nate during the 1950s are unique in many ways and were possible for a number of reasons. The area had traditionally experienced large-scale emigration of its impoverished and land-hungry population to the United States. People thus felt a certain kinship with the American soldiers that they did not necessarily share with the French. The fact that the state was a border region of Germany's traditional archenemy France and had suffered severely under the French military occupation only enforced that sense. The region was also unique because of the intimate living together in this mostly rural setting. Americans stationed in the American zone in such urban centers as Berlin, Frankfurt, or Munich lived very secluded lives, sheltered from the rest of German society. Their "little Americas," already established in 1945, provided for their every need. In Rhineland-Palatinate that separate infrastructure existed only by the later part of the 1950s. Because the military never provided sufficient on-base housing for its soldiers, GIs and their families continued to live on the German "economy." The withdrawal behind the safe walls of the "little Americas" would come in Rhineland-Palatinate only later, with the devaluation of the dollar in 1971 and the rash of terrorist attacks on American military bases during the late 1970s. For most of the 1950s and 1960s, Germans and Americans in the villages and hamlets of Rhineland-Palatinate lived as good neighbors and often became friends.

The preceding chapter provides a mere glimpse of the extensive and often cordial German-American relations that made the 1950s such a unique decade in Rhineland-Palatinate. Clearly, those Germans and Americans who sought out each other largely drove the narrative of those encounters. It is much harder to get a sense of the experience and attitudes of Germans who remained ambivalent, if not hostile, to the American presence. Oral histories are a wonderfully rich source for detailing the everyday encounters between Germans and Americans and for recapturing the wonder that many young Germans experienced in their interactions with the Americans. However, they are less helpful in revealing what anxieties Germans must have experienced over this dominant foreign presence and its social impact. Much of what appeared alien and threatening to local life and German traditions in the 1950s has since become routine and part of everyday life for Germans in these communities.

Recapturing the full spectrum of the German and American encounter during the 1950s is thus a complex challenge. The fact that both Germans and Americans were undergoing dramatic social change during that period only further complicates such an endeavor. Not only were Germans making the difficult transition from fascism to democracy; they were also experiencing radical changes in their way of life due to the American presence. At the same time, the American military faced its own
dilemmas. Deploying any such large contingent of single young men into a foreign country was a tremendous undertaking. The social revolution emerging in the United States over civil rights only complicated the military's task. Arriving with segregated troops in 1950, the European command spent the better part of the decade trying to overcome centuries of racial discrimination. That experience was probably no less dramatic for many of the American soldiers than were the profound changes Germans experienced in their way of life.

This chapter complicates the mostly positive narrative of the preceding one by exploring the social and cultural anxieties that marked the German-American encounter during the 1950s. As will be seen, not all was well in the provinces. While business people delighted in their new prosperity and German teenagers were dazzled by the glimpse that Americans provided into a new and desirable world, others felt overwhelmed by the Americans' alien culture. In the first few years after the troops' arrival, woeful expressions over the loss of Heimat (the homeland) existed side by side with exhilarated coverage of the modern military installations and the luxurious interiors of the American homes on the base. The record also indicates that for many Germans, black American soldiers were the most visible and disturbing sign of just how unsettled their lives had become.

By exploring in particular the face-to-face interaction of Germans and black GIs, I will show that German attitudes toward the black soldiers were multifaceted. While Germans expressed little open hostility toward black soldiers, the presence of single black men nonetheless evoked considerable anxiety. Thus, even as Germans grudgingly accepted the black families who moved into their towns, ate in their restaurants, or shopped in their stores, most Germans condemned as unacceptable the relationships between German women and black American soldiers. Germans were assured of the righteousness of their beliefs by the complex manner in which German and American racial attitudes interacted during the 1950s. Rejecting the language of Nazi racism, Germans drew instead on the example of American racial segregation to justify their own opposition to interracial relationships.

"We Have Lost Possession of Our Heimat"

Despite the good will of the American military, many Germans, especially before 1955, were bitter about the presence of U.S. troops, complaining, "We are still not masters in our own house and thus cannot define our own life." For much of the decade, Germans continued to see the GIs as occupiers, and American soldiers at times received the cold shoulder. In particular, many Germans on the Left continued to reject Adenauer's policy of West-integration and rearmament as the country's best hope of regaining its place in the family of nations. For these Social Democrats, the American presence was proof that Germany had learned little from its militarist and murderous past.

Perhaps most troublesome to Germans were the daily annoyances of having to live in close proximity to such a large, foreign military presence. Continuing land confiscations, damage caused by military maneuvers, the deafening noise of low-flying jets, and the daily barrage of shooting from firing ranges became a normal part of the lives of people in all military communities. Just as difficult was the fact that small rural communities like Baumholder had to integrate tens of thousands of American GIs. All communities with American GIs saw increased levels of crime and violence. Moreover, as far as the Germans were concerned, the Americans also directed too much attention toward local women. Especially around payday, GIs often approached women alone at night on the streets. GIs sometimes had difficulty taking no for an answer, and the local paper reported that women were occasionally harassed. Such incidents, rare though they were, raised the ire of local people. Many Germans were also annoyed by the GIs' jovial habit of calling every woman "Frollein" and their practice of inviting women for a "joy ride" or an evening of fun. The Birkenfeld police chief reported that his own wife had been accosted in this manner, and the mayor of Kaiserslautern had no better news to report.

The Americans also brought into those communities cultural norms that jolted the sensibilities of the German population. Thus, even when the soldiers were on their best behavior, many Germans judged the American military an alien presence that threatened their way of life and undermined German identity. In a typical account that regretted this development, a Protestant clergyman complained that Kaiserslautern, with its "abundance of American tailfin cars (Straßenkreuzer), American street signs, and men in American uniforms," was no longer a German city but an American one. Others complained that the city's streets teemed with "overly casual" and "undisciplined" men, who made up for their lack of German language skills by gesticulating wildly and speaking too loudly. German streets were not only populated with "alien" people; formerly sleepy German communities were allegedly also caught up in the "American tempo." Germans at times expressed their anxiety over the drastic changes by
American military housing appears to loom oppressively over the little town of Baumholder. Courtesy of Karl Edinger, photographer

objecting to how the physical landscape of their Heimat had changed due to the military construction program. They complained that whole hills were flattened, forests razed, and blooming meadows macadamized into airfields. Small communities like Baumholder found themselves surrounded by block upon block of military barracks and American family housing. Observers eyed with anxiety the intimidating and sprawling American bases (Amistäde) that hovered over the simple homes of the sleepy towns and villages. These new structures, considered “dull and monotone” by some Germans, dominated the rural landscape in an almost threatening manner, evoking fears that nobody could escape their “hot and restless breath.” For many, the huge American military communities stood as stark reminders that Germans had lost control over their own destiny. One commentator gave voice to that sentiment when he bemoaned, “Here we have been alienated from our Heimat; here we have lost possession of it.”

Conservative clergymen were the most outspoken critics of the cosmopolitan character that many of these provincial towns took on due to the American presence. They complained about the increase in traffic, the glittering neon lights, and the many foreign businesses that catered to the

GI. A Kaiserslautern clergyman expressed how alienating these changes were when he reported gravely that “the far east and the wild west meet here; there is the Cafe Broadway [sic] and only fifty yards over is the Chinese Restaurant Juang-Tung.” Conservative clergy, at times even drew on the racially charged language of the Nazi past to describe the new situation as an “over-foreignization (Überfremdung).”

In a widely published proclamation entitled “It concerns all of us,” the Kaiserslautern Synod probably expressed the sentiments of many a disgruntled German in 1954: “We have to blame ourselves most of all, when foreign masters have much power and great influence in our city and our Heimat.” The wording of the synod’s proclamation does not reveal whether Germans should accept blame for their support of Nazism, since it was this eager embrace of the dictatorship that had led to the current political situation. However, the synod’s recriminations make clear that the time for passively standing by was over. The authors admonished the population that something needed to be done: “It has to concern each and every one of us, that foreign white and colored soldiers dominate the appearance of our streets by day and even more by night.” While this appeal mentioned both white and black soldiers, most other observations focused almost solely on the black soldiers who allegedly dominated the appearance of the local streets.

**Encountering African American GIs**

When black GIs arrived in Rhineland-Palatinate, first in 1945 and then again in 1950, it was not the first time that the local population had encountered people of color. Indeed, when the Americans arrived with all-black units, it must have seemed like a replay for many older Germans. After World War I, an estimated 14,000 to 25,000 French colonial troops served as part of the French occupation forces in the Rhineland. Observers at the time reported little antagonism against these troops among the population; unlike the French, the soldiers from Morocco and Senegal did not view the Germans as their archenemies and thus tended to treat them more kindly. Nonetheless, the presence of these “colored troops” at the very moment when Germany had suffered a humiliating defeat and lost its status as a colonial power caused considerable hostility. Although the colonial troops perpetrated no more offenses against the German civilian population than did their white French counterparts, a nationally organized political campaign depicted them as “wild beasts” intent on destroying the German race. Foremost in this hateful propaganda about the
“Schwarze Schmach,” or the “Black Horror on the Rhine,” was the image of the black rapist defiling German womanhood and thus German honor. This racist image had been a staple of Weimar election propaganda not just for the National Socialists, but for all parties except the Independent Socialists (USPD) and the Communists (KPD). Nazi propaganda during the Weimar years went even further, linking the presence of black soldiers on German soil to a Jewish conspiracy aimed at destroying the “Aryan” race and German morality.\(^{13}\)

In the counties of Birkenfeld and Kaiserslautern, the memory of the highly politicized Schwarze Schmach lived on long after the troops left. In the Palatinate, the NSDAP had been able to gain a large share of the vote by exploiting the population's resentment toward the French and their use of colonial troops.\(^{14}\) During the Third Reich, the regime directed its racial hatred mostly against the Jews. However, the presence of the “Rhineland bastards,” and the regime’s campaign to forcibly sterilize them, kept alive the German encounter with blacks as a racial “other.”\(^{15}\) In the last months of the Second World War, the Nazis hoped to draw on those sentiments when they intensified their racial propaganda against black Americans. Hoping to shore up German resolve before the impending collapse, the regime evoked memories of the “Black Horror on the Rhine” but failed to mount a large-scale propaganda campaign. The impact of the regime’s antiblack propaganda in the last months of the war seems to have been limited, though.\(^{16}\) Unlike in the East, there was no mass flight from the advancing Americans. On the contrary, on the Western front, people refused last-minute evacuation plans during the waning months of the Nazi regime.

While Germans along the Western frontier were grateful to be conquered by American instead of Soviet troops, most probably harbored some anxiety over the prospect of black troops. When the first black American troops arrived in these regions of Rhineland-Palatinate in March of 1945, however, such trepidation and fear were quickly overcome. Black soldiers distinguished themselves through their generosity and friendliness toward the Germans.\(^{17}\) Lutz Niethammer suggests that this positive encounter with African American troops disrupted widespread anticipation of racial violence, allowing many Germans an opportunity to rethink their racial worldview.\(^{18}\) The experience of black GIs in postwar Germany makes possible an exploration of Niethammer’s intriguing thesis.

Germans were stunned at how well the black soldiers treated them, but black soldiers were equally amazed that most Germans approached them with much more tolerance than did white American soldiers. In the after-

math of Germany’s bitter defeat, many Germans preferred the black GIs to the white soldiers, because black GIs were more generous with their food rations. Black GIs also did not approach the defeated Germans with the sort of arrogance that many of the white soldiers displayed. Because of the humiliation of their defeat, Germans also experienced a certain kinship with the black GIs, convinced that black GIs, just like themselves, were treated as second-class citizens by the white Americans.\(^{19}\)

The encounters of black GIs with Germans were so positive that the African American press in the United States repeatedly described the experience of the GIs in Germany to indict American racism at home. Ebony, for example, reported in 1946 with much surprise on how cordially most Germans treated blacks: “Strangely enough, here where Aryanism ruled supreme, Negroes are finding more friendship, more respect and more equality than they would back home—either in Dixie or on Broadway.” While providing wide selections of photos of interracial fraternization, Ebony concluded, “Many of the Negro GIs . . . find that democracy has more meaning on Wilhelmsstrasse than on Beale Street in Memphis.”\(^{20}\) William Gardner Smith, who had served in Germany and contributed numerous articles on the experience of black GIs to the African American press, gave voice to these widely shared sentiments in his novel, The Last of the Conquerors. One of the protagonists, speaking for many black GIs at the time, declared: “I like this goddamn country, you know that? . . . It is the first place I was ever treated like a goddamn man.”\(^{21}\)

Because of their extensive and cordial relations with much of the German population, black GIs came to believe that Nazi racial propaganda had not left a deep impact on German attitudes toward blacks. When black soldiers experienced racism in Germany in the postwar years, one GI recalled, it was generally “marked, made in the United States.”\(^{22}\) The American military’s newspaper Stars and Stripes commented on this unexpected German tolerance when it reported in late 1945 that “the most serious source of racial propaganda against the Negro people” was white GIs.\(^{23}\) The message of German tolerance versus American racism was brought to a wider audience in the United States when Newsweek reported in 1946 that in “their attitude toward Negro troops, many Americans are more virulent than a large number of Germans.”\(^{24}\) Black observers who toured Germany several times during the occupation to investigate the status of black personnel reported much the same. They found “no carry-over of Nazi racial ideologies directed against the American Negro soldier;” stressing that the “expected ideological difficulties in the use of Negro troops in Germany have not materialized.”\(^{25}\)

Because of their status as American occupation soldiers, black GIs ex-
experienced their military service in Germany as a time of liberation. For
the first time in their lives, black soldiers could enter any pub, shop in any
store; they could even date a white woman. If their ability to do so pro-
voked sullen service in pubs and stores or rude stares from Germans, it
did not expose the soldiers to arrest or physical violence. A black soldier
in The Last of the Conquerors expressed how profoundly this experience in
Germany affected him: “Now I know what it is to walk into any place,
any place, without worrying about whether they serve colored. . . .
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. I had to come over here
and let the Nazis teach me that. They don’t teach that stuff back in the
land of the free.”

The commanding general of the U.S. Army in Europe suggested that
this positive experience convinced many black soldiers to extend their
tour of duty in Germany. According to Lt. General Clarence Huebener,
the “German attitude toward American Negroes immediately after World
War II was notably tolerant, a factor in the popularity among Negroes of
assignments to Europe.”

It would be too simple to dismiss the widespread acceptance of black
GI’s by Germans as a survival strategy during the years of military
occupation. A tour of duty in Germany remained one of the most coveted
assignments for black GIs even after the founding of the Federal Republic
in 1949. Military investigations conducted during the early 1950s showed
that black GIs encountered no discrimination when they frequented Ger-
man stores, pubs, and restaurants. After observing a German town with
a substantial presence of black GIs for a week during 1952, the military
investigators concluded their report by stating that most Germans con-
sidered blacks “friendly, fun-loving, and generous.” They reiterated that
Germans treated the black GI in a friendly manner, considering him “ten
times more pleasant than the Russian.”

Black soldiers who arrived from the United States, where communi-
ties around military bases—not just in the South—were still segregated,
were, in the words of a former soldier, “hard put not to make invidious
comparisons with the American scene.” The Department of Defense
also expressed surprise when it concluded in 1954 that “it is paradoxical
that the Negro citizen in uniform has frequently been made to feel more
at home overseas than in his home town.” Unfortunately, no surveys on
how black soldiers assessed their time in Germany were conducted during
the 1950s. However, the results of a 1965 survey are telling in a number of
ways. As late as the mid-1960s, when German postwar suffering was long
over and Germans had long since gained national sovereignty, 64 percent
of black GIs still believed that they experienced more racial equality in
Germany than in the United States. Only 6 percent of black GIs thought
that they were treated better in the United States, while 30 percent saw
little difference between the two countries.

A white soldier stationed in Germany during the 1950s expressed his
surprise at how easily Germans accepted blacks when he reported that he
“saw and heard of little prejudice on the part of the Germans, con-
sequently the black soldier could readily socialize and integrate with
the civilian population.” Another white soldier was equally amazed when
he learned just how much black GIs enjoyed their tour of duty there.
Complaining to a black soldier in the mid-1950s about being homesick,
he found little sympathy. The black GI responded: “You just don’t un-
derstand, Leland, I have it a lot better here.” For many black GIs, then,
their military service in Germany expanded their world and helped them
reimagine their own place in the world. One black veteran recalled, “Be-
fore going to Germany, I felt like a prisoner in the United States. Ger-
many opened my eyes to the variety of reactions a black could expect
when dealing with whites. I was surprised at how friendly some white
people were over there, especially older people.” Upon returning to the
United States, black soldiers reported with great dismay their shock at
having to “deal with Jim Crow” again after experiencing a “three-year
breathing period” in Germany.

The way in which black soldiers experienced their time in Germany as
a liberating experience should not blind us to the widespread racism that
existed side by side with the overall tolerance toward black soldiers. After
the horrors that Germans had committed in their quest for racial purity,
many Germans seemed to have been willing to question a Weltanschau-
ing based on rigid racial hierarchies and exclusion. Heide Fehrenbach’s
work on the liberal German discourse on how to treat the children born
of German women and African American GIs reveals a self-conscious
effort to overcome the legacy of racism. That same sort of self-conscious
effort can also be found on the local level. Thus, the occasional news-
paper report delighted in the new racial heterogeneity of local commu-
nities by stressing that “where just a few months ago children gawked
at black-skinned women and their dark-colored children,” nobody took
notice anymore. Much more common than this celebration of diversity,
however, was a sense of shock over the presence of black Americans.

Because Germans in these communities have been living with white
and black Americans for more than five decades now, none of the people
interviewed for this project mentioned black GIs specifically when re-
calling the 1950s. The interviewees recalled their sense of unease over the
black GIs in the 1950s only after the interviewers specifically inquired about how alien this aspect of the United States presence must have been. Once prodded on the topic, however, Germans recalled their anxiety over the encounter with black GIs vividly. Fifty years after the first blacks began moving into German villages and towns, people recalled “that it was scary” and “that they were afraid.” They explained their apprehension and fear by insisting that “one did not know what the blacks would do to us.” Because of widespread unease over this alien presence, people “entered with strange feelings into relationships and conversations with the black GIs.” Although none of the women interviewed reported a special fear of black GIs, a number of men suggested that women were especially afraid of the “dark-skinned,” since “women did not know whether [blacks] might assault them.” Another man suggested that no woman had been able to go out at night anymore because the town had become “a dangerous spot because of all the blacks.”

The manner in which the presence of American troops in Rhineland-Palatinate was problematized throughout much of the 1950s makes it clear that for many Germans single black GIs were the most troubling aspect of the American presence. The reporting in local and national newspapers reveals that most Germans assumed that black soldiers caused the major share of problems associated with the American military. News headlines always mentioned the soldier’s race when the offender was black. Even when there were no witnesses or evidence, it was all too common for the local news report to assert that the perpetrators were black soldiers. Statements such as “The soldiers, especially the Negroes, seem to enjoy the shatter of broken windows” and headlines that screamed, “Baumholder: Who is the next victim of such willful disregard—Every colored American soldier carries a knife!” reveal this all too clearly. Indeed, in neither of these two cases was there evidence that could substantiate the claims.

German anxiety over the presence of black men is expressed most clearly in press coverage of the sexual threat that the soldiers allegedly posed to local women and youngsters. These sorts of reports were generated mostly in the first few years after the troops’ arrival, and they reflect a long tradition of European racism that associated blacks with both sexual aggression and male weakness. In one such report, the mayor of Koblenz suggested that the “occupation soldiers, but especially the colored soldiers with their well-known uncontrolled passions (Triebhaftigkeit), presented an immense danger to our young generation.” Youth welfare agencies were convinced that black GIs posed a danger not only to women and girls but also to young men and boys. According to their anxious reports, young boys were in danger of homosexual seduction be-

cause it was not always easy for the “Negroes . . . to establish relationships with women.” Because of the GIs’ consumer goods, but especially because of their flashy cars, German boys were judged easy targets. In Kaiserslautern, a “22-year-old soldier with a Cadillac,” allegedly seduced all members of the boys’ club, where he volunteered, into homosexuality. The police suggested that this incident represented just the tip of the iceberg because “homosexuality tends to be hidden.” Having little hard evidence at hand that confirmed these speculations, the social workers and police nonetheless suspected that “indecent acts between occupation soldiers and children” seem to be going on around the barracks to a much larger degree than can be ascertained.

Another charge directed at black soldiers was that they employed children as procurers of women. The GIs were supposedly paying the children to bring them their older sisters or perhaps a female neighbor. A police report on this alleged phenomenon closed by admitting that so far none of these matters had been proven but that it was highly likely that these things were going on. Most of the concerns that were voiced were clearly mere speculation or else extrapolations from perhaps a single incident. In an effort to stop such wildly flying rumors, the Allgemeine Zeitung informed its readers in 1953 that none of the stories that “Negroes were offering money and sweets to children so that they organize women for them” were true.

Encountering Jim Crow

The fact that the Americans arrived in Rhineland-Palatinate with segregated troops and all the social problems associated with the ongoing integration of the military only helped to reinforce German prejudices against the black soldiers. Despite Truman’s 1948 Executive Order 9981, only 7 percent of black soldiers in the European Command were deployed in integrated units in 1952. Pressure to integrate the European Command came largely from the Department of the Army in Washington once the State Department realized that the Soviets as well as the West and East German Communist Parties were exploiting the continuing segregation of troops as an embarrassment to America’s alleged mission of defending democracy. Communist propaganda relentlessly attacked Americans as hypocrites and informed the German public that “lynching is the standard treatment of Negroes in the United States.” The “American Dilemma,” to use Gunnar Myrdal’s words, had been imported into Europe, and the American government was keenly aware that something needed
to be done. By 1951, the Department of the Army became convinced that a segregated military provided “a constant embarrassment in foreign relations, [but] also jeopardizes the effective maintenance of our moral leadership of the free and democratic nations of the world.” Integration in Europe, according to Assistant Secretary of Defense Anna Rosenberg, was a “living example of democracy in action—the only answer to communist propaganda.”

The secretary of defense had a difficult time convincing the commanding officers of the United States Army Europe in Heidelberg of this necessity. The commanders in Heidelberg opposed integration, warning that the positive experience with integration in Korea could not be transposed to Europe. They argued that the problem in Europe was complicated by social relations not only between white and Negro but between the Army as a whole and the civilian population. The officers thus seemed to suggest that it might be offensive to German sensibilities to have integrated troops. They also pointed to another source of conflict that complicated matters in Germany—namely the “competition between white and Negro troops for German girls, and some of the serious problems that were to arise if the troops were integrated”—as a major reason for their opposition to integration. Despite these objections from the military leadership, Washington insisted that General John W. Handy and his officers in the European Command revise their view that integration would be possible only in 100 years.

Integration of the military proceeded rapidly once the command in Heidelberg gave permission to proceed. By April 1953, 83 percent of black troops were deployed in integrated units. For the most part, integration on the military base was a rather peaceful process. However, many of the white soldiers, a disproportionate number of whom came from the South, were unwilling to extend integration to their off-duty time. In the words of one black veteran, who was an officer during that period, “We were integrated in bodies, but not in spirit.” Throughout the decade and even into the 1960s, troops continued to spend their leisure hours in a strictly segregated manner.

To avoid or limit social contact with blacks, white soldiers employed a number of strategies. On base, white soldiers succeeded in keeping black soldiers out of their clubs by playing only country and western music instead of jazz and boogie-woogie. Off base, white soldiers introduced Jim Crow laws into German communities, just as they had done in Great Britain during the war. Segregated facilities were of course illegal in Germany, because the German Basic Law assured equality of the law regardless of race. By using economic pressure, however, soldiers convinced pub or bar owners that catered exclusively to GIs not to open their establishments to black GIs. In general, the soldiers threatened the owners by telling them that all white members of the unit would boycott their businesses if they served blacks. In response to this, black soldiers also sought out their own places. In this manner, all establishments in close proximity to American military bases that catered exclusively to American GIs were segregated by race.

A November 1952 essay in the Saturday Evening Post informed the American public of the ongoing integration of the European command by stressing the relative ease with which it was being accomplished. That same article also hailed Germany as a test case for a future racial integration of the communities surrounding military bases in the United States. The reality of integration during the 1950s was often not that rosy. According to a former GI, integration was a “very scary and painful process . . . tensions were high since many of the soldiers hailed from the South.” For example, the first black Air Force soldier stationed in Birkenfeld slept in his truck for four weeks because he feared the antagonism of his white roommates.

Because of the military’s commitment to racial integration after 1952, commanders severely penalized soldiers who tried to sabotage integration on base. In order to avoid possible demotion, white soldiers thus expressed much of their opposition over the ongoing integration in their off-duty hours, that is, in the German communities surrounding the military bases. Black soldiers, not surprisingly, also carried many of their frustrations over the slow pace of integration and the emerging civil rights struggle in the United States into these German communities. For most of the 1950s and even into the 1960s, when soldiers came into town to socialize, they arrived in groups that were strictly segregated by race. Germans observed as the black and white soldiers went out of their way to avoid physical proximity to each other. White soldiers often crossed the street so they would not have to pass black GIs on the sidewalk. Sneers and derogatory comments aimed at the black soldiers who refused to budge were also part of this ritual of intimidation. Germans recall their surprise as they encountered the deeply troubled racial relations of the soldiers being played out in the streets of their towns and villages. For many, these scenes may have been ugly reminders of the sort of humiliation Germans had inflicted on the Jews during the Third Reich.

Physical violence between the soldiers was not the exception but the rule, especially on the American payday. Tempers often flared when either
party had consumed too much alcohol or, as the military had feared, when the parties were in competition for German women. Violence levels were especially high during the early 1950s, when many of the soldiers from “Hell on Wheels” arrived in these communities after serving in Korea. Brutalized by the war and its deprivations, the soldiers were ready to have a good time. The many new sergeants who had earned their stripes in Korea had a particular reputation for hard drinking and fighting.† Racial incidents in and around Baumholder probably were also aggravated because Baumholder was a training camp. The soldiers were removed from the usual routine of their home base, encountering units with whom they shared long histories of competition or antagonism.

While military commanders acknowledged that most of the racial conflict between the soldiers took place off base, they were also anxious to convey to the Germans that expressions of racial strife were most likely just “fights over German girls.” Germans in these communities, however, had a different story to tell. According to German police records, most of the increase in violence that all garrison towns experienced in the 1950s was caused by the ongoing integration of the American military. Violence erupted regularly when soldiers new to the community failed to observe the rigid racial segregation of local pubs. One black soldier, after entering a “wrong” place, was told by the waitress that she had no problem waiting on him, but she also warned him that if he stayed “too long,” he was going to have a problem because the 101st (Airborne) will be here in full force soon.† Black GIs who ignored such warnings could expect the full wrath of their white compatriots. During one such incident, it took fifty military police and German police officers to form a human chain to separate the fighting soldiers.† On a number of occasions, GIs demolished whole interiors of bars while defending their space from intrusion. During one of the bloodiest such incidents, the famous New Year’s Eve battle of 1955 in Baumholder, a number of GIs were killed, and scores were wounded as hundreds of white and black GIs battled each other in the middle of town.

As suggested earlier, tensions between white and black soldiers escalated regularly during the decade because of the emerging civil rights struggle in the United States.† Whenever a confrontation occurred in the United States over civil rights, German authorities and the American military police were put on alert to deal with the expected clashes between the soldiers. During one such confrontation in Butzbach, a small village in neighboring Saarland, a great number of soldiers were hurt and much property damaged in town. Violence also erupted in Baumholder in 1956 when black soldiers reacted with anger over the refusal of the University of Alabama to admit Autherine Lucy, a black student. The crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the fall of 1957 brought about a series of street battles between black and white soldiers in both Baumholder and Kaiserslautern.

As the civil rights struggle intensified in the United States, violence increased in the garrison towns because black GIs were less willing to accept the strict racial boundaries that white GIs had imposed on local bar owners. In 1958, black soldiers staged a sit-in in a Baumholder bar that had put up a sign informing guests that the place was closed to “colored soldiers.” The confrontation was especially jarring for the black GIs because the owner of the bar was an Eastern European Jew, who himself had been a victim of Nazi racial persecution. The soldiers demanded service, shouting at the waitress, “Where do you think you are, in Little Rock?” The soldiers erupted in anger when the waitress informed them that the owner was only doing what everybody else was doing in the United States when he refused service to them. Because the soldiers were not willing to take no for an answer, the owner called the American military police. Instead of defending the soldiers’ rights to equal treatment, the military police arrested them for disturbing the peace. The local paper condemned the owner for putting up the sign but was even more upset when it learned that the captain of the military police had brutalized the arrested soldiers in the Baumholder military jail with his truncheon and a water hose.

The violence between white and black soldiers and the outright contempt that many white GIs expressed toward the black GIs shocked many Germans, especially those who admired the United States as a progressive and democratic model. Just as surprising to these Germans were the institutionalized aspects of American racism. The Army, for example, insisted that it could do nothing about the development of Jim Crow in German communities, since the “men seem to want it that way.” Worse than this acceptance of racial segregation was the fact that commanders at times consciously condoned segregation. Investigations by civil rights advocates even found that in a number of bases commanders “used their authority to reinforce racial segregation and other forms of off-base racial discrimination.” The military police (MP), for example, recognized and enforced the racial boundaries the soldiers had created. A white soldier, newly arrived in Baumholder, reported that after he accidentally went to a “black bar” he was told by a white MP sergeant to “drink up and leave!” The sergeant informed the soldier that within a few hours his would be the “only white face in the crowd” and that he “didn’t need any more
bad as a nigger” and that he had called an American Indian a “son of a bitch.”

Observing the deeply troubled racial relations in the U.S. military in their own backyards provoked a number of responses among the German population. Germans stood back with amazement but also a good deal of Schadenfreude as they surveyed the widespread racism of their American mentors. The fact that the German Basic Law did not allow for racial discrimination proved to many liberal Germans that they had overcome their own racism. At the same time, the very presence of the military and the white GIs’ efforts to introduce Jim Crow into German communities allowed many other Germans to channel their own racism by drawing on the American model of segregation. Ironically, it was the American military with its segregated troops that confirmed for many Germans their own racist convictions that black soldiers somehow were not “real” Americans.

The labels that Germans used when talking about American GIs reveal this pattern of racial exclusion. German commentators generally distinguished between “American soldiers” and “Negro soldiers” (Amerikanersoldaten and Negersoldaten). When welfare agencies referred to “occupation babies,” they at times also relied on racial categories rather than national categories. One such report distinguished between “French babies, American babies, and Negro babies” (Franzosenkinder, Amerikanerkinder, und Negerkinder) with the last category presumably encompassing both American and French fathers.

The widespread popular identification of African American GIs as “Mockchen” reveals that Germans hardly needed the Americans to give them lessons in racism. When Germans called black GIs “Mockchen,” a name given to the black soldiers from Morocco during the 1920s Rhineland occupation, they were drawing on long established racial attitudes. Still, we cannot ignore the complicated manner in which German and American assumptions about race intersected in the daily encounter of German civilians and American soldiers, especially at a time when the United States’ impact on German life was tangible. The discrimination that black GIs experienced in German communities related mostly to being denied housing or access to bars and pubs. Civil rights investigations by U.S. authorities in the late 1950s and early 1960s found that GIs encountered these problems primarily in the communities immediately surrounding American military bases. Soldiers who left the American-dominated environment encountered no problems when entering pubs or restaurants. These same investigations stressed that discrimination in the garrison communities existed because Germans “began to adopt the
discriminatory practices of their conquerors. In 1965, General Paul Freeman, commander of the United States Forces in Europe, was the sole commander willing to admit that racial discrimination existed on overseas bases. However, he also made very clear that the racial discrimination black GIs encountered in Germany was largely imported from the United States.

Until the mid-1960s, the American military in Germany resisted intervening on behalf of African American soldiers for fear that such actions would force the military to intercede in the communities surrounding the military bases in the United States, especially the American South. In 1955, the Department of Defense (DoD) reiterated that it could not intervene on behalf of black GIs because “community mores with respect to race vary . . . and such matters are largely beyond direct purview of DoD.” The department repeated that line in 1959 when a black soldier in Germany was denied housing, and in the early 1960s investigators found that “local military commanders seemed unwilling to take the matter [of discrimination] seriously.” Demands from civil rights leaders to address these abuses brought only negative responses from the military commanders.

The unwillingness of the American military to adjudicate on behalf of black soldiers stood in stark contrast to the military’s usual concern for its troops. The military, for example, occasionally made German swimming pools off-limits to GIs and their families because the quality of the water was not up to “American standards.” At times, the military declared German pubs or bars off-limits for GIs if they did not fulfill the military’s standards of hygiene. No such action was ever forthcoming when local bar owners denied service to black GIs or when German landlords refused to rent apartments to black families. Unwilling to become involved in matters of race, the military command generally interpreted the discrimination that black GIs experienced in German communities as anti-Americanism rather than racism.

Attitudes within the military changed only in the mid- to late 1960s. In July 1963, on the fifteenth anniversary of Truman’s executive order, the Civil Rights directive of the Department of Defense was extended to assure integration of communities surrounding military bases in the American South. Beginning in 1964, the military started using economic sanctions to enforce this policy, and in 1968, the Open Housing act was passed. Pressured by the Civil Rights movement, the American military in Germany also took on a more active role to assure racial equality, even if this meant interference in German communities. For most of the 1950s, however, the white soldiers’ hostility toward integration and the military command’s laissez-faire attitude were not lost on the Germans.

Drawing the Line

As the discussion has shown so far, the experience of black soldiers in Germany in the 1950s was multifaceted. For many, their tour in Germany offered an unprecedented level of prosperity, social mobility, and freedom. Single black soldiers were able to date white German women without having to fear the sort of violence they would have encountered in their own country, especially in the South. When black families moved into German villages, friendships often developed with landlords and neighbors, especially when there were children in the home. Yet, we need to be careful not to overestimate the depth of German acceptance of black GIs. The fact that many black soldiers experienced their time in Germany as a moment of liberation probably says more about the level of discrimination that blacks faced in the United States than about German racial tolerance during this period.

The records also make painfully clear that German tolerance toward the black GIs found limits from which most Germans would not budge during the 1950s. The great majority of Germans did not approve of the relationships between white German women and black soldiers. “Many segments of the population,” reported one mayor in 1952, considered the “fraternization” between black soldiers and German women to be especially offensive. If anything, attitudes toward these relationships actually hardened as the decade progressed. In 1957, the minister-president (governor) of Bavaria did not merely complain about such relationships but went so far as to inquire of the U.S. military whether it was possible to send only “married colored troops” to his state.

A man interviewed for this project, who was in his early twenties in 1950, believed that young Germans, who were socialized during the Nazi regime, understood their racial attitudes in those years as a legacy of the Hitler years:

You have to keep in mind that the people who were 15, 19, 23 years of age [in 1950] were raised during the Hitler Reich by the Nazis, and racism was even taught in the schools. That's how we grew into this. Of course, young people were told that blacks were other human beings, that they were wild beasts from Africa [sic]. These young people, who had internalized all that, with their hate toward all that was different, now found themselves stand-
ing face to face with a nigger [sic] in Baumholder. My God! All of a sudden, there was a beautiful blond woman walking with a colored and she married him. In the beginning that was just awful.99

While the years of Nazi racism clearly left an impact on many Germans, especially those Germans who were wholly socialized during those years, it would be too simple to interpret German opposition to interracial relationships solely as a legacy of the Nazism. When conservative commentators condemned interracial relationships during the 1950s, they drew on racial hierarchies that long predated the Nazi regime. These commentators did not regard their convictions as residual racism inherited from Nazism but understood them as "natural" or "God-given" notions fully compatible with Western values and their new democracy. Letters to the editors of local newspapers or editorials made that point when they condemned interracial relationships by evoking divine law. In a 1952 editorial published in the Pfälzische Volkszeitung, a Protestant minister warned that "the racially mixed marriage presents a danger... and that God has made the different races and wants them separate accordingly."100 The author of a 1953 letter stated that a "racially mixed marriage is against nature and culture," because "true love could not exist between the two, only sexual confusion."101 Another letter to the editor in 1954 informed the readers that the "overwhelming majority of Germans rejected the mixing of races." The female author speculated that out of a "thousand parents, perhaps one would be willing to tolerate the marriage of his/her daughter to a Negro." The letter closed by stating that "nowhere in Germany has a Negro ever been harassed, but that in certain affairs there are limits, and these have been drawn by God himself."102

The idea of a sexual relationship between a white woman and a black man was clearly offensive to many Germans. White Americans, not surprisingly, confirmed them in these attitudes. In the immediate postwar years, the military command found that the "absence of a color bar—in particular the American Negro soldier's freedom to associate with white civilian girls—stirred most southern whites and many northerners to vitriolic anger."103 The former national commander of the American Legion was so appalled by interracial fraternization in Germany that he informed General Eisenhower in 1946, "These Negroes... likely are on the way to be hanged or to be burned alive at publiclynchings by the white men of the South."104 Not surprisingly, opposition to interracial relationships did not disappear after the armed forces integrated. In 1952, the military command speculated, for example that black soldiers would not fit again into the segregated society of the South once they returned home. How

"were blacks to understand that they have to step down from the sidewalk when they encounter a white woman."105

Throughout the 1950s and for much of the 1960s, white American soldiers shunned and stigmatized as "Nigger Lover" any German woman who associated with a black soldier.106 Many white GIs seem to have shared the convictions of the military police official in William Gardner's novel, The Last of the Conqueroirs, who tells a German woman walking with a black GI, "[You must] know that the colored man [is] not like everybody else, and that an American white woman could never go out with one... the colored man [is] dirty and very poor and with much sickness."107 The 1957 comments of a white military police officer in Kaiserslautern confirmed that prejudices toward interracial relationships still existed despite the almost decade-long effort at desegregation. Observing German women and black soldiers together, he snarled, "At home in Alabama they would take care of [such excesses]."108

Germans had plenty of opportunity to observe the hostility white GIs expressed toward interracial relationships; Germans also noticed the institutionalized aspects of these attitudes in the military. While the American military no longer frowned upon German-American marriages, they did not encourage them either. The application process for a wedding permit was not an easy one, even if both partners were white, but thousands of couples saw it through. During the 1950s, more than 5,000 German women married American soldiers each year despite the cumbersome process. Before 1954, the soldier could apply for the permit only after he had been stationed in Germany for eighteen months, and then it took on average another five to eight months before the permit was granted. The woman had to undergo a barrage of rigorous interviews to test her "morals" and intelligence. Unless the woman came from a respectable local family, military commanders suspected that many of the women willing to marry GIs were opportunists at best, prostitutes at worst. Permits could also be held up for health reasons or because the woman had been a member of a Nazi organization.109 Women who were expelled from the eastern parts of the former Reich or refugees from East Germany faced special hurdles. Not only did they have a hard time producing their birth certificates, the Americans also suspected that they might be spies sent by the Soviets or the East German government. Chaplains counseled these young couples with special care, warning the soldier that such a marriage could have a detrimental impact on his career.110 They also cautioned women of the hardships that living in the United States would entail for them.111

While the military command had committed itself to equal treatment
before the law regardless of race, the decisions to grant marriage permits were up to local commanders. The military headquarters in Heidelberg had delegated the decision making to the local command level to expedite the process but also to prevent young and often naive soldiers from making rash decisions. However, for a black GI this policy could also spell doom, especially if his commander hailed from the South. Due to the miscegenation laws that still existed in twenty-four American states until 1967, many commanders were reluctant to grant wedding permits for black GIs and German women.112 In 1952, when Luise Frankenstein interviewed 522 women who had children with black soldiers, she found that 20 percent planned to marry their partner. Yet, out of all these couples, only four had been granted wedding permits.113

To prevent such interracial marriages, commanders would at times reassign the soldier to another command in Germany or even ship the soldier back to the United States.114 This strategy was used even when the woman was pregnant, earning black GIs the reputation that they abandoned their babies. A soldier could appeal his transfer, but that usually involved another lengthy delay. Chaplains took special care to counsel interracial couples and to explain to them the “facts of life that they may have to face” upon their return to the United States. Young black soldiers were confronted with the harsh reality that they could not return to their homes and families in the South after their military service if they married a German woman. Soldiers also could not be deployed to a military installation in the South with their new wives because of the existing miscegenation laws. In 1952, when one interracial couple returned to the United States, they were imprisoned for violating that statute in one of the southern states. Only after the military promised to send the soldier to a base in the North was this ordeal resolved for the young couple.115 When the Second Armored Division transferred from Germany to Fort Hood, Texas, in 1957, the military had to separate thirty-one black GIs and their German wives from their units and reassign them to a military base in the North in order to ensure their physical safety.116

Another hurdle that the military imposed was the provision that the soldier had to prove his financial ability to “keep” his wife, so that she would not become a public charge. Although that rule applied equally to white and black soldiers, it left plenty of room for discriminatory practices. Since the military regulations did not specify what financial resources this mandate entailed, it was up to the individual commander to assess the soldier’s future ability to be a good provider. As late as 1957, some commanders granted a wedding permit to interracial couples only if the soldier had enough financial resources to return his wife to Ger-

many should the marriage fail. In light of the expense of transatlantic travel at that time, that provision proved an almost impossible barrier to surmount. This was a particularly harsh burden for lower-rank personnel because the military also did not pay for their wives’ transfer to the United States.117 The marriage plans of one soldier were thwarted when his commander demanded that he deposit $2,000.118

Recollections of a man born to a German mother and an African American father in the mid-1930s suggest that his parents’ experience prompted them to draw painful comparisons between their life in Germany and that in the United States:

My parents lived together in Germany where they wished; they traveled together where they wished; they were together where they wished; and they had many German friends. It was when they returned to the United States that my mother and father were forbidden from traveling in the same cabin; it was when they returned to the United States that they couldn’t be stationed in most military bases; it was when they returned to the United States that we feared as a family when we traveled together during daylight.119

In light of these problems, many of the interracial couples chose to stay in Germany rather than return to the United States, after the soldiers’ military service expired.120

Germans at the time were fully aware of the military’s ambiguous attitude toward the social implications of integration, but especially toward interracial relationships. Thus, when Germans expressed their opposition to interracial relationships during the 1930s, they often cited the American model of race segregation as informing their own views.121 Doing so allowed them to “normalize” aspects of their discredited Nazi past. While these commentators rejected the genocide of European Jews by the Nazi regime, their line of argumentation suggests, nonetheless, that not all aspects of Nazism were tainted. Observing the American military’s widespread opposition to interracial marriages convinced these Germans that Nazi racial segregation, codified in the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, was not an aberration but wholly compatible with a Western democracy. A 1953 editorial in the Rheinfalz makes this point succinctly. In explaining his objection to mixed race marriages, the author rejected the most recent German past during which “racial pride” (Rassenstolze) perverted the “timeless principle of decency” (zeitloses Prinzip der Wohlanständigkeit) into “revolting barbarity.” To overcome Germany’s descent into barbarity, he encouraged the readers to treat “black occupation babies” with respect and dignity. However, the author was equally adamant that a return to decency
In the first few years after the troops' arrival, Protestant and Catholic clergy emerged as the most outspoken critics of the American military presence. The clergy described the social and cultural implications of the presence when they denounced the disorder and racial tension. In all garrison communities, the clergy were at the forefront of resistance to the military's demands, whether they were Jewish or Protestant. In their words, the clergy described a society that had not yet overcome the disorder of the war and post-war years, and who had not yet overcome the disorder and racial tension. In their words, the clergy described a society that had not yet overcome the disorder of the war and post-war years, and who had not yet overcome the disorder and racial tension. In their words, the clergy described a society that had not yet overcome the disorder of the war and post-war years, and who had not yet overcome the disorder and racial tension.