

THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE, AFRICAN-AMERICAN GIs, AND GERMANY

at *THE ROBERT AND SALLIE BROWN GALLERY AND MUSEUM*
The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History
September 08 – October 28, 2011

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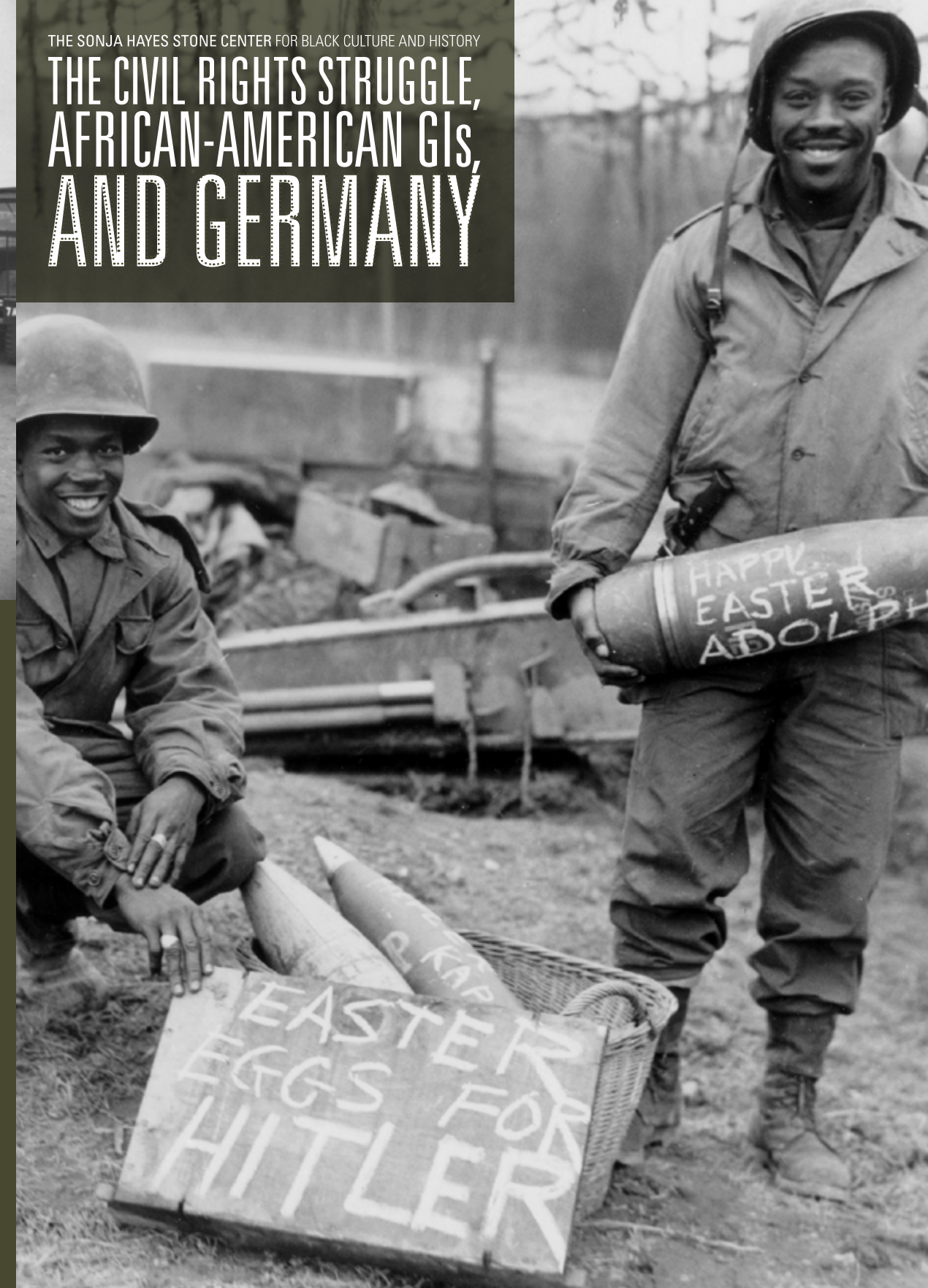


HISTORY AND OVERVIEW OF THE STONE CENTER

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a Center within the Academic Affairs Division under the Provost's Office, we play a central role in supporting the academic mission of the University. We have a commitment to broaden the range of intellectual discourse about African Americans and to encourage a better understanding of the peoples of Africa and the African diaspora and their perspectives on important social and cultural issues.

THE SONJA HAYNES STONE CENTER FOR BLACK CULTURE AND HISTORY

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THE SONJA HAYNES STONE CENTER FOR BLACK CULTURE AND HISTORY
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UNC
THE SONJA HAYNES STONE
CENTER FOR BLACK CULTURE
AND HISTORY

THE ROBERT AND SALLIE BROWN GALLERY AND MUSEUM
SEPTEMBER 08 THRU OCTOBER 28, 2011



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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 Union forced policy makers in Washington to support the civil rights agenda. What receives almost no attention in this Cold War interpretation, however, is America's involvement in Europe, and the role that the expansion of the American military base system and the encounter with Germans after WWII played in the unfolding drama of the civil rights struggle. Yet, by bringing a segregated Jim Crow army to military bases outside the physical boundaries of the United States, America literally transposed its racial conflict and its actors onto foreign soil.

This exhibition shows how Germany emerged as a critical point of reference in African American demands for an end to segregation and for equal rights. From as early as 1933, African American civil rights activists used white America's condemnation of Nazi racism to expose and indict the abuses of Jim Crow racism at home and to argue that "separate" can never be "equal." America's entry into the war allowed these activists to step up their rhetoric significantly and to call for an end to

segregation. The defeat of Nazi Germany and the participation of African American GIs in the military occupation only strengthened their determination. Drawing on the experience of soldiers stationed in Germany, these activists claimed that it was in post-Nazi Germany that black GIs found the equality and democracy denied them in their own country.

Once the civil rights movement gained momentum in the late 1950s, black GIs deployed overseas became crucial actors in the struggle. By 1960, sit-ins to integrate lunch counters were taking place not only in Greensboro, NC, but also in establishments on and around U.S. military bases in Germany. Because military deployments to Germany usually lasted 2 to 3 years, African American GIs were able to establish contacts and often friendships within neighboring German communities. Beginning in the early 1960s, black GIs started to collaborate with German student activists in places like Frankfurt and Berlin to support demands for civil rights in the U.S. After Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit to Berlin in 1964, the rise of the Black Power movement, and Angela Davis's solidarity campaigns in both East and West Germany in the early 1970s, African-American GIs only intensified their collaboration with German student activists to fight racism both in the U.S. military and in German communities.

By illustrating the untold story of African American GIs and the transnational implications of the African American civil rights movement, this exhibition hopes to advance a more nuanced and sophisticated sense of how America's struggle for democracy reverberated across the globe. It presents the first results of a joint research initiative of the German Historical Institute, Vassar College, and the Heidelberg Center for American Studies at the University of Heidelberg. As part of that project, we have also constructed a website/ digital archive.



The Civil Rights Struggle, African-American GIs, and Germany, is a joint project of the German Historical Institute, The Heidelberg Center for American Studies, and Vassar College. The exhibition was planned, researched, and curated by Maria Höhn (Vassar College) and Martin Klimke (German Historical Institute in Washington DC / Heidelberg Center for American Studies, University of Heidelberg) and is part of a larger research project. The project was awarded the NAACP's Julius E. Williams Distinguished Community Service Award in 2009. (see www.aacvr-germany.org)



PRELIMINARY LIST OF REFERENCES AND SOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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ITEMS IN NORTH CAROLINA STATE ARCHIVES

(http://www.archives.ncdcr.gov/ead/eadoxml/ml_wvw_two.xml)

Division of Archives and History—Title: World War II Papers, 1939–1947

General Correspondence and Related Materials

Box 3 Negro file, 1942–1944

Box 130 War activities of Negroes

Box 269 Photograph: 268th Station Hospital, Officers and Enlisted Personnel [African- Americans]

Private Collections

Box 47 Gladys I. Giles Papers (1 item)—Scrapbook, ca. World War II and later, with materials compiled by 2LT Gladys Irene Giles (Bainbridge, GA, later Raleigh, NC), US Army Nurse Corps, May 2, 1941–November 13, 1942, Fort Bragg, NC. One of the first African-American nurses at Fort Bragg.