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When things get hairy: afros, cornrows, and the desegregation of US military hair salons in West Germany

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ABSTRACT

This article employs 'hair' as a lens for investigating the ways in which black women's experiences in the US military and West Germany were racialized and, at the same time, gendered. Based on the personal stories of Women's Army Corps member Babette Peyton, who got court-martialed in Germany in 1975 for wearing her hair in cornrows, and Marie Davenport, teacher and beautician in Frankfurt, who desegregated the local military hair salon, this article uncovers black women's mundane activism against racial and gender discrimination. Their experiences and perseverance demonstrate that black military women made critical contributions to the Civil Rights Movement while abroad in Germany.

KEYWORDS

Black hair Germany; US Military Women's Army Corps; discrimination; civil rights movement; race; gender

In early 1975, Babette Peyton, an enlisted member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC), made national news. Headlines such as 'WAC Faces Court Martial For "Corn Row" Hair Style', and 'Corn Rows Bring WAC Troubles' inundated American newspapers across racial lines and geographical divides.[1] Spec. 4 Babette Peyton from Chicago was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany where she worked first as a social worker in the child guidance clinic and then as a receptionist at the 97th General Hospital. She faced trial beginning 10 February 1975 for wearing her hair in tightly braided cornrows against her scalp. While 'the Army told commanders last October to allow enlisted women '"the greatest degree of personal freedom"', an article in *The Milwaukee Journal* on 30 January 1975 reported, it listed 'corn rows as one of the "outlandish" styles specifically prohibited'. In addition, Peyton was charged for going absent without leave when the Army ordered her to undergo psychiatric examinations.

Peyton, however, reported that her superiors at the 97th General Hospital 'ordered her sent to the Landstuhl mental hospital after she filed a complaint about alleged racial discrimination with the local equal opportunity officer' (*The Miami News*, March 19, 1975). According to an article in the *Afro-American* on 8 February 1975, she insisted that she 'was being set up … They were trying to put me in the loony bin'. Peyton explained that she first experienced harassment from her supervisors when she complained after she had not been allowed to work in her specialty for over 18 months and instead worked as a receptionist. In addition, she received criticism for her off-duty activities that included taking college courses, teaching dance lessons and organizing dance

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recitals, for which she was particularly reprimanded when she invited a general. Based on this 'grandiosity', she noted, an Army doctor diagnosed her 'a chronic schizophrenic', which prompted her to go absent without leave in October 1974 for two weeks (*Afro-American*, February 8, 1975). For Peyton her case represented a blatant example of racial and sexual discrimination: 'They are afraid of women, especially vocal black women who are creative' (*Afro-American*, February 8, 1975). According to an article that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* on 16 March 1975, a woman who was familiar with Peyton's case supported this claim stating that 'she [Peyton] would not have gotten into difficulties had she not complained in the first place'.

Through the lens of 'hair', this article examines the acceptance and understanding of black women in the US military apparatus. It first investigates the military's historical engagement with the afro hairstyle in order to provide the context for Peyton's case. This analysis reveals that despite a major initiative to teach German barbers the skills of cutting and styling black hair, it was not until the mid-1970s that the US military addressed the needs of black women. Second, the article discusses the activism of Marie Davenport, a cosmetologist teaching at the Frankfurt American High School, who initiated a campaign to improve black women's experiences related to hair care on military posts abroad. Her efforts ultimately led to the desegregation of the local military hair salon.

These personal stories reveal the ways in which the US military, while claiming to be racially inclusive, denied millions of its members essential rights to self-identity and expression. They also uncover, however, that African American military women abroad made crucial contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in hitherto neglected, mundane areas. As such, this article expands on scholarship that has reframed the American Civil Rights Movement in a transnational context (Hoehn 2002; Hoehn and Klimke 2010).

It's a white hair world

For centuries, black hair has been tangled up with the history of slavery and oppression.[2] Scholars like Walker (2007, 2) have argued that 'African American hair has historically symbolized and continues to reflect struggles over race and gender in the United States'. At the same time, it is crucial to understand that the politics of black hair have particularly affected black women. Banks (2000, 2) explains that hair matters in different ways for black men and women since for women, what is deemed desirable, depends on hair texture and white standards, rendering black women's hair per se undesirable in mainstream society. Kelley (1997, 348) further notes that for black women, going natural meant not only an embrace of blackness but at the same time 'a direct rejection of a conception of female beauty that many black men themselves had upheld'. Consequently, as Walker (2007, 10) argues, 'by the 1970s, no one could deny that black women's hair was political'.

The US military's ignorance about the diversity of hair types, structures, and needs has a long history going back many decades to when black females began to join the US military in larger numbers. Most straightened their hair, hoping to fit the predominant beauty standard of soft, loose, and flowing locks, as Walker explains (2000, 538), for 'since the early twentieth century, straightened hair had been considered an essential part of good grooming and a respectable "modern" appearance for black women'. This notion

of 'good hair vs. bad hair' therefore permeated military circles, and Brenda L. Moore (1996, 195) notes,

> the African American Wac, in relation to her white counterpart, was often deprived socially, politically, and culturally; she was expected to fit the Eurocentric image (in regard to religious orientation, style of dress, taste of music, hairstyle, cuisine, and so on) that dominated all American institutions.

It is therefore not surprising that military documents on women emphasized white beauty standards and that a review of educational films, produced by the US military for the WAC, reveals the blatant neglect of black women's needs and concerns. In 'Mind Your Military Manners: Military Etiquette and Grooming' and 'Look Like a Winner: Military Etiquette and Grooming', both produced in 1971, the content addresses white women's hair, discussing the right cut and style, and emphasizing frequent shampooing.[3] Ironically, when discussing makeup, the films emphasize the need to enhance a woman's natural looks. One of the only two black women who appear in these films wears her hair natural and very short. The other woman wears a wig of long, straight hair, making for a very interesting 'bathroom scene' in which her morning hair routine apparently only included patting her hair, whereas her white peers painstakingly combed and styled their hair.

An exception to this silence around black women's hair needs occurred when the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, part of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, was sent abroad, first to England then to France in 1943. The 6888th was the only all black female battalion, made up of over 850 enlisted women and officers. The military sent this unit abroad not only with straightening combs and other beauty supplies but also with a handful of beauticians who could ensure the proper maintenance of these women's hair, thus reinforcing white beauty ideals (Gill 2010, 78). In this case, the decision to equip this unit with straightening combs should not be interpreted as a racist act but instead as a reflection of the times and dominant beauty trends among black women. Consequently, Moore suggests, this decision should be attributed to the battalion commander's special sensitivity toward the unit's morale (1996, 185–186).

Overall, then, black military women were expected to comply with mainstream beauty standards which meant mimicking white hair styles that required them to either straighten their hair or wear wigs or weaves, the only alternative being to wear very short natural hair to make it a non-issue. However, beauty was indeed an issue in the US military in the 1960s, and the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (2014) writes in its 'History of Women in the Military' that the emphasis on looks and behaving like a lady became so powerful that 'the more attractive women were assigned to front office positions, regardless of their technical capabilities and education'.[4] Concurrently, in the black civilian community, natural hair became increasingly popular among black Americans in the second half of the 1960s. Advertisements throughout black newspapers substantiate this claim as they celebrated natural hair for both men and women. The slogan 'Natural Women Steal the Scene' best captures this new trend. The product advertised, Raveen Au Naturelle, claimed it was 'for women who wear it like it is'.[5]

In September 1969, the popularity of the afro prompted the US Marine Corps commandant, Gen. Leonard F. Chapman to issue 'one of the most revolutionary orders in American military history … [that] ordered all unit commanders to permit the Afro hair style …

neatly trimmed on the side and back, no more than three inches high on the top' (*Jet*, September 25, 1969). This order, *Jet* reported, was part of a larger initiative to combat racial friction and to boost troop morale following racial clashes on two marine camps in North Carolina and Hawaii. The directive further approved the raised clenched-fist salute as a sign of unity, not defiance, and demanded an end to 'unfair practices in promotions, duty assignments, handling grievances and discipline' (*Jet*, September 25, 1969). Black marines, however, did not receive this order uncritically. One wondered how to wear a 'neatly trimmed Afro, … "there's no such thing"', he claimed (*Jet*, September 25, 1969). Another insisted that 'It ain't an Afro, and everybody knows it, especially us Africans' (*New York Times*, September 15, 1969). And *Jet* anticipated on 25 September 1969 that this order would 'stir more controversy than any armed forces command since integration of the services'.

The Army followed suit and, as the *Army Times* reported on 27 September 1969, approved a debatable relaxation with regard to black hairstyles just shortly after the Marine's directive was issued. Half a year later, however, it seemed that the directive often remained unsupported. In a letter to the editor of *Ebony* published in January 1970, one soldier stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas, complained that 'in most of the commands, soldiers are still being forced to wear the old type hair cut [*sic*]. It is being claimed here that no one ever heard of the change'. He continued to sum up what was at stake as follows: 'We are proud to serve in the United States Army, but we are also proud of our black heritage, and we want to show it without being oppressed' (*Ebony*, January 1970). Because no true progress was made, black members of the Armed Forces continuously had to measure up to predominantly white beauty standards. For black women this meant that, unless they wanted to wear traditional short hairstyles, they had to devote a lot of time and financial resources to either chemically processing their hair or investing in wigs or weaves.[6]

'The military meets the afro'

Especially for enlisted men and women abroad, the resources for black hair care continued to be scarce. It was only in the early 1970s that the US military first responded to 'problems its black servicemen, women and dependents have been having caring for their hair' (*Ebony*, September 1970). In this detailed story, entitled 'The Military Meets the Afro: Exchange Barbers Are Taught "Secrets" of Black Hair', *Ebony* reported about an unprecedented program initiated by the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) in 1970 to provide better service and resources for black hair needs. Consisting of two phases, the program would first train approximately 6,000 barbers and 1,100 beauticians worldwide to learn to cut and style black hair. It would then target the over 3,000 Army and Air Force exchange stores around the world and stock them with products tailored for black hair. According to *Ebony*, this program presented a 'top-priority effort for AAFES, the world's fourth largest retail enterprise … [that] serves about six million military and civilian personnel whose yearly purchases exceed $2 billion'. It can consequently be assumed then, that the AAFES deemed this program as quite lucrative, given that it could easily add the 'approximately one million black personnel and their dependents' to its client base.

For black military men and women, however, this program indeed presented 'a godsend', as *Ebony* explained:

> For years, the stock inventory of the exchanges were mostly geared to white hair. Blacks thus had to or either cut or process their hair to conform to the combs, clippers and liquid grooming products available on military installations. But even in the cutting and straightening, blacks rarely trusted the inexperienced white and foreign barbers and beauticians … Blacks therefore got together in barracks or private quarters off base to cut and style each other's hair with scissors, hot combs, razor blades and other makeshift tools.

As a result, San Diego-based pioneering barber Willie Lee Morrow explained in this article, black men and women often ended up with 'burned scalps, uneven haircuts, ingrown hair bumps, undernourished scalp, and dry brittle hair falling out'. These problems, Morrow assured, all resulted from a lack of proper treatment and care. In particular, women would often resort to wearing wigs once they ran out of their stateside hair products. The AAFES decided to commission Morrow, who had published a book on *The Principles of Cutting and Styling Negro Hair*, to produce a number of training films on black hair care and to train barbers and beauticians worldwide to serve black military men and women.[7] In 1970, he held training workshops in Europe, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and the United States. In March of that year, Morrow instructed 30 German master barbers in the art of cutting black hair and styling an afro in Frankfurt. They learned about picks and electric clippers, products that, the AAFES assured, would soon be available in US post exchange stores across Germany (*The Hartford Courant*, March 10, 1970).

Wherever Morrow went, he insisted, 'blacks flocked begging for haircuts, Afro combs, hair sprays, permanents, and conditioners' (*Ebony*, September 1970). It is therefore no surprise that 500 Afro combs ordered for an exchange outlet in Korea sold out within minutes. Morrow further conceded that the US military lacked specific guidelines for black hair given the unfamiliarity with black natural hair:

> As long as the blacks wore the 'Quo Vadis' or 'Ivy League' haircuts or processed their hair straight, there was no trouble complying with regulations and also getting a haircut at the exchange shops. But the black cultural revolution and this new ethnic pride in our natural features encouraged blacks to start wearing their hair long and in its natural state. The pressure they have exerted has also changed the regulations … [but] no matter how long military regulations will permit the black man's hair to grow, the final word will come from the individual commander … On some bases, black are required to wear styles which hardly differ from the closely-cut … haircuts popular during the late 50s and early 60s. On other bases, blacks are permitted to wear their hair so long that they have difficulty wearing even over-size military head-covers. (Ebony, September 1970)

These variations within Army standards, therefore, suggest that the capriciousness and at-will interpretations persisted despite the policies and practices of AAFES. Another article supports this suspicion in its claims that 'Afro haircuts are generally allowed in the European command as long as they are neatly trimmed. The final arbiter of what is "neat" is the local commander' (*The Hartford Courant*, March 10, 1970).

In a follow-up article from July 1971, *Ebony* reported that:

> within the past 18 months … the more than 3,300 Army-Air Force retail exchange outlets around the world have placed more than 300 black-oriented items on sales shelves. Previously, there were no more than 26 such items … for the one million or more black servicemen and their dependents.

These items, *Ebony* explained, included various hair care products and cosmetics, dashikis, greeting cards with 'soul' drawings and messages, magazines, and phonograph records. While this article points out the customer satisfaction in American-based exchange stores, it also admitted that this program was a work in progress and that 'some black servicemen still complain that the variety of black-oriented products is too limited and that not enough of the most popular items is ordered by a number of exchanges'. An investigation by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) supports this notion. While in Germany, representatives of the NAACP observed that 'blacks have a special problem with haircuts' since on many posts, barbers did not do adequate jobs despite the official training.[8] Black women especially complained, the report states, that 'the PX beauty shops do not have beauticians who can set the hair of black wives'.[9]

On the fringes of racial equality in Germany

Peyton's case, therefore, needs to be understood in this context. And it was clearly not isolated. In the years leading up to her case, 'hair' had increasingly become a source of contention in Germany and the United States. The African American press frequently reported about women facing natural hair disputes at their workplaces. In one example published in *Jet* on 18 September 1969, flight attendant Debby Renwick from Chicago experienced harassment from United Airlines officials when she started to wear her medium-length hair natural and no longer in a bouffant style. Up until then, *Jet* explains, she enjoyed a pleasant relationship with her employer. In spite of wearing a natural hairstyle that complied with United's hair length regulation, Renwick was threatened with dismissal if she did not trim her hair. She could wear a wig instead, United suggested. This 'arbitrary hair ruling', Renwick and her lawyer insisted, presented an '"obvious attempt" to discourage her from wearing a natural', and consequently should be identified as 'racially discriminatory in nature and tone'. In the article, Renwick cites the case of a black female ticket agent who was harassed for wearing her natural hair too long while her white colleagues had hair just about the same length and even longer. She insisted:

> I think the only reason they noted the length of my hair is because it was nappy and it wasn't straight. I don't know if this is unofficial policy for United, that black girls' hair can only be so long if it's nappy or what.

In military circles, two more cases further substantiate the capriciousness involved in these acts of discrimination. Jeretha D. Lay, born in Louisiana, was stationed in Frankfurt where she had a friend from the Virgin Islands who would braid her hair in cornrows. Her colonel, however, did not appreciate her hairstyle: 'That's when I'd say that my braids is [*sic*] a heritage of my people, and you have to define and show me somewhere, since the Army is ran [*sic*] by regulations, that I can't have braids', she retells her encounter. In this case, Lay was allowed to continue wearing cornrows.[10] In the second case, however, Janist Stewart, a typist in the Headquarter command in Washington, D.C. was convicted in a court-martial ruling for having refused to cut her afro hairstyle. A panel of five officers announced that Stewart would be demoted by one grade in rank (*Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1976).

Black males equally became entangled in these debates. Just shortly before Peyton's story surfaced in early 1975, the US military experienced a series of protests related to

its hair regulations. Army Lt. Matthew Carroll, stationed in Frankfurt, was tried for refusing 'to cut his hair or trim his mustache to conform to Pentagon standards' (*Afro-American*, February 8, 1975). Carroll, a white officer, who had grown is hair in an Afro-style, insisted that 'I don't feel the Army has a right to tell a human being how to comb his hair' (*Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1974). He reported that he was transferred from his regular job as a race-relations instructor to an office position after he refused to obey an order to cut his hair. Other soldiers in West Berlin protested the Army's hair regulations by organizing a 24-hour strike in an artillery unit (*Afro-American*, February 8, 1975). According to an *Afro-American* article on 21 December 1974, 'between 20 and 25 men have been subjected to Army court-martials in Europe' in November 1974 alone. As this article states, Wisconsin lawmaker Les Aspin, who investigated these unrests in Germany, allegedly received 'a letter signed by 1,200 of the approximately 3,000 men stationed in Berlin supporting their complaints' regarding harassment about hair regulations.[11]

On 18 March 1975, after nearly seven hours of hearing testimony, a jury of three officers and three enlisted soldiers, including two women, convicted Peyton of going absent without leave but decided not to sentence her (*The Miami News*, March 19, 1975). Judge Capt. Sanford W. Harvey, Jr. further decided to drop the insubordination charge regarding Peyton's cornrow hair style 'because Miss Peyton had not been given a proper order to conform to Army regulations' (*Jet*, April 3, 1975). Peyton's lawyer Christopher Coates concluded that 'The fact that they convicted her and refused to impose any punishment seems to show she was justified' (*The Miami News*, March 19, 1975).[12] Peyton herself showcased her conviction of her innocence by appearing in court with her hair braided in cornrows (*Afro-American*, March 29, 1975).

Marie Davenport in Frankfurt

Despite the Army's official concern for improving the black military experience, then, real progress was at most ambiguous. According to the Black Committee for Change in Frankfurt, 'The Blacks in the Frankfurt Community have always been concerned about the lack of qualified beauticians in the AAFES Shops'.[13] Laura B. Stenson, social worker, Chair Person of this committee, and representative of the Frankfurt Chapter of the National Organization for Women insisted in a letter from June 1975 to the General Manager of the Frankfurt Exchange of AAFEs Europe the following:

> For the past five years, AAFES has been giving lip service to improving service to the Black Community. Many of us recall the outstanding in-service training program given by Mr. Willie Morrow. There was an upsurge of improved services for Blacks, which very quickly lost its momentum, and things are now back to normal, racist as usual.[14]

In the weeks leading up to her trial, Peyton sought advice and support from Marie Davenport, a beautician and cosmetologist who taught cosmetology at the cosmetology department of the Frankfurt American High School.

Davenport and her ten–year-old daughter had just arrived in Frankfurt in the summer of 1974. Although her plan was to stay for two years only so that her daughter could attend the prestigious National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., Davenport eventually continued her assignment with the Department of Defense for 20 years. Considering her background, growing up with her parents in Mississippi, Davenport heard many stories about

her great-grandfather, Papi, a slave who joined the Union army in Kentucky during the Civil War to fight for his freedom. A strong work ethic and the determination to fight for one's dreams were values that Davenport learned young. As a child, she 'had a twenty-minute walk on a gravel road to the one-room school designated for black children in her community … As she walked, a bus full of white students, sometimes calling names to the black children through the window, would speed past' (*The 'Sip Magazine*, April 13, 2014). Upon graduating from high school in 1956, she had the opportunity to live with extended family in Toledo, Ohio, where she attended beauty school and learned to style white hair. After six years, she decided to move to Washington, D.C., where she attended the University of Maryland and worked at a white-only hair salon, first as a shampooer and later as the store manager. Her Jewish employer supported her, despite the hate notes they would frequently find on the store windows. As mentioned to me in an interview from 17 December 2013, she remembers that one time, 'they bombed the place'. But Davenport persevered. She explained to me that she 'just continued to work … I had to get over that hurdle and luckily I was able to break down some of these barriers'. In 1963, Davenport was one of the approximate 300,000 people who supported Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous March on Washington. She explains that for her, this event meant that she was 'more and more convinced that I had to get out and do something and not just talk about it' (*The 'Sip Magazine*, April 13, 2014). It was also in Washington, D.C. where Davenport first learned about the overseas teaching opportunities offered by the Department of Defense.

While in Frankfurt, Davenport taught both cosmetology and vocational education classes at the Frankfurt American High School. In addition, her passion for civil rights advocacy became vibrant throughout her career. Her family history and experiences with the Civil Rights Movement, Davenport explained, taught her that 'it's important to stand up for what you believe in'. Naturally then, Davenport quickly became a pivotal figure in the African American community in Frankfurt. For seven years, she frequently appeared on the American Forces Network TV show 'Guesthouse', where she spoke about black hair and skin care as well as African American and civil rights history. In fact, as she told me in the interview, she remembers that she did so much on television that many people thought it was her primary career. These engagements and her public activism quickly made her *the* confidant for many black Americans in Frankfurt. She insists that 'everybody knew me. Everybody came to me when there was a problem about racism. I had so many young ladies [come to me]'.[15] Davenport remembers that 'many people came to me, African Americans, complaining about people not treating them fairly and they had to go in the corner … I knew that that wasn't right'.[16] Many complaints, however, particularly revolved around concerns of hair care at the Frankfurt post salon. In particular, she would hear complaints from her students and their parents about the lack of appropriate service and products available to them at the post salon. Consequently, she learned that not only was the military post beauty shop de facto segregated, but also that the exchange store lacked sufficient hair care products. In fact, she recalls, that they only carried one product, a type of grease, targeting black hair.

In early 1975, Peyton approached Davenport for support in her impending trial. Both women had known each other through Davenport's civil rights initiatives as well as through her cosmetology department. In fact, Davenport's students had braided Peyton's hair in cornrows before. 'Peyton', Davenport recalls, 'was trying to gather

enough information so she would not lose her job'.[17] Davenport agreed to write a letter to the Frankfurt Community Commander on Peyton's behalf. In her letter, she insisted that Peyton should not be court-martialed for wearing her hair in cornrows. She explained that 'This is the way our hair is … This was part of our culture. This is what we did to keep our hair together'.[18] After the trial, she remembers, 'Babette came back to me to tell me what happened … It [the letter] made a difference'.[19]

Frustrated with the status quo, Davenport decided to take a part-time position at the Frankfurt PX Beauty Salon. She hoped to learn more about its practices so she could file a more informed complaint. While others called her a 'troublemaker', Dr Bloom, the principal at the Frankfurt High School, supported her in this decision. After one week, however, she quit because she 'was set off in a small, partitioned, poorly lighted area designated for "Blacks." Furthermore … she was offered the same low salary as the other beauticians: however, the Black customers whom she was designated to serve paid more for the services'.[20] Further, she resented that she would only be given the black customers while she was qualified to style white hair just as well.

Davenport's friend Stenson brought these complaints to the attention of Mr Rose, the General Manager of the Frankfurt Exchange. She insisted that 'all beauticians should be qualified to do the hair of all those who require their services, regardless of color'.[21] She also explained that beauticians such as Davenport, who are qualified to do all types of hair, 'resent being designated as "the black beautician"'.[22] In addition, she suggested that because of her qualifications, Davenport should have been paid more than her colleagues who could only style white hair. Stenson then challenged the manager: 'What do you require of us to get the system to change to meet our needs?'[23] On behalf of the Black Committee for Change, she further requested a meeting with representatives of AAFES Europe who were responsible for the conditions in Frankfurt.

Rose's response to this letter has not been found. A letter that he sent to Stenson on 23 September 1975, however, suggests, that he sent a reply to her original letter on 28 July 1975. His letter also implies that a meeting, as requested by Stenson, had not taken place. Instead, he first assured her that no black person would be used as a training model without his or her prior consent, and that no black clients had been turned away for service from the beauty salon. He further explained that the shop manager, Erika Steiner, along with one male operator 'can perform all required services to all patrons. The other operators are still in the process of receiving training to meet our standards'.[24] It seems almost contradictory then that according to Rose, 'Mr. Zech, the beauty shop concessionaire has advised this office that he will be glad to hire a black beautician for the beauty shop'.[25]

Without real progress achieved and with more and more complaints brought to her attention, Davenport felt that some action had to be taken. She remembers that a group of black women, including the Community Commander's wife, decided to all go to the post beauty salon to get their hair done. At the arranged date, however, Davenport was the only one who showed up. She told me that was greeted by the salon manager with the words 'but the black lady is not here now. She'll be in next week'. When she then insisted to be seen by someone else, the manager assigned her to 'a young French girl' who, after burning her neck and ears with the hot comb, admitted that 'I really don't know how to do your kind of hair'. Davenport finished styling her own hair.

After this encounter, she met the community commander, Robert Porter, to complain about her experience at the beauty salon. Porter, an African American, arranged for a meeting with a group of representatives from AAFES Europe. Davenport recalls that Steiner, the salon manager, was present at that meeting and began to cry when she presented her experiences both as a client and an employee. The AAFES representatives, according to Davenport, felt that they needed to put a new plan in action. They offered her the position of manager of all military salons in Europe. Davenport, however, declined because she did not want to leave her Frankfurt community and also because she enjoyed teaching so much. In the end, Zech, the beauty shop concessionaire accepted the job. Davenport, on the other hand, helped the AAFES implement a training program to ensure that stylists could serve all clients, regardless of their race. She traveled to other beauty salons throughout Germany to assess them and to hold workshops and seminars. In addition, she consulted them on products targeting black customers. The products that she listed to the AAFES, she notes, went into all salons in Europe. She also assured that the de facto segregation area in Frankfurt was removed and a black hairdresser was hired. She explained in the interview: 'I went by once just to take a look. It was all open space'. In addition, she confirmed that the military exchange stores then carried not just a single black hair product but a variety of products targeting a range of hair needs.

Conclusion

Despite the above changes, however, as late as 31 March 2014, the US military updated Army Regulation 670–1, entitled 'Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia', prohibiting popular natural black female hairstyles including cornrows, twists, dreadlocks, and afros, declaring them as 'matted and unkempt'. This regulatory change caused an uproar among black military women, who viewed this policy as discriminatory and racist. Some 17,000 people signed a petition to repeal these new regulations. A 'Pentagon Hair War', as the press called it, broke out when the Congressional Black Caucus led a charge against the military's decision to ban natural hairstyles popular among black women. As a result, all three military branches loosened their restrictions. The Army, for instance, now allows two-strand twists and has increased the authorized size of braids, cornrows, and twists, having removed spacing requirements.

For Congressional Black Caucus Chair, Marcia L. Fudge, this repeal demonstrates that Secretary Hagel and the Department of Defense are not only responsive to concerns of military members but that they also respect them. As reported by *Time* on 13 August 2014, she further explains:

> These changes recognize that traditional hairstyles worn by women of color are often necessary to meet our unique needs, and acknowledges that these hairstyles do not result in or reflect less professionalism or commitment to the high standards required to serve within our Armed Forces. (Rhodan 2014)

At the same time, the personal struggles of Peyton and Davenport reveal everyday expressions of activism and black pride in Germany that easily get overlooked in US-centered narratives of Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement. African American women, this article demonstrates, fought to carve out a space within the American military culture that would validate the identity and personal needs of black women. While Peyton's case

illustrates the limits of that acceptance, Marie Davenport's activism improved the military service's attitudes and practices regarding black hair for generations to come. The experiences of these black women as well as others provide insight into black military life in Germany and also reveal invaluable contributions that individual women made to advance civil rights and to support black solidarity regarding issues that have received little attention in scholarly work.

Notes

1. The articles include: "WAC Faces Court Martial For 'Corn Row' Hair Style," *The Milwaukee Journal*, January 30, 1975, 7; "Corn Rows Bring WAC Troubles," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 15, 1975, 3. Others include: "The Corn Row Case: Woman Faces Army Hearing Over Hair," *Daily Independent Journal* (California), January 30, 1975, 7; "WAC to Be Tried Over 'Hairstyle'," *Afro-American*, February 8, 1975, 7; "Black WAC Convicted of AWOL But Goes Free," *Jet*, April 3, 1975, 14; "No Punishment For Being AWOL: WAC Feared Transfer To Asylum," *The Miami News*, March 19, 1975, 1; "Technician Charges Bias," *Chicago Defender*, October 26, 1974, 1.
2. For thorough analyses of the politics of African American women's hair see: Craig (2002); Banks (2000); Patton (2006); Rooks (1996); Walker (2000); Walker (2007); Byrd and Tharps (2001); Kelley (1997).
3. *U.S. National Archives on Youtube*, accessed November 18, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOZoi6jFk9o and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyP9WwMeuoE.
4. "History of Women in the Military," Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, accessed November 18, 2014, http://www.deomi.org/eoadvisortoolkit/documents/Sexism_History_Of_Women_In_The_Military.pdf.
5. Raveen Au Naturelle. Advertisement. *Jet*, September 25, 1969, 26.
6. Weaves were used by African American women since 1950, but did not experience a major breakthrough until the late 1980s and 1990s. See Byrd and Tharps (2001, 85, 95).
7. According to *Jet*, Morrow self-published this book in 1966: "To Teach Overseas Black Barbers to Cut Black Hair," *Jet*, February 26, 1970, 25.
8. Library of Congress, Records of the NAACP, Part V, Box V2705, Memorandum for the Secretary of the Army, Trip Report: Visit to USAREUR, 23 October 1970.
9. See note 8.
10. Jeretha D. Lay, interview 85637, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress.
11. It is important to point out that these protests involved not just black but also white soldiers, who also viewed "hair" as a tool for self-expression and felt limited by military regulations in their personal freedom. At the same time, the German army allowed longer hair for men and had just issued hair nets for soldiers with long hair.
12. Babette Peyton served in the US Army until January 1973. There are no records of her discharge. Today, she lives in a disabled Veterans' Residence in the South Side of Chicago. She has been wheelchair-bound due to paralysis she suffered from a long-term service injury. http://financialservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hhrg-112-ba04-wstate-bpeyton-20120914.pdf.
13. Laura B. Stenson to Frankfurt Exchange, AAFES Europe, June 27, 1975, Private Archive Marie Davenport.
14. See note 13.
15. See note 13.
16. See note 13.
17. See note 13.
18. See note 13.
19. See note 13.
20. Laura B. Stenson to Frankfurt Exchange, AAFES Europe, June 27, 1975, Private Archive Marie Davenport.
21. See note 21.

22. See note 13.
23. See note 13.
24. L. Rose, Frankfurt Exchange, AFES Europe to Laura Stenson, September 23, 1975, Private Archive Marie Davenport.
25. See note 24.

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