

Introduction: Two Biographies

Overview

Jermaine Raffington, himself an Afro-German, has created a series on YouTube in which he interviews fellow Afro-Germans. In this lesson, the class watches two of these (roughly 7 minutes each) and discusses the aspects of each person's life presented as important to their own sense of identity.

Goal

Used an introduction to topic of Afro-Germans, this lesson should serve to destabilize the notion of a "Black German" identity as such. To the extent that "Blackness" serves as a signifier, it is largely via an association with African Americans (which, in the case of the two individuals presented, is largely absent in their own biographies). Students should thus gain the general sense that "Blackness" functions very differently in Germany than it does in the US, that it doesn't actually signify anything that these two individuals share, except as seen in the expectations of others.

Lesson Plan

A worksheet with images of Sylvie Nantcha and Kevin John Edusei is distributed. It asks students to take notes on the experiences, personal qualities, and cultural practices that each individual presents as important to their sense of identity. Answers will vary, but in general, Sylvie Nantcha is a CDU politician, an immigrant from Cameroon, a mother, and a PhD. She is religious, tenacious, and *gastfreundlich*. She describes incidents from her past in which she experienced racism and sexism, and is proud of the stereotypes she has broken. Kevin John Edusei is an orchestral conductor, who describes having grown up in a context relatively free of racism and the sense that he was different from other kids; he has had to fight off expectations projected onto him based on the assumption that he would somehow be "American," if not actually African American. Both of them end by saying that they are German.

But of course, these two people share very little in common with each other that can be tied to their "Blackness" – and much more that can be tied to their Germanness. So, after first discussing the notes the students have taken, further questions might include:

1. What did you find most interesting or surprising about these two individuals?
2. What do these two people have in common?
3. Which of these commonalities can we link to their identities as "Afro-Germans"?
4. Which can we link to their identities as "Germans"?
5. How did each of the individuals describe their relationship with the US? How can we make sense of their statements?
6. Based just on these two videos, how would you compare the situations of Blacks in Germany with that of Blacks in the US?

Materials: Links to materials are provided online.