

Tina Campt: *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004

By Kyle Frackman, University of Massachusetts, USA

1 In *Other Germans*, Tina Campt offers a significant and timely contribution to German Studies, Holocaust scholarship, and research into the function of memory within a greater historical and cultural context. In the author's own words, her work "examines the historical discourses that preceded and enabled the emergence of a Black German subject"; further, she "analyzes how the processes of racial and gender formation designed by National Socialism to purge non-Aryans from the landscape of German society contributed in paradoxical ways to the production of some of the subjects it sought to expunge" (2). In order to set herself apart from other research into Germany's National Socialist past, Campt writes that, "this work examines the generative effects of this totalitarian government and the processes of racialization and gendering that constituted its fundamental organizing techniques and practices" (1-2). Thus, Campt begins to make the case for the value of her scholarship, observing that the era of National Socialist control is most often considered only or at least primarily for its "destructive capacity" (1-2).

2 In her introduction, Campt emphasizes the importance of context in scholarly studies, especially historical work. Contexts delimit the topic as well as often determine or facilitate the (mis)interpretation of the stories that are being reconstructed and told (1). Her objects of study are the interviews she conducted with two Black Germans who experienced and lived in Germany under the Nazi regime. Demonstrating her awareness of context, Campt notes that Afro-Germans' history can be difficult to place and categorize, as it poses specific challenges and enrichments to such larger discourses as those of the Holocaust and the African diaspora (2-4). Despite the interviews' foundation in oral history's methodology, Campt encounters these accounts not only as documents but more as "narrative texts" that are "symptomatic" (à la Ronald Grele à la Louis Althusser) and "problematic" (e.g., 9). Indeed, Campt theorizes the usefulness of examining mediated accounts of past experiences in light of the fact that "true" past perceptions are inaccessible, calling to mind Joan W. Scott's essay on "Experience," which Campt also cites elsewhere.

3 Campt identifies "race" as the key, fundamental element of National Socialist organization and authority and ponders a shift of focus, or a change of lens, to see not anti-Semitism per se but rather an "ideology of racial purity" as the basis of National Socialism

(5). A recurring theme of Campt's work here is the lack of unity in National Socialist policy as regards Black Germans. Depending on various factors like skin color and location, Black Germans like the two individuals interviewed for this volume experienced service in the Hitler Youth, obstruction of professional aspirations, and involuntary sterilization. Because of the "contradictory" methods with which the Nazis dealt with the Black German population, Campt draws the conclusion that race is the "foundational discourse that motivated [. . .] this regime but also paradoxically presented the ultimate impossibility of fully realizing a racial state" (5). Black Germans did not fit into the — indeed overtly challenged-National Socialist conception of "Germanness." These contradictions were readily apparent, however, as one sees in the case of Fasia Jansen, who, because of her racialized status, was forced to work in a concentration camp yet maintained a status as a German citizen, still superior to the regime's "abject" (149-150). In a country and larger political entity (now the European Union) whose identities have been principally, if not exclusively, constructed as "white," Black Germans oppose the notion that racial issues can be as easily delineated as some scholarship would have one believe (8). Campt observes that analysis of discursive continuities from Germany's colonial period, post World War I, and the Third Reich "underlines [. . .] continuities in the stakes and salience of a conception of national purity as racial purity" (7; emphasis added).

4 Campt employs gender in her analysis of her interviewees' experiences, but is somewhat unclear about the foundations of her terminology. From her study, one can see that her approach is social constructionist, and Campt explains the utility of feminist analysis in this case, as race and gender are affected/effected cooperatively, that is, mutually inextricable (21-22). Unfortunately, Campt does not closely define her ideas of gender, which would have been beneficial, for instance, in the book's introduction, in her analysis of Hans Hauck's experiences in the Hitler Youth (e.g., 111-112), and in other formulations: "not only did [National Socialism] work through race in its administration of individual lives but also, perhaps more revealingly, that race necessarily worked through gender and gender necessarily worked through race" (21-22).

5 The book is divided into an introduction or contextualization, two parts (each comprising a brief introduction and two chapters), and a final chapter or "postscript." Using primary and secondary sources, part I charts a somewhat latent German fear of "racial mixture" and, in its two chapters, treats two examples of events or contexts in German history in which this fear surfaced, namely the discourse of miscegenation and interracial marriages surrounding Germany's colonies and French occupation of the Rhineland and the discourse of sterilization of the so-called "Rhineland Bastards." Part II focuses on the interviews collected

for this study. Chapter 3 applies specifically to the account of a Black German man, Hauck, a son of a French occupying soldier, who participated in the Hitler Youth and the Wehrmacht, was a prisoner of war, and underwent involuntary sterilization. Chapter 4 addresses the interview with Jansen, a female Black German who, faced with the closure of the professional track she had been pursuing, became a cook at a concentration camp.

6 In the final chapter of the book, Campt tackles the complex of issues related to the themes addressed in this volume. She takes issue with common "blanket" applications of a diasporic paradigm to "all formations of Black community," an approach that seems to be often requisite (174). Indeed, Campt points out that there are tensions among Black communities that preclude a simple attribution of the "diaspora" label. In that vein, she aims to re-theorize a diasporic discourse that is "more often and quite profoundly about the dynamics of *difference*" instead of a universal similarity (169, original italics). Part of the uniqueness of her approach can be found in her efforts to theorize this *difference* as fundamental to the experiences of Black Germans and even to other African diasporic communities. Campt rightly takes issue with previous essentialist notions of African diasporic identity, which required an automatic and un(der)theorized identification with Africa and/or African Americans. Indeed, she wonders where Black Germans may fit in.

7 This noteworthy volume integrates many secondary sources, including extremely influential works in Holocaust studies, memory, and German history, and Campt connects her claims to the relevant scholarship. Campt's work arrives at a quite productive time in the studies of the experiences of Black Europeans. In addition to ongoing published work, conferences like "Challenging Europe: Black European Studies in the 21st Century" organized by the Black European Studies Project at the Johannes-Gutenberg-University in Mainz, Germany (2005) and "Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture" (at which Campt was among the presenters) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (2006) continue to assemble and encourage revolutionary work in this field.