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The Future of the Distant Past: On Teaching the Pre-modern History of Africans in Europe

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Kristin Kopp

As recently reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the declining demand for German language courses has led to a renewed sense of crisis in the field of German Studies. Universities continue to cut back on foreign language requirements, reducing the number of students enrolling in language courses across the board; and, of those aspiring to learn a foreign language, interest has shifted to the previously underrepresented Arabic, Chinese, and Korean. As a result, over 280 institutions have cut their German language programs since 1990, and many in our field fear that they will be next (Berrett).

Assuming our field is worth saving, we must find ways to reach a broader audience for our programs. At the University of Missouri, we are fortunate to serve a population of students continuing to enter college with a motivation to learn German, largely due to their personal family ties. Missouri was the second most popular destination for German immigrants in the nineteenth century (after Texas), and a significant percentage of our students can trace their families' histories to the waves of German immigrants who have settled in our state. Our enrollments therefore remain strong, yet we are nonetheless looking to diversify our student base. There are two main reasons for our concern. First, if we rely on German heritage students to fill our classes, then we will see our enrollment figures drop along with shifting demographics. But second, and I would argue more important, if our field is not relevant for the wider student body, then it will ultimately lose validity in the public sphere.

These concerns resonate more urgently when contextualized within recent events in my state. With the uprising in Ferguson and student protests at its flagship university in 2015, Missouri is currently at the epicenter of what many see as the next wave of civil rights activism in the US. These events are directly impacting pedagogy and politics on our campus at the University of Missouri. While the Black Lives Matter networking platform had originated in 2013 in response to events that took place in Florida (where George Zimmerman was acquitted of charges in the shooting and killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin) the movement really coalesced over the course of the uprising in Ferguson over the death of Michael Brown, who was shot and killed by a St. Louis police officer on August 9, 2014. The result was (and continues to be) a nationwide series of protests against state violence against Black people. Police shootings have been a major focus of this activism, but the movement also draws attention to the myriad ways in which Blacks are the victims of institutional racism in the prison, law enforcement, and educational systems (blacklivesmatter).

It was therefore a logical progression for the energy of the Ferguson protests to reach Columbia, where it inspired students to address the serious inequities they face on campus. *Concerned Student 1950*—a group naming itself after the year the first Black

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student was admitted to the University of Missouri—launched a series of protests against racism suffered at Mizzou (aka the University of Missouri), which famously resulted in the resignation of the university's president (ConcernedStudent1950). I'm inspired by these students' activism, and proud that they were honored with an NAACP Chairman's Award at the 2016 Image Awards and that they were invited to join President Obama at the White House for a meeting of activist leaders (Keller; Pengelly).

As a direct response to these events, concerned faculty and staff have organized as the Black Collective and Allies (BCA) to draw attention to, and constructively address, the very legitimate concerns our students raise. The fact is, statistics reveal a dramatically unequal distribution of success across our campus. Black students are underrepresented with respect to state demographic distributions, and the university has proven unable to recruit and retain Black professors and other faculty of color. But perhaps the most shocking statistic involves undergraduate graduation rates: while the six-year graduation rate for white students is 72%, it is only 54% for African Americans (Forbes). A wide variety of factors play into this appalling statistic, but the racism that students encounter on campus ranks among them. Research has shown that social trust is essential for academic performance: students must know that they are being held to high standards, and that their instructors expect them to succeed. Where students instead perceive negative pre-judgment based upon their racial identities, their academic performance sinks precipitously.¹ What and how we teach matters.

In his book *How Universities Work*, career administrator John Lombardi argues that unlike research, teaching rests on talents found widely among academics (56). When almost half of a subset of students is leaving a university without a degree, perhaps it's time to challenge this untested assumption.

The members of the BCA are invested in improving the academic experience of Black students on our campus. For the members of our German and Russian Studies Department, the first step must be to attract these students to our programs, which means that we need to reassess the content and focus of our curriculum.

The Cultural History of Africans and People of African Descent in the German-Speaking Lands from Antiquity to the Present ("The History of Blacks in Germany," for short) is a course that was designed with just such concerns in mind. I worked together with the historian, Jeff Bowersox, to assemble and pilot the first iteration of the syllabus, and we are now teaching and further developing the course with Kira Thurman, a historian at the University of Michigan. For all three of us, "The History of Blacks in Germany" has served as a way to reach out to students of color on campus and desegregate our classrooms.² The course was first launched in 2012, but, given its success and its ability to meet the needs of our campus community, my department has worked to accommodate *The History of Blacks in Germany* on an annual basis beginning with this past spring 2016 semester.

¹ [F]or the greatest portion of black students—those with strong academic identities—the degree of racial trust they feel in their campus life, rather than a few ticks on a standardized test, may be the key to their success (Steele 54).

² With the goal of encouraging faculty in German, Black Studies, and other fields to incorporate into their course offerings the history of the Black diaspora in Europe, we have partnered with an international team of scholars and artists working in Black German studies to form the Black Central European Studies Network (BCESN), which is currently working to assemble resources for research and pedagogical use in an online platform to be launched in the summer of 2016: <https://blackcentraleurope.com>

I currently have seventeen students in my class, one half of whom are African, African American, or other students of color. Representing a range of majors from across the university, including STEM fields, journalism, music, psychology, and history, in addition to German and Black studies, the students have brought an extremely diverse array of personal and academic experiences to the table. But they also bring with them a calcified conceptual framework through which they have come to understand how race works in our society. There is much that they will need to unlearn in order to move forward.

Our course is able to displace and thus defamiliarize the US discourse on race because the history of Black people in Germany is radically different than the analogous American case, both temporally and spatially. The history extends back to the ancient period, displacing the temporal frame established by the narrative of slavery; and the contemporary population is so heterogeneously dispersed across German space that skin color is delinked from a shared cultural identity separate from being German. The history thus breaks with the main framing structures of time and space through which we have come to understand Blackness in the US. To a large extent, the field of Black Studies (as practiced both in the US and in German departments of American Studies) adheres to a set of spatio-temporal conventions that the European history successfully challenges.

In grappling with these differences, students often find themselves bringing the discussion back to the US context in order to draw useful comparisons and contrasts. But now they are discussing race in new ways, using new language and new ideas. Most exciting is the way this language allows them to discuss difficult issues across the racial divide, and to occasionally even recognize that they are doing so.

The *History of Blacks in Germany* course thus allows me to address the issues at stake for students on my campus by productively complicating the conventions of Black Studies. In her recent study, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, Michelle Wright describes and challenges the narrative of “Blackness” that informs much of the work in the field. The “Middle Passage epistemology” from her title refers to the way the history of African Americans is framed, and thus known and understood:

Most discourses on Blackness in the United States and the Caribbean locate themselves in the history of the Middle Passage, linking our cultural practices and expressions, our politics and social sensibilities, to the historical experience of slavery in the Americas and the struggle to achieve full human suffrage in the West. (7)

If a history of enslavement—and the ensuing struggles for abolition and civil rights—is that which unites the heterogeneous population of African Americans into a shared identity of Blackness, then the fact that the origin of this history is located in the movement of enslaved Africans over the Atlantic is of consequence. The narrative, so framed, has proven useful in positing a shared Blackness able to serve as a unifying political and cultural force, but at a certain expense. Because the Middle Passage narrative excludes Africans who have voluntarily migrated to the US in recent decades, it unwittingly creates harmful social divisions such as those existing between Africans and African Americans on my campus, hindering solidarity in action. Even more harmful, “the Middle Passage epistemology begins with white actions and Black reactions,” and therefore produces a Black collective identity that is not only predicated on white agency;

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it is a specifically malevolent white agency that brings the fact of Blackness into being. As a result, even within a progress narrative the question of a nonreactive agency arises: at what point can African Americans define themselves outside of white anti-Black racism...? (Wright 87)

An essentialized victim status, in other words, becomes written into Black identity in an indelible way. My students recognize this and express a deep sense of exhaustion at the inability to position themselves outside of this conceptual frame. The message, as they see it, is that struggle is noble and courageous, but that no amount of struggle can displace the logic of white racist agency and the Black anti-racist resistance within which they are located. For the students, racism has become a universal truth, and they see its inevitability reinscribed with every additional depiction of Black victimization. “I saw the word “slavery” in the title [of an assigned article], and it just made me so *tired*,” said a student not in protest, but in distress—indeed his whole body language radiated a sense of beleaguered depletion.

In our last revision of *The History of Blacks* in Germany, we took this set of reactions into account, and responded by adjusting our course content with the intention of destabilizing the Middle Passage epistemology. To a large extent, this has meant expanding the amount of time we spend on the pre-modern period—the period before European colonization, and before the Middle Passage. Disrupting this point of origin in our history of the global Black diaspora allows us to present moments of autonomous Black agency.

When we arrive at the modern period, we don’t avoid discussions of Black victimization (in the context of, for example, German colonial practices or life under the National Socialist regime), but this doesn’t hinder us from focusing on positive trajectories of Black agency in German space, in other words, on the histories of Africans and African Americans who chose to travel or reside in Germany as a way to live their own dreams of adventure, education, development, and discovery.³

In addition to the course content, the pedagogical structure and assignments of the course also serve to position the students themselves as active agents within an international frame. Currently, our students are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Columbia, Missouri; and London, England. To amplify course discussions on race and to position our students as transnational agents, we have divided them into small, cross-campus working groups and assigned them specific questions to discuss with their peers. The students meet using online conferencing software (e.g. Skype), and report back to us with written assessments of their conversations. In most cases, the groups include (only) one representative from each campus, so that each student must shift his or her identity from class participant to class/regional/national spokesperson. The results of this assignment have been powerful, and we will be including this exercise in all future courses.

³ A version of the syllabus can be found online: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/discussions/68644/ann-2015-syllabus-contest-results>

Vectors into Europe: Altering the Mental Map of the World

The course starts with units on the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods, the main purpose of which is to de-familiarize and destabilize certain naturalized conventions upon which our contemporary worldview seems to rest.⁴ I want the students to come to recognize the constructedness of experienced reality, to recognize some of the mechanisms by which these constructions are maintained, and to learn to challenge those that stand in the way of their progress. We begin with a challenge to our students' mental map of the world. This isn't so much a question of how many countries they would be able to correctly identify on a map, but instead the way that they divide the world into meaningful units, the ways in which they imbue these units with historical identities and meanings, and the relationships they envision between these units as represented by various kinds of links and flows. Hegemonic notions of history have created a subconscious, unchallenged mental map of the world in which all leadership, change, and progress arises out of European (including—or superseded by—North American) space and spreads from these origins into non-European space. Europeans are positioned as the agents of action, and Africans either the victims or the beneficiaries of European undertakings. The resulting mental map of world historical development might be represented by a flood of arrows originating out of a white European center and directed outward into non-European space. These arrows represent movement, territorial expansion, colonization, and imperial desire, but they also represent assumptions about the origin of civilization and its spread across the globe. Each arrow represents a technological, economic, governmental, or militaristic advancement carried off into non-European (or non-US-American) space by as many human vectors.

For example, where “Africa” appears on one's mental map as a space wrecked by drought and hunger (television fundraising campaigns being notoriously vague about the specificities of time and space as they homogenize the African continent into the image of suffering children), Europe and North America appear as the spaces in which aid arises and from which it is sent to Africa. The arrows on this mental map move in one direction—towards Africa—such that Europeans and North Americans initiate the flow, and Africans receive it. Superimposed upon a countless set of analogous diagrams of diffusion from the European center, an underlying conceptual diagram emerges, an ahistorical framework that structures expectations and the processing of new information.⁵

It is therefore quite difficult for students to imagine a set of arrows traveling in the opposite direction, and, at first, those that do inevitably represent negative flows—of refugees perhaps, or of Ebola—that must be contained, or staved off. This mental map has devastating consequences because it literally *displaces* any thought of autonomous African agency. The idea of a Cameroonian NGO sending young volunteers as development aids into American inner-city schools bristles with impossibility—because aid only ever flows in one direction on our mental map. Given the way our thought is structured, would we even be able to recognize a positive flow in the “wrong” direction?

⁴ The course won H-Net's 2015 syllabus contest in two of three categories: best overall new seminar, and best course addressing the pre-1789 period.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/discussions/68644/ann-2015-syllabus-contest-results>

⁵ cf. Blaut.

To challenge this mental map, we first show students that Europeans and Africans have not always seen their continents in division.⁶ [Herodotus' model of the world](#) (c. 450 BC) was centered around the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian Seas, and linked the shore-lands of Europe, Asia, and Africa. At a time when travel by water was easier and faster than travel over land, southern Europeans were in closer contact with northern Africans than they were with Europeans in the space of the continental interior. Similarly, the great ancient empires (Roman, Carthaginian, and Byzantine) often expanded their reach across the Mediterranean to include lands on both the European and the African continents. Our conceptual division of the world into distinct continents populated by distinct populations is therefore new.

The borders of the ancient empires shifted greatly over time. Europeans were sometimes the conquerors of African space, but they were also sometimes the vanquished, conquered by invading African armies. Individuals and groups of people moved over these lands in all directions during this period of contact and interconnectivity. We therefore see Roman emperors who were African (Septimus Severus and his sons, Geta and Caracalla; Marcus Opellius Macrinus; and Marcus Aemilius Aemilianus), Roman playwrights who were African (Terentius Afer), Christian theologians who were African (St. Augustine), and popes who were African (Victor I, Miltiades, and Gelasius I).

The history of the ancient period introduces a set of arrows traveling in the opposite direction, originating in Africa and extending into Europe. Given a narrative of global history in which Africans figure largely as powerless victims of the slave trade, and never as the active agents of movement and change, this reverse trajectory is disruptive, and in some of my students' cases, even experienced as a traumatic rupture. Their language revealed how difficult it was to dislodge the hegemonic mental map and its dictates. "It's amazing to me that the Europeans allowed Africans to hold power over them," commented one student in our discussion of the Roman emperors. We had to discuss at length all of the assumptions that went in to her use of the word "allowed"—the power relations it assumed, and why it was that she assumed them. We were tracing new pathways, drawing each new arrow individually, painstakingly, against the grain as a singularity, an exception. Gradually, however, a new mental map emerged, one with a different set of spatial-temporal relationships inscribed upon it. When we arrived in the modern era, and began addressing the movement of Black Americans into European—and specifically German-speaking—space, Black students were able to see themselves linked to a set of global flows established outside of the Middle Passage frame.

Skin Color vs. Race

After challenging students to question their global mental maps, our attention turns to the organizing structure of "racism." Typically, students in the class arrive with a certain degree of anti-racist training; they're familiar with the argument that race doesn't really exist, and are able to discuss the role stereotypes play in society. What they are lacking, however, is a historicized understanding of racism itself. In other words, their understanding of "fighting racism" is to challenge the negative set of stereotypes defining

⁶ cf. Lewis and Wigen.

relationships between blacks and whites in society, but they can't envision a situation in which race won't continue to organize identity and the relationships between individuals and groups of people. Teaching the pre-modern period allows us to unseat this notion of racism as timeless and inevitable.

In the pre-modern period, social rank was the operative category marking difference, and skin color was often treated as only negligibly important. Although, for example, the deeds of many of the African popes and emperors were carefully chronicled (the laws they passed, the journeys they took, etc.), in many cases, so little information is given about their appearance as to allow for dispute over whether they would be categorized as "black" or "white" were they alive today. Skin color as a marker of identity is *our* obsession, not that of the pre-moderns, who didn't always find it relevant in their descriptions of the notables. The idea that social rank could so overshadow race is difficult for students to process, as they struggle to envision this world in which race played such a negligible role.

The first book of Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval romance *Parzival* (c. 1200) provides an excellent starting point for our dislodging of racial frameworks. In this opening section, we read of the early life of Parzival's father, Gahmuret, prior to the birth of the eponymous hero. As the second son of a landowning lord, and thus not a direct heir to the family's lands upon his father's death, Gahmuret sets off to seek his fortune as a knight. He is determined to only ever fight in the name of the most powerful leader in the world, and thus heads to Baghdad to offer his services to the Caliph. When we meet him next, Gahmuret has traveled throughout the known world—to "Morocco...Persia...Damascus...Aleppo... Arabia...Alexandria"—and has landed in the kingdom of Zazamanc, whose queen, Belacane, is at war (8-9). Gahmuret offers her his knightly services in battle, wins the war, and takes the queen for his wife. But shortly thereafter—Belacane is pregnant with their first child—Gahmuret abandons her, and resumes his life of knighthood.

This first section of *Parzival* is fascinating because this fictional kingdom of Zazamanc is inhabited by a dark-skinned population. The narrator refers often to the black hue of Queen Belacane and her people, and the students' task is to determine the meaning this blackness holds in the text: does it, for example, help explain why Gahmuret leaves his wife? In the letter of departure he has left for Belacane, Gahmuret claims that it is their difference in religion that has forced him to leave, but we have much evidence indicating that this is only an alibi. Gahmuret has never asked his wife to convert to Christianity, nor has religion played a role in his sense of knightly honor—after all, even in a text written during the time of the Christian Crusades, Gahmuret has had no problem serving the Muslim Caliph. So, perhaps it is Belacane's blackness that causes him to leave? A close reading reveals that this also can't be the case, because Gahmuret never expresses anything but love for his wife and attraction to her beauty. Her blackness, and that of the members of her court, is marked as a *difference*, but this difference is not marked as a problem, obstacle, or detriment of any kind.⁷

⁷ "The descriptor black, however, is chiefly informative, rarely evaluative; there is hardly any direct connection made between the Africans' color and their religion, nor does their blackness signify any kind of moral weakness or depravity. Indeed we hear that the Queen of Zazamanc is sweet and constant well before Wolfram announces that she and her people are 'dark as night, ...black as ravens.' Gahmuret also sees her skin color, noticing that her darkness is not comparable to a 'dewy rose.' But the simile is not

Nor does this blackness correlate with any hierarchies of difference. Zazamanc is ostensibly located in Africa, given the skin color of its inhabitants (and blackness may thus carry the meaning of geographical distance, functioning here to indicate the vast reach of Gahmuret's travels), but it is coded as *culturally the same* as Europe. Gahmuret has no difficulty in communicating with the people of Zazamanc, and no difficulties understanding what has taken place when the story behind Belacane's war is revealed: The knight Isenhart had dedicated himself to serving the queen and winning her love. When she continued to withhold her favor, he undertook ever more dangerous acts of courage, ultimately fighting without armor, and losing his life. Despite his curiously German-sounding name, Isenhart is described as being of the same black color as Belacane, an identity made more curious by the fact that his first cousin ("Isenhart's uncle's son") is Fridebrand, the king of Scotland, who has arrived from across the seas to avenge his relative (12). We don't ever learn who the parents in question are, and the "inter-racial" marriage garners no further attention.

In Zazamanc, all of the conventions of European courtly culture are maintained: as in other medieval texts, beautiful women sit in the windows of the castle watching the men battle below and admiring the manly victors; lives are spared on the battlefield as oaths of peaceful surrender are secured; the code of chivalric honor leads the vanquished knights to appeal to the queen to grant them freedom in return for payments of riches and promises to cause her no further pain; and the queen takes the victorious Gahmuret into her private chambers where she personally removes his armor, and bestows that favor upon him that a knight in his situation might expect.

Culturally, then, we have not left the realm of the European court, and this African kingdom only functions to extend the periphery of the world as we know it. Differences in religion and skin color have been introduced, but neither has affected the culture or behavior of the people of Zazamanc. "Race" may correlate with religious difference (as "Moor" correlated with Islam during the age of the Crusades), but not with any differences in morality, honor, or love. Religion merely provides Gahmuret with a convenient excuse to leave Zazamanc, which, as a close reading of the text reveals, he does only because he is bored with his new domestic life and longs to return to the glory of the battlefield.

The Arbitrariness of Color

St. Maurice offers a different approach to the meaning ascribed to skin color in the pre-modern period. An Egyptian leader in the Roman Theban Legion, Maurice was ostensibly martyred in Europe for refusing to renounce his Christian faith. The most interesting aspect of this story is the fact that Maurice was martyred in territory that now belongs to Switzerland in the year 287—prior to the Christianization of this region. The story of St. Maurice is thus one of an African who traveled deep into European space and who was a Christian a century before the Roman Empire adopted the religion. Particularly for my students, a large percentage of whom identify as practicing Christians,

paired with a contradictory but or despite (except in critics' interpretations). Instead Gahmuret simply goes on to acknowledge that the black queen is a model of womanliness and nobility" (Prager 5).

Maurice represents a vector of progress originating in Africa and traversing vast stretches of territory bringing his faith (and his martyrdom) deep into the heart of Europe.

Various inconsistencies in the record have led historians to challenge the veracity of Maurice's story, leaving scholars now debating whether this event ever actually took place; and if it did, whether it would have involved a few individuals or the entire legion of thousands of men, whether it would have taken place in what is now Saint-Maurice, Switzerland or elsewhere in the region, and, if everything else were true, what Maurice would have actually looked like, phenotypically speaking, for, as we now might expect, the written record does not indicate Maurice's "race" (Woods). Egypt at the time was home to several different populations and religious groups, and, while the name Maurice (or Mauritius) indicates an African origin, it does not necessarily suggest dark skin.

Given this uncertainty, it is interesting to follow the depiction of St. Maurice in the visual arts, because it shifts from white to black over the centuries, and over the space of the continent. While European artists traditionally depicted St. Maurice with light-colored skin, there are certain contexts in which they chose instead to render him as a black African. The cathedral in Magdeburg, Germany—the Cathedral of Saints Catherine and Maurice—houses what is perhaps the most famous of these depictions of the saint. Dating from roughly 1240, the sandstone statue of St. Maurice presents a dignified and proud knight with features clearly of sub-Saharan origin. He appears so realistic in this regard that art historians think the sculptor likely based his statue on a sitting model (Devisse 150).

About a century later, and culminating in the 1500s, images of a black St. Maurice proliferated in altarpieces and other ecclesiastic art. But these depictions are almost exclusively found in the German-speaking region surrounding the cities of Magdeburg and Halle, and a set of shared features further unites them. Maurice is presented in full armor, and stands erect holding a sword in his left hand and a banner in his right. The banner displays either the red and white colors of the Theban legion, or the coat of arms of the Holy Roman Empire, and it is fastened onto a spear that is understood to be the spear with which Jesus was pierced during crucifixion. Renditions that deviate from this iconic norm may present Maurice in different postures, but they maintain the ornate armor and sword marking his status as knight. Elsewhere in Europe, meanwhile, the iconography is markedly different. In place of the proud knight standing erect, we often encounter a kneeling, dis-armed soldier about to meet his death. In Luini Bernardino's painting "The Martyrdom of St. Maurice" from the 1510s, Maurice is depicted in this manner—and as a white man with blond hair—in stark contrast to the German version.

The students are initially concerned with the question of the historical "truth" of Maurice's appearance, tending to see in the blond St. Maurice a desire to "white-wash" history (in line with contemporary portrayals of Jesus as a blue-eyed blond). So the saint must first serve as an object lesson in the limitations of what history can accurately prove: those who have closely examined the record have been unable to answer the question of Maurice's "race" with any certitude. And so we recognize that artists were faced with a real choice in how to depict the saint. What would have motivated Germans to deviate from the initial convention of depicting Maurice as white? To a certain extent, once the students are able to pose this question, the purpose of the lesson has been achieved, because they've made the connection between an initially arbitrary (and thus

absent) racial designation and subsequent decisions to “racialize” St. Maurice in order to stake a set of claims contemporary to the artist and unrelated to the martyrology.

One set of explanations offered by scholars mirrors the understanding of the function of the black kingdom of Zazamanc in *Parzival*: The blackness of St. Maurice supports the idealized vision of a universal Catholic church expanded to encompass the world in its known entirety. In the 1200s, this would have reflected Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich II’s global ambitions for the empire, and in the Counter-Reformation of the 1500s, of the continued claim to a universal Catholic church (Grimm).

The History of Blacks in Germany does eventually have to bid the pre-modern period farewell, but as we pass through the Enlightenment’s gateway to the modern, students take with them a new set of critical tools, and a new narrative of the Black diaspora—one that doesn’t seek to replace the narrative as framed by the Middle Passage, but instead to offer an alternative diagram of Blackness. The course proceeds chronologically through the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries to ultimately arrive at a unit on Germany in the present, which investigates the Afro-German reception of this year’s events in Missouri. The ISD (Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland) has held a series of demonstrations in solidarity with Ferguson under the banner of “Ferguson is everywhere,”⁸ and most major German newspapers covered the University of Missouri protests. The students in my class thus get to see themselves as directly linked to a set of transnational flows. Their agency matters, and there is a global community waiting to engage with them. There is, in other words, an alternative conceptual framework of Blackness that exists alongside the framework posited by the Middle Passage epistemology; students are presented with a fluid set of choices, and may choose, in some instances, to position themselves within a global frame of autonomous Black agency.

⁸ <http://isdonline.de/fergusoniseverywhere-aufruf-zur-teilnahme-an-der-fotokampagne/>

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