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The 1970/71 Racial Crisis in the U.S. Military:
Finding Solutions in West Germany and South Korea.

The 2006 documentary “Sir! No Sir!” about GI dissent in the Unites States during
the late 1960s and early 1970s was a bitter reminder for many Americans just how
tumultuous those years had been, and in what dire straits one of the world’s mightiest
military powers found itself because of widespread dissent in the ranks. As a
consequence of the Vietnam War and the societal upheaval of the 1960s, military
commanders reported collapse of morale and military discipline, widespread desertion,
and mounting racial tensions. Not surprisingly, countries with large U.S. military
deployments such as West Germany (250,000 troops), Japan (90,000 troops mostly in
Okinawa) and South Korea (70,000 troops), all experienced turmoil similar to that taking
place in and around military bases in Vietnam and the United States. By comparing the
unfolding of the crisis and how, in particular, the unprecedented racial crisis in the
military was approached in West Germany and South Korea, it becomes clear that the
global U.S. military empire is not as monolithic an institution as is often assumed.
Indeed, it matters a great deal whether the U.S. military’s daily interaction with the local
civilian society takes place within the context of a democratic society, like in West
Germany, or whether the U.S., for reasons of national security, was willing to collaborate
with a repressive military dictatorship, as it did in South Korea. Furthermore, I will
illustrate that the geographical location of the U.S. bases as well as the military’s decision
to only allow 10% of soldiers to bring their families to Korea led to a significantly
different approach to how the racial crisis was solved.
To illuminate how the very different military-civilian relationships in West Germany and South Korea created the cultural framework for dealing with the 1970/71 racial crisis, I will first describe events in West Germany. My essay will be weighted heavily toward West Germany, because the source base for West Germany, for a number of reasons, is much more diverse and broad. Most importantly, and unlike in South Korea, scholars have access to a wealth of sources to give voice to the complaints of African American GIs because leftist German students reached out to those GIs as possible revolutionary allies. Because of this highly unlikely alliance between students and soldiers, sources outside of U.S. military records were produced that provide a much more nuanced view of the grievances and demands of black soldiers.2 For the South Korean perspective, I will rely on Katherine Moon’s important analysis of how the crisis played out in South Korea, and how the 8th Army and South Korean officials responded to quell the crisis not only within the military but also between the military and local communities.

I will juxtapose the gender-focused South Korean solution of assuring African American soldiers equal access to local sex workers to how the racial crisis was resolved in West Germany. In doing so I will argue that the kind of troop deployment in West Germany, namely a mix of single soldiers and married GIs with families, as well as the by now well-established structures of German democracy prompted German and American officials to search for a much more comprehensive answer to address the grievances of African American soldiers. My discussion of the German case will also show that the racial crisis in 1970/71 was a much more complex problem than access to local women. Intense political grievances related to the slow pace of civil rights, and
entrenched racism within the military justice system were at the heart of black discontent in 1970/71. In West Germany, as in South Korea, the competition between white and black GIs over access to local women was merely the most visible and, for observers, the most recognizable expression of African American discontent and the widespread racial strife within the U.S. military.

**The U.S. Army, German Society, and the Solution to the Racial Crisis**

The 7th Army in West Germany was among the victorious U.S. armies that had crushed the Nazi menace in 1945, but little of that glory was left in the late 1960s, as American journalists visiting military bases in West Germany pointed out with great concern. The backbone of the European defense strategy in the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union was close to collapse. Because the Pentagon used the 7th Army in West Germany as a materiel and personnel reserve for the war in Vietnam, military units in West Germany were lacking 50% of majors and 37% of captains and lieutenants. Furthermore, officers serving in West Germany often rotated every 4 months, thus undermining any sort of continuity in leadership and unit cohesion. Deteriorating living conditions in crumbling military barracks, mostly built during the late 19th century or the Third Reich, and the gaps in the command structure, led to unprecedented discipline and morale problems.4

At military roll calls, soldiers at times greeted commanders with the cry “FTA” (F- -k the Army); in some instances, they lobbed grenades into commanders’ offices; and unit-wide incidents of insubordination were regularly reported.5 On all military bases, underground newspapers, such as the *Baumholder Gig Sheet* (Baumholder), *Graffiti* (Heidelberg), *Speak Out* (Hanau), *Venceremos* (Frankfurt) and *Forward* (Berlin),
emerged to provide outlets for the widespread anger of soldiers. One frustrated soldier
gave voice to the sentiments of many at the time when he summed up the situation: “We, the
unwilling, led by the incompetent, perform superfluous duties for the ungrateful
military.” That West Germany served as a deployment base to Vietnam and also as a
way station for returning GIs to cool off before heading stateside did not help morale.

The deterioration of morale in the 7th Army did not remain hidden behind the
gates of the military bases, and with the clandestine support from American anti-war
activists, German students, and German unions, ever-larger numbers of American
soldiers started deserting their units in West Germany. In 1971 alone, some 6,600 GIs,
deserted their posts in West Germany.

By the late 1960s it also became clear that the U.S. military had not kept pace
with the dramatic changes taking place in U.S. racial politics, as a much more vocal and
radical generation of African American soldiers was sent abroad. Many of the white
soldiers resented the Black Power movement and expressions of black pride by African
American soldiers – the elaborate rituals of the Dap greeting (which stood for Dignity and
Pride), Afro hairstyles, and the insistence that Soul music be played at servicemen clubs,
or that ethnic products be offered at the base PX stores. In some spectacular instances,
white GIs organized Ku Klux Klan formations and burned crosses in front of barracks
where black GIs lived. Black soldiers, inspired by the Black Panther Party for Self
Defense, responded by organizing Black Power self-defense groups. By 1970/71 and at
the height of black discontent in the military, dozens of militant black organizations had
been founded on U.S. military bases across West Germany.
Racial tensions among enlisted men were intense, and effective military leadership to deal with this crisis was sorely missing. Not only was the military command structure depleted because of the war in Vietnam, the military had also failed to keep up with developments in American society at large, and had not educated its commanders on how to deal with the more assertive and outspoken African American soldiers being drafted.¹

German officials watched with dismay as the U.S. military faced this unprecedented crisis, but they also expressed concern because the violent racial strife between white and black GIs increasingly spilled into German communities bordering on American military bases.² Interior spaces of German bars and discothèques were routinely demolished when black soldiers tried to enter places that white soldiers had traditionally claimed as their own. Often enough, white GIs threatened German owners of these establishments with an economic boycott if they allowed black soldiers on their premises, but plenty of German club owners did not need encouragement from white GIs to keep black GIs out. Existing tensions were only stoked further because many white GIs resented the fact that African American GIs dated white German women, or because German women preferred dancing with black GIs at local discothèques. The combination of too much alcohol and the competition over access to local women and off-base entertainment facilities often proved explosive, and just as often led to violence.

I have shown my other work that interracial romantic relationships had been offensive and unacceptable to white GIs and military commanders going back to 1945. The context in which such relationships took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s had dramatically changed, however.³ African American soldiers—enlisted men as well as
officers- no longer tolerated harassment by white GIs or their superiors for dating white German women, or that such relationships might imperil their chances for promotion. They also no longer accepted that certain establishments in German garrison communities “belonged” to white GIs and were thus off-limits to African-American soldiers."

For the casual observer of events taking place in German communities bordering U.S. military bases in 1970/71, it would be easy enough to conclude that most of the racial strife taking place between white and black GIs were results of too many drugs, too much alcohol, and competition for German women. Any glance at German newspapers or American newspapers at the time would easily lead to that conclusion. "Because the grievances of African American GIs received a hearing outside of the often sensationalist media coverage on the garrison towns, we have available a much more differentiated picture than that of white and black GIs fighting over German women.

As indicated above, we know so much more about the mood of African American GIs in West Germany because support from German students gave them a voice far beyond the military gates, making possible a multi-varied historical record of their grievances. Leftist German students, many of them the product of American efforts to reeducate and democratize German society after 1945, faced their former mentor with nothing but cynicism by the late 1960s. Students, who in years past had embraced American ideals and culture as an alternative to the discredited German Nazi past, now viewed America as just another racist and genocidal regime. The war in Vietnam, U.S. policies in the non-Western world, the failure of the liberal Civil Rights Movement, and the brutal crack down on the Black Panthers in the U.S. convinced many student activists
that more radical measures were called for. Enamored by the militant posture of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, and inspired by the writings of Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver and Franz Fanon, German students discovered in militant black Panther GIs stationed in Germany new forms of masculinity and a revolutionary authenticity that white and privileged middle class German students could only dream of.¹⁶

To forge an alliance with the Black Panthers in the U.S. and especially Black Panther GIs in Germany, beginning in November 1969 radical German students organized Black Panther Solidarity Committees in German university towns that were also host to U.S. military bases. In collaboration with activist black GIs and black veterans who had taken their discharge in Germany, students produced (and fully funded) underground newspapers, such as the Voice of the Lumpen to inform others about the connection between American racism and American imperialist ambitions in the Third World.² African American GI activists organized rallies and teach-ins all over German universities in 1969, to bring their message to a broader audience.² The students and their collaborators in the military also brought the demands of African Americans into the middle of German cities, and thus gave black soldiers a political voice outside the narrow circle of leftist activists. During numerous demonstrations in the spring of 1970, for example, black GIs marched with German students through downtown Frankfurt and numerous other German cities, protesting the war in Vietnam and calling for “Freedom for Bobby Seales,” the imprisoned Black Panther leader.²

Even more attention was drawn to the grievances and demands of black GIs when students and African American GIs organized the first “Call for Justice Meeting” at Heidelberg University on the 4th of July 1970. More than 1,000 Black Panther GIs and
hundreds of their German student supporters met to indict America for the war in Vietnam and for its unfulfilled civil rights agenda. In a clear reference to the discrimination that black GIs and their families experienced off-base in German communities, the protesters also demanded equal access to housing. The students and African American activists garnered even more exposure in October 1970, when the popular German TV show Panorama dedicated large segments of its weekly news coverage to another huge Black Panther Solidarity rally in Kaiserslautern.

The ever more radical struggle of America’s black minority had been brought to West Germany through the American military base system. In this “globalization,” of the American race question, the disenchantment and anger that African Americans expressed toward their own society became more widely and more intimately known to German society because German students were savvy in attracting the attention of the German media. While the German media had been consistently covering the civil rights struggle in the U.S., the alliance between students and black GIs brought that struggle and its increasing radicalization much closer to home. The Süddeutsche Zeitung concluded that the voices of the minority soldiers could only be heard so powerfully because of the support they were getting from German leftist students, but especially from KD Wolff and his colleagues on the Black Panther Solidarity Committee in Frankfurt.

By arranging interviews with some of West Germany’s most important media outlets, students helped black GIs get a platform, the latter would otherwise not have had. The students, for example, arranged an interview for two black Vietnam War veterans who had left their unit in Berlin after a series of racist attacks by white soldiers with Der Spiegel, West Germany’s most prestigious news magazine. The black soldiers told Der
Spiegel that they had deserted because they finally understood their own role in maintaining the world-wide U.S. empire: “the same thing that is happening to our people at home, well that is what the black man in the army is doing to other people around the world.” In another story on black dissent in West Germany, Der Spiegel informed its readers that African American GIs declared that “because of the dirty stinking ghettos in Atlanta, Detroit or Jacksonville, they were no longer willing to fight a war for the Whites, and instead demanded weapons to liberate their brothers and sisters at home.” Another national newspaper commented on the radicalization of African American GIs by quoting a young black soldier who told them that, “I bled for my country in Vietnam; now I will bleed for myself and if necessary, for my people.”

The German students’ collaboration with militant black GIs, their many public demonstrations on university campuses, in the streets of German university towns, and even in the deepest provinces educated Germans about the situation of African Americans in the U.S. and about racism in the U.S. military. Their militant posture also raised alarm flags in both the American and German governments. While German and American officials had been concerned for some time about the radicalization of African American GIs, it was the “Call for Justice” meeting on the 4th of July, 1970 at Heidelberg University, that prompted German and American officials to act. Not only had that meeting been held in the aula of one of West Germany’s most distinguished universities – with the explicit support of the president of the university – but Heidelberg was also home to the headquarters of the United States Army in Europe (USAREUR).

News of these sorts of protest and awareness-raising activities, especially those organized by the Black Panther Solidarity Campaign, reverberated throughout the U.S. The
New York Times compared the “soldier-activists” in West Germany to “organized black students groups” on college campuses in the U.S., and pointed out that the most active of them were Vietnam veterans. In another article, the Times properly noted that such protest activities by black soldiers outside their own country were unprecedented though their tactics mirrored those of “community activists” at home. At the same time, the paper differentiated developments in Germany from those in the states by registering the “global dimension” since the soldiers protested against “racial discrimination both at home and overseas.” Moreover, the Times stressed the unprecedented development of black soldiers “questioning whether they should fight for the United States” if discrimination continued—a perspective that threatened U.S. security in Cold War Europe.\footnote{27}

In response to the 4\textsuperscript{th} of July protest, government agencies at the highest levels in both the U.S. and West Germany came to believe that the radicalization of black GIs and their deteriorating morale undermined not only military discipline but also threatened the security of West Germany in the Cold War struggle.\footnote{28} Furthermore, action was called for because officials in West Germany and the U.S. feared that the alliance between radical black GIs and German students, as well as their political philosophy could prove attractive to “millions of [disenchanted, black] Americans” and might lead to a closer collaboration with the communist regime in East West Germany.\footnote{29}

Looking back from the less anxious perch of the post-Cold War world, one might be tempted to write off these overly anxious assessments as exaggerated, but for German and American officials at the time, these fears were very real indeed. Consequently, intervention at the highest level was called for. The political radicalization of black GIs, made visible and audible through the extensive support they received from German students, brought about a
comprehensive Pentagon program to deal with the deeply embedded racism within the military. In September of 1970, as a direct response to the 4th of July “Call for Justice” protest, a commission sponsored by the White House and the Pentagon (Render Commission) traveled to West Germany to take a hard look at the increasingly unmanageable situation in military bases across West Germany. In spring 1971, the Render Commission investigation was followed by a visit from the NAACP, which interviewed more than 2,500 soldiers, both white and black. In their conclusions, the Render Report and the NAACP investigation made starkly clear that the racial crisis in West Germany went far beyond territorial struggles over discotheques and access to local women. Both of the reports exposed and indicted the discrimination that black GIs faced in German communities –mostly from landlords and pub owners–but they also stressed that it was the widespread and institutionalized racism within the military that was the root cause of the deteriorating racial situation in the 7th Army.

The Render Report and the NAACP’s investigation, *The Search For Military Justice*, showed that although about 13 percent of the U.S. soldiers in West Germany were African American, just a bit over 2 percent of officers were African American, and at the junior officer level, black leadership was almost completely missing. Their investigation of the military justice system revealed even more shocking revelations about widespread discrimination against soldiers of color. Black GIs were disciplined and imprisoned not only more often, but also for infractions that brought no punishment for white GIs. African American GIs complained that officers interpreted any questioning of authority and any sign of non-conformity or expression of black pride as a sign of militancy. Thus, while discipline and morale had deteriorated for both white and black soldiers, it was black GIs who suffered the brunt of disciplinary action: in 1970, at a time
when a mere 13% of soldiers were African American, two-thirds of sentences for insubordination were handed out to black GIs, and more than 50% of inmates in U.S. military stockades in West Germany were African American. The NAACP also found that commanders disproportionately used pre-trial confinement for black GIs to remove so-called “black militants” from their units. The pretrial confinement rule allowed commanders to keep alleged offenders imprisoned for up to thirty days without filing charges, and in 1970, three out of five black prisoners in the stockades were held under this prerogative. In that same year, the NAACP found that 28% of African American prisoners (912 individuals) were released without charges ever having been pressed. These GIs had basically been imprisoned to intimidate them, and to silence “trouble makers.”

The Render Report and the NAACP investigation were a stinging indictment of the pervasive and widespread institutional racism in the 7th Army and brought about an extensive program to eliminate those injustices. As a first step, General Michael Davison who replaced General James Polk in Spring 1971 as the commander of USAREUR, acknowledged much more forthrightly just how deep-seated the problems were, especially in the administration of military justice, and he insisted that things could not improve unless officers became more sensitive to the needs of black GIs, and stopped interpreting every expression of racial pride as a challenge to their authority. The NAACP and Render Reports also brought about an unprecedented affirmative action program by the military to “truly integrate the Army.” To accomplish that goal, Davison insisted that his command needed to be much more racially diversified. To make African Americans and their families feel that the military was also their military, General
Davison insisted that the 7th Army needed “more black teachers, more black lawyers, more black counselors, more black chaplains, and more black officers and non-commissioned officers.” Davison also called for more “black content” in overseas school operations, “not only in faculty but also in curricula, [the] civilian work force, and in our management echelon.” A comprehensive affirmative action program to attract more minority officers was also complemented with mandatory race sensitivity workshops for all officers and non-commissioned officers. Finally, the NAACP Report also resulted in the establishment of a branch office of the NAACP in West Germany to represent the interests of the 28,000 - 30,000 black GIs stationed in West Germany.

A change in attitude and practices was also necessary for the host nation because the whole racial crisis in Germany had erupted at the very moment when congressmen such as Mike Mansfield (D) were questioning the rationale of continuing the extensive U.S. military presence in Germany. These critics emerged in light of Germany’s ongoing détente with Eastern Europe (Ostpolitik) and the resulting reduction in tensions with the Soviet Union. Mansfield and his allies quickly gained ground when representatives of the NAACP and the Black Caucus of the U.S. congress, upset over reports from Germany, joined them. Thus, every report of German discrimination against African American GIs gave fodder to those who agitated for withdrawal of troops. The U.S. military’s rapid and comprehensive response to the racial crisis thus has to be viewed in this larger Cold War context, because Mansfield’s demand for a drawdown of U.S. troops in Germany posed a serious threat to the Pentagon’s European defense strategy, which was based on maintaining military forces in Germany at their current level. Not surprisingly, the West
German government, given Germany’s precarious location in the Cold War struggle, was as eager as the Pentagon to preserve U.S. troop strength in Germany.\textsuperscript{36}

To assure their American alliance partner as well as the African American community in the U.S. that West Germany was not hostile toward black soldiers, both chancellor Willy Brandt and Secretary of Defense Helmut Schmidt made public statements. They repudiated any sort of discrimination that black soldiers might encounter in West Germany when searching for apartments or when trying to enter a club or a discotheque. West Germany’s president Gustav Heinemann met personally with General Davison, to express his concern over reported instances of discrimination from German landlords and pub owners.\textsuperscript{37} The Federal Republic furthermore initiated an extensive and expensive construction program of some 600 Million Dollars to modernize and update deteriorated military barracks that housed single soldiers or soldiers serving in West Germany without their families. To alleviate the situation in West Germany’s notoriously tight housing market, the German government also built new family housing for U.S. military personnel.\textsuperscript{38} While this program benefitted both white and black soldiers and their families, the impetus of the program was to address the complaints of black GIs over housing shortages and discrimination.

Meetings about how to ensure non-discriminatory policies were held at the federal, state, and local level and in collaboration with civic and business associations to educate landlords and owners of bars, discotheques and restaurants. Set in place were strict new rules that imposed economic sanctions on individuals who continued the practice of not renting to black soldiers and their families, or of keeping black GIs out of their clubs or discotheques. German government officials instructed media outlets to stop their practice
of identifying alleged offenders by race when covering crimes committed by U.S. soldiers. Newspaper editors were also urged to exert a greater effort in educating Germans about the accomplishments and contributions of African Americans to American history. These steps were necessary, as the German Secretary of Defense made clear in his instructions to state governors, because the problems and “concerns of [black] American soldiers in the Federal Republic must also be our concerns.”

This elevation of the race question to the highest level of the U.S. and West German governments was a dramatic shift from the 1950s when charges of racism by black GIs were largely denied, or the early 1960s, when such charges at most brought about ad hoc and often reluctant responses by individual U.S. military commanders and/or German mayors in garrison communities. After the crisis in the military in 1970/71, the situation for African American GIs stationed in West Germany would never be the same again. The moderate demands of the civil rights movement going back to WWII finally became reality, because protests of more radical groups forced the German and American governments to act.

**South Korea and the Sexualization of the Racial Crisis in the U.S. Military**

The way the 7th Army and German officials dealt with the anger of African American soldiers differed sharply from how the situation was handled in South Korea, where soldiers of color experienced and expressed similar anger, but where the solution to the problem would be vastly different. As Katherine Moon has shown in *Sex Among Allies*, just as their counterparts in West Germany, American military and South Korean government officials came to believe that the deterioration of morale, the rising use of
drugs and alcohol, the escalating racial tensions within the military undermined South Korea’s security in the Cold War struggle. Furthermore, officials were concerned that relationships with neighboring civilian communities had become ever more antagonistic as a result of the crisis within the military, and needed to be mended. The solution agreed upon by the 8th Army and the South Korean government on how to solve the crisis in the military and how to improve military-civilian relations focused, however, solely on regulating the sexual relationships between South Korean sex workers and African American GIs.

Black GIs in South Korea, especially those who might have already served a tour of duty in Vietnam, were expressing similar grievances and discontent over the disproportionate cost of the war for African Americans, the slow pace of civil rights, the 1968 murder of Martin Luther King, and the continuing and widespread racial discrimination in the military. While military observers at the time concluded that the racial strife in West Germany was the most severe in all of the military commands overseas, I would argue that this was only experienced as such because black GIs in West Germany – due to their collaboration with German students – were heard more loudly. (Just as an aside: in West Germany 48 underground newspapers were published as part of the GI movement, and a good number of them focused specifically on grievances of African American GIs. In South Korea, not even one paper was published. The one paper dealing with GI issues in Korea, was published by veterans Elmhurst, USA who had been stationed in Korea). Additionally, the U.S. military has traditionally emphasized the strategic importance of the West German command, and thus was more concerned about developments there. In fact, African American soldiers serving in South Korea had much
more cause for complaint. Not only were the overwhelming number of them deployed without their families (only 10% of all soldiers were accompanied by families, and a disproportionate number of those bringing families were officers), the military’s infrastructure in South Korea was in even worse shape than that of West Germany. Hastily erected during the Korean War, military bases were often built as temporary structures, and consequently were often in a state of utter dilapidation by the late 1960s.

Compared to West Germany, American soldiers stationed in South Korea were much more isolated from society at large because so many of the military bases were in desolate areas close to the DMZ. Not only were most soldiers removed from interacting with the broader South Korean society; in the overwhelmingly small base structure that prevailed in South Korea, there was also less variety in terms of leisure activity offerings on the bases. While the centralized bases in and around Seoul, Dagan and Pusan, had all the luxuries that life in America had to offer, the smaller bases often lacked adequate leisure facilities and soldiers had to rely to a much larger degree on what the surrounding camp towns had to offer. Because of the cultural distance between Americans and the larger South Korean society, fewer soldiers than in West Germany were willing to venture beyond the narrow confines of the camp towns. South Korea’s relative poverty at the time as well as the harsh rule of Park Chung Hee’s military dictatorship did little to induce American GIs to venture beyond the safe gates of the base or the relative familiarity of the surrounding camp town.

The alliance between America and West Germany was built on the understanding that both sides shared the same culture, and now, thanks to the American reeducation effort after WWII, also the same democratic values. This shared assumption was largely
lacking in the case of South Korea. Not only was the country culturally alien to most Americans, the U.S. also had never insisted that the country be a democratic one. Indeed, the U.S. was willing to tolerate first Syngman Rhee’s autocratic rule (1948-1960), and then Park Chung Hee’s (1961-1980) and Chun Doo Hwan’s (1980-1987) military dictatorship because those regimes most consistently reflected U.S. anti-communism and thus supported the U.S. military strategy in the Asian Command. This willingness not only to tolerate but also to support the repressive regimes of these dictators bred a much more antagonistic attitude toward the U.S. among broad sections of South Korean society. The fact that the autocratic South Korean regimes had mostly confiscated the land from local farmers to construct U.S. bases through eminent domain rather than compensation, only contributed to the bitter relationship between the military and the civilian population.43

Just as importantly, the interactions between American military personnel and South Koreans were also defined by the fact that the U.S. military viewed South Koreans as racially inferior. The widely prevailing attitude of commanders and personnel toward military service in South Korea as a hardship tour only exacerbated the prevailing sense of racial superiority vis-à-vis the South Koreans. Whereas the 7th Army in West Germany advertised travel to the Bavarian alps and the castles of the river Rhine as fringe benefits of military tours there, an article by the military’s newspaper, Stars and Stripes presented the advantages of a tour of duty in South Korea by focusing on the easy sexual availability of South Korean women and their docility: “Picture having three or four of the loveliest creatures God ever created hovering around you, singing, dancing, feeding you, washing what they feed you down with rice wine or beer, all saying at once: ‘you
are the greatest.’ This is the Orient you heard about and came to find.” Opinion polls conducted in the 1960s show that these appalling attitudes did not go unnoticed among the local population. Whereas a mere 13% of South Koreans thought that the Americans “liked them,” 70% of West Germans assumed that the Americans viewed them “as friends.”

Given the absence of military families, the geographical location of and spatial arrangements of the bases, persisting South Korean poverty, and the unequal cultural and racial context of the American-South Korean interaction, it is not surprising that for most of the American troops in South Korea, the surrounding camp towns and the sex workers employed in the many GI clubs were almost their sole contact with South Korean society. In Korea, it was the sex workers, as Katherine Moon argued in her book *Sex Among Allies*, who provided the “daily glue” between the military base and the civilian community.46

While contacts with sex workers might have constituted the sole encounter with German society for some of the GIs serving in West Germany, this was generally not the norm. Interactions between the military and German civilians were more extensive and multi-faceted for many reasons, but also because a much larger percentage of U.S. troops came with families. Because some 30% of soldiers in 1970 brought their wives, and because so many couples lived in German communities, the public face of the GI was not only that of the single, carousing soldier. Because of the presence of military wives, and their involvement in military community life, the *Stars and Stripes* article cited above would have never been printed in the USAREUR (United States Army in Europe) edition.
of that paper. Gender relations in West Germany also differed from those in South Korea because soldiers stationed in Germany tended to serve tours of duty that lasted from two to three years. These longer tours of duty allowed for a much larger degree of cultural comfort and acculturation, as well as the chance to establish and nurture serious relationships with Germans and romantic relationships with German women.

Thus, the much more narrow scope of interaction that was the norm between American soldiers and South Korean civilians, the lack of partnership built on equality between the two countries, and the reality of the South Korean military dictatorship defined in profound ways how the racial crisis of 1970/71 would be resolved. By drawing on Katherine Moon’s important work on the violence that occurred in the kijichion (camp town) of Anjongni, I will show how vastly different the solutions to the racial crisis in South Korea was approached compared to West Germany and what a crucial role equal access to sex workers played in solving the crisis.

The kijichion of Anjongni was home to some 4,795 South Koreans, and abutted Camp Humphrey, a military base with some 1,700 GIs of whom about 500 were African American. Three things that defined base-civilian relationships in Anjongni stand out: at a time when the proportion of African America GIs serving in the military was about 13%, almost 30% of soldiers in Camp Humphrey were black.47 Secondly, an astounding 970 women in Anjongni made their living as sex workers. Most of those registered sex workers were employed in one of the twelve clubs that catered to GIs. To avoid tensions between soldiers and South Korean men, all of these clubs were off-limits to South Korean men. Similar to West Germany, the clubs were segregated along the American color line. The town also had its share of un-registered sex workers who mostly made
contacts with GIs by walking the streets. Given the demographics of Anjongni and Camp Humphrey, the ratio of sex worker to GIs in this town (and in South Korea as a whole) is truly mind-boggling. 48 Not surprisingly, 84% of soldiers who had served in South Korea reported to have used the services of sex workers. 49

The racial crisis in South Korea, just like the one playing out in West Germany, had been brewing for some time. Beginning in the late 1960s, racial strife had increased between the soldiers on base and off-base, and attacks on South Korean nationals were also on the rise. Similar to West Germany, the racial strife among the soldiers often played out in the clubs that catered to the GIs. Arguments most often ensued after too much alcohol, over access to women, what kind of music should be played (Country & Western or Soul), or who “owned” a particular club. As in West Germany and all other overseas military bases, white GIs in South Korea had drawn a strict color line to keep black GIs out of their clubs; that color line assured that the sex workers employed by those clubs did not provide their services to black soldiers. In the past, that color line had been grudgingly accepted by black soldiers, and in response, they had created their own all-black spaces, where white GIs would not be tolerated. Military commanders implicitly and often explicitly approved of this Jim Crow color line because it allegedly preserved the peace during the soldiers’ social hours, and in many commands, the military police ensured that these racial boundaries were not violated. 50 As in West Germany, the growing politicization and radicalization of black GIs in the late 1960s led many of them to question those territorial boundaries based on race.

The racial crisis in South Korea came to a head in the kijichion of Anjongni in July 1971, when 50 African American GIs simultaneously entered five different clubs
that refused service to black GIs. The violent protest stands out mostly because it had clearly been planned ahead and was well orchestrated. The soldiers ordered people to leave the premises and then proceeded to demolish the interior of the establishments. They declared that they had resorted to this violence to punish the owners of the clubs and the sex workers employed by them for refusing service to African American GIs. Similar destruction of the interior of bars or clubs occurred in West Germany as well when black and white soldiers clashed, but the incident in Korea was of a different kind and more deliberate nature. Furthermore, the reaction of the South Koreans suggests how much more antagonistic military-civilian relations were in South Korea as compared to West Germany. Having endured the growing racial tensions between U.S. troops for some time, and lacking any other recourse, locals decided to take the law into their own hand. About 1,000 individuals pursued the black soldiers with sickles and rocks, leading to a further escalation of violence. It would take 170 U.S. military police, eighty South Korean police officers and the use of tear gas and warning shots to get the volatile situation under control. The military commander, in order to calm the situation, and to punish the locals for taking the law into their own hands, declared Anjongni off-limits to his soldiers for an indeterminate time.

The violent protest of the black soldiers as well as the violent reaction of the local population in South Korea reveal some important differences from military-civilian relationships in West Germany. Prior to the Anjongni incident, no established or effective channels of communication and crisis management existed between the military and the civilian community that could have addressed the brewing crisis. It speaks volumes about U.S. military attitudes toward the neighboring South Korean communities that
Community Relations committees were only established after the crisis in 1971; in West Germany such committees were established as early as 1950 because cordial relations with the German was seen as essential to the American mission. Secondly, although black GIs at times acted out violently in West Germany, they also found allies among German students, as well as black American exchange students and African students studying at German universities. These alliances were possible largely because West Germany had matured into a democratic country. Consequently, the grievances of African American soldiers were not only amplified by student collaborators, but were debated extensively in the public sphere, and taken seriously by those in power. Because of the deep gulf that separated the U.S. military bases from South Korean society at large, and because of South Korea’s military dictatorship had crippled the development of a democratic civil society, black GIs in South Korea were much more isolated. Thus, they lacked the necessary structural support to voice their dissent more constructively.

Thirdly, the violent reaction of the local population indicates not only an overwhelming sense of helplessness but also a long-brewing frustration over the uneven power balance vis-à-vis the U.S. troops. The decision by the U.S. commander of Camp Humphrey to issue an off-limits for the whole town only confirmed for the locals how utterly dependent they were on the goodwill of the U.S. military. A lasting off-limits would have meant the economic ruin of the town and its inhabitants.52

As Katherine Moon has shown, the Anjongni incident provided an important catalyst to devise measures that would calm the anger of African American GIs, settle the racial tensions among the troops, and improve the severely deteriorated South Korean-American relations caused by the draw down of U.S. troops as a result of the Nixon
Doctrine. In South Korea, as in West Germany, the concerted response to the racial crisis largely came about because American and local officials feared that disenchanted and radicalized black GIs might become easy targets for communist appeals. In one such assessment of that danger, the U.S. military’s Psychological Operations division (PsyOp) concluded that “for some time, the North Korean Communists have been directing some of their propaganda attacks toward the American Negro Soldier in an effort to encourage him to rebel against his military leaders, desert the army, abandon the defense of the ROK“ (Republic of Korea).53 Moon, however, also shows that the U.S. military foremost looked outward in trying to quell the crisis. Instead of scrutinizing the institutionalized racism within the military, or the military’s complicity in creating the racial boundaries that were now being contested by black soldiers, the military looked to the South Korean civilian population instead.

Whereas the racial crisis in West Germany brought about a comprehensive evaluation of racism in the military and in German communities, events unfolded very differently in South Korea. Because black soldiers “acted out,” as they did in the Anjongni incident, the U.S. military as well as their South Korean partners on the newly established Community Relations Committees identified South Korean sex workers as the source of the widespread racial unrest. Even though the racial tensions came about, just like in West Germany, because black GIs were fed up with the racism they encountered in the military and in civilian host community, American and South Korean officials identified South Korean sex workers’ refusal to “serve” black GIs as the chief cause of the crisis. If South Korean sex workers were at the root of the racial conflict it was all too obvious for the officials charged with taking care of the crisis that the sex
workers could also be the solution.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, both South Korean government officials and the U.S. military representatives assigned South Korean sex workers the main burden of mending the tensions between white and black military personnel. It would also be up to the sex workers to ease the tensions that had developed between the U.S. military and the civilian population.\textsuperscript{55}

To solve the crisis, South Korean and American officials agreed that African American GIs in South Korea had to be assured equal access to bars and clubs, and equal and courteous service by South Korean hostesses and sex workers. To ensure that club owners and sex workers understood the severity of the crisis and their own crucial role in solving it, the U.S. military’s PsyOp division devised flyers that were handed out to sex workers and also posted in the clubs for their information. One such flyer instructed the women not to discriminate against black soldiers by appealing to their nationalism. Club owners and sex workers were told that when they were refusing service to black customers, “you are unconsciously helping your enemy, while weakening the internal security of your nation… In order to keep your business and help the security of your country … you are urged to treat all U.S. customers equally.” To efface the authorship of the flyer, PsyOp presented it as an appeal from South Korean officials,\textsuperscript{56} but the reference to the economic implications of failure to comply probably revealed the true origin of the flyer to both the club owners and the women working for them. Thus, the U.S. exploited the South Koreans’ fear of Communism and the military’s economic weapon of the off-limits order to ensure compliance with its most unusual “affirmative action” program in the clubs.\textsuperscript{57}
Another aspect of the effort to improve morale of the troops culminated in an effort to rein in the abysmal VD rates among South Korean sex workers. To accomplish that goal, the South Koreans, together with the logistical support from the U.S. military, set up an extensive regime of VD control. Women working in the clubs were examined weekly, they had to carry picture IDs, and had to sport a registration number visible on their clothing so GIs could provide American military authorities with information about the source of infection. To achieve the goal of assuring safe and “equal access” to sex for its soldiers, while keeping VD rates in check, the U.S. military had to be intimately and directly involved in the regulation and supervision of prostitution. For the so-called Camp Town Campaign, the South Korean authorities drew on support from the military police, the Equal Opportunity Treatment Office, the Public Affairs Office, the Provost Marshall, the CID (Criminal Investigation Division), the Office of Preventive Medicine, and the Inspector General. Thus, despite the U.S. military’s official policy of not condoning prostitution, in South Korea it was the collaboration between American military and South Korean officials that ensured American soldiers equal and safe access to sex workers. This policy became a central aspect of maintaining racial peace in the 8th Army, and to assure better relations between the U.S. military and the South Korean civilian population.

It is important to point out, that the far-reaching reforms brought about in the U.S. military because of the crisis in West Germany would also benefit African American soldiers in military commands elsewhere. The military’s drive to attract more minority officers, to improve the record of the military justice system, and to establish affirmative action officers and race workshops, were command decisions that improved the situation
for African American soldiers in general. In fact, the response to this crisis made the U.S. military into the most inclusive institution in the U.S., setting in motion the “New American Revolution” as the Black Caucus in the United States Congress called the government’s response to the crisis. But we have also seen that the crisis in West Germany resulted in extensive investments to improve the crumbling base infrastructure. Furthermore, Germans and Americans worked attentively to assure African American soldiers that West Germany was a country worth fighting, and perhaps dying for. In South Korea, the solution was much more misogynistic and one-dimensional, but also much cheaper. While American soldiers in South Korea benefited from the extensive programs to combat racism in the military brought about by the Render Report and the NAACP investigation in Germany, the solving of the racial tensions within the military and the improvement of community–military relations were largely shouldered by South Korean sex workers.

This sexualization of the 1970/71 racial crisis in South Korea reveals how “local” we need to keep our focus when exploring the U.S. military empire and its implications for gender, sexuality and race. The solution to the crisis was so different from West Germany because in the eyes of U.S. military planners, South Korea had always been the “lesser ally.” A deep cultural gap separated Americans and South Koreans, and that gulf was made worse by the prevailing sense of racial superiority that Americans expressed toward the South Koreans. America’s support of the successive South Korean dictatorships meant that no democratic institutions emerged, and the absence of such democratic institutions also had deep implications for how the military-civilian relationship was handled, and how the social unrest among the troops and the racial crisis
of 1970/71 was solved. Perhaps most significantly, because South Korea was considered a hardship post, fewer than 10% of troops were able to bring their families, and the privilege was mostly granted to high rank personnel. Given this context, the easy and convenient access to sex workers was a fact of life to manage the thousands of single young soldiers far away from home.
Cortright (1975), and Brünn (1986) for GI dissent in military bases in West Germany. The documentary *Sir! No Sir!* (2005) was directed by David Zeiger.


While Katherine Moon acknowledges that the increasing militancy of black soldiers upset the strictly drawn color line in South Korean camp towns, and thus brought about racial strife among soldiers, but also with South Korean civilians, the focus of her analysis stays on the territorial competition over local women. See Moon (1997).


“Wir mussten die Siebte Armee ruinieren,” 81.


Most of these deserters eventually returned to their units but the prestige of the military suffered substantially due to the lack of discipline. For dissent in the ranks, see Brünn (1986) and Cortright (1975).

Höhn (2008).


see chapter 3 in this collection.

14 Hauser (1975), p. 78 cites Render’s comments from a speech he gave of how central the resentment of white soldiers over interracial dating was in stoking the crisis in West Germany. Harold Sims from the National Urban League stressed the same point, p. 81. See also Johnson, *Army in Anguish*, p. 47.


16 For a detailed discussion of this collaboration Höhn (2008) and (2010).

17 Ibid.

18 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B 106/39985 contains numerous reports by the *Bundesministerium für Verfassungsschutz* and the Innenminister on the pro-Black Panther meetings that took place all over West Germany in December 1969 and January 1970. Up to 1,000 people took part in each of these teach-ins.


28 The Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt, record groups B 86/1425, B86/1392 and B 106/80798 show how concerned German government officials were that the increasing anger of black GIs over German racism would undermine their morale and thus threaten German security. For responses to the crisis at the state level, see Hauptstaatsarchiv Hessen, Staatskanzlei, 502-7425/26. For newspaper coverage on initiatives set in motion by the protests, see, *FR* 13 February 1971, “Farbige fühlen sich ausgeschlossen. Gespräche mit amerikanischen Soldaten in Deutschland” and *General Anzeiger*, 6 June 1971, “US Neger in Deutschland beklagen Diskriminierung.” For American debates see, Congressional Record, 92 Congress, 1st Session, March 9, 1971 “Race Relations: A New Military Mission for the New American Revolution” and Congressional Record July 16, 1971, 25442-43 and Congressional record, 92 Congress, 2nd Session, Racism in the Military 13-14 October 1972.


31 Department of Defense (1972).

32 Speech by General Michael Davison given on 10 November 1971 at the Equal Opportunity Conference in Berchtesgaden. German translation in Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Wiesbaden, Staatskanzlei 502-7426, p. 105-09. As part of the improvement for black soldiers and their families, the military also began to stock black beauty products, books by African American authors, and began training German barbers and hairdressers how to cut and style hair of their African American clientele.

33 Congressional Record, 16 July 1971, 25542. Racial tensions were also escalating in the U.S.; thus it was a combination of riots and military prison uprisings in both the U.S. and West Germany that brought about this dramatic change in policy. How crucial developments in West Germany were to bringing about reforms has thus far been ignored. See for example, Alan M. Osur, “Black White Relations in the U.S. Military 1940-1972 (accessed at www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles.ayreview/1981/nov-dec/osur.htm). His focus is solely on the racial crisis in the U.S.


38 That initiative helped those soldiers who, because of their low military rank were not eligible for command-sponsored tours. The extra housing built for command-sponsored GIs alleviated the pressure on the tight housing market.

39 Archiv des Auswärtigen Amt, Record groups B 86/1425, B86/1392 and B 106/80798 show the extensive programs that were initiated.


41 The 1963/64 Gesell Report was intended to do away with widespread racism in the military, but as former Secretary of Defense McNamara acknowledged in hindsight, after issuing directives to alleviate racism in housing and in stores, diners and clubs off base, the Pentagon
turned its attention elsewhere. For McNamara’s self-criticism see, Osur (1981). See also Höhn (2002), chapter 3 on the military’s reluctance to intervene on behalf of African American GIs during the 1950s and 1960s.

42 For a detailed discussion of how civil rights concerns were carried by the U.S. military to Germany beginning with WWII, see Höhn (2008b).

43 For a thoughtful discussion of why the military-civilian relations in South Korea are so much more fraught because of these land issues, see Calder (2007).

44 *Stars and Stripes* article cited in Moon (1997), p. 33. For how Germany was advertised to the troops, see, Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, B 86/1426, USAREUR, “Special Issue: Germany” (1971).


47 Nelson (1987), p. 146. Of the 250,000 GIs stationed in West Germany, about 28,000 were African American. The disproportionate percentage of minority soldiers in Camp Humphrey reflects the fact that mostly combat troops were stationed there. Any military base in West Germany that had similar deployment of combat troops would have reflected the same racial make-up.

48 Moon (1997), p. 30. The Anjongni numbers are reflective of larger trends in South Korea. In 1965, for example, some 20,000 prostitutes catered to the 62,000 American GIs stationed there. As Moon points out, these numbers are similar to those of the Philippines at the time, where 55,000 prostitutes worked in some 2,182 Rest and Recreation establishments catering to American soldiers stationed in Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base.

49 Moon (1997), p. 37. These numbers stand in stark contrast to West Germany. Not only did no such off-limits clubs exist, but the number of sex workers was decidedly smaller. As a matter of fact, at the height of the American boom during the 1950s in Kaiserslautern, approximately 200 sex workers catered to a military community of some 40,000 GIs. One of the reasons for the much smaller numbers is the fact that many GIs arrived with families, or were able to initiate long-term relationships with German women due to the 3-year deployment schedule that was the norm. See Höhn (2002), chapter 8.

50 President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces (1963; 1964). See also Höhn (2002), chapter 3 for a more detailed depiction of how Jim Crow laws were introduced in West Germany.


52 Moon (1997), p. 29 shows that in camp towns 60-80% of income depended on the soldiers. For the more balanced economic interaction in West Germany see Höhn (2002), chapter 2. An off-limits was declared in 1957 against a German town that did not “play ball” but such a step would have been inconceivable in West Germany in the 1970s. See chapter 8 in Höhn (2002) for a discussion of the 1957 incident.


55 Moon (1997), p. 84. Moon also makes a convincing argument that the sex workers were also expected to alleviate the tensions between the U.S. and South Korea over the planned draw down of troops in South Korea as part of the Nixon Doctrine.


57 When the U.S. military imposed the off-limits order on Anjongni, the town’s economy was severely hurt. When locals and sex workers protested the off-limits order in front of the military base, the military used tear gas to disperse the protesters. Moon (1987), p. 81 and 145.
