

Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement. Tiffany N. Florvil. University of Illinois Press, 2020. 308 pp. \$26.95. Paperback ISBN-13: 9780252085413.

In her 2020 book, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement*, Tiffany N. Florvil, an associate professor of history at the University of New Mexico, offers the first in-depth investigation of the history of the modern Black German movement largely by examining the formations of two Black (German) empowerment organizations: ISD (today: *Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland e.V.*) and ADEFRA (today: *ADEFRA e.V. – Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland*). These two organizations, founded in the 1980s and 1990s and still operational today, focus on the social and political visibility as well as the mental and emotional well-being of Black Germans and other racialized and marginalized groups inside and outside the German border. In *Mobilizing Black Germany*, Florvil focuses a great deal on the contributions of “everyday” individual activists and organizers and introduces the concept of “quotidian intellectuals,” which is central to her analyses.

Florvil’s coinage of “quotidian intellectual” signifies the importance of challenging what scholars typically think of as “the archive” and broadening what sources, objects, and indeed subjects warrant academic attention. The term “quotidian intellectual” encourages readers to consider everyday Black German actors as valid creators of knowledge who made and continue to produce significant interventions in German society and history by making Black Germanness more visible in a country that often denied the possibility of simultaneously being both Black and German. Florvil’s use of the concept creates more space for the introduction and inclusion of people such as activists, artists, and authors who may have remained unheard of but are now unearthed and appear as potential subjects of future studies. For instance, beyond figures already commonly cited in Black German studies, such as May Ayim and Katarina Oguntoye, Florvil names many quotidian intellectuals and initial members of local chapters of ISD, such as Nii Addi, Eleonore Wiedenroth-Coulibaly, Rita Amoateng, and Marie Theres Aden. For some, though not all, Florvil goes into greater detail regarding their specific contributions. In regard to the formation of the archive, Florvil further highlights how inconsistencies in historical records (specifically regarding the inception of Black History Month events in Germany) reveal the need for scholars to recognize the importance of gathering oral histories, especially as certain populations age (140). By expanding the archive with oral history accounts and incorporating a greater variety of perspectives into their research, scholars will be able to offer richer observations and arguments than what white-centered, heteronormative archival sources typically allow.

The archival materials Florvil analyzes necessarily reflect the intersectional identities of the Black German who are the focus of her book, especially in regard to gender and race. At the center of *Mobilizing Black Germany* is the argument that largely Black German women, many of whom identified as lesbians or queer, were responsible for “shaping the...contours of the modern Black German movement” (2). Given the physical distance most Black Germans had from each other growing up, and in adulthood, many faced social marginalization and isolation in majority

white environments. Being viewed as the perpetual “Other” in their own homeland and not having adequate support socially or psychologically were experiences Black Germans shared, unbeknownst to many until Audre Lorde’s first visit to Berlin in 1984. Although there is some discrepancy amongst the Black German women cited in the book about the degree to which Lorde’s visit and interaction with Black German women at the Freie Universität influenced the start of the movement, what is clear, according to Florvil, is the strong impact on the activists of Lorde’s call to use writing as a means of expression and to build and nurture affective ties. Florvil includes much evidence for how Black German women embraced and further developed these strategies in various forms of cultural production, ranging from poems and speeches to correspondence within the community. The resulting bonds, Florvil emphasizes, were not confined to the borders of the German nation, but also extended to other European countries and overseas: Black German women joined a long history of Black internationalism as they collaborated with other activists who were, likewise, determined to improve the political and social realities of minorities.

Mobilizing Black Germany, likewise, is a book not confined to any particular discipline in terms of its relevance and usefulness. Scholars and educators in a variety of fields and at various levels of education will be glad to have *Mobilizing Black Germany*, as Florvil’s research is highly interdisciplinary, weaving history, women’s and gender studies, (Black) German studies, and queer studies. Florvil’s book could easily be taught in such classes as “International Women’s Movements,” “Black Europe: Then and Now,” or “Minorities in Postwar Germany.” To name but some, Florvil’s work will be a valuable addition to curriculum in areas such as global history, German and European studies, women’s or gender studies, and Black diaspora studies. I also see this book being a wonderful resource for anyone interested in the aforementioned areas of study—from self-taught, lifelong learners to high school and graduate students.

As I examine representations of Blackness in postwar German children’s and youth literature, Dr. Florvil’s enlightening study of the beginnings of the Black German movement is relevant for my work in that we both consider the visibility of Blackness in German spaces that are largely white. These representations—whether self-made by those within the Black community, as Florvil demonstrates in *Mobilizing Black Germany*, or created outside, which is the case for the literature I examine—have the power to influence what impressions non-Black people have of Black people and, perhaps more importantly, shape the real, everyday lives of Black (German) people.

Onyx Camille Henry, German Studies doctoral candidate, University of Michigan