RACE *after* HITLER

Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America

HEIDE FEHRENBACH

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For David and Dabi

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Race after Hitler

DEMOCRATIZING THE RACIAL STATE: TOWARD A TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY

> [R]acism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted . . . through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations. . .
>
> —Benedict Anderson

> If Germans endowed themselves with a "racial" identity and then excluded others from it, Americans tended to racialize others and consider themselves simply human—citizens of the "Universal Yankee Nation" and beneficiaries of what was promised to "all men" by the Declaration of Independence.
>
> —George M. Fredrickson[1]

IN 1937, the Nazi regime ordered the sterilization of all black German children fathered by foreign occupation troops of color stationed in Germany after World War I. A few years later, as German troops marched across Europe in World War II, at least one sterilized teenage girl narrowly escaped being pressed into prostitution for the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front. The history of Black Germans during the Third Reich is still being written, and their individual and collective fates remain unclear.[2] What is uncontroverted is that during those terrible years, state power served a racist fantasy intent on engineering a purebred Aryan *Volk*, resulting in the mutilation or murder of millions deemed racially alien to it.

After World War II, Germany again was occupied by foreign troops, and a new cohort of German children of color—the so-called *Mischlinge* or mixed-bloods—was born. Citing rumors that the previous generation of black German children had all wound up "in bordellos or circuses," died of climate-related illness, or "fallen victim" to the Nazi regime's racial policies, one Protestant social worker in early 1950s western Germany mused about what should be done with the current cohort. There were, she wrote, "three incompatible views" on the subject. The first suggested the children should remain in Germany, to be raised by families or in orphanages and socialized with other (white) children so they could learn to cope with "life's struggles" from an early age. A second view

held that children who "showed physical signs of their father's racial inheritance" should be adopted to America. And a third view argued that the children should be segregated into group homes in Germany, where they should be carefully educated with an eye to their future emigration.[3]

Postwar German social policy toward the children ultimately combined a bit of all three views. Nonetheless, the segregationist approach did not dominate. And as early as 1952, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the African American monthly *Ebony* made a point of publicly praising West Germany for its enlightened treatment of the children when compared to racial practices in contemporary American society and schools.[4]

In spite of the positive African American press extended West German officials a few years after the defeat of the National Socialist state, the primary goal of this book is not a congratulatory one. Rather than merely chronicle the apparent successes of the postwar democratization of West Germany, I seek to explore it as a social and cultural *process*. As the attention of the NAACP and *Ebony* suggests, the task of democratizing Germany after 1945 involved not only the transition from fascist to postfascist social ideologies and policies. It also involved the active oversight of Allied authority and troops on the ground. As Cold War hostilities rapidly replaced wartime ones, American influence in the western zones of Germany gradually became predominant. When democracy arrived in western Germany after 1945, the United States was its midwife.

This book focuses on a formative, yet understudied, moment in the racial reconstruction of postfascist Germany: transnational responses to black "occupation children" born to German women and Allied soldiers after World War II. Four years of military occupation between 1945 and 1949 produced some 94,000 occupation children, but public attention quickly focused on a small but visible subset, the so-called *Mischlinge* distinguished from the others by their colored paternity.[5] Although they comprised a small minority of postwar German births (some 3,000 in 1950 and nearly 5,000 by middecade), biracial occupation children took on a disproportionately great symbolic significance on both sides of the Atlantic. Their existence challenged historical definitions of ethnic German-ness and sparked heated debates about the social effects of occupation, as well as the character and consequences of democratization.

In the U.S. zone of Germany, where a substantial number of the children resided, official American response—which mandated the children's legal and social equality—served to highlight not only the lofty principles of American democracy, but also its hypocrisies and failings. Germans were quick to perceive, and to protest, that they were being reeducated by a nation with a Jim Crow army and a host of antimiscegenation laws at home. What is more, the NAACP and the African Ameri-

can press trained a critical eye on how the American government and military would reconcile its inspiring international rhetoric of democratic equality in Germany and elsewhere with the ongoing realities of racial discrimination within its own ranks.

German and American responses to black occupation children after 1945 were therefore conditioned by an ironic yet momentous bit of historical synchronicity. The American occupation and democratization of Germany coincided with a postwar push by African Americans and white liberals at home to democratize American society and its institutions.[6] As a result, the study of transnational responses to the children constitutes a rich field for the investigation of postwar reformulations of race, citizenship, and nationhood on both sides of the Atlantic.

Recent studies by historians of the United States have investigated the links between American foreign policy interests abroad and the emerging Cold War mandate to attend to the issue of civil rights abuses at home in order to avoid providing grist for the Soviet Union's propaganda mill during the superpowers' struggle for international influence in a budding bipolar world.[7] American "race relations" became an issue of particular concern in the aftermath of World War II. American wartime propaganda had, after all, pointed to venomous Nazi racism as an indication of the enemy's evil inhumanity.[8] The Allied liberation of the death camps and Nuremberg Trials publicized the horrendous dimensions of racialized murder in Nazi-dominated Europe. And shortly thereafter, the United Nations issued the 1947 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a global denunciation of racial classification, discrimination, and inequality in favor of the "inalienable rights of all members of the human family."[9] Given the altered geopolitical climate and heightened sensitivity to racial abuses, America's own racial practices represented a potentially serious political liability for the United States, at a time when it was engaged in a historically unprecedented worldwide expansion of its political, military, economic, and cultural presence. As a result, American federal policymakers recognized the need to "control the narrative by which the domestic struggle for reform unfolded in the media." The liberals among them worried aloud that American racism threatened "the national interest" by undermining the United States' message and moral standing abroad.[10]

While informed by such scholarship, my study aims to supplement this bird's-eye view of the interdependence of American foreign policy and domestic civil rights initiatives with a worm's-eye view that explores the social interactions and racial conflicts appearing on the ground in Germany as initially segregated American occupation troops pursued their mission to democratize that defeated country. This focus contributes a fresh perspective on the history of the desegregation of the U.S.

military, which has been almost exclusively examined in relation to *war-time* conditions (during hostilities in World War II, Korea, Vietnam) while the important impetus and experiences of military occupations has been inexplicably ignored.[11] However, a more primary point is to suggest that the American image abroad was not beholden merely to press coverage, whether negative or positive. Rather, in areas of American military presence it was also informed by the *social practices of race* that Germans (and others) observed among U.S. occupation troops or between U.S. soldiers and native populations.[12]

In studying the American occupation, historians have tended to treat democratization as a one-way process, a forcible transformation of West German society. While there is much truth in this, I am interested in looking at the occupation as a period of interaction and mutual transformation—and one with enduring implications for the postwar and post–Cold War eras. This study of the transnational response to black occupation children focuses on this crucial historical moment in order to probe its *constituent* effects on post-1945 social and legal deliberations on—and cultural expressions of—the fit between race, ethnicity, and national belonging. Moreover, it is designed to historically situate and illuminate contemporary debates about citizenship and multiculturalism in (re)unified Germany.

The postwar logic of race that emerged in Germany was beholden to an internationally enforced injunction that Germans differentiate their polity and policies from the Nazi predecessor. It reflected both a self-conscious democratizing impulse and, for the Federal Republic, a new Western orientation. What is more, it promised a fresh start through abrupt disavowal of state-sponsored racism.

A brief anecdote from my own experience in researching this book suggests how heavily white Germans may be invested in the postwar narrative of a radical rupture when it concerns notions of race. Several years ago, in the early stages of this project, I wrote to select archives inquiring whether they had material on social policy toward postwar *Mischlingskinder*. Within a few weeks, I received a curt reply from a western German archivist, admonishing me that the term *"Mischlingskind"* belonged to the racist vocabulary of the Third Reich and had been extinguished along with it. Like the Nazi Regime, he suggested, it did not survive defeat. Surprised by his sermon but undeterred, I visited that and other municipal, state, and federal archives in the Federal Republic of Germany, locating along the way a depressingly broad array of official, scholarly, school, and social welfare reports and memos devoted to *"Mischlingskinder"* and *"Negermischlinge."* This wealth of material only made the archivist's inaccurate historical lesson more unsettling. How could he claim the postwar extinction of racialist classificatory schemes when the

MAP 2

OCCUPIED AREAS OF GERMANY

DENMARK

U.S. ENCLAVE

SCHLESWIG-
HOLSTEIN

HAMBURG

MECKLENBURG

NETHERLANDS

BREMEN

LOWER SAXONY

HANOVER

BRITISH ZONE

BRANDENBURG

BERLIN

SOVIET ZONE

ESSEN

NORTH RHINE
WESTPHALIA

KASSEL

SACHSEN-ANHALT

COLOGNE

BELGIUM

HESSE

COBLENZ

FRANKFURT

RHINELAND-
PALATINATE

FRENCH ZONE

HEIDELBERG

WUERTTEMBERG-
BADEN

FRANCE

WUERTTEM-
BERG

SOUTH
BADEN

ZONE

THURINGIA

DRESDEN

SAXONY

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

NUERNBERG

U.S. ZONE

BAVARIA

MUNICH

UNDER POLISH ADMINISTRATION

AUSTRIA

SWITZERLAND

ITALY

J.S.

SCALE

| 0 | 20 | 40 | 60 | 80 | 100 |

KILOMETERS

A map of occupied Germany, 1945–1949. The American zone of
occupation was comprised of Bavaria, Hesse, Württemberg-Baden, and Bremen.
In 1949, the states of East and West Germany were founded: the Soviet zone became
the German Democratic Republic; the western zones merged into the Federal Repub-
lic of Germany, which achieved full sovereignty in 1955. *Source*: O. J. Frederiksen,
The American Military Occupation of Germany (Historical Division, Headquarters,
U.S. Army, Europe, 1953), 15.

very archival holdings he administered contradicted this assertion? Did he really believe in a "Stunde Null" when it came to racial ideology?

Over the course of my research, I have come to realize just how much historical evidence and social experience had to be ignored to claim the emergence of a race-blind German polity and bureaucracy after 1945. I have also come to understand how generalized this perception is. Indeed, one need only examine the trends of postwar historiography to see how little attention has been devoted to the historical linkages between race and nation after 1945, compared to the intense scrutiny it has received for the pre-1945 period.[13] To some degree, of course, historical inquiry on Germany has been dominated by the need to probe the relationship between National Socialism and the longer German nation. A significant focus of historians has been the particular ways that the German *Volk*, German citizenship, and German identity were reformulated in accordance with specific racial prescriptions and eugenic principles, and how this ultimately led countless thousands of Germans to assist in the sterilization, ghettoization, enslavement, and murder of millions of fellow Germans and Europeans due to their Jewish, Slavic, "Gypsy," or "Negro" descent.

In view of the intense scrutiny that the racist policies of the Third Reich have received from historians over the past thirty years or so, it is striking that more attention has not been devoted to the postwar *devolution* of the Nazi racial state, particularly given the more recent boom in the study of the postwar Germanys. Historical studies of the postwar period in both German states tend not to be conceptualized around the general category of "race." Rather, they explore state policies toward, or the social experiences of, specific groups such as Jews or Displaced Persons (DPs, an often implicitly racialized category), migrant ("guest") workers, asylum seekers, and so on. This tendency, I would argue, is largely unconnected with the current critical practice of dismissing the scientific basis—if not the historical salience—of "race" as a fictional, if intensely ideological, construct. Instead it is a more direct result of the way that historical inquiry has shaped itself in relation to the language of difference contained in its sources. For the Nazi period, this language of difference was expressed in the language of "*Rasse*" (race), "*Blut*" (blood), and "*Erbe*" (biological inheritance). And over the past few decades, historians increasingly have organized their research around the exploration of such categories. In the postwar period, while reference to these concepts was not completely absent, especially in the first decade or so after the war, the public invocation of "*Rasse*" became taboo over the course of the 1950s. This resulted in a gradual shift away from public discussions of "*Rasse*" in favor of "*Anderssein*" (difference) by about the mid-1950s in the Federal Republic. In the Democratic Republic, in contrast, socialist

ideology declared "*Rasse*" an extinct category of social classification and ordered it excised from official rhetoric. Each Germany declared the concept inconsistent with their founding documents (the West German Basic Law) or doctrines (East German socialism).

Nonetheless, "race" was instrumentalized for political purposes by both postwar German states, East and West. As each Germany's officials eagerly sought to establish their ideological distance from the Nazi predecessor, as well as their estranged Cold War twin across the border, they articulated new national cultural identities by drawing on eugenic imagery and even, as historian Uta Poiger has shown, by alternatively denouncing or embracing Germans' cultural consumption of black American music.[14] However, the social politics of race were not something the West German state could easily marshal to public effect to establish moral superiority over its socialist sibling. The new Bonn republic could and did point to its rejection of "race" as a legal classification and basis for discrimination in order to differentiate itself from the Berlin dictatorship. But the dictatorship countered was that of the recent past, not the socialist present. After all, by 1949 both states barred discrimination on the basis of race in their constitutions. Moreover, the socialist German Democratic Republic went further than the West German Federal Republic in expunging racial terminology from its official utterances (even if racial considerations continued to influence East German social policy more silently). The social language of race had distinctly different trajectories in East and West Germany. Where possible, I highlight aspects of those differences, along with their social policy consequences, when examining official responses to perceived miscegenation in the immediate years following military defeat. In this book, however, I have chosen to focus on developments in the Federal Republic, which was home to the majority of black "occupation children" and has persisted as the post–Cold War successor state.

After the defeat of National Socialism, the social landscape and national imaginary of both Germanys remained highly racialized, if in ways distinct from the wartime and interwar years. What Barbara Fields has said of the American reconstruction of the late-nineteenth century also holds for reconstructing Germany of the mid-twentieth: "It is easy enough to demonstrate a substantial continuity in 'racial attitudes.' But doing so does not demonstrate a continuity of racial ideology. . . . [A]lthough there was no appreciable decline or mitigation of *racialist* thinking, there was a decisive shift in its character."[15] And, I would add, in its function.

Racialist thinking did not disappear from postwar Germany, but gradually the use of the term "*Rasse*"—and its association with Jewishness—did, particularly in German official and academic circles. Nonethe-

less, in the cultural and social-scientific articulations of "race" after 1945, the recent German history of antisemitism and the Shoah remained a significant, if sometimes unstated, subtext.

The term "*Mischling*," for example, persisted well into the 1960s in official, scholarly, media, and public usage in West Germany. But its content changed markedly. It was no longer used to refer to the progeny of so-called mixed unions between Jews and non-Jewish Germans. Rather, after 1945, it was used to connote the offspring of white German women and typically foreign men of color. Thus "*Mischlinge*" remained a racialized category of social analysis and social policy after 1945, as before. But its definition of *which races* had mixed, as well as the social significance of such mixing, was fundamentally altered.

As a result of sustained official and scholarly attention to the so-called *Mischlingskinder*, "color" and "blackness" became significant referents for postwar German definitions of race in the first decade after the war. Moreover, for various reasons, this focus on blackness echoed the simplified black-white binary that emerged over the course of the 1920s and 1930s in the United States and came to characterize American definitions of race in the postwar period.[16]

This book seeks to chart the postwar devolution of the Nazi racial state in two ways: first, by tracing the shifting taxonomies and social policies of race and nation across the 1945 "divide" within Germany; and, second, by investigating the impact of international developments and impulses—via military defeat and occupation, Cold War, and the U.S. civil rights movement—on postwar reformulations of racial policy and practice within German society and the U.S. military. One goal, then, is to uncover the process by which German understandings of race came to resemble those informing postwar American social science and liberalism.

MILITARY OCCUPATION, INTERRACIAL SEX,
AND POSTWAR IDEOLOGIES OF RACE

For the majority of Germans who were not among the minority groups persecuted by the Nazi state and its accomplices, 1945 initiated a new era that was marked by the trauma of defeat, the shock of contact with enemy troops, and rapid regime change—first to the occupation governments of the American, British, French, and Soviet zones, and then after 1949, to the Cold War states of East and West Germany. In addition to the political revolution accompanying Allied victory, military defeat served to destroy and delegitimate the particular national-communal ideal of a superior Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft* that was officially advocated and murderously enacted not only in Nazi Germany, but throughout

Nazi-dominated Europe. With the demise of the Nazi Regime, Germans entered a phase in their national history that was characterized by the challenges of material want, political division, national redefinition, and social reconstruction. Postwar Germans faced the task of recasting the social and ideological parameters of their national identity. The first decades after World War II were dominated by debates regarding communal self-definition as contemporaries were compelled by circumstances to grapple with the question of what it would it mean to be German after Hitler and the Holocaust.[17]

This process was complicated and conditioned by the unique international matrix within which it occurred. Clearly, certain political and legal aspects of this national reconstruction and redefinition were compelled by the victorious powers. However, in addition to alien official directives, Germans, in shaping the postwar parameters of their national identity, proved intent on responding to what they perceived as the negative social and moral consequences of military occupation. Nineteen forty-five had been experienced by many Germans as a national humiliation. With the influx of foreign troops, outbreak of rape, and the advent of heterosexual fraternization, it came to be understood as a sexual humiliation as well.

Much of the moral and social dislocation following defeat was attributed to perceived abnormal relations between German men and women, and in particular to the active displacement of native masculinity by foreign troops and the German women who pursued sexual relationships with them. Beginning in the early days of the occupation and persisting for a good decade, public attention in western Germany was drawn irresistibly to relations between native German women and foreign occupiers as *symptomatic* of the postwar problems confronting Germany. What was at issue for many contemporaries was the very integrity of the German nation as it had been defined prior to 1945, along with its significant correlates of German honor, German manhood, and the German family.[18]

Postwar attempts to address issues of national self-definition necessarily involved confronting issues of race since defeated Germany was occupied by the multiethnic armies of hostile nations. What is more, these former racial subordinates now occupied a position of political superiority due to their membership in the Allied forces. Clearly, then, the very nature of the occupation challenged Germans to learn to function within a context that was radically postfascist in terms of social composition and political authority, if not yet in terms of ideological disposition or social policy.

As historians have noted, postwar Germans may have avoided—or even resisted—a thorough reckoning with their murderous past beyond the feeble native denazification efforts of the 1940s, remunerative

agreements signed with Israel in the early 1950s, and sparse number of trials against war criminals that decade and the next that, following Allied tribunals, cast race-based murder in the more generic language of "war crimes" or "crimes against humanity."[19] However, in response to the occupation and the interracial relationships and children that resulted, Germans felt themselves confronted with the need to assert or recast the fit between race and notions of national belonging. In a very real sense, then, military occupation stimulated and shaped the contours of postwar racial ideology in Germany. And this was because the most *explicit* discussions of race after the war occurred in response to interracial sex and reproduction between German women and Allied soldiers of color. Postwar West German notions of race were intimately connected with notions of proper *female* social and sexual comportment—as lovers, as wives, as mothers.

Over the course of military occupation, the specific interracial relations most discussed in public venues became those between white German women and black American troops. Although Germans after 1945 continued to operate within the context of a highly differentiated racial paradigm (developed over the course of the prior eighty or so years, which extended well beyond a simple reliance upon skin color to include a hierarchal racial valuation of various populations within Europe), postwar German officials, scientists, and social workers increasingly focused on distinctions between blackness and whiteness. In part, this may have resulted from Germans' unwillingness to speak openly about Jews in racialized terms, although antisemitic utterances and actions certainly were not uncommon or unrecorded.[20] However, as the Nazi era receded into the past, West German officials (if not the German public at large) gradually learned to adjust their language and self-censor their *public* statements on race, particularly—if not always successfully—as these concerned Jews.

German racism prior to 1945 was not limited to antisemitism, though its history often (and understandably) has been written that way due to the Nazi era's obsessive murderous policies targeting European Jews. Nevertheless, German racism was broader in scope. While antisemitism was an important, even central, ingredient of German racism, it was not the sole one. As Victor Klemperer noted in his poignant reflections in *The Language of the Third Reich*, the hatred of the Jews was "embedded" in the larger category of race.[21] Nazi fantasies of engineering a purebred Aryan *Volk* dictated that desirable Germans be delineated—socially and sexually segregated—from a host of foreign inferior races. Since Germany had been a colonial power prior to its defeat in the First World War, and since the German Rhineland had been occupied by French North African troops in the early 1920s, "racial mixing" between Blacks

and whites was both a social fact *and* perceived as linked to the loss of national status. Thus antiblack racism was a constituent part of a larger German racism that included but was not exhausted by antisemitism. An examination of social and scientific rationale that culminated in sterilization of "mixed-bloods" during the Third Reich (taken up in chapter three) illustrates this point.[22]

<p style="text-align:center">• • •</p>

This book is not a social history of Black Germans, although it aims to contribute to that emerging historical literature.[23] Rather, it examines the shifting racial assumptions, language, and social policy that framed the lives, and often determined the fates, of black German children after 1945. The evolution of racial understanding and policies in West Germany occurred in constant dialogue with Americans in the United States, be they in the Washington offices of the NAACP or State Department, the New York offices of the National Council for Christians and Jews or the International Social Service, or the Chicago offices of *Ebony* and the *Chicago Defender*. The children were variously understood as Germans or Americans, "occupation children" or "illegitimate children," "mixed-bloods" or "half-Negro." And the precise ways they were categorized helped to determine the social prognosis or social policy initiatives suggested for their future. What is more, since the children came to be perceived—by Germans and Americans alike—as the offspring of white German women and American (rather than other Allied) soldiers of color, they were also thought to embody and potentially upset the specific *national* racial ideologies of white domination those countries historically embraced. Therefore discussions regarding the children could be cast in the language of antiblack racism or enlightened postwar liberalism; could play upon anti-American or anti-Nazi (rather than anti-German) sentiment; and could serve or subvert the agenda of racial equality and civil rights.

In addition to the history of racial integration, this project speaks to the history of cultural transfers—especially those involving the sociology of racial knowledge and the social practices of race. The chapters are intended, moreover, to elucidate the range of official, public, and scholarly response that accompanied interracial heterosexual socialization, sexual relations, and reproduction between occupying troops and German women in western Germany and the United States. Chapter 1, "Contact Zones," focuses on the U.S. zone of occupied Germany to study the interaction of two distinct national-historical idioms of race. It considers how American race relations in the U.S. military (where practices of racial segregation persisted) and social contact between American occupiers and