

**Embracing Germany: interwar German society and Black Germans through the eyes of African-American reporters**

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***Embracing Germany: Interwar German Society and Black Germans through the Eyes of  
African-American Reporters***

Between November 1929 and January 1930 the front pages of the biggest selling African-American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, featured weekly reports about a tour of Western Europe undertaken by its editor Robert Sengstacke Abbott and his wife Helen. With the exception of Britain where he personally suffered racial discrimination the experience of visiting Europe was presented as being both liberating and inspirational - one which contrasted greatly with his experience of being black in the United States.<sup>i</sup> In detailed reports on the individual countries he visited he tried to convey a sense of this to his readers, the vast majority of whom would never be in a position to travel to Europe. He informed them: "For what do you find in the white man's own country? That a black man receives the highest courtesy and is free to come and go everywhere. In short, he is free to do what any other human being can do."<sup>ii</sup> For Abbott, and most likely his readers, the positive reception he received in Germany was the most surprising of all among the countries he visited. This contradicted prevailing negative stereotypes of the evil German "Hun" stemming from World War One. In a series of enthusiastic vignettes Abbott instead described Germans in glowing terms and Germany was presented as a place lacking in racial discrimination. Within Europe France was the most privileged site in the African-American political and cultural imagination, but now Germany too was imagined as a place where talented black men and women could be (and were) successful.<sup>iii</sup> Abbott's unexpected enthusiasm for Germany was shared by compatriots historian and journalist Joel Augustus Rogers and journalist Lewis Kennedy McMillan. Both were similarly touring parts of Europe in the late 1920s and early 1930s and they were also writing about their travels for an African-American readership in their respective newspapers *The New York Amsterdam News* and the Baltimore-based *Afro-American*. Like Abbott, they too drew on their own experiences as well as conversations with resident Africans and African Americans before concluding that Germany was a country where there was considerable scope for black agency.

Although prominent black intellectuals of the pre-1945 era the three men, particularly Rogers and McMillan, remain largely forgotten and their reflections on their time in Europe and Germany have been almost entirely ignored.<sup>iv</sup> At the time, however, the reach of the men's published reports was considerable; their newspapers had a combined circulation of well over 340 000 by the late 1920s.<sup>v</sup> Rogers' and McMillan's writings were also reproduced, often word for word, in a number of other influential African-American newspapers such as the *New Journal and Guide*, the *Philadelphia Tribune* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*. And, of course, copies were passed on to countless additional readers among family and friends, or picked up in black social and political spaces such as churches, barbershops, and salons.<sup>vi</sup> They played a central role in shaping knowledge about Germany and the Germans to their African-American readers even long after they had left.

In this article the men's writings are approached from two interlinking lines of inquiry. Firstly, the men's positive responses to Germany are explored. While much of their enthusiasm for the country appears to have been genuine their writings, on the one hand, were also informed by longer established African-American narratives of Germany as a site of cultural and intellectual achievement and of Germans as being defenders of African-American interests. On the other hand, and linked to this, their reports on Germany served as a means of critiquing institutionalized white supremacy in the United States. Europe in general and Germany in particular functioned as an alternative frame of reference against which to compare and contrast the life of African Americans in the US. The men consciously presented idealized and romanticized visions of a Germany in which there was a lack of color prejudice. This caused them to downplay or disremember racially charged incidents that they themselves witnessed and to ignore or question claims of racial discrimination that they heard from resident black informants. In a similar vein, in their coverage any meaningful reflection on Germany's violent colonial past, which might upset their visions of Germany, was noticeably absent. Equally, missing from their reports was any developed discussion of Germany's

more recent Black Shame propaganda campaign against France's use of colonial troops in the Rhineland. Instead, through creating a sanitized version of Germany the men were highly critical of race relations in the US and of American civilization, while simultaneously they encouraged readers to imagine what the opportunities for black men and women could and should be if their lives were not restricted by societal and institutional racism.

Their visions of Germany were complicated by the advent of National Socialist rule and Nazi policies of anti-Semitism, but even in the 1930s the comparison they drew between Germany and the southern states of the US continued to be favorable. The men's enthusiasm for Germany can be considered as a forgotten episode within a far longer history of African-American encounters with Germany and Germans which has been recently recovered by scholars such as Kenneth Barkin, Leroy Hopkins, Maria Höhn, Maria Diedrich, Jürgen Heinrichs and Larry Greene among many others.<sup>vii</sup> This rich and varied work has demonstrated the impact of these "cultural crossovers" on the intellectual and personal development of individuals including W. E. B. Du Bois and Angela Davis as well as on the more general political and cultural formation of blacks such as the African-American soldiers among the occupying troops stationed in post-World War Two West Germany. Coming at a crucial juncture of German history, the first-hand accounts of Abbott, Rogers and McMillan offer a new perspective on this relationship. At the same time they also suggest a degree of continuity in the role that Germany played as a mirror in which the inequalities of US society could be reflected.

Secondly, in writing of their encounters with resident and visiting blacks in Germany, the men's reports provide brief, but valuable insights into the lives of Black Germans.<sup>viii</sup> While these complement other sources they also provide intimate details not recorded elsewhere in the existing primary source base which is dominated by official and administrative documents. The latter foreground themes of dependency and criminality and largely silence the voice of black actors and, as a consequence, they clearly need to be read against the grain. The writings of Abbott, Rogers and

McMillan not only offer a different more intimate and positive perspective on Black Germans' lives, but the men were also interested in different things. Abbott told readers in his very first report that he wanted "to find out how our Race lives" in the countries he visited and he wanted readers to know "who and what he is."<sup>ix</sup> Among other things, all three provide readers and historians with evidence of community formation, black social spaces and to some degree black fashion; insights that are frequently missing from more conventional political accounts.

Moreover, it will be argued that their reporting on Germany's contemporary and historical black presence as well as on black populations throughout Europe speaks to a wider black diasporic consciousness in the making or what Robin Kelley has called a "diasporic vision."<sup>x</sup> As Kelley and others have shown from the late nineteenth century onwards a diverse range of political activists and cultural producers such as Du Bois, George Padmore and Alain Locke were articulating a sense of connectedness and solidarity with other black people across the globe, which was underpinned by shared experiences of racism and colonialism. While contested and heterogeneous, this transnational vision conceived of a common black identity and interests that were not restricted by the frame of the nation-state. As this article demonstrates newspaper reporters also made an important contribution to expanding and complicating the "diasporic vision" through making their large readerships aware of a black presence in Europe and writing about their everyday experiences of racial politics. In Europe it was above all Paris, with its relatively large black population, that drew black intellectuals and became both a real and imagined site of black internationalism.<sup>xi</sup> But as the work of Abbott, Rogers and McMillan illustrates lesser known black groups particularly those in Germany were now also consciously envisaged as being part of this imagined community. The feelings of empathy for these distant black communities that the men, Abbott especially, looked to engender within their readers strategically focused less on common experiences of racial hardship. Instead they sought to create a sense of shared racial pride through celebrating the achievements of Black Europeans living in majority white societies. As will be shown, however, such positive reporting

masked the reality of Black Germans' lived experiences while at the same time it helped to uphold the vision of an idealized, racially enlightened Germany as a counterpoint to the US.

### *Embracing Germany*

Abbott was the most prominent of the three journalists. A self-made man, he was the founder of the *Chicago Defender* and a well-known public figure. He had a personal link to Germany through his stepfather John Sengstacke, who was the son of a white German migrant and a black slave woman. Around autumn 1929 he was in the country for a matter of weeks, combining visits to Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne and Wiesbaden with a trip to see a "colored cousin" in Bremen. The Jamaican-born Rogers was the foreign correspondent for *The New York Amsterdam News* and in 1927 he made the first of several short visits to Germany as part of a larger trip around Europe. From his reports it is clear that over several years he visited large parts of the country including Berlin, Cologne, Wiesbaden, Leipzig and Munich. McMillan had been a circulation manager for the *Afro-American* before heading to Europe. He arrived in Berlin in 1929 to begin a four-year stay and reports on his time in the city appeared in the *Afro-American*. Initially, he was living with the Scheve family, which was linked to the German Baptist mission. The mission had sent missionaries to Cameroon from the 1880s onwards and the Scheves had already provided a home for around a dozen Cameroonian visitors before 1914.<sup>xii</sup> Although the three men spent differing lengths of time in Germany and sometimes visited different parts of the country there is a degree of commonality in their responses to what they saw and experienced. These often echoed longer established African-American discourses about Germany and the Germans which had evolved over the course of the nineteenth century.

The men were neither the first African-American intellectuals to develop a positive connection to Germany, nor were they the first African-American visitors to feel welcome there. In 1895 the *Teltower Kreisblatt*, a local Berlin newspaper, described an extraordinary summer

celebration which took place in the small village of Müggelheim to the southeast of Berlin.<sup>xiii</sup> According to report 230 men and women participated in the first summer festival for those of African heritage living or visiting Germany. Black dandies danced the cakewalk and a number of speeches were made. The speakers named included a "Mr Woods" described as the "head of an electrical factory," likely the inventor Granville Woods, and a "Mr Mc Cabe," described as the "founder of a *Neger* colony in Oklahoma," likely the political activist Edward P. McCabe.<sup>xiv</sup> In English Woods told his audience that it was their duty to show the Europeans that they welcomed the "blessings of civilization." He then praised Abraham Lincoln as the liberator of African Americans from slavery, before toasting the Kaiser and thanking the German people for the goodwill they had received in this "foreign land." The comments of a third man, Mr Gavin, alluded to the role of German Americans in the abolition movement and in the Civil War. He told his audience that in the German population of the US African Americans had found real defenders and supporters of an end to racial segregation and he asked the audience to toast all Germans.<sup>xv</sup>

This brief, but remarkable event hints at longer established components of the encounter between African Americans and Germany, which continued to find resonance in the later reports of Abbott, Rogers and McMillan. Firstly, a romanticized representation of benevolent Germans who were enlightened in their approach to race relations was already well developed by the late nineteenth century. As Gavin's comments suggest this was inspired largely by the actions and words of mid-century German migrants to the US who challenged the institution of slavery in their new homeland. Fleeing the failed 1848-49 revolutions in German Europe these migrants had brought with them a commitment to universal human rights and contempt for exploitation. In a number of US cities such as Cincinnati, where Woods was based, German Americans had actively campaigned with African Americans for black liberation from slavery.<sup>xvi</sup> This had helped to establish Germany as a "spiritual fatherland" for a number of influential nineteenth century African-American abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, who in turn inspired the likes of Rogers, Abbott and McMillan.<sup>xvii</sup>

Secondly, over the course of the nineteenth century German intellectual thought made a significant impact on the US educational system in general and on black intellectuals in particular. German-speaking Europe, as a key site of European philosophical thought and European "civilization," was a source of inspiration for black activists and scholars who looked to education as a strategy for emancipation.<sup>xviii</sup> It was not unusual for black colleges and universities to teach German language and aspects of German culture, nor was it unknown for African-American scholars to spend time in Germany. Among the prominent African Americans to study there prior to the outbreak of World War One were W.E.B. Du Bois, who spent two years at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin from 1892-94, and Carl Murphy Jr., editor of the *Afro American* at the time of McMillan's trip to Berlin. Murphy Jr. briefly attended the University of Jena in 1914.<sup>xix</sup> Both men studied German before leaving for Europe and were influenced by the image of Germany as a country of *Dichter und Denker* (poets and thinkers). Du Bois' experience of Germany impacted on his intellectual development and his vision of race as a potentially positive unifying force was influenced by studying under the economists Gustav von Schmoller and Adolf Wagner as well as the German nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke.<sup>xx</sup> In his spare time he read works by the likes of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine and Friedrich Schiller and he attended opera and concert performances whenever he could.<sup>xxi</sup> Upon his return to the US he was one of a number of academics teaching elements of German language and culture to future generations of African Americans.

Over thirty years later Germany continued to be a source of intellectual inspiration for African-American intellectuals. Part of the original purpose of McMillan's trip was to further his studies and he enrolled at the University of Bonn. There he completed a PhD in philosophy in 1933 with a work on the influence of Hegelian thought on the ideas of prominent art historian Karl Schnaase.<sup>xxii</sup> In coverage of the cities and sights they visited Abbott and Rogers continually made references to important German thinkers and cultural producers. Both self-educated men, this was



partly a means of publicly demonstrating their own knowledge, but it also reflected an underlying appreciation for German culture. Rogers was particularly forthright in expressing this. He declared to readers that Germany was his "intellectual motherland" and he informed them of the leading role Germans had played "in the development of art, literature, music, science, medicine."<sup>xxiii</sup> Alongside Berlin which he praised for having the most impressive monuments in Europe he was keen to visit Frankfurt as Goethe's birthplace and later home of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. He wrote about the former in his travel reports while he devoted an entire article to the influence of the latter on his own intellectual development.<sup>xxiv</sup> Rogers was especially drawn to Schopenhauer's argument that compassion formed the basis of morality. This he interpreted as meaning that "kindness of heart" was the greatest of all human attributes. It is perhaps not surprising then that in his travel accounts kindness was one of the key characteristics that Rogers, like Abbott and McMillan, ascribed to the white men and women he met in Germany. This served to emphasize their lack of racial prejudice in contrast to white Americans, but it was also in keeping with older African-American representations of Germans. Woods much earlier comments at the Müggelheim festival similarly exemplify this, while Du Bois' positive social interactions with white Germans led him to the more dramatic conclusion that it was in Germany that "I began to realize that white people were human."<sup>xxv</sup>

### *Challenging the Image of the Hun*

Despite these longer African-American connections to Germany the reception that the three reporters received there, more than in any other European country they visited, came as a surprise. The image of the enlightened, prejudice-free German had been disrupted by World War One and had been replaced by more recent, dominant stereotypes of the aggressive, militaristic and barbarous German "Hun." Such images had been widely disseminated in the US as part of wartime propaganda by the government agency, the Committee for Public Information, as part of their "Hate-the-Hun" campaign. This had been designed to secure popular backing for US entry into the

conflict.<sup>xxvi</sup> In propaganda posters, popular literature and film and in both the white and African-American press the savage "Hun" was depicted as raping and pillaging his way through Europe.<sup>xxvii</sup> These images continued to resonate into the postwar period. Additionally, as the reporters would have known not only were the Germans deemed guilty of starting the war, but the peace settlement had also led to them losing their overseas colonies. This was a part consequence of the unrestrained violence shown to colonized African populations. From 1905-08 in German Southwest Africa (Namibia) the Germans had attempted to exterminate the Herero and Nama population groups, while in German East Africa (parts of Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) even greater numbers of Africans had died as a consequence of the Maji Maji war, 1905-07.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In the US popular knowledge about these imperial abuses was certainly limited and it is more likely that the men and many of their black readers would have been aware of the infamous international "Black Shame" campaign of the earlier 1920s, which received some coverage in the African-American press.<sup>xxix</sup> In the US France's use of colonial African troops on German soil was a matter for discussion at the highest level of politics and diplomatic initiatives were started to call for their removal from the Rhineland. As in Europe a propaganda campaign was waged which employed an array of anti-Black imagery and rhetoric in its portrayal of defenseless Germans, particularly women, being exploited by black savages.<sup>xxx</sup> Such material, often stemming from Germany itself, hardly suggested that Germans would be welcoming of black visitors. In this fashion, of all the countries the men visited Germany, as the land of the barbaric Hun and with its recent history of cruelty against black populations, offered the perfect contrast against which to critique American civilization.

Yet, as was evident in their writing, the Germans the men actually encountered differed greatly from their expectations. Rogers mocked the notion of the "barbarous Hun," while Abbot similarly questioned the alleged brutality of the Germans. He wrote: "I am certain had I met the

German people before the war my views regarding them would have been different. They were certainly far finer to me than the white southerners, my own countrymen for whom we all fought.<sup>xxxix</sup> With a hint of *Schadenfreude*, before leaving for Germany McMillan acknowledged "especial curiosity" to meet the defeated German "barbarians." Once there, however, he informed readers that: "Of all the things I have seen in three months in Germany not once have I seen a HUN."<sup>xxxix</sup> Moreover, in his writing he displayed considerable sympathy for the state of the many now poverty-stricken wartime veterans, who had once been the focus of this anti-German propaganda. This extended to chastising a white American for arguing that the Germans were being rightfully punished for their role in the outbreak of the war.

Far from affirming the stereotype of the "Hun" the Germans the men encountered were depicted as being extremely courteous and, above all, very welcoming. Rogers on his 1927 tour of mainland Europe after having already visited Holland, Belgium, France, Italy and Switzerland, concluded that the Germans were "perhaps the most informally friendly people I have met so far."<sup>xxxix</sup> This led him to reflect on the Rhineland campaign; the only one of the writers to do so. On account of the overwhelming friendliness he encountered he admitted to struggling to believe that Germans were capable of anti-black prejudice, despite claims to the contrary from the Berlin-based Africans he met. In a further article he argued that this image of the Germans was partly down to biased political coverage in the US.<sup>xxxix</sup> Similarly conspicuous by its absence from the reporters' coverage was any substantial reflection on Germany's violent colonial past. McMillan briefly commented that the Germans had treated their colonized populations in a largely paternalistic manner, while Rogers, in a piece on French colonialism, repeated the views of a Martinican French official praising the infrastructure and medical improvements that the Germans had brought to Cameroon.<sup>xxxix</sup> Consciously or otherwise, the three men chose to ignore or downplay these problematic episodes from recent German history which would have otherwise challenged the visions of a racially enlightened Germany that they were constructing.

Instead, they offered considerable evidence of German goodwill towards black people through recording examples of white Germans treating them as equals. Rogers recalled the hotel manager who went out his way to help him during his stay in Leipzig as well as the restaurant manager who spoke some English and asked to join the journalist at his table. He was so taken aback by the welcome he received that he expressed great regret at not being able to converse in German with those he encountered.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Meanwhile, readers of the *Afro-American* were told of McMillan's evening dining with new-found white friends as well as of his invitation to speak before a white audience at the City Club of Dresden, scenarios that would have been unthinkable in most parts of the US.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In a similar fashion Abbott stressed how easy it was to make white friends in Germany and he wrote of being given a private tour of the printing presses of the liberal daily newspaper the *Berliner Tageblatt* by the prominent journalist Victor Klages.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Klages was presented as a prime example of the open-minded, prejudice-free German who was supportive of the interests of people of African heritage. According to Abbott he was well acquainted with the *Defender*, expressed incomprehension about US racial discrimination and he was working on a book on the rights of black people in the post-war world.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Not only were Germans depicted as being hospitable towards black people, but McMillan argued that African Americans and Germans had much in common. After several weeks in Berlin he wrote a remarkable article entitled "Germans Remind McMillan of US Negroes," which must have surprised his black readership. In this he made explicit connections between the social and cultural habits of white Germans with those he claimed race experts deemed were peculiar to African Americans.<sup>xl</sup> These ranged from the colorful clothes children wore and a shared hearty appetite for meat to the importance of religion and humor in everyday life. He especially saw parallels with the German love of music. This included the singing of folk songs and the revival of traditional dances. The forms of the latter reminded him of the "call-set-dance" style, essentially dancing in sets,

fashionable with African Americans. For McMillan all this was evidence of a shared humanity and proof of the socially constructed nature of difference. He concluded the article with a rhetorical question and what read like an appeal aimed at white Americans for a color-blinded cosmopolitanism: "Is it not true after all that the one race is the human race? and that the souls and the responses of men are so much alike that the faces of men are colorless."

### *The German Gaze*

What particularly impressed the men, like earlier black visitors from the US, where the color bar was more rigid and of longer standing, was the apparent absence of both subtle, everyday forms of racism as well as the absence of more institutionalized anti-black racism in Germany. While the US color line followed the journalists to Europe in the guise of white American tourists, here to their surprise they found white men and women willing to speak up on their behalf and defend their rights. Invariably any prejudice that they reported on during their time in Germany specifically and in Europe in general came from white Americans they came across. For example, Abbott and Rogers recalled incidents during which white Americans demanded that US practices of segregation be upheld overseas. In Berlin and Paris white guests asked that the journalists be thrown out of hotels they were also booked into. In both cases the proprietors refused and instead suggested the white guests should seek other accommodation.

At the same time the men were all too aware of the range of reactions that their presence drew from the German public. All three reflected upon being made aware of their skin color and they described how they were constantly being looked at, whether in towns or villages or large urban centers like Berlin. Unfailingly, the looks they were subjected to were positively contrasted to their experiences of being black in the US. While in Germany too there was a sense of being objectified, according to Rogers, the gaze of the Germans "has a different meaning."<sup>xii</sup> For him the experience of being looked at in Leipzig was not driven by malice, hence it fundamentally differed

from the more menacing looks African Americans were likely to be subjected to in "Pennsylvania, parts of Illinois and the South." This view was shared by McMillan who believed that, with the exception of young children and a few "uncultured" people, Berliners would not dare to openly stand and stare at him. Instead they would exercise "self-restraint" and try to casually glance over at him; even if this was the first time they had seen a black person.<sup>xiii</sup> Abbott provided a more detailed account of his experiences:

I was gazed at in Germany, more than any other country, but let me say here that it was a different gaze from that which I would be greeted with in America. . . . It was different from that, for instance, with which the Americans greeted us when we walked into the dining room of our hotel at Bremen. In short, the gaze of the German people was full of friendly curiosity.<sup>xiii</sup>

All three men argued that the German gaze was primarily driven by a positive sense of inquisitiveness, rather than being an expression of white claims to subjugation and domination over the black body.<sup>xiv</sup> On this basis Abbott actively welcomed the looks he received and he was happy to engage in conversation with his curious onlookers. For the men this curiosity was underpinned by the fact that the black presence in Germany was so small, which in turn implied that Germans appeared to lack a predetermined knowledge and experience of the racialized Black Other, which were central to racial hierarchies in the US. The unstated implication was that it was essentially the "exoticness" of their appearance that inspired curiosity.

That the men chose to interpret the German gaze in a positive manner was no doubt linked to the warm and friendly treatment that they had experienced. Nonetheless, this reading clearly benefitted their overall strategy of presenting Germany as being free of racial prejudice which in turn was a means of critiquing American civilization and racial intolerance in the US. Elsewhere this interpretation was somewhat undermined in Rogers' unreflected retelling of two incidents during his 1928 visit to Germany.<sup>xiv</sup> Here German curiosity was implicitly invested with an underlying sense of racial hierarchy and a sexual dynamic which hinted at the threat of violence. In the comparatively

harmless first example he described a German woman touching the curly hair of a black companion unprompted. In the second, he wrote of visiting the well-known Hofbräuhaus in Munich with two African-American female companions. Here too, the German observers were unable to restrain their curiosity. The white male guests began invading the women's personal space, touching and kissing their hands and trying to kiss their lips. So persistent was the attention they received that Rogers and the women had to escape back to their hotel with the help of their chauffeur. Rogers, who at the time was working on what would become his pioneering three-volume study into constructions of race, *Sex and Race* (1940s), chose to downplay this veiled sexual menace.<sup>xlvi</sup> Instead, German (and by extension white European) sexual interest in black men and women was interpreted as further evidence of Germans' favorable disposition towards black people and as evidence of the implausible claims of the "Black Shame" propaganda.

The issue of mixed relationships was given particular attention by all three men and they informed their readers that in some milieus black men and white women could socialize without the threat of facing serious consequences. Abbott commented: "... wherever a Negro is seen with a woman she was invariably white." McMillan similarly remarked that for black men to "socialize with German women is taken as a matter of course. The element of prejudice does not enter whatever on that point. It is simply another couple man and woman - spending time together."<sup>xlvii</sup> Rogers put it more dramatically; his 1927 article had as its sub-headline "German Women Find Delight in Associating with Negroes; Unlike Americans, Couples Appear in Daylight Rather Than After Dark." Whether in dance halls and restaurants or in public on the streets of Berlin readers were told of black men openly flirting with white women and of the naturalness of mixed couples displaying affection for one another without arousing suspicion. The encounters related were not limited to brief flirtations; one of McMillan's reports included mention of a Congolese man married to a German woman as well as of African-German children being accompanied to the park by their white nanny - a scene that astounded him. Recalling his visits to Berlin, Rogers too wrote of African men

who were married to white German women and of African-German families.<sup>xlviii</sup> Such encounters described were unthinkable in most parts of the US; in 1920 30 of the then 48 states had introduced anti-miscegenation laws which remained in place until after the Second World War.<sup>xlix</sup> Here in Europe, however, interracial relationships appeared to offer hope for black people, men in particular, to achieve a degree of social and sexual liberation.

An incident Rogers wrote about during his 1928 trip to Germany further hints at this, while also making clear the difficulties the men faced in escaping the psychological hold of Jim Crow, despite what they observed in Germany.<sup>i</sup> For part of his stay he had been accompanied by two white American women. While the women had frequently and easily engaged in conversation with German men, Rogers had busied himself with "studying the country" instead of attempting to converse with any German women. Days before leaving, while on a boating cruise on the Rhine, he finally plucked up the courage to speak to a group of white German college girls under the pretense of requesting a cigarette. He reflected: "Had I been in America I might have passed them with a glance, and as to speaking to them I would no more have thought of doing so than I would have gone to the police station and asked them to lock me up." To his astonishment not only did the young women offer him a cigarette, but they started flirting with him - all of which took place without negative consequences for either Rogers or the women.<sup>ii</sup> Before the end of the cruise the women asked Rogers to visit their college on his next trip to Germany and to write to them; the second request he fulfilled shortly after.

Not only did it appear that black men and women were able to freely socialize with whomever they chose, but for the journalists it was also clear that African-American visitors were able to enjoy far greater freedom of movement in public spaces than they could in the US. McMillan enthused: "Every public place in Berlin is wide open to Negroes. They can go anywhere they are able or foolish enough to go - from the best hotels down to the wildest of the night clubs."<sup>iii</sup> This lack of



segregation also extended to public transport. The three journalists tried to convey a sense of these freedoms to their readers through telling them of their extensive train journeys as well as visits to clubs, restaurants and hotels - none of which were segregated and none of which refused them entry. Certainly the nightlife of the late Weimar period, which Abbott compared favorably to Paris, was in itself part explanation for the men's enthusiastic response to Germany. Moreover, through highlighting the unrestricted freedoms that they enjoyed in Germany (and in Europe in general) the men's coverage underlined the aberrant nature of the social restrictions that African Americans faced in the US. The extent to which the men believed they were treated no differently from any other visitors was further underlined by an episode Abbott told of his time in Hamburg.<sup>liii</sup> He was "stung" in a nightclub on the city's notorious Reeperbahn when he was greatly overcharged for what turned out to be cheap wine. This calls to mind an incident Du Bois wrote about concerning his time in Imperial Berlin when he was cheated out of money by a cab driver.<sup>liv</sup> While Du Bois read this as a possible rare example of racial discrimination, Abbott chose to believe his misfortune was down to nationality rather than race. As he described in his own words, he and his colleague "were sitting in the seats reserved for Americans with more money than brains."<sup>lv</sup>

### *Diasporic Vision and Black Germans*

The men's positive responses to Germany as well as the welcome they felt they received need to be set against the historical context of their visits. The late 1920s and early 1930s were a period of great political, social and economic upheaval as the Great Depression hit Germany, unemployment rapidly increased and the Nazi party was on the verge of coming to power. Although a conservative backlash was growing, popular enthusiasm for North American cultural products such as jazz still existed. Increasing numbers of African-American entertainers had been touring Germany from the mid-1920s onwards, often as part of revue shows. In particular, Josephine Baker, the Sam Wooding orchestra and Paul Robeson enjoyed enormous success. Their popularity was linked to a general German fascination with the US as a model of economic and cultural modernity as well as popular

interest in exoticism, both of which offered escape from the harsh realities of life in post-war Germany.<sup>lvi</sup> Success was also testimony to the actual excitement and entertainment value of performances. This was something which was linked to black artists' ability to "merchandize" themselves to European audiences in ways which enabled audiences to discover "their internal Africa" and to engage in erotic fantasies within the safe confines of the theatre or concert hall.<sup>lvii</sup>

The journalists met a number of these touring performers and sportspeople while in Germany. They reported on their successes overseas as evidence of what African-American men and women could accomplish in an environment where racial prejudice placed no restrictions on achievement and where ability was recognized. These stories lent further authority to the impression that within Europe, alongside France, Germany too was especially free of color prejudice. Rogers, for example, devoted an article to the reception the renowned comedian Johnny Hudgins received; McMillan wrote about the successes of the tenor Roland Hayes and the Utica Singers; Abbott told his readers about the popular boxer Jimmy Leggett who had fought a young Max Schmeling to a draw as well about the multilingual US Consulate officer George Vaze.<sup>lviii</sup> Vaze was featured simultaneously in an article in the *Afro-American*, where he expressed a preference for living in Germany over France and Britain on account of the fact that "If you are clever you can always find a way to make it in Germany."<sup>lix</sup>

It was not just this largely transient African-American presence that the journalists encountered; they also successfully sought connections to Germany's resident black population and all three wrote articles about the people they met. For the historian as well as the contemporary readership the men's observations provide brief but valuable snapshots of the conditions under which German-based blacks lived. As the men noted this population was small, diverse and predominantly male. It was composed primarily of men from Germany's former colonies, foremost Cameroon, but also Togo, most of whom had arrived prior to World War One and most of whom

were concentrated in Berlin by the late 1920s. Language was not a barrier to establishing connections. In the capital McMillan made friends with an English-speaking Congolese man who showed him parts of the city and introduced him to his friends, while Rogers during his first trip to the city wrote of speaking with "about twenty" West African men - "nearly all of whom spoke English." On his second visit he continued to socialize with these Berlin-based Africans. Abbott was taken around parts of the city by an African-American music student, Frank Bascombe.<sup>lx</sup>

The men's articles, particularly those of Abbott, present evidence of a black presence with a longer history which by the late 1920s appeared to have developed into a vibrant community with its own social networks and social spaces. McMillan wrote of following his Congolese guide to a Berlin bar in the city center regularly frequented by "ten to eleven" Congolese men, where he was also introduced to the man's white wife. In *Sex and Race* Rogers later recalled visiting Berlin dance halls and bathing beaches favored by Cameroonians.<sup>lxi</sup> Abbott, meanwhile encountered many black men, including African sailors living and working at the port of Hamburg. Here in the district of St. Pauli he stumbled upon the "Indian bar," run by the Indian Hardas Singh, which he reported was a favorite haunt of African men, particularly sailors.<sup>lxii</sup> According to a contemporary German article part of the bar's attraction was said to be two black waitresses, who served caraway schnapps to customers.<sup>lxiii</sup> Abbott's reports on Germany were accompanied by photographs (some of which were later reproduced by Rogers in *Sex and Race*) which served to convey to readers visible proof of a thriving community. This included a group shot of 10 well-dressed Cameroonian men entitled "Movie actors of Race who have been given a chance in Berlin."<sup>lxiv</sup>

Abbott wrote: "It is in the arts that black people who have made their homes in Germany have found the greatest welcome." Readers were introduced to the Cameroonian actor Louis Brody described as "one of the most famous moving picture actors in all Germany." Several pictures of Brody were reproduced in the *Defender* including one featuring him in front of a train, surrounded

by male and female, white film colleagues. Abbott noted "it just couldn't happen like this in America" and he posed the rhetorical question - "is Herr Brody popular?"<sup>lxv</sup> Among other performers, further images and texts introduced Josefa Boholle, daughter of a Cameroonian man and Polish mother, who was a dancer with "a wide reputation on the Berlin stage" and the actor, architect and World War One veteran Joseph Bilé.<sup>lxvi</sup> In Germany, Abbott stressed, skin color was no restriction to those with talent. This extended to other areas of employment and mention was made of Africans and an African American who had served the Kaiser in the German army as musicians. For both Abbott and Rogers the prominent positions these men held was a sign of the respect that black people enjoyed in Germany.

This positive image that Abbott in particular developed did not match the reality of the socio-economic circumstances in which Black Germans lived. It was undermined partly by a brief acknowledgement that most Africans in Germany, even performers, were struggling to find work. That this was not simply down to the country's worsening economic situation was hinted at by Rogers who reported that the African performers he encountered in Berlin complained that white musicians were insisting that they be given preferential treatment when competing for jobs. Contemporary sources suggest that by the late 1920s most were living on the margins of German society as a consequence of both increasing popular prejudice as well as rising unemployment.<sup>lxvii</sup> One of the performers mentioned in Abbott's reports, the dancer Richard Dinn, died in poverty months after the journalist met him. As the three men observed most Black Germans were indeed performers, but this was largely because normal routes to employment were increasingly shut off to them. While Brody was successful and he was one of the few black actors whose roles were often credited, most of his contemporaries struggled to find regular engagements.<sup>lxviii</sup> In addition, images of Brody and Bilé in Harem costumes in the *Defender* underline the type of roles Black Germans were expected to perform; frequently they represented a generic figure of the racialized exotic

Other, whose nationality and ethnic background were largely irrelevant. McMillan was highly critical of such performances of "race" arguing that they inspired prejudice instead of admiration.<sup>lxix</sup>

The images of fashionably dressed Berlin-based Africans in the *Defender*, like other surviving images of Black Germans, similarly masked the difficult socio-economic situation they faced. Rogers candidly observed; "Every Negro I saw in Berlin was fairly well dressed . . . , though several of them said they hadn't been able to get a job in months. Please do not ask me how this is done, as I will be forced to choose between being truthful and being polite."<sup>lxx</sup> A number of men in the aforementioned group photograph had been forced to pawn their winter jackets in order to fund Dinn's funeral. At the same time, however, much as Du Bois had appreciated the power of dress in Imperial Germany, the images in the *Defender* suggest that decades later African residents wore spats, suits, hats and carried canes as means of asserting a sense of dignity under circumstances of insecurity and dependency that conspired to deny them this.<sup>lxxi</sup>

A lack of social inclusion is also betrayed by an image of Josefa Boholle in the *Defender*. The photograph, almost certainly unbeknown to Abbott, had been previously used in her 1928 German citizenship application: a reminder that almost all black people from Germany's former colonies as well as their children were not, nor had they ever been, German citizens.<sup>lxxii</sup> Instead, those who had arrived pre-1914 had been German colonial subjects with ill-defined and limited rights. In the post-war period they were now actual subjects of the French and British mandate powers who had inherited the German possessions. The French and the British were reluctant both to exercise this responsibility and to allow these men, women and their children to return home, thus rendering them effectively stateless and leaving them dependent on the goodwill of the German authorities. The liminal civil status Black Germans possessed imposed real restrictions upon their ability to carve out a life worth living in Germany.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Although both Abbott and Rogers alluded to the difficult circumstances under which Black Germans were living none of the three men dwelt on this in detail. It is possible that in comparison to the conditions under which many African Americans lived in the US the men felt Black Germans had little to complain about. In contrast to what they heard from informants their own experiences of interacting with white Germans had been overwhelmingly positive and they had observed black people interacting with whites in ways that were unimaginable in the US. At the same time, however, there were also strategic dimensions to their reporting. On the one level their reports on life in Germany served as critiques of racism in the US. They chose not to let information provided by informants upset their idealized depictions of Germany being a place lacking in racial discrimination. Furthermore, Abbott in particular, in presenting Black Germans as inspirational and aspirational figures to his African-American readership, sought to demonstrate what black people could achieve when free from institutionalized racism. This was similarly reflected in the men's reports on the successes of touring African Americans. In choosing to celebrate these men and women their writing can be construed as vindicationist - a tradition to which all three men and their newspapers contributed.<sup>lxxiv</sup> In line with this much of the men's published writings in general sought to refute racist assumptions about black social and cultural inferiority and to instead promote a sense of black pride and racial uplift through focusing on black achievement. Thus, they brought positive stories of success and stories which demonstrated the active role that black people had played and continued to play in world history.

In keeping with vindicationist tradition the men were internationalist in their outlook; they looked to create transnational connections, both real and imagined, between black populations on the basis of blackness being a positive identity.<sup>lxxv</sup> This is seen in the positivity of their coverage which served to create a sense of solidarity and affinity between readers and the Black European populations they were reading about. All three journalists presented these populations as being part of a wider black diaspora. These fleeting encounters with Black Germans as well as other Black

European groups, which the three men actively sought out, bespeak a sense of connection to them though the depth of the connection remains unclear given the journalists' apparent lack of empathy for their informants' socio-economic conditions. Nevertheless, the very fact that all three devoted articles to looking at Germany and Europe's black presence suggests that they believed their readers would at least share the journalists' interest in these populations and that they would want to hear more. The articles themselves are evidence of the communication lines between African Americans and Black Germans. They mark the beginning of a brief flurry of correspondence between Black Germans and the African-American press and at irregular intervals a range of African-American newspapers continued to publish stories and accompanying photographs about their achievements and circumstances long after the journalists had left.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

This connectedness is further suggested by the descriptor "Negro" which is used in a positive sense as a collective and individual term by all three men to describe both themselves as well as the black populations they met in Germany, Europe and beyond.<sup>lxxvii</sup> While Abbott and Rogers remained aware of the ethnic diversity of these different populations and the differing geographical and political contexts in which they lived they nonetheless envisaged a common black identity and interests unhindered by national boundaries. McMillan too employed "Negro" as a collective term and his writings express a degree of race solidarity, but the conclusions he drew from his time in Europe demonstrated the contested nature of the evolving black diasporic vision, which he ultimately rejected. For McMillan geographical location and political borders were central to the formation of identity and interests and ultimately diversity trumped unity. He argued that "[l]ike all other people, and in cases to a greater extent than other peoples, the Negro takes on the characteristics of his environment. A French colonial is a Frenchman, a British colonial is an Englishman . . ." and African Americans were Americans.<sup>lxxviii</sup> As with the comparison he drew between Germans and African Americans, he concluded that those of African heritage were better

served emphasizing that they were first and foremost members of the human race, rather than imagining a "black union."

The timings of the men's visits to Germany coincided with the Nazi party's ascent to power, an event which challenged their views of the country. Of the three, Abbott had the least to say about Hitler's party, although in 1929 he was clearly aware of its existence. Somewhat bizarrely a row of swastikas appeared under the paper's front page headlines in editions featuring reports of his trip to Germany. His paper, like the African-American press in general, however, actively discussed the new political situation and as a sign of the connections established to Black Germans, the *Defender* was one of several papers monitoring and drawing attention to their deteriorating situation.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

After leaving Germany, McMillan and particularly Rogers contributed more to debates in the press about the nature of Nazism. Notably absent in their writings was any considered discussion of anti-Semitism although both McMillan and Rogers recognized that the Jews were the primary targets of Nazi racial policy.<sup>lxxx</sup> Rogers stated that the persecution they faced was both brutal and unjustified. But his attempts to explain why they faced persecution were undermined by his resorting to existing stereotypes of the Jew as a capitalist exploiter and his questioning of the accuracy of reports about Nazi violence. Ultimately the point that he sought to make was that life for African Americans in the US was far worse than the conditions Jews faced in Nazi Germany. This was a comparison that was prominent in much of the African-American press' discussion about the Nazis.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

In general, the men's lines of discussion were in keeping with the overall coverage of the African-American press. Throughout the 1930s and wartime period, both men continued to present Germany as a mirror in which US color prejudice and a lack of meaningful democracy was reflected. Hitler at times was dubbed a southern "cracker" or compared to a member of the Ku Klux Klan.



Rogers even suggested that Hitler's racial hatred was American in origin.<sup>lxxxii</sup> While he admitted that German views on black people were shifting, like McMillan, he concluded that the Jim Crow south was a greater evil than Hitler's Germany and that black men and women still enjoyed far more freedoms under the Nazis than in the US.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Like Du Bois and others before them, for Abbott, Rogers and McMillan the experience of being in Germany, like most of Europe, was in many ways a revelation which caused them to reflect on their lives in the US and on US society and culture in general. Here they were to a greater degree than ever imaginable at home treated as equals and their rights and wishes were respected. They were able to move freely and socialize wherever and with whomever they chose without fear of reprisals. Clearly in contrast to the US Germany and much of Europe did seem to be free of anti-black discrimination and Rogers and Abbott urged their readers to spend time in Europe. While for the majority of their readership this was entirely unrealistic, the journalists' travel reports allowed at least a form of vicarious armchair travel. More importantly, however, the reports were deliberately constructed to highlight the inequalities of life in the US and to demonstrate to readers that these inequalities were not normal. Of all the countries the men visited interwar Germany functioned as the ideal place against which to judge American claims to democracy. US wartime propaganda had established Germany as an undemocratic state populated by barbaric Huns, a reputation further enhanced by Germany's legacy of colonial violence against black populations. The reporters' coverage of their visits to Germany, however, contested this and instead the men presented visions of a Germany free of color prejudice and segregation in which the barbarous Huns were far more humane towards black people than white Americans were. Germany, therefore, emerged as a civilized nation in contrast to the US whose own claims to being civilized were in doubt as long as Jim Crow continued to be tolerated.

These idealized visions were shaped by a mixture of the men's own experiences, by longer African-American narratives of Germany and the Germans, and by their strategic aim of criticizing the US. Consciously or otherwise this caused them to overlook the increasing marginalization their Black German informants faced as well as the more obvious forms of discrimination that they themselves witnessed, such as the human zoos featuring African participants that Abbott and Rogers visited, but did not comment upon. Even in the Third Reich black men and women were presented as enjoying more freedoms than in the US. Once away from Germany much of the men's later commentaries on life in Nazi Germany became even more abstract and romanticized; they were largely informed by the fond memories of their own visits and by a distinct lack of knowledge about the situation of Black Germans.

At the same time, while Paris was already an established site of black internationalism, in writing about Black Germans the men brought to their readers' attention the existence of a black community in Europe that most readers would not have been aware of. In doing so their coverage demonstrates the important role that black newspaper reporters played in expanding the black diasporic vision. Their reports on this black presence were certainly idealized in order to sustain their visions of Germany and the Germany that the journalists experienced, imagined and reported upon was far different from that which resident Black Germans experienced daily. But, in choosing to celebrate Black Germans' successes, rather than focusing on their declining circumstances they offer an important alternative perspective to the existing source base; one which helps to illuminate the extent to which Black Germans were actually able to create lives worth living despite the deteriorating socio-economic and political situation they faced. Additionally, the reports and the spate of correspondence they inspired provide evidence of the active participation of Black Germans within these wider black internationalist networks.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Once war was over Germany continued to serve as an important frame of reference with which to confront and contrast the social and political realities of life in the US for a new generation of African Americans. During the war the Double V Campaign had mobilized African Americans to challenge racial oppression in the US and to combat fascism, particularly Nazism, abroad. Much as Abbott, Rogers and McMillan had been surprised by the reception they had experienced in the land of the Huns, many African-American GIs among the Allied occupying forces were similarly surprised by the treatment they received in post-war West Germany.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Here, in contrast to the segregation they continued to suffer at home and in the US army, they too experienced a degree of liberation impossible in the US and they encountered white men and women among the former enemy who treated them well. For many the transformative experience of being stationed in Germany exposed the contradictions of American democracy and inspired them to take up the Civil Rights struggle. In 1948 McMillan was also in West Germany, reporting on the fate of the so-called occupation children. These were the offspring of white German women and African-American GIs. The children's future had become a matter of discussion for the African-American press and African-American political groups as they too were now drawn into imaginings of global black diasporic vision. Numerous commentators debated as to whether they could grow up free from racial discrimination in the former Nazi state. McMillan, now a Professor of History at South Carolina A. & M. College, intervened in this discussion writing several articles. In these, without any reflection on his own previous experiences of Germany, he argued that the children were better off in the country of their birth where their presence could help Germans to shake free from the "narrow views" of the Nazi past and to once again become free of color prejudice.<sup>lxxxvi1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article looks at the published reports on visits made to inter-war Germany by prominent black journalists Robert S. Abbot, J.A. Rogers and Lewis K. McMillan. Drawing on their own experiences as well as their engagement with German-based Blacks the reporters contrasted the oppressive conditions black people faced in the US with the apparent lack of colour prejudice in Germany. Their coverage serves as a critique of race relations in the US, while also providing snapshots into the conditions under which Black Germans lived as well as an insight into the writers' own perceptions of a broader Black Diaspora in development.

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<sup>i</sup> For Abbott's reflections on his time in England see, Robert S. Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: IX We Arrive in England", *Chicago Defender*, 4 Jan. 1930, 1-2 and "My Trip Abroad: X The Cardiff Riot", *Chicago Defender*, 11 Jan. 1930, 1-2. J. A. Rogers also felt that of all the European countries he visited Britain was the one where black people would most likely encounter prejudice; J. A. Rogers, "'Brightest Side of My Trip'", *New York Amsterdam News*, 5 Oct. 1927, 14.

<sup>ii</sup> Robert S. Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: Paris", *Chicago Defender*, 9 Nov. 1929, 1-2.

<sup>iii</sup> In their depictions of life in France Abbott and Rogers present a similarly idealized image of a country largely lacking in racial prejudice. On the relationship between African Americans and France see among many others, Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir. African Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Yael Simpson Fletcher, "Unsettling Settlers. Colonial Migrants and Racialised Sexuality in Interwar Marseilles," in

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Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities* (London: Routledge, 1999), 79-94; Pascal Blanchard, Eric Deroo and Gilles Manceran, *Le Paris Noir* (Paris: Hazan, 2001); Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

<sup>iv</sup> For a rare exception see the work of Thabiti Asukolie, "Joel Augustus Rogers: Black International Journalism, Archival Research, and Print Culture," *The Journal of African American History* Volume 95, No 3-4 (2010), 322-47. McMillan has largely been remembered in connection with his published criticism of African American education in South Carolina from 1952, which led to his dismissal from South Carolina State College. See the brief mention in Komanduri S. Murty and Julius Scipio, "Survival Management Becomes Academic Autocracy," in Vann R. Newkirk, ed., *New Life for Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Perspective* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 97-121. Here, 98-100.

<sup>v</sup> Figures from Mayiti Sengstacke Rice, *Chicago Defender* (Charleston SC: Arcadia, 2012), 31; Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892-1950* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 8-10; Lesley Vincent Tischauer, *Race Relations in the United States, 1920-40* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 56.

<sup>vi</sup> Alan D. DeSantis, "A Forgotten Leader. Robert S. Abbott and the Chicago Defender from 1910-1920," *Journalism History* 23 (1997), 63-71, here 64.

<sup>vii</sup> Among many others see, Kenneth Barkin, "W. E. B. Du Bois' Love Affair With Imperial Germany," *German Studies Review* Volume 28, No 2 (2005), 285-302; Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp, eds., *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011); Maria Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs, eds., *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers Between African America and Germany* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010); Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David McBride, Leroy Hopkins and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay, eds., *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World* (Columbia SC: Camden House, 1998); Timothy L. Schroer, *Recasting Race After World War II: Germans and African Americans in American-occupied Germany* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007); Katharina Gerund, *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange: African American Women's Art and Activism in West Germany* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013).

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<sup>viii</sup> For the growing literature on Black Germans see among others: Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Katharina Oguntoye, *Eine Afro-Deutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern in Deutschland von 1884 bis 1950* (Berlin: Hoho Verlag, 1997); Peter Martin and Christine Alonzo, eds., *Zwischen Charleston und Stechschritt: Schwarze im Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 2004); Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Tobias Nagl, *Die unheimliche Maschine: Rasse und Repräsentation im Weimarer Kino* (Munich: Text und Kritik, 2009); Clarence Lusane, *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>ix</sup> Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: Paris", 1-2.

<sup>x</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *The Journal of American History* Volume 86, No 3 (1999), 1045-77, here p.1047. Also; Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael O. West, William G. Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins, eds., *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>xi</sup> In particular see the work of Michel Fabre; Fabre, *Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980: From Harlem to Paris* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Also; Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*.

<sup>xii</sup> For more on the Scheve family's sponsoring of Cameroonian migrants see, Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, 44-9

<sup>xiii</sup> "Das erste Sommerfest", *Teltower Kreisblatt*, 1 Aug. 1895, 3a.

<sup>xiv</sup> As yet it has been impossible to find any further information about this remarkable event.

<sup>xv</sup> For the historical situation see, Bruce Levine, "'Against All Slavery, Whether White or Black': German-Americans and the Irrepressible Conflict," in David McBride, Leroy Hopkins and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay, eds., *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World* (Columbia SC: Camden House,

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1998), 53-64; Mischa Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

<sup>xvi</sup> See Mischa Honeck, "An Unexpected Alliance: August Willich, Peter H. Clark, and the Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati," in Greene and Anke Ortlepp, eds., *Germans and African Americans*, 17-36.

<sup>xvii</sup> Leroy Hopkins, "'Black Prussians': Germany and African American Education from James W. C. Pennington to Angela Davis," in McBride, Hopkins and Blackshire-Belay, eds., *Crosscurrents*, 65-81. Here, 70. On Douglass's influence see, Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 3; J. A. Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color: Volume 2* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 ed), 332-49.

<sup>xviii</sup> Hopkins, "'Black Prussians'", 66, 70-73.

<sup>xix</sup> On Murphy Jr. see, Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892-1950*, 8-10. Also, Murphy Jr's own observations of Germany, C. J. Murphy, "Travel by Rail in Germany", *Afro-American*, 29 Aug. 1914, 1.

<sup>xx</sup> On Du Bois' intellectual development in Berlin see among others; Russell Berman, "Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany," *German Quarterly* Volume 70, No 2 (1997), 123-35; Kenneth Barkin, "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Kaiserreich," *Central European History* Volume 31, No 3 (1998), 155-70; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* London: Verso, 1993), 133-45; Günther Lenz, "Radical Cosmopolitanism: W. E. B. Du Bois, Germany, and African American Pragmatist Visions for Twenty-First Century Europe," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* Volume 4, No 2 (2012), 65-96; Sieglinde Lemke, "Berlin and Boundaries: *sollen* versus *geschehen*," *Boundary 2* Volume 27 No 3 (2000), 45-78; William Strickland, W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Prime Minister of the State We Never Had," *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture* (2011). Available at:

<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-dubois.html>. Last accessed, 15 November 2016.

<sup>xxi</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 138-9

<sup>xxii</sup> "Dr. McMillan now from the University of Bonn", *Afro-American*, 8 July 1933, 21. Lewis K. McMillan, "Carl Schnaase als Hegelianer. Kunst und Geschichtsphilosophie" (PhD Thesis, University of Bonn, 1933).

<sup>xxiii</sup> J. A. Rogers, "Germany as 1927 Closes", *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 Dec. 1927, 14.

<sup>xxiv</sup> J. A. Rogers, "Appreciation of Schopenhauer", *New York Amsterdam News*, 19 Dec. 1928, 20.

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<sup>xxv</sup> Barkin, "W. E. B. Du Bois' Love Affair With Imperial Germany," 286, 288.

<sup>xxvi</sup> James J. Magee, *Freedom of Expression* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 9; Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6-11.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The best visual expression of this is H. R Hoops well-known 1917 propaganda poster *Destroy this Mad Brute!* Patrick J. Quinn, *The Conning of America: The Great War and American Popular Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001); Neil M. Heyman, *World War One* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 72-3.

<sup>xxviii</sup> There is a growing literature on German colonial violence. Among others see: James Gibling and Jamie Monson, eds., *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Joachim Zeller and Jürgen Zimmerer, eds., *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and Its Aftermath* (London: Merlin Press, 2008).

<sup>xxix</sup> For examples see, "Says French Troops Bad for Germans", *Chicago Defender*, 8 July 1922, 1; "Outcry Against the 'Black Horror' and an Urgent Appeal to Americans", *Chicago Defender*, 23 Sept. 1922, 15; "30,000 Blacks Occupy Rhineland", *Afro-American*, 7 May 1920, 1; "Race Prejudice in Germany for First Time in History", *Afro-American*, 4 Aug. 1922, 7; "'Lie' Given to Charges Against France's Colored Troops by Weeks", *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 Dec. 1922, 1.

<sup>xxx</sup> See Peter Collar, *The Propaganda War in the Rhineland: Weimar Germany, Race and Occupation after World War One* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012); Dick van Galen Last and Ralf Futselaar, *Black Shame: African Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1922* trans. Marjolijn de Jager (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 182-4.

<sup>xxxi</sup> J. A. Rogers, "Negro Colonies Lost, Germany Is Fast Losing Interest in Negroes", *Philadelphia Tribune*, 29 Dec. 1927, 9; Robert S. Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VII Sojourning in Germany", *Chicago Defender*, 21 Dec. 1929, 1.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "Negro Soldiers Found Too Late, There Are No 'Huns' In Germany", *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 9 Nov. 1929, 7.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Rogers, "Germany as 1927 Closes".

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Rogers, "Negro Colonies Lost".



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- <sup>xxxv</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "Superior Attitude of Native German Not Essentially Race Discrimination", *Philadelphia Tribune*, 3 Oct. 1929, 9; J. A. Rogers, "Cameroon Chief Justice is a West Indian", *Afro-American*, 30 June 1928, 5.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> J. A. Rogers, "Seeing Germany by Rail", *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 Jan. 1928, 6.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "McMillan Gets Hair Cut in Germany", *Afro-American*, 31 Aug. 1929, 3 and "Lectures in German", *Afro-American*, 5 Apr. 1930, 1.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Robert S. Abbott, "My Trip Abroad VIII: The Negro in Berlin", *Chicago Defender*, 28 Dec. 1929, 2.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> The book referred to is likely the novel *Die Neger* (Berlin: Wasservogel, 1929). Also, Nagl, *Die unheimliche Maschine*, 665-68.
- <sup>xl</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "Germans Remind McMillan of US Negroes", *Afro-American*, 19 Oct. 1929, 2. Also, Lewis K. McMillan, "McMillan finds Catholic Church is same in Germany", *Afro-American*, 12 Oct. 1929, 4.
- <sup>xli</sup> Rogers, "Negro Colonies Lost".
- <sup>xlii</sup> McMillan, "Superior Attitude of Native German", 9.
- <sup>xliiii</sup> Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VII Sojourning in Germany", 1.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Among others, George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).
- <sup>xlv</sup> J. A. Rogers, "May 1930: The American Negro in Europe," *The American Mercury* Volume 20, No 77 (May 1930), 1-10. Also, J. A. Rogers, *Sex and Race. Volume 1: Negro - Caucasian Mixing in all Ages and all Lands* (St. Petersburg, FL: Helga M. Rogers, 1967), 188.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Rogers refers to the manuscript he is working on that would become *Sex and Race* in "Negro Colonies Lost".
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "Berlin Receives Negro With Open Arms", *New Journal and Guide*, 5 Oct. 1929, 1.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Rogers, *Sex and Race*, 188.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 286.
- <sup>l</sup> J. A. Rogers, "A Mormon Speaks", *New York Amsterdam News*, 7 Mar. 1928, 13.

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<sup>li</sup> This incident brings to mind a similar story Du Bois recounted when he became engaged in conversation with a Dutch woman and her children while on board a steam ship on the Rhine. Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868-1919*, 127-28.

<sup>lii</sup> McMillan, "Berlin Receives Negro With Open Arms". See also Rogers comments in, "Germany as 1927 Closes".

<sup>liii</sup> Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VII Sojourning in Germany", 1.

<sup>liv</sup> Barkin, "W. E. B. Du Bois' Love Affair With Imperial Germany," 286.

<sup>lv</sup> Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VII Sojourning in Germany", 2.

<sup>lvi</sup> Beeke Sell Tower, "'Ultramodern and Ultraprimitive': Shifting Meanings in the Imagery of Americanism in the Art of Weimar Germany," in Thomas W. Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann, eds., *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic* (Columbia SC: Camden House, 1994), 85–104; here 100.

<sup>lvii</sup> Samir Dayal, "Blackness as Symptom: Josephine Baker and European Identity," in Heike Raphael-Hernandez, ed., *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 35-52. Here, 36, 41. Also, James Small, "Férrral Benga's Body," in Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken, eds., *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 99-119.

<sup>lviii</sup> J. A. Rogers, "America's Foremost Comedian Coming Back After Engagement in Germany", *New York Amsterdam News*, 25 July 1928, 6; Lewis K. McMillan, "Utica Singers Score in Berlin Concert", *Afro-American*, 22 Feb. 1930, 12; McMillan, "Berlin Receives Negro With Open Arms", Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VIII: The Negro in Berlin", 1-2.

<sup>lix</sup> "'Information' at US Consulate Speaks 6 Tongues", *Afro-American*, 2 Nov. 1929, 2.

<sup>lx</sup> Rogers, "Negro Colonies Lost"; 'McMillan, "Berlin Receives Negro With Open Arms", Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VIII: The Negro in Berlin", 1-2. It is likely that the men McMillan met were actually from Cameroon. There is no evidence of a Congolese community in the city.

<sup>lxi</sup> Rogers, *Sex and Race*, 187-8.

<sup>lxii</sup> Abbott, 'My Trip Abroad: VII Sojourning in Germany', 2.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Heinz Liepmann, "Häfen, Mädchen und Seeleute," *Velhagen und Klasings Monatshefte* Volume 47 (1932), 283-5, here 285.

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- <sup>lxiv</sup> Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VII: Sojourning in Germany", 2.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Abbott, "My Trip Abroad: VIII The Negro in Berlin", 1-2.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Ibid., 2 and "Architect and Actor", *Chicago Defender*, 28 Dec. 1929, 18.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Robbie Aitken, "Surviving in the Metropole: The Struggle for Work and Belonging among African Colonial Migrants in Weimar Germany," *Immigrants and Minorities* Volume 28, No 2-3 (2010), 203-23.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> On African performers and Brody in particular see, Nagl, *Die unheimliche Maschine*; also Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, 145-54.
- <sup>lxix</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "'Charm of Negro Men over German Women Idle Chatter'", *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 24 May 1930, 10.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Rogers, "Negro Colonies Lost".
- <sup>lxxi</sup> See Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2009); also Barkin, "W. E. B. Du Bois' Love Affair with Imperial Germany"; Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, 168-73.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> Identity Paper, Josefa Boholle, 23 February 1927, Landesarchiv Berlin A.Pr.Br.Rep. 030-06 no. 6473.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> On the legal status of colonial migrants and this impact on their lives see, Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*.
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> In particular see, St Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology: 2 Volumes* (Los Angeles: University of California, Center for Afro-American Studies, 1987, 1990). Also, Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, "Introduction: Anthropology, African Americans, and the Emancipation of Subjugated Knowledge," in Ira E. Harrison and Faye E. Harrison, eds., *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1-35. Here 12-16; Asukulie, "Joel Augustus Rogers"; Metz T. P. Lochard, "Phylon Profile, XII: Robert S. Abbott - 'Race Leader'", *Phylon* Volume 8, No 2 (1947), 124-32; Bayina W. Muhammad, "The Baltimore *Afro American's* Pan African Consciousness Agenda, 1915-1941," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* Volume 4, No 5 (2011), 8-25.
- <sup>lxxv</sup> Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "Introduction: The Rival Africas and Paradigms of Africanists and Africans at Home and Abroad," in Michael O. West and William G. Martin, eds., *Out of One, May Africas: Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1-36. Here, 19-22.

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<sup>lxxvi</sup> "Playing in Berlin", *Chicago Defender*, 10 Jan. 1931, 9; Victor Bell, "Letter", *Chicago Defender*, 24 May 1930, 4; "Auf Wiedersehen, Gluckliche Reise", *Chicago Defender*, 12 Apr. 1930, 1; "The Long and Short of Sunshine in Morning Land", *Afro-American*, 3 Jan. 1931, 10

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Abbott later rejected the term as well as a range of other racial descriptors. Robert S. Abbott, "Editor puts taboo on 'Negro' as Descriptor of Race", *Chicago Defender*, 29 Dec. 1934, 9.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "M'Millan thot Turk, Siamese in Germany", *Afro American*, 16 Nov. 1929, 3.

<sup>lxxix</sup> For examples see "300 Families affected by Hitler ban", *Afro-American*, 30 Dec. 1933, 1; "Africans feel lash of Adolph Hitler", *Philadelphia Tribune*, 18 Oct. 1934, 4; "Africans in Germany living in terror, French Report", *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 20 Oct. 1934, 5; "Hitler Expels Africans from Germany", *Chicago Defender*, 15 Apr. 1933, 1.

<sup>lxxx</sup> J. A. Rogers, "Paris Paper Compares Hitlerism With Race Hate in US", *Afro-American*, 23 Sept. 1933, 19; Editorial, "Adolph Hitler, K.K.K.", *Afro-American*, 9 Sept. 1933, 16.

<sup>lxxxi</sup> Larry Greene, "The African American Press on Nazi Germany," in Greene and Anke Ortlepp, eds., *Germans and African Americans*, 70-87, here 78. Also, Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims*, 118-28.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Rogers, "Paris Paper Compares Hitlerism", 19; "Adolph Hitler, K.K.K.", 16. J. A. Rogers, "Hitlerism is a Disease Cultivated by His Present Foes", *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 Nov. 1941, 9; *Sex and Race*, 1-2.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Lewis K. McMillan, "Jim Crow More Dangerous than Hitler", *Afro-American*, 18 Jan. 1941, 5; Rogers, *Sex and Race*, 188. This was a view that was repeated by John Welch, pianist and correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier* who spent 12 years in Nazi Germany and was repatriated in 1944. See series of articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier* from April to May of 1944.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Black Germans were simultaneously also involved in radical black internationalist networks through connections to George Padmore and Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté. See, Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, chapter 6.

<sup>lxxxv</sup> See in particular, Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins*; Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler. Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

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<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Lewis. K. McMillan, "Just What Should We Do About Those 3,000 Brown Babies?", *Afro-American*, 5 Nov. 1949, 1. McMillan, "Love Keeps German Mother and Her War Baby Together", *Cleveland Call and Post*, 29 Oct. 1949, 1; McMillan, "Brown Skinned War Babies", *Chicago Defender*, 5 Nov. 1949, 18.