African-Americans with German Connections

A project of the AATG Alle lernen Deutsch Initiative
African-Americans with German Connections

These portraits were created to introduce students, parents, and school administrators to the many African-American leaders with German connections. Many people are not aware of the connections between Germany and Historically Black Colleges and Universities and important movements in African-American history such as the founding of the NAACP. Too often school personnel question why a student of color would want to learn German or be interested in German-speaking countries. These portraits tell why some people did, and show the deep history of people of color learning and using German. A second purpose of these portraits is to convey to visitors to a classroom that all students are welcome and have a place there. Images by themselves are only a small part of the classroom experience, but they do serve an important purpose.

A second set of these portraits can be printed and hung up around the school. Students can use them in a “scavenger” hunt, looking for people from different time periods, from different areas of studies, etc.

Students could have a list of names depicted in the portraits and move around the classroom noting information from two or three of the portraits. They could learn about the others by asking classmates to provide information about those individuals in a question/answer activity.

The teacher can put two slips of paper with each name in a bag and have students draw names. The students then find the portrait of the name they have drawn and practice the alphabet by spelling the portrayed individual’s name in German or asking and answering questions about the person. They could also introduce their person to the other students.

The teacher could make a list in German of the information found in each portrait without including the names. Students would have to read the portrait and identify each person.

The teacher could prepare slips of paper with names from the portraits on them. Without being told which name they are given, each student would have a name taped to their back. Using a sheet with information about each individual, the students would walk around and ask questions of fellow students to determine which name they have.

Students could learn more about the various individuals and make a presentation to the class. They might learn about three people from different time periods and look for similarities and differences (i.e. who studied at an HBCU, who was active in the abolition movement, who speaks German, who lived and worked in Germany). Students an also look for ties with events happening during the life of an individual and how, or if they were impacted (i.e. W.E.B. Du Bois
Students can compare the individuals portrayed and discuss why they would have wanted to go to Germany and how that may have been impacted/changed their lives, etc. Students could also decide which of the people portrayed they would most like to meet, and/or what question/s they would like to ask them.
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Resources

Hopkins, Leroy, “Black History Month: A German Perspective”

“Jesse Owens Biography: Olympic Triumphs, Olympic-Sized Struggles”

Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia
Dr. Reginald Bess

Dr. Reginald A. Bess is Chairman and Professor of the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina. He has a Masters degree in German Literature and Philology and Ph.D. in Medieval German Studies from The Ohio State University. His research focuses on people of African descent in medieval German literature; Afro-German autobiography; and foreign language study at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He was guest editor of the Winter 2011 volume of The Zora Neale Hurston Forum. This is the first time in the history of African Diasporic Studies that a special issue of a literary journal has been devoted to Afro-German Literature. All the essayists are African-American professors with doctorate degrees in German.
Bruce Darnell

Darnell, an American model and choreographer in Germany, was born in New York City and grew up in Colorado. In 1983 he began his career as a model in Germany. During the following years he modeled for Kenzo, Issey Miyake, Hermès and Calvin Klein in Paris, Milan, Tokyo and New York. Darnell attained public fame in Germany when he served as a juror on Germany’s Next Topmodel. In connection with advertisements for this show he became famous for his typically American accent and mistakes in spoken German. Since 2011, he is a judge on Deutschland sucht den Superstar.
Angela Davis, social activist and educator, was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1944. She graduated magna cum laude with Phi Beta Kappa membership from Brandeis University with a degree in French, having attending the Sorbonne during her junior year. During her last year at Brandeis she studied under the noted German philosopher Herbert Marcuse and then spent 1965-67 studying with his former colleagues Oskar Negt and Theodore Adorno at the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe University in Frankfurt. She received an honorary Doctor of Political Science from the University of Leipzig. She was also enrolled in the doctoral program of the Humboldt University in Berlin (East).
Louis Winston Douglas

Louis Winston Douglas, born May 14, 1889 in Philadelphia, was an American dancer, choreographer, and music businessman. He toured Europe with Belle Davis from 1903 to 1908, and appears with her in the 1906 German film *Die schöne Davis mit ihren drei Negern*. Douglas organized and starred in shows in Berlin in 1926 and continued to live and work in Germany. He can be seen as a dancer in the 1930 film *Einbrecher* and in a leading acting role in *Niemandsland* made in 1931.
William Edward Burghardt Du Bois

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was teacher, author, editor, poet, scholar, Pan-Africanist and perhaps the most learned African-American of the century following the Civil War. An avid student of German language and culture, Du Bois studied German at Fisk and Harvard and spent two years (1892-94) studying at the University of Berlin. In 1895 he became the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. His first teaching job was at Wilberforce University where among other subjects he also taught German. Du Bois was one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.
Sophia Ellis

Sophia Ellis, a University of Michigan graduate in German literature and the sciences, studied in Germany in the 1950’s. Ellis began teaching in Detroit Public Schools in 1950 and was one of the first African-American women in Detroit to teach science. In 1985, Ellis began teaching biology and German at Martin Luther King High School, participating in the German-American Partnership Program. In addition, she produced teaching material for German instruction for diversity students and was honored for her work. She was also named Michigan Science Teacher of the Year.
Yvonne Frazier

Yvonne Frazier, European College of Liberal Art’s Choir Director and Vocal Instructor, has a B.A. in music from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell with subsequent study at Boston Conservatory. She has regularly appeared as a leading soloist in major opera houses and on world renowned concert stages throughout Europe and North America. In addition to her duties as music and choir director and vocal instructor, currently, she is voice teacher for Cantus Domus, a successful, young Berlin choir.
Dr. Margaret Hampton

Professor of German, Earlham College, Indiana, first became immersed in German on a semester abroad in Vienna. Dr. Hampton has carried out significant research on Afro-Germans and on German colonialism in what is now Namibia. She was the 2011 recipient of the Outstanding German Educator Award presented by the American Association of Teachers of German.
Dr. Leroy Hopkins

Dr. Leroy Hopkins, Professor of German, Millersville University, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Ph.D. in German from Harvard University. Hopkins lived and worked in Hamburg for several years, and researched African-American and German connections on two DAAD study grants and numerous study trips.
Robert “Jumper” Johnson
Johnson is a retired Air Force Air Traffic Controller who has lived in Berlin for over 20 years.
Percy Julian

Julian was born in Montgomery, Alabama, the grandson of an enslaved person. Julian graduated with a bachelor’s degree from DePauw and became a chemistry instructor at Fisk University. In 1923 he received an Austin Fellowship for graduate study in chemistry at Harvard University. Worried that white students would resent being taught by an African-American, Harvard withdrew the teaching assistantship and he was unable to complete his PhD at Harvard. Julian received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship at the University of Vienna, where he earned his PhD in 1933. He later became director of research at Glidden’s Soya Products Division in Chicago. Julian was very likely given the position because he was fluent in German and Glidden had just purchased a modern continuous countercurrent solvent extraction plant from Germany.
Alaine LeRoy Locke

Locke (1885-1954) was a philosopher, educator, and critic. He was a 1918 PhD magna cum laude of Harvard, and a Rhodes Scholar who attended Oxford University's Herford College (1907-10) and the University of Berlin (1910-11). His book *The New Negro: An Interpretation of Negro Life* typified the revolution in African American arts and literature during the 1920's Harlem Renaissance. As a philosopher Locke incorporated much of the thought of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, whose philosophy of history shaped not only the German school of historical thought but was also important for American thinkers.
Dr. John Long

John Long is an independent researcher on the African Diaspora, with a focus on Germany. Professor emeritus, University of Illinois, Chicago, College of Education.
Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi

German-American journalist and author born January 19, 1926, in Hamburg, Germany, to a German mother and Liberian father, the grandson of the consul general of Liberia. Massaquoi emigrated to the United States and served two years in the army as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division. He studied journalism at the University of Illinois followed by a career at Jet magazine and then Ebony magazine, where he became managing editor. In his bestselling biography *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany*, Massaquoi describes his childhood and youth in Hamburg during the Nazi rise to power. Over the years he has visited Germany many times, saying Germany is still his homeland. Massaquoi died on January 19, 2013.
Jesse Owens

Jesse Owens was born September 12, 1913 in Oakville, Alabama—died March 31, 1980 in Phoenix, Arizona. A track-and-field athlete, he won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. Owens's performance in Berlin has become legend. His four Olympic victories were a blow to Adolf Hitler's intention to use the Olympics to highlight Nazi ideology. Despite the politically charged atmosphere of the Berlin Games, Owens was adored by the German public. Owens was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1976.
Dr. Damani Partridge

Damani J. Partridge is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology and at the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan. Visiting Fellow, Center für Europäische Ethnologie. His dissertation was entitled *Becoming Non-citizens: Technologies of Exclusion and Exclusionary Incorporation after the Berlin Wall*. This project is based on research he began in 1995 in Berlin, Germany, during his year as a Fulbright scholar, and then expanded in 1999/2000, during his year as a German Chancellor Fellow, to address broader questions of citizenship and the production of non-citizens after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
Rev. James W.C. Pennington

James W. C. Pennington was born an enslaved person on an estate in western Maryland in 1807. He escaped bondage as a young man, fleeing north, and was able to educate himself, becoming the first African-American to attend classes at Yale. He was eventually ordained as a Presbyterian minister. He published the account of his harrowing escape in the book *The Fugitive Blacksmith, or Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington*. In 1849, James W. C. Pennington became the first African-American awarded an honorary degree from a European university when Heidelberg University conferred on him the honorary doctorate of divinity. The distinction from Heidelberg not only raised his prominence in the abolitionist movement in the US, but it also was seen as a positive tool for German liberalism.
Colin Powell

American statesman and a retired four-star general in the United States Army. He was US Secretary of State under President George W. Bush, the first African-American to serve in that position. In his autobiography *My American Journey*, he wrote of his tour of duty in West Germany in 1958 that for "...black GIs, especially those out of the South, Germany was a breath of freedom--they could go where they wanted, eat where they wanted, and date whom they wanted, just like other people. The dollar was strong...and the German people friendly..."
Paulette Reed-Anderson

Writer of materials for the Berlin Senat and researcher on the African Diaspora in Germany. Her book *Rewriting The Footnotes - Berlin and The African Diaspora* proved conclusively that Africans have been living in Berlin since the mid-1880s and provides information on the traces of the African Diaspora, people from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and the United States who lived in Berlin and have left their imprint on the history of the city including internationally renowned personalities, artists, musicians, and scientists.
Paul Robeson

Born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1896, Robeson was a dramatic actor and baritone soloist. An All-American, he received a law degree from Columbia University, but achieved international fame as a singer and actor. His portrayal of Othello in London has been considered the high point in English Shakespearean theatre in the 20th century. After World War II Robeson was honored by the German Democratic Republic for his efforts to promote world peace. His efforts to end Apartheid in South Africa were posthumously rewarded by the United Nations General Assembly.
Mary Church Terrell

Daughter of former enslaved people, Mary Church Terrell was one of the first African-American women to earn a college degree. Terrell majored in classics at Oberlin College, where she was the only African-American woman among mostly white male students. The freshman class nominated her as class poet, and she was elected to two of the college’s literary societies. She earned her bachelor's degree in 1884 and master’s degree in 1888. In 1904 Terrell was invited to speak at the International Congress of Women, held in Berlin, Germany. She was the only black woman at the conference. Terrell received an enthusiastic ovation when she honored the host nation by delivering her address in German. Terrell was one of two black woman invited to attend the first organizational meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where she became a founding member.
Gary Wiggins

Jazz saxophonist Gary Wiggins from Detroit has lived in Berlin for over 30 years. He has performed in countless music festivals, jazz and blues clubs, many private events, television, cinematic film, and theater. In 2001 he was awarded the prestigious Berlin Jazz and Blues Award. Gary is on the advisory board of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy as well as program director of music as cultural diplomacy, bandleader and member of The Very Soulful Tenors Show.
Richard Robert Wright, Jr. (1878-1967), outstanding bishop of the AME Church and scholar. His father, Richard Robert Wright, Sr. (1853-1947), was born in slavery but after Emancipation obtained an education and was a successful banker and college president. The younger Wright earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree from the University of Chicago in 1901. In 1903-04 he studied Theology at the Universities of Berlin and Leipzig and returned to the US to pursue graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School, earning a Ph.D. in 1911 for his dissertation *The Negro in Pennsylvania, An Economic History.*