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The Black Experience in Early to Mid-20th-Century

Great Britain, France, and Germany:

The Positioning of a Community as the “Other”

By

Tawreak Gamble-Eddington

\* \* \* \* \*

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of History

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2021

## ABSTRACT

GAMBLE-EDDINGTON, TAWREAK The Black Experience in Early to Mid-20th-Century Great Britain, France, and Germany: The Positioning of a Community as the “Other.” Department of History, June 2021.

ADVISOR: Mark Walker

This essay looks at the experience of Blacks during the early to mid-20th-century in Germany, Great Britain, and France. Drawing on the autobiographies of Black Germans and African-Americans living in France—as well as various secondary sources, government documents, newspaper articles, and accounts from African-American reporters visiting Europe—Blacks can be firmly placed within the context of early to mid-20th-century Europe and more generally European history. Due to the accessibility of primary accounts by mixed-race Europeans in the 20th century, special attention is paid to the experiences of mixed-race members of the Black community and their perception in each country.

Coinciding with the discussion of individual members of the Black community’s experiences, this essay will examine the ways in which mainstream white society in France, Germany, and Great Britain perceived race in the early to mid-20th-century by exploring the roots of the Eugenics movement in each case. Additionally, the experiences of members of the Black community in each respective country will be illuminated by framing them in the context of large-scale controversies related to race during the period, the possible presence of a colonial legacy in each country, and popular culture in the mid-20th-century. Lastly, this paper gives special attention to the general composition of the Black communities in each country and the role of the entertainment industry in not only providing opportunities to members of the Black communities but aiding in their

dehumanization and exoticization. The combination of state-sponsored discrimination, the eroticization of the Black body, mainstream societal stigmas, and colonial legacies were essential in the development of the Black experience as the “other” during the early to mid-20th-century in Great Britain, France, and Germany.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
A discussion of the intended outcomes for this research project, a literature review of relevant works and rationale for the selection of France and Germany as case studies.	
Chapter 1- Great Britain.....	12
Examination of the significance of Black culture, as seen through music and art, on Britain and a comparison with France. How France and Britain diverge with acceptance or rejection of Black culture. Analysis of British perception of Blacks in Britain, and more generally Europe, as seen through the discussions of Eugenics, immigration policy and newspapers. Comparison of British racial attitude with that of Germany's.	
Chapter 2- Germany.....	33
Discussion about the growing corpus of scholarship that explores the intersections of state-sponsored persecution, racial identity, eugenics and memory during the Interwar period in Germany. In particular, the contextualization of the black experience in Germany by examining <i>Black German</i> by Theodor Michael and <i>Destined to Witness</i> by Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi.	
Chapter 3- France .....	68
Exploration of the Black experience in Interwar France by examining the Negrophillia movement, prominence of the black population in France and the lived-experiences of African-Americans who lived or worked in Paris. In particular, an analysis of Josephine Baker's autobiography <i>Josephine</i> . Compare and contrast analysis of the influences of Black culture on France and Britain.	
Conclusion: .....	106
Closing analysis about the Black Experience in Europe during the Interwar Period, as seen through the lived-experiences of those spoken about (Josephine Baker, Theodor Michael and Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi) and the contextualization provided by the various other primary or secondary sources utilized throughout the essay. Significance/relevance of this research project to modern rise of ethno-nationalism and questions for continued research.	

## INTRODUCTION

Were there Black communities in the mid-20th-century? If so, what did it mean to be Black in Europe during the mid-20th-century and what were their lives like? Although they tended not to hold prominent positions in European society, many Blacks not only lived in Europe during the early 20th century but played a central role in European culture/politics. From the prominence of African-American singers like Josephine Baker and the emergence of the negrophilia movement in France, to the controversy over Black soldiers in occupied Germany following World War I and the mass persecution of Germans with black heritage, Blacks have played and continue to play prominent roles in the making of European history.<sup>1</sup> Being relegated to the background in European history, the Black experience in Europe during the Interwar Period and early stages of World War II has not been widely studied or documented in the English-speaking world. Like a sapling deprived of the sunlight it needed, many records about the Black experience and black history in early to mid-20th century Europe have eroded away and decomposed with the passing of time. Even in its own time, however, the Black community could not adequately thrive, and it found itself withering under the poor conditions of white mainstream society. This paper will argue that the combination of racism embedded in state-sponsored persecution and the eroticization of Black peoples caused by the popularity of African-American arts played central roles in the development of the Black

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Campbell, "Black Horror on the Rhine": Idealism, Pacifism, and Racism in Feminism and the Left in the Aftermath of the First World War," *Histoire Sociale*, Vol 47, No. 94 (2014): 471-493. doi:10.1353/his.2014.0034.

experience during early to mid-20th-century in France, Great Britain, and Germany because it repositioned the Black population in Europe as the “other.”

During the Interwar period, a handful of African-American immigrants moved to Western Europe in hopes of finding opportunity, escaping racism, and creating a new life for themselves. For many African-Americans, as well as others of African descent in colonial holdings, Europe seemed like a “color-blind” utopia. In the popular black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, African-American journalist Robert S. Abbott described his vision of France and his experiences visiting Europe in great detail. For Abbott, France was the “hope of all of humanity” and “her beauty was equaled only by her fairness.”<sup>2</sup> After visiting France just once, Abbott claimed that he had had his first real taste of freedom and was now ready to fight for racial freedom back at home in the United States. All of Abbott’s descriptions of France and the French people were positively glowing; the pure infatuation with and admiration of France make Abbott’s article seem like some form of propaganda or fantasy writing. On the topic of Europe more generally, Abbott told his readers that “those who go to Europe will have their ideas about color so upset that they will never be the same.”<sup>3</sup> According to Abbott, based on his experiences in France, the continent of Europe was a place that black people could not only feel at home but thrive in “color-blind societies” that looked beyond race.

While Abbott had a “color-blind” experience in Europe, the experience in Europe for many other members of the black community was not quite as positive. In incidents such as the “Black Shame” or any of the numerous controversies surrounding mixed-race

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<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Abbott, “My Trip Abroad: Editor Abbott Tells Vivid Story of Paris, the Wonder City.” *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition, 2001): <https://www.proquest.com/docview/492228277?accountid=14637>.

<sup>3</sup> Abbott, N.p.

children, members of the black community (in particular black men) were placed into a classic plot as the “villains” seeking to destroy “western civilization.”<sup>4</sup> There is a qualitative difference between a Black person simply going to and living in Europe on one hand, and having children with the natives on the other; in either case, however, members of the Black community were seen as “defilers,” of an conceived notion of race and civilization in the countries they were dwelling or they were simply seen as the “other.” In some cases, members of the Black communities in different countries could find a welcome home, similar in some regards to the “Europe” outlined by Abbott, if they were able to positively capture white mainstream European attention. In many cases, nevertheless, the Black experience in Europe during the period seems to be one filled with racism, prejudicial practices, and the systematic alienation of Black people by the White mainstream populace of Europe.

Many primary sources from African-Americans who worked, lived, or visited Europe in the early to mid-20th-century paint a very different picture of Europe’s race relations; Europe is portrayed as a utopian society free of racism.<sup>5</sup> Some of the cases studied, such as Josephine Baker, even manage to be “fully” embraced by the country they were dwelling in and living out extremely successful careers. Which, therefore, of the two aforementioned “Europes” is an accurate depiction of the Black experience during the early to mid-20th-century in Europe? Are both images of Europe correct? Or is there an image of early to mid-20th-century Europe yet to be seen? The Black experience in Europe is often not one that can be seen as merely black and white. Instead, it is a complex story of struggle, persecution, the yearning for acceptance, and a constant

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell, 471-493.

<sup>5</sup> Abbott, N.p.



requirement to satisfy the needs of white mainstream society in Europe. There exist conflicting stories of what Europe was because, at least to some extreme, one's experiences were driven by their background, place in society, and ability to satisfy the desire of white mainstream European society.

While reflecting on the ever-changing relationships between the perception of Blacks during the early to mid-20th-century in white mainstream European society and reality/lived experiences, this essay looks at widespread controversies in Western Europe around Black peoples and country-specific controversies. Towards those ends, this essay will focus on France, Great Britain, and Germany during the early to mid-20th-century—acknowledging that many other European countries also had Black populations and a unique history involving said populations—primarily because they both have the largest number of primary and secondary sources related to the Black experience in Europe during the early to mid-20th-century. To begin, an analysis of eugenics and controversies surrounding mixed-race children in Great Britain will provide breadth to white mainstream European perception of race during the period; Great Britain, similar to other countries being studied, lacks a large record of the black community within the nation during the period so a large emphasis will be placed on what limited sources are available. Great Britain will provide an essential framework for understanding the changing perceptions of European society, through the eyes of Eugenics.

For Germany and France, a larger number of sources are available to extrapolate on the experiences of the Black community within each respective country during the period. In the case of, Germany has a growing corpus of scholarship exploring the intersections of state-sponsored persecution, racial identity, eugenics, and memory during

the early to mid-20th-century.<sup>6</sup> In France, there is not as much literature on state-sponsored persecution or even racial identity during the period. However, for France in particular, there has been a great focus on the eroticization of Black people and African-American arts during the early to mid-20th-century that will help to frame my analysis of the Black experience during the early to mid-20th-century.<sup>7</sup> For all of the cases, there is a substantial number of primary sources that comparatively look at race relations between them (France, Great Britain, and Germany) and the United States that were created in the early to mid-20th-century.<sup>8</sup>

When discussing the case of Great Britain, the majority of the evidence used will be primary sources from British eugenicists, political/military officials, and newspapers. Early 20th century writings, such as Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* and Franvis Galton's "Hereditary Talent and Character," will frame the unique hierarchical and paternalistic perspective developed in Great Britain that influenced their outlook on race.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, documents from government officials, newspaper articles, and several secondary sources will furnish the remaining segments of the Great Britain chapter, providing insights into the "brown baby phenomenon" and the controversy around mixed-race children during the late Interwar period. By highlighting some of the racially driven perceptions in Great Britain during the period, this essay

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Weindling, *Blood and Homeland Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940*, (New York: Central European University Press, 2007): <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/union/reader.action?docID=3137215&query=>.

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Gillett, "Jazz and the Evolution of Black American Cosmopolitanism in Interwar Paris." *Journal of world history*, 21, no. 3 (2010): 471–495. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40985026.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A.0b74958fcd35df9541b6a22e61300626>.

<sup>8</sup> Abbott, N.p.

<sup>9</sup> Franvis Galton. "Hereditary Talent and Character." *Macmillan's Magazine* 12, no. 70 (August 1, 1865): 318–327.

hopes to lay a solid foundation for a discussion about eugenics and to compensate for a general dearth of primary sources/research regarding the black community in Great Britain in the early to mid-20th-century.<sup>10</sup>

The second portion will be dedicated to the experiences of members of the Black community in early to mid-20th-century Germany. In the aftermath of World War II and the carnage left behind by racially based theories of eugenics, historians have begun to shine a new light on the study of minority communities and their experiences, as racial or ethnic minorities, in an increasingly prejudicial Europe. In particular, great scholarly focus and research has been placed on things such as notions of German identity, the history of European Jewry, Jewish persecution leading up to World War II and the mass murder of various populations during the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup> From Micheal Arthur's studying of the role of Christianity in Jewish prosecution in *Holy Hatred Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* to Timothy Snyder's comparative study of Jewish persecution in *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler* and many other scholarly pieces, the events of the Holocaust have been tirelessly analyzed from a variety of perspectives since the conclusion of World War II.<sup>12</sup> Luckily, since the late 1980's a greater focus has been placed on the persecution of other minority communities in Europe, not only during World War II, but also over the course of the early to mid-20th-century. German

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<sup>10</sup> Lucy Bland. "Interracial Relationships and the 'Brown Baby Question': Black GIs, White British Women, and Their Mixed-Race Offspring in World War II." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 424–453.

<sup>11</sup> Windling, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Besides the historical analysis of Jewish persecution, great attention has also been given to how individuals remember the Holocaust and persecution. Some popular works include: *In the Hell of Auschwitz* by Judith Newman, *The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived* by Edith H. Beer, *The Holocaust Facing the Lion: Memoirs of a Young Girl in Nazi Europe* by Simone Arnold Liebster and *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank.

scholarship, in particular, led this endeavor by examining the lives of Blacks dwelling in the Germanic region and documenting state-sponsored persecution.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars in the United States and the United Kingdom have begun to study Black persecution in Europe during World War II and the early to mid-20th-century. Some leading works include Tina Campt's *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich*, Clarence Lusane's *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi-Era* and Robbie Aitken's *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community*. The growing literature on state-sponsored persecution in Germany during the Interwar and World War II period, including the aforementioned sources and many other pieces of scholarly work, will help to contextualize my analysis of the Black Experience in Germany and provide insights into the shifting perception of Blacks during the period. These secondary sources will help answer questions such as: In what ways did the German state persecute Blacks during the early to mid-20th-century? Did the treatment of Blacks worsen in the latter part of the early to mid-20th century as the Nazis rose to power? What was the fate of mixed-race German children?

Newspaper articles from the 1920s till the 1950s, including British newspapers such as *The Daily Herald* and African-American newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, German medical reports from the sterilization of mixed-race children, popular portrayals

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<sup>13</sup> For the growing German literature on Black persecution look at Katharina Oguntoto's *Eine AfroDeutsche Geschichte: Zur Lebenssituation von Afrikanern in Deutschland von bis* and Tina Campt's *Die unheimliche Maschine: Rasse und Repräsentation im Weimarer Kino*. However, many of the leading works on the topic have yet to be translated to English and their access, as such, is fairly limited for my research.

of Black people, documents/decrees from the German government and German political officials' comments will furnish the fundamental evidence for my analysis of Germany in this essay because they provide key insights into mainstream German notions of Black inferiority and popular racial stereotypes. In addition to the growing literature on Black persecution in Europe, an increasing number of autobiographies and first-hand accounts by Black Europeans about their experiences have either been translated to English or created since the turn of the century. Of the growing number of works available by Black Europeans, *Black German* by Theodor Michael, and *Destined to Witness* by Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi are, arguably, two of the most preeminent autobiographies about the Black experience and persecution in Europe during the Interwar and World War II period.

Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi was a mixed-race man born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1926 to a white German mother and a Black Liberian father. As the grandson of the consul general of Liberia in Germany, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi provides a unique perspective into what it meant to grow up as a Black man in Germany during the Interwar and World War II period.<sup>14</sup> Similar to Massaquoi, Theodor Michael was a mixed-race man born in Berlin, Germany in 1925 to a white German mother and a Black Cameroonian father. In his autobiography, Theodor Michael discusses his life growing up in Germany, racial discrimination and his time as a prisoner in a Nazi forced labor camp during World War II.<sup>15</sup> The autobiographies of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Theodor Michael will be incorporated into this essay to gain the perspective of Black Germans, using secondary

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<sup>14</sup> Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi, *Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany*, 1st ed. (New York: W. Morrow, 1999),

[https://union.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UCNY\\_INST/3f12dk/WorldCat41464909](https://union.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UCNY_INST/3f12dk/WorldCat41464909).

<sup>15</sup> Theodor Michael and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black German: An Afro-German Life in the Twentieth Century*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

sources to place the life of a few Black Germans into a larger narrative of the Black experience in Germany during the period.

Coinciding with my analysis of the Black experience in Germany, this essay will also examine the lives of Black people in France during the Interwar and World War II period. Unlike Germany, there is no significant literature available about the native Black experience in France during the Interwar or World War II periods. Uniquely, however, France has abundant scholarship on the influence of African-American music and culture in France, in particular in Paris, during the early to mid-20th-century. From Nicholas Hewitt's *Black Montmartre: American Jazz and Music Hall in Paris in the interwar years* to Bennetta Jules-Rosette's *Josephine Baker and utopian visions of Black Paris*, the literature on the influence of African-American music, dance, and culture during the early to mid-20th-century are numerous in number.<sup>16</sup> As such, for this essay, the experiences of African-American artists and the prominence of African-American influences will serve as the basis for my analysis of the Black experience in France.

Working in tandem with the scholarly sources mentioned, newspaper articles from the 1920's—including the French newspaper *L'Aurore* and the popular African-American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*—and popular black portrayal in literature/media will help to frame the Black experience in France during the Interwar and World War II period. Moreover, this essay will make use of autobiographies by, and bibliographic pieces on, African-American women who lived in France during the early

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<sup>16</sup> For additional literature on the influences of African-American music, dance, and culture on French society during the Interwar period look at *Jazz and the Evolution of Black American Cosmopolitanism in Interwar Paris* by Rachel Gillett and *Making Jazz French: music and modern life in interwar Paris* by Jeffrey Jackson amongst others.

to mid-20th-century as performers to gain the perspective of Blacks who were living in France during the time.

The main source that will be used is Josephine Baker's autobiography, *Josephine*. Josephine Baker was an African-American entertainer who lived in France and, during World War II, a French Resistance agent. Baker's autobiographies provide insights into her experience being Black in Europe, her career as one of the most famous Black people in Europe, and her fight against Nazism during France's occupation.<sup>17</sup> The autobiography of Josephine Baker will help to frame the Black experience in France as one littered with changing public perceptions, black commodification, and the eroticization of the Black female body. Moreover, the experiences outlined in the two aforementioned autobiographies will complement secondary sources to create a holistic image of what being Black in France meant during the period.

Potential outcomes for this essay will include increased awareness about the historical significance of Blacks in Europe during the early to mid-20th-century, a concise analysis of the Black experience in France, Great Britain, and Germany during the World War II period, and a meaningful contribution to the growing literature on Blacks in European history. This essay hopes to bring new attention to the experience of Black people in Europe during the Interwar and World War II period, focusing particularly on France, Great Britain, and Germany but also investigates the more general experience of Blacks in Europe during the period. As such, this essay draws substantially on the African-American experience in France, Great Britain, and Germany during the early to mid-20th-century as primary sources to compensate for the limited Black French

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<sup>17</sup> Josephine Baker, and Jo Bouillon, *Josephine* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1995), [https://union.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UCNY\\_INST/3f12dk/WorldCat32012006](https://union.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01UCNY_INST/3f12dk/WorldCat32012006).

sources available. Scarce sources, nevertheless, is not synonymous with a lack of importance. The black population in Europe has, and continues to be, active members of the countries they are a part of but have long been overlooked. Even in the modern day, the perception is often that the black communities in Europe are “new phenomena” that came about in the latter half of the 20th century, following World War II, or even as recently as the 21st century.<sup>18</sup> As a result, members of the black community are often seen as “new arrivals” and continually positioned as “the other” or merely the most recent addition to modern multicultural nations. In fact, however, the black presence in Europe can be traced back at least to the fledgling communities of the 19th and 20th century—this is discussed in later portions of this essay—and their numbers have grown overtime.<sup>19</sup> This research will aid in the continuing efforts to bring recognition to the “invisible” black members of European history and, hopefully, inform present perceptions on the black presence in Europe.

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<sup>18</sup> *Being Black in Nazi Germany*. Sheffield Hallam University, 2019.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLCUmio7in4&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLCUmio7in4&feature=emb_title).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



## CHAPTER 1: GREAT BRITAIN 1864-1945

Throughout the period of empire in Great Britain members of minority ethnic groups, primarily from different British colonies, were present in the British Isles; however, until the latter half of the 20th century their population was very small and was, often, not extensively studied.<sup>20</sup> As a result, there is relatively little information in terms of population estimates for the black community in Great Britain until after World War II, when their numbers were substantially increased following the mass immigration of colonial subjects to the British isles after the passing of the 1948 British Nationality Act.<sup>21</sup> The population of minorities in Great Britain, in total from the Commonwealth and Pakistan, sat at around 256,000 people in 1951; since the British population was approximately 48.91 million in 1951, the sum of minorities in the country amounted to less than 1% of the total population (0.52% to be exact).<sup>22</sup> It is safe to say, based on the total number of minorities living in Great Britain circa 1951, that the black community was fledgling at best and not a sizable or influential part of the general population. Similarly, Great Britain during this period was not the multicultural and diverse country of the modern-day United Kingdom but rather a very white and homogenous country; an estimated 7,000-10,000 non-white peoples lived in Great Britain before the start of World War II, according to the *Mixed Museum*, and they were mostly concentrated in seaports.<sup>23</sup> With a lack of statistical data to establish a rough estimate of the black community in

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<sup>20</sup> David Owen. "Ethnic Minorities in Great Britain: Patterns of population change, 1981-91." University of Warwick, Center for Research in Ethnic Relations 10, (December 1995): 1-25.

<sup>21</sup> Owen, 1-3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Brown Babies Archive." *The Mixed Museum*. United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Council. <https://mixedmuseum.org.uk/brown-babies/>.

great Britain in the early to mid-20th-century and the scarce availability of primary sources from members of the Black community dwelling in the country during the time period, this chapter focuses on the general racial mentality of Great Britain and the topic of eugenics. Eugenics provides essential insights into understanding the racially based mindset that affected British societies' view of other races.

Since the late 19th century, Great Britain found itself trapped between major wars, economic down turns, a rapidly growing population and independence sentiments growing in their various colonies. In the wake of relative social disarray and growing tensions in Europe, the idea of eugenics and later racial eugenics, took hold in British society as a way to improve the British population by limiting or eliminating variants determined to be undesirable; first to systematically articulate the view of eugenics, while using “scientific” theories of evolution and inherited traits as support, was Sir Francis Galton.<sup>24</sup> British eugenics built on a long colonial tradition of using “hierarchical classification” to divide humankind into distinctive groups and rank them along some arbitrary basis. In order to legitimize their rule over their colonial holdings, and conquered peoples in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, the British relied on the ideology that societies could be measured with “scientific precision” and classified on a hierarchy, based on cultural as well as religious, racial, and historical factors.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, British colonial policies held that the hierarchy of races, with the British atop it, was not permeable and all relations should be conducted horizontally and not vertically. This basic premise of British colonial ideology was built upon, expanded, and codified throughout the 19th century as “science” became a tool of classifying humans and

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<sup>24</sup> Galton, 318–327.

<sup>25</sup> Dan Stone. “Race in British Eugenics.” *European History Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2016): 397–425.

asserting the supremacy of not only white British people but the upper echelons of British society through eugenics.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, the European eugenics movement tends to be classified along two separate classifications of eugenics, which tend to overlap at times, British eugenics and German eugenics; there was also a classification of American eugenics which “tended” to fall between the two as it looked at race, health and class.<sup>27</sup> British eugenics, as will be discussed in this chapter, is often held to be an ideology centered around a middle classed movement focused primarily on the issue of class and improving the British population by targeting specific segments of British society, namely the poor or “undesirable.”<sup>28</sup> German eugenics, in contrast, is described as an ideology focused on racial theories of purity or Aryan superiority.<sup>29</sup> In the traditional conceptualization of British eugenics, therefore, the British middle class is described as having felt trapped between a still dominant old elite and an emerging working class, with higher fertility and reproduction rates, clamoring for rights. Although class concerns were a major factor in British eugenics, race has played a central role behind the ideas of British eugenicists and dated back to Sir. Francis Galton’s original conceptualization of the field.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the centrality of race in British eugenics through the way immigrants and minorities were discussed, and in the assumptions applied to notions of racial hierarchy carried over from British colonial theories of race.<sup>31</sup> The fundamentals of British eugenics in the late 19th century were, and are, essentially a combination of racial and class beliefs that helped

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<sup>26</sup> Stone, 397-399.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Stone, 398.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Stone, 407-410.

perpetuate the dominance of the British upper class members over those deemed inferior to themselves.

Sir. Francis Galton was an English explorer and anthropologist best known for his research in eugenics and human intelligence; he was the first person to study the effects of human selective mating.<sup>32</sup> In his famous 1865 work “Hereditary Talent and Character,” Galton outlines his rationalization for the practice of eugenics and support for notions of intelligence, talent, and character being traits that are inheritable.<sup>33</sup> In particular, Galton argues that the notion of character, intellect and character should—similar to physical traits like hair color and eye color—follow the same rules of genetic inheritance or be able to be intentionally inherited through breeding.<sup>34</sup> In essence, Galton was arguing for British society to envision mental capabilities and “predispositions” as characteristics given to someone by their parents. With this in mind, Galton sought to explore how British “geniuses” or men of “great intellect” developed their “masculine traits” and wished to pass on said traits to offspring in order to breed superior children.<sup>35</sup>

Galton wrote:

If a twentieth part of the cost and pains were spent in measures for the improvement of the human race that is spent on the improvement of the breed of horses or cattle, what a galaxy of genius we might create! We might introduce prophets and high priests of civilizations into the world, as surely as we can propagate idiots by mating creatines.<sup>36</sup>

Galton’s work set the groundwork for codifying existing ideas in Great Britain surrounding class, race, and culture. By “inheriting” your intelligence, rather than

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<sup>32</sup> Galton, 318.

<sup>33</sup> Galton, 318–320.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

developing it yourself, the British could firmly place those groups they deemed on lower rings of the racial hierarchy, such as the fledgling black community in Great Britain and the people of color in British colonies across the globe, as scientifically “predisposed” to “primitivity” or to lower levels of intelligence than the British. Galton's work, as well, had strong consequences for ideas of class in Britain.

Besides the basic premise, of inherited intellect or mental characteristics, Galton added a component of class to his discussion of eugenics. According to Galton, the wealthy in British society and those of greater stature are better positioned to be successful in life and contribute to society.<sup>37</sup> To justify his conclusion, Galton concludes that only 8 out of every 100 children inherit the characteristic of being successful from their parents in the current system of mating. Of those who do inherit the quality of being successful, Galton claims that the majority of them are those who are wealthy.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Galton argued that one's general predisposition, one of being a “good” contributor to British society, could be determined by your social strata since it was inherited from one's parents; the lower one's place in society the more likely, Galton argued, one would be a burden on society and lack any of the valuable characteristics desired or needed in British society.<sup>39</sup> Galton's analysis, therefore, merely served as a means to help reinforce existing social hierarchies in Great Britain by introducing a mathematical and scientific aspect to support why the upper echelons of British society had power, wealth, and influence while the poor lacked it. Galton even went as far as asserting that weak and sickly aristocratic children are more likely to get ahead than

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<sup>37</sup> Galton, 323-326.

<sup>38</sup> Galton, 322.

<sup>39</sup> Galton, 323-326.

healthy, robust lower-class children merely because of their “genetics.”<sup>40</sup>

Having unconsciously reaffirmed the self-evident injustices of British society, Galton went on to apply his ideas surrounding inheriting intellect of mental capabilities and applying them directly to British notions of race. What was the basic premise Galton put forward? Similar to how lower classes are predisposed to certain mental capabilities and intellectual limitations, with the rare exception, lower races are similarly limited in their capabilities.<sup>41</sup> While asserting that each race has certain “inalienable” or “inescapable” characteristics, traits, and intellect that they pass on to their offspring, Galton wrote:

Take, for instance, the typical West African Negro. He is more unlike the Red man [Native Americans] in his mind than in his body. Their characters are almost opposite, one to the other. The Red man has great patience, great reticence, great dignity, and no passion; the Negro has strong impulsive passions, and neither patience, reticence, nor dignity. He is warm-hearted, loving towards his master's children, and idolized by the children in return. He is eminently gregarious, for he is always jabbering, quarrelling, tom-tom-ing, or dancing. He is remarkably domestic, and he is endowed with such constitutional vigor, and is so prolific, that his race is irrepressible.<sup>42</sup>

For Galton, all children are equal at the time of their birth but as the years go by, the “higher races” continue to progress, and the lower ones gradually stop their mental development. As a result, coming full circle with British colonial notions of paternalism, the “lower races” “naturally” remain children in mind and with limited mental ability to grow but with the passions or lusts of adults.<sup>43</sup> With his justification of the British racial hierarchy in hand, the question became: how does one “improve” the British population.

For Galton the solution to the predicament of inherited mental characteristics and

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<sup>40</sup> Galton, 323-326.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Galton, 325-327.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

capabilities was the intentional separation of the different groups, based on race, intelligence and class, in order to promote “positive” traits in British society.<sup>44</sup> Galton separated society into two castes, A the inferior caste (made of social deviants and the poor) and B the superior caste (made of the well-educated, genius and other valuable contributors to society), and carefully managed the population so as to expand the numbers in caste A. However, Galton warns that the inferior caste A multiples quickly and, as such, could end up eliminating caste B in a few generations if “precautions” were not taken to stymie their growth.<sup>45</sup> Galton’s 1865 writings laid the groundwork for the beginning of the British eugenics movement and would come to serve as the basis for British elites’ continued “civilizing mission” and a “scientific” rationalization for their long perceived dominance over not only the poor or “undesirables” in British society but also other races who they deemed inferior to them.<sup>46</sup> Galton’s racial undertones, however, were to a large extent an indirect byproduct of his work and his time, rather than a concerted focus of his studies; Galton was first, and foremost, focused on the “issue” of class in British eugenics.

After Galton articulated his idea of eugenics and inherited mental capabilities/ characteristics on paper in the late 19th century, the idea of eugenics gained traction in Great Britain quickly. Building off of the “scientifically-based” eugenics framework outlined by Galton, English scientist Charles Darwin began to articulate his own idea of “selecting” partners. In his 1871 paper *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Darwin expresses his dismay that humans take “so little care” in choosing who they

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<sup>44</sup> Galton, 323-326.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

will marry and reproduce with, beyond “surface level desires” such as appearances or charm.<sup>47</sup> Darwin wrote: “Man scans with scrupulous care the character and pedigree of his horses, cattle, and dogs before he matches them; but when he comes to his own marriage he rarely, or never, takes any such care.”<sup>48</sup> With the lack of concerted effort on behalf of humans to improve the human race, by selecting a “good” mate, Darwin asserts that both sexes should refrain from marriage if they are inferior in body or mind in any regard.<sup>49</sup>

Who Darwin considered inferior is absent from his work, leaving readers to wonder who are the “inferior people” that Darwin seeks to isolate? Upon reading his complete work, one may infer that Darwin is referring in general to all “perceived” inferiority in British society; in particular, however, Darwin was likely referring to the notion of race or physical differences deemed “inferior,” given how he later references the Fuegians (native peoples of South America) as barbarous and inferior beings.<sup>50</sup> Darwin and Galton’s eugenic conceptualizations of race and genetic inheritance are not, per se, new phenomena but rather an extension of the widespread ideas about a racial hierarchy. The notion of finding a “good” mate in order to not create “inferior” offspring, for example, when applied to interracial relations is one that has existed in Great Britain since the establishment of the first colonies in the 17th century; one should “avoid” mating with “inferior” races so as to prevent “inferior” offspring from being born. Darwin, as well as many other British eugenicists, saw a rapidly growing British

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. New York: Appleton and company, 1930.

<sup>48</sup> Darwin, 397.

<sup>49</sup> Darwin, 399.

<sup>50</sup> Darwin, 201.



population that was “deteriorating” in its quality while domesticated animal breeds were flourishing from diligent genetic oversight. The solution to their problem, in their eyes, was simple; begin the careful selection of offspring to weed out “undesirables” and artificially restore the beneficial effects natural selection lost in modern society.<sup>51</sup> Darwin and Galton merely added “scientific” and theoretical backing to existing notions of race and class held by people within British society, laying the groundwork for not only an increasing focus on race in British eugenics but the application of eugenics to a prominent imperial mindset based on British racial hierarchies.

Throughout the early 1900s, British eugenics increasingly became focused on the notion of race and British “racial” purity. In 1903, English mathematician and biostatistician Karl Pearson published an article titled *The Scope and Importance to the State of the Science of National Eugenics*, where he discussed the growing “degeneracy” present in British society as a result of the propagation of “inferior races” and, more generally, the existence of inferior peoples in said society.<sup>52</sup> Pearson applies the notion of inherited mental characteristics to that of criminality, asserting that “the criminal tendency descends in stocks” and is particularly prone to appear in lower classes or “inferior races.”<sup>53</sup> For Pearson, “the criminal” is unable to be reformed, for they are genetically criminal in nature. Pearson continues by condemning societies’ attempts to deal with inferior races or peoples in, what he calls, a “communal feeling” of unity and the subsequent suspension of “the racial purgation maintained in less developed

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<sup>51</sup> Darwin, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Pearson. "The Scope and Importance to the State of the Science of National Eugenics," *Heinemann*, (1907): 169-170.

<sup>53</sup> Pearson, 169-170.

communities by natural selection.”<sup>54</sup> The ultimate result of Great Britain not removing “inferior” characteristics or peoples from the gene pool, according to Pearson, is the enabling of “race-suicide” of the white British race.<sup>55</sup> Not only the intermingling of the races but the pure presence of them, it seems, was a threat to the British conceptualization of race and white supremacy during the period. Karl Pearson, however, was not the only British eugenicist with strong feelings about the growing community of immigrants or minorities in Great Britain nor abhorring the possibility of interracial mixing. Pearson symbolizes the British intellectual departure from eugenics as a means to improve the overall “health” of the population through carefully encouraging or discouraging certain individuals from carrying offspring to a codification of the growing idea of British “empire”; in this way, Pearson took the initial concepts of eugenics surrounding class, heightened their racial applicability, and applied them to the racial hierarchy that informed the “imperial” British worldview.

In his 1906 work, *Race Culture; Or, Race Suicide? (A Plea for the Unborn)*, Robert Reid Rentoul—a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, the General Medical Council of Education, the Medico-Legal Society and the Society for the Study of Inebriety—advocates for the use of eugenics on the “feeble-minded” in British society to limit their size in the population. The “feeble-minded,” along similar ideological lines to Galton and Pearson, often take form in the lower classes in Great Britain, immigrants, other races, or anyone deemed as a “undesirable perversion” in Great Britain.<sup>56</sup> Using the idea of inherited mental capabilities, Rentoul asserted that the environment has little or no

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<sup>54</sup> Pearson, 169-170.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Reid Rentoul. *Race Culture; Or, Race Suicide? (A Plea for the Unborn)*, England: The Walter Scott Press (1906).

bearing on individual “degeneracy” but rather one's parents were responsible or genetics were the culprit.<sup>57</sup> What was Rentoul’s solution for the problem of inherited mental “deficiencies?” Rentoul promoted a strict separation of the races and classes so as to not make “monstrosities” of the white British race. Rentoul held the mere presence of “deficiencies” in British society, such as members of the black community and immigrants, caused the degeneration of white mainstream society; the thought of interracial relations or marriage, therefore, was seen as a social catastrophe to be avoided or forbidden by any cause, even if it meant the use of force.<sup>58</sup> Rentoul wrote: “The intermarriage of British with foreigners should not be encouraged. A few of us know the terrible monstrosities produced by the intermarriage of the white man and the black... From the standpoint of race culture, it is difficult to understand the action of those who advocate the naturalization of foreigners.”<sup>59</sup> Rentoul’s writings and the growing support for eugenics in British society during the period shows a shocking reinforcement of the colonial British racial hierarchy, moving away from eugenics based mostly on class and causing real effects on members of the black community living in Great Britain during the period.

British eugenics went far beyond the academic realm, it was far reaching into various facets of British society and government. With the ideologies behind British eugenics clearly outlined, therefore, a pivot towards the eugenic ideology within British society is long overdue. During the 19th-20th century, the growing British eugenics movement found compatriots in the British Labor and British Socialism movement. The

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<sup>57</sup> Rentoul, 109.

<sup>58</sup> Rentoul, 157.

<sup>59</sup> Rentoul, 157-161.

Socialist and Labor movements pursued the eugenics movement in hopes of creating “a better society” and because they “valued the collective good more than the individual.”<sup>60</sup> In particular, the Socialist and Labor movements, as well as other groups made up of primarily middle-class intellectuals, considered the eugenics movement to be scientifically sound and thus reliable sources for literature and policy. Proof of the relationship between the growing socialist movement and British eugenics can be seen in the writings of Robert Desborough, such as the 1870 *State Contentment: an Allegory*, that advocate for the creation of a socialist state free of poverty and with the presence of forced “culling” of children with “undesirable” traits or deficiencies.<sup>61</sup> Other examples can be found in the 1901 writings of *Anticipations* by H. G. Wells and *A Modern Utopia* (1905), where eugenics and the elimination of “inferiors” was suffused with the founding of a socialist state. As the literature surrounding eugenics grew and the notion of eugenics gained traction in British society, the Eugenics Education Society was founded in 1907.<sup>62</sup>

Schemes combining British eugenics and socialism, or other political movements were first found in a growing corpus of literature and later in the halls of the British parliament.<sup>63</sup> The Eugenics Education Society worked closely with the socialist Fabian Society, and then the Labor Party, to push eugenics legislation that would promote the “general health” of the British population. First up on the eugenicists list was those with mental “deficiencies.” In 1913 the Mental Deficiency Bill was passed in Great Britain, providing “funds and an administrative apparatus for the segregation of mental defectives

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<sup>60</sup> David Redvaldsen. “Eugenics, Socialists and the Labour Movement in Britain, 1865–1940.” *Historical research: the bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 90, no. 250 (November 2017): 764–787.

<sup>61</sup> Redvaldsen, 764-766.

<sup>62</sup> Redvaldsen, 769.

<sup>63</sup> Redvaldsen, 764-766.

in asylums.” The ultimate goal of the legislation, according to eugenicists, was to isolate those with perceived “mental deficiencies” in asylums so as to prevent them from having offspring.<sup>64</sup> A decade later, in 1924, the British government created the Mental Deficiency Committee to evaluate the state of “deficiency” in the British population; the committee, like the Eugenics Society, would go on to be a firm supporter of not only isolating those deemed “inferior” but sterilizing them.<sup>65</sup>

In 1931 a Voluntary Sterilization Bill met great opposition from catholic contingents in British politics and failed to pass. Nevertheless, in 1935 the National Workers’ Committee for the Legalization of Voluntary Sterilization was founded as a political organization consisting of pro-sterilization members of the Labor party, eugenicists, and the Women’s Co-Operative guild. With the goal of passing sterilization legislation in mind, British eugenicists kept pushing for sterilization legislation well until the start of World War II in 1939. As time progressed, however, the Socialist and Labor movements drifted away from the eugenics movement as it increasingly become seen as a solidification of existing class structures, a possible impediment to the development of “genius,” and German eugenics gained infamy with the rise of the Nazi party in 1933.<sup>66</sup> Although the official British eugenicists movement began to lose traction in the later part of the 1930s it still played a prominent part, especially its racial underpinnings, in British society and the mental psyche of the British government and people.

As political tensions rose in Europe leading up to World War II, British society found itself in the peculiar position of managing their own views on eugenics and

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<sup>64</sup> Redvaldsen, 770.

<sup>65</sup> Redvaldsen, 775-776.

<sup>66</sup> Redvaldsen, 782-785.

simultaneously opposing German eugenics as something “foreign” or “other,” despite the fact that both doctrines had a heavy emphasis on white supremacy and the dominance of Anglo-Saxons in the “racial hierarchy of civilizations.” The influence of notions of white supremacy and the prominence of eugenics can be seen in uncovered sources from the Royal British Anthropology Society in the mid-1930s.<sup>67</sup> In the mid-1930s, mere years before Great Britain’s entrance into World War II, the Royal British Anthropology Society established a special committee to confront Nazi eugenics based on racial ideology and openly dismiss their claims of Aryan racial superiority.<sup>68</sup> Called the Race and Culture Committee, this body was created at the behest of Charles G. Seligman and given the unofficial objective of producing a strong anti-racist statement attacking the anthropological notion of a pure Aryan race.<sup>69</sup> The hope of Seligman, as well as others in various sectors of British society, was that by condemning Nazi Germany’s actions and ideology Great Britain could “distance” themselves—all be it only in name—from German ideologies of race. Despite an emerging consensus that the German’s notions of racial purity were “indefensible” and a general turning away from British eugenics, however, the committee was unable to come to agreement because a contingent of the committee vehemently supported the German racial conceptualization, a strict racial hierarchy with Aryans above all others.<sup>70</sup>

Instead of condemnation, Nazi racial ideology found a welcome home in the institutions of British societal and governmental policies; the notion of Aryan supremacy

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<sup>67</sup> Bradley W. Hart. “Science, Politics, and Prejudice: The Dynamics and Significance of British Anthropology’s Failure to Confront Nazi Racial Ideology.” *European History Quarterly*, 43, no. 2 (April 2013): 301–325.

<sup>68</sup> Hart, 304–306.

<sup>69</sup> Hart, 306.

<sup>70</sup> Hart, 309–310.

and the Aryan Theory of Race fit well within the existing racial hierarchy advocated by British colonial policies. The Aryan Theory of Race holds that the original speakers of the Indo-European languages and their descendants up to the present day make up a distinctive race or subrace of the Caucasian race that derives from a nomadic group.<sup>71</sup> The Indo-European group, however, also extends to the Indian subcontinent where the Indians' Sanskrit language is a part of the Indo-European language group since said group conquered the region and lived on as its rulers.<sup>72</sup> The British government used the rationale of the Aryan Theory of Race to establish their historical right to "dominance" over the region as an "Aryan" and member of the Indo-European group; the British's goal, with racial eugenics in mind, was to "civilize" the barbarous ways of the "declining" Indian subcontinent and to place Indians on a lower rung of the racial hierarchy.<sup>73</sup> Ironically, however, "Even those Victorian intellectuals most noted for emphasizing the Aryan character of the Indians were unable to follow the Aryan chain of reasoning on India to its seemingly logical conclusions: that because of common racial descent, contemporary Indians were the equals of contemporary Englishmen and, therefore, British imperialism in India was unjust."<sup>74</sup> The Aryan Race Theory and its support in Great Britain—like that of the rise of eugenics and the case of the Royal British Anthropology Society—show an inkling towards white supremacy and an increasingly negative view of non-Anglo-Saxons as "the other" by British social, academic, and governmental institutions. The British mindset was rooted, as discussed

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<sup>71</sup> Joan Leopold. British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870." *The English Historical Review* 89, no. 352 (1974): 578-603. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/567427>.

<sup>72</sup> Leopold, 578-580.

<sup>73</sup> Leopold, 580-583.

<sup>74</sup> Leopold, 592.

earlier, in the shift of British eugenics from primarily focused on class to being underpinned by race and reinforcing notions of British “empire” building.<sup>75</sup> The British racial disposition extended far beyond, however, merely intellectual debate or literature and reached into governmental policies and likely into the lives of members of the Black community dwelling in Great Britain.

Although not much is known, as a result of a dearth of sources and lack of academic interest, about the fledgling black community in Great Britain in the early to mid-20th-century, the “colored issue” or issue of interracial relations became a center focus on the British government during World War II and the British notions of race took center stage in the “brown baby” phenomena. The “issue” of interracial mixing, as can be seen in the writings of Pearson and Rentoul, had been a prominent point of discussion in Great Britain since at least the turn of the 20th century. In the immediate period leading up to the invasion of France by the Allied forces, however, the issue took center stage as thousands of African-American soldiers were stationed in Great Britain in preparation for D-day.<sup>76</sup> Throughout the war, the British government had a deep concern about black troops being stationed in the country and the possibility of interracial mingling. The British were not opposed, per say, to the serving of soldiers of color in the Allied forces—seeing as how Great Britain raised over 8,586,000 soldiers from throughout the British Empire during the War, with over 600,000 of them being African soldiers and millions of soldiers for colored from the Caribbean basin to the Indian subcontinent—or

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<sup>75</sup> Leopold, 592.

<sup>76</sup> Lucy Bland. “Interracial Relationships and the ‘Brown Baby Question’: Black GIs, White British Women, and Their Mixed-Race Offspring in World War II.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 26, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 424–453.



to fight on Great Britain's behalf.<sup>77</sup> Instead, the British government was concerned about a large number of black troops being stationed in the British Isles and, with their eugenic and racial ideologies in mind, defiling British society in some form.<sup>78</sup> To the government's dismay, however, up to three hundred thousand African-American soldiers had passed through the country by the end of the war; the formerly isolated or hypothetical cases of interracial mixing now became, in the eyes of the British government, a real and undesirable possibility.<sup>79</sup>

The government had to walk a “tight rope” so as to discourage interracial mixing with African-Americans and not to alienate colonial soldiers, such as those from the West Indies, who had come to serve in the British armed forces.<sup>80</sup> Although the British government was formerly opposed to segregation, they did not oppose American’s segregating towns or bases they were using and the government often made racist remarks.<sup>81</sup> The British government had long portrayed itself, similar to other western European countries, as a “tolerant” place while subtly propagating paternalistic or eugenic ideals of racial superiority. But the large presence of African-American soldiers now caused a “colored issue” that “needed” to be addressed; American’s open racism played out as a juxtaposition for the British, who seemed more “tolerant” in their treatment of blacks. The British “tolerance,” however, was limited in its reach and did not extended to notions of interracial relations.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Statistics for this were drawn from the British Broadcasting Company’s “Fact File: Commonwealth and Allied Forces” in their *World War II People’s War Archive*.

<sup>78</sup> Bland, 425-426.

<sup>79</sup> Bland, 425-426.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Bland, 426.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

When black soldiers began arriving in Great Britain they were, largely, met with a warm welcome from the British populace near where they were stationed. In fact, according to historian Lucy Bland, black soldiers were, on average, liked more than their white counterparts because white soldiers constantly complained about Britain's lack of modern conveniences. In contrast, most of black soldiers were not used to such luxuries or conveniences at home as their white counterparts and, as a result, they did not have reason to criticize Great Britain for its lack of them.<sup>83</sup> Coinciding with a general liking of black soldiers, British women tended, at times, to find themselves captivated with the "allure" of the African-American soldiers stationed in Great Britain. Historian Sonya Rose wrote: "Fantasies about the sexuality of black people, and fears of both interracial marriage and sex between black men and white women, had a long history in Britain... the policing of interracial sexuality to maintain 'racial purity' is intimately bound up with constructing and maintaining white supremacy; it reinforces and reconfirms the boundaries of Empire."<sup>84</sup> The combination of a general liking of black soldiers, the possibility for close interactions, and a hyper sexualization of the black body created the necessary conditions for interracial relationships to flourish in Great Britain in the early to mid-1940s as the Allied forces prepared for the invasion of France.

The result of the interracial relationships of the 1940s in Great Britain was the highly controversial "brown baby" phenomena. "Brown babies," as they were called by the American media, were the result of interracial relationships formed between British women and African-American troops stationed in Great Britain in the early to mid-parts

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<sup>83</sup> Bland, 427-430.

<sup>84</sup> Sonya O. Rose. "Girls and GIs: Race, Sex, and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain." *The International History Review*, 19, no. 1 (1997): 146-60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40108089>.

of World War II; mixed-race children were referred to as “half-caste” in Great Britain during the time period.<sup>85</sup> News reports of relationships with American soldiers often read like “morality tales” in British tabloids and focused on the moral short falling of British women. The role that the soldier played, however, was dependent on their race. While white American soldiers were depicted as mere companions seeking out affection or relations with British women, in interracial relationships Black soldiers took center stage in news articles.<sup>86</sup> White women in an interracial relationship were seen as “immoral whores,” their black partners were predatory foreigners and their mixed-race children were “degenerates.”<sup>87</sup> The growing prominence of interracial mixing came at a time when racial tensions were elevating and the British middle class had created a 'color bar' on black colonial subjects living in Britain or serving in the armed service in order to deter them from moving and hinder their ability to work in Great Britain.<sup>88</sup> With the growing awareness of interracial relationships and mixed-race children, the British government and society began to take action to curtail what they saw as “moral” and “racial” shortcomings.<sup>89</sup>

In late 1942, female morality and behavior became an increasingly prominent topic in Great Britain as a result of the stationing of American troops in the country. Advocates for “policing” or enforcing a strict moral code—one free of interracial mixing—on British women ranged from moral welfare workers, the National Council of Women, and private citizens to social workers, clergymen, and elected officials.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Bland, 426.

<sup>86</sup> Rose, 151-152.

<sup>87</sup> Bland, 432.

<sup>88</sup> Rose, 153.

<sup>89</sup> Bland, 426.

<sup>90</sup> Rose, 146-148.

Virtually every aspect of British society was involved with the enforcement of “moral standards” on young British women with the goal, to some extent, of curtailing interracial relationships. To those ends, the British Home Office and local governments sought to not only regulate young British women but to prevent them from interacting with the African-American soldiers all together; they created black only clubs or dance events, eliminated fraternization with unmarried women, and excluded black soldiers from “white” bars/clubs that white women attended.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, British police took action against women or girls who associated with black soldiers through the use of female officers tasked with monitoring “female morality and behavior.” In particular, the British police made use of the Children's and Young Persons Act of 1933, which allowed the police to detain or arrest a girl 18 or younger if they believed that she was “in grave moral danger” or “in need of care and protection.”<sup>92</sup> In various facet of British society, concerted efforts were made to counteract the prominence of interracial mixing on the grounds of “moral,” racial, and eugenic basis.

Of particular note is that during the 1940s the British military never made any official statements about Interracial mixing, but rather enforced unofficial internal memos with apparent racial prejudices. In August of 1942 Major General A. A. B. Dowler, in charge of the Southern Command in Southern England, released a memorandum saying that “coloured men... work hard when they have no money and when they have money, they prefer to do nothing until it is gone. In short, they do not have the white man’s ability to think and act to a plan.”<sup>93</sup> Dowler, along with other members of British society,

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<sup>91</sup> Rose, 155-157.

<sup>92</sup> Rose, 157.

<sup>93</sup> Bland, 427.

called on white British women to “not associate with coloured men. It follows then, they should not walk out, dance, or drink with them [black soldiers].”<sup>94</sup> British Home Secretary Morrison later enforced the Major General’s comments by saying that morale would be damaged if white women were “debauched” by African-American soldiers. Interracial relationships and the mixed-race children represented a challenge to perceived British racial boundaries or colonial racial hierarchy and to the clear differentiation between the white British and the nonwhite “other.”<sup>95</sup> As such, mixed-race children and their white parents (often the mother) faced intense racism and ridicule from white mainstream British society, resulting in a substantial portion of mothers relinquishing their children to orphanages. In total, an estimated 2,000 mixed-race children were born during the “brown baby” phenomenon in the 1940s; they lived out their lives combating the eugenic and racially-driven sentiments imposed on them, one in which their existence was questioned as a “diversion” of the white British race.<sup>96</sup>

Although exact population estimates for the size of the black community in Great Britain are not available, a fledgling black community was taking form throughout the Interwar period and World War II. The black community, however, did not take full form until its population began to expand with the first large introduction of mixed-race children in the 1940s and subsequently the mass immigration of black individuals to Great Britain in the decades after World War II. Nevertheless, the prevalence of a sense of white supremacy and the legacy of Great Britain's colonial racial hierarchy are apparent in the social and political spheres of Great Britain throughout the early to mid-

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<sup>94</sup> Bland, 427.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “Brown Babies Archive,” n.p.

20th-century; numerous policies, campaigns, and academic literature throughout the period called for the removal or elimination of “degenerative” aspects of the British population, such as racial minorities or the poor. At the same time, however, when African-American soldiers arrived in Great Britain in large droves in the 1940s they were met by hospitality and a warm welcome by many British people. Great Britain, therefore, presents a paradox for those within the black community living there in the early to mid-20th century. It would seem that sentiments of white superiority were most prevalent in British government or social institutions. Meanwhile, the general populace adhered to similar ideas of white superiority when it came to relationships, as can be seen in the social stigma of interracial mixing, but also did not necessarily enforce a “segregation-like” or isolationist mentality when engaging with other races.

## CHAPTER 2: GERMANY 1918-1945

It is a serious violation of the laws of European civilization to use black troops to occupy the territory [the Rhineland] of a people as cultivated and intelligent as the Germans.<sup>97</sup> - German President Friedrich Ebert

As the artillery fire of World War I ceased, with the Allied forces emerging triumphant over the Central Powers, a new European political landscape took form to the detriment of Germany and the “humiliation” of German national pride. In the Treaty of Versailles, intended to “punish” Germany for beginning the war, Germany conceded the Alsace-Lorraine region to France and had the Rhineland and Saar regions occupied by Allied forces for 15 years. Additionally, Germany conceded vast swaths of territory (to Belgium, Lithuania, newly formed Poland and Denmark), lost its colonies, had its military capabilities limited and had to take responsibility for provoking World War I.<sup>98</sup> Like a fragile glass window, German national pride shattered into a thousand pieces by World War I, and nationalism emerged as a glazier to put the pieces back together. In the rebuilding of German “pride,” a tsunami washed over European society as the conditions of peace gave way to the rise of Nazism, as well as a desire to “reclaim” German honor, and minority groups became scapegoats for Germany’s woes.<sup>99</sup> With anti-minority sentiments heightened, the small Black community within Germany and black people in

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<sup>97</sup> Reiner Pommerin. "The Fate of Mixed Blood Children in Germany." *German Studies Review* 5, no. 3 (1982): doi:10.2307/1428948, 317.

<sup>98</sup> Brian Farmer. “The Treaty of Versailles and the Rise of Nazism: The Treaty of Versailles, the so-Called Peace Treaty Ending WWI, Was Meant to Humiliate and Punish Germany for Beginning the War, but It Led to Hitler’s Rise.” *The New American* (Belmont, Mass.) 34, no. 21 (November 5, 2018): 33-5.

<sup>99</sup> Farmer, 36-38.

Europe more generally began to come into the spotlight as rumors spread quickly about black French soldiers defiling German women and German society.<sup>100</sup>

Throughout World War I between 134,000 and 335,000 black colonial soldiers fought in the French armed forces, as they had done numerous times in the past during the Franco-Prussian war in 1857 and various other conflicts, and some 380,000 African-American soldiers served in the American armed forces on France's side.<sup>101</sup> World War I, however, was the first time the French had mass mobilized colonial soldiers from Africa for a war in mainland Europe.<sup>102</sup> In 1910, a book called *La Force Noire* or "the black force" praised the French colonial soldiers in Senegal for their abilities on the battlefield and questioned why the French had not or would not deploy them in a war in mainland Europe. *La Force Noire* caused widespread debate in France but also opened the door for a new French policy regarding their colonial soldiers. The French government, needing to find soldiers to match the overwhelming military might of Germany, took the advice of *la force noire* and looked to its colonies throughout World War I to bolster its army against the German military.<sup>103</sup> Black colonial soldiers, therefore, played a key role in the French forces during World War I.

In the months following the end of World War I the presence of black French soldiers in Europe took center stage; the realization that black French troops were stationed in occupied regions of Germany lit the match for heightened racism to spread

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<sup>100</sup> Galen Last, D. van, Ralf Futselaar, and Marjolijn De Jager. *Black Shame: African Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1922*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015.

<sup>101</sup> C. M Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner. "France, Africa, and the First World War." *The Journal of African History* 19, no. 1 (1978): 11-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/180609>.

<sup>102</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame."* DW Documentary, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J26kgGn5TdQ&amp;t=8s>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



across Europe like a wildfire. During the French occupation, approximately  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the 100,000 French soldiers in Germany came from the French colonies of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Madagascar, or Vietnam.<sup>104</sup> The presence of colonial soldiers in the French occupation was a reversal of “traditional” power roles. Now, the colonial soldiers could exert power over the white German populace, as members of the French military, who had once been colonial masters; the presence of colonial soldiers, therefore, was seen as a form of extreme humiliation in the eyes of the Germans and led to widespread debate.<sup>105</sup> Worsening racial tensions and continental sensation led newspapers throughout Europe, such as *the Daily Herald* in the United Kingdom, to use gendered terms to depict white women as under threat from black soldiers; using symbolic and strategic undertones to position black soldiers as “the other” or as an intruder destroying European civilization through their mere presence.<sup>106</sup>

In March 1920, anti-democracy general leaders Wolfgang Kapp and Walther von Lüttwitz attempted a coup against the democratically elected German government in Berlin.<sup>107</sup> With the coup underway, France sent its soldiers across the Rhine and Moroccan regiments marched into Frankfurt and Mainz where they clashed with demonstrators. The Moroccan soldiers opened fire on the demonstrators, killing nine people, and sparking widespread outrage by white mainstream European society.<sup>108</sup> The combination of the march incident and existing whispers about African soldiers' savagery

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<sup>104</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame,"* DW Documentary.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> “Black Peril on Rhine,” *Daily Herald*, 1, 314 edition, (London: April 12, 1920):<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000681/19200412/010/0001>.

<sup>107</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame,"* DW Documentary.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

in their treatment of white German citizens (in particular women) the situation quickly worsened, “igniting the smoldering German rage against its French occupiers.”<sup>109</sup> As rumors about black soldiers murdering and defiling White women began to spread, a sense of “European defilement” or “white defilement” spread across borders to spark even Germany’s enemies to speak out against the stationed black soldiers.<sup>110</sup> As the days passed, anti-black sentiments and concerns about their “defilement of European civilization” continued to grow as the European governments, newspapers, popular media stations and even Vatican City expressed their dismay with black soldiers watching over civilized white Germans.<sup>111</sup>

Through popular portrayals of white women and Christendom as being dishonored by the “barbaric” and “heathen” blacks, Germans were able to control the political narrative and effectively galvanize the public against the black soldiers.<sup>112</sup> The believability of rumors after the war was aided by the presence of similar rumors and false reports during the War about black soldiers “savagery” on the battlefield and animal-like behavior; black soldiers, in particular, were rumored to be cutting off the ears of German soldiers and wearing them as necklaces.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, the “Black Shame” campaign built on existing German perceptions of Black primitivity and “savagery” embedded in the country during the early colonial era.<sup>114</sup> Black French soldiers were seen, put simply, as alpha predators who were defiling or dishonoring white

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<sup>109</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame,"* DW Documentary.

<sup>110</sup> “Black Peril on Rhine,” *Daily Herald*.

<sup>111</sup> Campbell, 480.

<sup>112</sup> “Black Peril on Rhine,” *Daily Herald*.

<sup>113</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame,"* DW Documentary.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

German society; to get this point across a large scale smear campaign was initiated on every front by German society and the German government. Posters, magazines, films, plays, monetary currency, novellas, and even books were all created to portray black soldiers as predators.<sup>115</sup> On the left is a 1920 German Image. In the image, a “black” colonial soldier is depicted as some type of monkey and he is carrying away a seemingly helpless white woman.<sup>116</sup> Images like the one on the left were common in 1920 and would often be accompanied by short stories or false reports about colonial soldiers’ brutality.<sup>117</sup> According to Deutsche Welle, “In the spring of 1920, it seemed as if overnight an army of African rapists and pedophiles had set out to systematically defile and dishonor German women, girls and boys. The outrage over the allegedly barbaric conduct of the French colonial troops on German Soldiers festered over into bizarre and strange images.”<sup>118</sup> The conflict over black French soldiers stationed in the Rhineland, later termed the “Black Shame” or “Black Horror on the Rhine,” encompassed one of the first large scale racial debates surrounding blacks in Europe during the Interwar Period and shows a rapidly shifting perception and dynamic relationship between blacks and white mainstream European society not only in Germany but for Europe in general.<sup>119</sup> At the same time, the “Black Shame” gives light to a recurring trend in European history to

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<sup>115</sup> The German Government’s department of Information would not only publish a large array of anti-black materials and propaganda but would actively invite foreign dignitaries or reporters to the Rhineland to see the “horrible state” of the region due to black soldiers. After visiting, the German government would urge the foreigners to write about the defilement of the German race in their respective countries and advocate for international intervention.

<sup>116</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the “Children of Shame,”* DW Documentary.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Campbell, 473.

scapegoating or shifting blame for socio-economic instability and political fragmentation onto minority groups.<sup>120</sup>

As a result of the “Black Shame,” along with the loss of the German colonies in Africa, the small Black community increasingly came under scrutiny in Germany. Before the 1950’s—when large numbers of refugees fled to Germany and increasing numbers of “guest workers” moved there—Germany was a homogenous nation and had very few minority groups within its borders, except for a sizable Jewish population.<sup>121</sup>

Nevertheless, as early as 1884 a fledgling community of blacks took form with the founding of the German protectorate in Cameroon.<sup>122</sup> The black community in Germany during the Interwar and World War II period consisted primarily of Cameroonians from the former German colony and a handful of black diplomats and their families.

Additionally—as a result of low female to male ratios in many parts of the black community in Germany and interracial mingling, especially in occupied territories with large numbers of black soldiers, more generally—a notable population of mixed-race Germans were born in the occupied Rhineland and throughout Germany.<sup>123</sup> Although growing in numbers, the Black community in Germany was small and, likely as a result

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<sup>120</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame,"* DW Documentary.

<sup>121</sup> Robbie Aitken, John Macvicar., and Eve Rosenhaft. *Black Germany: the Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884-1960* Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2013: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139649575>, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Before 1914, most Cameroonians coming to Germany were men in search of an education or members of missionary societies and, more rarely, for work (some Cameroonians were hired for the notorious colonial exhibits or displayed as special attractions in stores). However, for Cameroonians, and more generally blacks in Germany, existence was often discontinuous or hard to track throughout the 19th and very early 20th century.

<sup>123</sup> Aitken, 1-5.

of stereotypes and their few numbers, were considered “exotic” in the Interwar and early World War II period.

There were sexual relations between, primarily, white German women and the black soldiers stationed in the Rhineland following the German defeat in World War I.



1920, “African Colonial soldier” kidnapping a white German woman. Source: Deutsche Welle’s *Nazi prejudice and propaganda – the racist crimes against the “children of shame”*

However, the relations between black soldiers and German women by all modern accounts—despite what German propaganda perpetuated about mass murders and rapes of white German women—appears to have been consensual and not uncommon amongst the Allied forces stationed in the Rhineland.<sup>124</sup>

Hidden from many in the German public, nevertheless, was the existence of children born from German intermingling with black Allied soldiers. 385 mixed-race

(black and white) children were born between 1919 and 1925, with 201 of the mixed-race children being male and 182 of them being female.<sup>125</sup> The mixed-race German children, for a long period, were purposefully ignored by the German government to avoid engaging in discussions about a new population of mixed-race Germans and German women's willingness to consensually liaison with blacks.<sup>126</sup> They were perceived as a

<sup>124</sup> Pommerin, 317.

<sup>125</sup> Pommerin, 317-318.

<sup>126</sup> Pommerin, 317-318.

potential threat.” The mixed-race German children were referred to, in derogatory terms, as “*Mischlings*,” “*neger*” or “Rhineland Bastards” by not only the German government but private citizens and various organizations.<sup>127</sup> Including the mixed-race population in Germany, the number of black people in Germany in the 1930s is estimated at 5,000 to 25,000 with the bulk of the population being composed of African migrants.<sup>128</sup> The German population was some 67 million in the 1930s, meaning that blacks composed far less than one percent of the population (between 0.00007463% and 0.00037% to be exact).<sup>129</sup>

With a small community in Germany, many black youths had a unique experience in war-torn Germany during the Interwar period driven by the exoticization of the Black community and racial stereotypes. In order to understand the black German experience in the Interwar Period, it is important to look at first-hand accounts from members of said community and put a face or lived experience to the discussion of the Black German community. Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi was a mixed-race German man born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1926 to a white German mother and a black Liberian father. Growing up as the grandson of the consul general of Liberia in Germany in his youth and living out the later portions of his life with only his mother in a working-class and single-family German household, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi provides a unique perspective into what it meant to grow up as a black man in Germany during the middle of the 20th century.<sup>130</sup>

When reflecting on his life, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi wrote:

Racists in Nazi Germany did their dirty work openly and brazenly with the full protection, cooperation and encouragement of the government, which

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<sup>127</sup> Massaquoi, 17-18.

<sup>128</sup> Pommerin, 318.

<sup>129</sup> Aitken, 93-94.

<sup>130</sup> Massaquoi, xii.

had declared the pollution of Aryan blood with “inferior” non-Aryan blood the nation’s cardinal sin...I faced the constant threat that Nazi ethnic-cleansing policies posed to my safety alone. I faced this threat without the sense of security and feeling of belonging that humans derive from being members of a group, even an embattled one. Because of the absence of black females and the government-imposed taboo of race mixing, I had no legal social outlet when I reached puberty...<sup>131</sup>



1933, Massaquoi in the second grade in Hamburg Germany. Source: *H. J. Massaquoi Collection*

While growing up in Nazi Germany, Massaquoi encountered the racism of the Nazi state and the internal dilemma of knowing how to self-identify; Massaquoi considered himself German and only spoke German, and yet everyone saw him as the “other” because of the color of his skin. In Nazi Germany, it appears that ethnic categories and race could not be crossed or overlapped. One could be white and German or black and foreign; the former seemed

“normal” in Germany and the latter “exotic,” but nothing laid between the two extremes.

Although he encountered racist remarks since his earliest memories, Massaquoi’s first encounter with being seen as the “other” came when he went to a zoo exhibit in Hamburg with his mother during elementary school. As part of Hagenbeck’s famous “culture shows” that had been traveling around Germany, as well as many other European countries, there were special exhibits of “primitive peoples” at the Hamburg zoo.<sup>132</sup> Massaquoi wrote: “After walking past spectacular exhibits of monkey, giraffes,

<sup>131</sup> Massaquoi, xii-xiii.

<sup>132</sup> Massaquoi, 25-26.

lions, elephants and other African wildlife, we arrived at the ‘African Village,’ replete with half a dozen or so thatch-roofed clay huts and people, we were told, by ‘authentic Africans’ ....barefoot and dressed in tattered rags.”<sup>133</sup> The image of blacks as “primitive” and “exotic” peoples in Germany was a common stereotype during the time period that could be traced to a lack of exposure and intense Nazi propaganda dating back to the occupation of the Rhineland by black soldiers; so much so that, upon approaching the ‘African Village,’ the white Germans visiting the exhibit pointed at Massaquoi and called him “one of their kids.”<sup>134</sup> Massaquoi’s experience at the zoo and the presence of the ‘African Village’ shows how “exotic” many Germans viewed blacks as during the period and the ignorance of German society about not only black peoples but black civilizations.

Similar to the experiences of exoticization Massaquoi suffered from, a black German named Theodor Michael grew up working in an “exotic circus,” surrounded by those who saw black people as “the other” and as exotic.<sup>135</sup> Michael was a mixed-race man born in Berlin, Germany in 1925 to a white German mother and a black Cameroonian father who migrated to Germany before the conclusion of World War I.<sup>136</sup> The Cameroonian portion of Theodor Michael’s family was part of a large number of Africans who traveled to Germany between 1884 and 1914 to find jobs and pursue an education or look for other opportunities, creating the origins of a black community in Germany.<sup>137</sup> The large majority of those Africans in Germany during the period came

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<sup>133</sup> Massaquoi, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Massaquoi, 26-27.

<sup>135</sup> Michael, 20.

<sup>136</sup> The Cameroonian portion of Theodor Michael’s family was part of a large number of Africans who traveled to Germany between 1884 and 1914 in order to find jobs and pursue an education or look for other opportunities.

<sup>137</sup> Michael, 19.



from the former German protectorate of Cameroon. Although Michael's family chose to stay in Germany, few of those Africans who migrated to Germany during the period choose to stay long-term since they were often looking only for short term opportunities; of those Africans who stayed, the vast majority had families with a white German partner.<sup>138</sup> The experiences of Michael and his family during the Interwar Period tell the story of not only blacks in Europe, but immigrants in Europe.

The German colonial concessions at the end of World War I caused Cameroonians in Germany to become virtually stateless overnight as they lost their German citizenship and were reclassified as "racial aliens."<sup>139</sup> Adding to the burdens of his family, Michael's mother passed away in the early 1920s and his father—Theophilus Wonja Michael—was inflicted with mental ailments. To make matters worse, Michael's father suffered from chronic unemployment, largely, as a result of Anti-black and Anti-immigrant rhetoric in Germany rooted in the stationing of black soldiers in the German Rhineland.<sup>140</sup> Michael wrote: "if they had regular employment, Africans now lost their jobs ('He's taking work away from one of us.'). Under these circumstances, it was very difficult to find work.... The Africans who up to now had been officially known as the German's African compatriots. 'They had to go back where they came from!' was the general opinion."<sup>141</sup> With a large number of job opportunities closed off to the Black

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<sup>138</sup> Michael, 2-3.

<sup>139</sup> When Germany lost possession of its African colonies, they "relinquished" their responsibilities towards former colonial subjects or their children and stripped them of German citizenship. As a result, Cameroonians and their descendants in Germany became legal "aliens" in Germany and were given Nansen passports pursuant to League of Nations Guidelines.

<sup>140</sup> Michael, 23.

<sup>141</sup> Michael, 23.

community in Germany, many black people had to “play the African” and turn to demeaning lines of work that would help survive.

As a result of the difficulty of blacks to find work in Germany, Michael and his



1929, The Michael family (with Theodor on the far right and his father next to him) and stepmother Martha.

family turned to the human menageries or the *Völkerschau* of the “exotic”

Holzmüller Circus, where Michael worked as an “exotic African

performer.” The picture below of Michael provides an accurate image of what the *Völkerschau* were. Michael is

sitting next to his father in the center of the photo with a grass skirt and a

traditional-appearing wooden shield from Africa.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, on both sides of Michael, are black people holding “primitive” weapons (spears, swords, and bows) rather than modern weapons. The black body in the *Völkerschau* became exoticized and positioned as the “other” in society in order to be commodified by German society. When describing the *Völkerschau* Michael wrote: “For German Africans, they were one of few ways to make money, alongside film work, since ‘normal’ occupations were now closed to them. In these human menageries that were supposed to portray ‘Africans’ the way that people in Europe in the twenties and thirties of the last century imagined them: uneducated savages, without culture and dressed in grass skirts.”<sup>143</sup> As a member of the Black community in Germany, Michael, like Massaquoi, encountered the racial

<sup>142</sup> Michael, 116-117.

<sup>143</sup> Michael, 24-25.

stereotypes of blacks and the alienation of black Germans; oftentimes Michael would not only have to subject himself to the demeaning stereotypes of the “exotic” black person to survive financially but to be taunted by white German children and spoken to in “broken German,” despite German being his first language so that he could “understand” them. Michael worked in the *Völkerschau* of the Holzmüller Circus, doing various performances as an “African,” until he got taken away from his father by the German state due to the financial instability.<sup>144</sup> Michael’s time fulfilling white mainstream Germans stereotypes about blacks, however, did not end.

With limited employment options available to Michael’s father, Michael got placed into the welfare system and, after a brief stint with a white German family, found himself under the legal custody of the Ahmeds. The Ahmed’s were a North African family that lived in Germany and ran their own *Völkerschau* show, traveling throughout Germany and Europe to bring “exotic” attractions to white mainstream Europe.<sup>145</sup> For Michael, as well as many black Germans, employees of the welfare system asserted that he belonged with foster parents that ran circuses and would be “safe” if they stayed with them moving forward. With an infatuation with the “other” in Germany, *Völkerschau* shows continuously grew in popularity throughout the country and in the late 1930s, the Nazi party sought to appropriate them for the benefit of Nazi ideologies of racial superiority. As such, the German Labor Front or *Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF)* absorbed all of the labor unions in Germany and dominated the German workspace, taking control of the *Völkerschau* shows and aiming to control the Black presence in Germany through

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<sup>144</sup> Michael, 2.

<sup>145</sup> Michael, 36.

*Völkerschau* shows.<sup>146</sup> In 1937 DAF created its own *Völkerschau* show called “the German African Show” in hopes of gathering together the scattered communities of Africans living in Germany and their “offspring” into one place.<sup>147</sup> The intended effect of “the German African Show” was the “total control and the possibility of carrying out sanctions against individuals and against the whole group.”<sup>148</sup> By the time DAF came to



1928, A *Völkerschau* that Michael participated in as an “exotic” African, wearing a grass skirt and stereotypical African garb. Source: *Black German*.

being, nevertheless, Michael had grown out of the foster care system and ended his time working for *Völkerschau* shows. Nevertheless, DAF’s “German African Show” and the various other *Völkerschau* shows in Germany, including those that Michael took part in, demonstrate a propensity of white mainstream Germany to

commodify blacks and position them as the exotic “other” in society, whether members of the Black community in Germany were Germans by birth or not.

Massaquoi’s and Michael’s experiences, with the “African Village” and the “Exotic Circuses,” shows how the perception of blacks in mainstream white German society during the Interwar Period could be traced to a fascination with and exoticization

<sup>146</sup> Michael, 46-47.

<sup>147</sup> In 1940 DAF’s German African Show got dismantled by the German high command over concern that its existence gave value or validity to the continued presence of ethnic minorities in Germany.

<sup>148</sup> Michael, 47.

of the black body. Black people were seen not as equals but as primitive beings “in grass skirts” that were intended to entertain mainstream white Germany.”<sup>149</sup> The constraints, especially in terms of job opportunities, and increasingly compulsory stereotypes about blacks consumed black Germans' lives. From being put on display at circuses, in shop store windows, or at zoos as exotic creatures to “acting African” in human menageries and playing exotic roles in films, the racial policies of Nazi Germany relegated black people to “the other” and limited their opportunities in society.<sup>150</sup>

While commodifying and exoticizing the black body through the use of African stereotypes in film and other forms of entertainment, Germans willingly embraced and marched to the beats of African-American jazz during the 1920s.<sup>151</sup> By the late-1920s, the German radio regularly played jazz music throughout the country and, as time progressed, artists such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington became more popular than German jazz musicians.<sup>152</sup> Although African-American jazz became admired, as well as heavily commodified, by mainstream white Germany during the Interwar period, its association with black people caused the music genre to decline sharply in the 1930s and become identified as “Negro Music” as the Nazis gained power.<sup>153</sup> By the mid-1930s the German public, after a series of propaganda campaigns by the Nazis and ultimately the national banning of jazz, came to see jazz not as a new fad or beautiful art form but rather as an inferior or “primitive” work of art, belonging to an allegedly “inferior”

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<sup>149</sup> Michael, 2.

<sup>150</sup> Michael, 60-61.

<sup>151</sup> Michael Kater. “Forbidden Fruit? Jazz in the Third Reich.” *The American historical review* 94, no. 1 (February 1, 1989): 11–43.

<sup>152</sup> Kater, 11-13.

<sup>153</sup> Kater, 13.

race.<sup>154</sup> The German fascination and consumption of black music in the social realm of Germany, like that of “exotic” film or other means of entertainment, comes into perspective only when placed in the context of the underlying racial exoticization of the Black community.

Black individuals' experiences in the early portion of the Interwar Period marked by their portrayal as the exotic “other” in German society. The exoticization and alienation of blacks from German society, however, did not halt as time progressed. Instead, as the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s, blacks were increasingly separated from participation in society and persecuted along with other minority groups. For the Nazis, the perceived “problem” of the mixed-race German population and a growing Black community in Germany took center stage.

In his political discourse, Hitler and the Nazis were one of the only segments of the German political sphere who emphasized German “racial purity” as a cornerstone of governance.<sup>155</sup> As such, in *Mein Kampf*, along with numerous other speeches and written works, Hitler uses various conspiracy theories to address the existences of the Black and mixed-race community in Germany; Hitler claimed that the Jews brought the black men to the Rhine to “defile” German women and create mixed-race children.<sup>156</sup> In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler described France as “by far the most terrible enemy” and wrote:

This [French] people.... Which is basically becoming more and more negrified constitutes in its tie with the aims of Jewish world domination an enduring danger for the existence of the white race in Europe. For the contamination by Negro blood on the Rhine in the heart of Europe is just as much in keeping with the perverted sadistic thirst for vengeance of this hereditary enemy of our people as is the ice-cold calculation of the Jews thus to begin bastardizing the European continent at its core and to deprive

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<sup>154</sup> Kater, 23-27.

<sup>155</sup> Pommerin, 320.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

the white race of the foundations for a sovereign existence through infection with lower humanity.<sup>157</sup>

Hitler and many other members of the Nazi party saw the existence of the mixed-race and Black populations in Germany as a “problem” of “defilement” in the German state that needed to be addressed in some manner. What the proper solution to deal with the Black community in Germany should be turned out to be a subject of great debate within the Nazi party. The question for Hitler and the Nazis, therefore, after assuming power was not whether they should do something about “the problem” of black Germans, but what they should do.<sup>158</sup>

Throughout the Interwar period, and well into World War II, the Nazi government began creating a series of laws that limited the rights and protections of Non-Aryans, a new classification created by Nazis to differentiate between “pure” Germans and other members of Germany. Nazi racial laws began to directly target the Jewish population of Germany and indirectly targeting the few minority groups within the country.<sup>159</sup> The Non-Aryan population of Germany, often not outlined by the Nazis, encompassed not only black Germans but all minority groups within the country.

The Nazi regime passed a series of laws between 1933 and 1935 that limited the ability of non-Aryans to participate in the public sphere of Germany; originally designed to persecute the Jews, the Nazis’ laws had the effect of perpetuating the systematic persecution of black Germans as well.<sup>160</sup> Some of the laws passed by the Nazis included a prohibition against Jewish or black farmers, restrictions on non-Aryans’ ability to be civil

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<sup>157</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1889-1945, 2001: Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>158</sup> Pommerin, 320.

<sup>159</sup> Pommerin, 320-322.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

servants, a ban on intermingling between Aryans and non-Aryans, and the virtual elimination of non-Aryans' ability to receive higher education or attend high school in Germany. Chief amongst the Nazi race laws of the 1930s were the, seemingly all-encompassing, Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935. In their original form, as well as its subsequent extensions and clarifications of definitions, the Nuremberg Race Laws provided the legal framework for the systematic persecution of non-Aryans and the removal of their rights.<sup>161</sup> When describing the Nuremberg Race Laws, Theodor Michael wrote:

The Nuremberg Laws issued in 1935 included a whole series of racist and discriminatory regulations, including the Law for the Protection of German Blood and honor, the Reich Citizenship Law, the universities Law, the Civil Service Law. The Laws affected not only Jews, but also Roma and Sinti ('Gypsies') as well as Africans and Asians--something that is still relatively unknown. That got Germany into diplomatic difficulties with Japan and with Arab and Indian allies [as well as numerous neutral nations in Africa and South America], in fact everybody that they characterized as 'non-Aryans.' The law on 'race defilement' (*Rassenchande*) was a constant threat, especially for us younger 'Afros.'<sup>162</sup>

Following international outrage from the passage of the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935, the Nazis quickly assured international delegations that the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws were not intended for other minorities or "immigrant" populations, except for the Jews, in Germany.<sup>163</sup> Concerns about the term non-Aryan led the Germans to superficially amend the Nuremberg laws, but it did not prevent the Nazis from using the vagueness of the term non-Aryan to more subtly persecute the Black community in Germany; the ambiguity of the Nazis' discriminatory laws provided the necessary room for the alienation and persecution of the Black community in Germany by the Nazis in the 1930s

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<sup>161</sup> Pommerin, 321.

<sup>162</sup> Michael, 57.

<sup>163</sup> Pommerin, 320.



and 1940s. The effects of the Nuremberg Race Laws, and the growing hostility towards the Black community in Germany, can be seen clearly through the first-person experiences of Massaquoi and Michael in their youth.

Like all kids in Germany, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Theodor Michael were obliged to go to school as a result of German compulsory education laws. In the wake of the passage of the Nuremberg Race Laws, however, the educational environment changed dramatically for black Germans and their mere presence in the classroom came into question.<sup>164</sup> After the Nuremberg Race Laws were passed Michael got kicked out of school because of “new regulations” that called for non-Aryans to be dismissed from educational institutions, expressly forbidding their presence in secondary schools or universities.<sup>165</sup> Before leaving school, however, Michael endured increasing racial profiling, name-calling—Michael especially loathed the term “negur” which found its origins in Ethiopia—and even physical attacks from not only his White German peers but from school administrators.<sup>166</sup>

Despite facing discrimination and racial profiling from white mainstream German society, Michael became enchanted by the Nazis’ nationalistic calls for a “greater Germany” and a restoration of pride; Michael attempted to join the Nazis’ youth movement called the *Jungvolk* but got rejected because of his status as a non-Aryan.<sup>167</sup> German nationalistic propaganda, it would seem, could reach into the hearts of even some of the most persecuted groups in Interwar Germany. When elaborating on his experiences, Michael wrote: “In my first year at school I had been told that German was

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<sup>164</sup> Michael, 37.

<sup>165</sup> Michael, 46.

<sup>166</sup> Michael, 48-50.

<sup>167</sup> Michael, 55.

my mother tongue, and I should master it. But I hadn't been welcome in *Jungvolk* and I'd had to leave secondary school because of my heritage."<sup>168</sup> While Michael got dismissed immediately from his secondary school other blacks like Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi in the German education system were unable to complete their secondary education.<sup>169</sup>

Massaquoi continued his education until he finished secondary school but he, too, encountered racism within the classroom from his peers, teachers, and administrators. With a Nazi as the principal of his school and a racist teacher, Massaquoi encountered biased fitness tests to prove his "inferior" or "cowardly" "racial nature," pushed into the shadows of the school's public events/performances, and constantly reminded of his perceived intellectual inferiority (based solely on his race) to his white German counterparts. Massaquoi, however, often found himself at the top of his class academically and, despite the dismay of the Nazi administrators, regularly outperformed his white German peers in various activities.<sup>170</sup>

In another instance, which speaks to the view of many Germans about the Black community in Germany, Massaquoi's teacher told him: "there are many ways of being racially inferior. I wouldn't be at all surprised if your *Klassenkamerad* [referring to Massaquoi] one day winds up as an antisocial element, such as a criminal or alcoholic, or if he is already susceptible to a host of debilitating diseases."<sup>171</sup> Massaquoi's teacher, after pulling Massaquoi aside in class, continued: "Let me tell you something, young

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<sup>168</sup> Michael, 55.

<sup>169</sup> It is possible that the discrepancy in the enforcement of the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws depended, partially, on one's geographic location in Germany. Michael, being born and living in Berlin, found himself in the center of the German state and Nazi Propaganda. Meanwhile, Massaquoi lived more so on the periphery by living in Hamburg.

<sup>170</sup> Massaquoi, 68-70.

<sup>171</sup> Massaquoi, 110-111.

man. Don't feel so smug [referring to Massaquoi's participation in class], because after we have finished with the Jews, people like you [members of the Black community] will be next."<sup>172</sup> Massaquoi's racially charged encounter with his teacher was a recurring trend. In a different instance, Massaquoi's principal told him that Hitler would remove "treasonous non-Aryans" to prevent them from "defiling" German blood through intermingling and "stealing" the "rewards" of Germans' hard work.<sup>173</sup> The tropes and stereotypes about blacks in Germany, as corrupting and inferior human beings, present in the Massaquoi's education shows the far reach of Nazi racial doctrine in German society; no individual avoided the Nazis' racial indoctrination and discrimination, not even German children. Upon the completion of his secondary education, Massaquoi could not attend university because "the universities" section of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws forbade non-Aryans from attending universities in Germany.<sup>174</sup> As such, Massaquoi went on to get an apprenticeship as a machinist.<sup>175</sup>

Despite the racism and discrimination that Massaquoi endured in his youth, like Michael, Massaquoi found himself influenced greatly by Nazi propaganda and, to some extent, bought into Nazi racial propaganda. From claiming that he hated Jews because he was a "good German" and repeatedly attempting to join the *Jungvolk* to collecting figurines for the Nazi leaders, Massaquoi desired to be a part of the Nazi movement and admired Germany.<sup>176</sup> Once he reached adulthood, Massaquoi even attempted to join the

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<sup>172</sup> Massaquoi, 111.

<sup>173</sup> Massaquoi, 130.

<sup>174</sup> Michael, 57.

<sup>175</sup> Massaquoi's ability to do an apprenticeship and subsequently have a job as a machinist appears, based on historical records, to be an anomaly or exception for job placement for members of the Black community in Germany and not the norm. Most members of the Black community, as previously discussed, were relegated to service jobs or jobs where they had to use their "exoticness" for money.

<sup>176</sup> Massaquoi, 57-62.

Nazis' military forces.<sup>177</sup> A possible rationalization for Massaquoi's desire to be a part of German society, in spite of his experiences, could be a desire to obtain some semblance of respect, acceptance, or prestige that he had up until that point been deprived of because of his race.<sup>178</sup> Additionally, Massaquoi (similar to Michael) found himself in a constant struggle to understand his own personal identity as a bi-racial German and accordingly could have seen participation in the systems of his oppression as a means to connect with his German heritage.<sup>179</sup> The simplest understanding, nevertheless, is that both Massaquoi and Michael wanted to be a part of German society because they were immersed in Nazi propaganda inside, and outside, of the classroom. No matter the rationale, the fact remains that a desire to be part of the state appeared as an omnipresent desire of at least some of the mixed-race individuals in Germany.

Outside of the classroom as well, Nazis' notion of "racial purity" took center stage in the lives of members of the Black community and can be seen clearly through Massaquoi's experiences.<sup>180</sup> One of the primary stereotypes used, especially against black men, portrayed black people as sexual predators or "defilers" of the German race; the Germans named the relations between Aryans and non-Aryans, even if consensual, as *Rassenschande* or "racial pollution."<sup>181</sup> As such, the Nazis included the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor within the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 to criminalize any intermingling between Aryan Germans and other groups. In particular, the Law originally only included Jews but, after being amended, stipulated that "Gypsies,

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<sup>177</sup> Massaquoi, 192-193.

<sup>178</sup> Massaquoi, 192-193.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Massaquoi, 134.

<sup>181</sup> Massaquoi, 180-183.

Negroes and their bastard offspring” were forbidden from having relations with Aryan Germans and imposed severe punishments of castration, internment or death.<sup>182</sup>

Massaquoi recalled: “If I entertained and notions of simply ignoring the law, they were countered by chilling accounts I had heard, detailing how Jews [as well as other minorities] who had been caught committing *Rassenschande* [interracial relations] with German women had paid for their ‘crime’ with castration or even their lives.”<sup>183</sup> As a result of the Nazi laws surrounding racial purity, blacks in Germany lived in perpetual fear of possibly being accused of *Rassenschande* and treaded lightly around White German women; nevertheless, possible accusations of *Rassenschande* and portrayals of “the Black man” as predatory were possible even if one tried to avoid them. Masaquoi recalled, in particular, an instance while walking home at night and he got detained by Nazi SS soldiers for “loitering” and being “on the prowl for defenseless women [referring to white Aryan women] or looking for an opportunity to steal.”<sup>184</sup> The German conceptualization of “the Black man,” or the Black community more generally, as a sexual predator or “defiler” of German society did not begin the rise of the Nazis; instead, its origins date back much further and can even be seen in the German portrayal of black French soldiers occupying the Rhineland after World War I.<sup>185</sup> The positioning of the Black community as the “other” or a threat transcends merely the World War II period in Germany and expands even beyond the borders of Germany to Europe more broadly.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Massaquoi, 188.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Massaquoi, 160.

<sup>185</sup> Campbell, 480.

<sup>186</sup> “Black Peril on Rhine,” *Daily Herald*.

Massaquoi's experiences with racism throughout his youth, as well as the experiences of Michael in his youth, show the discriminatory nature of German society during the Interwar and early World War II period and the reach of Nazi racial policies. Massaquoi and Michael were, in the eyes of the Nazis and mainstream white Germany, "inferior" beings. Simultaneously, however, they were viewed as an exotic "exhibition" for white mainstream German consumption and a "corrupting" force of or "problem" for German society and an exotic "exhibition" for white mainstream German consumption.<sup>187</sup> Although Massaquoi and Michael's experiences growing up in Nazi Germany are telling of the struggles that the Black community in Germany faced they do not tell the complete story or cover the broad range of experiences encountered by members of the Black community in Germany; in the later part of their lives, until the war ended, Massaquoi worked as a machinist doing forced labor in a German factory and Michael completed odds and ends of jobs working at "Exotic" hotels.<sup>188</sup> To those ends, Massaquoi and Michael were both were able to avoid some of the worst aspects of the Interwar and World War II period for blacks in Germany—namely forced sterilization, internment, or death—by avoiding the attention of the Nazi party, but many other blacks in Germany during this period were not as lucky.<sup>189</sup>

Since the turn of the 20th-century notions of sterilization of "degenerates" and "undesirable" members of society was gaining traction in Germany as renowned German doctors, like Boeters and Alfred Ploetz, began promoting sterilization as a solution to "protect the German race from hereditary disease."<sup>190</sup> The arguments of the

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<sup>187</sup> Massaquoi, 68-70.

<sup>188</sup> Massaquoi, 59.

<sup>189</sup> Massaquoi, 70.

<sup>190</sup> Pommerin, 319.

aforementioned doctors, as well as many other German doctors, relied on five general assumptions about genetics that were held as facts in the 1920s and 1930s Germany. First, Germany's socio-political failings in World War I could be attributed to degeneration or *Entartung* of the population rooted in social welfare's enabling of "Counter-selection" or *Gegenauslese*. Counter-selection inferred that social welfare programs hindered the process of natural selection and permitted "undesirable" segments of the population to survive.<sup>191</sup> Second, eugenic inferiority became increasingly documented by German doctors, and medicine developed into a possible solution to addressing eugenic "inferiority."<sup>192</sup> Third, eugenic "inferiority" became viewed as hereditarily transmitted and used as a "scapegoat" for all of society's ailments. Fourth, the individual's rights were irrelevant in the mission to redeem or reclaim a larger notion of "the German people."<sup>193</sup> Fifth, a vision for a world without "inferiority" or illness seemed possible if the "necessary" steps were taken.<sup>194</sup> With prevalent assumptions surrounding race and a desire to "protect" the German race, It did not take long for the sterilization of minority groups to gain prominence as a solution to protect notions of German racial purity.<sup>195</sup> With an increased number of mixed-race Germans—many of whom were coming of age in the late 1920s and early 1930s—the "mixed-race" problem for those in the German government continued to grow. As a result, throughout the

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<sup>191</sup> Susan D. Bachrach, and Dieter. Kuntz. *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004: 61-90. Print.

<sup>192</sup> Bachrach, 63.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Pommerin, 319.

1920s, illegal sterilizations were being conducted to maintain the “purity” of German blood.<sup>196</sup>

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s public health officials from Germany and pro-sterilization doctors began warning that mixed-race children or “bastard” children posed a serious danger to the health of Germany; their rational, although never substantiated or proven in any actual scientific manner, was that mixed-race children were more prone to sickness like syphilis because of their many “inferiorities” resulting from “unnatural” racial mixing.<sup>197</sup> Doctors and public health officials were not alone in their concerns for the “health” of Germany and the “purity” of German blood, political figures throughout Germany held similar or even more racist beliefs. The mixed-race children, in particular Afro-Germans, were put into an impossible position: “They were a reminder of the defeat in the War, they were a reminder of French occupation force, and they reminded people of the inability of German men to protect their women from alleged rapists. That means that the authorities already had these children in their sights by the mid-1920s.”<sup>198</sup> In 1927 Governor Jolas of the Palatinate wrote to the German Central Government in Berlin about his concern that “the older children of mixed blood living in his region would soon reach the age at which they could produce children in their turn.”<sup>199</sup> The solution to the problem, Governor Jolas proposed, should be the sterilization of black and mixed-race German teenagers—which he acknowledged as illegal at the time and advocated for legal exceptions—so that they could not further “defile” the

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<sup>196</sup> Pommerin, 318-320.

<sup>197</sup> Bachrach, 96-97.

<sup>198</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame,"* DW Documentary.

<sup>199</sup> Pommerin, 318-320.



German race.<sup>200</sup> With no legal means to sterilize “legitimate” mixed-race or black Germans, however, pro-sterilization doctors and politicians looked to the rising popularity of the Nazi party and their radical racial purity policies as a means to achieve their desired outcome.

Nine weeks after the Nazis came to power, Minister of the Interior of Prussia, Hermann Göring sought to examine the extent of the “mixed-race” problem and he requested a survey to be conducted in order to evaluate the number of mixed-race children in Germany.<sup>201</sup> Goring assigned racial eugenics scientist Dr. Eugen Fischer and his assistant Dr. Wolfgang Abel the task of conducting the survey in the summer of 1933. Fischer and his assistant came to the conclusion that the mixing of an “inferior race” with a “superior race” caused the genetic decline of humans down the “hierarchical ladder of races” and, as a result, should be avoided at all cost.<sup>202</sup> The following year, Fischer’s assistant Abel published an article in the journal of the Racial Policy Office and called for their sterilization of mixed-race children to prevent the “pollution” of the German race. With the growing “scientific support” for sterilization, on June 28th, 1933, a mere five months after Hitler took power, the Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick outlined the Nazi Race program clearly to the German people and he emphasized the essential role that sterilization would play in it.<sup>203</sup> For Frick, and the Nazi party, there were portions of the population that needed to be sterilized to prevent the further propagation of their genes because they—as a result of their physical and mental inferiority—caused the

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Bachrach, 96-97.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Bachrach, 60-61.

cultural or racial degeneration of Germany.<sup>204</sup> The Nazis, therefore, sought to prevent the continued births of “undesirable” segments of the German population and to promote “hereditary health” through the procreation of “desired” (i.e. Aryan) segments of the population.<sup>205</sup> With the Nazi race program clearly outlined, on July 14th of 1933, the German government passed the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases in order to “eradicate biologically inferior hereditary taints” and to cleans the “undesirable” segments of Germany’s population.<sup>206</sup>

When introduced, the 1933 Nazi law encountered little public criticism and a large amount of support from the German medical community, which had increasingly become pro-sterilization over the 1920s years and had a desire to “reclaim” the German people or *Volk*.<sup>207</sup> Additionally, the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases promised to decrease public reliance on the state by sterilizing “inferior,” reduce costs for institutional care, decrease the number of illegitimate children and provide greater benefits for the “desirable” segments of the German population.<sup>208</sup> The 1933 Nazi law mandated the forced sterilization of “certain” individuals with physical and mental disabilities. Nazis considered minority groups to not only be physically disabled or “inferior” when compared to their white counterparts but mentally inferior as well and, in many cases, comparable to wild animals.<sup>209</sup> The law, although it did not directly include being a minority as rationale for sterilization, indirectly gave the legal grounds for the

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Bachrach, 62.

<sup>206</sup> Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases. In US Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression. Volume 5, Washington, DC, 1946 (July 14, 1933): <http://german.historydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/English30.pdf>, 880-83.

<sup>207</sup> Bachrach, 65.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases, N.p.

involuntary sterilization of people with physical and mental disabilities or mental illness, and “asocial elements;” normalizing the sterilization of individuals deemed “inferior” by the Nazi regime and creating state institutions to enforce said determinations.<sup>210</sup> After 1937, the rationalization used in the law, in conjunction with the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 served as the basis for the illegal sterilization of black Germans.<sup>211</sup>

In 1937 the Nazis took the next step in their mission to address the “problem” of the black and mixed-race population in Germany by setting up a means for their sterilization in secrecy. Between June and July of 1937, the Nazis created a “Commission” at the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin—as well as three sub-commissions in Wiesbaden, Ludwigshafen, and Koblenz—to begin the process of secretly sterilizing black Germans.<sup>212</sup> obtaining the consent of the mixed-race and black children seemed to be the only remaining “problem,” in the eyes of the Nazis; since their mothers were German citizens, the Nazis’ feared the public backlash from stripping parental rights away from German mothers. As a result of modern records, however, it is known today that the vast majority of mothers (some 90% according to records) agreed to have the procedures completed on their children and put up no resistance.<sup>213</sup> Throughout the secret sterilization mission, some 385 mixed-race children between the ages of seven and seventeen were sterilized.<sup>214</sup>

When it came to mixed-race Germans and black adults the Nazis forcibly sterilized many of them in secrecy throughout the country, sometimes without even the

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<sup>210</sup> Bachrach, 71.

<sup>211</sup> Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases, N.p.

<sup>212</sup> Pommerin, 322.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

victim even knowing, and records of said sterilizations are far scarcer. When speaking on the topic of forced sterilization and his avoidance of medical services in Nazi Germany, Michael wrote: “I heard that some of our young “countrymen” had been sterilized against their will when they had to go into hospital for one reason or another.”<sup>215</sup> Altogether, the Nazis sought to solve the mixed-race “problem” in Germany by secretly sterilizing members of the Black community in Germany and systematically alienating them from the public sphere through legal decrees that identified them as non-Aryan. The fate of the Black community in Germany from 1933 to 1945 ranged from societal isolation to state-sponsored persecution, forced sterilization, medical experimentation, internment, and even murder in some cases merely for the color of their skin.<sup>216</sup> The Black community in Germany, however, did not suffer from a public and systematic program for their elimination like the Jews and other groups; instead, the Black German community became persecuted in secrecy and through the ambiguity of Nazi race laws.

Why was the Black community in Germany not systematically persecuted to the same extent as other minorities in Nazi Germany, such as the Jews? A possible explanation for the experience of blacks in Germany is that they were seen as “undesirable” by Nazis but not, necessarily, as a threat to German society or Nazi racial plans. Central to this vision of Germany was the notion of purity of “Aryan” blood and a “reclaiming” of the German people or *Volk*.<sup>217</sup> As such, the Nazis’ had a coherent notion of racial and eugenic policy and clear groups who were understood to be the primary targets of Nazi efforts; on the one hand were those classified as “aliens” (Jews, Blacks,

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<sup>215</sup> Michael, 89.

<sup>216</sup> Pommerin, 318-319.

<sup>217</sup> Aitken, 231-232.

and Gypsies) and on the other hand those who were of ‘German blood’ but genetically “inferior.”<sup>218</sup> The targets, as such, were clear from the onset of Nazi racial policies. The differences between the groups were Nazis’ conceptualization of which should take priority, and which were “most” dangerous to German society. The notion of “the most dangerous” became synonymous with the Jewish population who were seen as “parasites” on the German society/economy and the Gypsies who refused to serve in the German armed forces or abide by Nazi regulations.<sup>219</sup> While the rationalization for Nazi persecution varied, Nazi racial policies were often ironic and not consistent; while Gypsies were oppressed for not serving, mixed-race German children were barred from participating in the military or public sector jobs.

In the end, a large portion of the Nazis’ racial discrimination targeted Jews and Gypsies, who were blamed for nearly any problems ongoing in German society. Hitler even, as previously discussed, blamed the Jews for the existence of mixed-race children and the Black community in Germany, insisting that their presence could be traced to a plot to undermine Germany by the Jews.<sup>220</sup> With the vast majority of scapegoating being targeted at the Jewish community and Gypsies, the Black community largely escaped systematic persecution because they were viewed as peripheral problems to the Nazis race agenda or, simply, as not threats; however, they could not escape the day-to-day persecution of being deemed a non-Aryan or “undesirable.” Nevertheless, it is possible, if not likely, that the persecution of the Black community in Germany would have become more intense had the Nazis stayed in power.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Aitken, 231-232.

<sup>220</sup> Pommerin, 320.

<sup>221</sup> Massaquoi, 111.

As the Black community in Germany underwent racial discrimination, exoticization, alienation and commodification throughout the early, and mid-20th century, many within the Black community sought out connections to a greater “Black experience” that transcended borders. Throughout the Interwar and World War II period, the Black community in Germany tended to look to international Black icons, often taking the form of well-known African-American athletes or performers, as symbols of a larger “Black experience;” in their view, their success became equivalent to the success of everyone within the Black community globally.<sup>222</sup> As such, in the autobiographies of both Massaquoi and Michael, they discuss the significance of black athletes—such as African-American track runner Jesse Owens and boxer Joe Louis—to themselves and the Black community in Germany as symbols. Massaquoi, in particular, made note of the symbolism of Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympic Games breaking the German stereotypes of blacks as “primitive” beings.<sup>223</sup> Massaquoi recalled:

Even the most ignorant and prejudiced among my neighbors were quick to realize that the clean-cut young black men [Jesse Owens and other African-American Olympic athletes] in the smart white uniforms... were anything but the primitive savages they had expected. Learning that the black athletes were college students made a deep impression on my education-worshipping countrymen...From the very beginning of the games it was clear to me that the black athletes’ victories were my victories, that their defeats were my defeats. I immediately felt a surge of pride over the very special kinship that linked me with these men from America.<sup>224</sup>

Successful black athletes, as Massaquoi described, helped blacks in Germany to feel connected to an international “black experience” based on shared experiences of race, providing pride and optimism in a period when Nazi race policies constantly undermined

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<sup>222</sup> Massaquoi, 111.

<sup>223</sup> Massaquoi, 120.

<sup>224</sup> Massaquoi, 120.-122

their value to society. At the same time, however, black athletes unable to beat their white counterparts became symbols of the Black community's "inferiority" to white mainstream society.<sup>225</sup>

As World War II came to a close, Michael and other members of the Black community in Germany were left in a state of ambiguity without any aid from the German government or the occupying Allied powers; Germans bore "no responsibility for foreigners" and Americans were ordered to only help those who were prisoners of war, Jewish or those otherwise interned in concentration camps.<sup>226</sup> With little opportunity and no support in war-torn Germany, Michael found comradeship with the African-American soldiers—African-American soldiers were also highly discriminated against by their white counterparts in the American army and by members Nazi supporters in Germany—occupying Berlin. Michael recalled: "There was nothing for it but to turn to the black soldiers, I felt right at home with them. I even made friends with some of them before they went home. They were very friendly to me, taught me my first English with the help of those comics and later through American films."<sup>227</sup> For the small Black community in Germany, the presence of African-American soldiers in Germany placed them into a transnational community rooted not only in race but shared experiences of racial discrimination. This sense of community between black Germans and African Americans provided mutual support in the face of discrimination by white mainstream society, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers to connect blacks from different continents together.

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<sup>225</sup> Massaquoi, 118-120.

<sup>226</sup> Michael, 114.

<sup>227</sup> Michael, 115.

With the Black community in Germany painted as the exotic “other” or an “undesired” segment of the population and discriminated against at every turn, Nazi race policies consumed the everyday life of blacks in Germany; however, even before the Nazi rise to power there existed was an alienation of the black community as “the other” and a relegation of the black existence to something unnatural and exotic.<sup>228</sup> Some admiration of the international black community could be seen throughout various periods—as noted with the prominence of African-American Jazz in the Interwar period and the limited admiration for African-American athletes like Jesse Owens—but the general sentiment in Germany held that blacks (as well as other minorities) were responsible for Germany’s shortcomings during World War I, were mentally “primitive” and physically “inferior” to their white counterparts.<sup>229</sup> In fact, in many instances, the “primitivity” of blacks became exoticized and subsequently commodified, for the entertainment of white mainstream German society.<sup>230</sup> The story of the Black community in Germany is a testament to the general experience of Blacks in Europe during the period and the important role that race can play in casting minorities as the “other” in the erosion of their human rights.

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<sup>228</sup> Michael, 116-117.

<sup>229</sup> Massaquoi, 120.-122.

<sup>230</sup> Michael, 116-117.



## CHAPTER 3: FRANCE 1918-1945

**Section 1- The Black Community in France & French Eugenics:**

France has an extensive and checkered history with both the conceptualization of race and the black population that has dwelled within its borders to varying degrees since the 17th century. As a result of their colonial past, France developed an extensive hierarchy of racial classifications (*noir*, *nègre*, *métis*, and *mulâtre*) to clarify and reinforce their colonial rule, promoting the creation of *mulâtre* or mixed-race children to be educated in France and serve as the colonial ruling elite in French colonial possessions abroad.<sup>231</sup> The French conceptualization, therefore, of race and blackness was multilayered, unlike the case of German case discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>232</sup> French racial classifications affected the experience of blacks while in France and, respectively, in their home communities as well.<sup>233</sup> In the 20th century the French fetishized black people in a movement called Negrophilia—most often this fetishization can be seen through the hyper-sexualization of the black body and common stereotypes about African primitivism—and relegated them to the status of the “exotic other” in society; in this way, the black presence in France can be seen through mainstream white France’s desire infatuation with black entertainment. French fascination with the “exotic other” allowed black performers to find work during the Interwar Period when opportunities were scarce,

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<sup>231</sup> Jennifer Anne Boittin. "Black in France: The Language and Politics of Race in the Late Third Republic." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2 (2009): 23, doi:10.3167/fpcs.2009.270202.

<sup>232</sup> Andy Fry. *Paris Blues: African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920-1960*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014: 30. Print.

<sup>233</sup> Boittin, 23-24.

but it also institutionalized France's racial definition of the black community in France as different and marginal.<sup>234</sup> While the French found themselves infatuated with blacks and black culture, the conservative segments of French society often found themselves villainizing blacks as foreign “predators,” condemning blacks as mechanisms of foreign cultural imperialism—especially in the case of African-American music or entertainment—or even outright persecuting them.<sup>235</sup> Lastly, the French conceptualization of blackness, permitted by its colonial views, was one that allowed France to appropriate or assimilate aspects of black culture into mainstream society more easily; art or other types of work could be, like an individual, placed somewhere on the French racial classification as somewhere in between black and white.<sup>236</sup> Although the experiences of each black person in France during the period varies based on their background, overarching themes of simultaneous alienation and fetishization remain constant.

In 1918, the French Empire stretched across more than four continents and encompassed sizable portions of Africa; France’s African possessions included not only a sizable portion of West Africa, Northern Africa, and French Equatorial Africa, but Madagascar and French Somaliland as well.<sup>237</sup> Some parts of Northern Africa were so integrated within the French state that they were considered official overseas provinces or *départements* of France and were administered in the same way as provinces like Normandy or Île-de-France. Despite its sizable African holdings, a sizable black population was not documented in France until the start of World War I when colonial

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<sup>234</sup> Boittin, 23-24.

<sup>235</sup> Fry, 6-7.

<sup>236</sup> Boittin, 23-24.

<sup>237</sup> Aitken, 279.

troops landed on the shores of France to serve in the military. The black colonial subjects were met by a fledgling group of black students and educated colonial subjects who worked in white-collar jobs and as African-American entertainers.<sup>238</sup>

With France emerging victorious from World War I, they began to station their troops, both black and white alike, in occupied German territories along the German-French borders; between 134,000 and 335,000 black colonial soldiers fought in the French armed forces during World War I and some 380,000 African-American soldiers served in the American armed forces on France's side. Some French black colonial subjects came to Europe during World War I to serve as workers and others, the vast majority, came by force as *tirailleurs*.<sup>239</sup> In France *tirailleurs* is a term used to refer to black French colonial subjects who were recruited to serve in the army, often by overt force or covert coercion. In addition to the white-collared elite, Tirailleurs and workers, there was a large number of African-American soldiers present in France throughout the World War I period, with some choosing to stay after their deployment had ended.<sup>240</sup> Despite their concurrent presence in Europe throughout World War I, the existence of the large black population in France and France's occupied territories did not come under scrutiny until the war had concluded.

In the months following the end of World War I, continental outrage sparked as the presence of black French soldiers in occupied Germany, as discussed in the previous chapter, took center stage, and rumors of black soldiers raping and murdering white Europeans spread.<sup>241</sup> Overnight, European foreign leaders, religious leaders, and activists

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<sup>238</sup> Boittin, 23-24.

<sup>239</sup> Boittin, 25.

<sup>240</sup> Fry, 5-7.

<sup>241</sup> Last, 124.

alike were calling on France to remove their black soldiers from occupied Germany and cast them out of Europe before they could defile “European civilization” any further. With anti-minority sentiments heightened, the French government began phasing out their black colonial soldiers from occupied Germany and encouraging or forcing them to leave Europe to return home.<sup>242</sup> As a result, the large black population in France brought about by World War I substantially dwindled within the following months and years. However, a handful of former colonial troops, African-Americans, and blacks working white-collared jobs stayed in France.<sup>243</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, with thousands of blacks leaving Europe to head home, a new wave of black immigrants set sail for France in the months and years to come. France became a place of refuge for Black Germans and former Cameroonian immigrants to Germany (who now fell under the protection of France pursuant to the Versailles Peace Treaty) fleeing war-torn Germany.<sup>244</sup> Although the vast majority of African Americans left France after the war, many African-Americans chose to visit or came to live in France during the Interwar Period to find opportunity in the music or service industries and to “escape” the large scale persecution of blacks in the United States of America by immigrating to the “race-blind” country of France.<sup>245</sup> As a result, France became a place of refuge for blacks not only in other parts of Europe but in the United States seeking economic opportunity or security.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Boittin, 25.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Michael, 94.

<sup>245</sup> Fry, 2-3.

<sup>246</sup> Although many African-Americans viewed France as a “color-blind” society many historians, such as Ralph Schor, have argued that “egalitarian ideals” of “fraternity” or “racial coexistence” were often just fantasized versions of the black experience in France. Instead, Schor argues, that black people in early to mid-20th-century France were encountered with the everyday reality of racism; French racism was just often more covert than in the USA.

An exact count of the black population in France during the Interwar period is difficult to determine as a result of Afro-Caribbean, who were French citizens, and African-Americans not being accounted for in many estimates and consistently conflicting estimates by French police.<sup>247</sup> The SLOTFOM—a French government agency affiliated with the Ministry of Colonies’ Military Affairs Division—calculated that 379 French West and Equatorial Africans, and 462 Malagasies lived in 1924 France. In 1926, 2,015 Africans and 665 Malagasies were calculated to have lived in France. Lastly, in 1932 SLOTFOM calculated that 894 Africans and 559 Malagasies lived in France based on historic records and estimates.<sup>248</sup> Contrary to SLOTFOM’s calculations, however, French police records estimate that in 1926 there were between 10,000 and 15,000 black men in Paris alone. Although estimates vary about the exact size of the black population in France, some notable trends are present in all of the demographic information compiled and some tangible comparisons can be drawn with the black population in Germany.

The similarities between the French and German black populations begin with their demographic compositions. The vast majority of the black population in France in the early 20th century was composed of males; men made up some 98% of those recorded by SLOTFOM or the French police and women were only 2% of the black population in France.<sup>249</sup> Similarly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of the black population in Germany consisted of men.<sup>250</sup> The gender imbalance in the black population dwelling in Germany led to the creation of a notable mixed-race population in

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<sup>247</sup> Boittin, 25-26.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Boittin, 23-26.

<sup>250</sup> Aitken, 1-5.

the German Rhineland and some major urban centers as black men sought to find German spouses; the birth of mixed-race children, after the German government became aware, was something carefully tracked and monitored.<sup>251</sup> A similar phenomenon may have occurred in France, due to the gender imbalance, during the early to mid-20th-century. The birth of mixed-race children, however, was not as closely monitored in France—likely due to the larger size of the black community in France and the normalization of mixed-race children in French society due to the nation’s colonial history—so exact numerical accounts are difficult to find.

In addition to having similar gender compositions, the black population in France and Germany both also came from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder and dwelled in large urban centers. Members of the black population in France and Germany often came from Africa, or in the case of France from the United States of America, looking for opportunity and were employed as performers or some type of worker.<sup>252</sup> However, the aforementioned economic class of people within the black community, of course, has its exceptions. Most notably, in France there was a prominent class of mixed-race people—from the ruling class in French colonies—who occupied prominent positions in French society, worked white-collared jobs, or studied in French universities.<sup>253</sup> Additionally, France enjoyed the presence of some highly successful African-American entertainers, such as Josephine Baker, who had a prominent role in French society and made a comfortable living.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Fry, 5-7.

<sup>253</sup> Fry, 5-7.

<sup>254</sup> Fry, 7-9.

Besides socio-economic class, the black populations in France and Germany also both were concentrated in major urban centers or port cities. In the 1920s, the SLOTFOM estimated that some  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the French black population was located in Paris alone, with the vast majority of the remaining population residing in port cities such as Le Havre, Bordeaux, Toulon, and Marseille.<sup>255</sup> Similarly, a majority of the black population in Germany in the early to mid-20th-century could be found in the country's major cities like Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich.<sup>256</sup> A likely explanation for the centralization of the black population in France and Germany around urban centers is that there was a greater amount of job availability in said regions, especially since many black people worked in the entertainment or services industries. While the demographic composition of the black population in France and Germany bears similarities in terms of their socio-economic class, residency, and gender breakdown they also have defining differences from each other.

The primary differences between the black population in France and the black population in Germany stem from their sheer size and visibility. Blacks in France held a more visible place in French society as a result of France's vast colonial holdings in Africa, the French colonial practice of developing a mixed-race elite class in its colonies for administration, and the cultural impact/popularity of black entertainment such as Jazz in France.<sup>257</sup> In contrast, Germany had a rather small colonial presence in Africa, did not actively promote interracial mingling in its colonies, and black entertainment—although successful—met only marginal prominence in the country during the early to mid-20th-

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<sup>255</sup> Boittin, 25.

<sup>256</sup> Aitken, 20.

<sup>257</sup> Fry, 7.

century.<sup>258</sup> Put simply, the black population of Germany was not as integrated into society or normalized as the black population in France was. Besides their greater visibility, and perhaps partly as a result of said visibility, blacks in France were more numerous than in Germany.<sup>259</sup> The black populations in France and Germany during the period share striking similarities, but also some notable differences that affect the experience of blacks living within each country during the early to mid-20th-century.

With a small black community in France, many black people had unique experiences there in the first half of the 20th century driven by the exoticization of the Black community and racial stereotypes. Due to the limited sources available about the black population in France, however, this essay has a limited scope for primary sources by members of the black community about their experiences, except for the more prominent African-American musicians or entertainers. A possible explanation for the limited number of sources, available in English, is the working-class characteristic of many within the community and their limited financial resources.<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, to understand the black French experience in the early to mid-20th-century, it is important to look at first-hand accounts from members of said community and add lived-experiences to the discussion of the Black French community; for the purposes of this essay the first-hand accounts will come primarily from African-American entertainers

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<sup>258</sup> Kater, 11-13.

<sup>259</sup> Reference earlier statistics of the black population in France and Germany, respectively, during the early to mid-20th-century to see the difference in sheer size.

<sup>260</sup> This could be a reasonable explanation for the lack of sources in all languages, including French, on the topic of the black presence in Europe during the time period; English-language sources for the history of other cultures (so long as they do not share English as a native language) largely depend on their notoriety in English-speak countries.



who lived and worked in France, since these works are the most prolific and available in English.

As black entertainment took France by storm in the first half of the twentieth century and a small black community began to take form in France, so too did notions of eugenics, racial hygiene, nationalism, and conservative xenophobia.<sup>261</sup> One of the most notable examples of xenophobia and nationalism during the period was the Dreyfus Affair. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a French spying scandal involving a Jewish artillery captain in the French army named Alfred Dreyfus shows the xenophobia and nationalism apparent in French society during the period. who was falsely convicted of passing military secrets to the Germans.<sup>262</sup> In 1894, a French spy at the German Embassy in Paris discovered a ripped-up letter detailing French military secrets in a trash can. The French spy claimed that the writing resembled Dreyfus' and in a matter of no time he was court-martialed, found guilty of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>263</sup> What followed was a strong wave of antisemitism.

The publicity and antisemitism surrounding the Dreyfus Affairs, as it would come to be known, was symbolic of the rising tide of French nationalism and xenophobia apparent to some extent throughout the 20th century. In a public ceremony in Paris following his conviction, Dreyfus was publicly denounced as a traitor and paraded throughout the streets as crowds shouted, "Death to Judas, death to the Jew."<sup>264</sup> In the

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<sup>261</sup> Fry, 10.

<sup>262</sup> Émile Zola and Elizabeth Vitanza. "'J'accuse'" *In The Literature of Propaganda*, edited by Thomas Riggs. Gale, 2013: 1-7.  
[http://libproxy.union.edu/login?auth=shibboleth&url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/gale/jp/j\\_accuse/0?institutionId=5120](http://libproxy.union.edu/login?auth=shibboleth&url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/gale/jp/j_accuse/0?institutionId=5120).

<sup>263</sup> Zola, 1-3.

<sup>264</sup> Zola, 1-3.

wake of the Dreyfus Affair, Émile Zola published an editorial titled *J'accuse* or “I accuse”. The editorial, which appeared on January 13, 1889 in the Paris newspaper *L'Aurore*, was written to the French President and it proclaimed Dreyfus’ innocence to the charges of treason and attempted to expose the rampant anti-Semitism that led to his conviction.<sup>265</sup> The editorial began the large-scale debate that would become the Dreyfus Affair and, ultimately, led to the acquittal of Dreyfus. In the aftermath of both the Dreyfus Affair and Zola’s editorial piece, however, Zola was convicted of libel and fled to the United Kingdom.<sup>266</sup> *J'accuse* and the antisemitism that caused, and resulted from, the Dreyfus affair shows a far less “color blind” and accepting image of France than that which Baker details. France’s anti-Semitism at the turn of the 20th century shows how France, in its own right, had discrimination during the period that was rooted in a growing sense of French conservatism and nationalism.

Of note, as well, in understanding the perceptions of mainstream French society is the heightened French-Algerian tensions throughout the early to mid-20th-century and the subsequent anti-African sentiments that arose from it. After its subjugation in the early 19th century and its subsequent integration into the French state as a province or *département*, civil unrest began to mount in Algeria as French colonial practices systematically brutalized and isolated the Muslim majority from any economic or political power.<sup>267</sup> Consequently, France spent the early to mid-20th-century attempting

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<sup>265</sup> Zola, 5-7.

<sup>266</sup> The accusation of Libel was used to persecute Jews throughout the Middle Ages and well into the early twentieth century. In its essence, the libel or blood libel accusation insinuated that Jewish people used the blood of Christians in religious rituals, especially in the preparation of Passover bread. In the case of Zola, as well as many other Jews, the accusation of libel was used as a way to silence him, and said accusations were often baseless or founded on fictitious evidence.

<sup>267</sup> Fry, 98-102.

to pacify the Muslim majority of Algeria up until the point that Algerian militants broke out into open violence to obtain greater autonomy and independence.<sup>268</sup> In the context of Algerian unrest, the performances of Baker and other black entertainers fit well into the mindset of mainstream white French society; black performances like Baker, having been accepted by many in mainstream France, serve as a “sanitized” reflection of the perceptions of white French society because, in a sense and in an exceptional way that had been accepted as “honorary members.” For mainstream French society, Black performers could simultaneously act out the “inferiority” or “savagery” stereotypes that the French desired to impose onto the rebellious Algerians—as well as Africans more generally—and at the same time serve as an outlet to vicariously live out their colonial desires that was being lost by their weakening colonial grip.

Essential, as well, to the discussion of white mainstream French society’s colonial desire and view of a “racial hierarchy” is the concept of eugenics. As mentioned earlier, the French had a fascination with the concept of hybridity, the creation of a mixed-race group of individuals, to create a ruling class in their colonial subjects.<sup>269</sup> The French fascination with hybridity in their colonies, arguably, served two purposes: (1) the creation of a ruling class accustomed to each respective colony but with the interest of France at heart and (2) the fulfillment of French colonial desires through interracial mingling.<sup>270</sup> However, as French colonial desires became unattainable as a result of the changing French policy towards interracial relations in the colonies, moving away from previous ambivalence towards it and towards outright rejection, members of white

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Fry, 60-64.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

mainstream French society turned towards black entertainment to fill some aspect of the void.<sup>271</sup> When discussing the interactions between hybridity, entertainment, and the colonial desire, historian Andy Fry wrote: “theorizations of hybridity [involved] an obsessive rehearsing of the consequences of the guilty appetite for —and, often force, union with—the other that was a feature of colonial movements the world over.”<sup>272</sup> The narratives of white men having interracial relations, and yet lacking any obligation to marry or care for the women (usually black or native) they engaged with, created an allure that infatuated the French audience and captured the male gaze. Black entertainment like Josephine Baker’s *la Revue Nègre*, therefore, served as manifestations of the French racial theory and colonial desire.

France’s obsession with race and racial theory led to growing support for a French eugenics’ movement; the French conceptualization of race, however, was far different than that viewed in other European countries such as Germany or the United Kingdom. Similar to Germany, the French conceptualized Europeans (with a special emphasis on French Europeans) as being the ideal race of people. Uniquely, however, the French idea of race emphasized the valuable presence of hybridity in the racial hierarchy and emphasized the need to control the rate and type of said hybridity.<sup>273</sup> In 1853 Count Gobineau—a highly influential French writer on racial theory—released a four-volume book, titled *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines (Essay on the Inequality of Human Races)*, which acknowledged the “vitalizing” nature of racial intermixing but cautioned against the instability and degeneration inherent to intermixing.<sup>274</sup> In order to minimize

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<sup>271</sup> Fry, 64-65.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Fry, 64-65.

the “natural” deficits of intermixing, Count Gobineau claimed that the racial balance had to be maintained after the creation of a national culture was created and enforced by whatever means necessary.

Count Gobineau’s work carries with it two primary assumptions: (1) the culture of non-white societies is nonexistent and must be “made” by intermingling with European people, and (2) since the national culture of France was already established the racial composition (as it was) needed to be maintained.<sup>275</sup> In addition to the prominent racial theories of Count Gobineau, in the mid-19th-century, racial theorist Pierre Paul Broca hypothesized that mixing between “proximate races” was beneficial and that mixing between “distant races” was dangerous. Count Gobineau and Broca’s work, although both considered groundbreaking in their time, were reliant on assumptions about French societal decline that had been present since the early 19th century as a result of declining birthrates and military defeat at the hands of the Germans in the Franco-Prussian war.<sup>276</sup> Nevertheless, the work of Count Gobineau and Broca helped to lay the theoretical groundwork for the rise of the French eugenics movement in the 20th century and encapsulate France’s theory of race well.<sup>277</sup>

In the 1920s, building off of the work of earlier writers such as Count Gobineau and Broca, France began to embrace the notion of “positive eugenics” to improve the growth of a healthy population with “desirable” characteristics.<sup>278</sup> French eugenics, like theories of eugenics in many other countries, was the culmination of fears surrounding

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> William Schneider. "Toward the Improvement of the Human Race: The History of Eugenics in France." *The Journal of Modern History*, vol 54, no. 2 (1982): 268-91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1906158>.

<sup>277</sup> Fry, 62-64.

<sup>278</sup> Fry, 65.

the “health of the nation” culturally, demographically, and racially in the early to mid-20th-century. Unlike other European nations, however, French eugenicists based their work on a Lamarckian view of heredity and not on a Darwinist view.<sup>279</sup> The Lamarckian view of heredity held that offspring can inherit physical characteristics that their parents acquired throughout their lifetime through use or disuse, meaning that an offspring's characteristics could be directly affected by their parents’ development or environment.<sup>280</sup> The French adoption of a Lamarckian view of heredity allowed them to examine the race theory of hybridity as a basis of understanding human abilities/ characteristics but also to argue that control over the French population’s environment can play a role in developing superior qualities that would be passed along to subsequent generations. Also, the French acceptance of the Lamarckian view of heredity meant that the health of the country was “constantly threatened by degeneration from all sorts of negative influences which could be passed on to subsequent generations;” French conservatives came to view these “degenerative” forces as anything they deemed not “French,” such as black entertainment and minority cultures.<sup>281</sup> In large part, however, the early stages of French eugenics fit well into the context of eugenics in other countries and were focused on how to improve the health of the population by “removing” any negative influences from the gene pool.

The earliest parts of the French eugenics’ movement looked at class and disease as the primary negative traits that were “inherited” by subsequent generations and it sought to curve both throughout the early 20th century. In 1914, Adolphe Pinard,

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<sup>279</sup> Schneider, 270.

<sup>280</sup> Schneider, 270-271.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Paris Medical School, and other eugenicists pleaded with the French public to not have children if their family had a history of carrying diseases for it was their “sacred duty” to their descendants and France to make strong offspring.<sup>282</sup> At the same time, however, throughout the 1930s Pinard and others sought to emphasize similar precautions to be taken for lower-class people in French society who they held as mentally inferior to the wealthy and more prone to diseases such as alcoholism, syphilis, and tuberculosis.<sup>283</sup> Concerns about a “healthy population” gained support in various realms of French society as solutions were articulated by scientists—calling for treatment of diseases and improvement of environmental conditions to limit negative traits inheritance—and the French Eugenics Society was formed.<sup>284</sup> In the 1920s the ultimate goal of the members of this society, many of whom were scientists who specialized in hereditary diseases, was to “protect” the French population from hereditary diseases, but their movement quickly turned from “positive eugenics” to “negative eugenics” as they entered into the realm of politics.<sup>285</sup>

At its core “Negative eugenics,” involved the elimination of undesirable traits from the French populace voluntarily or by force to ensure they were not passed on to subsequent generations. As French eugenics grew in prominence throughout the 1920s it became adopted by the National Social Hygiene Office of France French in 1924 and increasingly began to focus on eliminating negative traits or influences, sometimes by force, rather than improving or limiting them. To those ends, French eugenicists worked towards the passage of a law requiring a premarital physical examination to limit “unfit”

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<sup>282</sup> Schneider, 273.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Schneider, 280.

<sup>285</sup> Schneider, 278-279.

people from starting families, lobbying the government and raising awareness for their efforts.<sup>286</sup> On the matter of marriage, French eugenicist Georges Schreiber emphasized that screening was required before entering the army to ensure fitness and he questioned why such a regulation wasn't not mandatory for marriage or giving birth to children.<sup>287</sup> Debates surrounding the question of marriage "fitness," a mandatory examination and a national registry were highly debated in French Eugenics Society until they held a conference on the matter in 1926; the culmination of the French Eugenics Society's conference was the endorsement of legislation mandating marriage examinations and its promotion by organizations across France, such as the National League Against Alcoholism.<sup>288</sup>

In 1932, the French Eugenics society successfully lobbied for their legislation to get brought up for a vote in the French assembly, only to be shot down by changing public sentiments. 1932 premarital physical examination law, as well as other laws proposed by eugenicists, included an underlying tone of also adhering to a faint sense of racial selection.<sup>289</sup> For example, René Martial proposed an immigration system in France similar to tree grafting, claiming that interracial mixing needed to be controlled for the "health" of the French population. According to Martial, "the closer the match [of immigrant], the more chance the cutting [assimilation and "healthy" coexistence] would take place."<sup>290</sup> As quickly as "negative eugenics" came to prominence in France, it fell just as quickly from mainstream grace. As the Anglo-American eugenics' movement

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<sup>286</sup> Schneider, 283.

<sup>287</sup> Schneider, 281.

<sup>288</sup> Schneider, 286.

<sup>289</sup> Fry, 65.

<sup>290</sup> Fry, 65.



came under scrutiny and the Vatican publicly condemned eugenics for ignoring “celestial” influences, “negative eugenics” lost popularity quickly in France throughout the 1930s.<sup>291</sup>

Despite its decline in popularity, French eugenics lived on in conservative segments of the French population and emerged as the fascists took power in the 1940s. The French perception of race, hybridity, and eugenics—along with their lustful colonial desire—serve as important backdrops or influences on the way in which blacks in France had to live during the time period. In particular, France can be seen as a nation infatuated with and yet repulsed by the black community throughout the late 19th century and well into the Interwar period.

## **Section 2- The Life of Josephine Baker:**

When discussing African-American entertainers in France during the first half of the 20th century it is hard to not mention the remarkable life of the performer Josephine Baker. In 1906 St Louis, Missouri, Baker was born to a poor African-American family who struggled to find employment. Baker grew up in a “one-room shack” in the poorest section of the black quarter of St Louis until she was sent away by her parents to work as a servant, ensuring to some extent her physical wellbeing in exchange for work, for a white family in the countryside.<sup>292</sup> In her youth, Baker worked from 5:00 AM until 8:30 PM each day doing chores before heading to her employers’ cellar at 10:00 PM to sleep next to the dogs and other household pets. In the wake of mistakes or errors in her work,

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<sup>291</sup> Schneider, 286-289.

<sup>292</sup> Baker, 20.

Baker was regularly beaten or abused by her employers.<sup>293</sup> The abuse Baker endured in her youth, showing her the harsh realities of being poor and black, stopped only once she left her employers and returned home to her family.

Once home, now in her teenage years, Baker met an entertainment organizer named Mr. Bob Russell who helped her get involved in show business. After a successful opening night at one of Mr. Russell's performances, playing a cupid character, Baker hit the road with a "Negro company" to dance and sing throughout Missouri and nearby states.<sup>294</sup> Within no time, Baker was recognized by an international hostess in 1925 named Mrs. Dudley, who offered her a place as a black performer in a Paris show. According to her writings, Baker was ecstatic to escape the prejudice she had experienced in the United States since her youth as a black woman and travel to the "color blind" society of France where black people were appreciated. Baker told her acquaintance that: "In France I can go wherever I please. I'll be accepted in the best families. Being black isn't taken for granted there."<sup>295</sup> Baker's desire to travel to France as an entertainer and her optimism for a French society that "accepted" her was not unique to members of the African-American community in the 20th century; instead, Baker was part of a long tradition of African-Americans romanticizing France and migrating to the country.

The African-American perception of France, as well as some other European countries, during the early to mid-20th-century was one of great optimism in regards to race relations.<sup>296</sup> Paris, France, in particular, was seen by African-Americans as a

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<sup>293</sup> Baker, 3-4.

<sup>294</sup> Baker, 15-17.

<sup>295</sup> Baker, 43.

<sup>296</sup> According to historian Andy Fry, the romanticization of France by African-Americans was not secluded merely to those who had visited France in person or who had served in World War I. Instead, stories were passed on by parents and grandparents about French hospitality and the grandeur of French culture.

“hospitable” home that promoted “interracial harmony,” in sharp contrast to the racial discrimination, many African-Americans encountered at home in the United States.<sup>297</sup> Before World War I, an African-American community took root in France as entertainers. Black entertainers found success in France primarily because of a phenomenon in the late 19th century and early to mid-20th-century called negrophilia; the negrophillia movement consisted of the exoticization of the black body, black art, and the “black nature.” The French captivation with “blackness” came together to create les *Revue Nègres*—which were shows that emphasized stereotypes about African “primitivity” for the entertainment of white mainstream French society—and various other black entertainment forms. At the same time, however, the French infatuation with blackness created plentiful opportunities for black entertainers coming from around the world to work in France.<sup>298</sup>

The first African-Americans, according to records, came to France as minstrel performers in the 19th century and as “Cakewalkers” at the turn of the 20th century.<sup>299</sup> As World War I began and African-Americans came to France in large droves to fight in the war, African-American entertainers declined in popularity. However, black servicemen—like James Reese of the 369th Hell fighters—became well known for their musical abilities and were some of the first to not only help France celebrate victory in the war but to re-establish the prominence of African-American entertainment in France.<sup>300</sup>

Throughout the 1920s African-Americans were common-place entertainers in France as

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<sup>297</sup> Fry, 2-3.

<sup>298</sup> Fry, 2-9.

<sup>299</sup> Minstrel performers conducted comedic skits that played on the racial tropes and stereotypes held about black people. Contrarily, Cakewalkers were performers who did the African-American Cake Walk dance; the Cakewalk dance was a dance developed by slaves on southern plantations in the USA.

<sup>300</sup> Fry, 6-7.

exclusive black-run nightclubs appeared in urban areas, black entertainers headlined music-hall shows and French cafe and nightclub culture embraced African-American entertainers.<sup>301</sup> At the same time, however, white Frenchmen and women often impersonated African-American performers as well by using “blackface and white lips [or large and exacerbated red lips]” and performing dances such as the cakewalk, black bottom, or Charleston; the practice of blackface, although it continued to some degree, largely stopped as blacks migrated to France in larger numbers.<sup>302</sup>

Josephine Baker came to France in the third migration wave of African-American performers and came to embody the *Revue Nègres*, which were named after Josephine Baker’s 1925 performance *la Revue Nègre*, that captivated French society. When Baker arrived in France in the mid-1920s, she hit the ground running by doing a series of performances at the Champs-Élysées theater in Paris that captivated the French press and people with its “exotic” nature.<sup>303</sup> Historian Andy Fry wrote: “The originality of *la Revue Nègre* came less in nature than in degree: for the first time, black performers were occupying a French stage for an entire act (though still not an entire show).”<sup>304</sup> The performance positioned black entertainment, and by virtue black people, as an exotic spectacle for white mainstream French society.

The flyer for the performance, depicted on the left, shows Baker positioned in the center of the image in a sexualized position with her hips pointed.<sup>305</sup> Surrounding Baker is two black men with dark skin, large bulging eyes, and large lips typical of racial

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Baker, 53.

<sup>303</sup> Baker, 50-53.

<sup>304</sup> Fry, 36.

<sup>305</sup> Baker, 51-52.



1925, a flyer from Josephine Baker's la Revue Negre show in Paris. Source: Harlem in Montmartre Museum

caricatures of black people.

Additionally, the two black men depicted have highly exaggerated facial expressions that make them seem abnormal and distance them from the viewer of the flyer as something strange or “other.”

Therefore, the main attraction of the *Revue Nègre* show, as seen through the eyes of the promoters, was the performance of exaggerated stereotypes and sexualized images of black people for the entertainment of white mainstream

French society. In a similar fashion, throughout the early 20th century

Minstrel shows in the United States grew in popularity as racist caricatures of black people were performed throughout the country. Both black and white Americans used burnt black-cork to paint their faces black and carry out shows for white mainstream American society about what was considered “black behavior.”<sup>306</sup> The *Revue Nègre*, in this way, bear similarities with the human menageries or the *Völkerschau* in Germany discussed in the previous chapter, and also the Minstrel shows performed in the United

<sup>306</sup> Sampson, Henry T. “Blacks in Blackface.” *Blacks in Blackface: a Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows 2nd ed.* Lanham. Scarecrow Press, Inc., (2014): 2226-2260.

States; there was, to some extent, a fascination with the performative degradation of the black community in numerous white mainstream societies throughout the early to mid-20th-century.

When the French public entered the Champs-Élysées theater they were not to be disappointed by advertisements; Baker provided a riveting performance that some reportedly watched multiple times.<sup>307</sup> The *Revue Nègre* was performed by an all-black group and depicted African-American life, which the show depicted as “Mississippi steamboat races, New York skyscrapers and Charleston cabaret scenes.”<sup>308</sup> Baker's performances drew on French conceptualizations of the African-American experience as one solely of oppression and grief and presented racially driven depictions of Africans as “primitive” or “savage” through dance.<sup>309</sup> In fact, Baker's dance would come to be called *La Danse Sauvage* or savage dance by herself and onlookers. *La Danse Sauvage* involved Baker doing various rapid movements to demonstrate “savagery” and slow motions intended to grab the attention of the male audience through sex appeal. Baker would subvert the white male gaze with the wave of her arms, the sway of her hips, and the poking out her rear; she played elegantly with the imagination or fantasies of onlookers and played on their stereotypes about black people. When discussing Baker's early performance, her late husband Jo Bouillon said:

Now it was Josephine whose presence filled the stage, bringing with her a glimpse of another world. As she danced, quivering with intensity, the entire room felt the raw force of her passion. The excitement of her rhythm. She was eroticism personified. The simplicity of her emotions, her savage grace,

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<sup>307</sup> Baker, 51-52.

<sup>308</sup> Fry, 33-34.

<sup>309</sup> In the early to mid-20th-century, the “Harlem Experience” was a concept often attributed to things derived from African-American culture or experiences because of the prominence of black Harlem entertainers and performers, as seen throughout the Harlem Renaissance.

were deeply moving. She laughed, she cried, then from her supple throat came a song...”<sup>310</sup>

In virtually all, if not every single one, of the reviews of Baker’s early performances, the key elements emphasized by others were her “banana” or “exotic” skin color and “savage” dancing. The combination of the two aforementioned elements captivated the audience to such an extent that it seemingly transported them to some “alternate world” of primitivity.<sup>311</sup> The majority of reviewers placed Baker within the “colonial fantasy” of mainstream white French society, primarily males, of the era by sexualizing her body and emphasizing animal terms to describe her. Reviewers described Baker as a monkey, a panther, a giraffe, a snake, or some mythical creature.<sup>312</sup> For mainstream white French society, Baker was everything they desired and yet everything they believed to be beneath them at the same time.

Put simply, what attracted the audience to Baker’s performance was her “exotic otherness” on stage; she could personify the image of “the savage” black that mainstream white French society wanted to see through her performances.<sup>313</sup> Baker’s success in her first French show, *la Revue Nègre*, at the Champs-Élysées theater captivated French society to such an extent that the mere name of her show ceased to denote a particular show and, instead, became a generic description of similar shows.<sup>314</sup> Baker’s *la Revue Nègre* performance transformed overnight into its own unique genre or type of French entertainment based on stereotypical “savage” black dancing, jazz music, and storylines about “African-American” suffering in segregated America or African “primitiveness” as

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<sup>310</sup> Baker, 51.

<sup>311</sup> Baker, 55.

<sup>312</sup> Fry, 39.

<sup>313</sup> Baker, 55.

<sup>314</sup> Fry, 38.

“seen” in French colonial holdings.<sup>315</sup> Baker used her race, sexual appeal, and awareness of self-image to captivate her French audience’s sexist and racist fantasies through her works. Baker’s appeal to her French audience’s fantasies did not stop at the plots of her



1926, Josephine Baker wearing her “banana skirt.” Source: Paris Blues

performances or dancing, but rather extended into her costumes as well. After her time at the Champs-Élysées theater, Baker began entertaining at the Folies-Bergère theater in 1926 and she donned her notorious “banana skirt” costume in what would come to be the most iconic theatrical performance of her career. Baker's 1926 banana skirt performance, unlike her debut performance at the Champs-Élysées theater, focused on the French conceptualization

of Africans as “primitive.”<sup>316</sup> As the performance begins, Baker crawls down a palm tree in the center of the stage to the sound of “African” music in the background that is played on drums by two scarcely dressed black men. Baker's entrance onto the stage and her outfit frame her as something that is simultaneously exotic, sexually enticing, savage, and almost animalistic to the audience. To onlookers, Baker appears almost as if she is a “monkey” descending from a tree with her bananas strapped around her waist.

While Baker descends the tree, wearing only her banana skirt (consisting of 16 rubber bananas) and a bra, she encounters a white explorer who has fallen asleep

<sup>315</sup> Fry, 33-34.

<sup>316</sup> Alicja Sowinska. “Dialectics of the Banana Skirt: The Ambiguities of Josephine Baker's Self-Representation.” *Bodies: Physical and Abstract* (University of Michigan), Fall, 19 (2005): 14-16, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark.5583.0019.003>.



underneath the tree and a “colonial fantasy” unravels throughout the remainder of the performance.<sup>317</sup> Baker’s banana skirt performance, in its essence, is a story about white explorers voyaging to the edge of civilization, encountering the savagery of Africa, and indulging in its delights by making love with a “savage woman” embodied by the black female body.<sup>318</sup> In her banana skirt performance, as well as her other performances, it is important to note that Baker’s black caricature tended to fall for their white and male counterparts. However, the white men presented in the performances almost always choose a white woman over a black woman (Baker in this case) or just choose to leave the black woman behind. Through her performances, Baker played into racist stereotypes and narratives that were held about black people in French society. At the same time, nevertheless, she subverted the meanings of her performances and added her personality.<sup>319</sup>

As Baker completed her banana skirt performance in different variations at Champs-Élysées, her performance captivated not only mainstream white French society but Europe as a whole. Overnight, Baker became a sensation as dolls resembling her in a banana skirt were sold throughout Europe, film producers reached out to produce shows, women began to rub oils on their faces to darken their skin like Baker’s, and images of her popped up on merchandise everywhere.<sup>320</sup> Baker’s usage of explicit portrayals of exoticism and eroticism became so popular in France that people wanted to erase Baker’s African-American heritage, oftentimes claiming that she was French or from a French

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<sup>317</sup> Sowinska, 14-16.

<sup>318</sup> Sowinska, 16.

<sup>319</sup> Fry, 152.

<sup>320</sup> Baker, 72.

Colony.<sup>321</sup> Baker was viewed, throughout Europe, as “the Black Venus who drives men mad” by performing stereotypical behaviors in black or colonial roles; Baker bridged African-American contexts and French colonial narratives are stepping into the role of a girl from the West Indies, an African women, an African-American slaves or any of her numerous other roles.<sup>322</sup> After her success at Champs-Élysées, Baker went on to tour her show across the globe.

The *Revues Nègres*, and its performers, played on racial tropes about Africans in a period when French obsession with blackness was at its peak and their sense of power—culturally with the decreasing popularity of traditional French entertainment and politically with their territories in Africa—was wavering in the eyes of some. For French conservatives, the popularity of black entertainment in France “threatened traditions with extinction” because it forced the “primitive hordes” to meet the “civilized.”<sup>323</sup> Additionally, throughout the Interwar period, conservatives heavily criticized black entertainment because they believed it to be a symbol of not only black “cultural encroachment” but of American cultural encroachment as well.<sup>324</sup> To add to the sentiment of American cultural encroachment, there was also an increasingly powerful sense of French alienation from the larger international community as American industrialization and mechanization was adopted as the norm.<sup>325</sup> To a certain extent,

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<sup>321</sup> Anthea Kraut. “Between Primitivism and Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham.” *Theatre Journal* (Washington, D.C.) 55, no. 3 (2003): 433–450, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/25069279?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25069279?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>322</sup> Baker, 78.

<sup>323</sup> Fry, 46.

<sup>324</sup> Fry, 57–59.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

therefore, a “solidarity across races” as seen through the popularity of black shows may have been apparent as a respite from American modernity. Historian Andy Fry wrote:

The reception of African American performance away from home, then, surprises in both its richness and its contradictions: the most flagrant stereotypes may contain a nub of good intention... but superficial resonance with familiar notions of cultural difference may, on the contrary, imply a belief in racial separatism. Certain is that *Revue Nègres* remained slightly troubling to the audience: the comic (and tragic) stereotypes the entertainers performed were unstable and, for some at least, turned their critique back on the West. At the same time, however, French writers could shield themselves from their charges, insisting that the prejudice was American and that they, uniquely, had African American interests at heart.<sup>326</sup>

French claims of racial solidarity with blacks, therefore, often entailed a qualified unity in critiquing American society through the presentation of the tragic “African-American experience” on stage and relegation of claims of racism onto their American counterparts; there was not a blanketed “unity” with the black community in France but rather a unity against a common enemy.<sup>327</sup> In this way, French “support” of the black community in France simultaneously involved the condemnation of racism in the United States and an endorsement, of sorts, of racism in France through the use of racial stereotypes or tropes about blacks.

To combat the perceived weakening of French identity and the encroachment of the “American way of life,” conservatives attempted to cast doubt on the “blackness” of entertainment in France, promote traditionally French art/entertainment, and disavow the general presence of “blackness” in France.<sup>328</sup> Baker’s *la Revue Nègre* had secured the popularity of black entertainment in France, as well as other parts of Europe, during the early twentieth century but also helped flame the fires of fascism in France. The

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<sup>326</sup> Fry, 58.

<sup>327</sup> Fry, 57-59.

<sup>328</sup> Fry, 14.

prominence of black entertainment played a central role in national debates about cultural politics and prompted a staunch conservative response throughout the Interwar period calling for a return to “tradition.”<sup>329</sup>

Chief amongst the targets of French conservatism was the symbol of the *Revues Nègres*, Josephine Baker, and the increasingly prominent Jazz genre of music. The erasure of Baker’s African-American and black identity, as her fame grew, was part of a concerted effort to assimilate or “civilize” aspects of black entertainment into French popular culture and remove the “blackness” associated with some popular forms of entertainment in France.<sup>330</sup> Historian Andy Fry wrote: “To this day, celebrations of Baker as an African American heroine contrast with perceptions of her as a sign of successful French assimilation...”<sup>331</sup> To counter Baker, arguably the most popular performer of her time in France, conservatives attempted to first decrease her popularity by promoting traditional French entertainment and second to subvert the “otherness” or “blackness” associated with her by claiming her as a product of the French “civilizing mission.”<sup>332</sup> Baker’s Racial identity, however, was not the only aspect of black entertainment in France to confront attempts of assimilation; Jazz and other forms of black entertainment were gradually drawn under the umbrella of being “French” in essence.<sup>333</sup>

As conservative sentiments mounted in France and international tensions came to a climax, France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, alongside Great

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<sup>329</sup> Fry, 36.

<sup>330</sup> Fry, 19.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> It is important to note that while there was a concerted effort to “civilize” or make “less black” Baker and her work in France, there was also a strong admiration on the part of Baker for France. During her lifetime, Baker even renounced her American citizenship and became a French citizen.

<sup>333</sup> Fry, 102.

Britain and entered World War II. Two days earlier, on September 1, 1939, Germany had ignored the French guarantee of Polish borders and chosen to invade Poland.<sup>334</sup> The 1930s saw a decline in the popularity of black entertainers, amidst the depression and outbreak of war, but African-American entertainers like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong still visited France and promoted black culture/entertainment to some extent.<sup>335</sup> As war broke out at the end of the 1930s, however, many African-Americans chose to leave France altogether and return home. Baker, nevertheless, chose to stay in her adopted country of France and contribute to the French war effort. In the early stage of World War II, Baker began performing a new show called Paris-London at the Casino de Paris to help bolster the morale of the French civilian populations and Allied soldiers on leave.<sup>336</sup> Additionally, Baker wrote letters to French soldiers on the front lines, prepared and sent care packages, hosted parties for the French military and conducted various forms of social work on behalf of the French war effort. Baker was determined, as the war progressed, to play a role in the French war effort and express her “love” for France.<sup>337</sup> As black entertainment took France by storm, throughout the Interwar period, notions of French nationalism and the resurgence of conservative xenophobia embraced Nazism as the Germans grew in power.<sup>338</sup>

As the German military tore through the French defenses and countries throughout Europe (Denmark, Belgium, Poland) began to fall to the German Reich, Baker began to work with the French resistance and took on a new role in the war effort

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<sup>334</sup> Baker, 114-117.

<sup>335</sup> Fry, 7.

<sup>336</sup> Fry, 116

<sup>337</sup> Baker, 114-117.

<sup>338</sup> Fry, 10.

as a spy. In June of 1940, less than a year after France joined the war, the French government signed an armistice agreement.<sup>339</sup> The armistice agreement divided France into two separate zones: one to be under German military occupation and one, often called Vichy France, to be left under nominal French sovereignty. The occupied zone was comprised of northern France and the entire Atlantic coastline. The unoccupied zone consisted of the southeast two-fifths of France and was led, primarily, by French conservatives and Nazi collaborators.<sup>340</sup> After being forced to relocate from Paris to Vichy France for her safety, and later to Northern Africa, Baker used her privileged position as an internationally renowned performer to cover or spy for the Free French government and gather information while touring in Italy, Germany, and German-occupied territories.<sup>341</sup> On one occasion, after the fall of France in 1940, Baker helped to get French captain Abtey to Portugal covertly to meet with British intelligence and re-establish French-British lines of communication. As Baker came into her new role as a spy, she would also make it a point to continue doing her performances for French resistance soldiers and allied forces in order to bolster their morale.

From the French camps scattered across northern Africa to the British camps in Libya and Egypt, Baker traveled across northern Africa attempting to boost the morale of allied soldiers, raise awareness for the French Resistance cause, and support the Free French Government led by General Charles De Gaulle.<sup>342</sup> On the road, Baker put on *the Josephine Baker Show* for soldiers and diplomats alike, where she would perform in front of a large French flag with the cross of Lorraine to jazz music. In all of her performances,

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<sup>339</sup> Fry, 198-210.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Fry, 117-118.

<sup>342</sup> Baker, 134-135.

Baker either did not collect any money or donated the proceeds to the French Red Cross or another French nonprofit to help with the war effort.<sup>343</sup> Baker's activities during the war were so extensive that by the time World War II ended, Baker had obtained the rank of sub-lieutenant in the French armed forces. Before she passed, Baker obtained the *Médaille de la Résistance*, the *Médaille de Croix de Guerre*, and the *Médaille Légion d'Honneur* for her work during World War II.<sup>344</sup> Baker faithfully served in the French military until World War II came to a close and, when looking back, attributed her willingness to serve to her love for France and its racial acceptance. While Baker's work encapsulated a large portion of black entertainment remaining in France during the period, other independent forms of black entertainment such as Jazz persevered to some extent as well.

The World War II period was one full of paradoxes for black entertainment in France. Many blacks who remained in France after the German occupation were systematically discriminated against and incarcerated in Nazi prison camps, but their music became a symbol of the French resistance.<sup>345</sup> During the occupation, black entertainment was not banned by the Nazis in either the Nazi-controlled region or Vichy France. Instead, black entertainment, except for physical performances, was rebranded as being "French" and their names were changed to French.<sup>346</sup> In fact, Jazz prospered in France during the World War II period and were adopted by the Zazous youth movement (who were known for long hair and "zoot-suited" clothing) that advocated for French freedom. In this way, Black entertainment and art forms like Jazz were used as icons of

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Baker, 150-154.

<sup>345</sup> Fry, 180.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

French cultural identity and resistance during the war.<sup>347</sup> Nevertheless, as a result of the vast majority of black performers fleeing France or staying and later being interned, performances by black artists in France largely stopped. As a result of their participation in the war effort, the black community in Germany played an important role in French society during the World War II period; in some regards, black music and performers became as much a symbol of French victory and liberation as iconic French military figures during the period.<sup>348</sup>

In the background of Baker's fight on behalf of the Free French government, there was a strong movement towards "negative" eugenics and racism under the Vichy French government. Although waning in mainstream French society throughout the late Interwar period, "negative eugenics" was picked up by conservative segments in France who wanted to eliminate "negative" cultural influences from minority groups, regulate racial mixing and oppose immigration.<sup>349</sup> After the German victory over France in June of 1940, the newly formed Vichy government of France openly adopted "negative eugenics" to remove "undesired" segments of society. Similar to the Nazis in Germany, the Vichy government of France created a series of laws that aimed to isolate "dissimilar" or "incompatible" minority groups within its borders based on race, nationality, religion, or political view.<sup>350</sup> At the onset of forming the Vichy government, France openly adopted many of the eugenicist policies of Nazi Germany and embraced them as expressions of the conservative French ideology seeking to remove negative elements. In 1940, a series

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Fry, 7-9.

<sup>349</sup> Fry, 7-9.

<sup>350</sup> Stephanie Kates. "Vichy France's Collaboration with Nazi Germany." *Arbutus Review* 8, no. 1 (October 30, 2017): 37-44.



of anti-Semitic laws were created by Vichy France, without any instruction from the Nazis; the laws, passed just after German occupation began and in the middle of economic turmoil, inflamed anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiments in France leading to a series of public denouncements of minority groups.<sup>351</sup> Similarly, in late 1940, Vichy France mandated that all Jews were registered with the French police, and then the government, willingly, handed over all of the said information to the German Gestapo and SS.<sup>352</sup> In terms of maintaining the general “health” of the French population, in 1942 Vichy France adopted the policies of the French Eugenicists society; said policies included the passing a law requiring a physical examination of couples before marriage to determine “health” and instituting a series of screenings for pregnant women to check for different diseases.<sup>353</sup> Throughout the occupation, Vichy France was an enthusiastic proponent of “negative eugenics,” attacking racial minorities and the products of minority cultures, and a collaborator with the Nazi regime in Germany.

The culmination of Vichy France’s racial policies was the forced imprisonment of minorities within their borders in internment camps. At the behest of the Nazis, the Vichy government built and controlled internment camps for “undesirables” segments of the French population (such as blacks, and Jews).<sup>354</sup> The Vichy government rounded up more than one-quarter of France’s native and refugee Jewish population and placed them in internment camps; the French government even went against Gestapo orders to round up only fit Jewish men and instead rounded up Jewish, men, women, and children alike.

According to historian Stephanie Kates: “These camps had horrendous living conditions

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<sup>351</sup> Kates, 37-38.

<sup>352</sup> Kates, 40.

<sup>353</sup> Schneider, 289.

<sup>354</sup> Kates, 40-41.

that paralleled conditions in the Nazi camps. The French camps had ‘faulty sanitary facilities,’ and food provisions could not ‘sustain even a bare minimum of existence.’”<sup>355</sup> In addition to the Jewish people rounded up by the Vichy government, numerous members of the Black community were interned in France and lived out their lives in confinement or were confronted with death from decrepit conditions and murder.<sup>356</sup> The Vichy government’s willing internment of minority groups and creation of racially based laws, without instruction from the Nazis, shows a French ideology prone to discrimination and emphasizes a strong conservative undertone in French society that was prominent throughout the 20th century. The conservative undertone in French society, however, often found itself competing with the growing prominence of popular “non-French” culture and modes of entertainment throughout the time period.

Despite what Baker and many other accounts from blacks during the period note, France in the early to mid-20th-century was not a “color-blind” society.” Baker’s warm welcome to France was less a matter of French “color blindness” than of negrophilia and an obsession with the subjectification of the black.<sup>357</sup> Baker’s welcome, as well, stood on top of a growing radicalism in the background of French society that openly embraced conservatism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism.<sup>358</sup> While French negrophilia did provide opportunities for blacks to thrive in the French entertainment industry by commodifying their body and subjecting themselves to white French mainstream colonial fantasies or stereotypes, it did not lead to the “color-blind” acceptance that many African-Americans had longed for. Instead, negrophilia in France valorized or fetishized a

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Kates, 40.

<sup>358</sup> Schneider, 281.

particular image of blackness and framed the black people in France as the “other” while allowing French onlookers to live vicariously through the colonial fantasies presented to them on stage.<sup>359</sup> Nevertheless, the society that negrophilia did foster in France was seen as such an improvement to the racism encountered in the United States that French racism could “often” be overlooked by its victims. Throughout her autobiography, Baker often overlooks instances of racism and prejudice, discussing them only in passing.<sup>360</sup> On different occasions, however, Baker brings up problems related to interracial marriage in France and even makes note of the condemnation she received from the catholic church as a “black devil” who was the “embodiment of immoral decadence.”<sup>361</sup> Unless one meticulously reads Baker’s accounts, nevertheless, it appears as if she lived a life free of discrimination in France.

With the Black community in France painted as the exotic “other” throughout the Interwar period and as an “undesired” segment of the population to be interned or managed through eugenics during World War II, The black experience in France during the early to mid-20th-century. French racial theory, eugenics, and race policies did not affect black people to the same extent as other countries such as Germany; however, there existed an alienation of the black community as “the other” and the relegation of the black existence to something unnatural and exotic throughout the early 20th century.<sup>362</sup> With notions of racial hygiene and xenophobia on their mind—as well as a strong perception of a weakening or corruption of traditional French society by non-white mainstream elements of France—throughout the late 19th century, many French

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<sup>359</sup> Fry, 9.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Baker, 74-75.

<sup>362</sup> Fry, 116.

conservatives welcomed Nazi racial ideologies and choose to implement Nazi-like policies based on “negative eugenics.”<sup>363</sup> At the same time, however, admiration of and infatuation with the black community could be seen throughout various periods in French history—as noted with the prominence of African-American Jazz/dance and the life of Josephine Baker—but the general sentiment in France held that blacks, African-Americans were a plentiful source of entertainment for white mainstream society.<sup>364</sup> Josephine Baker’s life story, in particular, gives insights into how some members of the black community desired to be a part of French society and managed to live a successful life by feeding into white mainstream France’s stereotypes.<sup>365</sup> Baker lived out her life in stardom up until her final days when she passed away in a hospital bed from sickness, with French media swarming the compound looking for a scope about the “beloved French artist's passing.”<sup>366</sup> Baker’s life is telling of certain members of the black community in France—since she was famous, a woman and, an American—and, as such, is limited. Nevertheless, the story of Josephine Baker and other members of the Black community in France shows how race can make minorities appear as the “other” in society and become exoticized as a piece of entertainment or interned as an “undesirable.”

What made the Josephine Baker Phenomena of acceptance and success possible, one may ask? Building off of their colonial desire and fascination with theories of hybridity, French society in the early to mid-20th-century became entranced with the “essence” of the black body; the resulting hyper-sexualization of black females led to a

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<sup>363</sup> Kates, 37-38.

<sup>364</sup> Baker, 50-55.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Baker, 110.

thriving entertainment industry in France.<sup>367</sup> The French hyper-sexualization of the black body, however, was not blind acceptance or “color blind” treatment of those within the black race but rather a fascination with the mental conquest of the black body through performances tailored for a white mainstream French audience, the emotional conquest of the and, at times, the physical conquest of the black body through interracial relations. The result, put simply, was the placement of the black community in France into the center of a long history of French colonial theories of dominance or subjugation and a yearning of some within the black French community to overcome all odds and join French mainstream society.<sup>368</sup> The black community and white mainstream French society were simultaneously separated by colonial theories of racial dominance and united by their historically close interactions with one another in French colonies. In contrast to the French example, in Germany the black community was something that was entirely the “other” and “foreign” to mainstream society in Germany. As a result, the experience of many black people within Germany during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century was one of pure exoticization and distant viewing in *Völkerschau*, with little sense of hybridity or “colonial desire.”<sup>369</sup> In both cases, in France and Germany, the ultimate result of European fascination with the growing black community within their country was a strong conservative response that aimed to isolate and alienate members of the community through eugenics and racial ideologies of “pure blood.” Through Josephine Baker’s experience in France, and more generally the experience of African-American’s in the French entertainment industry at the time, clear differences can be seen between

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<sup>367</sup> Baker, 74-75.

<sup>368</sup> Baker, 110.

<sup>369</sup> Fry, 33-34.

the black experience in France and that of Germany; at the same time, however, clear connections between the two communities can be observed across borders and backgrounds.

## CONCLUSION: CONNECTING ACROSS BORDERS

The Black experience in early to mid-20th-century Europe was one of not only alienation and fetishization but of the often-strategic positioning of members of the black community as quintessentially “other.” Through state-sponsored discrimination in Germany, the eroticization of the Black body in the European entertainment industry, white mainstream societal stigmas across Europe, and colonial legacies of European nations, the Black experience during the early to mid-20th-century in Great Britain, France, and Germany was one shaped by a toxic “love-hate” relationship and required perseverance.<sup>370</sup> Despite some overarching themes, however, the Black experience in the early to mid-20th-century was not a singular experience that could be defined by one factor. Instead, the Black experience during the period is a complex piece of history that is defined by societal actions/perceptions and individual encounters.<sup>371</sup> Although this analysis was unable to cover every country or use every source available, it looked at three different cases and outlined profound differences in each case regarding their treatment or perception of members of the black community. Differences in the cases ranged from the size of the black population in each country, the prominence of black entertainment, the impacts of a colonial past on conceptualizations of race, and the role of eugenics in government race-based policy to whether members of the black community was ignored or celebrated in some form.<sup>372</sup>

Until the latter half of the 20th-century, the population of the black community in

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<sup>370</sup> Stone, 397–425.

<sup>371</sup> “Brown Babies Archive.” *The Mixed Museum*.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

Great Britain was very small and it often found itself relegated to the periphery of society under the auspices of a “racially inclusive” British society. In Great Britain, as in other cases to some extent, public dialogue about race was centered around the scientific field of eugenics and a racial hierarchy carried over from the colonial era. Sir. Francis Galton, in particular, with his research in eugenics and the heritability of human intelligence or mental characteristics played an essential role in the development of the British eugenics field.<sup>373</sup> Originally focused on health, class, and “improving” British society, British eugenics later transitioned to focusing on how the ideas of inheriting intellect or mental capabilities could legitimize existing British notions of racial superiority. As such, throughout the early 1900s, British eugenics increasingly became focused on the notion of race and British “racial” purity. British eugenics, however, went far beyond the academic realm, reaching into British society and government, finding its culmination in the 1931 Voluntary Sterilization Bill.<sup>374</sup>

As racially-based eugenics gained prominence, the fledgling black community in Great Britain in the early to mid-20th-century was forced to live under an increasingly discriminatory society.<sup>375</sup> The notions of race and interracial mixing relations came to be the center focus on the British government during World War II and the British notions of race took center stage in the “brown baby” phenomena, as the British government walked a “tight rope” to discourage interracial mixing with African-Americans and not to alienate colonial soldiers.<sup>376</sup> The racial focus of British eugenics, societal backlash about the creation of a mixed-race British population, formal government attempts to promote

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<sup>373</sup> Galton, 318–327.

<sup>374</sup> Stone, 397.

<sup>375</sup> “Brown Babies Archive.” *The Mixed Museum*.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.



eugenics, and informal military/government practices to perpetuate British notions of racial purity, placed the black community in Great Britain firmly as the “other” during the period. Unlike in countries like Germany, however, members of the black community did find some acceptance from British society, so long as there was not interracial breeding or relationships involved.<sup>377</sup>

In Germany, the experience of members of the black community was affected by notions of German eugenics and a staunch desire for the country to redeem itself from the “humiliation” of national pride suffered at the end of World War I.<sup>378</sup> Unfortunately, the “redemption” of German national pride coincided with the rise of the Nazis and large-scale persecution of ethnic minorities to achieve “racial purity.” Beginning in the months following the end of World War I, German propaganda that spread sensational stories of black French soldiers stationed in occupied regions of Germany ignited large scale outrage over the “defilement” of European society flooded the media; the event came to be known as the “Black Shame.”<sup>379</sup> As a result of the “Black Shame,” along with the loss of the German colonies in Africa, the small Black community increasingly came under scrutiny in Germany and was a prime target for Nazi persecution when they rose to power. The controversy surrounding the “Black Shame” bears, in many regards, similarities to the later “Brown baby phenomena” in Great Britain for both used white women as the center of discussions surrounding racial purity and used the portrayal of said women being defiled or having their morality stripped from them as a catalyst to

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<sup>377</sup> “Brown Babies Archive.” *The Mixed Museum*.

<sup>378</sup> Farmer, 33-35.

<sup>379</sup> Last, 20.

rationalize or spark support for the positioning of the black community as the “other” in European society.<sup>380</sup>

With a small black community in Germany, the experiences of Hans--Jürgen Massaquoi and Theodor Michael growing up as mixed-race children in war-torn Germany during the Interwar period shed light on how German society exoticized and profiled their Black community during the period. From racial profiling in public schools and zoo exhibits featuring “primitive Africans,” to *Völkerschau*, Massaquoi and Michael encountered the racial undertones of what being the “other” was like in German society.<sup>381</sup> Massaquoi and Michael’s experiences, with the “African Village” and the “Exotic Circuses,” illustrate mainstream white German society’s fascination with or exoticization of the black body during the period. In Germany, there truly was a love-hate relationship or fascination: blacks were “inferior,” primitive, and unsuitable for mating” but simultaneously also the center of German fascination in a system of exotic commodification through different modes of entertainment.<sup>382</sup>

The love-hate relationship in German society, however, quickly turned south as the Nazis rose to power and the fledgling black communities in Germany became moved to the margins. Throughout the Interwar period, and well into World War II, the Nazi government began creating a series of laws that limited the rights and protections of non-Aryans. The Nazi laws culminated in a series of legislation between 1933 and 1935 that limited the ability of non-Aryans to participate in the public sphere of Germany.<sup>383</sup> Soon after the Nazis came to power, the quiet forced sterilization of the mixed-race population

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Michael, 30.

<sup>382</sup> Kater, 11–43.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

in the Rhineland began in order to “protect” the health and purity of German society.<sup>384</sup> Despite facing discrimination and racial profiling from white mainstream German society, Michael and Massaquoi nevertheless felt a strong yearning to belong in German society and both, on numerous occasions, attempted to place themselves within the nationalistic rhetoric of Nazi Germany.<sup>385</sup> This was to no avail, however, Michael and Massaquoi remained at the margins of society and were symbols of “racial impurity” and the perceived failure of Germany to protect its white women and society.<sup>386</sup> Similar to the “Black Shame” and the “Brown baby” phenomena, the controversy surrounding mixed-race children in the German Rhineland centered around a conceptualization of white racial purity and the perceived defilement of white women by predatory black men.

In France, there is an extensive history of notions of “hybridity” or interracial mingling and a conceptualization of race dating back to the colonial era. As a result, the black population that dwelled within France in the early to mid-20th-century encountered racial prejudices driven by European colonial notions of racial supremacy and the French “colonial” gaze or exoticization of the black body.<sup>387</sup> Black entertainment took France by storm in the first half of the 20th-century and occurred in tandem with French notions of eugenics, racial hygiene, nationalism, and conservative xenophobia.<sup>388</sup> French eugenics and racial theory, unlike that of Germany or Great Britain, centered on a Lamarckian understanding of genetic inheritance and the racially driven eugenic work of Count Gobineau rather than Darwinian genetic inheritance.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Pommerin, 317.

<sup>385</sup> Michael, 55.

<sup>386</sup> Pommerin, 317.

<sup>387</sup> Fry, 30.

<sup>388</sup> Fry, 10.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

Similar to Great Britain, French eugenics began by looking at class and overall population health, but it gradually moved towards “negative eugenics” in the 1920s.<sup>390</sup> The eugenics movement in France culminated in 1932 when the French Eugenics society successfully lobbied for their sterilization legislation to be voted on by the French assembly. The legislation ultimately failed, but it laid the groundwork for the adoption of “negative eugenic” policies by the Vichy French government and French conservatives during World War II.<sup>391</sup>

When discussing the black experience in France during the early to mid-20th-century, an examination of African-American entertainers in France such as Josephine Baker provides vital details into life for blacks in France during the period.<sup>392</sup> Josephine Baker came to France in the third migration wave of African-American performers and she became famous through her *Revue Nègres* performances and banana skirt performances.<sup>393</sup> Baker's performances attracted French audiences because she was able to embody the “exotic otherness” on stage that white mainstream French society envisioned through their colonial gaze. Baker could, simultaneously, personify the stereotypical image of “the savage” or “unintelligent” black that French society desired to ridicule and the “seductive” black woman that white French men yearn to possess.<sup>394</sup>

To combat the growing prominence of black entertainment, conservatives attempted to question the “blackness” of Baker, promote traditional French entertainment, and disavow the presence of blacks altogether.<sup>395</sup> As conservative

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<sup>390</sup> Fry, 65.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Baker, 20.

<sup>393</sup> Baker, 50-55.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Fry, 14.

sentiments mounted, France declared war on Germany in 1939 only to fall to German forces soon after. Many blacks who remained in occupied France of Vichy France were discriminated against or outright put into Nazi prison camps. Black music, however, became a symbol of the French resistance during the period and had a prominent impact on French culture during the period.<sup>396</sup> France, unlike Germany or Great Britain, provided an outlet for members of the black community to thrive in the entertainment industry and even to become seen as “French” in some regards. France was not, however, a “color-blind” society.”<sup>397</sup> A great deal of the acceptance and celebration Blacks encountered in France can be seen as a result of French fascination with members of the black community as the “other.” In this way, the perception of blacks and their placement as the “other” in France in the early to mid-20th-century is comparable to the positioning of blacks in Great Britain or Germany as the “other” due to their infatuation with or repulsion from their black communities.<sup>398</sup>

By analyzing the black experience in Great Britain, France, and Germany in the early to mid-20th-century, this thesis has shown how some overarching features in white mainstream European society contributed to the alienation of members of the black community and that the actual experiences of black individuals are dependent on various factors; some of the factors that can effect on a member of the black communities experiences are their gender, place of origin, and the location or country in which they live.<sup>399</sup> In many of the most prominent cases of racially-based discrimination, however,

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<sup>396</sup> Fry, 180.

<sup>397</sup> Baker, 74-75.

<sup>398</sup> Massaquoi, 25-26.

<sup>399</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame."* DW Documentary, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J26kgGn5TdQ&t=8s>.

their origins can be seen through the stereotype of black men being “sexual predators,” black women being a subject of hyper-sexualization and colonial desire or mixed-race individuals being “delusions” of the white race.<sup>400</sup> In many of the cases, as well, white women were weaponized as symbols of a larger European society and their imagined defilement by a “black sexual predator” was used as a rationalization for further discrimination and persecution of the black community.<sup>401</sup> The three aforementioned stereotypes of the black community in Europe appear, from the three studies examined, to be some of the driving conceptualizations of “blackness” and Europeans’ “rational” for discrimination.

No matter the “rationale” behind the discrimination that many members of the black community faced in Europe in the early to mid-20th-century, the fact remains that the individual experiences varied greatly during the period. As seen through the life of Josephine Baker, it was possible for members of the black community to live in Europe during the period and to thrive to some extent; for Baker, Europe was the land of opportunity and an accepting paradise when compared to the USA.<sup>402</sup> In contrast, however, the lives of Massaquoi and Michael in Germany demonstrate how being black in Europe during the period was not always an easy or simple task.<sup>403</sup> Massaquoi and Michael encountered racism, especially as mixed-race children, throughout their lives in the school system, in public, in the workforce, and their private lives; race was a constant limiting factor and source of possible harassment.<sup>404</sup> The experience of each individual

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<sup>400</sup> *Nazi Prejudice and Propaganda – the Racist Crimes against the "Children of Shame."* DW

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Baker, 50-55.

<sup>403</sup> Michael 5-10.

<sup>404</sup> Michael 5-10.

examined, and more generally of different members of the black communities in the cases studied, is highly variable depending on the context of each person. The accounts of each black person's life, nevertheless, provides vital information about the lived experiences of black people in Europe during the period and helps to fill in the gaps of modern historical accounts regarding the black presence in Europe in the early to mid-20th-century.

One overarching point of comparison, in at least the case of Germany and France, is that there appeared to be a desire to belong in white mainstream European society that was inherent in at least some of members of the black communities in each respective country; this point of similarity can be seen in the experiences of Baker, Massaquoi, and Michael, each wanting to be a part of their respective societies despite the discrimination some of them faced.<sup>405</sup> For members of the black community, therefore, there was a desire to move away from the periphery, erase the categorization of the “other” placed on them by white mainstream French society, and become part of “white” society.<sup>406</sup> The sense of belonging experienced by some members of the black community and the discrimination black people encountered in early to mid-20th century Europe is not unique; in fact, is a part of a long-lasting black experience in Europe.

A black presence in Europe—as seen through the analysis of Germany, France, and Great Britain in the early to mid-20th-century—is not a new phenomenon. A fledgling black community has been present in European countries such as France, Germany, and Great Britain for centuries and their population has only grown over time; the Black population in Germany today alone numbers over 1 million, and in all of

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<sup>405</sup> Massaquoi, xii-xiii.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

Europe it is around 12 million.<sup>407</sup> Usually in contemporary history, however, the historical presence and significance of black communities in Europe are overlooked or altogether whitewashed in favor of more “desired” accounts of history and defining what it means to be “European.”<sup>408</sup> As a result, the perception that Europeans and those who have contributed to European culture, history, and socio-economic development, as only those who are white is a historically inaccurate notion.<sup>409</sup> This historical notion, nevertheless, has been a prominent factor in driving the alienation of black people as the “other” in European society not only in the 20th-century but also in the 21st century. Of her experiences growing up and living as a mixed-race German girl, reporter Jana Paregis said:

The perception that Germans are white, fair-haired, and blue-eyed has never been true and will never be true, it is a myth. People always ask me where I am from like it is not possible to be German and black. From the moment I get up and leave the house in the morning I am confronted with racist views, images, and stereotypes of black people. As a child, I always wanted to have white skin because I felt bad being black and not being able to blend in and always kind of sticking out from the group. I didn't want to be different.<sup>410</sup>

As expressed by Jana Paregis, the discrimination and racial prejudice that members encountered in the early to mid-20th-century is still prevalent in modern German society and more generally European society. Paregis also talks about her desire to overcome her “exotic status” and be “white” or to just fit into mainstream German society as a child; experiences similar to those of Michael and Massaquoi in many regards. The work done in this thesis helps to fill in the gaps surrounding the black experience and presence in the

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<sup>407</sup> “Afro Germany - Being Black and German | DW Documentary.” Deutsche Welle, 19 Mar. 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcfPVj5qR1E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcfPVj5qR1E).

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.



early 20th century but also to shed light on how the conditions or treatment of members of the black community from the past remains prevalent in the modern-day to some extent; black refugees or immigrants are attacked on the streets of Germany, harassed in public settings, stereotypical notions of Africa are commonplace, and black experiences are ignored by the government.<sup>411</sup> In addition, the notion of historical continuity for the black presence in Europe runs counter to modern narratives of black communities as new phenomena for Europe or as “strange” anomalies. By shedding light on the experiences of members of the black community this thesis hopes to provide context for current discussions surrounding what it is like, and has been like, to be a member of the black community in Europe, breaking down the modern positioning of black people as the “other” and examining past antecedents of discrimination. Nevertheless, this work is merely a piece of the larger puzzle surrounding the importance of exploring marginalized peoples’ histories. More research and academic work needs to be done to truly comprehend the variance of experiences and encounters of members of the black community in the early to mid-20th century Europe.

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<sup>411</sup> “Afro Germany - Being Black and German | DW Documentary.” Deutsche Welle.