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## Germany and the Black Diaspora by Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke and Anne Kuhlmann

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***Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250-1914.* Eds. Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke and Anne Kuhlmann.** New York: Berghahn, 2013. 262 pp. \$90/£56 Hardcover. ISBN 9780857459534.

This collection combines articles on history, art history, culture and literature to analyze encounters of Africans, African-Americans and other non-specified Black people with Germans in Germany, the United States, Cameroon, and Togo. Originating in a conference in 2009 at the German Historical Institute, the volume reveals a long history and the variety of connections between Germans and Africans and African-Americans (3). These meetings have made an impact on Germans and the African Diaspora, as both groups engaged in “a dialogical model of intercultural negotiation in which individuals from both groups actively engage in processes of mutual exchange and influence (5)” as the editors explain.

This volume contributes to a line of scholarly writing on Black people in Germany that thinks beyond Germany’s borders. Afro-German Studies is a recent field emerging in the 1980s. Scholarship in Afro-German Studies in the Anglophone context began when *Farbe bekennen* (1986) was translated and published in English in 1992. The translation widened the awareness of Afro-Germans and their experiences for an English speaking audience. The first English language book on Afro-Germans was the *African German Experience* edited by Carol Blackshire-Belay. It examines the African Diaspora and uses an interdisciplinary approach including both German Studies scholars and African Diaspora Studies scholars. Later, Tina Camp’s historical analysis of Afro-Germans during the Third Reich, *Other Germans* (2001), drew attention to Afro-German Studies when there was little interest previously. The *Callaloo Sonderheft* on Afro-Germans in 2003 on Black Germans has been also extremely useful for scholars and groundbreaking in its attempts to look at transnationalism and Afro-Germans and the Diaspora. Shortly thereafter, the interdisciplinary collection *Not so Plain as Black and White* (2005), edited by Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver on Afro-German film, history, and literature and performance evaluated the complexity of Afro-German identity. These English language authors drew on studies simultaneously appearing in German by Afro-German scholars such as Fatima El-Tayeb and Katharina Oguntoye, among others.

The editors of *Germany and the Black Diaspora* argue that scholarship on the African diaspora in Germany focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the books listed above, that does seem to be the case. This volume brings in scholarship focusing on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond. Themes in the book include Black agency, migration and representation. This collection contains two sections, and eleven chapters total, not including the editor’s introduction and an afterword. The sections are entitled: “Saints and Slaves, Moors and Hessians” and “From Enlightenment to Empire.” Part one, comprised of five chapters, shows a change in African integration into German culture (9). The editors describe this section: “The contributions of the section by and large trace a decline in the integration of African people in German culture as the notion of blacks as a racially subordinate group became hegemonic. At the same time, the chapters also reveal how African influences were ‘filtered’ and adapted to the

specific needs of the receiving cultures” (9). Using words such as “integration” and “filtered” is a problematic approach as it assumes one culture must change to be like another. Further, the term “filtered” is a disguise for taking agency away from Africans and African-Americans in Germany. That Black identity was “filtered” for the needs of German culture is not something that should be celebrated. This being said, there is a change in the meaning of Black identity in Germany as time progresses. Chapters in part one address representation of Black people in various contexts: at court, in the army, on stage and in art. Throughout the first section, there are some moments of agency in mobility within the court and as soldiers. The six chapters in part two, “From Enlightenment to Empire,” examine German ideas of Blackness and contributions of Black individuals post Enlightenment (11). Part two largely addresses Black agency and migration. One chapter depicts the lack of agency through translation of Black authors by white Germans, but the majority of the chapters in part two show Black agency through travel, scientific endeavors and subversion of colonial plans in Togo.

Paul Kaplan shows how paintings featuring Black people represent their presence at German courts, but these depictions may also be a projection of white fantasy by white German artists, according to Kaplan. Similarly, Kate Lowe examines artistic representations of Blackness in art, specifically, the image of Black people in *King Solomon and Four Cardinal Virtues*. Like Kaplan, Lowe questions some art of this period and its usage of stereotypes, as the artistic depictions of Blackness may or may not be a product of the white artist’s imagination. Anne Kuhlmann explores the topic of Africans at courts in Germany. As a place of major social importance, Kuhlmann finds Black agency within the court system; mobility was possible through baptism, and according to Kuhlmann, Black courtiers used this strategically to change their position. Rashid-S. Pegah contrasts the ballet stage and the opera stage. For him, the opera stage was a place of inequality where Blackness represented inferiority. This reception was a reaction to the increase in visual presence of Black actors, dancers and singers on the court stage. Maria Diedrich examines African-American men who fought for the British during the American Revolution and the migration of some of them with their families to Hesse. Diedrich finds agency in the lives of these African American men and the dependency on them by British and German army officials.

In the second section of the volume, Heike Paul delves into the reception of African-American literature by German audiences. Paul uses works by Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Frank Webb and Josiah Henson. All four works show how Black agency was denied in authorship, or through translation. Jeannette Eileen Jones investigates German professor of physiology and anatomy Friedrich Tiedemann, who refuted nineteenth century science and beliefs that African descended people were intellectually and morally inferior to whites. Instead, Tiedemann defended his ideas with science and history to show that Black people could govern themselves. From his standpoint, slavery could not be justified by science and it should therefore, be abolished. Mischa Honeck examines the travels of two African-American men, James W.C. Pennington and David E. Dorr. Honeck explains, “For both, going abroad was an act of emancipation” (154). This transatlantic travel transformed these men, giving them new ideas

about American citizenship and equality. Bradley Naranch focuses on Karl Andree, a writer on commerce and race. Andree edited and wrote for the scientific journal *Globus*, which included debates on African-American rights and slavery. Kendahl L. Radcliffe explores Tuskegee cotton planters' experience in the German colony Togo. She sees agency both for the African-Americans and Togolese people in this German colonial venture. Because of the lack of success with cotton, the Togolese people sold the Germans traditional crops, which was an act of subversion; they did not follow the colonizers' plan for cotton growth. Robbie Aitken examines Cameroonians who travelled to Germany, particularly students from Cameroon who came to Germany for education. The lack of government control over the program gave the Cameroonian students more agency than the German government intended. The afterword by Dirk Hoerder looks at the wider European context of Africans in Europe and challenges white normativity in Europe. He briefly contextualizes interactions from the Middle Ages onward, shifting terminology, and usage of the term "Black." Hoerder acknowledges that more work needs to be done, but maintains that this book lays the foundation.

This book has certain advantages. It is not common to see African American and African experiences in Germany in the same volume. However, perhaps this is the beginning of a longer history of Afro-Germans or Black Germans. The editors briefly draw modern day connections citing the contemporary relevance of colonialism as seen through street names and blackfacing, asserting that "Germany's place in the black diaspora was anything but marginal" (6). Particularly, I enjoyed Anne Kuhlmann's chapter, "Ambiguous Duty," on Africans at court. She shows agency of Black individuals converting to Christianity in order to change careers and improve their court position.

Despite these advantages to the collection, there are also significant critiques to mention. It is important to note that this book does not expand on the work of "Afro-German intellectuals" as it states in the introduction (5). Instead, it builds on scholarship from white academics who study Africans in Germany (e.g. specifically mentioned are Peter Martin's aforementioned work *Schwarze Teufel*<sup>1</sup> (1993) and Hans Debrunner's *Presence and Prestige*<sup>2</sup> (1979)); the choice to continue to use white scholarship over Black scholarship is a significant issue in academia. In the introduction, editors criticize Peter Martin for his lack of showing Black agency due to his source materials (4–5), but these editors do something similar by silencing Black scholarship. It is essential to recognize that Black Germans have been studying Black German history and the history of Africans in Germany as well. Contributions by Afro-Germans May Ayim<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren: Afrikaner in Geschichte und Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Hamburg: Junius, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige. Africans in Europe: A History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> May Ayim, "Rassismus, Sexismus und vorkoloniales Afrikabild in Deutschland," in *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, eds. Katharina Oguntoye, Dagmar Schultz, and May Ayim (Berlin, Orlanda Verlag, 1986). Based on her thesis "Afrodeutsche: Ihre Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte aus dem Hintergrund gesellschaftlicher Veränderung."

Katharina Oguntoye<sup>4</sup> should be included in this collection; they have both written on Afro-Germans in Germany since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Choosing not to examine their scholarship invalidates Black German/Afro-German researchers past and present and perpetuates the problem in academia of researchers refusing to incorporate sources by People of Color, although they exist. The specificity of the chapters is another limitation. Instead of giving a general history, the book's chapters discuss very specific people or moments in history. The book's subtitle implies that the volume covers all time periods, or at least gives the same treatment to earlier periods, but it does not. Medieval art is used as a departure point rather than the focus, yet the subtitle, *Points of Contact, 1250-1914*, gives the impression that the medieval era will be covered in the text. While I appreciate the anecdotes offered here on Black people in German speaking regions during the Middle Ages, this would disappoint scholars looking specifically for entire chapters on that period. A more appropriate subtitle would have been: *Baroque and Beyond*, as the chapters place more emphasis on sixteenth century and beyond. This focus on the time period has advantages; the volume analyzes art and literature of the Baroque and later periods very thoroughly. There is nothing to tie the articles together at the end in a conclusion. There is an effort to do that in the afterword, but the afterword is another chapter and does not conclude the collection. In chapter eight, "Liberating Sojourns?" the author did not adequately discuss Paul Gilroy's theory on the Black Atlantic from the book of the same name published in 1993. Thinking about Paul Gilroy is relevant in terms of this project, as he also discusses routes and roots, but more attention should be devoted to it than a page for Honeck to show how Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory does not work, which Honeck describes as antinational. Further, Bradley Naranch's article does not seem to quite fit the themes of the rest of the volume because it does not seem to address the issues of agency, representation or migration.

Still, through art and literature, this collection does indeed contribute meaningfully to the study of the Black diaspora in Germany, especially in regards to the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. This interdisciplinary collection also highlights specific cases of Africans and African-Americans in earlier periods and recognizes that more work needs to be done in this field.

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<sup>4</sup> Katharina Oguntoye, *Eine afro-deutsche Geschichte: zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern und Afro-Deutsche in Deutschland 1884-1950* (Berlin: Hoho Verlag, 1997).