The Black Panther Solidarity Committees and the *Voice of the Lumpen*

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Beginning in 1967, German student radicals started reaching out to African American GIs serving in Germany, hoping that an alliance with Black Panther GIs could forge anti-imperialist solidarity against U.S. militarism and racism in both Germany and abroad. Their collaboration did not achieve its larger goal, but the Black Panther Solidarity Campaign brought about comprehensive government reforms from both the U.S. and the FRG to address widespread racism in the U.S. military and in German society. The visibility that African Americans received through this campaign also reintroduced "race" as a critical category into West German public discourse.

Only in the last few years have historians turned their attention to exploring the transnational aspects of the student revolts of the 1960s.¹ That work has interpreted 1968 as a global event, and some of that research has also explored the close connections between the student movement in the U.S. and in Germany.² But this "Other Alliance," as historian Martin Klimke has called the collaboration between students in the German SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund) and the American SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), had an additional component that has for the most part been ignored. Beginning in 1967, German students also started reaching out to American activists much closer to home. When the 7th Army in Germany began showing serious signs of disintegration as a result of the Pentagon’s decision to use the troops in Germany as a materiel- and manpower reserve for the war in Vietnam, German students started taking note of the protest potential of American GIs.³ As a consequence, all German cities that were home to both universities and U.S. military bases saw not only increased political agitation against the war in Vietnam, but also growing collaboration between German students and dissident American GIs.⁴

Research on this transnational collaboration has only just begun, but scholars are also for the first time looking more closely at the collaboration between German students and one particular subset of dissatisfied American GIs, namely African American GIs.⁵ This most unusual collaboration between German students and Black Panther GI activists blossomed at the tail end of the tumultuous 1960s in university towns across Germany and attracted not only the attention of the German public but of government officials in both Germany and the U.S. Given the dearth of scholarship on the social aspects of
the U.S. military presence in Germany, it is hardly surprising that this encounter between activists at German universities and African-Americans radicals in the U.S. military has received no scholarly attention so far. Yet the fact that this collaboration was possible at all, illustrates to what degree America’s “racial question” and the demands of African Americans became globalized through America’s worldwide network of military bases.

The most unusual alliance between Black Panther activists in the U.S. military and German students came about between late 1969 and 1971, when the emergence of Black Power in the U.S. inspired KD Wolff, the former head of the German SDS and one of Frankfurt’s most prominent student radicals, to bring together anti-Vietnam War protesters and activists supporting the struggle of the Black Panthers. The collaboration between German students organized in Black Panther Solidaritätskomitees and Black Panther activists working on the GI underground newspaper, Voice of the Lumpen, benefited both sides. German students were able to overcome their sense of disillusionment after the collapse of the European protest movements of 1968 and the dissolution of the SDS. The students’ material and logistical support in turn gave African American GIs in Germany a political voice they normally would not have had. By taking the cause of African American GIs to the streets of Germany’s cities and into the deepest provinces, the students and GIs were able to publicize widespread patterns of discrimination in the military and within German society. In the end, the many demonstrations and teach-ins associated with the Black Panther Solidarity Campaign resulted in far-reaching and comprehensive government programs in both Germany and the U.S. to deal with the grievances of African American GIs. Just as importantly, the Black Panther Solidarity Campaign brought about a vigorous public debate over German racism, and thus helped to bring back “race” as a critical category of West German discourse.

**German Students and Black Power**

The collaboration between African-American GIs and German students between 1969 and 1971 was a most unlikely alliance, given the deep gulf that separated the two groups. Although African-American GIs had been stationed in Germany since 1945, and many made an effort to experience Germany beyond the gates of their military bases, their distance from German society was even more pronounced than that of white GIs. German students were even less likely to interact with black GIs than the population at large, given the students’ social and cultural distance from the U.S. military. While individual students were attracted by the music that African American GIs brought to GI clubs and bars in German cities, during the 1950s it was largely working-class youth that were drawn to African-American cultural productions. In Diskus, the Frankfurt University student newspaper, African American GIs, let alone African American GIs were not a topic of interest during the 1950s despite the fact that thousands
of GIs were stationed in the greater Frankfurt area. When students became interested in Third-World issues through their interactions with students from non-Western countries in the early 1960s, they also started taking note of the civil-rights struggle in the U.S. But the black GIs in their midst remained for the most part outside of the students’ scope of experience.8

This social and cultural distance was overcome by the mid-1960s when students organized in the SDS became enchanted with the Black Power movement in the U.S. At its 1967 convention, the German SDS declared solidarity with Black Power, but students also made clear that they favored one particular kind of Black Power. Students in both Germany and the U.S. rejected as reactionary the liberal vision of Black Power, which emphasized empowerment through “black capitalism” and the creation of black enterprise zones in America’s ghettos.9 Like the American SDS, the German SDS sympathized with the left wing of the Black Power movement, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (Black Panthers hereafter), which was founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seales in Oakland, California in 1966. Radical students in both countries were drawn to the Black Panthers because they shared the party’s anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist stance, but also because the Black Panthers reached out to white radical groups in order to foster revolution first in the U.S., and then world-wide.10

German students idealized and even romanticized the Black Panthers for another reason. In the eyes of the students, the Panthers’ status as a racial and oppressed minority, and their self-conscious identification as “Afro-Americans” or as an “internal colony” of the U.S. made them revolutionary subjects par excellence. Thus, when Black Panther activists in the U.S. expressed solidarity with the national liberation movements of the Third World, and claimed that they had opened a “second front” in America’s ghettos, they expressed a revolutionary authenticity that white and privileged middle-class German students could only dream of.

In his insightful discussion of how influential the tactics and ideas of the Black Panthers were in the formation of armed struggle in Germany, Martin Klimke makes a powerful argument for how “the shadows of a past insufficiently overcome” and the identification of the Black Panthers as urban guerrillas led some radical German student activists to turn toward terrorism. In their escalating rhetoric of resisting “fascism” both in the U.S. and at home, and of equating the war in Vietnam with the genocide in Auschwitz, some radical activists refused to be “good Germans” and took up arms. Klimke effectively shows how the Black Panthers’ ideas, their willingness to resist white police forces in America’s ghettos, and their infatuation with guns provided German radicals not only with a vocabulary of resistance, but also a model for urban guerilla warfare. But Klimke also rightly cautions that this turn to illegality by a minority of student activists should “neither be taken as direct or inevitable.”11
The overwhelming number of students who were enchanted with the militant rhetoric and posture of the Black Panthers did not turn to armed struggle. Although they used the martial rhetoric and imagery of the Panthers, their goal during demonstrations on behalf of the Black Panthers was to provoke, to educate, and to create international solidarity. While the *Amerika Haus* in Frankfurt suffered the occasional broken window when students and police clashed during Black Panther rallies, German student organizers usually cautioned restraint. Indeed, many of the activists believed that through their intimate, face-to-face alliance with African American GI s, abstract ideas, such as international class and race solidarity could be made immediate and real, and that this experience could lead to a transformation of consciousness.

**The Black Panther Solidarity Committee and the *Voice of the Lumpen***

The students’ theoretical interest in the Black Panther Party transformed into concrete action in Germany largely through the efforts of KD Wolff. Wolff had first become interested in the Civil Rights struggle of African Americans when he spent a year as an exchange student at a high school in Marshall, Michigan in 1958/59. There he came in contact with Quaker civil rights activists, and this experience with American grassroots democracy and civic activism proved transformative, as he later recalled. In February 1969, he returned to the U.S. for a six-week speaking tour at U.S. university campuses. While in the U.S., he met with American SDS representatives Bernadine Dohrn, Todd Gitlin and Tom Hayden, as well as Black Panther leader Bobby Seale. Before Wolff left the U.S., he was called before a U.S. Senate hearing that was investigating his meetings with American SDS representatives and Black Panther activists. During that hearing, he did not give an inch and, as Tom Hayden later recalled, in doing so, “KD Wolff set a new standard of how to defy U.S. senators.”

During his 1969 trip, Wolff was deeply impressed by the transformation that had taken place in the black liberation struggle. He was moved by the self-help programs of the Black Panther Party in America’s inner cities, but also by the Panthers’ willingness to defend themselves against the brutality of white police forces in the black ghettos. During an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on his return from the U.S., he reported “that the development of the Black Panther movement in the black ghettos has led to a self-conscious class-struggle based movement and self-defense tactics, from which we have much to learn.” He was clearly taken with the revolutionary potential that the Black Panthers represented, but also seemed to believe that African Americans had a more authentic status as a repressed minority. As one of his collaborators in the revolutionary struggle, Daniel Cohn-Bendit quipped, “KD’s happiness would be complete if only he could be black as well.”

After his visit to the U.S., Wolff was committed to supporting the Black Panthers, and to do so more effectively he founded the Black Panther Solidarity
Committee in late November 1969. For him, the Solidarity Committee made possible the sort of grassroots activism (*Basisarbeit*) that could fill the vacuum left by the failure of the protest movements of 1968 and the collapse of the German SDS in early 1969. The Frankfurt-based Solidarity Committee was made up of just 15 people from the Socialist Club in Frankfurt, and became a model for the founding of such solidarity committees in other German university towns, as well as in other European countries. The creation of the Solidarity Committee received an enthusiastic reception in the pages of the New Left, such as the *Berliner Extra Dienst*. The other main conduit to inform the German Left on the Black Panthers and the activities of the Solidarity Committee was the *Sozialistische Correspondenz-Info*, a publication associated with the Socialist Club in Frankfurt and published by Wolff, his brother Frank, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, among others. In 1970, KD Wolff also founded his publishing house, *Roter Stern*, which translated and published the writings of Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton, but also prepared educational materials on the Black Panthers to be used at workshops for university and high school students and apprentices.18

The Solidarity Committee’s main goal, as stated in its founding document, was to expose the “fascist terror of the ruling classes in the U.S.,” to forge international solidarity with the black liberation movement, and to correct the prevailing misconceptions about the Black Panthers in the mainstream German press. The Solidarity Committee also pledged to provide material support for the Black Panthers and to raise money for legal expenses and bail for its imprisoned leaders. To move the struggle of the Black Panthers forward outside of the U.S., the Solidarity Committee also stated its goal to agitate and propagate among black GIs stationed in Germany, and to reach out to them as possible revolutionary allies. An alliance with black GIs, poor whites, as well as other minorities in the military, so the students hoped, would bring about the necessary transformation of consciousness that would prepare first the activists and then “the masses” for revolutionary action.19

Forty years after the tumultuous 1960s, it is hard to fathom the optimism of activists like KD Wolff and Rudi Dutschke, who believed that an alliance between German students and African American soldiers could bring about an “overthrow” (*Umwälzung*) of the U.S. “centers of imperialism” and overturn the “power of the militarist war machine” in the heart of Germany.20 Students drew their optimism from the unexpected strength that the Vietnamese people had shown in resisting U.S. military might. One of the world’s mightiest military powers had been brought to its knees by an ill-equipped army of guerilla fighters. After the 1968 TET offensive, the deterioration of American military power was also revealed on a daily basis close to home. Because the Pentagon used the 7th Army in Germany as a materiel- and personnel reserve for the war in Vietnam, military units in Germany were lacking 50 percent of majors and
37 percent of captains and lieutenants. The gaps in the command structure and deteriorating living conditions in crumbling military barracks, often built during the late 19th century, led to unprecedented discipline and morale problems by the late 1960s.21 Morale was not helped by the fact that Germany not only served as a deployment base to Vietnam but also as a way station for returning GIs to cool off before they were sent back to the U.S. Brutalized by the war, but also alienated by the chicanery of mind-numbing military drills and the boredom of army life, soldiers increasingly turned to alcohol or drugs. Not surprisingly, crime rates of American GIs more than doubled in the late 1960s. Many GIs also sought a way out of the “green machine” and, with the clandestine support from German students, unions, and anti-war activists, ever-larger numbers of American soldiers started deserting their units in Germany. In 1967 alone, more than 12,000 American GIs left their posts in Europe to avoid service in Vietnam.22 By the late 1960s, the 7th Army in Germany was close to collapse, as even the most ardent German supporters of the U.S. military would later admit.23

The pervasive and often deep-seated racism within the military command only further aggravated what was already an explosive situation in U.S. military bases in Germany. Violent racial strife between white and black GIs plagued not only the military bases, but increasingly spilled into German communities.24 Every racial conflagration in the U.S. reverberated in Germany, and the murder of Martin Luther King in 1968 convinced many black GIs that the liberal and pacifist civil rights movement had been a failure.25 Racial tensions within the 7th Army were not helped when white GIs organized themselves into Ku Klux Klan formations on some military bases, and burned crosses in front of barracks with black GIs.26 In response, African American GIs started to organize themselves into militant organizations or self-defense groups as well. Some of the most important groups that sprang up to protest the war in Vietnam, but also the pervasive racism within the military, were the Black Action Group in Stuttgart, the Black Dissidents in Karlsruhe, and the Unsatisfied Black Soldiers in Heidelberg and Mannheim.27

Black GIs organized in groups like these became the primary hope for German student activists. An alliance or collaboration with these politicized and radicalized GIs, so the students hoped, could make possible revolutionary action to unseat the centers of American empire in both Germany and the U.S. To reach these GIs, students protested in front of U.S. military barracks, raising their fists in the Black Power salute and calling on the soldiers to join them. Because of increased U.S. military police surveillance, but also because the U.S. military made it clear that it would use force should students try to enter American bases, students changed tactics.28 To make contact with black GIs, students started to frequent pubs, bars and discotheques that catered to...
black GIs. Students printed buttons and posters, which they distributed on message boards and in the bathrooms of those establishments. Contacts were also made through female students, who dated black GIs. Furthermore, women students, called “brides of the revolution” by the Washington Post, made contacts with black GIs at discotheques and then involved them in political discussions on Vietnam and the Black Power struggle. Some students joined black GIs on American military bases to participate in Black History Study groups and reading groups focused on the Black Panthers and their goals.39

The concerted efforts to reach out to black GIs clearly came to fruition, and rallies and teach-ins, in which both students and GIs participated, were held in December 1969 all over German universities.30 The students and Black Panther GIs also carried the demands of African Americans into the German cities. During numerous demonstrations in the spring of 1970, Black Panther GIs marched with German students through downtown Frankfurt and other German cities, protesting the war in Vietnam and calling for “Freedom for Bobby Seales,” the imprisoned Black Panther leader.31 Even more attention was drawn to the demands of the Black Panthers when students and African American GIs organized the first “Call for Justice Meeting” at Heidelberg University on the Fourth of July 1970. The event was planned as a counter-celebration to the Independence Day celebrations being held on U.S. military posts across Germany, to indict the U.S. for its failure to grant freedom and equality to its black citizens. More than a thousand Black Panther GIs and hundreds of their German student supporters met to indict the U.S. for the war in Vietnam and to condemn American racism at home and abroad. Significantly, the protesters also condemned the racial discrimination that African American GIs and their families encountered in German society, demanding equal access to housing.32

The Black Panther rally organized by the Kaiserslautern branch of the Solidarity Committee in the city’s convention hall in October 1970 brought even more attention to the African American GI activists and their struggle. The evening was advertised as a German-American friendship “happening” that was to overcome the tensions caused by the recent increase in violence around U.S. military bases. City officials and police had been circumspect about the event from the beginning, and they were stunned to watch when more than a thousand Black Panther GIs in black berets and hundreds of their German supporters marched into the Fruchtballe to the shouts of “Black Power.” The Kaiserslautern rally gained nationwide attention when the popular TV news report Panorama devoted an entire segment of its show to the meeting and the activities of Black Panther GIs in Germany.33

Because KD Wolff and his compatriots believed that “political agitation became more concrete in the face-to-face interaction” with African American GIs they wanted to formalize and thus fortify their collaboration with the sol-
In November 1970, the Solidarity Committee and African American activists founded an underground newspaper that was to represent the Black Panther Party in Germany. The newspaper, entitled Voice of the Lumpen was a prime expression of the sort of international collaboration and solidarity that Wolff had in mind. The paper was addressed to black GIs, but also made a pitch to poor whites and other ethnic minorities, who carried the brunt of the fighting in Vietnam. The paper was also sold to interested German audiences on the Left. The name Voice of the Lumpen was chosen to acknowledge the contributions that the “down-and-out of society,” the Lumpenproletariat, long ignored by traditional Marxism, could make to the revolution. The paper also informed the GIs about the Black Panther Party and its program, and reported on developments in the U.S. and the non-Western world while keeping the GIs abreast of the struggle on military bases across the American military empire. In all their efforts, the editors wrote, they were aiming to further “the GIs’ capacity to deal with their situation in the military and to understand how it related to the struggle being waged today inside Babylon (AmeriKKKa).”

The more formalized collaboration between GIs and students made possible by the founding of the Voice of the Lumpen entered its most organized stage when two Black Panther activists associated with the newspaper were arrested. The German students finally had their own “martyrs” of the cause, the Ramstein Two. The arrest came about after Edgar Jackson and William Burrell shot and injured a German guard who tried to stop them from entering Ramstein air base. Since the two activists were no longer in the military, they were to be tried in June 1971 before a German court in Zweibrücken. For the students, the Ramstein Two were a god-send because the trial allowed them to connect their struggle in Germany to the struggle of the Black Panthers in the U.S. International solidarity and a transformation of consciousness, made possible by intense propagandistic activity and collaboration between Whites and Blacks, so the students believed, were theirs for the taking.

The Solidarity Committee, the Voice of the Lumpen, and their supporters across Germany rallied around the two defendants, providing them with excellent legal counsel and trial observers. Two large fund-raisers were organized on American military bases, which resulted in 6,000 signatures from black GIs asking the court to “free the Ramstein Two.” The months leading up to the trial offered a tremendous chance not only to agitate among GIs, but also to organize and propagandize in the provinces. To bring together German and American, as well as urban and rural activists in an experiential rather than solely theoretical solidarity, the Solidarity Committee and the Voice of the Lumpen declared 6 March an “International Day of Solidarity with Bobby Seale and the Ramstein Two.” University and high school students and apprentices arrived from all over West Germany and Berlin to participate in a teach-in about the Black Panthers at the Kreiskulturbau Saarbrücken and in a protest march.
in Zweibrücken.38 The event in Saarbrücken played to an overflow crowd of more than 700 participants and more than 1,200 protesters participated at the rally in Zweibrücken. 3,000 local onlookers stood by to watch events unfold in Zweibrücken, while KD Wolff, according to the Rheinpfalz: “painted the specter of fascism against a brilliant blue winter sky.”39

The trial itself offered numerous opportunities to educate, to expose both American and German racism, and to forge what students hoped would be international solidarity against American imperialism.40 The Solidarity Committee used the trial to indict West Germany’s slavish alliance with the U.S., and to draw parallels between American and German forms of racism. In this effort, the Solidarity Committee and the Voice of the Lumpen connected the struggles of the Black Panthers in the U.S. to the way Black Panther activists were treated in the Federal Republic. This allowed the activists to make the case that Germany was not only a willing enforcer of U.S. imperialism, but also a deeply racist society itself.

All the activities surrounding the Black Panther Solidarity Campaign and the trial of the Ramstein Two brought tremendous public attention to the cause of the activists, but the alliance between students and GIs would not endure much beyond the trial.41 The Voice of the Lumpen would be troubled by some of the same problems that tore apart the Black Panther Party in the U.S. The introduction of gang structures, and drug dealing by some members of the Voice of the Lumpen did much to undermine political activism and collaboration with the students. Political collaboration with the Solidarity Committee became increasingly difficult as nationalist African Americans, who rejected working with white activists, came to dominate the leadership of the newspaper. As much as German students dreamed of international solidarity and black and white collaboration, deep divisions existed among black GI activists over the appropriate course of action. While a good number of African American GIs believed in collaboration with like-minded white revolutionaries, just as many insisted on separatist nationalism, believing that collaboration with whites would undermine their cause.42 The collaboration, however, also came to an end because of deep divisions among German students over the use of violence.43 By the end of 1972, the Solidarity Committee ceased to exist amidst much disenchantment as three of its members, Johannes Weinrich, Hans-Joachim Klein, and Winfried Böse went underground to join the armed struggle that would be responsible for violent attacks against U.S. installations and military personnel in the years to come.44

To the great dismay and disappointment of German student radicals, the Black Panther Solidarity Campaign and the collaboration with African American GIs did not overthrow the “American war machine” as many an idealistic student revolutionary had hoped in the heady days of the Black Panther Solidarity campaign. The students had overestimated their own strength, but
also underestimated the ability of the “American military machine” to hold on
despite the set-backs suffered in Vietnam and the resulting deterioration of the
7th Army in Germany. But the students had also misjudged the state of affairs
in Germany. The Federal Republic was not on the verge of fascism, no matter
how adamant the students were in making that point. While many Germans
deplored the situation of America’s black minority, and many were critical
of West Germany’s unquestioning support of the U.S. in Vietnam, most were not
willing to accept the students’ assessment that the U.S. and the Federal Republic
were fascist societies. In due course, the Federal Republic as well as the United
States responded with comprehensive measures to address the grievances of
African American soldiers, thus effectively deflating the radicalization that had
led to the crisis in the first place.

The Black Panther Campaign—Government Responses
While German and American officials had been concerned for some time about
the radicalization of African American GIs, it was the “Call for Justice” meeting
at Heidelberg University on the Fourth of July 1970 that prompted German
and American officials to act.45 Not only had that meeting been held in the
main auditorium of one of West Germany’s most distinguished universities,
but Heidelberg was also home to the headquarters of the United States Army
in Europe. In response to the Fourth of July protest, government agencies at
the highest levels in both the U.S. and West Germany came to believe that
the radicalization of black GIs and their deteriorating morale undermined not
only military discipline but also threatened the security of West Germany in
the Cold War struggle.46 Even more troublesome to these observers was the
extensive political collaboration between radical black GIs and German students.
Action was called for because government officials in West Germany and the
U.S. feared that this collaboration as well as the political philosophy underlying
this collaboration could “produce a coordinated movement” that could prove
attractive to “millions of [disenchanted, black] Americans.” Government offi-
cials were equally anxious that the collaboration between students and GIs
could also prove appealing to the “communist East.”47

Looking back from the less anxious perch of the post-Cold War world, one
might be tempted to write off these overly frightened assessments as exagger-
ated, but for German and American officials at the time, these fears were very
real indeed. The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, for example, echoed the anxiety
of government officials by pointing to the 30,000 Italian, Greek, and Spanish
communists among Germany’s so-called Gastarbeiter, the growing Black Power
movement among GIs, “the Black Power Solidarity Committees, and the Voice
of the Lumpen to warn of an emerging leftist radicalism.48 These concerns, in
turn, prompted intervention at the highest government-level to address the
grievances of African American GIs. The intervention came about in large part
because the political radicalization of black GIs had been made visible and audible through the extensive support they received from German students. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* made that point, when the paper concluded that the “voices of the minority soldiers could only be heard so powerfully because of the support they were receiving from German leftist students, but especially from KD Wolff in Frankfurt.”49 Thus, while African American GIs on military bases across the globe protested in anger over racism in the U.S. military and in their host societies—Korea and especially Vietnam stand out—it was in Germany where the most comprehensive political reaction emerged,50

In response to the most unusual alliance between radical black GIs and radical German students a comprehensive Pentagon program to deal with the deeply embedded racism within the military was put in place. In September 1970, as a direct result of the Fourth of July “Call for Justice” protest, a commission sponsored by the White House and the Pentagon (Render Commission) traveled to West Germany to take a hard look at the increasingly unmanageable situation. In spring 1971, the Render Commission investigation was followed by a visit from the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP), whose representatives interviewed some 3,000 African American GIs. In their conclusions, the Render Report and the NAACP investigation made starkly clear that the racial crisis in West Germany went far beyond territorial struggles over discotheques and access to local women—a charge often made by military commanders. Both of the reports exposed and indicted the discrimination that black GIs faced in German communities—mostly from landlords and pub owners—but they also stressed that it was widespread racism within the military that was the root cause of the deteriorating racial situation in the 7th Army.51

The Render Report and the NAACP’s investigation, *The Search for Military Justice*52 were stinging indictments of the pervasive and widespread institutional racism in the 7th Army and brought about comprehensive programs to eliminate those injustices.53 General Michael Davison who replaced General James Polk in Spring 1971 as the commander of USAREUR (United States Army Europe), acknowledged much more forthrightly than his predecessor just how deep-seated the problems were. Davison was especially appalled at the widespread racism in the administration of military justice, and he insisted that things could not improve unless officers became more sensitive to the needs of black GIs and stopped interpreting every expression of racial pride as a challenge to their authority. The NAACP and Render Reports also brought about an unprecedented affirmative action program by the military to “truly integrate the Army.” To accomplish that goal, Davison insisted that his command needed to be much more racially diversified. To make African Americans and their families feel that the military was also their military, Davison insisted that the 7th Army needed “more black teachers, more black lawyers, more black counselors,
more black chaplains, and more black officers and non-commissioned officers.” Davison also called for more “black content” in overseas school operations, “not only in faculty but also in curricula, [and the] civilian work force, and in our management echelon.”54 The comprehensive affirmative action program to attract more minority officers was complemented with mandatory race sensitivity workshops for all officers and non-commissioned officers, as well as for their spouses.55 Finally, the NAACP Report resulted in the establishment of a branch office of the NAACP in West Germany to represent the interests of the 28,000–30,000 black GIs stationed there.56

A change in attitude and practices was also necessary for the host nation because the racial crisis in Germany had erupted at the very moment when congressmen such as Mike Mansfield (D) were questioning the need for continuing the extensive U.S. military presence in Germany. Mansfield and his allies quickly gained ground when representatives of the NAACP and the Black Caucus of the U.S. Congress, upset over reports from Germany, joined them. Every report of German discrimination against African American GIs gave fodder to those who agitated for withdrawal of troops.57 The U.S. military’s rapid and comprehensive response to the racial crisis thus has to be viewed in the larger Cold War context, because Mansfield’s demand for a drawdown of U.S. troops in Germany posed a threat to the Pentagon’s European defense strategy, which was based on maintaining military forces in Germany at the current level. The West German government was as eager as the Pentagon to preserve U.S. troop strength. German politicians were also forced to act because the United Nations had designated 1971 the year to combat racism and racial discrimination. Stories about German discrimination against African American GIs had prompted the U.S.-based “International Committee Against Discrimination” to question the German ambassador in Washington about these reports.58

The German government’s response to the Render and NAACP reports was thus immediate and comprehensive. Helmut Schmidt, the Minister of Defense, admonished the governors of states with U.S. troops, “there is no substitute [for U.S. troops], not militarily, but especially not politically and psychologically.”59 To assure American soldiers, and especially soldiers of color, that their service in Germany was worthwhile and much appreciated, all discrimination needed to stop. While investigations found that the problem of discriminating landlords and pub owners was not as widespread as anticipated—only 33 incidents of discrimination were reported from some 19,000 troops renting on the German market—German authorities were most anxious to convey that even these numbers were unacceptable.60 A Heute news report in May 1971 on the German television channel ZDF expressed that same conviction. It featured an African American captain, who wondered why African American GIs should risk their lives to defend German homes when they were not even
welcomed to live in those homes.\textsuperscript{61}

To assure their American alliance partner as well as the African American community in the U.S. that West German society was not hostile toward black soldiers, both chancellor Willy Brandt and Foreign Minister Walter Scheel made public statements that were reprinted in publications for American GIs. They repudiated any sort of discrimination that black soldiers might encounter in searching for apartments or trying to enter a club or a discotheque. President Gustav Heinemann met with General Davison to express his personal concern over reported instances of discrimination from German landlords and pub owners.\textsuperscript{62} A speech by Chancellor Willy Brandt in March 1971 was especially eloquent in condemning discrimination against both African American soldiers as well as students of color. He called for a new kind of patriotism that was not based on feelings of superiority but on open-mindedness toward all those coming to Germany from other continents. It was this kind of open-mindedness that would create honor for Germans (\textit{uns Deutschen Ehre machen}) across the globe. He concluded that "tolerance made in Germany: that would be something we could be proud of."\textsuperscript{63}

These efforts to stop discrimination were backed by deeds and practical solutions. As a first step, the Federal Republic initiated an extensive construction program to modernize deteriorated military barracks housing single soldiers or soldiers serving in Germany without their families. To alleviate the notoriously tight housing market, the government built new family housing for U.S. military personnel as well.\textsuperscript{64} While these efforts benefited both white and black soldiers, they were undertaken to address the complaints of black GIs over housing shortages and discrimination.

In meetings at the federal, state, and local levels, government officials, in close collaboration with civic and business associations, devised programs to educate landlords and owners of bars, discotheques, and restaurants.\textsuperscript{65} Strict new rules imposed economic sanctions on individuals who refused to rent to black soldiers, or barred them from clubs or discotheques. The media were instructed to stop identifying alleged offenders by race when covering crimes committed by U.S. soldiers.\textsuperscript{66} Newspaper editors were urged to exert a greater effort to educate Germans about the accomplishments and contributions of African Americans to American history. Germans were to learn more about the many kind deeds of African American GIs in Germany. As part of that effort a photo of an African American GI playing Santa Claus to a shy, but curious German orphan boy was distributed to 26 newspapers, and viewed by some 800,000 readers.\textsuperscript{67} As the German Minister of Defense made clear in his instructions to state governors, the "concerns of [black] American soldiers in the Federal Republic must also be our concerns."\textsuperscript{68}
Conclusion

Scholars outside of military history have for the most part ignored the impact of the 60-year-long U.S. military presence in Germany after 1949; yet much light can be shed on post-1945 German history by focusing on the encounter between German civilians and American, but especially African American soldiers.69 The interaction of radical German students with African American soldiers described here is just one aspect of this extensive German-American “crossover” history, to use Maria Diedrich’s term.70 While the encounter described in this essay involved only a small number of activists on either side, the repercussions of their transnational collaboration reverberated at the highest level of government in both countries. It helped bring about the “New American Revolution” in the U.S. military, as the Black Caucus in the United States Congress called the government’s response to the crisis.71

This elevation of the race question to the highest level of the U.S. and West German governments was a dramatic shift from the 1950s when charges of racism by black GIs were largely denied, or the early 1960s, when such charges at most brought ad hoc and often reluctant responses by individual U.S. military commanders and/or German mayors in garrison communities.72 After 1971 the situation for African American GIs significantly improved because the policies set in place as a response to the 1970/71 racial crisis made the U.S. military the most inclusive institution in the U.S. Thus, the moderate demands of the African American liberal civil rights movement going back to World War II finally became reality because the political radicalization of African American GIs forced policy makers to act. This radicalization of soldiers of color took place in military bases across the globe as well as in the U.S., but it was West Germany’s location on the frontline of the Cold War, and the alliance between radical German students and black GIs that prompted American and German policy makers to respond so vigorously to the crisis there.

Just as importantly, because the Black Panther campaign made public the grievances of African American GIs over German forms of racism, the students and their GI allies brought back “race” as a critical category into West German public discourse. Surely, students were not the first or even the only ones who reintroduced “race” into public debates, but their sensationalist activities on behalf of and together with African American GIs helped to broaden that discourse significantly.73 As a consequence, German newspaper coverage, for example, no longer argued, as was often the norm in the 1950s and early 1960s, that racism against black GIs was an imported “American problem” because white GIs pressured German landlords and pub owners to keep black GIs out. Instead, newspapers stressed that the prejudices against black GIs had deep roots in German history. Consequently, stories of discrimination against black GIs in Germany by Germans (rather than at the hands of other Americans) received much more attention in the German press, with newspaper coverage regularly
pointing out widespread patterns of German racism in garrison towns. This shift in media coverage also meant that discrimination against *Gastarbeiter* or foreign students received more attention as well.74

The collaboration between German students and African American GIs thus prompted Germans to “discover” the “Others” within their own society, and to talk about their own country’s racist past and present. Willy Brandt eloquently gave voice to that long overdue shift in German debates on race in his speech addressing the grievances of African American GIs, when he told Germans to stop criticizing other countries, such as the U.S. or South Africa for their racism, and to take a hard look at the situation “at home” instead. “I am against self-righteousness which is often noticeable when foreign and far-away countries are being criticized. Charity begins at home, but also the rights of man start at home.”75

1 I would like to thank the National Endowment of the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, and Vassar College for their generous support while I was conducting research for this essay. Thanks also to the Ford Foundation, which made it possible to have my student research assistant, Emma Woelk travel to German archives with me. Martin Klimke has been most generous in sharing his insights after we learned that we were both researching the same topic. Thanks are also due to Michael Hanagan, Patrice Nganang, Peggy Piesche, Detlef Siegfried, and Judith Weisenfeld who read early versions of this paper and added their thoughtful insights.


immer neue Neger,” 32–33 provide extensive overviews on the crisis ion the 7th Army. Alexander Vazansky’s (Heidelberg University) is currently writing his dissertation, “Army in Crisis: The United States Army, Europe, 1968–1975” which explores the collapse of the 7th Army and U.S. policies how to deal with the crisis.


5 Although more than two million African American GIs have been stationed in Germany since 1945, almost nothing is known of their experiences.

6 Höhn, GIs and Fratulents. The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), chapters 3 and 8. The isolation of the U.S. military from the German civilian population was more pronounced in cities than in the countryside, where interactions were more immediate.

7 Detlef Siegfried, Time Is on My Side (Wallstein, 2006); Uta Poiger, Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).


10 See Martin Klimke’s discussion on the German SDS’s reception of Black Power, 235–37.


13 Interview Wolff. Elizabeth Pfeifer, “Public Demonstrations of the 1960s: Participatory Democracy or Leftist Fascism?,” in: Coping with the Nazi Past, 199 makes this case for student protestors in general. See also Kraushaar, Frankfurter Studentenbewegung, vol. 1, 270 on Dutschke’s thoughts on the urban guerilla. Also Wolfgang Kraushaar, Karine Wieland, and Jan Philip Reemtsa, Rudi Dutschke, Andreas Baader und die RAF (Marburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005).

14 For an overview of KD Wolff’s activities while he was in the U.S., see Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, 91st Congress, First Session, 14 March 1969.


17 KD Wolff comments at Heidelberg conference. See Michael Baumann, Wie alles anfing (Frankfurt, 1976), 15, 61 for how German students viewed themselves as their country’s “Negroes” or “Jews” because of the way they were being berated by their elders. West Germany’s lack of a reflective discourse on the Nazi past made such problematic statements possible. For reflections on how problematic this identification can be see, Moritz Ege, Schwarz werden. “Afromerikanapholie” in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren (Bielefeld, 2007).


19 SCI, 6 December 1969, 11–12. The Berlin Archiv für Soldatenrecht, e.V. is a treasure trove of materials reflecting the confidence of both GIs and German students that it was in their power to overthrow the American “military machine.”

20 On the Vietnam Kongress where these statements were made, see Kraushaar, Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, vol. 1, 298. The SDS declared its solidarity with the “War of Liberation of the People” and called for concerted efforts to convince U.S. soldiers to desert their units in Germany.

21 Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt (AAA hereafter) B 86/1392 has numerous newspaper clippings attesting to the sorry state of affairs within the U.S. military in West Germany. For drug problems see B 31/346 “Orientierungsbericht Deutsche Botschaft 10 August

22 Most of these deserters eventually returned to their units but the prestige of the 7th Army suffered substantially. For dissent in the ranks: Widerstand in der US-Armee and Cortright, Soldiers in Revolt. For contemporary coverage of dissent in the ranks, see Der Spiegel, 23 August 1971, “Wie Coca Cola” and Der Spiegel 17 April, 1972, “Wir mussten die Siebte Armee ruinieren.”


28 FR 15 May 1970 “Sechstausend zogen zu den Amerikanern.” During the 1968 Vietnam Congress, Dutschke and a group of students had planned to connect with some Black Panther GIs willing to mutiny at McNair Barracks. However, after the U.S. military made clear that they would shoot should the students try to enter the base, the students abandoned the plan. Nick Thomas, Protest Movements in 1960 West Germany (Berg, 2003), 159.

29 Interview KD Wolff.
30 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B 106/39985 contains numerous reports by the Bundesministerium für Verfassungsschutz and the Bundesinnenministerium on the pro-Black Panther rallies that took place all over West Germany in December 1969 and January 1970. Up to 1,000 people took part in all of these teach-ins.

31 See Endnote 12

34 Interview Wolff.
Lumpenproletariat in their analysis referred to the small-time criminal, as well as 
the pimp and the prostitute, literally the down and out of society.

Archiv für Soldatenrecht e.V., VOL May/June 1971. The first issue of November 1970 
has an extensive overview of how the VOL sees its role in the revolutionary struggle. 
The paper was published with the support of the Solidarity Committee on the presses 
of KD Wolff’s publishing house, Roter Stern. The usual press run was approximately 
20,000 issues. Interview with KD Wolff

For the extensive trial records see Oberstaatsanwalt Zweibrücken. Oberstaatsanwalt 
Beyer was kind enough to let me see the complete files in Summer 2007. I want to 
thank Wolfgang Ohler for his efforts in making these records available to me. For the 
GIs’ and the students’ perspective of the trial see, VOL May 1971 and VOL May/June 
1971, ”Political Prisoners in West Germany;” APO Archiv (Freie Universität), Black Panther folder, “Freiheit für die Ramstein 2” Antimperialistischer Kampf 2/3 Materialien 
& Diskussion, Ramstein 2 Prozess.

APO Archiv, Black Panther folder. Black Panther Solidaritätskomitee, Informations-
brief 2/71, “Aufruf!” and flyers advertising the event in Saarbrücken; Archiv der Johann 
Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Flugblätter und Poster, Mappe 2 has a flyer advertising 
a Teach-In at Frankfurt University. See also photo coverage of the event in FR 8 March 
1971; Rheinpfalz, 8 March 1971, “Schwarze Panther: Sammetpfötchen und Krallen;” 
Pfälzischer Merkur, 8 March 1971, “Heiß war der Tag trotz Eiseskälte.” SZ, 8 March 

Rheinpfalz, 8 March 1971, “Schwarze Panter: Sammetpfötchen und Krallen.” The 
students reported 2,500 participants.

The BED covered the events leading up to the trial and the trial itself in 6 March 1971, 
14 July 1971, 8 December 1971, and 10 May 1972. See also the coverage in Diskus, 1 
July 1971, “You can’t kill the Revolution.” For media coverage of the trial see, Rheinpfalz, 
Panther Prozess mit Zwischenfällen,” Der Spiegel, 21 June 1971 “Schwarze Hinne” and 
description of how the trial of the Ramstein 2 prompted German debates about 
racism and the Nazi past, see my essay “I Prefer Panthers to Pigs’: The Black Panther 
Solidarity Committee, the Voice of the Lumpen and the Trial of the Ramstein 2,” In: 
Changing the World, Changing The Self: Political Protest and Collective Identities in 1960/70s 
West Germany and the United States, Belinda Davis, Martin Klimke, Carla McDougall 
and Wilfried Mausbach, eds. (Berghahn Books, 2008).

The Solidarity Committee and the Voice of the Lumpen failed in freeing both of the 
Ramstein 2. While Burrell was declared innocent of any wrongdoing, Jackson received 
a six-year jail sentence for attempted manslaughter. Oberstaatsanwalt Zweibrücken, 29 
Ks 3/71 verdict of the Landesgericht Zweibrücken of 20 July 1971 and Schwurgericht 

The problem of “cultural” nationalism bedeviled the collaboration from the beginning. 
A 1968 flyer from the SDS and ASTA of Mannheim University, which invited black GIs 
to a demonstration to express solidarity with the struggle of black Americans, is indicat- 
tive of this challenge. The clumsily worded flyer expressed hope that the GIs ignore 
the “suggestion by black power leaders not to join any action organized by whites” by 
assuring them that the “part of German youth sympathizing with black power is
much more radical as [sic] those at home in the States.” They also implored the GIs to ignore their officers’ orders not to participate in any demonstrations, and invited them to speak after the march or on any other day. See APO Archiv, Black Panther Folder, flyer entitled “Black GIs.”

45 During a 7 July 1971 Angela Davis rally at Frankfurt University that brought Kathleen Cleaver to Germany, GIs and some 800 German Black Panther supporters came to show their support. When some Heidelberg students joined the rally at the conclusion to chant their support for the RAF (“Mahler-Meinhof-Baader, das ist unser Kader”) and to hand out flyers, they were, according to undercover police reports, met with a cold shoulder (keine Zustimmung fanden). For the report from the undercover police officer Müller, see Hauptstaatsarchiv Hessen (hereafter HHSTAW) Wiesbaden, Folder 461/32248. The officer identified the students as belonging to the “Heidelberg Parteien Kollektiv.” I assume they were members of the “Heidelberg Patienten Kollektiv.”

44 Kimke, “Black Panther, die RAF.”

43 The FAZ, 7 September 1970, article, “Rassenstreit der Amerikaner in Europa” credits the 4th of July meeting of Black Panthers at Heidelberg University in 1970 for having set in motion the investigation of the U.S. government resulting in the Render and NAACP reports over discrimination in the Armed Forces.

46 AAA record groups B 86/1425, B86/1392 and B 106/80798 show how concerned German government officials were that the increasing anger of black GIs over German racism would undermine their morale and thus threaten German security. For responses to the crisis at the state level, see HHSTAW Hauptstaatsarchiv Hessen (hereafter HHSTAW), Staatskanzlei, 502–7425/26. For American debates see, Congressional Record, 92 Congress, 1st Session, March 9, 1971 “Race Relations: A New Military Mission for the New American Revolution” and Congressional Record July 16, 1971, 25442–43.


49 SZ, 18 December 1970 “Panther Sprung nach Europa.” The students were savvy in making contact with some of Germany’s most distinguished media outlets. For example, they arranged an interview between two black Vietnam War veterans who had deserted their unit in Berlin after a series of racist attacks by white soldiers with Der Spiegel. See Der Spiegel, 21 June 1971, “Die Armee schafft sich immer neue Neger,” and “Höherer Grad,” 31–32.

50 See my essay “The 1971 Racial Crisis in the U.S. Military: Responses in Germany and Korea” in: Gender, Sexuality, and Race in the Global U.S. Military Empire: Germany, Korea, Japan, Maria Hohn and Seungsook Moon eds. (Durham: Duke University Press,
2008).


54 The speech by General Michael Davison was given on 10 November 1971 at the Equal Opportunity Conference in Berchtesgaden. For a German translation of that speech, see HHSTAW 502–7426, 105–09. As part of the effort to improve the lives of black soldiers and their families, military libraries and bookstores started featuring books by African American authors. The post exchanges on bases also began to stock black beauty and hair products. The military also brought African American hair-dressers and barbers from the U.S. to train German personnel serving African American clientele. See Sepia vol. 20, 1971, “G.I. Race War in Germany,” 56–61.

55 Congressional Record, 16 July 1971, 25542. See also AAA, B 86/1425 for a letter of the Department of the Army to the Auswärtige Amt, 24 June 1971 in which they list all the steps that have been taken to alleviate the crisis. Racial tensions were, of course, also escalating in the U.S.; thus it was a combination of riots and prison uprisings in both the U.S. and West Germany that brought about this dramatic change in policy. How crucial developments in West Germany were to bringing about these reforms has thus far, however, been ignored. See for example, Alan M. Osur, “Black White Relations in the U.S.Military 1940–1972: www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/ayreview/1981/ nov-dec/osur.htm, accessed 18 June 2007. His focus is solely on the racial crisis in the U.S. EAZ, 8 March 1971, “Rassenkurs für Amerikan Soldaten.”


60 AAA, B 86/1425. Department of the Army, 2 March 1971 letter to Auswärtiges Amt.

61 AAA, B 86/1425. report was shown on 24 May 1971.


63 For Brandt’s speech, see AAA, B 86/1425.

64 That initiative helped those soldiers who, because of their low military rank were not eligible for command-sponsored tours. The extra housing built for command-sponsored GIs alleviated the pressure on the tight housing market.

65 See for example folders at AAA, B86/1426 and 1427 for how comprehensive those
efforts were.
67 AAA, B 86/1426. “Scheue Zuneigung.”
70 Maria Diedrich at Münster University has been instrumental in creating a transnational network of scholars to explore the Crossover aspects of German and African American history. Sabine Broeck at the University of Bremen has also been setting up a scholarly network to explore the American Civil Rights movement in Europe.
72 The 1963/64 Gesell Report was intended to do away with widespread racism in the military, but as former Secretary of Defense McNamara acknowledged in hindsight, after issuing directives to alleviate racism in housing and in stores, diners and clubs off-base, the Pentagon turned its attention elsewhere. For McNamara’s self-criticism see, Osur, “Black White Relation.” See also Höhn, GIs and Früuleins, chapter 3 on the military’s reluctance to intervene on behalf of African American GIs during the 1950s and 1960s.
73 Siegfried, Time is on My Side (Wallstein, 2006) shows how the Nazi past and German racism was discussed in youth magazines such as Töven, 154–58. In “Ein Atemzug der Freiheit,” I show that transformation beginning in the early to mid-1960s, as Germans debated the propriety of interracial love relations between German women and African American soldiers. But those incidents never rose to the level of high government.
75 AAA B 86/1425. Text of 21 March 1971 speech. Still absent in any of these debates, and in Willy Brandt’s speech were Afro-Germans. This lack of attention to Germany’s own racial minority confirms Heide Fehrenbach’s finding how the denial of “race” as a critical category after 1945 had also erased the presence of Afro-Germans in German consciousness.