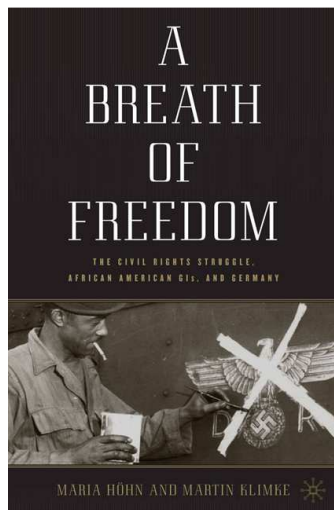


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# A Breath of Freedom

The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany

Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke

"A breakthrough in international history" — *Brenda Gayle Plummer, University of Wisconsin-Madison, author of Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*

Based on an award-winning international research project and photo exhibition, this poignant and beautifully illustrated book examines the experiences of African American GIs in Germany and the unique insights they provide into the civil rights struggle at home and abroad. Thanks in large part to its military occupation of Germany after World War II, America's unresolved civil rights agenda was exposed to worldwide scrutiny as never before. At the same time, the ambitious U.S. efforts to democratize German society after the defeat of Nazism meant that West Germany encountered American ideas of freedom and democracy to a much larger degree than many other countries. As African American GIs became increasingly politicized, they took on a particular significance for the Civil Rights Movement in light of Germany's central role in the Cold War. While the effects of the Civil Rights Movement reverberated across the globe, Germany represents a special case that illuminates a remarkable period in American and world history.

Digital archive including videos, photographs, and oral history interviews available at [www.breathoffreedom.org](http://www.breathoffreedom.org)

MARIA HÖHN is a professor of German History at Vassar College and an established scholar of the American military presence in Germany. MARTIN KLIMKE is a research fellow at the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC and the Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA) at the University of Heidelberg.

"Höhn and Klimke make an enormous contribution to African American History, German History, Military History - and how they intersect. It is beautifully written, persuasively argued, and expertly researched." — *Gerald Horne, University of Houston*

"A compelling narrative that is essential reading for anyone interested in the ways in which transnational connections reshape national histories." — *Akira Iriye, Harvard University, former president of the American Historical Association*

"Even for those of us who were involved in the civil rights movement during the 1960s, *A Breath of Freedom* is an eye-opener." — *Bob Filner, Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee*

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## Advance praise for *A Breath of Freedom*

"A story of transnational alliances grounded in complex local realities, *A Breath of Freedom* is a stellar work of international history."  
—**Adriane Lentz-Smith, Duke University, author of *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I***

"This deeply moving book perfectly captures my own experience as a black soldier in the segregated U.S. army during WWII who took part in the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp of Buchenwald. Höhn and Klimke vividly illustrate the fundamental impact these events had on my own life and on the lives of so many veterans who later became foot soldiers in the civil rights movement.

—**Leon Bass, WWII veteran**

"A fascinating exploration of an important but previously ignored topic. Through their rich history of black GIs in Germany, Höhn and Klimke have demonstrated that the American story of race was indeed a transnational one."—**Stephen Tuck, Oxford University, author of *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle from Emancipation to Obama***

"As a young GI in Germany in 1945 and 1946, I discovered that the early American occupation was a microcosm of the racial and civil rights struggle that would emerge later in my life. My own experience thus anticipates and validates the main thesis of Höhn and Klimke's *A Breath of Freedom*."—**David Brion Davis, Yale University, author of *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World***

"Höhn and Klimke's carefully researched and lucid book stands for a paradigm shift in our reading of the civil rights movement and deserves to become a classic in the field: not only does it invite the movement's relocation in a transnational context; it also succeeds in illustrating the innovative potential of this global perspective with its in-depth case study of the specific intersectionality of post-World War II Germany and African America." —**Maria Diedrich, University of Münster, founding president of the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR), author of *Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglass***

"Despite the countless books that have been written about the Cold War, the story of black GIs and their civil rights struggle outside of the United States remained untold – until now. In *A Breath of Freedom*, Höhn and Klimke make a signature addition across a number of scholarly fields including Black Diaspora, Military, Civil Rights, and Comparative Studies, to name a few. There simply is no comparable work on this subject. With its solid research, incisive analysis, and broad historical reach, this book should become a fundamental text for anyone curious about the cross-section of African American History and International Relations."—**Clarence Lusane, American University, Washington, DC, author of *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of European Blacks, Africans and African Americans during the Nazi Era***

"This important study amends Cold War history by delineating the substantial, though very different, roles that African Americans played in East and West Germany before the fall of the Wall. The volume makes a significant contribution to the expanding fields of Black Diaspora and Transnational Studies."—**Sara Lennox, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, former President of the German Studies Association**

"*A Breath of Freedom* is a fresh breath of air in the field of African American history, blowing captivating new insights into the transnational dimensions of the black freedom struggle and the role that soldiers' experiences abroad played in it. With its historical precision and engaging storytelling, this book is sure to appeal to general audiences and scholars alike."—**Simon Wendt, University of Frankfurt, author of *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights***

"This beautifully written book eloquently illustrates how people and cultures work in tandem, sometimes struggling against, sometimes inspiring one another, and how, in the case of Germans and African Americans, this historical entanglement inevitably helped both societies move toward the North Star of greater freedom for all. Höhn and Klimke's account thus encourages you to believe again in the possibilities of Martin Luther King's 'World House'."—**Joy Ford Austin, Executive Director, Humanities Council of Washington, DC, and former president of the African American Museums Association**

"Depicting the African American GI as the unheralded keystone of the civil rights movement in America during the post-WWII era, this book exhilaratingly exposes the two-facedness of America denazifying Germany while practicing Jim Crow segregation in its own military. With a thorough analysis of the African American press's role in exposing this hypocrisy, it reveals the many ways in which subsequent civil rights leaders owe their success to the groundwork laid by African American GIs. Together, they forged the space to launch a civil rights revolution in America."—**Calvin Robinson, President, NAACP, Rhein-Neckar Branch (Heidelberg, Germany)**