

American or Black? African-American GIs in West Germany in the Postwar Period (1950s)

Abstract

This photograph from 1952 shows five uniformed African-American soldiers socializing at the restaurant “Zum goldenen Löwen” in Berlin’s Lichterfelde neighborhood. The restaurant was just a short walk from the Andrews Barracks on Finckensteinalle, where many American troops were stationed. For many Black GIs, perhaps even those pictured in the photograph, Germany “was a breath of freedom.” This was impression of Colin Powell, the Black American general who served as National Security Advisor under President Ronald Reagan and later as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the First Gulf War (“Desert Storm”). The son of Jamaican immigrants to the U.S., Powell had begun his career as an officer in 1958 in West Germany, where he observed that Black GIs, especially those from the South, were able to live more freely than they could back at home. As he explained in *American Journey*, his 1995 autobiography, “They could go where they wanted, eat where they wanted, and date whom they wanted, just like other people.” During this time in Germany, Powell seems to have experienced a heightened sense of both his Americanness and his Blackness, though not always in negative ways. That all of this played out against the backdrop of the Cold War adds another level of complexity—American troops were at once an occupying power and the first line of defense in any potential confrontation with the Soviet Union. The German people were “friendly,” he noted, “since we were all that stood between them and the Red hordes.”

Source



Source: Private postcard, Collection Aitken. From the *Black Central Europe* website, <https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1945-1989/5-soldiers-relaxing-in-berlin-1952/>

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