

Of all places, the country that took racism to the absolute extreme appeared to black U.S. soldiers as a haven of racial tolerance. In the land of the Nazis, which they had helped to defeat, they felt like emancipated human beings for the first time in 1945.

It happened sometime in 1946, in the nightclub of the U.S. Army in a small Bavarian town: A couple of black soldiers danced in the middle of the room with German 'Frolleins.'

That in itself was already a remarkable occurrence because at that time no black man would have dared to even approach a white woman in the U.S., especially in the South. At that time, white women danced with, dated and married only white men.

In Germany however, where racist mania had raged only a short time earlier, the black soldiers were very popular after initial distrust. Among those Germans who had direct contact with them, they were considered good-natured, generous and nice to children.

A study published in 1954 by the International Union for Child Welfare in Geneva, stated that Puerto Rican-Americans were particularly popular. They "particularly distinguished themselves through their amiable manner and through an impeccable comportment toward German citizens and they helped wherever they could. Due to this behavior, they were known and popular in every family and even established close ties within some families on occasion."

According to an October 1946 report in *Ebony* magazine, that evening in Amberg, five white U.S. soldiers entered the soldiers' club. What they saw apparently outraged them. One of the white soldiers, Floyd D. Hudson, threw a beer bottle onto the dance floor.

The black soldiers, under attack, did what they would have never dared to do back home: They went and got a few .30 caliber carbines and shot at the white soldiers. Hudson died while the four others survived their injuries. The aftermath was the same that it would have been back home: A court sentenced three of the black soldiers to death by hanging.

Also, there was the question of who owns the spoils of war, when these are women. Let's not kid ourselves: It wasn't only Russian soldiers who raped German women: More than 1,500 such acts committed by U.S. soldiers are on record in 1945. In her book, "GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations," Petra Goedde wrote that some soldiers "regarded the 'taking' of a German woman as a form of revenge."

Still, there was certainly much consensual fraternization. First of all, in 10 percent of the documented cases it was supposedly the parents who compelled their daughters to have intercourse with the occupying Allied soldiers, according to the Geneva study. The goal was always the same: "The black soldiers were particularly sought-after as a source of food, candy and tobacco products because they were known for their

An Unexpected Freedom

What black U.S. soldiers experienced in Germany after the war

By Peter H. Koepf



Unknown happiness: Black U.S. soldiers found acceptance and tolerance in post war Germany – and sometimes even the love of their lives.

benevolence and generosity," the researchers wrote.

War correspondent Meyer Levin paraphrased such relationships in the magazine *Search* in 1950 this way: "Rape in Germany was accomplished through the medium of a bar of chocolate, and was known as fraternization." Furthermore, he analyzed "the lustful eagerness of German girls to fulfill their roles as conquered women." Others characterized the relationships as "between love affairs and prostitution."

Initially however, contact between the soldiers and the local population had been prohibited. In February 1945, in Stolberg near Aachen, four women were charged with "acting in a manner prejudicial to the good order of members of the Allied Armed Forces." The court said that they had invited U.S. soldiers into their homes after dark, "tempted them into violating the fraternization rule."

In October 1945, the ban on fraternization was lifted. Nonetheless, Germans still did not have access to the nightclubs of the U.S. Army. Because of that, the soldiers frequently explained that their companions were allegedly displaced persons, in other words, not Germans, that they were Polish, for example. In the spring of 1946, the military in Nuremberg reviewed whether it would make sense to issue "social passes" for desirable members of the German population – naturally, all of them women.

But the affairs between German women and GIs had long since become customary. *Newsweek*

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had already asked in December: "Do the Fräuleins change our Joe?"

The Fräuleins did indeed change Joe. However, not in the way that *Newsweek* had feared, namely that the U.S. soldiers would not denazify Germans but rather that "Veronica Dankeschön" could infect the soldiers with venereal diseases, and even worse, with the Nazi virus. Billy Wilder turned this topic into his propagandistic anti-fraternization movie, "A Foreign Affair."

At the time, Americans back home were also clearly against their soldiers being allowed to date German women: 70 percent of young women responding and 40 percent of men under 30 said they opposed such unions.

The soldiers in Germany perceived the situation differently: "Most American soldiers held

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There were approximately 30,000 black U.S. soldiers who had come to liberate the world from German fascism. "Many of them, particularly those from the American South, experienced for the first time in their lives the freedom to date white women without fear of retribution," according to *Ebony* magazine. "At a time, when lynching was still all too common in the American South, Germany appeared, especially to those who grew up in the South, like a haven of racial tolerance." *Ebony* wrote that black soldiers enjoyed "more friendship and equality in Berlin than in Birmingham or on Broadway."

By 1951, the relationships between German women and U.S. soldiers had produced about 94,000 children, about 3,000 of them "Mischlinge" (mixed-race children) as they were called at the time. Four-fifth of these children, who were conspicuous in appearance to Germans in the postwar period, lived with their mothers or close relatives. The *Survey* magazine concluded from a poll in 1949 that "German mothers treated their 'Mischlingkinder' considerably better than their counterparts in England and Japan."

English mothers often sent them to children's homes or orphanages and "some Japanese mothers had even resorted to infanticide of occupation children (both black and white)." *Survey*

went on: "In Germany not only is infanticide unthinkable but even separation is rarely considered."

Nonetheless, one should not sugarcoat it: Women who got involved with black soldiers had problems in Germany as well. They had to endure ridicule and contempt. Especially those returning from the front and prisoner of war camps berated and beat them – and not only their own husbands.

In her 2002 dissertation, "Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung. Afrodeutsche 'Besatzungskinder' im Nachkriegs-Deutschland" (Between care and marginalization: Black-German "occupation children" in post-war Germany), Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria reports on the case of a girl whose mother had placed with her parents. The parents allegedly could not let the mixed-race child out into the street "and when guests came to visit, the child would be hidden."

Nonetheless, the 1954 Geneva study came to the following conclusion overall: "According to our investigation, the cases in which mixed-race children are being rejected by their communities because of their family background should be considered the exception. Generally, the relatives, neighbors and other children meet them with cordiality and affection. It is not uncommon that they are even being particularly favored and pampered, be it because they make friends quickly due to their funny manner and their cuddly nature, be it because the grown-ups feel pity for these children for whom they anticipate a difficult future."

Nonetheless, well-meaning pastors' wives and eager youth welfare office employees came up with numerous solutions in order to help the children and their mothers: children's homes just for them, adoption in the U.S., Africa and Venezuela. In the end, most children stayed in Germany. There could have been worse solutions.

But there could have been better solutions as well: At least one quarter of the black fathers paid alimony, more than among the white fathers. One in five made an effort to get permission to marry his girlfriend. But that only succeeded in one out of 200 cases.

Starting in 1946, the so-called "Sweetheart bill" (War Brides Act) allowed brides to enter the United States. By June 1950, 14,175 German wives had come to the United States – six husbands and 750 children as well – predominantly the brides of white soldiers, however.

While researching files of the headquarters of the European Command (EUCOM), Faria found the following statistic: By September 1947, 908 black-American soldiers had filed a request to be allowed to marry their German girlfriends. Fourteen were given permission, 1.5 percent. It is no surprise, though: Until 1967, she writes, such interracial marriages were banned in 30 states. ■

For an extensive project, writer Peter H. Koepf is looking to speak with children of black American soldiers with German mothers, and with their respective parents. Please write to: peter.koepf@times-media.de