

Article

From Both Sides of the Atlantic: Black German Adoptee Searches in William Gage's Geborener Deutscher (Born German)

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Abstract: William Gage's Geborener Deutscher, a print newsletter distributed by traditional mail from the late 1980s until 2003, and the eponymous Internet forum Gage established in 2000 on Yahoo Groups, provide search resources and community support specifically for German born adoptees. The archived newsletters and conversations offer early insight into the search and reunion activities of many who were transnationally adopted to the United States as infants and small children in the wake of the Second World War. Among Gage's mailing list and Yahoo Group subscribers are members of the post-war cohort of Black German Americans living in Germany and in the US. Gage's archive provides a unique opportunity to begin to explore Black German adoptee search, reunion, and community development over nearly a two-decade span.

Keywords: adoption; transnational adoption; reunion; reunification; African American; Germany; Black German; Afro-German; Afrogerman; Afrodeutsch

With respect to my authorial standpoint and socially constructed categories of difference that relate to this essay, it is important to disclose that I identify as a Black German American transnational adoptee and am the only known adoption scholar belonging to the historical Black German-U.S. adoptee cohort. My research and analyses benefit from my own adoption, search, and reunification experiences, and are informed by both my personal and my professional relationships with hundreds of members of the diasporic community of Black Germans. Importantly, as vice president and president of the Black German Cultural Society (BGCS) (2000–2011), and as founder and president of the Black German Heritage and Research Association (BGHRA) (2011–present), I have been privy to many adoptee testimonies, assisted adoptees in their birth-family searches, and represented the interests of Black German adoptees, internationally. My previously published essays represent the existing literature exploring actual Black German-US adoptees' childhoods and reunion experiences (Peña 2015, 2016). No ethnography, and only a few adoptee memoirs have been published to date. As a community leader, I designed and moderated all organizational websites, Internet forums, and social media networks for the BGCS from 2000–2011 and for the BGHRA thereafter until the present. Having archived all communications and images shared since 2000, I enjoy privileged and unequalled access to a vast amount of primary source material related to Black German adoptees reunifying transnationally. My analyses are therefore derived from many years of participant observation as administrator and member in the private online communities and e-lists hosted by the only two Black German organizations established in the U.S. Since 2000, I have also observed Black German adoptee interactions in other online communities such as those hosted by Black German organizations in Germany, and other adoption and family search related organizations. Since the mid-2000s, Black German organizations have joined other adoption related groups in establishing both public and exclusive virtual communities on the Facebook social network platform. An astute

observer is more easily able to discern those who identify as Black Germans and who belonging to multiple groups. Networking between and among groups often occurs. For example, it is likely that a Black German adoptee who emerges in one affiliate group will often be recruited by or referred to another as the circumstances dictate.

Adoptees searching for their origin stories and birth-family members typically connect with others who share in their context specific circumstances in online social networks and community-based forums. There is no way to determine how many Black Germans subscribed to Gage's printed newsletter in the earlier years or are among the 477 current members of his online Yahoo group. Not all list members reveal their personal information, and unlike social media today, no image is attached to an individual's profile. According to researchers Catherine Ridings, et al., (Ridings et al. 2006) who study online behavior for business marketing purposes, people often join online groups and remain "lurkers," they simply find the information they are seeking by reading the archives and other subscribers' postings. "Since lurkers do not post, it is impossible to gather information about them in the persistent conversation. It is important to know about lurkers, however, since they are bona fide members of the virtual community and consumers of its knowledge. Thus, they may be affected by the virtual community content even if they do not contribute to the ongoing conversations" (330). Some Black German adoptees only discover they belong to the historic adoptive cohort when they begin to search for their bilateral family roots in Germany and the U.S., and from what they learn from others they encounter in online forums and social networks. Although most Black Germans who have shared their stories with me and online are aware of their adopted status since childhood, some reveal they are late discovery—meaning they learn about their adoptions as adults. Many never saw their birth certificates or adoption papers until their adoptive parents died. Others still have no access to their identity documents and are fearful that their citizenship status in the U.S. is precarious given contemporary immigration politics; although, only one Black German adoptee is known to have ever been deported. Adoptees with access to their identity documents while their adoptive parents are alive often hesitate to discuss their intention to search for their families of origin with their adoptive parents. Many adoptees wait until their adoptive parents are deceased to initiate their searches out of fear of offending them or appearing ungrateful. Black Germans are no different from adoptees belonging to transnational adoptive cohorts born in the 1950s and 1960s in this regard. What makes this group unique are the historio-political circumstances of their transnational adoptions—solely on the basis of race, and also that the cohort of dual-heritage, biracial, German born adoptees are the only known group of children to be adopted from overseas by African Americans.

Race is a complex and nuanced topic in the Black German context. The transnational adoptions of biracial children into African American families must also be considered transracial since the research reveals that many Black Germans believe they experience(d) race and racism, particularly during their 1960s' childhoods, differently from their African American peers (Peña 2017). The proliferation of diaspora, migration, and critical mixed-race studies reveals that the experiences of persons considered to be Black and biracial are not monolithic and are context specific in terms of history, culture, and individual preference. Adoptees raised in military families, for example, were sheltered from overt discrimination in childhood and were among the first to attend integrated schools (Peña 2017). It would be disingenuous to suggest that while the children were absorbed into the African American community, per se, that they didn't stand out as visibly different from their adopted parents.

The adoptees were both biracial and of dual heritage and were born during a time when relationships between blacks and whites was expressly forbidden in many of the United States, prior to the Supreme Court decision on *Loving vs. Virginia* (1967) declaring bans on interracial marriage unconstitutional. "In the late 1940s and 1950s an interracial couple with or without a mixed-race child faced countless obstacles, many of which seemed insurmountable. In thirty out of forty-eight states of the Union during this period, interracial marriage was legally prohibited by

anti-miscegenation laws” (Lemke 345). Maria Höhn’s, “GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany” (Höhn 2002) and her later work with Martin Klimke, “A Breath of Freedom: the Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany” (Höhn and Klimke 2010) illuminate not only the transnational socio-political and cultural contexts in which the interracial relationships developed, but also give invaluable insight into the lives and experiences of the men and women who became the birth parents of the Black German children. In the case of the African American GI’s, some of the men that Höhn and Klimke discuss also became adoptive fathers, effectively raising the children that their compatriots left behind.

Between 1945 and 1956, an estimated 150,000 children were born in West Germany to occupying troops and German women. More than 9000 were the children of African American and Moroccan soldiers (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003). Statistics are unreliable, and although most of the children remained in Germany with their mothers, historians approximate that in the two decades following the War as many as seven thousand Black German children were adopted to the U.S. Many of the children’s generational peers were also adopted domestically and, transnationally, to Denmark. Others of their peers grew up in German children’s homes and/or in White German foster families (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2012). All formal adoptions were closed, as it was the contemporary custom in transnational adoption. Upon relinquishment of their rights and responsibilities to their children, German mothers waived the right to ever pursue contact with their children in the future. Many of the mothers, who are silent in the literature, placed their children in adoptive homes under pressure from family, social workers, and community members.

There is a dearth of literature about Black German adoption and only a handful of memoirs exist. The present author is the only Black German adoptee scholar, and the only researcher to have published about the U.S. adoptees’ childhood experiences growing up in the U.S. Effectually, the transnational adoptions of the Black German children to the U.S. entered academic discourse primarily through the three historical texts written by Yara-Lemke Muñiz de Faria beginning in 2005 although, Heide Fehrenbach is the first American scholar to publish a monograph on the history of Black German adoption English. Fehrenbach’s (Fehrenbach 2007) text is therefore, the most comprehensive English historical account of the postwar adoptions of Black German children. Lemke Muñiz de Faria’s book (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2002), *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung: afrodeutsche “Besatzungskinder” im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Between Welfare and Exclusion: Afro-German “Occupation Children” in Post-War Germany (2005)), has not yet been translated into English. An earlier article by Lemke Muñiz de Faria, *Germany’s ‘Brown Babies’ Must Be Helped! Will You? U.S. Adoption Plans for Afro-German Children, 1950–1955* (2003), previewed her German publication. Plummer (Plummer 2003) and Rudolph (Rudolph 2003) have to a lesser extent written about the postwar adoptions of Black German children. Collectively, these historical accounts illuminate the socio-political ethos that precipitated the children’s births in Germany and elaborate on the contemporary transnational debates over what to do with them. Lemke Muniz de Faria writes:

The debate over the fate of Afro-German children as it was articulated in Germany and the U.S. between 1945 and 1960 reveals the particular importance attached to these children solely on the basis of their skin color. These children were confronted less with national or moral feelings of resentment as children of an occupying power, or illegitimate children, than with racial prejudices. Their skin color, features, and hair structure led Germans and Americans to declare these children different or foreign and consequently that they belonged not in Germany but in the U.S.—in the African-American community. Ultimately, racial characteristics served in their native country as a factor of exclusion, while in their fathers’ country as an attribute of belonging’ (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003, p. 358).

Beginning in 1952, Mabel Grammer, an African American woman and foreign correspondent for the Baltimore-based newspaper, *The Afro-American*, facilitated somewhere between fifty to five

hundred “by proxy” adoptions of Black German children to the U.S. Estimates are inconsistent in the literature. These children were first introduced to their adoptive parents after they arrived in their new country. Grammer and her husband, an African American administrative officer who was stationed in Germany between 1950–1954, adopted several of the children after visiting St. Josef Children’s home in Mannheim, Germany. Grammer is still honored by the St. Josef staff and members of the Mannheim community who aspire to name a street in her honor. Mabel Grammer launched a press campaign in the *Afro-American* informing African Americans in the U.S. about the children she encountered in Mannheim and encouraged married couples to adopt. Her initiative became known as the “Brown Baby Plan,” and the children she placed were referred to as the “Grammer Babies.” Thanks to Grammer, the children’s controversial plight was publicized extensively in Germany and in a number of African American newspapers and magazines (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2009).

Grammer’s appeals in the *Afro-American* and articles in *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines encouraged African American married couples who could provide evidence of their education and economic stability, and who would allow their stories to be printed in the newspaper, to apply to adopt. Scandinavian Airlines voluntarily transported the children from Germany to their waiting adopters in the U.S. Many more children were adopted by African American military couples serving in Germany at the time (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2009). Statistics are difficult to come by in the Black German context since after the defeat of Nazism, neither the German census nor birth records identify individuals by race. By the 1980s, many belonging to the postwar generation, who were now approaching middle-age, began searching for their origin stories and family roots on both sides of the Atlantic and began sharing their stories and discovering each other through *Geborener Deutscher*.

As a direct result in the rapid advancement of internet communications technologies over the last two decades, group-specific adoption related organizations and internet social networks like Gage’s *Geborener Deutscher* have proliferated exponentially. Concomitantly, the availability of DNA testing, international family search consultancies, genealogy and public records research databases have made searching across national borders much less expensive and complicated propositions today than it was for the Black Germans in the 1980s. Before WIFI, smartphones, and social networks, Red Cross workers often referred searching German-born adoptees who wrote or called their missing persons department to Leonie Boehmer. Boehmer is a German-born birth mother and search consultant located in New Mexico, U.S., who specializes in German adoption searches. Gage, a German-born adoptee, came to Boehmer for help locating his birth mother. In cooperation with Boehmer, Gage subsequently authored and distributed a free adoptee newsletter entitled *Geborener Deutscher* (German by birth) (Gage 1988b, p. 5).

The first issue of *Geborener Deutscher* was published in 1988, shortly after Gage’s search for his mother ended with the revelation that she had already passed away. Gage described his newsletter as “a new adoptee/birth parent periodical . . . designed to meet the needs, answer the questions, and otherwise provide a forum for discussion of topics of concern to German born adoptees and birth parents, particularly those residing in the United States of America.” The newsletter advertised that future issues would contain search workshops, profiles of adoption reformers, first person “search journals” and progress updates. Boehmer was the first adoption activist profiled, and Gage shared his own adoption story in the premiere issue. The workshop offered instructions on how to write a letter to the Standesämter (state registries) and Jugendämter child welfare offices in the German state in which the adoptee was born and/or adopted. In addition to providing information on how to go about searching, requesting documents and applying for recognition of German nationality or dual German/U.S. citizenship, Gage also printed adoptee reunion testimonies.

Jenny Jansen, a domestic adoptee living in Munich, was the first Black transnational reunion story featured in the second issue of *Geborener Deutscher* in 1988. Gage describes Jenny as “a mixed-race German-born adoptee who searched for and found both of her birth parents in the U.S. and who has had her story publicized quite extensively in Germany.” After sharing on Jenny’s adoption details, Gage closes his essay thus:

But for all the peace that reunion with her past has brought her, questions remain for Jenny. Being half black and half white, half American and half German, she wonders where, exactly, she belongs. Jenny discovered a group of other black Germans in München—Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD) (initiative of Black people in Germany)—many of whom are also adoptees. She wonders if she could live in America, in San Francisco, where she had felt comfortable with her father's family. She feels herself, however, to be more European—more “white”—with little more in common with American blacks than her outward resemblance to them (Gage 1988a, p. 2).

Geborener Deutscher was in print for three years before Black German adoptees headlined the Autumn 1991 issue. Boehmer's (Boehmer 1991) featured front page essay warned, “Biracial Adoptees Can Expect a ‘Mixed’ Reaction.” In the center of the article in large bold print, Boehmer writes, “To this day, I, as a German-born birth mother, am ashamed to say that the attitude of Germans towards people with other-than-white skin has not changed.” Boehmer further suggests that fathers are more likely to be open to reuniting with their adopted biracial children. Boehmer points out that Black Germans up until that point represented less than 10% of an unquantified number of her clients. Adoptee testimonies shared in other spaces over many years reveal a myriad of reunion experiences that challenge Boehmer's predictions though no relevant research yet exists. The first Black German transnational adoptee story in fact, seems to refute Boehmer's claim.

In the 29 February 1992 issue of Gage's newsletter, Black Germans once again made the cover page of *Geborener Deutscher*, but this time without a direct mention of race in the headline. This featured adoptee profile came in the form of a letter written to Gage from a Black German reader, Henriette Cain. Cain's letter entitled *Rockford, IL, Adoptee Finds Mother and Three Half Brothers in Virginia*, offers a closer look at the frustration involved in adoptees' early efforts to find their families before broadband internet technology was available for home users. Genealogy researchers and the adoption community have historically been early social network adopters and connected to the internet via dial-up services like Prodigy and AOL that called into Bulletin Board Services (BBS), a rather primitive real-time digital communications technology that was installed on servers hosted in private homes. Gage hosted one such service called KinQuest where searching adoptees could dial in from their home computers and engage in running conversation with other callers interested in adoption searches that were generally then archived and made accessible to future users. Cain reveals that after a challenging search, she found a consultant through KinQuest that eventually led to her finding her mother. Cain explains that her mother was tentative on the first call and claimed not to be the person Cain was looking for. The search consultant encouraged Cain to call back again and the second time the woman who answered her call admitted that she was indeed her mother. Cain's mother then disclosed that she had kept the adoptions of Cain and another biracial daughter a secret from her husband of 34 years and their four sons. Eventually, Cain and her husband visit her mother and her family in Virginia and all goes well with their reunion.

When we got ready to depart, my mother and I both cried, brother's girlfriends cried, and there were tears in the brother's eyes too. It seemed as though I have always known them, in a sense, but then again, it does seem strange to now have three half-brothers and to know my birth mother and her husband. We were overwhelmed by everyone's kindness and generosity. Mom didn't know for sure how her sons would handle it, especially since I have a Black father. She said she and her husband had always taught the boys to treat everyone as a person, that skin color doesn't matter (Cain 1992).

Cain mentions at the close of her letter that she normally finds it difficult to ask for help but appreciates the guidance she received from Gage's publication. “I want to thank you for publishing *Geborener Deutscher*. It helped me in my search. Had it not been for the ideas and tips, I would probably not have gotten this far as I did by myself. I'm just sort who likes to do things herself and always hate having to ask for help.” Cain's comment is noteworthy because she will later become well known

transnationally for her work helping other Black German adoptees searching for their family members. The next Black German story featured in Gage's newsletter also had a happy ending in the U.S., this time in the same state. Again, Black Germans were the cover story.

Back to the Future was the title of the article in the Spring 1994 issue that Gage acknowledges was a reprint of the reunion story written by journalist Joann Smith that was featured in the *Atmos Reporter*, the adoptee's employer's newsletter from August 1993.

After briefly describing a happy childhood and positive relationships with her adoptive parents, Ingrid Smith from Dallas, Texas, describes how she came upon Leonie Boehmer to ask for help with her search. "I finally couldn't stand it any longer said Smith. When I called the adoption hotline listed in the Yellow Pages, the representative referred me to a nonprofit organization in Irving called Search Line of Texas." Smith said Search Line referred her to a Ms. Boehmer in New Mexico, who specializes in German adoptions. "It took me two weeks to finally get up the courage to call Ms. Boehmer and she asked me to send her my birth certificate—the one thing I had from my past." Within a few short weeks Ingrid was on a plane headed to El Paso to meet her mother and younger sister. Smith is at first disappointed when she doesn't find a physical resemblance in her mother but is pleased that they share values and a number of interests.

After looking at family pictures, Smith and her mother decided that she looks like her maternal grandmother. Smith and her mother even share the same first name. 'My adoptive parents were going to call me Michele,' said Smith. 'But my birth mother asked them to leave me Ingrid, after her.' Smith said her adoptive parents agreed to the birthmother's request, but she never knew they actually named their daughter in good until they met. 'She named my half-sister Michelle, thinking she was giving her the same name I was using,' said Smith (Smith 1994).

As it is the case with so many reunion testimonials, Smith's story ends with the initial encounter, but the reader is led to assume the bond between mother and daughter was significant at the moment of the writing. Smith adds, "It seems as if we were never separated for 27 years" (Smith 1994). It is interesting that Smith, like Cain, gives no information about their backstories, about how their parents met and how they came into the world or why their mothers placed them in foreign adoptive homes and later emigrated to the U.S. themselves. It is especially interesting that there is no mention of race whatsoever in Ingrid Smith's story, even in the part where she focuses on her familial resemblance—or lack thereof. Readers only recognize that Smith is biracial by the included reunion photograph of the two Ingrids standing next to one another. What is illuminated in Smith's story is the importance of belonging in adoption. Belonging as a theme in adoption storytelling is amplified again in the next Black German adoptee profile appearing in the Autumn 1994 issue of *Geborener Deutscher*.

Gary Freeman's *Who I Was Is Gone* is the first time a Black German man's adoption story is featured in Gage's newsletter (Freeman 1994). Self-written, Freeman's four paragraph essay describing the devastating moment he first learned he was adopted is both powerful and provocative. Freeman leads with the exclamation that he finds his name, Gary, to be strange and asks his reader, "Wouldn't you agree? Maybe it is and then again maybe it's not. I'll let you make the call." In the next two paragraphs, Freeman describes a happy childhood with an African American soldier father he admired and respected and a beautiful African American mother who loved him dearly and whom he adored. "She always told me that I was special, and that she couldn't have chosen a better little prince. I was their son, their only son. I would carry their name and one day pass it on. This was who I was. It was good. I belonged." Freeman goes on to describe how his complete sense of Self and belonging were shattered when his mother revealed he was not their biological child. Freeman does not reveal his exact age on the particular evening when, after hearing his parents argue in another room, his mom came into his bedroom to comfort and reassure him. Apparently, what started out as a relatively frequent family scenario, this time, as Freeman explains at the end of his essay, it was a night that would change him forever.

‘Mama has something to tell you tonight, Gary. You’re not our son, your adopted. Mama loves you though. It will be all right.’ Who I was, is gone. Who are the strangers I live with anyway? My father was an African-American soldier, but *he* wasn’t there to teach me things a father should. There were no long hours listening to *his* stories. I don’t know him to love him, but I do. My mother was a beautiful German woman. She wasn’t here to cuddle or nurture me. I don’t know if *she* ever thought of me as her pride and joy, or *her* little prince. I don’t know her. But I love her very much. I am their son. You see who I was is gone. This is who I am. My name is Gary. Not such a strange name after all, is it?

After Freeman’s article only one other Black German adoption story was profiled over the fifteen years that Gage published fifty-seven issues of *Geborener Deutscher*. The fifth and final adoptee featured reveals how profoundly the need for belonging in the Black German context extends beyond biological kin. Black German adoptees are members of a diverse, multicultural, and multigenerational Black German diasporic community.

Shirley Price (Price 2000) began her story entitled *A Little Brown Baby: An Afro-German Adoptee’s Story*. Price’s essay was again on the front page of the Spring 2000 issue. Price’s narrative offers valuable insight into the establishment of a sense of community between Black people in Germany and Black Germans living in the U.S. It was a chance meeting with a Black German woman from Germany at the Million Woman March in 1997 in Philadelphia that inspired Price’s internet search for Black people in Germany even before she began searching for her birthmother. After considerable effort to locate the woman she met at the event in Philadelphia, Price discovered the website of an organization of Black women activists in Germany known as ADEFRA (an acronym for Afrodeutsche Frauen or Afro-German women in English). “Certainly, like our white counterparts’ assimilation into the American culture, we too have been assimilated into the (Black) American culture, and are, therefore, not too easily identifiable. Finding a website for and about people like myself, was a revelation, and an emotional revelation.” What Price suggests here is that simply being Black in America did not guarantee her a sense of community with African Americans. On the ADEFRA website, Price learned about a Chicago host committee for the African-American and Afro-German Cross-Cultural Community Initiative. After contacting one of the Chicago organizers, Price was invited to accompany the group on a trip to Berlin for Black History Month. The thought of going back to Germany filled Price simultaneously with excitement and anxiety.

Initially I was very excited about the trip to Germany. I was constantly on the Internet trying to get additional information about Afro-Germans. But as the weeks went by I started to feel very panicky about the trip. Would I be accepted? Would I be mocked for not being able to speak German? Even though my family and I had talked about going to visit my birthplace one day; Germany had always been a nice fantasy place in my mind. The reality of actually going back filled me with anxiety.

After discussing with her husband and children, Price revealed her plans to her adoptive parents. While her father was supportive, her mother was less than encouraging. “My father was very excited for me and wanted me to go. My mother, on the other hand, came across as very blasé, wondering why I wanted to go since I didn’t speak German and wouldn’t know where to go once I got there. Needless to say, I decided then, I would not discuss the trip with her again.” Price ultimately sent her son Tyson to Berlin in her stead and wrote at length in her essay about his experience and the information he brought back with him about Afro-Germans and the community in Berlin. Price was delighted to receive a note from the woman that she met at the March in Philadelphia, and they were able to reconnect.

Not long after her son returned from Germany, Price was moved to begin her own birth-family search. She found her way to Gage’s new *Geborener Deutscher* online network and contacted Leonie Boehmer. When Boehmer translated her adoption papers, Price describes a sense

of relief when she learned her mother was a nursery school teacher rather than a nanny as she had interpreted the German language documents to say.

On 19 February 1999, I received a reply from Leonie telling me she received my documents. She stated in her letter, that my mother was a nursery school teacher. That was a surprise. From reading the documents myself, I sadly thought her occupation was a nanny, not that a nanny is not an honorable profession, because it is. But the thought of my birth mother taking care of someone else's children after giving her own up for adoption . . . well I'll just say the thought of it made me feel sad.

Price ends her essay by acknowledging the community's anticipated advice while she is restlessly waiting to hear news from Boehmer on the whereabouts of her mother.

I know you all are saying that I should be mindful that there are no guarantees. Not all searches are successful. Not all searches end with a 'happy beginning,' and I appreciate your concern. But I have a better sense of myself now. I am a woman who shows courage. And while I pray for the best, I am prepared for the worst. With the love and support of my family, and all of you, it is a chance I'm willing to take for the little brown baby in me.

Beneath Price's article, Gage adds important references to Black German organizations in Germany and recommends to readers the canonical anthology *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, edited by May Ayim Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz (1991). The five Black German adoption stories profiled in *Geborener Deutscher* reveal the bilateral nature of the search and reunion activities of the postwar generation of dual-heritage Black German Americans. Gage's newsletters also document the naissance of a virtual Black German community. While there is no adoptee-exclusive Black German organization in the U.S., there are two non-membership non-profit organizations that promote transnational community development on and offline. Cain and Price until today serve together on the Board of Directors of the Black German Cultural Society (BGCS). In 2011 the Black German Heritage & Research Association (BGHRA) hosted the first international Black German convention at the German Historical Institute in Washington-DC. three more have been held since and the videotaped panels and events are available on the BGHRA website.

Geborener Deutscher's now rather rudimentary Yahoo Group still exists online today after all these years. While Gage stopped mailing the printed newsletter in 2003, they remain accessible in the archives. Over the years new Black German adoptees have come to the list seeking advice and assistance with their searches. Information about Black German history, organizations, and events are also sometimes shared, but often without acknowledgement or follow-up discussion with other members. With the revolutionary changes in internet communications technology and the proliferation of virtual spaces available to Black Germans and searching adoptees to gather online, there have also been tremendous shifts in how, where, and when adoptees share their personal stories, and from whom they request assistance.

For example, Jenny Jansen, the first Black German adoptee featured in Gage's newsletter exemplifies the fluidity of reunion experiences over time, and how the more recent digital archives of discovery engage with the old to memorialize family encounters over time. More than a decade after Jansen was profiled in *Geborener Deutscher*, she discovered via DNA that Willie Booth, the man she found initially and was pictured with in the article, was not her father. In 2016, Price, the fifth and final adoptee featured in the newsletter, shared a link to her BGCS Facebook group where she posted Jenny's video appeal for assistance with a renewed search with a comment, "Jenny is looking for her biological father: please give her help by sharing this video from her." Jenny had posted her video appeal on YouTube and shared links publicly on her Facebook page, asking others to spread the word by sharing the link on their own Facebook pages and timelines. Jenny updated the video description on YouTube a year later in 2017 and posted celebratory photographs on Facebook when she finally

reunited with half-siblings and extended family members, subsequent to her father's death. She never got to meet him after all.

Adoption scholar Sylvia Posocco refers to the process by which the excavation and unveiling of adoption history takes place as enfleshment (Posocco 2015). "'Enfleshment' in this sense," Posocco argues, "is simultaneously regulatory and plural. Far from stable or univocal, it is processual and instantiated through varied technologies and forms of relationality at the points where discourse, embodiment, and personhood congeal into socially situated objects, subjectivities, and social relations" (569). Since nearly three decades now, as revealed in Gage's *Geborener Deutscher*, Black German adoptees are and have been participating in their own enfleshment by virtue of the digital footprint each adoptee creates when they initiate their searches or share their adoption stories online. Various forms of, "my name is, I was born in 1950 or 60-something in Germany to a German woman and an African American GI. I was adopted to the U.S. by African Americans and am just now deciding to look for my mother" appear in numerous online search forums and community networks.

It is rare that searches and reunions are publicized as intensely and as broadly as Jansen's and even rarer that we are able to follow an adoptees reunion journey over a period of years. No study exists that follows up with Black German adoptees post-reunion. As multiple generations of globally situated Black Germans relaying disparate adopted childhoods are earnestly piecing together their fragmented, intimate family histories in virtual spaces, they are also actively constructing a sense of community among themselves. At such a time of personal and political activity, and with much of it taking place on the internet, it is important to examine how and where Black Germans are writing themselves into public memory and the ways in which the unveiling of their personal life stories in internet social networks is in itself, an unwitting history-making endeavor. Thus, an examination of the Black German adoption narratives in William Gage's *Geborener Deutscher* is timely and relevant.

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