

Newspaper Article about Children of African-American Members of the Allied Forces (1951)

Abstract

From 1945 to 1955, tens of thousands of occupation children were born in West Germany. They were the children of German women and foreign occupation soldiers and were usually born out of wedlock. In several thousand cases, the father was an African-American GI, which meant that the child's parentage was immediately evident. This 1951 newspaper article from Bamberg (Bavaria) describes the "little Negroes" living there. While the children were still young, society perceived them as "cute," but as they matured, they ran the risk of unpleasant confrontations with German social prejudices.

Source

Three Little Young Negroes . . .

There are 42 colored children in the city of Bamberg and its environs.

Three little Negroes – there they sit, on the bench in the kindergarten. They are called Karl-Heinz or Gisela or Monika, and when they open their little mouths, they babble in the purest Bamberg dialect. Their black eyes still look out into the world without mistrust. They have no inkling yet of the difficulties and the suffering they are unlikely to escape. But next year already, life will begin in earnest for these children – and not in the joking way that is often meant, but in all seriousness. The oldest – born in 1946 – will enter school next year. Up until this point, they have grown up under the care of their own mothers, foster parents, or home sisters, but now it will be up to teachers to prevent these unknowing children from paying for things that some see as the unforgivable faults of their parents, and it will be their job, above all, to tolerate no mockery or cruelty from the children's fellow students.

A total of 42 colored children live in the city and surrounding district of Bamberg. Most live at home with their mothers, who – according to the experiences of the city's youth welfare office and social workers – are attached to their children with the same love as any other mother, and who would never give them up. This is evidenced by the fact that of these 42 children, only 6 are with foster parents – in most case, relatives of the mother, people who have taken the children into their hearts – and 7 in are children's homes. One child was adopted by a colored American family that is currently residing in Bamberg.

The home children, however, are for the most part little human beings who have been abandoned by mother and father, and who have no one to look after them. We know, for example, of a case in which a mother sold her "little Negro" to a traveling showman. The office of youth welfare intervenes in such instances of extreme inhumanity; 21 children are under the guardianship of the authorities. The social workers in those districts where colored children are growing up have a lot of stories to tell: twins with coffee-brown faces dressed in a Seppl outfit and a dirndl; a mother who only takes her white child to the Plärrer [a fair] and who is ashamed of her colored one; the white sister who beats her dark brother and calls him "black devil;" the colored fathers who, as long as they are here, spoil their children with chocolate, oranges, and packages of clothes from America. But only if the mothers stick with them – even if they don't get married.

In the children's homes, the children, under the attentive and loving care of the sisters, are initially unaware of their dark skin color. They are kind, tractable, trusting, in many respects more natural than the other children, impulsive and temperamental, and very sensitive to injustice.

In one of the homes that we visited, the children had just gone down for their afternoon nap. A black child with curly hair lifted herself up when the sister opened the door, "Sleep, Hannele, sleep," the voice of the sister sounded gentle and calming. The round black eyes closed again, the beautiful curls disappeared under the blanket. "Hannele is three-and-a-half," the sister told us, "the other day she stood in front of a mirror and looked at her hands and her face. Afterwards, she was sad."

In another case, we are told, a melancholy little fellow tried to color his face on the white wall. Soon he will discover that that is useless.

Three little Negroes . . . , they still sit on the bench without a clue, play with the other children, and in the street the people stop and say: "How cute!" or they silently stare at the children disapprovingly, yet curiously. Soon they will be older and then the problems will start: school – but maybe the class will be happy to have a real moor in "The Three Kings" – work and marriage, the human community. One doesn't really want to think about it. Perhaps it would be better if they stayed this small forever . . .

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