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III. Research Reports

A. Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb

Project: "German-Speaking Refugee Scholars of the Thirties in Historically Black Colleges"

The project "German-Speaking Refugee Scholars of the Thirties in Historically Black Colleges" captures a singular instance of cross-cultural interaction in immigrant and minority history. Approximately fifty German-speaking scholars who taught at eighteen historically black institutions after their emigration from Central Europe have been identified (see appendix). This encounter has gone unnoticed in the copious literature on emigration. Its significance lies in the very varied ways in which the Europeans, as well as the Americans involved, were affected. It must be remembered that the encounter between refugee scholars and black institutions was played out with the background of the Depression and anti-semitic and racial prejudice. In addition, virtually no one expected the Nazi regime to stay in power, and thus the refugees were considered temporary visitors.

Progress of Project

My project on the refugee scholars at historically black colleges was initially backed by the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Symposia and Seminars (now The Office of Interdisciplinary Studies), with Director Dr. Wilton Dillon's steadfast support, in 1984. In this phase of the work, Ms. Carla Borden, associate director of the Office and editor of the book *The Muses Flee Hitler*, was my co-investigator. Backing was given to explore the extent to which émigré scholars found positions in historically black colleges after 1933. We found sufficient numbers of both individuals and institutions in our category to warrant further study. After the Smithsonian's active involvement ceased, the Anson Phelps Stokes Institute appointed me Resident Scholar to continue my research. I proceeded with the work: collecting documentation and doing interviews with a few surviving refugee scholars, their one-time students, family members and friends.

The German Historical Institute supported my work from May to December, 1988. My first priority was to complete the research; that is, to gather

all the documentary material available from the colleges identified, and to trace surviving scholars for possible interviews. At this time, the identification and documentation of individuals and institutions is practically complete. I would be surprised to discover any more refugee scholars who taught at historically black colleges.

In addition to documentary materials, I have assembled a collection of some twenty audio-taped interviews with individuals involved with the encounter between refugee scholars and black institutions. These collections have been forwarded to the following institutions: The Amistad Research Center (New Orleans), The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (Washington, D.C.), The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York City), and The Smithsonian Archives (Washington, D.C.).

In May, 1988, I travelled to Houston, Texas to interview one of the most significant people in this study, Professor John Biggers, a major painter who studied with Viktor Lowenfeld, from Vienna, at Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). Biggers transferred his studies from plumbing to the fine arts because of his contact with Lowenfeld, who transformed Hampton's Industrial Arts Department into an Art Department.

In November, 1988, I spent two days at the Rockefeller Archive Center in Pocantico Hills, New York, where I found a treasure trove of archival materials of interest to all researchers of the emigration from Nazi Germany. I hope to return to the Rockefeller Archives for a week's stay to explore their collections further. In November I also spoke on my subject at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York City.

Research Results

The research work has been extremely slow and time consuming. Many colleges lack the necessary records, and few have archivists or other personnel for such research. In one instance, I had been given the names of several faculty members who turned out not to have been refugees at all. This, after many letters, telephone calls and more than three years! For some individuals, however, I have copious material from a large variety of sources. In other cases, there are only the recollections of a single individual on hand. Thus the documentation remains very uneven. At this time there are few loose ends left to research. As in much historical work, however, there are many paths one could pursue. The completion of the investigation must also be determined by extraneous factors, such

as the fact that few principals are still alive, and the scarcity and difficulty of obtaining records.

One of the central questions I attempted to answer was how the refugee scholars came to find faculty positions in the black colleges. The evidence points to several ways. An identical letter was sent to at least seven of these institutions by the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Scholars, suggesting these placements; this letter was sent as late as 1941, several years after a number of scholars had begun their tenures. There was word of mouth, of course, and other informal referrals. I have not succeeded in identifying a central source of these placements. Perhaps there was none, or the sources can not be documented because the refugees were placed as a result of oral communications. I shall continue to be on the lookout for the answer to this question.

On the whole, the encounter between refugee scholars and members of the black institutions proved of considerable value to both sides—the Americans were exposed, for the first time, to a more cosmopolitan approach to education, as opposed to the more compartmentalized methods in the United States. The newcomers, on the other hand, found themselves in a part of the country segregated and oppressed, socially and economically, so that their new lives had to be experienced in a doubly alien environment. Their reception was cordial, and while only a minority of the émigrés remained in the black colleges for many years, nearly all of the émigrés had a positive impact on students, and, not infrequently, on colleagues and others on the campus as well. Without exception the knowledge of their new country was immeasurably enriched by their experiences at the black institutions despite, or perhaps because of, the poor conditions they sometimes encountered.

Future Plans

The D.C. Community Humanities Council is funding a panel discussion on the topic of German-speaking refugee scholars at historically black institutions at Howard University on April 11, 1989. Participating scholars include myself, Russell L. Adams (Afro-American Studies Department, Howard University), Hartmut Lehmann (German Historical Institute), and Max Ticktin (Judaic Studies Department, George Washington University).

On April 21 I shall participate in a panel at the National Conference on Blacks in Higher Education, organized by the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education.

Appendix

The following list contains the names of German-speaking refugee scholars who taught at historically black institutions following their emigration to the United States after 1933. The list is organized by the institutions at which the refugee scholars taught. I ask that the names of any refugee scholars missing from my list be brought to my attention. If you have any information, please contact:

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List of German-speaking refugee scholars who taught at historically black institutions:

Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA:

Ossip Flechtheim: History, Political Science; 1940–1943
Hilda Weiss: German, Social Science; 1941–1943

Bennet College, Greensboro, NC:

Beate Berwin: German, Geography, Philosophy; 1942–1950

Coppin State College, Baltimore, MD:

Eric Fischer: Geography; 1965–1969

Dillard University, New Orleans, LA:

Georg Iggers: History; 1957–1963
Wilma Iggers: French, German; 1957–1963

Fisk University, Nashville, TN:

Werner Cahnmann: Sociology; 1943–1945
Elsbeth Einstein Treitel: German; 1943–1946
Otto Treitel: Mathematics, Physics; 1943–1946

Hampton Institute (now University), Hampton, VA:

Margaret Altman: Animal Husbandry, Genetics, Biology; 1941–1956
Peter Kahn: Art; 1953–1957
Karla Longree: Home Economics; 1941–1950
Ernst Lothar: Art; 1948–1950
Marianne Lothar: German; 1948–1950
Viktor Lowenfeld: Art; 1939–1946
Hans Mahler: Music; 1941–1943
Fritz Neumann: History; 1946–1947
Anna Stein: Mathematics; 1942–1944

Howard University, Washington, D.C.:

Ernest L. Abrahamson: Romance Languages, Latin; 1939–1941
Kurt Braun: Economics; 1943–1969
Johann Caspari: German; 1946–1953
Karl Darmstadter: German Language and Literature, Russian; 1945–1965
John Hertz: Political Science; 1941–1943, 1948–1952
Gerhard Ladner: Art History; 1951–1952
Julius Ernst Lips: Anthropology; 1937–1939
Erna Magnus: Social Work; 1947–1966
Otto Nathan: Economics; 1946–1952
Franz Julius Rapp: Art History; 1945–1951
Hugo B. Schiff: Jewish Literature and Cultural History; 1943–1950
Wolfgang Seiferth: German, Russian; 1937–1968
Erika Thimey: Dance; 1944–1955

Knoxville College, Knoxville, TN:

Gerard M. Mertens: Chemistry, Romance Languages; 1957–1962

LeMoyne-Owen College, Memphis, TN:

Boris Alexander: Political Science, Economics; 1934–1939

Lincoln University, Lincoln, PA:

Walter Fales (Feilchenfeld): Philosophy; 1946–1953

Josef Herbert Furth: Economics, Sociology; 1939–1944

Simon Green (Gruenzweig): Mathematics; 1948–1950

North Central University, Durham, NC:

Adolf Furth: Chemistry; 1952–1962

Christa Furth: German; 1961–1962

Ernst Manasse: German, Latin, Philosophy; 1939–1973

Marianne Manasse: German; 1948–1949, 1956–1972

Hilda Weiss: Social Studies; 1940–1941

Paine College, Augusta, GA:

Simon D. Messing: Anthropology; 1956–1958

Philander Smith College, Little Rock, AR:

Simon Green (Gruenzweig): Mathematics; dates unknown

Georg Iggers: History; 1950–1956

Wilma Iggers: French, German; 1950–1956

Spelman College, Atlanta, GA:

Hilda Weiss: Social Studies; 1941–1943

Saint Augustine College, Raleigh, NC:

Adolf Furth: Chemistry; dates unknown

Christa Furth: German; dates unknown

Talladega College, Talladega, AL:

Gustav Ichheiser: Social Psychology, Economics; 1944–1948

Herman Kranold: Economics; 1936–1943

Gerard M. Mertens: Chemistry; 1952–1953

Fritz Pappenheim: German, Economics; 1944–1952

Lore May Rasmussen: Elementary Education; 1949–1955

Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, MS:

Ernst Borinski: Sociology; 1947–1983

West Virginia State College, Institute, WV:

Frederick Lehner: French, German; 1939–1961

Xavier University, New Orleans, LA:

Katherine Radke: Social Service (Director, School of); 1935–1938

Wolfgang Johann Weilgarth: German; 1945–1949

Erwin Wexberg: Social Psychiatry; 1936–1940