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Between Empire and Exile – African American Thought and the German Colonial Imagination

WiSe 2026
November 19-21
JFK-Institute
Freie Universität
Berlin
Lansstraße 7-9
14195 Berlin
&
Zoom

This conference asks how encounters with Germany have shaped African American engagements with race, empire, colonialism, memory, political resistance, and diasporic belonging. Across several days of presentations, conversations, and a keynote address, participants will explore the intellectual exchanges connecting African American and Afro-German histories while considering Germany as a significant site of Black intellectual and political encounter. This is a hybrid conference that welcomes both in-person and online participation.

Keynote Speaker: Tiffany Florvil (University of New Mexico)

Organized by K. Bailey Thomas (University of Rhode Island) and Helen A. Gibson (Freie Universität Berlin) with the support of the Foundation on German-American Academic Relations (SDAW).

Please register for the conference via the link (click here) or scan:

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

SDAW

John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien

Thursday, November 19

12:30–13:00: Registration

13:00–13:30: Welcome and Project Introduction; Room 201
K. Bailey Thomas (U Rhode Island), **Helen A. Gibson** (FU Berlin)

13:30–15:30: Panel 1: Germany and the Making of Black Intellectual Thought; Room 201
Chair: **Denson Staples** (Harvard U)

Andrea-Vicky Amankwaa-Birago (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Anton Wilhelm Amo Heritage Society) — "Walking with Du Bois: Black Cartographies of Movement, Return, and Memory in Germany" [online]

Trey Daniel (Harvard University) — "'Of Our Spiritual Strivings': Germany's Influence and the Formation of Black Collective Life in Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk"

Hazim Hardeman (Harvard University) — "Veiled Corner, Damaged Life: W.E.B. Du Bois's Aesthetics of German Filiation"

15:30–16:00: Coffee Break

16:00–18:00: Panel 2: Empire, Solidarity, and Black Visibility; Room 201
Chair: **Olatunji Egungbemi** (FU Berlin)

Nina Weißer (LMU Munich) — "Cold War Solidarity: Angela Davis, the GDR and the Left in West Germany and Italy"

Adrienne Merritt (University of Colorado Boulder) — "Smashing the Glass Coffins: Black Gazing, Reclaimed Beingness, and the German Museal Space"

Silke Hackenesch (University of Cologne) — "An African American Family, a Senegalese Father, and a Black German Life: Rethinking Diasporic Kinship across the Atlantic" [online]

18:00–19:30: Dinner

Friday, November 20

9:30–10:00: Registration

10:00–12:00: Panel 3: Black Kinship, Fugitivity, and Belonging; Room 340
Chair: **Oumou Ba** (FU Berlin)

Tashia Ethridge (FU Berlin) — "Born in the Lurch: Mabel Grammer's 'Brown Baby Plan' as Black Fugitive Planning"

Yanda Bango (University of Erfurt) — "Resisting Coloniality and Forging a Positive Sense of Belonging in Germany: Drawing from African Intellectual Thought"

12:00–14:00: Lunch (not provided)

14:00–16:00: Panel 4: Black Feminist and Queer Worldmaking; Room 340
Chair: **K. Bailey Thomas** (U Rhode Island)

Garance Tomczak-Decolasse (Paris-Cité University) — "The Erotics in Translation: Audre Lorde and the Politics of Lesbian Desire in Afro-German Activism"

Anne Potjans (HU Berlin) — "The Poetry of Guy Nzingha St. Louis: Toward a German Queer of Color Critique"

Hannah Olive Jane Casey (University of Vienna) —"Poetic Encounters and Interventions Across the Diaspora: Exploring Historical Methodologies Through Self-Writing"

16:00–16:30: Coffee Break

16:30–18:00: Keynote Lecture — "Reflections on May Ayim's Diasporic Anticolonialism"; Room 340
Tiffany Florvil (University of New Mexico), Chair: **Helen A. Gibson** (FU Berlin)

18:00–19:30: Dinner

Saturday, November 21

Berlin Decolonial Walking Tour, TBA