

**INTRODUCTION**  
**RACE, MEMORY, AND**  
**HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION**

Contextualizing Black German Narratives  
of the Third Reich

**QUESTIONS OF CONTEXT: RACE,  
GENDER, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

The most difficult part of beginning any story, any project, or any study but especially any history lies in the choices and decisions we make with regard to context. How and why do we situate the stories we want to tell in the ways we do? What information needs to be known so that our stories make sense? Against what backgrounds and in what frameworks do we want our stories to be understood? What other stories do our tales cite or reference, and what differentiates our stories from those of others? Contexts—both discursive and sociohistorical—are the possibility of existence and intelligibility of our stories as well as the ultimate limit of how they are read. At times, contexts even constitute the source of the misreading or unraveling of the very stories they seek to construct. In this way, contexts can be as problematic as they are illuminating.

This book tells the story of a group of individuals that is frequently left out of numerous stories, histories, and historiographies. However, this volume is in no way the definitive or comprehensive telling of this story. It offers instead a partial account of how, in the first half of the twentieth century, German Blacks were constituted as particular kinds of raced and gendered subjects in Germany under the Nazi regime—a regime that is most often considered primarily for its profoundly

destructive capacity. Breaking with this tendency, this work examines the generative effects of this totalitarian government and the processes of racialization and gendering that constituted its fundamental organizing techniques and practices. This book does so by looking at a population that is not popularly seen as the primary target of this regime's racial ideology—Germany's Black citizens. This book examines the historical discourses that preceded and enabled the emergence of a Black German subject and analyzes how the processes of racial and gender formation designed by National Socialism to purge non-Aryans from the landscape of German society contributed in paradoxical ways to the production of some of the subjects it sought to expunge. In this way, this work seeks to theorize and understand racial and gendered subject formation as a historical as well as social process. I construct this account through an analysis of the memory narratives of two Black Germans whose status as German subjects was shaped by this regime in profound ways. In this way, the book uses memory as both a lens for theorizing and a site for analyzing this regime's effects on these individuals.

The challenge of contextualizing the history of Black Germans in the Third Reich lies in recognizing both the productive and delimiting implications of some of its most pertinent historiographical contexts. The history of this population opens up alternative ways of conceiving of racial and gender formation and adds new levels of complexity to interpretations of race and gender in the historiography of German colonialism, the Holocaust, and National Socialism as well as for theorizing memory, oral history, and the African diaspora. Yet it is equally important to acknowledge the limitations of reading this history solely through any one of these contexts.

Although the contextualization of one's object of study is always a central part of any scholarly analysis, the stakes of this project are particularly high with respect to representing the history and experiences of a population such as Afro-Germans. Because of the late emergence of this group in the larger narrative of German history, the context in which their accounts are placed is that much more significant, particularly with regard to how this book is situated in the historiography of the Holocaust. An anecdote may help to more clearly illuminate some of the issues involved here. A few years ago, while I was researching parts of this book at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

(USHMM), I received an unexpected inquiry from one of the museum's archival staff—a request to donate materials I had collected on Afro-German history (specifically, oral histories I conducted) to the museum's archive. Indeed, it was quite a straightforward and affirming request: straightforward because it would appear that the question of whether I would want to have the life histories of the courageous and inspiring individuals whom I interviewed preserved in one of the finest archives of German history in the United States would seem a no-brainer; affirming, I believe, because despite criticism to the contrary, the interest shown by the USHMM in the history of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich is a sincere expression of the museum's conception of the Holocaust as a phenomenon by no means restricted to the persecution of European Jews but rather one fundamentally centered on the larger question of race.

But from another perspective, this question is not a straightforward one. From this question arises a series of other questions, each of which reflects the profound implications of context and memory in the constitution of identity, community, and history. On the one hand, what does it mean to deposit in an American archival collection dedicated to the study of the Holocaust some of the few recorded memories of a group of people whose history has begun to be written only in the last twenty years? As inclined as I am to have these materials preserved in the hands of an institution as respected as the USHMM, it is nevertheless necessary for me to acknowledge the fact that to place them in this collection is also to insert these narratives into a particular historical context. At the same time, to have these voices enter into history framed by this particular context is also to be aware of the ways in which this framework influences, shapes, and necessarily limits how these memories might be read—for example, as stories of victimization and persecution rather than as narratives of affirmation and resistance.<sup>1</sup>

One example of this can be found in David Okuefuna and Moise Shewa's excellent documentary, *Hitler's Forgotten Victims: Black Survivors of the Holocaust*.<sup>2</sup> The film is invaluable for the wealth of new material it provides—in particular, the documentary footage and still photographs of Black GIs and Africans in Nazi Germany as well as the Afro-German oral history testimony that serves as the film's core. But the film presents these individuals' testimony and the supporting his-

torical source material in an extremely narrow context: Afro-Germans are essentially rendered one-dimensionally, solely as victims of Nazi persecution. Even at obvious moments in the film, when narrators offer fascinating accounts of their lives in the Third Reich—recounting, for example, their membership in the Hitler Youth or military service (the implications of which will be discussed at length in chapter 3)—the ways in which such accounts complicate the status of victimhood are left wholly unexplored.

The stakes of contextualizing the history of Black Germans in the Third Reich are similarly high with regard to how these individuals' narratives are situated in the larger context of the African diaspora. Indeed, some renderings of the experiences of Afro-Germans have shown a worrisome tendency to overlook the complexities of the contradictory and ambivalent ways in which members of this population have been positioned historically in German society. This tendency can be observed in the collection *The African-German Experience*, edited by Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay. With noteworthy exceptions, the essays collected in this volume contextualize Afro-German history and articulations of identity in relation to African-American history and community formation. In this way, Afro-German identity and the history of this community are often rendered in an almost patronizing manner, in what amounts to a portrayal of them as a group of individuals at the beginning of a long journey toward "real" or "true" Black consciousness, a model assumed to be exemplified by the African-American community.<sup>3</sup>

Such contextual considerations provoke a reformulation of the more general questions posed here regarding the stakes of framing and historical context. Specifically, in what contexts are we to read the history of this population? How does the history of Black Germans broaden our understanding of ongoing historical and theoretical debates? In short, where does this history fit into a larger scholarly project? The two most obvious contexts in which this study of Black Germans in the Third Reich must be located are historical interpretations of the Holocaust and National Socialism. Yet it is perhaps as important to outline what my analysis will not undertake in this context as it is to emphasize how the history of Black Germans in this regime adds and shifts within this historiography.

First, this book will not examine the set of questions posed under

the rubric of the *Historikerstreit* regarding the uniqueness or singularity of Nazi genocide. Despite the fact that this debate continues to produce fruitful analyses, it is not my primary concern here. Although this book discusses the forms of Nazi victimization and persecution of some members of the Black German population, I do so in ways that challenge a conception of this regime's response to this group as a systematic or coherent state policy. Indeed, the contradictory and uneven effects of Nazi racial policy on the Black German population will demonstrate not only the extent to which the National Socialists seemed unable to fit Black Germans neatly into their racial ideology but also that Black Germans were a highly diverse group of individuals whose status and fate within this regime was quite different from and thus cannot be subsumed in historical accounts and explanations of other "non-Aryan" groups such as Jews and "Gypsies." I will engage race as the foundational discourse that motivated and propelled this regime but also paradoxically presented the ultimate impossibility of fully realizing a racial state.

Rather than placing anti-Semitism at the center of my analysis of National Socialist (NS) racial policy, I recenter the concept of race that formed the true basis of this regime's fundamental organization as well as its authorizing discourse. I ask how race worked in the Third Reich by looking at its Black rather than its Jewish community. Hence, I focus on a very different question than that posed by many studies of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust: What happens when we view the Holocaust not through the history of anti-Semitism and the persecution of the Jews but through the ideology of racial purity? In this way, I emphasize how, in the service of racial purity, this regime produced the same subjects it regulated, administered, and indeed ultimately sought to destroy.

This approach to understanding National Socialism's effects also means that this book does not attempt to assess or address the status of this regime as a particular kind of fascist or totalitarian state. Rather, this work looks at how in the Third Reich, power worked through racialization and gendering to produce different forms of both docile and resistant subjects in ways that at times worked against the grain of and in contradiction to the regime's aims. This emphasis on subject formation among Black Germans is intended to highlight the extent to which these individuals were interpellated by this racial state in ways

that both constrained and enabled their constitution as German subjects. In the societies in which they lived, the categories of Blackness, Germanness, and gender were both internally contradictory and contradicted each other; thus, Afro-Germans' accounts of their experiences within the Reich vividly reflect their negotiation of these contradictions. The racial and gendered technologies of subject constitution that these people experienced within the Third Reich were productive in that they quite literally brought these individuals into being as particular kinds of differentially valued and devalued German subjects, both with and without certain kinds of possibilities. Thus, these technologies enabled and constrained them as the raced and gendered parameters of their intelligibility yet they lacked the capacity to ever completely define or fully contain those parameters and possibilities.

An equally significant context for understanding Black German subject formation is Germany's colonial history. Connecting the Nazi ideology of racial purity and public discourse on Black Germans to earlier discourses on Black Germans both within and beyond the boundaries of the German nation in the years preceding the establishment of the NS state plays a crucial role in explaining the power and efficacy of such discourses within the Third Reich. This study supports the contentions of several key texts in the emerging historiography of the German colonial experience. In particular, the keen analyses of Susanne Zantop, Sarah Friedrichsmeyer and her coeditors, Pascal Grosse, and Lora Wildenthal have recently broken new ground through their focus on the mutually reinforcing interplay between metropole and colony that connects colonial discourses of race and gender to their implications and consequences within the metropole, and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> This book draws on these scholars' work to emphasize the links between colonial discourses on miscegenation and citizenship and their influence on parallel and subsequent debates on the status of Black Germans within the Reich. Moreover, this volume supports this work by underlining the fact that despite its truncated colonial history, Germany depended as much as any other European nation on the distinction from non-European populations in the constitution of national identity.

Throughout this book, it is important not to view the links between the historical periods examined here as cumulative or inevitable in their relation. Nor should the developments documented with regard

to the public discourse and response to Black Germans be read as culminating in the Nazi sterilization of Black Germans. On the contrary, I seek to paint a far more complex picture. In fact, I try strenuously and carefully to resist a convenient or predictable teleology of Nazi persecution by focusing instead on a nuanced notion of historical “echoes” and “specters.” What is most remarkable about the relationship between discussions about and discourse on Black Germans in the colonies following World War I and in the Third Reich is the discursive echoes that recurred in each context. These echoes of the dangerous specter posed by a Black German population link the very different historical events of each of these periods and demonstrate the resilience of the perceived threat of racial mixture. At the same time, these echoes show how the discourse of nation was and remains an inherently gendered and racialized discourse that relies on gender and race to incite and sustain its efficacy. Overdetermining the links between these events and epochs would in my view be a mistake that denied and occluded the complicated ways that race and gender historically have worked together, with powerful social and political effects. This volume moves in a different direction by connecting and historicizing the discourses that incite and enable historical events—that is, not necessarily by connecting and historicizing the events themselves. In this way, placing the history of Black Germans in the Third Reich in the context of Germany’s colonial legacy underlines not only continuities in how Black Germans were perceived but, more importantly, continuities in the stakes and salience of a conception of national purity as racial purity.

In the same way that this book speaks to some of the central questions of Holocaust and NS historiography from an alternative vantage point, it also approaches the question of the relation of Black Germans to the African diaspora from an oblique perspective. The second half of this book examines from an unconventional viewpoint some of the debates and questions central to the study of the African diaspora, asking, for example, how the African diaspora is constituted by looking at Germany rather than at Africa or the Americas. Instead of focusing on the implications of displacement, migration, or settlement from the African continent to sites elsewhere, I explore the thorough emplacement of the Black German community. Hence, this study is situated firmly in Europe, albeit in a part of Europe that usually falls out of the traditional cartography of the African diaspora. My analysis of the

narratives of my Black German interview partners contests both the centrality of triangulation that characterizes many conceptions of the African Diaspora and the crisscrossing trajectory of movement mapped by the model of the Black Atlantic. Rather than normalizing any assumed affinities among Black peoples, this book theorizes our stakes and investments in the links postulated by academics and nonacademics as constitutive of the relations between different Black communities transnationally. In this way, this book is strategically located between two directions in the study of Black European cultural formations. It builds on the work of scholars of German history and German studies on the nexus of race, gender, and sexuality in the history of Blacks in Germany as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, this work takes up theoretical impulses set out by scholars of Black British cultural studies, who redefined the concepts of race, cultural identity, and diaspora to take into account the realities of contemporary Black European communities, particularly in the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> This book uses these theoretical models to think through the ways in which articulations of Black German identity contest both German and European national and cultural identities, which have traditionally been constituted “racially” as white. Here it is useful to consider another important context—that of the genealogy of the terms *Afro-German* and *Black German*.

*Afro-German* (*Afro-deutsch*) is a term of identification that emerged in the mid-1980s among Germans of African descent to describe their mixed ethnic and racial heritages. As the Afro-German movement has evolved and come to include individuals of more diverse cultural backgrounds (individuals of Indian, Arab, and Asian heritage, for example), the term *Black German* (*Schwarze Deutsche*) has also come to be a widely accepted term of identification among members of this community. *Afro-German* is both a consciousness-raising provocation and an articulation of the German and Afro-diasporic heritages of this population. At the same time, *Black German* emphasizes the constructedness of blackness in German society and the fact that public perception of blackness in Germany is not restricted to the attribute of skin color. Both these terms pose the questions of what or who is Black in German society and how blackness comes to be defined in this context. Throughout this text, the German populations of African descent that



are the subjects of this investigation are referred to as either *Afro-Germans* or *Black Germans*. My use of these contemporary terms of identification is not intended retrospectively to attribute to these individuals a form of Black identity or consciousness that they may or may not have had. On the contrary, my usage grows out of the descriptive necessity of finding a term with which to refer to a group of people for whom there existed no positive term of reference as individuals of both Black and German heritage. *Black German* and *Afro-German* are appropriate terms of reference in that they give voice to one of the central phenomena explored in this study: how individuals of African descent were constituted as Blacks in German society on a number of levels, regardless of any personal identification with blackness. Indeed, the extent to which Blacks have identified as “Black” has never been of any consequence in the perception or treatment of them as such. Furthermore, this work attempts to unsettle prevalent notions of racial identity that proscribe a dichotomous, either/or choice between blackness and whiteness, revealing both the constructedness of racial categories and the stakes involved in their definition.

The final context in which this book must be understood is in relation to the methodology of oral history. Throughout this work I refer to the accounts of my Black German interview partners as “memory narratives.” My use of this alternative terminology is not meant to imply that the interviews from which these accounts are derived are not oral historical texts. The methodology of oral history quite literally provides the structure of these accounts, and these interviews emerged from an active and critical engagement with oral history, ethnography, and qualitative research methodologies.<sup>7</sup> Yet I will be reading these accounts as narrative texts rather than strictly as documents. Although my analysis aims to mine these accounts’ valuable insights into the historical settings that are rendered, I resist seeing the interviews as direct presentations of the past “as it really was.” My interest lies in reading these narratives “symptomatically,” as Ronald Grele proposed in his often-cited adaptation of Louis Althusser’s notion of “symptomatic reading.” Like Althusser, Grele envisions the goal of oral history analysis as unearthing the submerged levels of meaning within these narratives—or, in Althusser’s formulation, their “problematic.” As Grele writes,

If read properly, [oral history interview texts] do reveal to us hidden levels of discourse—the search for which is the aim of *symptomatic* reading. If read (or listened to) again and again, not just for facts and comments, but also, as Althusser suggests, for insights and oversights, for the combination of vision and nonvision and especially for answers to questions which were never asked, we should be able to isolate and describe the problematic which informs the particular interview. It is at the level of this problematic—the theoretical or ideological context within which words and phrases, and the presence or absence of certain problems and concepts, is found—that we find the synthesis of all the various structural relationships of the interview, as well as the particular relation of the individual to his vision of history.<sup>8</sup>

Grele's adaptation of Althusser has greatly influenced my approach to reading oral history texts. Moreover, similar to Freud's observations on dream work, my analysis of my informants' accounts is premised on the notion that the associations my informants make in their accounts should not be read as contingent or random. Rather, these associations reveal deeper underlying meanings and are fundamental to understanding the historical production of their subjectivities as raced and gendered individuals. Hence, their direct utterances as well as the gaps in articulation within their narratives become revealing sites of analysis. My readings of these accounts aim to push the limits of contemporary uses and interpretations of oral history narratives by engaging the dynamic interaction of memory, speech, and articulation in the writing of history. The foregrounding of memory in my conception of these complicated narrative accounts is an approach to interpreting oral testimony that I share with such scholars as Lawrence Langer, Geoffrey Hartman, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, James Young, Luisa Passerini, Michael Frisch, and Alessandro Portelli, whose work on memory, oral history, and the Holocaust has significantly influenced mine.<sup>9</sup> My interpretative approach emphasizes the dialogical character of these narratives, which I conceive not as monologues but rather as polyphonic texts that invite historians to probe the multiple, overlapping, and often contradictory voices therein. Reading both speech and silence in these texts and in these individuals' descriptions of the physical and ideological "spaces" they

occupied in this society, my analysis reveals the complex manner in which race and gender structured the lives of Afro-Germans and social interaction more generally in the Third Reich—for both “Aryans” and “non-Aryans” alike.

Unlike many analyses of oral historical accounts, this book will not offer readers a complete biographical portrait of either of my informants. My interest is rather in these individuals’ recollections of how National Socialism affected their lives and in the forms of subjectivity that were made available to and created by them during that time. This is not to say that their accounts will be treated as snapshots of their lives in the past, rendering photographically “accurate” representations of this period. Instead, these accounts will be treated as complicated texts of memory. Paradoxically, this conception means relinquishing some of the expectations we often take for granted about oral histories. One of these is an expectation of a kind of “knowledge” of the individuals whose accounts are being presented. Although one product of this volume will certainly be some sense of the personae of these individuals, I will provide only a very partial picture of these complex people. One will also not get a sense of who these individuals became after the war, in the wake of the demise of the Nazi regime. In particular, I will not attempt to assess or describe the very personal ways in which they came to terms with the effects of National Socialism in their later lives or what their individual processes of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“coming to terms with the past”) looked like. Although such an analysis might well have yielded compelling results, my informants did not allow me access to these aspects of themselves or their psyches, and their invocation of this prerogative is one that I wholeheartedly respect. Sadly, neither individual lived to see the publication of this book, and thus they no longer can provide these potentially valuable insights. However, my objective in examining their testimony was to construct an account of racial and gender formation in the Third Reich. For this reason, I have chosen not to include an extensive postwar analysis.<sup>10</sup> Such an analysis will have to be the subject of a future project.

Consequently, many questions will necessarily remain open about the very rich lives of the individuals presented in this study, and readers of this text may want to know much more about them. I sincerely hope this is in fact the case, for I would be gratified if this book pro-

voked others to fill in the many gaps that remain in the history of the Black German community. Neither a community history nor a study of collective memory, this book seeks instead to use memory as a way of prying into the crevices of the Third Reich to examine how the Nazis contended with a group of people whose status and existence challenged some of the most basic premises of National Socialism. Memory offers a powerful historiographical tool for understanding this regime, a tool that will be utilized and exploited to its utmost potential in this book.

**QUESTIONS OF MEMORY: HISTORY, TECHNOLOGY,  
AND REPRESENTATION; OR, TOWARD A  
SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY OF MEMORY**

A preoccupation with how best to engage the memories of my Afro-German interview partners prompted me initially to recognize the necessity of exploring the complexities of memory in writing the history of this group of individuals. This process is best understood by means of what I have come to conceive as the social technology of memory. My reference to the notion of technology is borrowed in at least two senses. First, it is borrowed from the field of technology studies and its conception of technology as practical and material techniques of production. The notion of technology is borrowed in a second sense from scholars such as Teresa de Lauretis's feminist theoretical appropriations and adaptations of Michel Foucault's conception of technologies as sets of socially constructed techniques that produce specific forms of meaning in society—for example, “the technology of gender” or the “technology of sex.”<sup>11</sup> Applying these two complementary understandings of technology to the functioning of memory as it relates to the writing of history, one might conceive of a technology of memory that operates on at least two levels.

In the first sense, the technology of memory functions as the material techniques of recording memories and transforming them into public texts accessible to interpretation—what Pierre Nora refers to as “history.” In his seminal 1989 work “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” Nora contends that what is currently called memory is in fact not memory but is already history. As he writes,

Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. What began as writing ends as high fidelity and tape recording. . . . Hence the obsession with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past. . . . Memory has been wholly absorbed by its meticulous reconstitution. Its new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there.<sup>12</sup>

Thus conceived, the technology of memory corresponds to a process Nora calls the materialization of memory, involving material techniques of archiving in the broadest sense—processes of recording, preserving, and reproducing memories. These include but are not limited to what he describes as the material, bureaucratic, symbolic, and functional modes of recording and preserving memory, such as collecting, writing, audio and visual recording, and commemorating.

In the second sense, as a set of techniques that produce and inscribe meaning in society, the technology of memory functions as a mode of articulation and construction of identity, experience, events, and history and as a crucial apparatus through which these meanings and understandings are transported, absorbed, and preserved by and among individuals in society. Indeed, both levels of the technology of memory emphasize the fundamentally social character of memory argued consistently by scholars of memory, most prominently by Maurice Halbwachs. As Halbwachs writes in *On Collective Memory*,

The past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present. . . . The collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. . . . One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the

memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories.<sup>13</sup>

Yet there is an additional dimension of the technology of memory that necessarily overlaps both of these two domains. This third element of the technology of memory involves what I have previously only hinted at, situated in the gaps (or what de Lauretis calls “the interstices”) of these representations.<sup>14</sup> It is that which always exceeds representation, located in the space(s) these representations leave out, bracket, or overlook but at the same time imply. Representation can never fully encompass all meaning; for this reason, some residual or “leftover” will always exceed and at the same time contest the claim of any representation to render its referent comprehensively or with complete accuracy or veracity.

It is in the spaces between representations and in excess of them, de Lauretis locates the terms of alternative constructions of gender and the potential challenge they pose to dominant forms of meaning and representation.<sup>15</sup> By the same token, the representation of memory—and, for that matter, history—will and can always only be partial in its presentation of the past. Moreover, the particular representations of memory and history that have come to be institutionalized as narratives of “official history” and national or collective identities not only leave out alternative forms of memory that have yet to be recorded (memory technologies in the first sense) but also, by definition, render them invisible and unrecognizable by virtue of the fact that they are seen as unintelligible in relation to these “official histories.” In this way, recording and preserving the memories (and thereby beginning the process of writing the history) of Afro-Germans is in no way a simple matter of getting the story of “what really happened” and assuming that, as a result, these individuals will enter into the official historical narrative.

As highly textured accounts of race, memory, identity, and history, Afro-German narratives of the Third Reich constitute complicated texts of “experience.” *Experience* here is understood in the most complex of terms, as a process that produces and constructs subjectivities.<sup>16</sup> As such, these narratives are always in need of contextualization and analysis. As Joan Scott reminds us, “Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* in need of interpretation.”<sup>17</sup> In this way,

recording the memories and life histories of Afro-Germans is only a first step in beginning to write their history, a project that requires critical analysis. In the readings that follow, these accounts will not be treated as factual presentations of “experience” (for we can never gain access to the experience of others in any direct form) in the sense of “what *actually* happened.” Rather, they will be approached as representations of history rendered through the lenses of different memory technologies. Thus, to adapt James Young’s formulation, the value of such narrative accounts will be less a question of their “factuality” than of the interpretation of their “actuality.”<sup>18</sup> That is, what is significant is their capacity to document not necessarily the “experiences” they relate but rather the interpretations that underlie these experiences, or what Young terms “the conceptual presuppositions through which the narrator has apprehended experience.”<sup>19</sup> And it is at both levels of interpretation that this study is aimed.

Particularly with regard to the Nazi period and the Holocaust, narrative accounts must be viewed critically as mediated representations of the events they recount and must necessarily be consciously used and interpreted as such. Yet this in no way diminishes or compromises their value as sources. As Young astutely points out,

Rather than coming to the Holocaust narrative for indisputably “factual” testimony, . . . the critical reader might now turn to the manner in which these “facts” have been understood and reconstructed in narrative: as a guide both to the kinds of understanding the victims brought to their experiences and to the kinds of actions they took on behalf of this understanding. . . . Instead of damaging the credibility of these works, this critical approach might affirm the truth of interpretation and understanding that attends every narrative of the Holocaust.<sup>20</sup>

The inherent partiality of representing memory in historical analysis underlines the issue of the more general limits of representation and of the gaps and excesses these limits intrinsically imply. This study of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich addresses this issue not only at the obvious level of researching and unearthing the memories of a group of Germans who only in the past two decades have come to be acknowledged as having had a history, let alone come to be included in the his-

toriography of Germany. In addition, the narratives of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich also pose the question of the limits of representation in the form of both an excess and a gap.

Perhaps the notion of a simultaneous gap/excess of representation appears a contradiction in terms. In his essay "Trauma and Transference," Saul Friedländer comments on this paradox in relation to the difficulties encountered by historians attempting to represent the Holocaust in historical analyses. This paradox has led Friedländer to describe much historical representation of the Holocaust as characterized by either "surplus meaning or blankness with little interpretive or representational advance."<sup>21</sup> Through his emphasis on the necessity of self-awareness for the historian of the Nazi period and the equal importance of the continual reintroduction of individual memory into the representation of this troublesome epoch, Friedländer calls for the integration of critical commentary by the historian as an essential part of a responsible historical representation of the Holocaust. However, Friedländer also acknowledges the limits of this representation with regard to the project of presenting the Holocaust in historical analysis. As he writes, "The Shoah carries an excess and this excess is the 'something [that] remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.'" Here, Friedländer invokes an evocative formulation by Jean-François Lyotard to articulate the significance of this conundrum.

The *silence* that surrounds the phrase "Auschwitz was the extermination camp" is not a state of mind, it is *a sign* that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.<sup>22</sup>

Lyotard describes silence as a sign of something left over, in excess of or escaping representation, something that remains to be articulated, though not necessarily unspecified, unsaid, or unexpressed. Silence here is a gap or lack and at the same time functions as an excess of meaning. Later in his essay, Friedländer offers an even more eloquent and sophisticated way of understanding this subtle relation by drawing on Maurice Blanchot's notion of absent meaning. In fact, the simultaneous existence of gap and excess is in no way a contradiction but rather constitutes a crucial element of the question of the limits or



boundaries of representation. The limits and intrinsic partiality of both memory and history imply that which exceeds them. Indeed, limits and boundaries of any kind in and of themselves function to define spaces within spaces and in this way always suggest something beyond themselves.

I would expand on Friedländer's characterization of these limits and excesses. Such phenomena are not necessarily unique to the Holocaust but are excesses that arise from the concept of race as a category that poses similar problems of limits, gaps, and excessive meaning. Like the category of gender, race is a category both lacking any essential meaning and overdetermined by the meanings attributed to it in society. These attributions (which have historically claimed the status of essential, biological, or natural attributes) lend race the semblance of excessive meaning. In this way, race often comes to overdetermine an individuals' meaning and status in society. By the same token, the representation of the Holocaust, both in narrative accounts and historical analyses, can be read as having a similar plurality of meanings because it is a phenomenon of *race par excellence*.

In their accounts of life in the Third Reich, Afro-Germans confront both the limits of representation and the proliferation of meaning of the category of race in ways that recall those described by Friedländer and Lyotard. Here, the issue of silence is central. Like Friedländer and Lyotard's characterization of silence as a sign of something left out or left over, in excess of representation though not necessarily unsaid, certain silences in the narratives of Afro-Germans can similarly be read paradoxically as "loud" articulations and forms of indirect speech that reveal important levels of submerged meaning.

In my conversations with members of this particular generation of Black German men and women, I was often confronted with the challenge of interpreting not only speech but more significantly silence. In many instances, "speaking" of race was at least initially characterized less by speech than by silence. Moreover, methodologically, in life history narratives, silences often speak as loudly as speech. In relation to the concepts of race and gender, silence is a powerfully polyvocal signifier that often defers and complicates our understanding of the meaning and function of racialization and gendering—and demands critical analysis and interpretation. In my readings of Afro-German narratives of the Third Reich, silence functions as a complex form of

representational excess, crossing the limits of representation on a number of different levels. Focusing on ways of reading different types of silence I have encountered in the testimony of Afro-Germans on the issue of race, I examine silences that are not so much moments of quiet or narrative pause; rather, reading these silences as provocatively filled expressions, I engage them as a narrative phenomenon I call “loud silence.” Instead of seeing silences as a lack or a void, my analysis explores how they “speak,” what they in fact “say,” and how they often “race” rather than “erase” the life histories of my Afro-German narrators.

The richness of oral history texts lies in the interpretation of both speech and silence. Similarly, the challenge of analyzing and interpreting the effects of race and gender in these texts lies in interpreting their simultaneous and mutually constitutive effects. Ironically, in the two narratives of Afro-Germans presented in this book, many of these effects are articulated perhaps most clearly through silences. Silence often functioned as an interstitial space between these individuals’ words and statements, framing their articulations by outlining the effects of race and gender and setting them in stark relief.

Perhaps it is most instructive for us to use the notion of interstices not only as a way of understanding the function of silence in these narratives but also as an equally productive way of conceptualizing the excesses of representation. Instead of focusing on the limits of representation as that which is unrepresentable, it might be more constructive to read these limits as always implying an excess in need of alternative forms of both representation and interpretation. Moreover, the spaces between existing historical representations and interpretations insist on such rearticulation and revision. In the narratives of Afro-Germans presented here (accounts situated in precisely these interstitial spaces), interpreting their memories of the Third Reich may eventually become the stuff of such historical revision, an important site for thinking through the excesses of representation and the potential of individual memory for expanding and enhancing the historiographical project.

#### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

My inquiry into the history of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich begins with an examination of one of Germany’s earliest confrontations with

its Black German population. Part I of the book, “Echoes of Imagined Danger—Specters of Racial Mixture,” traces the trajectory of what I term “echoing specters of racial mixture”—a trope that conceived of racial mixture as a threat to the future of the white race. The two chapters in this section argue that German society’s first public responses to this population were articulated through a discourse of purity and pollution that constituted Black Germans as a danger to the German body politic. The specter of racial mixture associated with the Afro-German population evoked a dire sense of endangerment that can be seen to have “echoed” or recurred repeatedly in German history. The chapters in part I examine three significant historical contexts in which this was the case. Chapter 1, “‘Resonant Echoes’: The Rhineland Campaign and Converging Specters of Racial Mixture,” explores the discourse of racial endangerment enunciated in the German colonies of the Kaiserreich during the debates on the status of racially mixed marriages and their Afro-German progeny. The chapter links this discourse with a second recurrence of the specter of racial mixture in the Weimar Republic. Setting the colonial *Mischehe*, or mixed-marriage debate, in relation to one of Germany’s dominant and most resilient representations of a Black German population, the figure of the “Rhineland Bastard,” this chapter ends by reconstructing the emergence of this figure in the post–World War I propaganda campaign protesting the French use of Black troops in the occupation of the Rhineland. This image would have a lasting impact on German perceptions of Afro-German populations, particularly during the Nazi period.

Chapter 2, “Confronting Racial Danger, Neutralizing Racial Pollution: Afro-Germans and the National Socialist Sterilization Program,” continues to trace the echoes of the discourse of racial endangerment, taking up the enduring influence of the specter of the Rhineland Bastard in the Third Reich. As the “Black Horror” receded from the arena of public debate and into German collective memory, this figure became more diffuse but nonetheless remained present. As a concretely embodied specter of racial mixture, the figure of the Rhineland Bastard was the decisive image motivating the NS initiative to sterilize the Black children of the Rhineland occupation. Looking at the genesis and execution of this program, chapter 2 assesses Nazi attempts to neutralize this domestic racial threat, concluding with an analysis of the implications of the regime’s decision to deal with this “problem”

through a program of “internal containment” (sterilization) rather than through disenfranchisement, exportation (deportation), or productive maximization (work camps)—options that the regime considered and pursued for other groups of *Fremdvölkische* in the Reich.

Whereas part 1 focuses on an evaluation of German responses to Afro-Germans as articulated in primary and secondary source material, part 2 places oral sources at the center of its analysis, using them to construct an account of Afro-German memories and recollections of their lives in this period. These three chapters juxtapose two case studies of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich. Chapter 3 focuses on the testimony of a male member of the Rhineland group, analyzing a complex series of events in his biography: his childhood in the Saarland during National Socialism, his experience as a member of the Hitler Youth, his sterilization at age thirteen, his subsequent induction into the Wehrmacht as a young adult, and his later internment as a German prisoner of war in Russia. Chapter 4 examines the testimony of a female Afro-German, who, although a contemporary of the man who is the focus of chapter 3, has a biography wholly unrelated to the Rhineland occupation. This chapter considers the complicated landscape of her life history: growing up in a communist household in Hamburg, being forced to end her early training as a dancer because of her non-Aryan heritage, and perhaps most significant, the paradoxical experience of being required to work as a cook for a concentration camp where she was not interned but rather was allowed to return home each evening after a grueling twelve-hour shift. Contrasting her life history with that of a male member of the Rhineland group, the chapter allows us to see some of the gendered implications of National Socialism for Black German women and men while evaluating the significance of the figure of the Rhineland Bastard for Afro-Germans who did not belong to this group. The testimony of these individuals raises the issue of the status of Afro-Germans in Nazi racial legislation. Each of these accounts problematizes the tensions within NS racial policy, its implementation, and their effects on the constitution of Black Germans subjects within this regime.

Part 2 argues that the bureaucratic nature of National Socialism allowed many Afro-Germans to exist in a “gray zone” of German society. Because German conceptions of Black Germans in this period were so profoundly shaped by one very specific, though much publi-

cized, segment of this population—the six to eight hundred children of the Rhineland occupation—other individuals who did not belong to this group could to some extent escape Nazi scrutiny. As the testimony of these two individuals shows, it was indeed possible for some Black Germans to become integrated into local community networks in German society. These tightly knit social structures, particularly in smaller communities, often proved resistant to NS racial ideology and in this way sheltered those Afro-Germans who were seen as part of the fabric of these communities. Yet in the Third Reich, social integration guaranteed neither security nor safety for an individual. This book reveals one of the paradoxical effects of this racial state—some Afro-Germans could maintain their inferiority to their regime and enjoy some of its privileges while simultaneously suffering discrimination and persecution. This volume seeks to show how the life histories of Afro-Germans highlight such paradoxes in the racial politics of the National Socialist regime, for the functioning of its power in the NS state was rife with contradictions.

Moreover, as a feminist, the goal of my work on Black Germans in the Third Reich is not only to bring feminist and critical theory methodologies to bear on the study of female members of this group. In fact, women are neither the site nor the object of my analysis. My focus instead is on the larger impact of gender and race within the Nazi regime. Specifically, my interest lies in explaining and understanding the simultaneity and inextricability of the processes of racialization and gendering that were central to the National Socialist state and fundamental to its most catastrophic effects. Rather than seeing racialization and gendering as separate, distinct processes or as overlapping or intersecting vectors of social formation, I view these phenomena as part of a single larger whole. What was perhaps most crucial to this regime's power over both women and men was its ability to produce different forms of legitimate and illegitimate raced and gendered subjects and its success in regulating the lives of these subjects through the differential value placed on human lives. Black German memory narratives of the local are an important site for engaging these effects. What a feminist theoretical analysis brings to bear in my readings of the impact of National Socialism on its Black German subjects is an emphasis on the fact that not only did this system work through race in its administration of individual lives but also, perhaps more reveal-

ingly, that race necessarily worked through gender and gender necessarily worked through race. This mutual constituency—this inextricability in the production and regulation of individual subjects and the contradictions that arise from a system that attempted to reduce all individuals to their essential, biological traits—serves as the focus of my inquiry into the effects of this regime on this small population.

Like the “Black folk” whose “souls” W. E. B. Du Bois described in his celebrated volume *The Souls of Black Folk*, most Black Germans also grow up with a kind of “double consciousness.” Contrary to DuBois’s formulation, for my Afro-German interview partners—members of a generation who came of age during the totalitarian regime of the Third Reich—this tension was not necessarily experienced as one of absolute duality or “twoness.” Rather, it was a contradictory and complexly textured form of identity that forced them to reconcile these two supposedly incompatible aspects of their identity. The absence of a Black community for most Afro-Germans, and for my interview partners in particular, did not diminish the intensity with which they experienced the tensions of Black identity that DuBois describes. This lacuna did, however, render my interview partners qualitatively different from African-Americans, in ways specific to the German context. Until recently, for example, most Afro-Germans did not have the option of choosing between a Black community or identity and a German identity. As the testimony of these individuals shows, they were often forced to occupy a position between a conception of German identity that excluded blackness and a conception of blackness that precluded any identification with Germanness. This in-between position (or positioning) is emblematic of the history and experiences of the generation of Afro-Germans examined here. The strategies developed by the individuals discussed in this volume for living this in-between position were not approaches of resignation or defeat. On the contrary, their responses to the challenges of constructing an identity were most often creative and self-affirming, even in the midst of one of the most repressive of totalitarian regimes. In this way, these individuals’ accounts raise difficult questions about the construction of Black identity in the European context. Specifically, these stories point to the question of the necessary distinctions that must be made between and among different Black populations and communities in Europe and abroad, particularly with regard to the dominance

of African-American and Black British paradigms for understanding Black identity and Black cultural formations.

The final chapter of the book, “Diaspora Space, Ethnographic Space—Writing History between the Lines,” offers a meditation on complicated questions of relation and distinction among and between different Black communities within the African diaspora. This post-script attempts to link the comments of my informants to contemporary discourses of diaspora and examines the ways in which these testimonies challenge and contest key elements of this discourse and the important insights my interview partners provide into the dynamics of transnational Black relations. This chapter explores how these relationships were enacted and negotiated in compelling ways within the ethnographic space of the interview. I argue that both the space of diaspora and the space that constitutes the ethnographic exchange of our interviews are highly constructed sites of projection and desire. At the same time, they are places in which the connections and differences between different communities are played out in ways that reflect broader implications of culture, politics, and power.

Focusing on moments of difference, discrepancy, and translation among Black communities in the diaspora, it uses the comments of my Black German informants to challenge notions of similarity and unity that often anchor dominant modes of theorizing the diaspora and its relations. Placing difference, translation, and interpellation at the center of analysis as constituent elements of the African diaspora, the final chapter tries to unpack the diversity of the diaspora, conceiving of it as a vibrant site of analysis, investment, and aspiration. In this way, the chapter serves as an appropriate coda to the book by enacting the tensions of difference within the diaspora that the larger historical analysis of Black Germans in the Third Reich invites us to consider. Setting these final theoretical reflections in dialogue with this part of this community’s history offers fertile ground for continued debate and inquiry into the dynamics of race, nation, and place in the African diaspora.