



German Historical Institute
Washington, D.C.

Call for Papers:

***African American Civil Rights and Germany
in the 20th Century***

**Conference at Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, NY)
October 1–3, 2009**

Jointly organized by the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC
and Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY

Conveners: Maria Höhn (Vassar College) and Martin Klimke (GHI Washington)

When Barack Obama addressed more than 200,000 enthusiastic Berliners this year, the German press evoked not only the memory of John F. Kennedy's famous visit to the city in 1963 but also that of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. the following year. Surprisingly, however, neither King's visit in September 1964 nor the role of Germany in the history of the African American civil rights movement has so far received noticeable scholarly consideration.

Until recently, the story of the African American civil rights movement has been told largely within the context of American history. Only since the collapse of the Soviet Union have scholars shown how U.S. foreign policy concerns and the competition with the Soviet Bloc forced policy makers in Washington to support the civil rights agenda. What receives almost no attention in this Cold War interpretation, however, is the role the many African American encounters with Germans before and after WWII, as well as the expansion of the American military base system in Europe, played in the unfolding drama of the civil rights struggle.

Many African American intellectuals and artists, such as Ira Aldridge, W. E. B. Du Bois, Duke Ellington, and Paul Robeson, visited Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their personal interactions, often facilitated by transnational networks (e.g. artistic connections, religious organizations, trade unions, etc.), opened up a space for the mutual exchange and transfer of cultural practices across the Atlantic. Such transmissions also took place in Germany itself. Since American forces occupied Germany in 1945, almost 3 million African American soldiers, their families and civilian employees of the U.S. Department of Defense have lived and worked in the country. This conference seeks to shed light on the experiences of these African Americans and of those people who

interacted with them over the issue of civil rights, thereby expanding the story of the African American civil rights movement beyond the geographical boundaries of the U.S.

The conference has two principle objectives: In addition to exploring how African American perceptions of Germany influenced the development of the American civil rights movement, it also aims to look at how Germans perceived and re-contextualized that movement's ideology, iconography, and cultural practices. It seeks to trace how the solidarity and support for African American civil rights in Germany transformed traditional concepts of democracy, civil society, and the public sphere and how it influenced the ways Germans constructed and negotiated ethnic identities and ideas of blackness throughout the 20th century.

Special attention will also be paid to the relationship between African Americans and both East and West Germany after 1945.

Researchers from all disciplines are invited to discuss this history of mutual perception and contact in the fields of politics, law, religion, sports, literature, music, art and popular culture.

Possible conference topics include:

- Germany in the African American civil rights discourse (black press, etc.)
- Experiences of African American GIs in Germany
- Germany in African American literature, art and music
- The African American civil rights movement in German discourse (press, politics, religion, literature, publishing, etc.)
- Encounters of African Americans and Germans in 20th century sports history (Jesse Owens, Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, etc.)
- Experiences of individual Germans (clergy, activists, journalist, etc.) or German (non-profit) organizations in the civil rights movement
- Civil rights in German law
- The Role of African American music in postwar Germany (jazz, blues, soul, etc.)
- African American civil rights and the German student movement
- Connections of individual African American intellectuals, artists, activists to Germany (e.g., Ira Aldridge, W. E. B. Du Bois, Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, etc.)
- African Americans in German literature, art and music
- The Impact of Martin Luther King Jr. in Germany and his visit in 1964
- German responses to Black Power
- Angela Davis solidarity campaigns in East and West
- German government reactions to the African American civil rights movement (both on a national and local level)
- The History of African American studies in Germany

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a brief CV to **Martin Klimke** at klimke@ghi-dc.org.

The **deadline** for submission is **March 1, 2009**. Participants will be notified by the end of April 2009.

The conference, held in English, will focus on discussing 5,000–6,000-word, papers (due **September 1, 2009**) that will be circulated beforehand to all participants. Expenses for travel and accommodation will be covered.