

**PART I ECHOES OF
IMAGINED DANGER—
SPECTERS OF RACIAL MIXTURE**

I knew that my father was Algerian, but we never talked about it. It was just sort of mentioned in conversation: “You can’t deny your heritage”—which was not at all meant to be mean. I couldn’t imagine that Algerians were different. I didn’t even know what that meant. I came to understand it much later. . . . The neighbors’ kids taught me that soon enough. . . .

I was insulted and verbally abused about my father’s heritage. That was just after the war. The fathers of all the other kids were German soldiers. And mine was the enemy.

—HANS (JOHANN) HAUCK, BORN IN FRANKFURT, 1920
SON OF A GERMAN MOTHER AND AN ALGERIAN FATHER¹

In the above quotation, the speaker describes growing up in Germany as the son of an Algerian soldier conceived during the post–World War I French occupation of the Rhineland. Through the comments of others, this man came to think of his Algerian heritage as something that differentiated him from other German children. The topic of his mixed heritage and illegitimate birth was taboo in his family and thus was an issue that was not discussed with or around him. The direct and indirect remarks about his father conveyed to him a particular conception of Blacks and blackness. During the speaker’s youth in Germany during the 1920s and ’30s, this conception was strongly influenced and shaped by the presence and later the memory of the French occupation troops and by the accompanying mythology of marauding Black soldiers. The image of the “Rhineland Bastard,” a term that was coined during a 1919–22 newspaper campaign, came to embody the children these soldiers left behind as a complex representation of the manifold tensions of the occupation.

In the campaign protesting the use of Black occupation troops, at least four powerful discourses converged to create this early and perhaps most enduring image of a Black German population. The first of these was a scientific discourse of race as a biologically immutable category of human difference. The authority of this essential notion of race lie in its value as a means of differentiating among individuals and the social and political implications these distinctions were imputed to have. What were seen as the significant genetic consequences of racial mixture—as postulated in the work of turn-of-the-century geneticists and eugenicists—made this a second particularly potent discourse in these debates. The threat that racial mixture was seen to pose within these essential discourses of race was articulated as a form of endangerment and violation of the boundaries that constituted German national identity. During the Kaiserreich, these discourses came together with a third, equally compelling, colonial discourse on racial mixture—specifically, the legacy of prewar debates on mixed marriage in the German colonies. Together, these three factors significantly shaped German responses to the presence of a Black population, in both pre- and interwar Germany. Finally, a discourse of German victimhood combined with these discourses of race in the Rhineland protest campaign to transform German defeat into a larger narrative of German victimhood. In this narrative, Germany was only the first and most innocent victim of a racial conspiracy/pollution that would ultimately unite it in victimhood with its former enemies, in the process recasting defeat as heroic martyrdom. It was through these discourses that German responses to Blacks and Afro-Germans were articulated, and in their terms that Black Germans came to take on meaning.

The two chapters in this section examine three important events in the history of a group of individuals whose experience constitutes one of the dominant historiographical paradigms of the Afro-German experience in the twentieth century. The Black German children of the Rhineland occupation are without a doubt one of the most well documented groups of Germans of African descent. Although the experiences of this group are in no way representative of those of other Afro-Germans in either the Weimar Republic or the Third Reich (for example, the children of Black immigrants from Germany's former African colonies or those of other African and African-American immigrants to Germany during this time), the events discussed in chap-

ters 1 and 2 had an indelible impact on the lives of Afro-Germans through the representations they engendered in each of these periods.² The events to which I refer are the 1912 debates on mixed marriages (*Mischehe*) in the German colonies, the 1919–22 campaign against the use of a Black occupation force in Germany, and the Nazi sterilization program carried out on the Afro-German children fathered by these troops. Each event is crucial to understanding the history and recollections of Black Germans in the Third Reich.

In this trajectory, the Rhineland campaign plays a pivotal role because it articulates the central elements of a specter of the imagined danger of racial mixture that can be found in German public discourse both before and after World War I. Reading the discourse of this campaign in relation to that of its historical antecedent, the 1912 Reichstag debates on colonial *Mischehe*, reveals important resonances and continuities between these two incidents as sites where the danger posed by racial mixture became the focus of political agitation. The Nazi sterilization of the Black children of the Rhineland occupation represents one of the most extreme consequences of the discourses of race and racial purity that converged in the Rhineland campaign as well as the most concrete response to the threat posed by this imaginary specter. The contradictions in the discussion, planning, and implementation of these sterilizations, together with similar tensions in the broader Nazi response to Afro-Germans in the Third Reich (examined in chapters 2, 3, and 4), reveal interesting fissures in National Socialist racial politics. At the same time, Nazi policy toward Afro-Germans reflects the influence of representations of Afro-Germans articulated both in the Rhineland campaign and in the *Mischehe* debate, as well as how these representations were in turn shaped by scientific and colonial discourses of racial mixture and the dangers of pollution that racial mixture was seen to pose.

The French use of African colonial troops in the occupation of the Rhineland following World War I is important not only as a site of confrontation between myth and reality (what Sander Gilman describes as “the first major confrontation between the German image of blackness and the reality of the Black”).³ It is also a location that witnessed the emergence of a figure of the Black that synthesized and rearticulated many of the images of Blacks and blackness that had developed in the preceding centuries. In this way, the significance of

the Rhineland campaign should not be underestimated: the discourse on Blacks and Black Germans articulated during this campaign represents an important turning point, when public discussions of the implications of Blacks and Black Germans shifted from a focus on external concerns to a focus on internal concerns. Unlike the stereotypes that preceded it (for example, in the colonies or with regard to African colonial troops), the Rhineland Bastard is the first representation of a domestic, German-born Black native. Contrary to the “mirage of blackness” described by Gilman, this trope emerged simultaneously with the people it represented and eventually would eclipse it as a particularly imposing threat posed from *within* the boundaries of the German nation.⁴ Notwithstanding this newer incarnation of the German image of the Black, it nevertheless remains important to emphasize the links between the Rhineland Bastard and the prewar constructions of race, blackness, and racial mixture, for these discourses enabled the figure’s emergence. Indeed, as an echo of the specter of racial mixture, the trope of the Rhineland Bastard resonates with and at the same time rearticulates both biologicistic constructions of race and racial mixture and colonial conceptions of the social and political consequences of racial mixture that historically had been seen as posing a dire threat.

Each of these discourses contains historical echoes and resonances of a recurring specter that in each context figured racial mixture as a threat to the German nation, German identity, and, by implication, the purity of the white race. In the first case, the specter was a genetic one that transmitted the negative traits of an “inferior race” to contaminate and degrade the genetic pool of the pure and thus superior white race. In the second case, the specter of a mixed-race colonial citizen with a claim to the rights of legitimate political subjecthood posed a threat to the German body politic through the prospect of racial parity symbolized by a mixed-race, Black German citizen. In the post–World War I occupation, this specter returned in the form of the Rhineland Bastard (a term coined during the protest campaign that eventually came to represent the Black German children left behind by these soldiers) as a threat both to the purity of the German nation (read *body*) and to the postcolonial balance of power in the former colonies—a threat posed from within the boundaries of the Reich itself. The echoes of this imagined danger eventually came together in the Third Reich with the vision of a National Socialist racial state and led to the steril-

ization of members of this group of Afro-German children as the most concrete embodiment of this fantastic threat to the purity of the Aryan race. In this trajectory, the Rhineland campaign is particularly salient because (though not necessarily the first such site) it articulates the central elements of a specter of racial mixture expressed through a language of pollution and endangerment—a specter that recurred repeatedly both before and after World War I.