

Clarence Lusane. *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era.* New York and London: Routledge, 2003. 320 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-93295-0.



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In making the analytical category "race" central to his investigation of Hitler's black victims, Clarence Lusane situates his book within an important new area of German Studies scholarship. Since the 1984 creative writing course taught at Berlin's Freie Universität by African-American poet Audre Lorde, who discovered a number of native-German-speaking women of color among her students and asked, "Who *are* you," "Afro-Germans" (or "Afro-Deutsche," a term coined in connection with Lorde's course) have taken the initiative to define themselves as a politically and culturally significant group in Germany. They have also been the subjects of a growing number of scholarly studies investigating the past and present experiences of the black populations of Germany. Certainly the initial catalyst for the Afro-German movement was the 1986 Frauenverlag volume that grew immediately out of Lorde's seminar, *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (published in 1992 in English translation as *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*). From the 1980s to the present, Afro-Germans (who sometimes also term themselves "Black Germans")

have founded new self-help organizations and other forums, including the Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (later, in recognition of new migration from Africa, renamed the Initiative Schwarze in Deutschland) or ISD; ADEFRA, an association of black women; the (now-defunct) journal *Afro-Look*; Black History Month celebrations all over Germany; an annual Bundestreffen and smaller regional meetings; and, more recently, Cyber-Nomads, the Black Media Network, and several Black Media Congresses held in Berlin.

Though Rainer Pommerin's *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde* (1979) appeared before these efforts at self-organization began, many studies undertaken by scholars of the black German experience loosely or more closely allied with these organizations have been written subsequently, like Paulette Reed-Anderson's *Rewriting the Footnotes: Berlin and the African Diaspora* (2000); Fatima El-Tayeb's *Schwarze Deutsche: Der Diskurs um Rasse und nationale Identität 1890-1933* (2001); Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria's *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung: Afrodeutsche Besatzungskinder im Nachkriegsdeutschland*

(2002); and Tina Campt's *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich* (2003). Some Afro-Germans have also helped to retrieve black German history by writing their own autobiographies and memoirs, like Ika Hügel-Marshall in *Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben* (1998) and Hans J. Massaquoi in *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (1999). Some recent work on German colonialism has also been informed by new attention to the category of "race," like Reinhard Klein-Arendt's and Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst's edited book *Die (koloniale) Begegnung: AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland 1880-1945, Deutsche in Afrika 1880-1918* (2003); Bechhaus-Gerst's conference in October 2004 on "Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Africa and Blacks in German Popular Culture"; and two forthcoming conferences in Windhoek, Namibia (August 2004), and Bremen (November 2004) commemorating the 1904 Herero uprising and subsequent genocide.

Though recent studies of race and/in Germany insist on the specificities of the black German experience, most of their authors would acknowledge that their investigations would have been almost literally inconceivable without the insights and inspiration of activists and scholars of the African diaspora, particularly those from the United States and, to a lesser extent, Britain.

An African American professor at American University and a frequent commentator on global and national race relations in the U.S. press, Lusane brings the advantages of his own "positionality" to his examination of black Germans. Part 1 of his book, entitled "Beyond a White German Past," draws on his wider understanding of how race functions within modernity to offer a useful framework for understanding the role of race within Germany. He turns to philosopher Charles Mills's notion of the "racial contract" (one aspect of classical political theory's "social contract") to designate the formal and informal agreements en-

tered into by whites to secure white domination and establish the parameters of social space for "others." But racism, Lusane insists, is "multidimensional, contingent, and intersecting," so that "in a given society multiple racisms may be in practice, that is, differentially constructed oppressed racial groups will face dissimilar experiences in terms of racism" (p. 7). Though individually and subjectively blacks in Germany were doubtless compelled to recognize their "difference" from white Germans, until quite recently, Lusane emphasizes, people of African descent in Germany possessed no self-conscious racial awareness or group identity (thus constituting an "UNimagined community," as he puts it). Hence, though the Nazis certainly regarded blacks as members of an inferior race, they were, unlike Jews, of limited importance as a group to the Nazis "because they existed neither as a cultural or social community nor as an economic or political community" (p. 29). The Nazis lost little by attacking blacks, but also had little to gain; as a consequence Nazi policies towards blacks were inconsistent, even contradictory, and often local and personalized. The more recent adoption of the designations "Afro-German" or "Black German" provides those who embrace the term a means of forging an "identity of resistance," Lusane argues, "a necessary stage in developing a counterhegemonic voice and sociopolitical movement" (p. 12). But, though the descriptor "Afro-German" helped activists name their own experience, Lusane finally notes that (like the various names applied to and accepted by African Americans) that particular term may be ultimately of only transitional importance in the long-term struggle of people of African descent to gain democratic inclusion within Germany.

Though the seven chapters of part 3, "'The Worst You Can Imagine': Blacks and Nazism," focus on the Nazi era, part 2 examines "Blackness before Hitler," and part 4 looks at "Black Skins, German Masks: Blackness in Contemporary Germany." Though objections might be raised to Lu-

sane's somewhat curtailed and scatter-shot approach, in its attention to almost the full span of the black history in Germany his book comprises the most inclusive study of the black experience to date, bringing together materials hitherto only available in far less accessible publications. In chapter 1, Lusane sketches out racial views derogatory to blacks held by German and European thinkers ranging from Johan Friedrich Blumenbach and Christoph Meiners through Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel to Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and the Nazis. Chapter 2 focuses on encounters between people of African descent and Germans, with special emphasis on German policies on interracial marriage in their colonies and the genocidal German response to the Herero uprising in 1904. Lusane argues forcefully for a link between the ideologies that informed German colonialism and those advocated by the Nazis. Chapter 3 is devoted to the occupation of the Rhineland by French colonial troops in the twenties and the mixed-race children, the so-called "Rhineland bastards," that were its consequence. He also touches on Hitler's diatribes against blacks in *Mein Kampf* and elsewhere, and notes the black resistance groups, comprised mainly of blacks of non-German nationality (including the black Communist and later Pan-Africanist George Padmore), that existed in Germany during the Weimar Republic. Lusane's final two chapters examine the complex and variegated circumstances of blacks in Europe after 1945, with particular attention to the rise of new racist and neo-fascist movements and the attacks on people of color for which they have been responsible. But he also stresses the emergence of anti-racist organizations to counter this violence and also briefly chronicles the contemporary Afro-German movement. He notes the existence of various black communities in Germany today: Afro-Germans holding German citizenship; African immigrants who may or may not remain in Germany; and black expatriates from other countries of the world who will eventually leave. He concludes his

book by calling for solidarity among blacks from all areas of the African diaspora.

Within this framework, part 3 of Lusane's book takes on the central topic of his study, circling around it to attack it from varying directions. In successive chapters, Lusane investigates Nazi policy towards blacks, the Nazi sterilization program directed at blacks, black captives of the Nazis, Nazi propaganda against blacks, the Nazi response to jazz, their reaction to black athletes, and blacks in the resistance movement. Several recurring themes inform these chapters. First, Lusane stresses the Nazis' differential treatment of differently situated black groups and individuals. Though many blacks tried to leave and some Africans and other expatriates succeeded, the Nazis confiscated Afro-Germans' passports, and the British prevented natives of Southwest Africa from returning because they had fought with Germany in World War I. However, blacks in Germany were never targeted for elimination or even systematic harassment. In general, Africans were better treated than Afro-Germans, since the Nazis foresaw they would need African assistance should Germany regain its colonies. The Nazis also employed Afro-Germans in the German film industry to portray Africans in colonial propaganda films made mostly between 1938 and 1943. Lusane can document the presence of blacks (imprisoned for other reasons) in concentration and labor camps as well as black GIs in POW camps. Otherwise, Afro-Germans were mobilized for the war effort like the rest of the German population. Some even belonged to the Hitler Youth and served in the German army--but were also compulsorily sterilized. Lusane declares, "the preference to address the problem by sterilization of some would be as coherent as the Nazi policies ever got regarding Afro-Germans and Africans" (p. 99). Since Nazi sterilization law, promulgated in 1934, did not allow sterilization based solely on race, the Nazis undertook the sterilizations in secret. At least 385 Rhineland children were sterilized between 1935 and 1937, a gradual strategy

that, Lusane argues, nonetheless "sought to erase any future blackness on German soil" (p. 142).

Secondly, Lusane documents interactions of various sorts between National Socialism and African Americans. An ardent admirer of Germany, W. E. B. Du Bois visited in 1936 and was quite restrained in his criticism of the Nazis. Lusane remarks, "Du Bois's love for Germany seems to have blinded or at least clouded his usually sharp reading of racism" (p. 128). Prior to the 1940s, many African American entertainers had migrated to France to escape U.S. racism and seek employment opportunities. Though many left when war was declared, some remained, including Josephine Baker, who was recruited by the Allies as a spy. Blacks in Germany as elsewhere were devastated when boxer Joe Louis lost to Max Schmeling in 1936 but jubilant when Louis won in the 1938 rematch. Hitler's failure to shake hands with victorious African American athletes, including Jesse Owens, in the 1936 Olympics was cited by the U.S. press as evidence of racial views that Americans should oppose (though, as the black press pointed out, the black athletes confronted similar racist views in the United States). Though, because they considered it both Jewish *and* black, the Nazis opposed and prohibited jazz on principle, its popularity compelled various Nazi concessions, including unsuccessful attempts to create more acceptable German jazz and "swinging" German radio music. German swing movements and jazz clubs constituted a form of cultural, though rarely political, resistance to the Nazis. Lusane can also document that jazz was performed at Auschwitz, Flossenburg, and Theresienstadt as well as at some POW camps. Lusane has perused many black U.S. newspapers of the period and reveals the black press's attentiveness to developments in Germany, its concern about the rise of National Socialism, and its condemnation of Hitler's policies towards Jews and blacks.

Finally, Lusane seems committed to saving little-known figures of the black diaspora from his-

torical oblivion by recounting their individual encounters with National Socialism. These figures range from Hans Massaquoi, son of the Liberian ambassador to Germany who survived the Nazi era to become an *Ebony* editor, to the "enigmatic" (p. 122) Lonnie Lawrence Dennis, mixed-race U.S. writer, diplomat, and businessman, who seems to have admired Hitler, embraced anti-Semitism, and advocated for fascism. William Marcus Baarn, a black nightclub singer from Dutch Guinea, even served as a Nazi spy. Some blacks, like the composer Elmer Spylglass in Frankfurt (perhaps protected by his African American affiliation), lived comfortably in Germany throughout the Nazi period. Other blacks in Germany opposed the Nazis. Joseph Bile of Cameroon published a letter in a black U.S. newspaper pleading for black U.S. solidarity with blacks in Germany. Hilarius Gilgus was an Afro-German labor organizer and an early Nazi victim, killed by the SS in Düsseldorf at the age of twenty-four. Mohamed Husen from German East Africa served with the Germans in World War I, appeared in numerous colonial films, but was eventually convicted of *Rassenschande* and sent to Sachsenhausen, where he died in 1943. Jean Johnny Voste from the Belgian Congo was active in the Belgian resistance movement and survived Dachau. Joseph Nassy from Surinam, a black Jew, was captured in Belgium and sent to an internment camp in Bavaria where he could teach art and also produce sketches, drawings, and paintings now in the holdings of the U.S. Holocaust Museum. Johnny Williams, son of an Alsatian father and a mother from the Ivory Coast, discovered his "splendid voice" (p. 165) in the Neuengamme camp and went on to a successful singing career after the war. Johnny Nicholas, originally from Haiti, was captured as an Allied spy in France and sent to various camps, where he survived by working as a doctor. Lusane regrets he has little information about black women but does try to reconstruct the story of the jazz trumpeter Valaida Snow, who may have been interned in a Nazi camp in Denmark. It is not exact-

ly clear what can be concluded from these disparate experiences, but Lusane has certainly successfully documented a black presence in Germany and Europe during the Nazi era and pointed the way towards many potentially fruitful research areas.

However, Lusane's book also points towards necessary future work in some more unfortunate ways. Despite the service this book performs in compiling information about blacks and National Socialism, many aspects of Lusane's book are unsatisfactory. His book is based on little original research; only his investigation of the black press's treatment of Nazi Germany, a fascinating topic deserving an investigation in its own right, is his own contribution. Moreover, Lusane has drawn almost exclusively on English-language sources both for his information on black Germans and on Nazi Germany, and he seems to have failed to consult some obvious sources on the black German experience. Without further corroboration, he also relies on articles in the U.S. press (for instance, the *Washington Post* on Germans in South West Africa) for what he treats as authoritative information. Most disturbing are the book's many typographical and spelling errors and outright mistakes in English and, more critically, in German. "Völkerschauen" are termed "Volkschuen" (p. 61); Adolf Hitler frequently, though not always, appears as "Adolph" (e.g. p. 15, p. 103). Friedrich Ebert turns into "Friedrich Eben" (p. 78), and the NSDAP is repeatedly termed the "NSDDP" (p. 79). "Mohrenköpfe" turn into "Morendöpfe" (p. 63); "Mischling" becomes "mischeling" (p. 35); "Der Stürmer" is given as "Der Stumer" (p. 226); "Swing-Heinis" are (sometimes) "Swing-Heines" (pp.204-205); and at least twice "Das Schwarze Korps" becomes "Das Schwartz Korps" (pp. 183-184). Mistakes in German capitalization, plurals, adjective endings, and umlauts are pervasive; most egregious is perhaps the identification of the name of the black German women's organization, ADEFRA, as an acronym for "Afro-Deutsch Fraülein" (p. 201)! These many errors seem more

than an indication of a (shocking) absence of careful editing on the part of the book's publisher and may draw into question Lusane's competence to address his topic.

The accomplishments and limitations of Lusane's book sound a cautionary note for scholars in German Studies and beyond. Current global developments as well as interdisciplinary tendencies within our own fields demand that we stretch ourselves further than ever before, venturing onto terrains far beyond those in which we were trained. Whether those new fields demand that we acquire new methods or competence in new geographic areas, we must be able to produce scholarship that wins the respect of scholars in the field onto which we are venturing. The great virtue of Lusane's book is his strong background in the scholarship of the African diaspora--though precisely those qualities may not be appreciated by scholars of German Studies, who know little about it. Lusane himself, it appears, does not have an extensive knowledge of scholarship on Germany. For all the merits of Lusane's study, the important new area of Black German/Black European studies demands more scholarly rigor and care than his book is able to deliver.

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