History and Overview of The Stone Center

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill plays 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.

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 Civil Rights Struggle, African-American GIs, and Germany

at The Robert and Sally Brown Gallery and Museum

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History

September 08 – October 28, 2011

The Exhibition Advisory Committee

John Stephens
Director, Center for European Studies

Earl Jones
Carolina, NC Museum of History

Harry Watson
Director, Center for the Study of the American South

Fatimah Jackson
Director, Institute of African American Research

Joy Kassen
Chair, American Studies

Heather Williams
Professor, History

EXHIBITION CO-SPONSORS

The Department of American Studies

The UNC Center for European Studies

The Center for the Study of the American South

The Institute of African American Research

The Carolina Jewish Center

The Southern Historical Collection

The Carolina Black Caucus

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Charmaine McKissick-Moltan
Program Director

Laura Skaggs
Program Coordinator

Josephina Blythe

Agit Spalding

Randy Simmons

Kenneth Janken
Professor, African/African American Studies

Tim West
Director, Southern Historical Collection

Michelle Lanier
Acting Director, NC African American Heritage Commission / Curator of Multicultural Initiatives, NC Div. of State Historic Sites & Properties

Sakib Huq
Campus Y

Jonathan Hess
Carolina Center for Jewish Studies

Deborah Stroman
Carolina Black Caucus

This exhibition was made possible through the generous support of the Friends of the Robert and Sally Brown Gallery and Museum.
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 2010. (see www.aacvr-germany.org)

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 conflict with the Soviet Union-forced policy makers in Washington to support the civil rights agenda. What receives almost no attention in this Cold War setting is the transposition of the civil rights drama of the United States to bases out-side the physical boundaries of the United States, America literally transposed its racial conflict 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 with 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 this project, we have also constructed a website.digital archive.

The exhibition shows how Germany emerged as a critical point of reference in African American history. After 1945, the first African American GIs who were stationed on American military bases started to perceive Germany as a model of a multiracial society. By the mid-1950s, black GIs established contacts and friendships with German students, workers, and the NAACP in Berlin, Hamburg, Koblenz, and Bad Kissingen. Beginning in the early 1940s, black GIs entered the U.S. labor force and Black soldier organizations to fight racism both in the U.S. military and in German communities.

This exhibition shows how Germany emerged as a critical point of reference in African American history. After 1945, the first African American GIs who were stationed on American military bases started to perceive Germany as a model of a multiracial society.

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 this project, we have also constructed a website.digital archive.