Chapter One

CONTACT ZONES: AMERICAN MILITARY OCCUPATION AND THE POLITICS OF RACE

> I like this goddamn country, you know that? That's right. . . . You know what the hell I learned? That a nigger ain't no different from nobody else. I had to come over here to learn that. . . . They don't teach that stuff back in the land of the free.
>
> Maybe I'll write a book about all this. . . . I'll write a book and tell how the Germans listen attentively to speeches on democracy and then look around at the segregated camps and race riots over white women and listen to the slurs on Negro soldiers on the streets, and then how Germans in the coffee houses along the Hauptstrasse . . . gather and laugh at the Americans who preach a sermon on what they, themselves, do not yet know.
>
> —William Gardner Smith, *Last of the Conquerors*, 1948[1]

THE MILITARY occupation of Germany by American troops elicited two striking responses that were organized around irony and issues of race. One came from Germans, who noted with incredulity and derision that they were being democratized by a nation with a Jim Crow army and a host of antimiscegenation laws at home. The second came from African American GIs who, in their interactions with Germans, were stunned by the apparent absence of racism in the formerly fascist land and, comparing their reception with treatment by white Americans, experienced their stay there as unexpectedly liberatory. Both responses criticized the glaring gap between democratic American principles and practices; both exposed as false the universalist language employed by the United States government to celebrate and propagate its political system and social values at home and abroad. Yet both also suggested the centrality of intercultural observation and exchange for contemporaries' experience and understanding of postwar processes of democratization.[2]

From their inception, the occupation zones in Germany were zones of social and cultural contact between occupier and occupied. Rapidly, they

emerged as informal sites of racial reeducation and reconstruction as well. When the victorious allies subdued Germany in May 1945, their most urgent agenda centered upon the need to demilitarize, denazify, and democratize their defeated foe. Dismantling attitudes of racial superiority among Germans was understood by the Western allies as an implicit part of this process. But aside from the first year of occupation—when American officials in particular insisted on mandatory screenings of atrocity films like *Todesmühlen* (*Mills of Death*), with its graphic scenes of liberated death camps, denunciation of notions of Aryan supremacy, and blunt accusations of collective German guilt—"race" barely figured in formal reeducation programs, nor did it play a central role in allied policies for German reconstruction.[3] Racial reeducation in early postwar Germany resulted primarily *not* from the official programs of occupation authorities, but rather more spontaneously through the experience of social interactions between Germans and Americans or through German observations of social relations among the multiethnic American occupation forces.[4] In the public behavior of U.S. troops on the street and in the pub, the current complexion of American race relations was on display for postwar Germans to see.[5]

It was in the specific historical circumstances of the occupation that two distinct national-historical idioms of race—the American and German—confronted and instructed each other. Under these circumstances, Germans reformulated their notions of race after National Socialism, and African American GIs experienced and appraised the comparative state of race relations between democratic America and its fascist foe. It is in this context, then, that racial reeducation as an informal *interactive* process must be investigated and understood. Encounters between white Germans and African American GIs after 1945, moreover, were not merely transitory phenomena; rather, they had a constituent effect on postwar racial understanding in both countries that outlived the period of occupation.

•   •   •

German-American interactions were embedded in a larger field of power relations dominated by the United States and structured by official American policies and practices. As is well known, the United States conquered and occupied National Socialist Germany with an army in which troop units, training, work assignments, housing, recreational and other facilities, and even religious worship, were segregated by race.[6] And although President Harry Truman formally began the process of desegregating the U.S. military in 1948, when he issued an executive order proclaiming "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the

armed forces," a corresponding commitment to the principle of racial integration was not at that time a value held by most American commanders in general, nor by those responsible for Germany in particular. As a result, the actual integration of American military forces stationed both within and outside of the United States dragged on well into the 1950s.[7]

Ultimately Cold War considerations, and especially the United States' entry into the Korean conflict in 1950, helped dictate the timing of desegregation of the U.S. military, which emerged as a pragmatic response to the pressing exigencies of mobilizing manpower and fighting the Korean War. Commitment to the social value of integration had little to do with it. Predictably, then, its application was uneven. Where wartime exigencies did not exist, leadership response was lethargic or temporizing. According to historian Bernard Nalty, "the need for efficiency imposed by the Korean War did not make itself felt in Europe . . . where enthusiastic reports from Korea [regarding the performance of integrated troops] went unread or encountered disbelief."[8] In Germany, the mandate to integrate U.S. army bases was ignored until the spring of 1952 and then took over two years—into August 1954—to complete.[9]

Nearly a decade after defeating and occupying Nazi Germany, and some five years after overseeing the foundation of a democratic West German state, the United States finally dismantled its almost century-long tradition of racial segregation in its armed forces.[10] The slow pace of postwar integration of the U.S. military—and the even slower pace of postwar integration of American society—meant that for the entire period of military occupation (1945–49), and throughout most of the High Commission in Germany (1949–55), postfascist German society was democratized by a country whose institutions, social relations, and dominant cultural values were organized around the category of race and a commitment to white supremacy.

Fighting the War, Winning the Peace: "The Problem of Negro Troops"

Like Germany, American society too was undergoing an uneasy period of challenges and adjustments to entrenched racial ideology after 1945. Unlike Germany, however, the postwar years in the United States represented a continuation and intensification of social transformations that began in earnest during World War II. The important point for our purposes is that at the same time it was fighting Nazi Germany, the U.S. government was under considerable public pressure by a growing number of African American activists and organizations to democratize the United States and dismantle its discriminatory policies and practices toward its own citizens of color. Democratic America of the 1930s and 1940s can

not be said to have enjoyed a stable or consensual understanding of the significance of race.[11] Rather, the social ideology and organization of race was hotly disputed and, with mobilization for war, gave rise to a new sort of advocacy politics that was attentive to both national and international developments and ultimately succeeded in affecting the political decision-making process in Washington, D.C.[12]

Prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, African American newspapers tended to express an isolationist view, characterized by a 1940 essay in the NAACP's mouthpiece, *The Crisis*, which proclaimed that while they were: "sorry for brutality, blood, and death among the peoples of Europe . . . the hysterical cries of the preachers of democracy in Europe leave us cold. We want democracy in Alabama and Arkansas, in Mississippi and Michigan, in the District of Columbia and *the Senate of the United States*."

Or as C.L.R. James pithily put it, "the democracy I want to fight for, Hitler is not depriving me of."[13]

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, however, the battle broadened to two fronts for most African American leaders. Instead of characterizing war as an either/or proposition, black leaders and newspapers fused domestic and international quests for democracy into a campaign for "double victory." To modify columnist George Schuyler's 1940 dictum in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, their motto became "our war is against Hitler in Europe *and* against the Hitlers in America." From early 1942, African American leaders and the press overwhelmingly supported black participation in the war effort while continuing to lobby against racial discrimination and injustice at home.[14]

The United States' entry into war—and especially its official justification of fighting Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in order to free the world for democracy—created a useful context for African Americans to press their case for social equality and civil rights. Black leaders well recognized the wrenching irony of the situation and did their best to use it to its greatest political effect. As the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted, "What an opportunity the crisis has been . . . to persuade, embarrass, compel and shame our government and nation . . . into a more enlightened attitude toward a tenth of its people!"[15]

One of the most prominent organizations to lobby on behalf of "Negro" interests was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which, during the wartime and postwar years, became an outspoken advocate of African American soldiers' rights. NAACP leaders scrutinized the relevant policies of U.S. officials in the War Department and White House, and later in the American Military Government in Germany, and publicized their reactions and recommendations in the African American press. Complaints centered around racial inequities in soldiers' recruitment, training, assignments (most black troops

were relegated to service, housekeeping, supply, or transport duties), promotion, housing, entertainment, and other facilities. In addition to frequent episodes of violence directed at black servicemen by white American citizens and soldiers in the United States and overseas, African American leaders and the black press documented and publicized widespread discriminatory practices exercised by the Selective Service, white military officers, white communities surrounding the predominantly southern U.S. military bases, and by the Red Cross, which segregated by race not only the soldiers' social functions it hosted, but also the blood plasma it collected.[16]

African Americans bristled at the poor treatment accorded black troops. Soldiers wrote letters to loved ones and the black press that chronicled the wide range of indignities they were subjected to, which resulted in a profound sense of demoralization and disgust. Soldiers from the northern United States were shocked by official expectation that they adjust to the overtly racist Jim Crow practices of the southern states and proved unwilling to adopt the self-effacing posture demanded of them by white southerners. Black inductees clearly expected that as American soldiers in uniform, they should receive the respect extended their white compatriots. When this did not occur—when, for example, African Americans in uniform were refused service in local restaurants, were ordered to the back of the bus when traveling off base, were subjected to racist epithets, physically assaulted, or saw their black officers mistreated or passed over for promotion, to name but a handful of common occurrences—they became disillusioned or embittered.[17]

Throughout the decade of the 1940s, and extending well into the 1950s, African American soldiers' experience was dictated by the U.S. military's insistence on the primacy of race and the "fact" of their Negro blood. According to official military policy, African American soldiers—unlike their white counterparts—were not treated as individuals with specific abilities, aptitudes, or educational accomplishments. Rather, their military selection and assignment were made according to their group identity as "Negro" with all of the racist valuations that accompanied that social classification. As a result, skilled African American soldiers rapidly became insulted and dejected by assignments to labor and service units that derived solely from their race and failed to recognize or utilize their abilities.[18] As one soldier remarked: "Civilian life is one thing, but to be drafted and fight to save the world for democracy only to find that you have entered the most undemocratic and racist organization in the whole country is quite another thing. This . . . turned me off completely."[19]

One of the greatest insults to African American soldiers—and one repeatedly commented upon in the black press—was the comparatively

better treatment, even camaraderie, extended to German POWs by white American soldiers and civilians in the presence of black American troops.[20] Since numerous complaints were recorded on this issue, a few examples will have to suffice. Sergeant Edward Donald of the 761st Tank Battalion remembered that African American soldiers were housed in the segregated "swampland" of Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, while German POWs were accommodated in a more desirable area of the camp, "had access to facilities denied black American soldiers . . . and were given passes to town when black soldiers were confined" to base. "This was one of the most repugnant things I can recall of the many things that happened to Negro servicemen," he concluded.[21] Captain Charles Thomas of Detroit remembered having hunger pangs on his return trip to his camp in Texas and looking for a place to eat:

> The station restaurant was doing a rush business with white civilians and German prisoners of war. There sat the so-called enemy comfortably seated, laughing, talking, making friends, with the waitresses at their beck and call. If I had tried to enter that dining room the ever-present MPs would have busted my skull, a citizen-soldier of the United States. My morale, if I had any left, dipped well below zero. Nothing infuriated me as much as seeing those German prisoners of war receiving the warm hospitality of Texas.[22]

Black soldiers weren't the only ones infuriated. Singer Lena Horne was scheduled to give two concerts at Camp Robinson in Alabama, the first for white officers, the second for black GIs. However, the second concert was also attended by German POWS, who were given the best seats up front, while black American soldiers were relegated to the back. Realizing the outrage, Horne responded, "Screw this!" stormed off the stage and refused to perform. Following that incident, she consented to sing only for African American troops.[23]

As the comparative official and informal treatment of German POWs and African American soldiers in the United States makes clear, the "problem of Negro soldiers," from the perspective of African Americans, had its origins in the prejudicial practices and policies of white America. The first point made by the preceding testimony was that African Americans—whether in uniform or out—were not accorded the rights or recognition of their American citizenship. Rather, they were treated as subordinates—as inferior or "not-quite" Americans—by white compatriots and military leaders, as evidenced by the preferential treatment extended white prisoners of war. While the American rhetoric of war pivoted on the appeal to a national "we," African Americans learned time and again from their wartime experience that this was empty rhetoric. The second point derives from the first. This was that race—and especially a shared

whiteness—trumped nationality when it came to social privilege and prerogative. As a result, even though German soldiers were, and remained, the military enemy throughout World War II, once they were pacified as POWs, they were treated as social equals in a way that African American soldiers never were. And to a large extent these sociocultural presumptions and practices of whiteness survived the war to shape postwar reconstruction in occupied Germany.[24]

The blatant abuses and indignities perpetrated on African American men in uniform mobilized black leaders, citizens, and newspapers. In addition to headlining domestic expressions of racial inequality and violence, African American newspapers sent correspondents overseas to cover the condition and contributions of "Negro troops" abroad. Walter White of the NAACP toured U.S. installations in Britain, France, Northern Africa, and the Mediterranean to interview African American troops about their treatment and morale.[25] In response, U.S. officials in the White House and War Department grudgingly learned to consult representatives of the NAACP, Urban League, and other black organizations for their opinions before making or announcing major policy decisions, if only to try to deflect criticism and negative publicity.[26]

From the official perspective of Washington, the "problem of Negro troops" was first and foremost a political one: How to appear responsive to black leaders and their constituencies, in order to effectively mobilize them as workers and soldiers for the war effort, without having to concede to their demands for wholesale racial equality. Just before the presidential election in 1940, for example, FDR appointed a black aide to the director of the Selective Service and a black civilian aide to the secretary of War to illustrate his responsiveness to African American concerns. Once the United States entered the war and the Army's racial policy came under increasing fire by black leaders and the black press, the War Department established an "Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies" which failed to coordinate effectively with the War Department's civilian aide. In sum, official and institutional attention to the "Negro problem" stemmed more from official assessments of political expediency than any wholehearted interest to right discriminatory policies and practices. Throughout World War II, the U.S. president and his military officers single-mindedly prioritized fighting and winning the war and actively resisted calls to revamp the military's policy of racial segregation, which they dismissed as a dangerous "social experiment" that would sow conflict among the troops and result in markedly weakened troop morale, performance, and cohesion.[27]

The War Department considered the need to induct black soldiers as presenting irksome organizational challenges and problems of performance and morale. The military leadership tended to view black troops

as a drag on military efficiency and effectiveness and, in group terms, as not combat worthy. Noting the small numbers of African Americans assigned to combat units, critics accused the military of considering black soldiers "too stupid to fight."[28] Since War Department officials paid little attention to the demoralizing *effects* of racial stereotyping, institutionalized racism, and segregation in the military, they blamed black soldiers for being disloyal, unpatriotic, and overly "race conscious."[29]

As military intelligence registered the large readership newspapers like the *Afro-American, Pittsburgh Courier,* and *Chicago Defender* enjoyed among African American soldiers, the War Department became concerned that news coverage of racial discrimination was fostering "agitation" and disaffection among them. During the war, circulation numbers for the African American press increased 40 percent and membership in the NAACP multiplied tenfold. Detecting a similar pattern among its black troops, the War Department issued a secret order banning "Negro newspapers" on military bases. Ultimately, the ban was lifted in 1943, the year pent-up frustration regarding racial discrimination burst forth in a wave of riots that swept American cities, workplaces, and military bases.[30]

Widespread social unrest caught the attention of the White House and War Department, which recognized the need to respond to the political pressure of disgruntled African American opinion. This they did in selective areas: by instituting black officer training programs, by mounting a publicity campaign to recognize African American contributions to the war effort (most notably in the 1944 motion picture, *The Negro Soldier*), by issuing Army recommendations to its white officers on "the command of Negro troops," by increasing the numbers of black troops shipped overseas, by assigning some black soldiers combat duties, and by integrating troops on the battlefront in isolated emergency situations. Nonetheless, for the duration of the war, the American political and military leadership staunchly resised a more general policy of racial desegregation. Despite this fact, African American organizations, through their unrelenting attention to racial inequities in the U.S. military and workforce, played an important and productive role in unsettling entrenched racist ideologies and practices, fostering African Americans' expectations, and setting a broad social reform agenda for the postwar period.[31]

Once war in Europe began to wind down, the War Department and European Command questioned the merits of having black troops participate as occupation forces, particularly in Germany. General McNarney, commander of the U.S. Army in Europe, went "on record with a recommendation to recall all black troops from Europe, citing the absence of Negroes from the U.S. Occupation Army in the Rhineland after World War I." Off record, he judged "the Negro . . . a failure as a soldier," add-

ing that "it will be 100 years before he . . . will be on a parity with white Americans." His successor, Lucius D. Clay, commander of the European Theater and American military governor in Germany, thought African American soldiers should be "used primarily as parade troops."[32] There was a general concern about how receptive Germans would be, steeped as they were in Nazi-style racism, to the occupation goals of a multiracial army.

But this was not the only, or even overriding, concern.[33] Following the end of hostilities, the army was expected to shrink from approximately 8 million troops to 1.8 million, but the percentage of black troops was projected to increase from about 10 to 15 percent due to new and reenlistments. The anticipated increase in the percentage of black troops concerned the U.S. State Department, which had earlier made "informal arrangements" not to post black U.S. troops to countries like Iceland, Panama, and China that refused to host them, even within a segregated army. As a result of these agreements, black troops would have to be concentrated elsewhere, and both the War Department and European Command had reservations regarding their placement in Germany for reasons of both political prestige and effectiveness.[34]
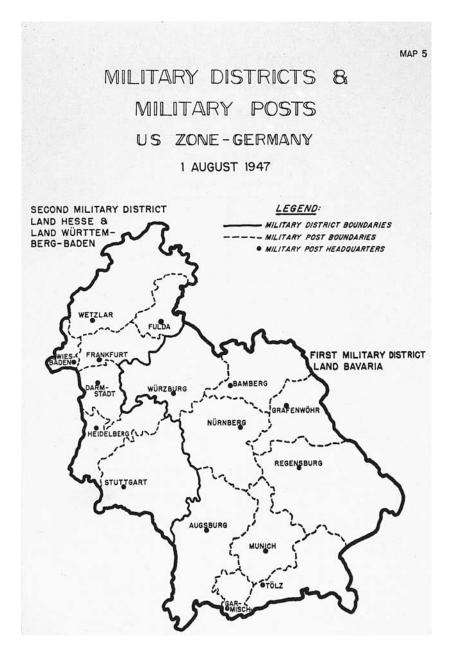
With the end of war in Europe in May 1945, the demobilization of combat troops proceeded apace, although at a much slower rate for black soldiers than for white. Within the year, the number of U.S. troops in the Europe was reduced from just over 3 million to 342,000; by mid-1947, it stabilized at around 135,000, until the mid-1950s, when the numbers again nearly doubled. The proportion of African American troops hovered around 10 percent.[35] During this time, wartime troops were replaced by younger, inadequately trained troops of uneven aptitude, skill, and commitment. In 1946, the European Command began to register a marked decline in performance and discipline and a rise in rates of venereal disease as well as serious criminal incidents against property and civilians among its troops in Germany. Statistics showed, moreover, that black troops were disproportionately more involved in disciplinary infractions and criminal activity.[36] In response, the NAACP—inundated by letters from black GIs complaining of discriminatory treatment in matters of military discipline and struck by the stark overrepresentation of Blacks in military arrests and punishment, including courts-martial and executions—launched an investigation and publicly questioned officials about the racist assumptions and practices underlying military justice. The American military leadership, however, continued to make policy decisions on the basis of these statistics, treating them as objective and value-neutral.[37]

Due to negative publicity regarding the behavior of occupation troops in the white mainstream press, a Senate Special Investigation Committee

undertook a study on the conduct of "Negro soldiers" in Germany as part of a larger inquiry into the operations of military government in Europe. Chief counsel George Meader produced the 1946 report, subsequently described as a "curious amalgam of sensational hearsay, obvious racism, and unimpeachable fact, " in which he recommended that black troops overseas be returned to the United States.[38] Meader's biased report provoked outraged response by black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which noted that Meader hadn't even bothered interviewing black soldiers on his four-week tour of Germany, but relied exclusively on information provided by white officers.[39] Over the course of late 1946, the secretary of War's civilian aide, Marcus Ray, also studied the situation of black troops in Europe and ultimately concluded that "substandard troops" of *both* races were the cause of increased indiscipline, crime, and venereal disease rates overseas.[40]

The War Department and the European Command concurred with Ray about the poor quality of troops, but remained concerned about an anticipated "glut" of enlistment by black soldiers with poor education, skills, and motivation. As a result, they took steps to address these concerns within the larger context of efforts to upgrade the overall quality of the postwar army. The Army discharged any soldier who scored in the lowest category of the general classification test (many of whom were black, due to widespread economic hardship and limited access to quality education among African Americans), and the War Department set the lowest acceptable test score for African Americans a full thirty points higher than for whites. In addition, they exercised a racially differentiated approach to first enlistments by accepting only those African Americans possessing required skills, and instituted remedial military training and basic academic programs (at Käfertal, Grafenwoehr, and Kitzingen) for African American soldiers in Germany. Through these methods, they raised the performance level of black troops abroad while at the same time studiously limiting their numbers.[41] As historian Bernard Nalty summarized, in the first years after the war, "Little change took place in the treatment blacks received. . . . The retraining program for blacks in Europe, instead of broadening opportunities for graduates, served mainly to increase effectiveness of existing segregated units, many of them service organizations. . . . Segregation remained the first consideration, . . . the gap in power and privilege between black soldiers and whites [persisted]."[42]

Throughout the decade following V-E Day, African American organizations and newspapers continued unabated their wartime strategy of lobbying for desegregation of the military and equal rights for black soldiers. After 1945 they often turned their eyes to conditions in Germany to focus more sharply their political and ethical points.[43] In June 1946, for example, in response to official attempts to suspend—or at least drasti-

Military districts and posts in the U.S. occupation zone. By early 1947, all black American troops assigned to Germany were trained at Kitzingen, just south of Würzburg. Afterward, they served near all the major military posts. *Source*: O. J. Frederiksen, *The American Military Occupation of Germany* (Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Army, Europe, 1953), 37.

cally reduce—overseas service by African American troops, the United Negro and Allied Veterans of America (UNAVA) announced that "the ghost of Hitler . . . [is] very much alive" in American-occupied Germany. But this time around it was haunting American military bases rather than German public spaces. The next month, the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association submitted a report to the secretary of War cataloguing instances of abuse that they collected on their tour of U.S. bases in Europe. Among the grievances were those of soldiers stationed in Nidda, Germany, who alleged that their white commanding officer refused them the right to attend Sunday religious services, "drew his gun when reprimanding them," and referred to them as "niggers" when speaking to German civilians.[44] That same summer of 1946, the War Department received a letter from a black U.S. soldier stationed in Auerbach, Germany, complaining that his regiment was quartered in barracks that recently housed German prisoners of war. Surrounded by barbed wire fences, the barracks had been neither cleaned nor upgraded after the German POWs were vacated. The black troops entered a filthy, garbage-filled, louse-ridden compound with overflowing, noxious latrines, and no electricity or bathing facilities. The letter writer was rightly outraged that African American troops were assigned to live literally amidst German shit, while their white officers took up residence in homes located in a village two miles from base.[45]

While conditions for African American troops in Auerbach may have been extreme, they were indicative of an ongoing attitude among white military officers who saw nothing wrong in segregated substandard facilities for African American troops. Due to soldiers' complaints and political pressure from black leaders and newspapers, the quality of housing, leisure and sports facilities, and work assignments would gradually be improved for black American troops. But well into the 1950s African Americans in Germany continued to be drastically underrepresented in Military Government headquarters, in the officer ranks, in medical and professional services, among chaplains and the military police, and in assignment to combat duties. As a reporter for the Baltimore *Afro American* noted in mid-1948, after chronicling some of these inequities in an article on "racial bars" in occupied Germany, "The Germans know these things, and it doesn't help promote the so-called democratic way of life being introduced" to them.[46]

Occupation, American Style

While Germans' reception of American troops in the spring of 1945 was certainly marked by the bitterness of defeat, it was also influenced by Germans' assessment of the practical alternatives. As is evident from postwar testimony, Germans felt it far preferable to be occupied by the

Americans or British than by the Soviets or (later) the French. Like the British, the Americans were generally considered disciplined and well-mannered, but with none of the famous British reserve. Alone among the Allied troops, American GIs, both black and white, were described as friendly and informal, inordinately tall, broad-shouldered, and healthy, with unimaginably good teeth. From the first, their casual demeanor and physical appearance made an indelible impression.[47]

Germans were also struck by American soldiers' affluence, generosity, and access to consumer goods, which far exceeded not only the miserable material circumstances of early postwar Germans, but also the more meager resources of the other Allied soldiers as well. The stereotype of the gum-chewing, chocolate-bar-dispensing GI originated both in the actual social practices of U.S. occupation troops and in German perception of these behaviors as somehow uniquely American. GIs were the informal source of that unofficial currency of the booming black market in occupied Germany, American cigarettes, as well as other diverse gifts to Germans such as supplemental food, nylon stockings, and rock and roll. A bit later in the occupation, GIs rolled through German towns in big American sedans, occasionally offering ogling German children or, more frequently, young German women a ride. The spectacle of American soldiers' cultural modernity and avid consumerism evoked strong responses in Germany, both positive and negative. But it served to differentiate them from the British and especially the Soviets and French, who were denounced by Germans for their particularly punitive provisioning policies during the first years of occupation. American GIs, in comparison, are remembered for an openhanded largesse, which reinforced in most Germans the image of the United States as a land of material—if not necessarily cultural or moral—abundance.[48]

In the months following the defeat of Nazi Germany, occupiers and occupied alike were struck by the high incidence of fraternization between American troops and German civilians. As historian Elizabeth Heineman has pointed out, "in the western zones, fraternization became one of the most-discussed aspects of the occupation," and a focus on fraternization has shaped the historical understanding of postwar reconstruction in West Germany. In contrast, Germans' experience of Soviet occupation, and their retrospective historical assessments of it, have been dominated by references to Soviet authoritarianism, coercion, brutality and, at the earliest stages of contact, rape. Such perceptions and distinctions were, of course, forged and refined in response to a quickly evolving political and ideological context in which wartime gave way to postwar, out of which the Cold War would rapidly emerge.[49]

Nonetheless, it is significant that Germans' personal and historical narratives of life in the American and Soviet zones are structured around *different dynamics of social interaction* between occupier and occupied. The

Soviet approach preached socialist equality via policies that increasingly isolated Soviet troops from Germans, in part due to official fears of reciprocal negative political and ideological influences if social interaction were allowed.[50] The American approach—after a failed attempt to prohibit fraternization between its troops and a presumed Nazi-infected German public in the first few months of occupation—permitted its soldiers to live among Germans in private housing and to socialize with them off base. Moreover, they encouraged organized contact through official American sponsorship of cultural and sporting events, holiday parades, parties for children, and the like.[51]

In stark contrast to early interactions between Soviets and Germans—which were marred by terrifying incidents of Soviet vengeance that included mass rapes in the spring and early summer of 1945—social contact between Germans and Americans was perceived as elective, rather than coercive. This was not due to an absence of violent crimes, including rape, perpetrated by American troops against Germans. These did occur, but not on a mass scale and widespread basis over a relatively short amount of time, as was the case with Soviet troops.[52] Moreover, while some Soviet soldiers cultivated consensual relations with Germans, and particularly German women, after 1945, such opportunities were officially discouraged by late 1947. At that time, Soviet soldiers and officers were prohibited from cohabiting with Germans in private arrangements and were rehoused. In order to create segregated billets for its troops, Soviet officials evicted Germans and confiscated their housing and gardens, forcibly transforming whole city streets and rural villages into Soviet military districts. With housing scarce, the results for affected Germans were devastating.[53]

In the American occupation zone, an opposite trend was evident, as GIs increasingly took advantage of the possibility to rent private housing from German landlords, sometimes using the opportunity to cohabitate with German girlfriends or to import their own wives and children from the United States in a wave of family reunions. Housing and servicing American GIs became a highly lucrative business, which provided Germans both an additional reason to welcome them to the neighborhood and an unprecedented level of contact with American soldiers, their families, and their distinctive way of life. By late 1946, family reunion was well underway for American officers and soldiers in Germany and, within the year, American families and soldiers were integrated into surrounding German residential areas.[54] Unlike the Soviets who opted, for ideological reasons, to rule at a social distance, the more informal interactive American approach appeared based on a presumption of social (if not political) equality between Americans and the nonsovereign Germans, and could work to the economic benefit of the latter.

If Germans pragmatically preferred Americans over other Allied soldiers, American GIs in Europe overwhelmingly returned the compliment. When asked to assess European countries and peoples among whom they served, American GIs disregarded the battle lines of World War II and expressed a strong preference for Germany and the German people over Allied countries and their inhabitants. In a Red Cross register signed by soldiers returning to the United States, for example, about four out of five named Germany as their "favorite foreign country." During the first year of the occupation, a poll taken by the U.S. Army found that nearly 60 percent of enlisted men serving in Europe who spent at least one month in Germany reported their opinion of that country as "favorable" (compared to 32 percent of enlisted men who had not had a German tour of duty). By early 1946, GIs' partiality toward Germans attracted the attention of sociologists and the popular press. Under the ominous caption, "Disaster lies ahead for a nation which cannot tell its enemies from its friends," the *Reader's Digest* featured an article titled simply "Why So Many GIs like Germans the Best."[55]

The reasons for these preferences appear to be many, and surely included the enforced political subservience of the Germans and the corresponding heightened political authority of the American occupiers, though GIs rarely referred to this in their responses. U.S. soldiers commonly praised the Germans for their cleanliness, friendliness, compliant attitudes, relatively good health, and habituation to a "higher material standard of living"—attributes that stuck them as admirable and somehow "familiar" when compared with the French and even the British. For a considerable number of GIs, moreover, this familiarity derived from heredity and heritage, and from the first days of military occupation, many disregarded the fraternization ban to contact and visit relatives still residing in Germany. Whatever the complex of motivations—which doubtless ran the gamut from political to material, genealogical to sexual—American occupiers and German civilians sought each other out. Normalized postwar relations between Americans and Germans derived in large measure from such practices of social proximity and intimacy.[56]

"Democracy's Negroes" in "Naziland": Germany Meets Jim Crow

It should not be forgotten that such practices of social proximity and intimacy were undergirded by the highly asymmetrical power relations existing between American occupiers and their German subjects, on the one hand, and among members of the American occupying force, on the other. The racial hierarchy of the American military—along with its explicit policies and social practices towards minority members—affected

and helped to rescript the hierarchical relationship between victor and vanquished. Race fractured the social binary of American-German relations under the occupation into a more complicated and less predictable social triad. And since it was structured around the contested category of race, the dynamics of this triad wreaked havoc with notions of loyalty, belonging, and difference based upon national identification. Any assessment of the military occupation of Germany, then, is incomplete without a consideration of the impact and consequences of the social dynamics of race.[57]

On their march into Germany in the spring of 1945, African American soldiers reported experiencing unpleasant receptions by German civilians. Several recalled being spat upon or glared at by hostile German women, acts that may well have been directed at all conquerors, regardless of race. Others remembered that Germans were told they had "tails and other such garbage," the sort of racist propaganda that also circulated in Italy and even England during the war and originated in both Axis sources as well as rumors spread among native populations by white racists in the U.S. forces.[58]

Germans, for their part, greeted the sight of African American troops with a mixture of trepidation and disgust. In an interview with an American sociologist a few years after defeat, a member of the Christian Democratic Party in Hesse scolded: "We were deeply hurt when you Americans sent Negroes to Germany in soldiers' uniforms. How can America do this to us, a white people? We are not used to Negroes here; you in America are because you have mongrels of all kinds; but here in Germany we are a pure white race. To see a Negro shocks us, as we would be shocked to see a poisonous snake while walking through the woods."[59]

Germans' negative reactions were shaped by long-held antiblack stereotype, as well as more recent wartime propaganda disseminated by the Nazi Regime. Women and girls were particularly affected by rumors that stereotyped black soldiers as primitive savages and rapists. As American forces entered their communities, Germans found it "scary" since they "did not know what the Blacks would do to" them.[60] One woman, who was a child at the time, recalled "For the first time in my life I now saw Blacks. They were 'cannibals,' we were told by the older children whose word meant something to us. Nothing, however, happened. The unit passed by us completely peacefully."[61]

While fear of black soldiers persisted among some Germans, others reported "experiencing or witnessing pleasant contacts" with African American GIs. By September 1946 in Mannheim, nearly one in six Germans polled by the American military government (OMGUS) claimed to have a relationship (of some sort) with black soldiers.[62] Six years later, one-quarter of West Germans polled said they would be "willing to in-

vite a Negro soldier" into their home, while a larger number, some 30 percent, said they would not.[63] Although the percentage of hospitable Germans was not high, one cannot help but wonder what sort of comparative numbers this question would have yielded in the United States at the time, and whether OMGUS pollsters ever gave serious thought to this issue when analyzing survey results.[64] While it is difficult to get a clear picture of the extent of interracial U.S.-German socializing that developed in the American zone and, later, in West Germany, available data suggest that it was confined to a minority of Germans—albeit a highly significant one, both in statistical and symbolic terms.

Antiblack racism has a long historical legacy in Germany and frequently was fused with anti-Americanism and antisemitism during the first half of the twentieth century—something that will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, the problems that confronted officials in occupied Germany did not derive for the most part from Germans' wholesale unwillingness to mingle with American troops. Quite the opposite, in fact. Shortly after Germany's unconditional surrender, American officials reported an unanticipated "epidemic" of fraternization between African American troops and the native population.

Prior to 1948, during the worst of the hunger years in occupied Germany, fraternization between black GIs and Germans extended beyond the heterosexual romantic relationships that would increasingly become the obsessive complaint of white Americans and Germans alike to the larger German community. In contrast to the superior attitude and "conquering hero" posture evinced by some of their white counterparts, black GIs appeared less likely to treat Germans as subordinates. Germans tended to consider them more affable, modest, courteous, and compassionate than white American soldiers and officers. Black GIs were known at the time, and have been remembered since, as especially kindhearted and generous toward children, but also as responsive to the stark misery of other Germans after the war as well. "In a village near Ulm, during the their six-month tour, nearly every German household had its own 'house-negro' [*Hausneger*]" to supply it with scarce food or goods, recalled one German woman in offensive, if characteristic, fashion. In other localities, German women reportedly "refuse[d] to take in the laundry of white soldiers if black soldiers were stationed in the area," presumably because the latter compensated the women more liberally. In Kitzingen, the site of a training center for African American GIs, where two thousand Blacks mingled off hours in a small town of 17,000, inhabitants uniformly described the soldiers as "very friendly" and prone "to share cigarettes, wine, or beer." Friction occurred only when such generosity was declined, since this tended to be interpreted by black GIs as a racially

motivated insult.[65] Clearly, then, contact with black soldiers could offer significant material advantages to Germans.[66] But it also caused headaches for American officials, who complained in an OMGUS memo on Bavaria in 1946 that "the core of the problem did *not* consist in educating racially prejudiced Germans to refrain from the display of a hostile or disrespectful attitude towards the negro soldier, but rather in supervising the springtime of fraternization" that allegedly resulted in the siphoning of military rations and clothing into German homes.[67]

Perhaps the greatest surprise of intercultural contact in occupied Germany was reserved for African American soldiers, who—after the initial shock of contact, which for some included the revolting, firsthand observation of the horrors of Dachau and Buchenwald—reported surprisingly cordial relationships with Germans.[68] They commented upon the striking *absence* of racism in postwar German society: the relative friendliness of the German population and their ability to move about without undue restriction and to socialize with anyone they pleased regardless of race. Although they had "heard about Hitler's autobiography, 'Mein Kampf,' with its unflattering reference to Negroes as 'Semi-Apes,' . . . had heard of Germans' prejudices, and . . . were prepared to hate them," as Bill Smith of the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted, African American soldiers experienced their stay in this formerly fascist country as both eye-opening and emancipating. Germany's reputation as a desirable place to be stationed spread among African American troops, and it remained a sought-after assignment throughout the American civil rights era.[69]

Germans' positive public reception of black GIs and perceived lack of racial discrimination toward the soldiers was headlined in the black press in the first years of the occupation and even resonated in the mainstream American press in publications like *Newsweek*. As a 1946 report in *Ebony* magazine put it: "Strangely enough, here where once Aryanism ruled supreme, Negroes are finding more friendship, more respect and more equality than they would back home either in Dixie or on Broadway. . . . Race hate has faded with better acquaintance and interracialism in Berlin flourishes. Many of the Negro GIs in the German capital are from the South and find that democracy has more meaning on Wilhelmstrasse than on Beale Street in Memphis."[70] Of course much of this German response can be attributed to African American soldiers' stature as representatives of a victorious occupying power. "Here in Naziland," noted the *Pittsburgh Courier*, black GIs began "to feel equal or even superior to everyone around him. And they liked for a change to feel superior."[71] African American soldiers in Germany were struck by the novelty of being treated courteously as "Yanks," or representatives of the United States and its military. In Germany, unlike in the United States and its military, their uniform and national affiliation dictated German response

and superseded their racial classification as "Negro" in spite of the privately held racial attitudes of individual Germans. African Americans immediately registered and responded to this outward show of respect, precisely because it was an unprecedented social experience for them.[72]

In his 1948 novel, *Last of the Conquerors*, William Gardner Smith (the same Bill Smith who wrote for the *Pittsburgh Courier*) drew on his own tour of duty as occupation soldier in postwar Germany to produce a critical commentary on the social and emotional effects of antiblack racism and racial segregation in American society and its military. Described as the "first twentieth-century novel by an Afro-American writer to deal with the sensitive matter" of black soldiers' experience in a Jim Crow army, *Last of the Conquerors* is set in occupied Germany and narrated from the perspective of its protagonist, Hayes Dawkins, whose duties, assignment, and social contacts in the novel closely echo those of Smith, who was inducted into the army in December 1945 and served as clerk-typist with the 661st TC Truck Company in Berlin from June 1946 through January 1947.[73] *Last of the Conquerors* chronicles Dawkins's introduction to Germany and his easy integration into the army and a wider social life in Berlin, the site of his initial posting. It explores his friendships with other black soldiers and their interactions with white officers, both benign and, with a transfer out of Berlin to the "nigger hell" of Bremburg, increasingly brutalizing. Throughout, however, the social critique of American race relations is juxtaposed against the interwoven story of Dawkins's ready social acceptance by the Germans he meets, both male and female. This includes, first and foremost, a developing love affair with Ilse—a beautiful yet respectable German secretary who works for the U.S. chaplain on the base in Berlin and initiates their romance by asking him out on their first date—as well as his warm relations with her family and friends, first in Berlin and later near Bremburg, where the devoted Ilse follows him, unbidden, at risk to her personal safety.

Smith makes clear in the novel that time abroad in a different national context—even and especially in postfascist Germany—provided African American soldiers with a new, and quite unforgettable, perspective. A quarter of the way into the novel, Dawkins and friends throw a going-away party for Murdock, whose tour of duty is up. After an evening of drinks, Murdock breaks down in front of Dawkins:

> I can't leave this place. I can't. . . .
> You don't understand. . . . You ain't been away from all that s—— as long as I have. You ain't yet got the feel of being free. I like this goddamn country, you know that? That's right. I like the hell out of it. . . . [N]ow I know what it is to walk into any place, *any* place, without worrying about whether they serve colored. You ain't been here long enough to feel that like I do. You

know what the hell I learned? That a nigger ain't no different from nobody else. I had to come over here to learn that. . . . They don't teach that stuff back in the land of the free.[74]

Contact with Europeans provided black soldiers with expanded cultural knowledge and a comparative vantage point from which to assess American racial practices. As one soldier put it: "It was the biggest thing that ever happened, and it touched everybody's life who was around at that time." Some men expressed their intention to stay in Germany after their tours of duty ended. In early 1947, William Gardner Smith advertised such sentiments in a front page article for the *Pittsburgh Courier* titled "Few GIs Eager to Return to States." In the article, which likely served as inspiration for his novel and the character, Murdoch, he quotes a soldier as saying: "I don't want to go home again, ever. . . . How can I leave these people who have treated me so swell . . . like a man, not like some damn animal?"[75] Others appeared to have toyed with the idea of fleeing to the Soviet zone of Germany, hopeful that socialist promises of equality rendered race and racism irrelevant there. By the early 1950s, African American newspapers reported "scores of American ex-servicemen . . . now listed as 'missing' or 'AWOL' or 'deserters' . . . [who] constitute a kind of 'invisible army' wandering illegally over the face of Europe, on both sides of the 'iron curtain.' "[76]

Overseas experience had a transformative political effect on many black American GIs, rendering them "less willing to accept discriminatory treatment." In contrast to would-be expatriates, however, other black GIs found that intercultural contact reaffirmed their national identity and made them "feel more American." Consequently, some returned to the United States determined to support the fight for black civil rights.[77]

In *Last of the Conquerors*, another of Smith's characters, a former reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, dubbed the "Professor" by fellow GIs for his serious manner and facility with words, contemplates the effects of his stay in occupied Germany and offers the following analysis:

You know what? I don't think I'll ever be happy at home again. . . .

I was born there, and my parents were born there. I'll go back, because it's the only place I know. But you know, before I came here I just ignored the things that went on there. I mean, I knew what was going on, I wrote about it in fact, and I hated it, but I was used to it. It had been with me all my life. Now it's different. I've gotten away from that stuff and I'll never be able to take it calmly again. I'll endure it, I guess. I might even become sort of used to it again. But not the way I was before. I'll never take it the way I used to. . . . Because I'll always remember the irony of my going away to Germany to find democracy. That's bad.[78]

African American soldiers' positive response to Germany shouldn't be taken to indicate that Germany had been transformed overnight into a racial paradise; it hadn't. Rather, the soldiers were indicating a heightened sense of personal safety, freedom of movement, and freedom of association. As members of a well-paid U.S. military, they enjoyed an elevated economic status and sociopolitical power vis-à-vis ordinary Germans. Yet these benefits had their downside as well, and from the earliest years of occupation through the 1950s, African American soldiers attracted the resentment of white competitors—both American and German—for white German women precisely *because* they had the opportunity and the means to attract and court them.[79]

In American-occupied Germany, interracial dating, sexual relations, and reproduction became a flash point for white male resentment and official regulation that transcended national lines. Both countries had histories in which interracial sex, marriage, and reproduction between Blacks and whites were legally proscribed. Germany's attempt to discourage and disadvantage black-white marriages and reproduction developed out of its experience with colonies in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, and accelerated in the years leading up to the First World War. It was not until the so-called Nuremberg Laws of 1935 under the Nazi Regime, however, that interracial sexual relations and reproduction between white Germans and "jews, blacks, gypsies and their bastards" were explicitly prohibited and subject to punishment and persecution by the state.[80]

In the United States, social and legal proscriptions against interracial sex and reproduction had a longer history and reached back well into the nineteenth century, only to be reinvigorated with a vengeance with the end of slavery and the social controls that institution afforded propertied whites. In the aftermath of the American Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan organized as a kind of terror organization led by prominent local white businessmen, politicians, professionals, and other property owners devoted to the preservation of white supremacy and privilege. A cornerstone of white supremacy became the policing of white women's sexual purity and propriety—ensuring, that is, that white women socialized and reproduced "within their race." Any infraction—real or imagined—was punished quickly and lethally, with vigilante action targeting the alleged black male "perpetrator" and only rarely his white female companion. By the turn of the twentieth century, lynching became an endemic cultural practice throughout the United States that persisted into the post-1945 period. In its unique American form, it developed into a surprisingly popular spectator sport that drew crowds of white onlookers—male and female, children and adults—and spawned a gruesome commercialized souvenir market of postcards and other memorabilia.[81]

Black soldiers' assessments of their experience abroad are relative and therefore always at least implicitly critical of the comparatively more dangerous ways that racism was mobilized and expressed in the United States than in occupied Germany. Given the tremendous importance that white Americans placed on policing their women's "virtue" and, by extension, their white bloodlines, and given the terrifying illicit violence that putatively "respectable" white American citizens historically proved themselves willing to marshal and condone in order to punish—or merely prevent—interracial sex, reproduction, and or even just heterosexual socializing, it is no wonder that African American soldiers in Germany were most struck by their unprecedented ability to date white women there. This becomes evident in *Last of the Conquerors*, when Hayes Dawkins, on his first date with Ilse, finds himself sunbathing next to her on the beach at Wannsee, a lake on the outskirts of Berlin: "I had lain on the beach many times, but never before with a white girl. A white girl. Here, away from the thought of differences for awhile, it was odd how quickly I forgot it. It had lost importance. . . . No one stared as we lay on the beach together, our skins contrasting but our hearts beating identically and both with noses in the center of our faces. Odd, it seemed to me, that here, in the land of hate, I should find this one all-important phase of democracy. And suddenly I felt bitter."[82]

As Smith indicates in this passage, this is not an issue of black men finding white women somehow more desirable than black, or—as racists would have it—of black men cravenly craving carnal knowledge of white women. Rather, Dawkins experiences a moment when "race" as a marker of difference and social place is nearly forgotten and he is given the freedom—as an unmarked individual—to choose a partner from among other, similarly unmarked individuals. With "hearts beating identically and both with noses in the center of our faces," the only race restriction is their shared humanity. Toward the end of the novel, Dawkin's fantasizes, lying in bed next to Ilse, in "a dream without sleeping." But his fantasy—with its focus on domesticity, sociability, middle-class sensibility and respectability—is poignant for its mundane quotidian detail and the stark contrast it presents to his ghettoized life in Philadelphia:

> *A house in Wannsee in Berlin. With ivy on the walls and a flower garden with lawn chairs. A small house, but a house that is clean, to which many friends come to talk, and play cards, and drink beer, or maybe schnapps. With books along the walls and scrubbed paint and windows that open out and a bathtub that is always well washed and always being used. A porch, and nighttime sitting on the porch looking at the water of Wannsee, hearing the wind through the trees, smelling the scent of the grass and trees and water and flowers. With quiet in the night and rising early in the morning and the wife who puts the blankets and sheets and pillows in the window at eight o'clock to air out. Paintings on the wall and lis-*

tening to operas and symphonies over the radio or in the theater. Head held high and smiling people. To dances that are not in tiny halls and dancing not the jitter-bug all the time, but the waltz and the tango and the rhumba and the samba and the polka. Singing "I'm in Love with Vienna."

Wie geht's, Herr *Dawkins*?

Danke, sehr gut. Und Dir?

Auch gut, danke.

Und deine Frau?

Auch gut. Es geht uns sehr gut.

Shall we go to the coffee house? Why yes, I would like that. The coffee house warm and cozy on a winter's night with many people at the tables smiling red-faced and merry. The Fraulein: *May I serve you, sir? Yes. What do you have? Well, we have wonderful Kartoffel Salad*, gnädiger Herr. *Would you like that, Ilse? Yes. I think it would be nice. All right, we'll take it. And anything else, sir? Well, the coffee of course. Thank you, sir. And in the coffee house everyone looking up at me in admiration, admiration, admiration . . . not disdain . . . because my skin is brown and healthy-looking and as a man's skin should be. With the barber saying*, Herr Dawkins, *you have wonderful hair. And the laugh inside.*[83]

Time spent in Germany was instructive to many black GIs because it provided them with the ability—via a different cultural frame—to think beyond their social experience as black men in the United States. It gave them a sense of the historical and cultural contingency of American racial practices. It extended the possibility of escaping prejudicial legal and social prohibitions based upon entrenched notions of race.[84] (For although the novel concludes with Dawkins returning to the United States, novelist William Gardner Smith ultimately chose to become an expatriate, settling in Paris.)[85] It could also fuel aspirations for social reform since it brought the realization that racial segregation, antimiscegenation laws, and lynchings were not universal practices common to all white societies, but socially and culturally mutable, differing from nation to nation. While such cultural comparisons might generate despair regarding the condition of American society, they could also fuel hope by suggesting that racism was not the *essential* condition of all whites.

Learning from America: Democracy Imposed, Whiteness Unchallenged

It was precisely a realization of the potential emancipatory effect of such experience abroad on black soldiers' social perceptions and behavior that accounted for the zealous rage and condemnation of some of their white compatriots. In a series of intelligence debriefings of U.S. troops returning from overseas in 1945, for example, numerous white officers and

GIs denounced interracial dating by black GIs abroad as a significant *cause* of racial violence in the military. Beginning with the entry of U.S. troops into England and Europe during the war, white GIs publicly harassed white women in the company of black GIs and hurled insults, fists, and in one case even a sledgehammer, at the latter.[86] Antiblack slurs and violence within the American ranks abroad caused one angry soldier, interviewed in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) by the NAACP's Walter White, to ask, "What are we fighting for over here? Are we sent . . . to fight the Nazis—or our white soldiers?"[87]

In a mid-1945 interview regarding "Colored Soldiers in the ETO," a white Lieutenant Ducharme asserted that "the problem of social equality" and particularly the willingness of "large numbers of women" to socialize with black American troops "created a feeling of resentment on the part of white soldiers." Tellingly, the lieutenant complained that their dating of white women encouraged a "new found assurance" by black troops "that frequently resulted in over-stepping the limits of propriety."[88]

White male resentment was not limited to troops abroad. In 1946, Dwight D. Eisenhower received a letter from Alvin M. Owsley, an "indignant former national commander of the American Legion" who was irate after seeing a photo of a black GI fraternizing with a white German woman: "My dear General, I do not know . . . where these negroes come from, but it is certain that if they expect to be returned to the [U.S.] South, they very likely are on the way to be hanged or burned alive at public lynchings by the white men of the South. . . . There is only one way to stop the white men of the South from burning and hanging blackmen [*sic*] who lay their hands on our white women and that is . . . [for] . . . the blackmen [*sic*] to associate with black women and leave *our* white women alone."[89] As an American sociologist, writing about the racial friction in the U.S. Army abroad, astutely summarized:

> There can be no doubt that the new situation required considerable adjustment . . . and was more difficult for white officers and men than for the Negro. . . . As can be readily imagined, the issue revolved largely around women and the fact that they made little or no distinction between colored and white and, in some cases, even preferred the Negro male to the white. The whites expressed the fear that the Negro would never be satisfied to go back to his old status and would continue to expect white women to submit to his sexual desires. The Negro expressed similar sentiments. . . . Negro troops were under the impression that white women in America were perfectly willing to accept them as sexual partners and that only the American male stood in their way.[90]

The battle, then, was one involving American "manhood." Although expressed through the language of sexual competition for white women,

the stakes—it should be clear—were perceived as much more profound and far-reaching by Blacks and whites alike. This was not just a contest over access to white female bodies, but over access to political and social equality. For the history of antimiscegenation laws in the United States reveals that such laws were (merely) the emotionally charged touchstone for a more comprehensive *program* of legal and extralegal initiatives to bolster white supremacy via white patriarchy, on the one hand, and to effect the permanent political, social, and economic subordination of African Americans, on the other. "Manhood"—in all of its dimensions—had been crafted as the exclusive domain of white men in the United States, and therefore was a fundamentally racialized term. So when African American men claimed the privileges of sexual manhood through elective relations with white women, they were perceived by white men—and also perceived themselves—to be attacking the entire edifice of white (male) superiority.

White American hostility toward interracial relations between African American troops and German women persisted throughout the first twenty-five years or so after 1945, but was especially heated through the 1950s. White American servicemen vehemently, and sometimes violently, opposed interracial fraternization and, like Alvin Owsley above, sought to defend an imagined transnational community of inviolable whiteness—"*our white*" German women—from the attentions of their black compatriots. In shifting the emphasis from national to racial belonging when it came to interracial heterosexual relations, white American soldiers redrew the battle lines between "us" and "them."[91]

But because U.S. troops were in postwar Germany to assist in the official American program of denazification, political democratization, and social and ideological reconstruction, and because in this period Germany was literally rendered a borderland for Cold War skirmishes between hostile socialist and capitalist systems, good public relations and the ability to project a positive image was of paramount political importance in securing American interests internationally. As a result, public displays of American antiblack racism at home and abroad became increasingly worrisome to American officials both because of the disillusionment it could sow among occupied populations, but also because of the negative publicity it could provide Cold War enemies regarding American values—or rather American hypocrisy in the *social transubstantiation* of those values.[92]

During the years of occupation through the 1950s, American officials devoted resources to intelligence gathering among Germans and attempted to ascertain, for example, Germans' attitudes toward the goals of the American occupation and the behavior of its troops, and the level of anti-Americanism and, to some extent, also antisemitic sentiment "on

A private club for black GIs in Berlin in which, according to *Ebony*,
"only ice cream and Coca-cola were served." German women were welcome;
German men were not. Courtesy of The Newberry Library, Chicago.

the streets" in western Germany. Moreover, U.S. occupation and military
officials were acutely aware of German reactions to the public displays
of interracial friction in the U.S. Army. The most common incidents were
white-on-black verbal and physical assaults—including, for a time, white
soldiers' practice of driving their vehicles onto sidewalks in the attempt
to run down black GIs in the company of German women—or raucous
barroom brawls in or near German establishments. White soldiers were
also alleged to have detonated two bombs on a base in Bremen in order
to dissuade black soldiers from dating German women. Occasionally,
brawls got out of hand and fatalities occurred. In one case, white Ameri-
can southerners of the 29th Division amused themselves in a pub by fir-
ing their guns at the feet of two black GIs to "make them dance." In-
censed friends of the victims, upon hearing of the incident, rushed to the
scene and returned fire. At a dance at an enlisted men's club in Asberg,
Bavaria, when white GIs threw beer bottles at black GIs dancing with
white German women, angry black soldiers turned .30 caliber carbines
on the culprits. One white soldier died and as a result, "three Negro sol-
diers were sentenced by court martial to hang on the gallows."[93]
    As historian Maria Höhn has pointed out, by the 1950s the American
civil rights struggle was transferred to Germany, resulting in bloody
street fights and riots between white and black American troops in west-
ern German towns like Baumholder, Kaiserslautern, and Butzbach. The

integration of the U.S. military did not end racial segregation: it merely moved it off base. Under pressure from white GIs, German bar-owners near U.S. bases excluded black soldiers from their establishments, forcing the soldiers to carve out their own social space in less desirable areas of town and frequently in bars owned by Eastern European Jews. As a result, Jim Crow practices were transferred to German garrison towns, with whites cleaving to whites and Blacks relegated to areas of racial otherness. Such informal practices, moreover, became subsequently formalized by the endorsement of white officers and enforcement of white Military Police (MPs) on patrol, who would chase away any black would-be interlopers with the threat of violence or incarceration.[94]

As telling were cases in which black GIs alleged racial discrimination on the part of German landlords or shopkeepers who refused to rent to or serve them or their families, and who presumably could justify their actions with appeal to racially discriminatory American practices in Germany. In these instances, the U.S. military declined to intervene, either by labeling these actions "anti-American" rather than racially motivated, or by maintaining that "community mores with respect to race vary" and were "beyond the direct purview of the DOD [Department of Defense]." However, the real concern was that if they did intervene in German cases, they would have to respond to black allegations of discrimination in garrison towns in the United States as well. In refusing to act, they upheld the principles of racial segregation and antiblack racism in postwar America and Germany.[95]

However the most heated racial animosities centered on black-white dating. While U.S. officials—and the African American press—noted that sexual competition between white and black troops over German women exacerbated hostilities, and that black GIs' fraternization with white women drew particularly condemnatory opinion or action by white U.S. soldiers, little was done over the years of the occupation and High Commission to defuse white soldiers' hostile responses. Disturbances and fights between white and black GIs remained frequent and ferocious and were assiduously reported in the German press.[96] In response, American military courts doled out the severest sentences to retaliatory action by black GIs, who had been targeted for racial violence and even murder by whites and, pushed well past their boiling point by an unresponsive command, had determined to meet violence with violence.[97] More lenient sentences tended to be meted out to their white antagonists.[98]

The U.S. military in Germany initiated policies of social control that managed the problems of racism and racist violence rather than confronted them. A major, stationed at Roth Army Air Base, wrote to the *Chicago Defender* in late 1946 to report that when a black enlisted man "is

caught with a German girl, he is given up to six months in the so-called guard-house. The girl is beaten and locked up in German prison."[99] Local commanders would monitor the off-duty activities of black GIs, and MPs would cooperate with German authorities to regulate the behavior of white German women seen in the company of black troops.

During the occupation, American military police routinely hauled women dating or socializing with black GIs into custody for venereal disease (VD) checks. Motivation for such action ranged from officially endorsed racist white assumptions that only the lowest forms of white femininity—namely, prostitutes or the pathologically promiscuous—would associate with black men to concerted attempts to pressure women to renounce interracial fraternization.[100] Black GIs stationed throughout Europe complained that such prejudicial assumptions and actions negatively affected the views of local populations toward them and caused respectable women, out of fear for their reputations, to disassociate themselves increasingly from black soldiers.[101]

In *Last of the Conquerors*, Ilse is picked up for a VD check one night while returning with Dawkins from a visit to her aunt and uncle. When she is finally released, she is reluctant to give him the details of her incarceration. At his insistence, she describes her interrogation by an American lieutenant: "[T]he lieutenant spoke to me very softly like a child. He said I must know that the colored man was not like everybody else, and that an American white woman would never go out with one. He said that the colored man was dirty and very poor and had much sickness. He said everything soft and sounded very kind. He said I could go, only I must promise not to go with the colored soldier any more." This Ilse refuses to do, responding that she loves her soldier and will stay with him. She is locked up with other women in similar circumstances and, over the course of her stay in jail, is propositioned by white MPs, who promise to release her if she has sex with them. When she declines, they call her a "nigger-lover" and tell her she will never again experience the love of a white man. Ten days later, she is handed over to the German police, "friends" of the MPs, who "said the same thing . . . that we should not go out with colored soldiers. They were very angry when we did not say we would no longer see you. . . . After a time they let us go. They said if they did see us again with a colored soldier they would put us in prison. Many of the girls are now afraid and will not again go with a colored soldier."[102] The novel suggests the ideological affinity and practical cooperation between the American military police and the German civilian police on the issue of race and racial mixing—something borne out by reports of American military government authorities and the German police during the period.[103]

And this, ultimately, became a central problem of the occupation since interracial fraternization between black GIs and white German women was treated as an unbearable provocation by numerous white American soldiers and officers, and by white German men more generally. Moreover, white men of American and German nationality employed a common epithet: "nigger lover" or *Negerliebchen,"* newly popularized in the German language, to slander German women who associated with black troops. Although white Americans and Germans drew on distinct national-historical idioms of race, both agreed upon the necessity—for peculiarly postwar reasons—to "defend" white manhood and to police white women.

This is not to argue that postwar Germans learned antiblack racism from American occupiers. After all, Germans already had a long tradition of such bigotry that predated and was intensified by both Germany's short stint as a colonial power prior to 1918 and shorter stint as National Socialist power between 1933 and 1945. Rather, at the level of the street, Germans were absorbing the *postwar* lesson—inadvertently taught by their new American masters—that democratic forms and values were consistent with racialist, and even racist, ideology and social organization. Informal contacts between occupier and occupied—along with the discriminatory policies of the U.S. military toward its minorities and the tense relations among occupation soldiers of differing ethnicities—affected the ways Germans perceived and received American political and social values after 1945. German understandings of the *content* of "democratization" were conditioned by the implicitly racialized *context* within which this was delivered. As a result, military occupation reinforced white supremacy as a shared value of mainstream American and German cultures.[104]