

rendering due in large part to the near impossibility of securing evidence in the circumstances of war and the disorganization of the postwar situation. Many witnesses and suspects simply could not be located and the postwar chaos militated against efficiency and rigor in carrying out criminal investigations. In 1944 and 1945, when Allied soldiers, which included African American troops, began to penetrate German-occupied territories and Germany itself, the number of allegations skyrocketed. In most instances, the unwarranted murders of black soldiers were not in dispute; the identity of the perpetrators of these war crimes was the issue at stake. Individual German soldiers, units of soldiers, and even German civilians were all alleged to have committed heinous slaughter of black soldiers. While each instance of a battlefield homicide was obviously not ordered from Berlin or by higher-ups, a clear message had been sent that African American and Jewish captives could be disposed of in the most expedient way possible without repercussions. The following chronological list compiled by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum researcher Robert Kesting, covering roughly the last fifteen months of the war, gives some indication of the racial nature of the ground war by its end:

- February 20, 1944: In Salzburg, Austria, a Dr. Prima, who may have been in the SS, was accused of coming upon wounded African American airmen and summarily executing them.
- May 5, 1944: In Budapest, Hungary, near a local prison, the Gestapo hanged three African American pilots to death.
- (On or about) September 1, 1944: Near Merzig, Germany, black American soldiers were ordered to dig their own graves and then shot. It is also alleged that perhaps another 20 black American soldiers were taken to a nearby forest and executed there.
- December 17, 1944: Near Wereth, Belgium, 11 African American soldiers of the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion were murdered, allegedly by members of the 1st and/or 2nd Panzer Division. Among the killed were Curtise Adams, Mager Bradley, George Davis, Thomas Forte, Rob Green, Jim Leatherwood, Nathaniel Moss, George Motten, and William Pritchett.
- December 18, 1944: In Sopron, Hungary, at a local jail, a black American pilot was executed without cause or explanation.
- (On or about) December 18, 1944: Near Muehlberg, Germany, while being marched to Stalag IV-B, a black American soldier was singled out and killed by the SS.
- April 1, 1945: In Moosburg, Germany, at Stalag VII-A, a SS guard was alleged to have executed a black American, with no excuse being given.<sup>38</sup>

While there were killings of white U.S. soldiers during the same period, the allegations were far fewer, and the racial dimension element was not present except in the case of Jews. The black executions demonstrated a predisposition against black soldiers that was especially egregious in that they occurred, in effect, after the war was lost. The

② N.B.

war had turned against the Nazis by 1944, and there was little to gain from the wanton murder of black troops.

African captives suffered as well. One notorious case involved a thousand black Senegalese soldiers who were being held at a slave labor camp in Fritzlar, Germany. It was reported on 16 July 1945 by four surviving inmates that the SS member Alfred Moretao had carried out the execution of these African troops because they allegedly were stealing potatoes. This case was eventually turned over to French authorities who ultimately closed it without any resolution, as would happen with many of the charges of homicide and war crimes brought against individual Nazis.<sup>39</sup> There were other large massacres carried out during the war. On 10 June 1940, 400 to 500 black prisoners were lined up and killed at the French town of Erquinvillers. Around the same time, another 250 African soldiers were murdered in the little village of Chasselay-Montluzin.<sup>40</sup>

GREATER VIOLENCE AGAINST FRENCH AFRICAN SOLDIERS

**Blacks in the Concentration and Labor Camps**

Evidence and documentation on the number of Afro-Germans and others of African descent in the concentration and labor camps and their experiences are almost nonexistent. Despite the extensive research done on concentration camps, this has been a large area of neglect and only recently, primarily through the work of the researcher Paulette Anderson, has this area been given some attention. For a number of reasons, collecting accurate and reliable data is difficult. First, it is believed that many of the

- ① Afro-Germans who went to the camps died there and no records remain. Second, although some records were found in many of the camps, the SS began to destroy evidence of their crimes as the war was ending and for most of the camps there simply are no official records available. For example, more than 77,000 records were missing from the Ravensbruck concentration camp that housed women, destroyed in spring 1945.
- ② For example, more than 77,000 records were missing from the Ravensbruck concentration camp that housed women, destroyed in spring 1945.
- ③ Third, even at the former camp sites where records were discovered, there is no certainty that even if there were Blacks in the camp, they were identified as such. In many instances, if not most, skin color was not recorded and only nationality was noted, and even that could be misleading. The letter "A," for instance, may have been used in a shorthand manner under nationality, but "A" could have stood for Albanian, Algerian, or simple African. Finally, those Blacks who did survive the camps have not, for the most part, written or spoken extensively about those experiences, information that would give insight into not only their experience but that of others.
- ④

LITTLE TO NO DATA OF NO BLACKS IN THE CAMPS

N.B.

N.B.

AS NOT KNOWN

EST 2000 (AF.) Black DIED IN CAMPS

No one knows for sure how many people of African descent were actually in the camps or how many perished. Toward the end of the war, the Nazis made every effort to bury and destroy all evidence and records of their murderous rampage. While many of the larger camps have been turned into memorial sites with some documentation on who the inmates were, for the most part, those data are unavailable. On the basis of her research, the German-based scholar Anderson, who is African American, estimates that about two thousand Blacks died in the concentration camps. She has been contacting the former camps directly and seeking any information that could yield clues about the presence of Afro-Germans and other Blacks who were interned and likely died.

Documents available at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum support the assertion that Blacks were used as slave laborers in some of the concentration camps. According to a report submitted to the United Nations War Crimes Commission on 1 June 1945 by the U.S. 21st Army Group, "Negroes" were used as slave labor at the Neuengamme concentration camp.<sup>41</sup>

While there were literally hundreds of camps and subcamps established by the Nazis in Germany and the occupied lands, there was an extremely organized system that created several layers of operations and functions. The Category I camps were the killing centers of which there were four: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. The purpose of these horrors was clear and simple: to kill as fast and as efficiently as possible as many people as possible who had the misfortune to end up there. All four centers were located in Poland. Category II-A camps were combination labor and extermination complexes. These two camps, Auschwitz/Birkenau and Majdanek, were also located in Poland. Mass exterminations also occurred at these sites. Category II-B camps were the "official" concentration camps sanctioned by the SS and the Gestapo chief, Heinrich Himmler. These eleven camps were Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbruck, Buchenwald, Flossenburg, Neuengamme, Gross-Rosen, Natzweiler, Mauthausen, Stutthof, and Dora/Nordhausen, most of which were located in Germany. In Category III was Bergen-Belsen, which was primarily a reception, holding, and transfer camp. And finally, in Category IV, was Theresienstadt, an entire town that functioned as a prison. The difference between Category I and the other categories was in the method and systemization of the killings. In every camp run by the Nazis, death was a constant and there was a relentless, obsessive search for more efficacious and quicker means of slaughter. The thousands of other camps established by the Nazis revolved around the ones noted and were designated as mainly subcamps.<sup>42</sup> The Nazis set up other means by which to mass-murder Jews, Russians, Gypsies, and others—most notably the Einsatzgruppen (Security Police) and Einsatzkommandos (Security Commandos), killing teams that roamed through the East. It would be in the camps, however, where the real systematic slaughter would take place.

Colored badges were used in the concentration camps to identify categories of inmates. Yellow badges were used for Jews, red for political prisoners and communists, pink for homosexuals, violet for Jehovah's Witnesses, black for asocials, brown for Gypsies, blue for immigrants, and green for habitual criminals. Often prisoners wore two overlapping triangle badges or a patch over the triangle with a letter on it that further identified their "crime" or status. What is notable here is that there was no badge that specifically designated people of African descent in the camps. In one sense, of course, for Blacks, their skin was their badge. For historical research, however, not having a badge has made it difficult to identify black inmates because the records based on the distribution of badges do not classify them by a specific category. Blacks in the camps could be and were labeled asocial, communist, homosexual, or Jehovah's Witness along with others. Further complicating matters, asocials included prostitutes, vagrants, murderers, pimps, beggars, thieves, lesbians, and race defilers, all "crimes" that Blacks were accused of frequently. Also, many of the smaller camps were destroyed, or

N.B.  
3

DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY BLACKS IN RECORDS

ASOCIAL AFRICAN  
5

4

COLOR BADGES

N.B.

N.B.

there are no records available. Given that there were Afro-Germans in small towns all over Germany, especially in the West, it is likely that there were Blacks in the camps situated in those areas and that data is forever gone.

It has also been extremely difficult to find information on black women who were in the concentration camps. The suffering and degradation that women faced in the camps were, in many ways, much more severe than that faced by men. While a critical component of control for the Nazis was to strip inmates of all shades of human dignity, women were deprived additionally of every possible vestige of womanness and femininity. Women had to endure being sheared of all body hair, the loss of their menstruation cycle driven by extreme stress (or lack of sanitation if they did menstruate), rape, forced prostitution (what one victim termed "organized rape"), brutal abortions, and sterilization either by poison chemicals in their food or through X-rays that literally burned their insides. Extreme humiliation before death was the object of these methods.

In some cases, only sketches of information about black women inmates are available, and much more investigation must be done. For instance, it is known that there were Afro-German women at Ravensbruck, a concentration camp for women. Records from the camp received by Anderson identified only three for sure: Erica Ngando, Bolau J., and Johanna Peters. Ngando, who was born 5 July 1915, was recorded as a "negroid [sic] half-breed" who had been arrested as an "asocial." She entered the camp on 12 October 1940. Bolau J., born 7 September 1901, was listed as a "Protection prisoner," that is, political arrestee, and her nationality was listed as "Afr.," meaning African. It is unknown whether either survived. Further research by Anderson discovered one other black woman at the camp, Johanna Peters, but no other information was available about her. In addition, according to a 1998 BBC Channel 4 documentary on Jehovah's Witnesses in the camps, including Ravensbruck, there was at least one unknown black woman who was in the camp as a Jehovah's Witness.<sup>43</sup>

Even prominent Blacks who were well known in Germany were not protected. The Boholle family, who were originally from Cameroon and had been active in a number of black political and social groups during the 1920s, were sent to the Stutthof camp in Poland near Danzig. Before they were arrested, members of the family had been involved in the infamous "Africa Show" touring performing company and acted in Nazi propaganda and entertainment films about Africa. Although it is believed that most of the family died in the camps, Josef Boholle and Josefa Boholle both lived to see the end of Hitlerism.<sup>44</sup> Lesser-known and thought to be black or African camp prisoners for whom there are some official records include Charlie or Charly Mano, Abdulla Ben-Moosa, and Guillermito Ster, all interned in Sachsenhausen. There is little information on them other than their date of birth, when they arrived at the camp, and their prisoner status. It appears that Mano was released at some point, but that is impossible to verify.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the Afro-Germans and Africans residing in Germany at the time, a number of unlucky African Americans and other Blacks were in the concentration camps. Sources for these data include some camp records, media reports, and official government documents. Notably, there are few autobiographies or first-person accounts available. Many of these individuals were entertainers who had refused to

Black  
Les

N.B.

leave as warnings about Nazi invasion to the West grew. Either they did not believe the alarms or thought they would be exempt from the Nazi terror, and, indeed, many were for a while. However, even some of those who were initially left alone were eventually interned, even if only for a short time. Among them were the Paris-based jazz trumpet player Arthur Briggs who was sent to Saint-Denis on 17 October 1940. Records from Sachsenhausen also list Robert Demys, an African American. Demys is recorded as entering the camp on 22 June 1940 and given prisoner number 026019. His date of birth is listed, 20 May 1908, but no further details are available.<sup>46</sup> Lionel Romney, a black merchant marine fireman on the *SS Makis*, was captured by the Italians and turned over to the Germans after the ship was sunk on 17 June 1940. He was sent to Mauthausen where he was forced to do lumberjack work, which apparently got him extra food rations. Mauthausen was opened on 8 August 1938, near the city of Linz, Austria, with forty-nine subcamps. It is believed that more than 150,000 died there. It mostly functioned as a slave labor camp. Mauthausen was classified as a so-called category three camp, meaning that prisoners there were not to be returned (*Rückkehr unerwünscht*) and worked to death (*Vernichtung durch arbeit*). It is unknown whether Romney survived.<sup>47</sup> There were also Blacks at the Lodz concentration camp.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the African Americans who were interned were later traded for Germans. In March 1944, the Swedish ship *SS Gripsholm* arrived in New York carrying twelve black men and one black woman who had been in either internment or concentration camps. The men included a number of musicians including the pianist John Welch, the guitarist John Mitchell, and the horn player Freddy Johnson. The other men, some of whom were also musicians, included Henry Crowder, Maceo Jefferson, Reginald Berry, Jack Taylor, William Bowman, and George Welch (no relation). Mitchell had been in the Willie Lewis band and was arrested in Amsterdam on 11 December 1941, the day that Germany declared war on the United States. After being held in Holland for about a month, he was put on a train, along with Taylor, Johnson, and Bob Young, all African Americans, and sent to Germany. Visits to the unnamed camp from the Red Cross and the YMCA brought "cans of corn beef, pork meat, sardines, butter, condensed milk, coffee, cocoa, and prunes, orange powder, hard tack, cheese, three packages of cigarettes and smoking tobacco."<sup>49</sup> George Welch, who was arrested in Brussels, was sixty-two at the time of his arrival back in New York and had been out of the country for more than forty years. He had left the United States in 1901 to "travel the world."<sup>50</sup> Welch was sent to the Tittmorning concentration camp, which was located near Hitler's Bavarian retreat.

The one black woman who was on the ship was Evelyn Anderson Hayman. She had first gone to Europe in 1925 as part of the Josephine Baker revue. Hayman was held in a concentration camp near Liebenau, Germany. Through the Red Cross, she was able to get access not only to food and coffee, but also female items such as "lipstick, perfume, and face powder."<sup>51</sup>

In all the instances cited above, for the Afro-Germans, the Africans, and the African Americans, very few details are available on why these individuals were arrested in the first place, how they were treated while incarcerated, how they related to other prisoners, and what they ultimately thought about their imprisonment time. The authentic

voices are few, and, of course, many of those who even made it out of the camps have since passed on. While a general history of Blacks in the concentration camps has yet to be written, there are fortunately, a number of instances where quite a bit of information is known on what happened to individual Blacks. These experiences vary from the unyielding cruelty of the worst concentration camps to the relatively benign imprisonment of the transition and civilian camps. Among those whose stories must be told are Bayume Muhammed Hussein (also known as Mohamed Husen), the Belgian Jean Johnny Voste, the Surinamese painter Joseph Nassy, the poet and political leader Leopold Sedar Senghor, the singer Johnny Williams (also known as Armand Huss), and the African American entertainer Valaida Snow. These cases provide evidence not only of how Blacks were treated in the camps but also of the tenacious will on the part of black victims to fight and often survive the Nazi death machine. All of these individuals suffered to different degrees at the hands of the Nazis, and their stories provide critical and previously unknown insights into the intersection of Negrophobia and fascism in the camps.

*Bayume Muhammed Hussein (Also Known as Mohamed Husen)*

Under National Socialism, "racial pollution" was a criminal charge, a pretext, of course, on which Afro-Germans, Africans, Jews, Gypsies, and others could be—and were—arrested and sent to the camps. As time passed, interracial or interethnic social intercourse of any nature could generate state repression; sexual intercourse, that is, racial pollution, would especially guarantee the harshest response and treatment from the Nazis. One black victim of this "crime" of racial defilement was Mohamed Husen, who was born Bayume Muhammed Hussein. Originally from German East Africa (Tanzania), he came to Germany in 1929 at the age of twenty-five. This was after his service during World War I on behalf of the Germans. As a soldier, Husen stood out and was awarded a number of war medals.<sup>52</sup> But, according to Michael, he felt that he had not gotten all that he deserved and sometime later, after Hitler had come to power, he demanded from the government a medal that he felt was due. Apparently, again states Michael, he had also brought a lawsuit of some sort against one of his German employers. These incidents, and perhaps other issues, won him a reputation as a "troublemaker," the last designation anyone would want in Nazi Germany.<sup>53</sup>

Husen was also upset that he and his wife had had their passports taken away from them in June 1933, a practice of creating "stateless" people that had happened to all the Africans who were in Germany during the period. While most, left with little democratic recourse, accommodated themselves to the situation this was another area of Nazi power that Husen rebelled against.

His troubles were perhaps tied to the desperate economic woes that he and most other Africans faced with their labor becoming less and less wanted as National Socialism marched forward. He held a number of jobs including those of waiter, barman, and even lecturer at a seminar for oriental languages at one of the universities in Berlin, this last position reflecting a long history of employing African instructors. His luck would pick up, however, as the technological advances in moviemaking and the

MANY BLACK ENTERTAINERS

LIME  
2/17/50  
50 ON

emergence of a vast German propaganda operation helped to create a Nazi film industry in which he and many other Africans and Afro-Germans would find lucrative employment. Work in the films generated not only a source of income but also a site of refuge for Husen. He appeared in a number of films, including *Knights of German East Africa*, which Michael characterized as “the first in the long row of colonial films” that the Nazis hoped would build their case for reclaiming their former colonies.<sup>54</sup> This film and others served the propaganda interests of the Nazis who used them to construct a narrative of colonialization in which the Germans are heroes, the Blacks are willing servants, and other imperialist states, such as England and France, are the enemy of both the Africans and the Germans.

While this film work provided Husen with a generally safe existence, and a reprieve of sorts, he continued to voice his complaints and thus was not able to escape the inevitable wrath of the Nazis. In August 1941, he was arrested and prosecuted on the racial pollution—*Rassenschande*—charge. The Gestapo’s animosity toward him was clear in notes from a secret report on his arrest that read, “The charge ‘racial pollution’ was not sustained; no date set for his release.”<sup>55</sup> The Nazis had fabricated a reason to arrest Husen, and now that they had him, they were not about to let him go. He was not given a trial and, instead, was turned over to the Gestapo. He was sent to the infamous Sachsenhausen concentration camp where he would die on 24 November 1944.<sup>56</sup> His twelve-year-old son Bodo would later be given his father’s ashes. Bodo died during a 1945 bombing attack.

On 24 November 1999, a ceremony that included a visit to his gravesite was held in Germany commemorating Husen’s life and his symbolic significance for those unknown and forgotten Blacks who died at the hands of the Nazis in concentration camps and elsewhere. Organized by Paulette Anderson and others, the event was attended by Husen’s family members, Black activists, and even a government official.<sup>57</sup>

#### Jean Johnny Voste

Jean Johnny Voste, who was born in the Belgian Congo, was a prisoner at Dachau, one of the most infamous of all the concentration camps. Dachau was the setting for John A. Williams’s novel, *Clifford’s Blues*, the saga of a homosexual African American musician, Clifford Pepperidge, who is caught by the Nazis soon after Hitler comes to power in 1933, taken into “protective custody,” and sent to the camp. In the novel, Pepperidge is in a constant battle of wits as he tries to survive the capricious and arbitrary nature of the Nazis and daily life in the camp where good and evil are in ever-changing form.

Voste had been active in the Belgium resistance movement.<sup>58</sup> Eventually, he was caught and arrested in May 1942 for acts of sabotage that he and others had been accused of committing near Antwerp. The Nazis decided to send him to Dachau where he stayed until the end of the war. In the film *Black Survivors of the Holocaust*, a former camp prisoner, Willy Sel, remembers Voste fondly. He recalls that although he is not sure where he got them, Voste shared vitamins with his fellow inmates.

Amazingly, Voste managed to survive Dachau. On 29 April 1945, when soldiers from divisions of the 7th U.S. Army arrived, he was still breathing. There is a photo of Voste



Manoli Spuru and Jean Johnny Voste at the time of the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp. Frank Manucci, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.

and another inmate, the Greek Manoli Spuru, preparing some scraps of food after the Allies had liberated the camp. Written on the photo are the words “Liberation Feast.” Although he lived through the experience, there is very little information on what life was like for Voste during his capture. In the picture, he looks very thin but relatively healthy compared with the usual image of gauntness and near-death fragility that dominates so much of our visual reading of what concentration camp inmates looked like at the time of being rescued. Voste is wearing a hat and shoes and sitting near Spuru, who has neither. It is not clear whether he received the shoes and hat just before the picture was taken, but his ability even to search for food is indicative of a will to live that was not broken by the Nazis.

#### Joseph Nassy

One of the more remarkable camp stories of the period is that of Josef Johan Cosmo Nassy who defied the odds and not only survived Nazi imprisonment but managed in his own unique way to chronicle a part of it through art. Nassy may have been the only black Jew—certainly the only known one—captured by the Germans during the war. Here you had, in one individual, the embodiment of two of the most despised and hated groups the Nazi racial hierarchy could possibly conceive. The very existence of Nassy disrupted the racial boundaries established by the Nazis, some of whom