# "We Shall Overcome"

## The Impact of the African American Freedom Struggle on Race Relations and Social Protest in Germany after World War II

BRITTA WALDSCHMIDT-NELSON

When Barack Obama gave a speech in Berlin during his 2008 presidential campaign, more than 200,000 Germans enthusiastically applauded him, and millions more watched on TV. When he won the election that made him the first African American President of the United States, there were celebratory parties all over the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Moreover, the level of Obama's popularity since he took office has been consistently higher among Germans than among Americans.[1] The roots of this remarkable phenomenon can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which was crucial not only for political rise of Barack Obama in the United States, but also to changes in race relations and understandings of social justice in Germany. In his 2006 political memoir *The Audacity of Hope,* Obama writes, "I've always felt a curious relationship to the sixties. In a sense I'm a pure product of that era."[2] He stresses that his mother viewed the civil rights movement as central to what was good about the 1960s. She deeply admired Martin Luther King, Jr., and encouraged her son to follow King's lead in standing up for social justice, equality, and tol-

1 See, for example, Marschall, *Obama*, and Remnick and Griese, *Obama*.
2 Obama, *Audacity of Hope*, 29.

erance.[3] It was no coincidence that Obama, who describes his own success as deriving directly from the accomplishments of the civil rights movement, timed his acceptance speech for the Democratic Party's nomination exactly on the forty-fifth anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Obama and King became entwined in popular consciousness, and many Americans—and people all over the world—saw Obama's election as the fulfillment of King's Dream.

While this essay cannot discuss the accuracy of such a claim[4], it will focus on an interesting international dimension of the civil rights movement that has received comparatively little scholarly and public attention. German high school books, for example, often provide detailed descriptions of the well-known milestones of the movement (such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington) [5], but are silent on this movement's relevance for German postwar society.[6] This essay seeks to fill this lacuna by focusing on the interconnectedness of the black freedom struggle in America with race relations and the struggle for social justice in Germany during "the long 1960s," that is, from the aftermath of World War II until the early 1970s.

## GERMANY AND BLACK PEOPLE BEFORE WORLD WAR II

To understand the remarkable change in black and white race relations in Germany during the postwar era, it is essential to outline the history of the relationship and attitudes that Germans had toward people of African descent. Up to the 1920s, most of the contact between Germans and black people was a byproduct of Germany's missionary and colonial activities in

3 Ibid.

4 For a discussion of this topic, see, for example, King, *Obama and Race*; Iffill, *Breakthrough*; Touré, *Post-Blackness*.

5 The well-known German schoolbook publishers Klett, Schöningh, and Cornelsen offer materials for high school students' English lessons that include the history of the civil rights movement and racial problems in the United States today. Klett even offers a whole book on Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott; see http://www.klett.de/produkt/isbn/3-12-580606-2.

6 The number of historians who focus on this topic still remains rather limited. Most noteworthy are Belinda Davis, Maria Höhn, and Martin Klimke.

Africa.[7] Germany was never a colonial power on the scale of Great Britain, France, or Spain, but in 1884 the German empire acquired (by purchase and protective treaties) four regions in Southwest and East Africa as colonies (today's Tanzania, Namibia, Togo, and Cameroon) and kept them until World War I. During this period, German colonial officers, who ruled over the territories supposedly with the "noble goal" of civilizing and Christianizing their African subjects, often ruthlessly exploited their labor and land resources.[8] Following the British lead, Germans quickly picked up on negative prejudices against black Africans and then actively contributed to the dominant racial discourse of the time that defined white Europeans—and in this case, Germans in particular—as a civilized "people of culture" (*Kulturvolk*) while stigmatizing black Africans as primitive "people of nature" (*Naturvolk*).[9] Beyond a belief in the general cultural superiority of the white "master race" (*Herrenvolk*), more specific negative racial stereotypes also became increasingly popular within Germany during that time. Blacks were supposedly primitive, ugly, lazy, unreliable, unintelligent, potentially violent, and, on top of that, morally depraved. Young black females were seen as seductive temptresses and black males were suspected of constantly lusting after white women.[10] Even though some whites—most notably a number of missionaries in Africa—did not fully share these stereotypes,

7 There were some very well respected blacks individuals living in Germany during earlier centuries, for example Anton Wilhelm Amo, the first African to obtain a doctoral degree in Germany (at the university of Halle in 1729), who went on to became a professor of philosophy in Germany and published several scholarly works in Latin. In the nineteenth century, a number of African Americans visited Germany as well. W. E. B. DuBois, for example, studied at Berlin's Humboldt University in 1893–94. But the number of these black people was too small to attract broader public attention.

8 See Perraudin and Zimmerer, *German Colonialism*; Friedrichsmeyer and Zantop, *Imperialist Imagination*; and Förster et al., *Bismarck, Europe and Africa.*

9 For the construction of Africa as the "Dark Continent," and the establishment of anti-black racial stereotypes in the colonial discourse, see, for example, Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*; Keim, *Mistaking Africa*; Pallua, *Eurocentrism*. For a postcolonial critique of the above-mentioned phenomenon, see, for example, Bhabha, *Location of Culture*; Said, *Orientalism;* and Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture*.

10 Ibid.; Schubert, *Der Schwarze Fremde*; Lorbeer and Wild, *Menschenfresser.* For information on how these negative stereotypes were used to justify slavery in the United States, see Frederickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*; Faust, *Ideology of Slavery*; Finkelman, *Defending Slavery*; and Waldschmidt-Nelson, "Are All Men Created Equal?"

they could not prevent their consequence. As a result of most Germans' complete lack of respect for the culture and humanity of black people, many Africans were not treated much better than slaves during the colonial period. Besides everyday beatings and other physical abuse, attempts to resist the colonial rulers were punished mercilessly. Among the most infamous crimes committed by Germans during that time was the killing of over three quarters of the rebellious Herero tribe in 1904—a planned military extermination campaign that many scholars refer to as the first genocide of the twentieth century.[11]

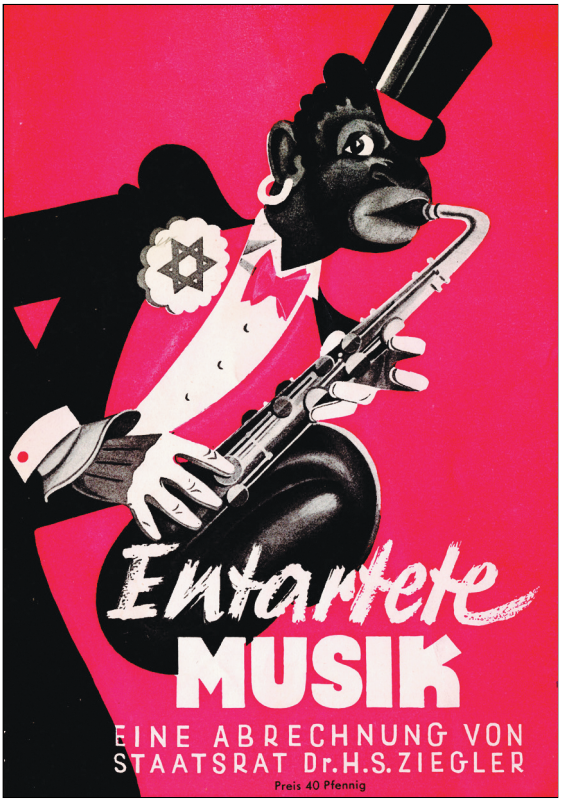
World War I effectively ended Germany's colonial rule and, in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, most of its former African territory was distributed among Britain, France, and Belgium in 1919. But the loss of these colonies did not cause a decline in most Germans' belief in white superiority. On the contrary, the pseudoscience of eugenics became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the fear of miscegenation grew into an obsession, especially after a number of children fathered by black French colonial troops occupying the Rhineland were born to German mothers. These children were referred to negatively as the Rhineland Bastards, and the interracial relationships that they sprang from were publicly condemned as shameful acts of "racial treason" (*Rassenschande*). German nationalists also regarded the offspring of such unions as a dangerous threat to German "racial purity." During the Nazi era, these Afro-Germans suffered constant harassment and many were sterilized against their will.[12]

But not all black people encountered hostile attitudes in Germany. During the 1920s, jazz played by African American musicians started to become very popular in Germany and other European countries. A number of black American artists, such as Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Tiger Ray, achieved remarkable fame and admiration. Despite hostility from conservative and nationalist circles who despised "Negro culture" and opposed anything they saw as contributing to the supposed Americanization of Germany (fig. 1), there was a sizable part of the

11 See Sarkin, *Genocide of the Herero*, and Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides*.

12 See Adams, *Wellborn Science*; Ehrenreich, *Nazi Ancestral Proof*; and Campt, *Other Germans*.

*Figure 1: Nazi propaganda against black musicians*




"Entartete Musik" ("Degenerate Music"). Nazi propaganda on the front page of a brochure published by the Weimar National Theater in 1938. Courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

German population, especially younger people, who loved this music. Many of them also became interested in other forms of black art, and some developed close friendships with African American artists who were living and performing in Germany.[13] To counter this popularity and as part of their general campaign to instill hatred against Jews, blacks, and other sup-

13 See Kater, *Different Drummers*, and Lotz, *Black People.*

posedly inferior racial and ethnic groups, the Nazis publicly discredited and harassed black artists. After gaining control in 1933, they used their power to drive these "undesirables" out of the country. One way to achieve this goal was to propagate their belief in the fundamental racial inferiority of all blacks, declaring any friendship with people of African descent a form of moral treason for Germans. Then there were the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which deprived Jewish and nonwhite Germans of most of their citizenship rights, established legal discrimination, and prohibited any form of interracial marriage. After almost a decade of racist policies and intense propaganda, the attitude of most Germans towards people of African descent had reached a low point by the mid-1940s, when black US soldiers fought against Germans and helped to defeat the Third Reich.[14]

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORLD WAR II FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND GERMAN ATTITUDES ON RACE

World War II was doubtlessly one of the most important factors in the fundamental transformation of race relations in both the United States and Germany. Over one million African American soldiers served in Europe between 1941 and 1945. For many of them, especially those from the US South, it was their first time in an environment without racial segregation and where white people, including women, treated them with respect.[15] These black GIs returned to the United States with a much heightened sense of self-esteem, and many joined the civil rights movement. The war also exposed the hypocrisy of a democratic American government that fought a war against Nazi Germany and denounced Hitler's racism, while condoning

14 During the Nazi era many black artists were arrested and beaten up, and at least one was murdered. (The dancer Hilarius Gilges, who had married a white German woman, was brutally killed by the Gestapo in 1933). Black people who lived in countries occupied by Germany were often put into internment camps. See Friedman, *The Other Victims*; Lusane, *The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans*; and Pützstück, "AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland."

15 Lieutenant Colin Powell, the first black US Secretary of State, said about his time as a military officer in the FRG: "For black GIs, especially those of the South, Germany was a breath of freedom." Powell, *American Journey*, 53. See also Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 21–88.

racism in large parts of the United States. Consequently, more and more people supported the Double V campaign, victory over racism in Europe and the United States. Civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) experienced huge membership increases, intensifying pressure on the US government to take a stand against segregation. In this way, World War II helped to prepare the ground for the American civil rights revolution of the following decades. Together with the Cold War, it also internationalized the issue of civil rights and black equality.[16]

In Germany, black-white race relations quickly gained importance during the American occupation.[17] Given the previously widespread German belief in black inferiority, the presence of large numbers of African American soldiers in positions of military authority presented quite a challenge to many Germans. This issue was further highlighted by the significant number of relationships between white German women and black American soldiers that developed during the postwar years. For black soldiers, especially those coming from the American South, having a white girlfriend was in many cases a kind of a "dream-come-true," since touching or openly desiring a white woman was still the ultimate taboo for black men in the South (a taboo that, if broken, could easily get a black man killed).[18] Moreover, there were very few "marriageable" German men available at the time because so many had been killed during the war, were in jail for war crimes, or still in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps. Many others were physically and psychologically damaged. In this context, young, healthy American soldiers with food and money made an attractive choice for unmarried German women. And black soldiers had a reputation for being particularly polite and generous to the "Fräuleins." Germany was certainly not free from racism, and the hostility towards the so-called *Ami-Liebchen* (women

16 See ibid. and Klimke, "Civil Rights Struggle," 93–98. For a more detailed description of the roles of World War II and the Cold War in the history of the civil rights struggle, see also Borstelman, *Cold War and Color Line*, and Plummer, *Window on Freedom*.

17 Unless differently noted, the term "Germany" stands for "West Germany" here, since most of the examination refers to the FRG.

18 Alleged sexual advances of black men toward white women were a frequent cause of lynching in the South. One of the most infamous cases was the brutal killing of fourteen-year old Emmett Till in Mississippi in August of 1955. See Metress, *Lynching*; Berg, *Lynching*; and Waldrep, *Lynching*.

*Figure 2: Interracial wedding*


Wedding photograph of a black GI and his German bride, 1945.
H. Kremer; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

who fraternized with American soldiers) may have been even more pronounced if the American partner was black. Nevertheless, the willingness of so many German women to engage in friendships, intimate relationships, and even marriages with African American males clearly revealed a noticeable shift in German racial attitudes (fig. 2).[19] The presence of interracial children that came out of these relationships began to create a small but growing Afro-German presence, which further challenged traditional views on the significance of race and what it meant to be German. The fate of these *Besatzungskinder* (occupation children) was often difficult though, especially if the father did not marry the mother but moved (or was ordered) back to the United States alone. While many of the children were loved and well cared for by their mothers and other family members, many others were given up for adoption (mostly to African American families in

19 For more details on interracial relationships in postwar Germany, see Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins*; Höhn and Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom*; Goedde, *GIs and Germans*; and Schroer, *Recasting Race.*

the United States), and those growing up in Germany often felt unaccepted as full and equal members of German society.[20]

## GERMAN SUPPORT OF THE US CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND KING'S VISIT TO BERLIN

The presence of so many black GIs in Germany, the extraordinarily close relationship between Germany and the United States during the Cold War, and the extensive news coverage of the civil rights movement led to a growing interest among many Germans in the African American liberation struggle during the 1950s and 1960s. German newspapers and magazines published detailed articles about the Montgomery bus boycott, the sit-in movement, the March on Washington, the Selma campaign and other major civil rights events. By 1964, Martin Luther King had become a popular figure in both West and East Germany. Most of his books had been translated into German, and many who read these texts and witnessed the unfolding of the civil rights movement in the news became deeply sympathetic to the cause of black equality. Among them were, for example, the Protestant ministers Heinrich Grosse and Heinrich Grübner. Grosse, who had become interested in the black protest movement as a theology student in Hamburg, moved to the United States in 1967 to study at Boston University and soon became involved in the movement. He met and marched with King, who inspired him not only to support the civil rights cause but also the movement against the Vietnam War. After King's assassination, Grosse moved back to Germany, where he translated many of King's sermons and other writings. In 1971, he also published the first German historical study of the black civil rights movement. An ordained minister and later also a professor of theology in Hannover, Grosse continues to work for racial and social justice in Germany. He also numbers among the main supporters of the Martin-Luther-King-Zentrum für Gewaltfreiheit und Zivilcourage (MLK Center

20 Robert Stemmle's 1952 movie *Toxi* is a romanticized example of such a difficult Afro-German childhood. See Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler*; Lemke Muniz de Faria, *Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung*; and Pützstück, "AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland."

for Nonviolence and Civil Courage), which was founded in Werdau in 1998 by peace activists from the former East and West Germany.[21]

Heinrich Grübner was already an established minister and church leader when he first heard of King and the black civil rights movement. As an outspoken opponent of the Nazis who had helped Jews hide from persecution, Grübner was arrested and spent three years in a concentration camp. Almost two decades later, during a 1962 speaking tour through the United States, he witnessed the black civil rights struggle directly for the first time. Deeply moved, Grübner began corresponding with King, comparing his struggle against racism and discrimination with his own fight against fascism and Nazi terror: "I write in the bond of the same faith and hope, knowing your experiences are the same as ours were." He also stressed, "During the time of Hitler, I was often ashamed of being a German, as today I am ashamed of being white. I am grateful to you, dear brother, and to all who stand with you in this fight for justice, which you are conducting in the spirit of Jesus Christ."[22] Grübner also invited King to come to Berlin, which he did in September 1964 (fig. 3). This visit did not garner much attention from the media at the time or from historians later, but it marked a new high point in alerting Germans on both sides of the Berlin Wall to the inequality that black Americans still suffered in the United States. First, King was enthusiastically received by the people of West Berlin, including Mayor Willy Brandt, who praised him as a hero of the black freedom struggle and as a role model for all people fighting for liberty—whether from racial, colonial, or communist oppression. King visited several areas of West Berlin and preached before more than 20,000 people at the Waldbühne on September 13. He compared racial segregation in the United States with the ideological oppositions that separated his host city and explained that Berlin for him was "a symbol of the divisions of men on the face of the earth." While sharing details of the African American freedom struggle with his audience and asking for their support, he also stressed that the oppressive barriers of race, creed, and ideology could ultimately only be overcome

21 See Grosse, *Die Macht der Armen*. Grosse also published a number of other works on King and on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For more information on the King Center in Werdau, see their website at http://www.king-zentrum.de.

22 Heinrich Grübner to Dr. Martin Luther King, July 15, 1963 and December 16, 1963, cited in Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 92.

*Figure 3: King at the Berlin Wall*

Martin Luther King, Jr., together with Ralph Abernathy at the Berlin Wall (Bernauer Straße/Schwedter Straße), September 13, 1964. J. Jung; courtesy of the Landesarchiv Berlin.

by faith in God and his love and by belief in the common humanity of all people.[23]

On the same evening, King travelled to East Berlin to preach at St. Mary's Church, which was so full that some 2,000 people were left outside waiting to hear him. King later gave another sermon in nearby Sophia Church. The reaction of his audience was even more enthusiastic than in West Berlin. Reports of the event described the listeners as "spellbound" by King, deeply moved by his words and by the mere fact that he had come to them, to East Berlin, with a message of freedom and hope.[24] Significantly, though, no German Democratic Republic (GDR) government officials participated in the event or met with King. Although he was a representative of the "other America," King was also a devout Christian and not yet an outspoken critic of US capitalism. So the communist government may have

23 "Martin Luther King in der Waldbühne," *Welt am Sonntag*, September 6, 1964, 29; also cited in Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 95. For a detailed description of King's visit to East and West Berlin, see ibid., 89–105.

24 Ibid., 100–102.

wanted to avoid affording him official recognition. Moreover, GDR officials could have been worried that King's visit might inspire East Germans to articulate their own dissent. In any case, they kept their distance. The people in East Berlin, however, who met King, exulted in his visit. They besieged him after his speech, trying to touch him or shake his hand and asking him to return.[25] The event may not have had any immediate visible effect in 1964, but it certainly had a long-term impact. King's visit and message gave the Christian minority in the GDR new hope. His theology and the method of nonviolent resistance doubtlessly inspired the GDR opposition in the following decades and thus—at least to some degree—contributed to the eventual downfall of the communist regime there. In the late 1980s, "We Shall Overcome," the anthem of the civil rights movement, became the marching song of the GDR opposition movement. Moreover, the Martin Luther King Center was established in Saxony, that is, in the former East Germany, and the center also houses the archive of the Saxon civil rights movement.[26]

## TRANSNATIONAL PROTEST NETWORKS AND THE RADICALIZATION OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

German university students also engaged in the cause of black equality during the 1960s. In September 1963, for example, some 100 students organized a protest march against racial discrimination in Frankfurt. They delivered a petition signed by 450 people to the US consul general calling upon President Kennedy to give more support to African Americans.[27] Questions about civil rights, democratic participation, and nonviolent direct action were debated on university campuses, in churches, and in political institutions throughout Germany in the 1960s. Representatives of the African American freedom struggle became quite influential in Germany, not only in terms of politics but also with regard to popular culture. Besides King, more radical figures, such as Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka, Stokely Carmi-

25 Ibid., 102–3.
26 See ibid., 104; and http://www.king-zentrum.de.
27 See Klimke, "Civil Rights Struggle," 99.

chael, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Angela Davis, were seen as role models by members of the German student movement.[28]

Quite a few German students travelled to the United States (many as participants of government-sponsored exchange programs) and became supporters of the black freedom struggle there. Most felt especially attracted to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), founded by participants of the sit-in movement in North Carolina in 1961, which had become a major force in the organization of direct action campaigns and voter registration drives. More radical and confrontational than the established civil rights organizations (such as the NAACP or King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference), members of SNCC also became important figures in the free speech movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the women's rights movement.[29]

German students visiting the United States soon realized that the involvement of young white students in SNCC's Freedom Summer campaign of 1964 had been an important factor in promoting the rise of the American student protest movement and the formation of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Some Germans, like Michael Vester, for example, became active members of the American SDS and contributed significantly to its internal political debates.[30] He and other young Germans involved with the American civil rights and student movements eagerly shared their insights with friends back home. They not only discussed the relevance of the black freedom struggle for social protest in Germany but copied and adapted strategies and techniques developed by the civil right movement for strategic use in Germany. Vester also served as vice chairman of the German Socialist Student League (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund), called SDS too. Thus many of the student protest marches, teach-ins and sit-ins

28 See ibid. For an analysis of this cultural exchange, including black music, literature, and art, and the emergence of African American Studies in Germany, see Dietrich and Heinrich, *Cultural Crossovers*.

29 See Carson, *In Struggle*; Forman, *Black Revolutionaries*; and Hogan, *SNCC's Dream.*

30 Vester, for example, worked closely with Tom Hayden and was directly involved in formulating the final draft of the SDS manifesto in 1962, the Port Huron Statement. See Klimke, *Other Alliance*, 18–26.

organized in the FRG in the 1960s mirrored the methods and actions of the SNCC.[31]

Based on the experiences of German SDS members such as Michael Vester, Karl-Dietrich ("KD") Wolff, Günter Amendt, and others who had spent significant amounts of time in the United States and witnessed racial discrimination and violence against African Americans, there was also a strong sense of solidarity with the emerging black nationalist movement, especially the Black Panther Party (BPP), which was founded in Oakland, California, in 1966. Although the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act in 1964 and 1965 ostensibly ended legal discrimination against African Americans, economic inequality and institutionalized racism continued to be major problems, especially in urban ghettos. Aware of these inequities, the German SDS denounced US racial policies, and following the race riots in Newark, Detroit, and other American cities in the summer of 1967, its leadership issued an official statement supporting Black Power during their twenty-second national convention:

> The violent struggle of the blacks who conceive of themselves as 'Afro-Americans' in the US makes the solidarity with the national liberation movements of the Third World concrete. As they create a second Vietnam in the USA itself, their struggle against American capitalism is tied, in practice to the international class struggle against imperialism. [32]

Of course, the radicalization of the German student movement after 1965—including the SDS's solidarity with Black Power and with the American SDS—was also spurred by political and cultural developments in the FRG. Although the country's close alliance with the United States during the Cold War brought growth, stability, and affluence (as well as an influx of American popular culture) to Germany, there were still quite a few Germans, especially of the younger generation, who opposed Chancellor

31 See Klimke, "Civil Rights Struggle," 99. For an excellent analysis of the connection between the German and the US student protest movements throughout the 1960s, see Klimke, *Other Alliance*.

32 "Die XXII. Ordentliche Delegiertenkonferenz des SDS (Resolutionen und Beschlüsse)," 26, in *Papers of Ronny Loewy*, vol. 1 (SDS 1966–1970), Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung. Cited in Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 112.

Adenauer's policies of Western alignment and West German rearmament. Moreover, as further information about the Nazi regime became more readily available, many young Germans were appalled by what they perceived as their government's lenient policies towards some former high-ranking Nazis. Their outrage over how many political decision-makers had been allowed to stay in power despite their tainted pasts served as a primary catalyst of the 1960s student movement. Awareness of the Holocaust and other horrible crimes that had resulted from Nazi racism caused a sense of "collective guilt" or "special responsibility" in many Germans. Racism had to be fought wherever in the world it occurred, which was also a reason to support the African American freedom struggle.[33] Moreover, as the Spiegel Affair of 1962 demonstrated, most German students disapproved of their government's rigid anti-communism and harsh suppression of internal dissent.[34] Following that incident, concern about the FRG's new emergency laws grew even stronger. These laws, first debated in 1958 and finally passed in May 1968, expanded the government's executive powers in case of an internal or external emergency. Their critics saw them as a severe threat to German civil liberties and to the democratic founding principles of the FRG.[35] Some student protesters even compared them to the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. A smaller group also pointed to the lack of democracy in the country's university system as a major problem. Many SDS members felt that the German government's internal policies and its support for the United States, including what the students perceived as an imperialist war in Vietnam, were undermining the country's democracy and depriving them of their rights as free citizens. These sentiments added to their identification with the radical wing of the African American freedom struggle, especially with SNCC and the Black Panther Party. In the view of these young Germans, black nationalism was an integral part of the larger

33 A number of German students openly compared the situation of blacks in the South to the one of Jews in Nazi Germany. See, for example, Schultz, "Seltsam schönes Land." Some older Germans shared this feeling, as the letters of Heinrich Grübner to King cited above show.

34 In this infamous affair, German Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauss had ordered the arrest of some politically opposed journalists on charges of treason. As it turned out, the state possessed no evidence of the alleged crime, Strauss had violated due process and blatantly overstepped his constitutional powers.

35 For a detailed discussion of the political tensions and generational conflict during this time, see Gassert and Steinweis, *Coping with the Nazi Past.*

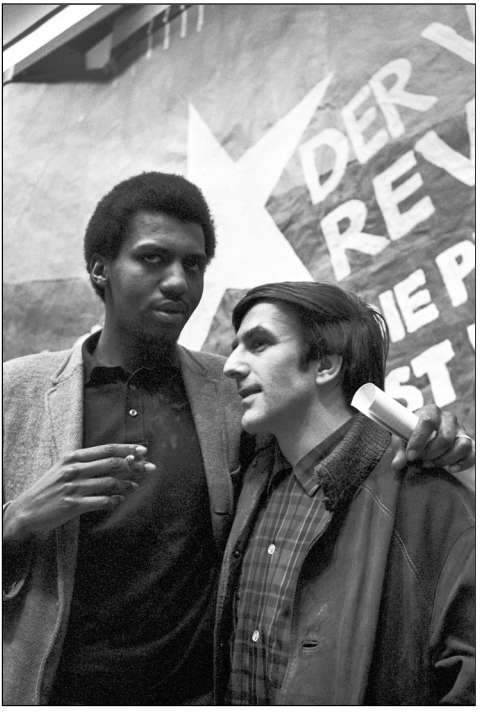
international class struggle against American imperialism and capitalism. Therefore, they felt that they should not only support it, but help to coordinate it with liberation movements all over the world.[36]

In February 1968, SDS organized an international Vietnam Congress at the Technical University of West Berlin, which was attended by over 5,000 activists. Speakers such as SNCC's Dale Smith argued that the Vietnam War was also "a war against us and against the bit of humanity that remains to us," and SDS leader Rudi Dutschke added that the Vietnam War threatened to impose "a long period of authoritarian world domination from Washington to Vladivostok" (fig. 4). Both activists stressed that it was essential for people to come together to create a "second front" in the fight against "global imperialism."[37] This Vietnam Congress can be seen as the first public evidence of a new, revolutionary alliance between the German student movement and the radical black civil rights activists that went beyond demanding black legal equality to advocate a global agenda of fighting for racial justice and freedom from imperialist oppression. In this way, they advanced an agenda already pursued by W.E.B. Du Bois in the early twentieth century and by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King during the final months of their lives.[38]

Only six weeks after the Vietnam Congress, the assassination of Dr. King on April 4, 1968 shocked the world. Many activists interpreted his murder as evidence that the policy of nonviolence had failed and that Black Power was the only available option. In Germany, SDS members proclaimed King's murder a "clarion call for revolutionary action." As Ekkehart Krippendorff put it, "We are the ones who must satisfy his demand for a truly revolutionary change of our society . . . [T]he legacy of Martin Luther King is, for us, the continuation of this social-revolutionary struggle with his—but also with our—methods, here in our own country."[39] Accordingly, the German student movement intensified its protests, especially in Frankfurt and Berlin. It also stepped up its sup-

36 See Höhn und Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 107–18.
37 Smith and Dutschke, cited in ibid., 107.
38 See Lewis, *Du Bois*; Davis, *Changing the World*, 255–73; and Waldschmidt-Nelson, *Dreams and Nightmares*, 99–152.
39 Krippendorff, "Über King"; also cited in Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 113.

*Figure 4: Dale Smith together with Rudi Dutschke*



German SDS leader Rudi Dutschke together with SNCC delegate Dale Smith during the Vietnam Congress at West Berlin's Technical University, February 17, 1968. Mehner; courtesy of ullstein bild.

port for Black Power in various ways. One organization, the Berlin Committee for Black Power, openly tried to collect money to arm black people. German activists translated publications by the Black Panthers and other texts by radical black nationalists. SDS also supported black GIs in their efforts to fight racism and discrimination at US military installations in Germany, for example, by collaborating in the publication of the radical black

GI newspaper *Voice of the Lumpen* and through their Free the Ramstein 2 campaign.[40]

Two other events reflecting the German student movement's further radicalization and embrace of Black Power were the founding of the Black Panther Solidarity Committee (BPSC) in 1969 and the Angela Davis Campaign in the early 1970s. The Frankfurt-based BPSC was established by KD Wolff after his return from the United States in November 1969. It had three official goals: "1. Education about the party's struggles and about the fascist terror of the ruling class in the USA; 2. Agitation and propaganda among GIs stationed in Germany, and 3. Material support of the Black Panthers."[41] The committee published translations of key texts from the Black Panther Party and it organized fundraisers and demonstrations, reading groups, lectures, film screenings, and solidarity rallies for prominent BPP leaders including Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, and Ericka Huggins. Embracing Black Power and socialist ideas while harshly denouncing German support for what they saw as American racist and imperialist policies, BPSC members clearly viewed the FRG as part of the arena for worldwide liberation and thus called on students to join their radical revolutionary movement. A key player in the transatlantic support network linking black and white students, the BPSC existed until the BPP splintered in 1971–72.

The BPSC was also heavily involved in the campaign to support Angela Davis in the early 1970s. Born in 1944 in Birmingham, Alabama, where she also grew up, Davis studied German philosophy at Brandeis University with Herbert Marcuse and was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Frankfurt from 1965 to 1967. There she became involved with the German SDS. After returning to the United States, she joined the Black Power movement and the American Communist Party (CPUSA), completed her PhD, and became an assistant professor of philosophy at the Univer-

40 Ibid., 143–70. The *Voice of the Lumpen* was edited by black GIs and veterans in cooperation with SDS; it was printed by a press owned by KD Wolff and supported by German subscribers, so GIs could obtain copies for free. The so-called Ramstein 2 were Edgar Jackson and William Burrel, two black editors of the *Voice of the Lumpen* who were arrested in November of 1970 after a shootout with a German guard at Ramstein Air Base. Their arrest led to massive protests and solidarity demonstrations in Germany. In July 1971 Burrell was acquitted and Lawrence was sentenced to six years in prison.

41 BPSC, "Solidaritätskomitee für die Black-Panther-Partei"; Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 114–15 and Klimke, *Other Alliance*, 116–26.

sity of California, Los Angeles. She also became a well-known advocate for the rights of black prisoners in that state. On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson, the brother of inmate George Jackson, whom Davis knew well, tried to free three black prisoners in a Marin Country courtroom by armed force. During the ensuing shootout, Jackson and five other people, including the prisoners and the presiding judge, were killed. The police ascertained soon afterwards that the guns used by Jackson had been registered in Angela Davis's name. Davis fled California, was put on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list and was arrested in New York City on October 13.[42]

Her arrest caused an unprecedented international outcry. Davis's friends in Germany and the United States, including many faculty members in California and Frankfurt, denounced the incident as a blatant case of injustice and a brutal attempt to silence political protest. Marcuse warned that, if Davis was found guilty, she could face capital punishment. He stressed that she could only be saved by "a powerful protest, a protest that is present everywhere and cannot be stifled."[43] Following this call, German students were the main contributors to what became a huge, international protest movement in support of Davis (fig. 5). The BPSC disseminated information materials about her cause and held demonstrations for her acquittal. Moreover, an official Angela Davis Solidarity Committee (ADSC) was founded in May 1971. Its members proclaimed that "[t]he German people, especially, have a right to be educated about the ongoing racism in the world. And precisely those who have made their inner peace with the Jews should consider that their credibility depends on their willingness to fight without compromise against the social causes of racial discrimination wherever it appears."[44] Solidarity with Angela Davis was thus seen as an indicator of a true antifascist and antiracist mindset. In June 1972, the ADSC organized a congress in Frankfurt entitled "The Example of Angela Davis," which was attended by over 10,000 people.[45]

42 For more details, see Aptheker, *Morning Breaks*; James, *Angela Y. Davis Reader*; and Davis, *Autobiography*.
43 Marcuse, cited in Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 119.
44 ADSC, "Freiheit für Angela Davis!" paper cited ibid., 120–21.
45 Ibid., 121–22, and Klimke, *Other Alliance*, 134–42.

*Figure 5: German Free Angela Davis demonstration*


A demonstration organized by women's groups in Frankfurt in support Angela Davis on March 13, 1971. M. Tripp; courtesy of Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung.

In Davis's remarkable case, the solidarity campaigns were not only transatlantic but also reached behind the Iron Curtain. For the regime in the German Democratic Republic, Davis was the perfect representative of "the other America." The authorities there regarded her as an innocent African American communist who was persecuted by evil capitalist forces and who was therefore deserving of East German support. Thus, GDR media reported the case in detail. East German citizens signed petitions in Davis's behalf, raised money for her defense, and sent protest letters to President Richard Nixon. School children painted "sunflowers for Angela Davis" and wrote letters to her. When she was finally acquitted on June 4, 1972, Erich Honecker congratulated her with a personal telegram. Three months later, Davis visited the GDR. There she was enthusiastically celebrated by the East German people. She received an honorary degree from the University of Leipzig, was awarded the Great Star of Friendship among the Peoples by Walter Ulbricht, and became the heroine of an official documentary movie. The regime turned Da-

vis into a kind of "communist superstar," and she apparently gladly accepted this role.[46]

## FROM BLACK POWER TO THE RED ARMY FACTION

The Angela Davis campaign was without doubt one of the major successes of the international alliance of German students and African American freedom activists, but it also marked a turning point in the movement. There was a growing sense of frustration and disgust among many young Germans with what they perceived as the decay of democratic values in the United States and Germany. The killing of student activist Benno Ohnesorg during a demonstration in Berlin on June 2, 1967, and the assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke on April 11, 1968 (who survived with severe brain damage that caused his death a few years later) significantly added to the anger and fear of radical German students, who felt they were threatened by the same type of violent opposition as their African American friends in the southern United States.[47] Their trust in the democratic legitimacy of their own and the US government deteriorated. When interrogated by the US Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security in March 1969, KD Wolff, for example, harshly denounced what he saw as the illegitimate repression of liberal protest movements. He asserted that there was a dangerous "emergence of a new institutional fascism both in West Germany and the United States" and called the senators "a bunch of criminal bandits."[48] Many young Germans agreed with his analysis and thus, at the end of the 1960s,

46 In her speech, "Not Only My Victory," delivered in German in East Berlin on September 11, 1972, Davis lauded communism and the social order of the Soviet Union and the GDR, and denounced American racism and imperialism. She concluded by saying: "Long live the GDR! Long live proletarian internationalism!" See Davis, "Nicht nur mein Sieg," 63. For a discussion of the GDR's support of Davis and other socialist black visitors, such as Du Bois and Paul Robeson, also see Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 123–41. Sophie Lorenz at the University of Heidelberg is working on a manuscript entitled "Peace, Friendship, Solidarity? East Germany and Angela Davis, 1965–1989," which will be completed in 2013.

47 For a firsthand account of this process, see Aly, *Unser Kampf*. I would like to thank Robert Winkler for referring me to this book and for other valuable insights regarding the "dark side" of the German student movement.

48 Wolff, cited in Höhn and Klimke, *Breath of Freedom*, 195.

voices grew louder among the more radical activists calling for "armed resistance" against what they saw as a fascist government. As activist Gudrun Ensslin put it after the assassination of Benno Ohnesorg, "This fascist state wants to kill all of us. We have to organize the resistance. Violence can only be answered by violence. This is the generation of Auschwitz—you cannot argue with them."[49]

Ensslin, who had spent a year in the United States as a high school student, worked with the SDS and BPSC during the 1960s and supported a desertion campaign for black GIs in West Germany (many of whom found refuge in the GDR). She eagerly embraced the ideas of Black Power early on and saw the BPP not only as a welcome ally in the international struggle against American imperialism but also as an inspiration for standing up to government power. Together with Andreas Baader and two other friends, Ensslin set two shopping malls on fire in April 1968. Her aim was "to protest the ignorance of the people watching the genocide in Vietnam."[50] Two years later, in June 1970, Ensslin, Baader, and Ulrike Meinhoff founded the Red Army Faction (RAF). Named after Lenin's revolutionary army of 1917, the RAF was a terrorist organization with the explicit aim of organizing armed revolution to overthrow the German capitalist—and in their view, fascist—government. Their founding document, "Build up the Red Army!" (published on June 5, 1970) and other texts such as "The Concept of the Urban Guerilla" (written in 1971) revealed that the philosophy of the RAF was based on a mix of various revolutionary doctrines, including Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, Frantz Fanon's concept of the liberating force of revolutionary violence, and Che Guevara's ideal of revolution by way of guerilla warfare .[51]

Seeing themselves as part of an international revolutionary struggle against capitalism and imperialism, members of the RAF were willing to cooperate with all kinds of other liberation movements (including the Palestinian Liberation Organization), but early on it showed a special affinity for radical black nationalism. The RAF's leaders admired the militancy of the Black Panther Party, especially the open display of weapons, which to them signified determination and strength. RAF members therefore made it a

49 Ensslin, cited in Aust, *Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex*, 60.
50 Ensslin, cited in Sontheimer, "Wie Alles anfing."
51 See Klimke, *Other Alliance*, 127–32. For a detailed history of the RAF, see Aust, *Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex*, and Proll, *Hans und Grete*.

priority to arm themselves, and there is some evidence that they might have received some guns from Black Panther groups in Germany.[52] More remarkable than ideological similarities and practical cooperation between the RAF and BPP, however, was the process of cultural appropriation that occurred. RAF leaders not only copied the style of the BPP by carrying weapons or using militant rhetoric (they called policemen "pigs" [*Schweine*], for example), but they emphatically stressed their solidarity with the black freedom struggle, frequently quoting Black Panther statements in their publications, "The Concept of the Urban Guerilla" concluding with a statement from Eldridge Cleaver.[53] Black culture, music, and literature were very popular among RAF members, and many of them identified with the situation of African Americans because they perceived themselves as similarly oppressed outcasts under deadly attack by a fascist government. As Meinhoff and Ensslin declared on May 22, 1970, "Did the pigs, who shot first, really believe we would let ourselves be killed nonviolently like slaughterhouse animals? Gandhi and Martin Luther King are dead. The bullets of their murderers, the bullets fired at Rudi . . . have ended the dream of nonviolence. The one who does not resist dies. . . . Berlin is an outpost of American Imperialism . . . the enemy of all blacks in the US, the enemy of the workers in Berlin—the enemy is American Imperialism."[54] There was also much admiration for the courage and defiance of black prisoners such as George Jackson. While in prison in the 1970s, Ensslin and other RAF leaders quoted from his published work in their prison letters in order to encourage each other to follow Jackson's example of self-sacrificing dedication to the cause of liberation.[55] The most obvious sign of the RAF's admiration for the BPP was the fact that they appropriated the Party's logo (a black panther jumping forward) and combined it with the image of a Russian Kalashnikov in their founding manifesto (fig. 6).[56]

52 See ibid., 10, and Klimke, *Other Alliance*, 127.

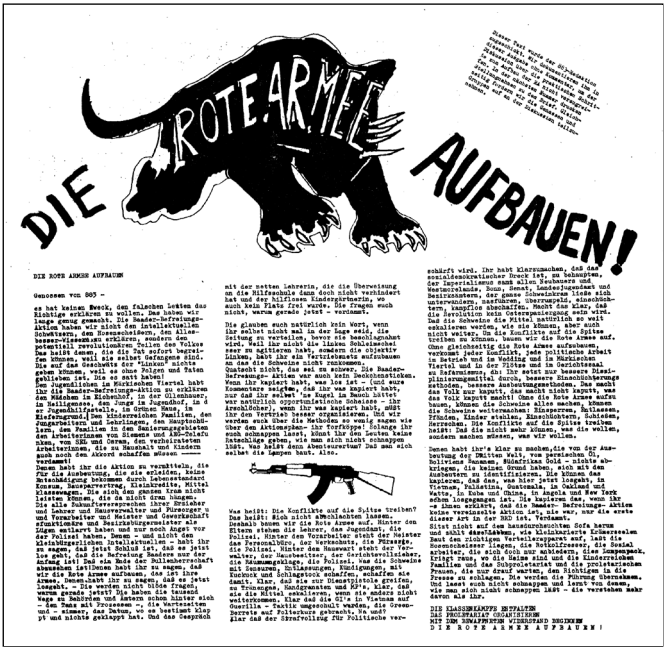
53 See RAF, "Das Konzept Stadtguerilla."

54 Meinhoff and Ensslin, "Die Rote Armee aufbauen" (translation by author).

55 Ensslin, for example, wrote in a 1974 letter, "[L]et Jackson teach you the whole thing—his joy in doing this job, for example here: 'If you ask me generally how this struggle will end, I answer: With a victory. If you ask me specifically, I answer: With death.' Or do you perhaps have anything to lose anymore?" Cited in Klimke, *Other Alliance*, 133.

56 See image of the manifesto in ibid., 128.

*Figure 6: The founding manifesto of the RAF*




"Die Rote Armee aufbauen!" ("Building up the Red Army"), founding manifesto of the RAF, originally published in *Agit 883*, no. 62, June 5, 1970, 6.

Despite affinities and proclamations of a common agenda, however, there were also significant differences between the RAF and BPP. In contrast to the Panthers, who also engaged in community programs, the RAF despised reformist efforts to improve the existing system. The only strategy acceptable to them was violent revolution. Consequently, the RAF grew increasingly ruthless during the 1970s and 1980s, engaging in a campaign of brutal terrorism that ultimately killed more than thirty people. Although there were some Panthers, especially Cleaver, who also favored revolutionary militancy (and there can be no doubt, that the FBI, especially J. Edgar Hoover, perceived the BPP as an actual threat to US security, and so waged a brutal campaign against them), BPP founder Huey Newton always stressed that their arms were solely for self-defense. Newton and cofounder Bobby Seale took a much more reformist stance than Cleaver, and eventually—

after heated internal debates—they prevailed. The BPP never fully embraced, and finally distanced themselves from, the agenda of violent revolutionary action followed by the RAF.[57] This may explain why after 1972 the official RAF logo no longer contained the image of a black panther, whereas that of the Kalashnikov remained.

Historical connections between the Black Panthers, the radical German student movement, and the RAF clearly show that young German radicals drew inspiration from the black nationalist movement in the United States, appropriated many of its ideas and cultural iconography, and actively cooperated with the BPP during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the RAF began its terrorist campaign, however, its agenda proved incompatible with the Black Panthers'. The BPP's main focus was the survival of their community. Finding the most effective way towards improvement of the social, cultural, economic, and political situation of African Americans was ultimately more important to them than fighting for world communism or engaging in what would have been a suicidal attempt to overthrow the US government. So although the BPP played a certain role in the emergence of the West German terrorist movement, this alliance was short-lived and had remarkably little influence on the perception of African Americans by the German public at large. In fact, most German people never noticed the connection between the BPP and the RAF.[58] Throughout the 1970s, the German media focused much more on Angela Davis as the icon of black radicalism. Despite her communist affiliation and her stinging critique of Western capitalism and racism, Davis never openly advocated violence and was therefore not perceived as a threat. Eventually this brilliant, beautiful activist, who spoke fluent German and advocated social justice, racial equality, and women's rights, became very popular in both German states, perhaps helping to further improve the general attitude of white Germans towards African Americans.

57 Cleaver was ousted from the party in 1972, but internal differences had significantly weakened the BPP and contributed to its demise. One of the splinter groups, the Black Liberation Army (BLA) endorsed revolutionary violence. THE BLA apparently planned some terrorist attacks, but never succeeded and remained politically insignificant. For more, see Austin, *Up Against the Wall.*

58 Klimke, in *The Other Alliance*, was one of the first historians to explore this phenomenon, 126–42.

## CONCLUSION

One can certainly observe much improvement in many areas of black-white race relations in Germany since World War II. Nevertheless, as ongoing incidents of discrimination against Afro-Germans and other people of color show, racism continues to exist in Germany. In contrast to the 1960s, most of the about 500 000 black people living in Germany today do not come from the United States but from sub-Saharan Africa, many having entered Germany as refugees from war-torn countries with the intention of returning home some day. But there is also an increasing number of descendants of African Americans and Africans who were born in Germany, are German citizens and want to be treated as such. Perhaps inspired by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, they began organizing a new black movement and founded the Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (Initiative of Black Germans) as well as ADEFRA e.V.—Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland (Black Women in Germany, the acronym ADEFRA standing for Afrodeutsche Frauen) in 1986. Through local and national meetings, workshops, demonstrations, online networks, and publications,[59] both of these organizations promote the social, cultural, and political inclusion of Afro-Germans. They fight against discrimination and racism and help to build a supportive community and positive sense of identity for black people in Germany.[60] Having grown up in a nation that does not have the historic multiethnic and multicultural background of the United States, many white Germans still struggle with the concept that someone who is not white or Christian can be is just as German as they are. As current political debates indicate, however, the number of Germans willing to work for a more inclusive society appears to be on the rise. Organizations such as Gesicht

59 See, for example, *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* by Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, and Dagmar Schultz. This book, first published in 1986, is viewed by many as the "founding document" of modern Afro-German identity.

60 Just as ADEFRA changed its name from "Afro-German Women" to "Black Women in Germany," ISD has also been renamed *Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland* (Initiative of Black People in Germany) in order to include non-German blacks who live in the FRG. See the organizations' websites http://neu.isdonline.de/verein/ and http://www.adefra.de/. See Oguntoye, Opitz, and Schultz, *Showing Our Colors*; Pützstück, "AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland"; and Mazón and Steingröver, *Not So Plain as Black and White*.

Zeigen!, Verein gegen Ausländerfeindlichkeit und Rassismus, the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, and the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolence and Moral Courage are firmly committed to fighting against racism and intolerance and to promoting social justice in Germany.[61] The popularity of Afro-German sport or media stars (such as Gerald Asamoch, Steffi Jones, Cherno Jobatey or Arabella Kiesbauer) may also be seen as a sign of progress. There is still a long way to go, but one should remember that in the wake of the African American freedom struggle after World War II, the first significant steps to overcoming racial prejudices among Germans were already taken during the long 1960s. Certainly there are still many problems, and too many white Germans (as well as other white Europeans and Americans for that matter) continue to hold on to some anti-black, racist stereotypes. But the hope remains that "we [all] shall overcome some day."

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61 See ibid. and the website of the King Center at Werdau as well as http://www.gesichtzeigen.de/, http://migration-online.de/biblio._aWQ9OTYz_.html, and http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/.

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