perceived image over time and how the community of Afro-Germans seeks to define itself as a reaction to those general perceptions.

In chapter 1, "Dangerous Liaisons: Race, Nation and German Identity," Fatima El-Tayeb identifies a "tension between the central metaphorical presence of blackness and a simultaneous denial of the existence of actual blacks within the nation" (p. 29). She arrives at her conclusions by looking "specifically at the role the Social Darwinist sciences and colonial politics played in consolidating a racialized concept of Germanness" (p. 31). El-Tayeb details colonial studies that claimed to show the "impossibility of influencing genetic racial disposition" as justification for separating "primitive" Africans from "civilized" Europeans (p. 31). In addition, she reports on scientific studies that also helped to pass mixing laws, which both churches and mainstream media supported. Subsequent historical events, such as forced sterilization and amplified propaganda against troops in the Rhineland, substantiated the chief fear that blacks could taint German blood. El-Tayeb makes implicit parallels explicit with her claim that racism and antisemitism connect because, in both cases, a dominant culture discounted the social value and genetic quality of a minority population. She summarizes the historically and scientifically defined existence of Afro-Germans this way: "The loss of citizenship, the exclusion from schools, universities and professions, and the forced sterilization had changed the status of African Germans from outsider to that of persecuted minority" (p. 51). El-Tayeb is careful to mention, however, that policies in the Third Reich represented less a direct result of previous developments than the zenith of carefully mechanized policies of exclusion.

In the next chapter, "The First Besatzungskinder," Krista Molly O'Donnell presents a more in-depth look at colonial childrearing practices and racial policy in German Southwest Africa between 1890 and 1914. Even from within her highly specialized topic, O'Donnell touches more general themes, such as the ongoing, even legislated, refusal to acknowledge the black race within German culture. The author describes the German inability to resolve the ambiguity of the children's identities, and underscores the tendency for Germans to "erase … the Afro-German population in the colony from their consciousness and their categories of citizenship" (p. 61). O'Donnell's chapter further informs the reader about shifts in collective thinking that changed how officials categorized different races. For example, even if authorities made exceptions for Africans deemed to have the same level of education as the dominant culture, a common opinion of blacks as a "moral danger" and general "bad influence" (p. 74) still prevailed. Like other authors in the book, O'Donnell links policies and realities as experienced by children from the African colonies to those of the later *Besatzungskinder,* for whom Germans "worked to create institutions that perpetuated Afro-Germans' isolation" (p. 79). Through her meticulous and well-organized essay, O'Donnell guides readers to her conclusion that Germans worked with determination to make already fatherless Afro-German children motherless, stateless, and invisible as well.

In a subsequent chapter concerning race and gender in pre-1945 history, Tina Campt considers how propagandistic material that predated the Third Reich and that showed Afro-Germans as a pollutant threat to the pure German nation provided fertile ground for subsequent regimes. Her methodological backward glance, which involves examining associations, if not direct links between historical periods, confirms that the author does not suggest cumulativeness or inevitability of later events. Instead, she provides isolated and intertwined moments that evidence blacks as nothing more than "raced subjects." Campt substantiates her claims by reporting on public debates concerning interracial individuals and attempts to assert race as a legal category. Campt augments her study with an analysis of a gendered discourse that privileges the body of the white woman and equates the body with purity, order, and cohesion. By extension, Germanness becomes equated with purity and the vulnerable female body while blackness represents the equivalent of "a deeply threatening specter of racial mixture that endangered German national identity through the perils of racial purity" (p. 102). Consequently, "metaphors of victimhood and endangerment served as a form of national adhesive that offered a source of unity and identification in the later period of postwar national crisis" (p. 102). Campt's intriguing conflation of the concept of nation with the contours of a body can both stand alone and fit into a retrospective examination of racist impulses that fed subsequent Third Reich ideologies.

In the first essay of the second part of the book, Tobias Nagl refocuses the lens to film studies as he considers "Louis Brody and the Black Presence in German Film Before 1945." Although Nagl focuses on the biography of black actor Louis Brody, he broadens the scope to consider films as documentation of stereotypical images. In their roles as "non-threatening stereotypes … embodying nature," black actors, Nagl argues, lost their individuality in favor of representing expected stereotyp-

ical images“ (p. 109-110, 128). Heide Fehrenbach continues the discussion of film in her essay on ”The Phenomenon of the *Toxi* Films“ in the 1950s. In scrutinizing these first films to feature the ”occupation children born to white German women and fathered by black occupation soldiers of color,“ Fehrenbach examines how race was ”renarrativized after 1945 as a social category and national marker“ (p. 136). After tracing the plot, in which Toxi was dropped on the doorstep of a middle-class family home, Fehrenbach interprets the film's conclusion as evidence that, after all the proposed solutions, integration is ultimately impossible. She cites an ambivalence that ”forsakes principle of racial integration in favor of racial tolerance,“ and lays bare the pervasive cultural conceit that ”preached racial tolerance but insisted on maintaining racial difference“ (p. 150). After studying subsequent films in the essay, Fehrenbach boldly links the issue of race with the postwar German difficulty of coming to terms with the past. Specifically, Fehrenbach detects a ”shifting [of] the location of race from Jewishness to blackness in order to distance it from the Holocaust and Germans' crimes against humanity“ (p. 156). Randall Halle rounds out the study of film by examining films that have developed out of the Afro-German community itself. Halle makes the bold claim that the ”new German audience“ of these films can ”experience its laughter as part of an antiracist movement“ (p.175), and that the Afro-Germans speak for themselves and more importantly speak outside of stereotypes.

Considering approaches to studying Afro-German literature, Leroy Hopkins takes readers on a tour of that branch of writing since 1985, marking the starting point as one when authors “could create a group identity to speak out against racism and discrimination” (p. 183). Hopkins identifies and examines the general cultural implications of at least three common denominators of Afro-German literature. Largely autobiographical and largely by women, the literature demonstrates a “connectedness to the German diaspora,” rather than “asserting rootedness in traditional German cultural values” (p. 188). Hopkins asserts, however, that even with a potentially unifying diaspora, the commonalities among authors are just as numerous as their varied backgrounds. In an equally ambiguous vein, Hopkins argues that while “empowerment comes through joining diasporic community,” “idealization of the diasporic community is a cul-de-sac that can only impede full integration” (pp. 202-203). In a well-measured response to that problematic, Hopkins provides an analysis of Ike HÃ¼gel Marshall as a technique for showing the organic process of an evolving diasporic consciousness.

The book's last essay continues with the idea of the construction and implications of a black diaspora for Afro-Germans. As the authors of the previous essays have confirmed, Afro-German writers exist between the disadvantaged condition of needing to assert their individuality within the German culture and the advantageous position of having the diaspora as a place to confirm their identity. The essay's author, Anne Adams, introduces the reader to some perhaps lesser-known Afro-German cultural moments, such as W. E. B. DuBois's sojourn in Berlin, during which he reached political maturity and resided just a few doors away from the current offices of the *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche*. The historical line that describes the construction of the Afro-German community intersects with Adams's theoretical line, claiming that an explicit Afro-German community is an implicit diaspora. Adams provides many examples of available products “for social, political, cultural and emotional collectivity,” but then poses an important question regarding abstract resources, such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or scholarly products that help to “crystallize the consciousness of community” (p. 220). She also emphasizes the importance of diversity, even under the umbrella term “Afro-German,” and cites a number of contributing factors to the multiplicity of experiences that fill out the personal processes of the more collective consequence of African diaspora.

Overall, this collection, with its interdisciplinary design and research approaches, reaches its ostensible goals of spotlighting the artistic and social challenges and successes of establishing black German identity. Randall Halle eloquently formulates a response to the challenges: to “increase … the presence of Afro-Germans and Afro-German issues in all the media to the point where they can come to occupy a normalized and naturalized position within German society in all its real existing diversity–including the diversity within the Afro-German community itself” (p. 179). Through its varied and well-analyzed examples, the book verifies that the increase in groundbreaking works like *Farbe bekennen* since its publication in 1986 have helped many Afro-Germans advance from having themselves legally defined as a dangerous “other” to generating their own positive identities via German literature, media, music, and scholarship.

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