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›BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL‹*

Radical Chic, Chromatic Politics, and Constructions of *Race* in the Campaigns of the West German Christian Democrats in the 1970s

In 1972, the Federal Republic of Germany experienced a fierce national election campaign, later remembered as the ›mother of all election battles‹.[1] It was a period of unprecedented politicization and mobilization in West German politics. On 19 November 1972, a year earlier than originally scheduled due to a series of parliamentary defections that threatened Chancellor Willy Brandt's social-liberal majority, voters turned out in record numbers: 91.1 percent of eligible voters participated, the highest percentage of any federal election since 1949.[2] The governing Social Democrats ran a particularly dynamic, highly personalized campaign centered around the popular Brandt. Taking their cue from campaigners in the United States, the SPD's strategists had begun building him up as a ›German Kennedy‹ a decade earlier.[3] In 1972, both major West German parties ran American-style campaigns utilizing new methods, such as canvassing, and wooed voters with colorful imagery and numerous witty slogans, often using rhyme or alliteration. Given the highly personalized nature of the campaign, many of these featured Brandt (›*Willy wählen*‹) or, much less successfully,

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1 Werner A. Perger, Die Mutter aller Wahlschlachten, in: ZEIT Online, 10 August 2013, URL: <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2013-07/wahlkampfzeiten-1972/komplettansicht>.

2 Der Bundeswahlleiter (ed.), Ergebnisse früherer Bundestagswahlen, Wiesbaden 2022, p. 8.

3 Thomas Mergel, *Propaganda nach Hitler. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Wahlkampfs in der Bundesrepublik 1949–1990*, Göttingen 2010, pp. 215-220.

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his less charismatic Christian Democratic challenger Rainer Barzel (›*Rainer, sonst keiner*‹), each of whom was introduced to voters on a first-name basis to project personability.[4]

One of the most remarkable posters to be distributed that year – and one that party strategists considered to be one of the most resonant – also used alliteration but looked very different.[5] Instead of featuring one of the two candidates for chancellor or the faces of other prominent politicians, it simply presented bold white letters on a black background. ›Black is beautiful‹, it declared. Below the slogan was the logo of the party that had commissioned it in small red letters: CDU.[6]

Poster for the federal election campaign, 1972 (and 1976)
(Konrad Adenauer Foundation/Stiftung [KAS], Archive for Christian-Democratic Policy/Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik [ACDP], 10-001-1550)

In campaigning with ›Black is beautiful‹, the center-right Christian Democrats appropriated one of the most recognizable slogans of US Civil Rights activists – one that had indeed given a name to a distinct strand of the quest for Black liberation: the ›Black is beautiful‹ movement. This Black pride cultural movement had begun to translate the legislative victories of the Civil Rights Movement into a consciously joyful critique of racism and white supremacy, moving liberation from a political to a personal project.[7] It did so by rejecting white, European ideals of beauty and celebrating the natural features of Black bodies.

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4 Michael Fritzen, Humor – damit der Gegner kocht, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 November 1972, p. 4; Mergel, *Propaganda nach Hitler* (fn 3), pp. 215-225. On the difficulties of selling Barzel, who had a reputation as a cold careerist, to voters, see Thomas Mergel, Grenzen der Imagepolitik: Eine gescheiterte Kampagne für Rainer Barzel 1972, in: Daniela Münkel/Lu Seegers (eds), *Medien und Imagepolitik im 20. Jahrhundert. Deutschland, Europa, USA*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, pp. 47-69.

5 Ottfried Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht der Bundesgeschäftsstelle der CDU, Januar 1973, Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP), 07-001-7073.

6 ›Black is beautiful‹, ACDP, 10-001-1550; ACDP, 07-001-7060; Hans-Gert Pöttering (ed.), *Politik in Plakaten. Plakatgeschichte der CDU aus acht Jahrzehnten*, Bonn 2015, p. 115; see also <https://digit.wdr.de/entries/68158>.

7 Melissa L. Baird, ›Making Black More Beautiful‹: Black Women and the Cosmetics Industry in the Post-Civil Rights Era, in: *Gender & History* 33 (2021), pp. 557-574; Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*, Oxford 2002; Stephanie M.H. Camp, Black Is Beautiful: An American History, in: *Journal of Southern History* 81 (2015), pp. 675-690.

While some of its ideas can be traced back as far as the mid-1900s, the birth of the slogan and movement is often dated to the early 1960s and New York's Harlem neighborhood.[8] Until then, Black Americans – and especially Black women – had been expected to conform to white standards of beauty. Afros, for example, were frowned upon and considered unruly. In a white-dominated society, Black women straightened their hair. The members of the African Jazz Art Society and Studios (AJASS), a New York-based artists' collective, sought to change this when they staged a fashion show at a popular Harlem nightclub in January 1962 to raise Black self-esteem. Officially titled ›Naturally '62: The Original African Coiffure and Fashion Extravaganza Designed to Restore Our Racial Pride and Standards‹, it featured local women from Harlem who proudly wore their tightly curled hair and modelled African-inspired clothing and jewelry.[9]

The show was a huge success, running annually throughout the 1960s and inspiring similar shows across the US. Its message was carried not least by photojournalist Kwame Brathwaite, who captured striking images of the Black models. Brathwaite was not only a talented artist; he also had a keen business sense and began producing ›Black is beautiful‹ paraphernalia. The catchy slogan was printed in big, bold letters on posters and fliers.[10] It was also taken up and popularized further by the radicals of the Black Panther Party (BPP; originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense), the most stylish – and perhaps most influential – international revolutionaries of the sixties who combined militant, Marxist-Leninist, anti-imperialist politics with a distinctly Black aesthetic, inspiring activists from Berkeley to Bamako.[11] In the era of decolonization, the slogan ›Black is beautiful‹ quickly began to resonate internationally, expressing, as it did, a powerful rejection of Eurocentrism.[12] The West German press and television, which were closely following US race relations at the time, also began to cover the movement in the late 1960s.[13]

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8 Lisa R. Merriweather, »Black Is Beautiful«, in: Akinyele Umoja/Karin L. Stanford/Jasmin A. Young (eds), *Black Power Encyclopedia. From »Black Is Beautiful« to Urban Uprisings*, vol. 1, Santa Barbara 2018, pp. 108-112.

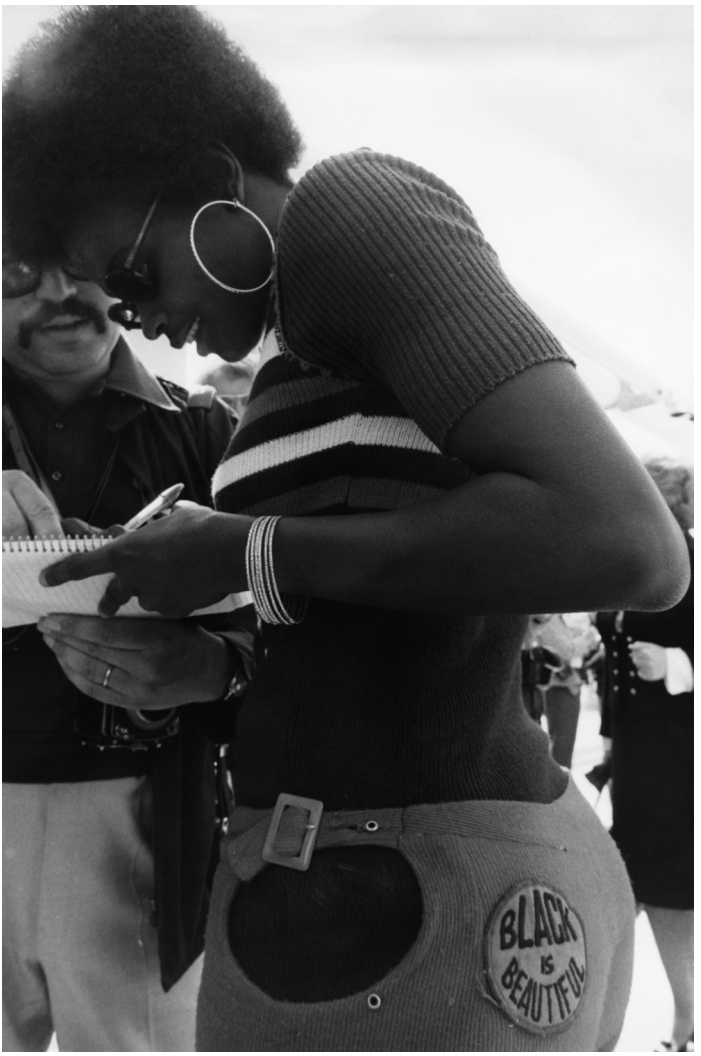
9 Lilly Workneh, The Rise of the Black is Beautiful Revolution, in: *Essence* 53, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2022), pp. 80-83.

10 Tanisha C. Ford, Kwame Brathwaite: Black Is Beautiful, in: *Aperture* 228 (2017), pp. 46-53; Workneh, The Rise of the Black is Beautiful Revolution (fn 9).

11 Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness. The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*, Charlottesville 2010, pp. 53-56; on the organizational history of the BPP and its global reach, see Joshua Bloom/Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire. The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, Berkeley 2013; Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland. Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War*, Ithaca 2017.

12 Merriweather, »Black Is Beautiful« (fn 8).

13 NEGER. Schwarz ist schön, in: *Spiegel*, 16 September 1968, pp. 157-158; Brigitte Zander-Spahn, Das neue Nairobi liegt in Amerika, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 November 1968, p. 12. West Germany's second public television channel showed a documentary about the movement in 1971. See the announcement in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 March 1971, p. 12.



A young African American woman with a sticker declaring ›BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL‹ on her clothing, 1960s
(dpa/Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo)

It was against this backdrop that the Christian Democrats adopted ›Black is beautiful‹ in 1972 to oust the Social Democrats from the Chancellery. They repurposed the slogan, which had already been used in the United States to sell everything from cosmetics and clothing to alcohol and cigarettes, to promote the CDU. Not only did the party distribute tens of thousands of posters bearing the slogan, but Christian

Box of matches, 1972
(KAS, ACDP, CDU-Bundespartei [07-001], 07-001-7078-13)

Democratic voters could also get their hands on ›Black is beautiful‹ buttons, stickers, and boxes of matches – paraphernalia the party distributed *en masse* for the first time that year.[14]

Why did a West German conservative party – a party whose leadership was entirely white and whose platform had little in common with the Black liberation movement – see fit to adopt an American anti-racist slogan meant to celebrate the Afro and promote Black pride?[15] What are we to make of this rather counterintuitive and – at least by today's standards of cultural appropriation – tone-deaf take on ›radical chic‹, Christian Democratic-style?[16] Was it simply a mischievous marketing ploy to boost the fortunes of a 1970s party whose obliviousness to racial politics only seems outdated in retrospect?[17] Or just another example of the sanitization and commodification of sixties' radicalism that has become a familiar narrative?[18]

14 Examples in: ACDP, 07-001-7078-13; ACDP, 04-007-132-3; ACDP, 07-001-7078.

15 It would take until 2022 for a Black German, Joe Chialo, to be elected to the CDU's federal board. See Jana Simon, Wer ist Joe Chialo?, in: *ZEITmagazin*, 8 February 2024, pp. 30-37.

16 The author Tom Wolfe coined the phrase ›Radical Chic‹ in a 1970 essay, which satirized the appropriation of the revolutionary politics of the BPP by members of the wealthy white New York elite. Tom Wolfe, Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's, in: *New York Magazine*, 8 June 1970; see further Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness* (fn 11), ch. 3.

17 Wolfgang Streeck interprets a later iteration of the campaign as a hedonistic and depoliticized middle-class recruitment drive of an establishment party worried about its collapse in membership. Wolfgang Streeck, *Critical Encounters. Capitalism, Democracy, Ideas*, London 2020, p. 81.

18 Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool. Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, Chicago 1997; Luc Boltanski/Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris 1999; Alexander Sedlmaier/Stephan Malinowski, ›1968‹ – A Catalyst of Consumer Society, in: *Cultural and Social History* 8 (2011), pp. 255-274; Bernhard Dietz, Revolte in der Warenwelt. Konsumkritik, nonkonformistische Ästhetik und der Paradigmenwechsel in der westdeutschen Werbeindustrie von 1968–86, in: Karin Moser/Franz X. Eder/Mario Keller (eds), *Grenzenlose Werbung. Zwischen Konsum und Audiovision*, Berlin 2020, pp. 145-171.

This article addresses these questions by tracing the history, background, significance, and subsequent iterations of this Christian Democratic campaign. The analysis draws on visual materials from the campaign, internal party documents from the Christian Democratic party archives in Sankt Augustin, and contemporary media coverage. It also brings into conversation histories and secondary literatures that have mostly been treated separately: the party-political history of the Federal Republic and the West German Christian Democrats; the history of political chromatics and political communication; as well as the history of *race*, racism, and anti-racism in Germany – topics long considered marginal in the (German-language) historiography of post-1945 Germany that are now beginning to receive the scholarly attention they deserve.[19] While the article focuses on a specific political moment and campaign, it thereby engages with a number of larger (and rather timely) conceptual and historiographical questions – about the transformation of the Christian Democrats in the 1970s, their first decade in opposition, and their struggle to appear ›modern‹ in a period of rapid social and cultural change; about configurations of *race* and perceptions of Black popular culture in a society that had banned the word ›race‹ from its political vocabulary in order to repudiate the Nazi racial state; and about the Christian Democrats' complex relationship to identity politics.

1. The Color(s) of Christian Democratic Politics

As strange as it may seem to associate the CDU with Black pride, the choice of ›Black is beautiful‹ as a Christian Democratic campaign slogan was not entirely coincidental, of course. After all, the party had been associated with the color black since its postwar founding.

The history of black as a ›semiotic device‹ capable of conveying a variety of different and sometimes contradictory political meanings is a long and complex one.[20] Black had been the color of princes and courtiers since the late Middle Ages, when high-quality

19 See e.g. Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins. The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany*, Chapel Hill 2002; Rita Chin et al. (eds), *After the Nazi Racial State. Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*, Ann Arbor 2009; Tiffany Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany. Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement*, Urbana 2020; Maria Alexopoulou, Blinde Flecken innerhalb der zeithistorischen Forschung in Deutschland. Eine Antwort auf Martin Sabrows Kommentar »Höcke und Wir«, in: zeitgeschichte|online, 9 February 2017, URL: <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/kommentar/blinde-flecken-innerhalb-der-zeithistorischen-forschung-deutschland>; for a historiographical overview, see Anna von der Goltz, Writing the History of Post-1945 Germany from Across the Atlantic: Entangled Histories and Critical Perspectives, in: Karen Hagemann/Konrad H. Jarausch (eds), *German Migrant Historians in North America. Transatlantic Careers and Scholarship after 1945*, Oxford 2024, pp. 339-358.

20 On colors and their politics, see Hanno Balz, ›Hostile Take-Over‹: A Political History of the Red Flag, in: *Socialist History* 59 (2021), pp. 8-30; and Hanno Balz, Editorial, in: *WerkstattGeschichte* 89 (2024): farbmarkierungen, pp. 9-14. Political scientists have traditionally not paid much attention to colors and their meaning. See the review of the relevant political science literature in Matteo C.M. Casiraghi/Luigi Curini/Eugenio Cusumano, The Colors of Ideology: Chromatic Isomorphism and Political Party Logos, in: *Party Politics* 29 (2023), pp. 463-474.

dyes arrived on the European market and rulers began to wear black robes as a sign of their wealth and power. During the Protestant Reformation, black became increasingly associated with Protestantism. Its ›chromatic austerity‹ resonated with a movement against ecclesiastical excess; the black robes of Protestant priests became a symbolic representation of their temperance, simplicity, and humility.[21] However, black was also the color of the Counter-Reformation and Catholic priests. According to the art historian Michael Pastoureau, a pioneer in writing the history of colors, ›Catholic and Protestant ethics tended to converge to embrace Christians – all Christians – within the same chromatic value systems‹.[22]

In the politics of the French Revolution, however, black was primarily associated with conservatism and Catholicism – particularly with Ultramontanism, which emphasized the supremacy of the pope over popular civil authority. In Imperial Germany, black remained associated with the heirs of that tradition, the Catholic Center Party (*Zentrum*), whose deputies included many clergymen who wore black robes in the *Reichstag*. In the context of the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s, which pitted Bismarckian Germany against the Roman Catholic Church, the term ›the blacks‹ (›*die Schwarzen*‹) as a label for political Catholics had distinctly pejorative connotations, which survived into Germany's first republic and beyond – despite the fact that other, far more radical political actors and groups on both the left and the right, including anarchists and fascists (e.g. the Italian ›blackshirts‹ who became a transnational phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s), adopted the color over time.[23]

Although the postwar CDU/CSU was an explicitly interdenominational party designed to overcome the longstanding divide between political Protestantism and Catholicism, the association with the color of the Center Party persisted, not least because the Catholic heritage of the Christian Democrats remained dominant.[24] In the popular imagination, the party was black.[25] As a case in point, the visual graphics of polling institutes and post-election media coverage typically used black to represent the Christian Democrats – and most have continued to do so to this day.[26] Traditionally,

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21 Michel Pastoureau, *Black. The History of a Color*, Princeton 2008, p. 130; Harald Haarmann, *Schwarz. Eine kleine Kulturgeschichte*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, p. 72.

22 Pastoureau, *Black* (fn 21), p. 133. In addition to his book on the history of the color black, he has written works on several other colors. See Michel Pastoureau, *Blue. The History of a Color*, Princeton 2001; *Green. The History of a Color*, Princeton 2014; *Red. The History of a Color*, Princeton 2017; *Yellow. The History of a Color*, Princeton 2019; *White. The History of a Color*, Princeton 2022.

23 Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadrismus und in der deutschen SA*, Cologne 2002; Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts! Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars*, London 2006.

24 Frank Bösch, *Die Adenauer-CDU. Gründung, Aufstieg und Krise einer Erfolgspartei 1945–1969*, Stuttgart 2001.

25 Bernd Schüler, Farben als Wegweiser in der Politik, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 56 (2006) issue 20, pp. 31-38; Christian Semler, Subversiv schwarz, in: *taz*, 17 November 2001, II.

26 Both the public television channels ARD and ZDF still used black to represent the CDU/CSU in their coverage of the federal elections in 2021. See <https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2021-09-26-BT-DE/index.shtml> and <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/thema/bundestagswahl-120.html>. However, the Federal Returning Officer (*Bundeswahlleiter:in*) used dark blue instead: <https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse.html>.

however, it was not a color that the Christian Democrats featured prominently in their own advertising, nor was ›black‹ a label that they used to describe themselves; at least originally, it was a pejorative label imposed on them by their political opponents and critics. The CDU's 1972 ›Black is beautiful‹ campaign, on the other hand, emphatically embraced black as a design choice and as a term of self-description. So, what had changed?

The answers to this question have much to do with the Christian Democrats' diminished political fortunes in the preceding period. The election of Brandt as Federal Chancellor and head of the new social-liberal coalition government in 1969 had represented a seismic shift in West German politics: it was the first passing of the torch from the CDU/CSU to the SPD since the founding of the Federal Republic twenty years earlier. For Christian Democratic politicians and conservative West Germans in general, it represented far more than a routine transfer of democratic power. Since 1949, the Christian Democrats had seen themselves as the Federal Republic's *Staatspartei* – the natural party of government. Brandt's election therefore appeared to be an aberration. Given that the SPD did not even receive an overall majority on 28 September 1969 (42.7 percent to the CDU/CSU's 46.1 percent) and was only able to form the government because of the FDP's shift to the left, Christian Democrats considered the election stolen. For all these reasons, their first step into parliamentary opposition triggered a deeply felt crisis of identity and hegemony.[27]

Moreover, this change of government took place in the wake of the student movement and the broader political-cultural revolt of ›1968‹, which had challenged the liberal democratic foundations of the Federal Republic that the Christian Democrats had built. And it took place against a backdrop of rapid social and cultural change, in which conservatism was increasingly equated with anti-modernism and thus with being out of touch.[28] This raised considerable concern about the political attitudes of future generations, not least the young elites – and ultimately about the future of the party.

Such fears were not unwarranted: although the CDU/CSU had remained the largest party overall in 1969, it had suffered disproportionate losses among voters under the age of thirty.[29] Given that the voting age was lowered from twenty-one to eighteen

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27 Geoffrey Pridham, *Christian Democracy in Western Germany. The CDU/CSU in Government and Opposition, 1945–1976*, London 1977, pp. 188-189; Axel Schildt, *Konservatismus in Deutschland. Von den Anfängen im 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1998, pp. 244-245; Frank Bösch, Die Krise als Chance. Die Neuformierung der Christdemokraten in den siebziger Jahren, in: Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte*, Göttingen 2008, pp. 296-309; cf. Anna von der Goltz, *The Other '68ers. Student Protest and Christian Democracy in West Germany*, Oxford 2021.

28 See the CDU's post-election autopsy of 27 January 1973, in: *Barzel: »Unsere Alternativen für die Zeit der Opposition«. Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1969–1973*, ed. by Günter Buchstab with Denise Lindsay, Düsseldorf 2009, pp. 1086-1206, especially p. 1112; also more generally Martina Steber, *Die Hüter der Begriffe. Politische Sprachen des Konservativen in Großbritannien und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945–1980*, Berlin 2017, pp. 107-165, 310-311; Schildt, *Konservatismus in Deutschland* (fn 27), pp. 211-252.

29 Peter Haungs, Wahlkampf und Wählerverhalten 1969, in: *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 1 (1970), pp. 90-106, here p. 99.

in 1970, suddenly increasing the proportion of young voters in the electorate, the need to attract young voters took on even greater urgency in the years that followed, and party leaders fretted endlessly about the youth vote in internal party meetings.[30] Thus, against the backdrop of coming to terms with their new oppositional role, street protests, rapid social and cultural change, and a growing concern about engaging West German youth, it suddenly made sense for Christian Democratic strategists to associate their party more explicitly and in new ways with the color black.

Changes in the advertising industry, which became much more professionalized and academically grounded in the 1960s, also explain the sudden appeal of color as a branding tool. Advertisers increasingly relied on insights from the behavioral sciences, and marketing became a separate field within economics around this time. The first university chair in marketing was established in 1969 in Münster.[31] This professionalization and scientification was accompanied by a much more sophisticated use of visuals. The 1960s was the era of the ›creative revolution‹ and ›corporate design‹, not only in the United States, where many of these corporate and artistic developments had originated, but also in West Germany.[32] In 1966, Otl Aicher, one of West Germany's most influential graphic designers and one of the founders of the Ulm School of Design, began work on an all-encompassing design for the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics, which included an intricate rainbow color scheme intended to portray the Federal Republic as an open, friendly country and to create a deliberate visual contrast with the Berlin Olympics of 1936, which had been dominated by Nazi favorites such as brown and red.[33]

In the context of a professionalized advertising industry and a broader visual and chromatic turn, all the major West German parties began to think more systematically about colors and their symbolic meanings in order to develop their own corporate designs. The Social Democrats, long associated with red, the traditional color of the political Left, adopted orange in 1969. The FDP chose blue and yellow in 1972.[34] As the parliamentary opposition hoping to regain the chancellery, the Christian Democrats were particularly eager to rebrand and open to a chromatic makeover – indeed, changing its corporate color scheme has become the party's signature move whenever

30 Konrad Kraske, Briefing on the state of election planning, 21 August 1972, in: *Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1969–1973* (fn 28), pp. 852-866; see also the party's post-election autopsy of 27 January 1973, in: ibid., pp. 1087, 1099, 1104, 1111.

31 Dietz, Revolte in der Warenwelt (fn 18), p. 147.

32 Frank, *Conquest of Cool* (fn 18); Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers. A History of American Advertising and Its Creators*, New York 1984.

33 Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects. A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design*, Berkeley 2004; Eva Moser, *Otl Aicher, Gestalter*, Ostfildern 2012; Mark Holt, *Munich '72. The Visual Output of Otl Aicher's Dept. XI*, London 2019.

34 Balz, ›Hostile Take-Over‹ (fn 20); Gerd Koenen, *Die Farbe Rot. Ursprünge und Geschichte des Kommunismus*, Munich 2017; Thorsten Jungholt, Die FDP, ein Hoffnungswert in Magenta, in: *Welt*, 6 January 2015.

it has been in opposition at the national level since 1969.[35] At the time, the CDU commissioned its first psychological study of voter reactions to different color schemes, and its in-house creative team began work on a new corporate ›CDU look‹ in the early 1970s.[36] While the party settled on red as the most effective signal color for its party logo, black and white were deemed equally effective and were incorporated throughout the CDU's visual presentation.[37]

For party strategists newly sensitized to the symbolic power of political chromatics, black was particularly alluring: after all, it did not just signify power and religious affiliation – associations that naturally resonated with the Christian Democrats. In the course of the twentieth century, it had also become the ›emblematic color of modernity‹.[38] In the interwar period, thanks in part to Coco Chanel's ›little black dress‹, elegant black clothing had become a popular fashion choice; in the postwar decades, the color also began to evoke images of rebellion – associated, as it now was, with the rockers, the *blousons noir*, and the Black Panthers. To embrace black, therefore, was to simultaneously present oneself as powerful, modern, progressive, and perhaps even a little radical – a welcome association for an opposition party that was trying to overturn its gerontocratic image, fashion a new political identity, and appear innovative.

2. Projecting ›Modernity‹

Although the Christian Democratic campaign that produced the ›Black is beautiful‹ poster was under considerable time pressure due to the early election – and although it was ultimately unsuccessful – it was a comprehensively planned and executed one. With only half as much time to mobilize voters as in 1969, the CDU still managed to produce and distribute more than twice as much campaign material.[39]

By the time the call for early elections was made, the party had already prepared the ground. CDU strategists had begun planning for the following year in the spring of 1972. The party's executive office – the *Bundesgeschäftsstelle* – set up a special committee that

35 In the early 2000s, after their second ouster in 1998, the party adopted the color orange, and in 2023, two years after their third ouster at the national level since 1949, the main party logo and color scheme became turquoise – a color that is close to the traditional blue associated with many European conservative parties. Sebastian Christ, CDU-Wahlkampf. Orange in der Arena, in: Spiegel Online, 26 July 2005, URL: <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/cdu-wahlkampf-orange-in-der-arena-a-366926.html>; Schwarz, türkis und drei Streifen: Das ist das neue Corporate Design der CDU, in: Horizont Online/dpa, 19 September 2023, URL: <https://www.horizont.net/marketing/nachrichten/schwarz-tuerkis-und-drei-streifen-das-ist-das-neue-corporate-design-dercdu-214736>; Casiraghi/Curini/Cusumano, The Colors of Ideology (fn 20).

36 Memorandum for CDU executive director Hennig, 2 February 1972, ACDP, 07-001-5131; see also Mergel, *Propaganda nach Hitler* (fn 3), p. 168.

37 Kraske, Briefing (fn 30).

38 Pastoureau, *Black* (fn 21), pp. 189-192, here p. 189.

39 Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht (fn 5).

oversaw and ultimately directed the campaign from within.[40] Reflecting the professionalization and scientification of the advertising industry and political consulting in this period, the committee drew heavily on social scientific methods and research generated by the party's new in-house social science research institute led by the political scientist Werner Kaltefleiter. Given voters' widespread concerns about inflation and left-wing radicalization at this time, the committee opted to portray the CDU as a force of political stability, internal security, and economic competence – coupled, however, with an explicitly dynamic element meant to emphasize that Christian Democrats embraced progress. This dualism was expressed in the campaign's chief slogan: ›We build progress on stability.‹[41]

At the time, all West German parties saw catchy slogans as the cornerstone of successful campaigns.[42] The CDU had been a pioneer in developing slogans in collaboration with advertising professionals. Since the late 1950s, advertising psychologists had been testing all CDU slogans, visuals, and other campaign materials in advance to see how voters would react to them.[43] For the 1972 campaign, the party again sought outside help, inviting proposals from most of the major West German advertising agencies. Three agencies presented their ideas, and the party eventually hired two of them, the renowned agencies *Team* and *Dr. Hegemann*, which were jointly responsible for the creative output of the campaign (although the party committee and, ultimately, the board had the final say).[44] Party strategists briefed the agencies in advance that they wanted content that would evoke an emotional response from voters, help polarize attitudes about the two major parties, be original and provocative, and project a ›positive self-image‹.[45]

As CDU Secretary General Konrad Kraske explained in a closed-door meeting of the party's executive board, the campaign had two distinct tasks: to mobilize its traditional base and to win over swing voters. ›These two tasks must be solved together, but they must be solved through different media and in different forms‹, Kraske explained. While core voters were best mobilized through live events and rallies, ›advertising must be aimed first and foremost at undecided voters and swing voters‹. Therefore, its content ›must be orientated more towards their sensibilities and mindset [*Bewusstseinslage*] than towards that of our loyal supporters‹. One of the biggest questions facing the campaign, Kraske specified, was ›how we deal with the groups where we have the greatest need to catch up, namely the young voters – six cohorts, as we all know – [and] the urban middle

40 Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht (fn 5).

41 Ibid.; other slogans included ›Against inflation – for stability and reason‹ and ›We will succeed together‹.

42 Mergel, *Propaganda nach Hitler* (fn 3), pp. 257-259.

43 Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht (fn 5); Frank Bösch, Werbefirmen, Meinungsforscher, Professoren. Die Professionalisierung der Politikberatung im Wahlkampf (1949–1972), in: Stefan Fisch/Wilfried Rudloff (eds), *Experten und Politik. Wissenschaftliche Politikberatung in geschichtlicher Perspektive*, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 309-327.

44 Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht (fn 5).

45 Vorlage Elschner für Agentur-Briefing, n.d. [1972], ACDP, 07-001-054.

class‹.[46] As the party's youth wing, the electoral committee of the *Junge Union* (JU), pointed out, in a time of rapid social and cultural change, young voters would respond particularly well to content that emphasized progressivism and dynamism.[47]

Aesthetically, the advertising agencies recommended ›a renunciation of arabesques, [...] a renunciation of images and the idyllic [...], a renunciation of any alienation in favor of a clear political statement‹.[48] Although its political message was quite ambiguous, the ›Black is beautiful‹ poster, with its simple slogan printed in bold white letters on a black background, exemplified this perfectly, and it also addressed many of Kraske's concerns. Alongside a poster showing a young, naked woman running away from the observer with a caption that read ›Do it like the prices – run away from the SPD‹, the ›Black is beautiful‹ poster was one of two designs meant to appeal specifically to the young and embraced by the Junge Union. In total, 51,000 copies were distributed across the country.[49]

Although there are no archival records that allow us to reconstruct the exact contours of the decision to adopt ›Black is beautiful‹ as a campaign theme, it was developed, like the other slogans and posters used by the party that year, in collaboration with professional advertisers, tested with constituencies in advance, and deemed effective. Activists from the League of Christian Democratic Students (*Ring Christlich-Demokratischer Studenten*, RCDS) had already begun using the slogan ›Black is beautiful‹ in some of their most successful campaigns in the late 1960s, such as in leaflets distributed at the University of Bonn, where center-right students won majorities at a time of leftist uprisings on West German campuses.[50] It is therefore likely that, much like the sexualized imagery that the students had relied on to attract voters, the slogan originally found its way into the CDU's national campaign through former student activists, who had begun to rise through the expanding party apparatus since 1969.[51]

Provocative as it undoubtedly was, the slogan did not produce the desired result – at least not in 1972. In an election with record turnout, the CDU/CSU received only 44.9 percent of the national vote share, the party's worst result since 1949. More importantly, for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic, the SPD received more votes than the Christian Democrats. The CDU/CSU did extremely poorly among young voters, with approval even worse than in 1969: in 1972, only 35.3 percent of voters aged 18 to 25 chose the Christian Democrats while 54.7 percent gave their vote to the Social Democrats. In fact, the CDU/CSU only outperformed the SPD among voters over the age of 45.[52]

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46 Kraske, Briefing (fn 30).

47 Wahlkampfkommission der JU, Thesen zum Bundestagswahlkampf 1972, ACDP, 04-007-089-4.

48 Kraske, Briefing (fn 30).

49 In addition, the television presenter Dieter Thomas Heck, the host of a popular show featuring *schlager* music, did 48 events on behalf of the CDU that were geared toward young voters and reached over 100,000 people. Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht (fn 5).

50 Such leaflets typically featured attractive white women, so-called ›election girls‹, next to the slogan. See ACDP, Bildarchiv, no. 5472/2; RCDS Bonn (ed.), Wahl-Reflex (1967/68 winter semester).

51 Von der Goltz, *The Other '68ers* (fn 27), pp. 230-232.

52 Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden (ed.), *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Stuttgart 1973, p. 128.

While party leaders reevaluated some campaign materials in the light of their loss – a poster featuring Barzel and his team (the so-called ›Quadriga poster‹) came under much criticism for championing outdated personnel, for example – a major internal report on the campaign hailed the ›Black is beautiful‹ poster as a particularly successful one that had ›received a positive echo‹.[53] In fact, party strategists doubled down on ›Black is beautiful‹ over the next few years. The slogan featured prominently in state elections, and the party used the original 1972 poster again in the national elections of 1976, in which the CDU/CSU won the largest share of the vote (but did not yet return to power).[54]

More generally, however, the 1972 defeat led to considerable soul-searching among Christian Democratic party leaders, who were finally forced to come to terms with their oppositional role and honestly confront the reasons for their sudden political vulnerability. The CDU had come across to voters as too ›conservative‹, ›reactionary‹, and ›old-fashioned‹, something which had been a particular problem with younger voters in an era of rapidly changing values, party leaders conceded after the election.[55] According to the political scientist Max Kaase, one of the party's top academic pollsters, the Christian Democrats would have to figure out how to recapture the zeitgeist if they ever wanted to be successful again. Kaase then got more specific: ›If you want a characterization of the zeitgeist [...], then I would like to reduce it to a single word, namely modernity.‹[56] The pollster offered a revealing definition of the latter – one that arguably goes some way toward explaining why the Christian Democrats were in such trouble at the time: ›Modernity‹, Kaase outlined, was ›basically not content, but merely a labeling that can be filled with very different content. To put it another way: it is perfectly conceivable, as you can also see in fashion, that you can take standards that were modern ten, twenty or even fifty years ago, and if you can convincingly present them as modern, then they can be modern again.‹[57]

In 1972, the Christian Democrats were clearly still struggling with how to respond to social and cultural change and demographic shifts. While there had been a cautious inner-party opening and programmatic turn within the party that had begun under its first secretary general Bruno Heck in the late 1960s, it was only after its 1972 defeat that the CDU would undergo a process of far-reaching internal reform with greater intellectual effort and increased participation by ordinary members. The changing values of the electorate became a major concern at this time and would ultimately

53 See the discussion of the posters during the party's post-election autopsy of 27 January 1973, in: *Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1969–1973* (fn 28), pp. 1097, 1108, 1144, 1151; Hennig, Wahlkampf 1972. Rechenschaftsbericht (fn 5).

54 ACDP, 10-001-1550; ACDP, 10-029-6.

55 See the party's post-election autopsy of 27 January 1973, in: *Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1969–1973* (fn 28), pp. 1100-1101; generally also Pridham, *Christian Democracy* (fn 27), p. 207.

56 Max Kaase during the party's post-election autopsy of 27 January 1973, in: *Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1969–1973* (fn 28), p. 1112.

57 Ibid.

shape the CDU's programmatic and strategic deliberations until the 1980s when it became a far more electorally successful party.[58] Up to this point, however, many party leaders were convinced that ›modernity‹ was a label that could simply be attached to the party with the help of clever advertising, rather than any kind of social reality to which it had to adapt by overhauling its platform. With these sensibilities and convictions about the need to project modernity, the Christian Democratic ›Black is beautiful‹ poster made sense: for the campaigners, black was useful as the quintessential ›modern‹ color; using an American slogan in a German context signaled a vague progressivism aimed at wooing young voters; and championing a mantra associated with a left-wing movement as a conservative party was surprising and indicated nonconformity – a move that promised to attract attention according to the logic of contemporary advertising.

3. ›We Blacks Must Stick Together‹ – The Politics of *Race*

While the campaign explicitly sought to exploit the color black's association with youth and modernity, the fact that ›Black is beautiful‹ was in fact an *anti-racist* movement, whose goals were thus very different from those of the CDU in the 1970s, did not play an obvious role in the party's deliberations. At first glance, the issue of *race* – defined here not as a marker of biological difference but as a historically specific social construct – was conspicuous only by its absence.[59] Although unmistakably modelled on ›Black is beautiful‹ posters and buttons from the US,[60] the 1972 poster with its white letters and black background did not feature Black bodies or reference the struggle for Black liberation in any overt way. But just because it was not always made explicit, does this mean that the campaign had nothing to do with *race*? Or, to put it another way, what does the apparent absence of *race* from the party's deliberations and its (initial) aesthetic choices have to say about West German sensibilities at this moment in time?

Of course, the Christian Democratic ›Black is beautiful‹ campaign did not take place in a vacuum, but at a time when the African-American struggle for civil rights and the Black Power movement were omnipresent in German society, in East and

58 Steber, *Hüter der Begriffe* (fn 28); Bernhard Dietz, »Geistig-moralische Wende« oder Kurs der Mitte? Der »Wertewandel« und die CDU in der Bundesrepublik der 1980er-Jahre, in: Thorsten Holzhauser/Felix Lieb (eds), *Parteien in der »Krise«. Wandel der Parteiendemokratie in den 1980er- und 1990er-Jahren*, Berlin 2021, pp. 41-55; von der Goltz, *The Other '68ers* (fn 27), pp. 249-252.

59 Maria Alexopoulou, »Rasse«/*race*, in: Inken Bartels et al. (eds), *Umkämpfte Begriffe der Migration. Ein Inventar*, Bielefeld 2023, pp. 283-297.

60 See e.g. Center for the Study of Political Graphics, ›Black is Beautiful‹, Venice Library, Operation Black (1968), ID no. 1768; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Button declaring ›BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL‹, object number 2011.159.3.11, URL: <http://n2t.net/ark:/65665/fd5bc424c19-2f70-4b8f-966f-5b072c913df4>.

West Germany alike. Black power activist Angela Davis, for one, was tremendously popular on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In April 1972, *Time Magazine* reported that perhaps no other country seemed ›to be so deeply in the grip of Angelamania‹ as the German Democratic Republic (GDR). When Davis visited the Socialist country in September that year – just as the West German election campaign was in preparation – approximately 50,000 East German citizens, who saw her as a symbol of the ›other America‹, turned up to greet her at Schönefeld Airport.[61] Davis and the Black Power movement also exerted a deep fascination for West Germans, especially young leftists. Leading student activists integrated Black Power ideology into their overall political agenda of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism and romanticized the militant Black Panthers, in particular, as the revolutionary subjects par excellence.[62]

While such expressions of international solidarity between white West German leftists and Black activists (and other people of color from the US and Global South) were more explicitly political and self-consciously celebratory than the Christian Democratic appropriation of ›Black is beautiful‹, they were not without their problems, as Detlef Siegfried, Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach and others have pointed out. In their attempt to sustain an oppositional habitus and create a radical persona, West German leftists often identified so completely with postcolonial liberation movements that they symbolically merged themselves with Black subjects – with the result that the defining feature of *race* as a marker of experience and oppression disappeared.[63] This kind of political ›Afro-Americanophilia‹, which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, may have been more benign than other forms of racial exoticization, but, as Moritz Ege has argued, it could still represent a kind of racism that failed to see Black individuality and erased difference in the pursuit of more self-serving agendas – including deflecting German guilt and avoiding discussion of the Holocaust.[64] As Priscilla Layne has shown, West German leftists in the 1960s and 1970s were in fact part of a long

61 East Germany: St. Angela, in: *Time Magazine*, 3 April 1972; Sophie Lorenz, »Heldin des anderen Amerikas«. Die DDR-Solidaritätsbewegung für Angela Davis, 1970–1973, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 10 (2013), pp. 38-60.

62 Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance. Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties*, Princeton 2009, pp. 116-118; Maria Höhn, The Black Panther Solidarity Committees and the *Voice of the Lumpen*, in: *German Studies Review* 31 (2008), pp. 133-154, here p. 133.

63 Detlef Siegfried, White Negroes: The Fascination of the Authentic in the West German Counterculture of the 1960s, in: Belinda Davis et al. (eds), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s*, New York 2010, pp. 191-214, here p. 198; for a later example, see Frank Biess, »Ganz unten«. Günter Wallraff und der westdeutsche (Anti-)Rassismus der 1980er-Jahre, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 19 (2022), pp. 17-47. *Race* was also secondary to class as a marker of social experience in East German understandings of international solidarity. See Quinn Slobodian, Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany, in: idem (ed.), *Comrades of Color. East Germany in the Cold War World*, New York 2015, pp. 23-39.

64 Moritz Ege, *Schwarz werden. »Afroamerikanophilie« in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, Bielefeld 2015, p. 163; Rita Chin/Heide Fehrenbach, German Democracy and the Question of Difference, 1945–1995, in: Chin et al., *After the Nazi Racial State* (fn 19), pp. 102-136, here p. 112.

tradition of Germans casting themselves as white (and typically male) rebels in black, appropriating Black popular culture to protest against various norms, but not automatically supporting anti-racist efforts in doing so.[65]

In this context, the Christian Democratic appropriation of ›Black is beautiful‹ appears in a different light – and in some ways as a typical product of its time. The use of the Black freedom struggle to fashion a rebellious image and further other political agendas was quite common around 1968, even if the idea of Christian Democratic ›rebels in black‹ may seem particularly counterintuitive to us today.[66] At the time, not even their political opponents raised objections on grounds of *race*: in a response to their rivals' new campaign, the Social Democrats did not take any issue with the Christian Democrats' insensitive appropriation of an anti-racist slogan but solely with the fact that they had dared to call themselves ›beautiful‹. ›Surely, no one had thought of [CSU leader Franz Josef] Strauß‹, the SPD taunted in a press release, the author of which had clearly overlooked the fact that the ›Black is beautiful‹ movement was at least partly about body positivity.[67]

Fascination with Black popular culture extended well beyond the circles of political activists in this period. It was as much a commercial phenomenon as it was a political and cultural one. Most famously, the (white) Düsseldorf-based advertiser and photographer Charles Wilp used Black models in his iconic 1968 campaign for the soft drink Afri-Cola, which dramatically increased sales of the brand. Other advertisers followed suit; Black models graced campaigns to sell men's shirts and chocolate bars around this time. This was no longer the ›commodity racism‹ of the colonial era, but what Ege has termed a new kind of ›postcolonial commodity racism‹ that represented Black people as proud and liberated rebels whose imagined strength would rub off on the products they were invoked to sell.[68] In the popular imagination, Black culture was coded as hip and counter-cultural, and, as such, it was a useful tool for an industry that liked to push boundaries to attract attention.

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65 Priscilla Dionne Layne, *White Rebels in Black. German Appropriation of Black Popular Culture*, Ann Arbor 2018; see also Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag. Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, Ann Arbor 2009.

66 West German progressive movements, including the gay movement, also adopted the slogan in this period (›Gay is beautiful‹), albeit without using the word ›Black‹. See Craig Griffiths, »Gay Equals Left?« Conservatism in Male Homosexual Politics in 1970s West Germany and the United States, in: *German Yearbook of Contemporary History* 7 (2023): Cultures of Conservatism in Western Europe since the 1960s, ed. by Martina Steber, Tobias Becker and Anna von der Goltz, pp. 137-174, here pp. 155-156; also Benjamin Möckel, Auf der Suche nach ökonomischen Alternativen. Ernst Friedrich Schumachers »Small is Beautiful« (1973), in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 19 (2022), pp. 600-607.

67 Worte der Woche, in: *ZEIT*, 10 November 1972, p. 2.

68 Ege, *Schwarz werden* (fn 64), p. 23. On ›commodity racism‹, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York 1995; and, for Germany specifically, David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire. Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, Cambridge, Mass. 2011.

Conservatives were not immune to such tactics. In the run-up to the 1969 elections, for example, Rudolf Werner, a businessman and parliamentary candidate from Lower Saxony, used his private funds to hire none other than Wilp – who also advised Willy Brandt on his image in both 1969 and 1972 – for his election campaign. The main photograph Wilp took for the campaign showed Werner framed by three bikini-clad Black female models – a sure sign that sexualized, glamorized visual representations of Blackness could be used to sell anything at this time, including Christian Democratic politicians.[69]

Race was present in Christian Democratic politics in other ways, too – including in more overt ways that linked the Christian Democratic identity of ›being black‹ to skin color and experiences of marginalization. In 1972, it was none other than the famous *schlager* singer and entertainer Roberto Blanco who made the connection. Blanco, who was of Afro-Cuban origin and at the peak of his musical career at the time, appeared at the party convention of the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) held in Munich in early November 1972. In front of a packed hall of white delegates, the Afro-German singer declared that it was the first time in a while that he had sung to a room full of ›Blacks‹. ›We Blacks must stick together‹, he quipped.[70] While Blanco was clearly humoring his audience and making light of the fact that he was probably the only person of color at the event, some Christian Democrats – particularly student activists who faced a resurgent Left on campus around 1968 – had begun to link their own political marginalization in campus politics to the fact that they were ›black‹ and mistreated as a result.[71] Although not always made explicit, there was clearly something about the unfamiliar experience of being a party in opposition and a minority in certain contexts (e.g. student politics) that created imaginative links in the minds of some Christian Democrats – however tenuous they may have been in reality – with marginalized groups elsewhere.

A decade later, CSU leader Franz Josef Strauß took it one step further when he recycled Blanco's one-liner on a visit to West Africa. In 1983, the Governor of Bavaria visited Togo's capital Lomé with the goal of helping the Bavarian meat manufacturer Marox expand its business in the country. Strauß had a close relationship with Togolese president Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who had ruled Togo by autocratic means since staging a coup in 1967. During the lavish public festivities surrounding Strauß's visit, the CSU leader told the assembled Black delegates of Eyadéma's party ›We Blacks must

69 PERSONALIEN. Rudolf Werner, in: *Spiegel*, 18 September 1972, p. 178; Dieses schöne Bild, in: *Spiegel*, 16 October 1972, pp. 54-57; see also Ege, *Schwarz werden* (fn 64), pp. 28-29. However, there were limits to how much provocation audiences would tolerate from advertisers. Werner hired Wilp again in 1972, and the campaign picture taken that year was even more provocative: it showed Werner with nine naked children in gas masks, which caused a considerable scandal. Werner was demoted to a much lower place on the party list as a result and lost his seat in the Bundestag in 1972.

70 Worte der Woche (fn 67); Fritzen, Humor (fn 4).

71 Interview with Ingrid Reichart-Dreyer, Berlin, 10 June 2014; see further von der Goltz, *The Other '68ers* (fn 27), pp. 62, 100.

stick together‹[72] – an episode commemorated in a recent play of the same name that was staged in Munich in 2021. In the context of a wider debate about the need to overcome Germany's ›colonial amnesia‹, the German and Togolese playwrights drew on postcolonial theory to interpret Strauß's ›outrageous quotation‹ as ›a symptom of repressed colonial guilt and Germany's postcolonial entanglements‹, albeit without making the connection to the Afro-German singer Blanco, who had first introduced the Christian Democrats to this phrase in 1972.[73]

4. *Cool Drive Union*

The Christian Democratic reliance on Black popular culture and the symbols associated with the Black freedom struggle reached its peak in the years after 1972. The state elections held in Lower Saxony, a traditional Social Democratic stronghold, on 9 June 1974 were an important milestone. Four years earlier, the SPD had again won the state by a narrow margin, but opinion polls conducted before the vote suggested that the CDU might win the majority – a hopeful sign for a party preparing for the federal elections of 1976. As a result, the CDU's campaign – one of the most expensive state election campaigns to date – garnered national attention. With local graphic designer and advertising expert Broder Brodersen in charge of their corporate design, the Christian Democrats consistently used the color black in their visual presentation. ›Being »black« is portrayed in such a way as to suggest that black is synonymous with »young« and »chic« and a whole host of modern values‹, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* observed.[74]

One of the most widely discussed posters of the campaign – a real ›crowd pleaser‹, according to the weekly *ZEIT* – also resurrected the slogan ›Black is beautiful‹.[75] This time, it did not just feature white script on a black background. Instead, the poster, designed by Brodersen, featured a Black woman with an elaborate feathered hat wearing a long, tailored costume dress gazing defiantly at the camera from above – an angle that was typical of glamorized representations of Blackness after

72 »Josef ist der Größte«, in: *Spiegel*, 23 May 1983, pp. 23-24, here p. 23; Dominic Johnson, Eine schwarze Männerfreundschaft, in: *taz*, 7 February 2005, p. 6; Bartholomäus Grill, *Wir Herrenmenschen. Unser rassistisches Erbe: Eine Reise in die deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, Munich 2019, pp. 112-113.

73 Jan-Christoph Gockel (dir.), »Wir Schwarzen müssen zusammenhalten« – Eine Erwiderung (2021), URL: <https://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/de/programm/12-wir-schwarzen-mssen-zusammenhalten-eine-erwiderung>. I thank my colleague Katrin Sieg for pointing me toward this play and the Strauß quotation.

74 Hans Ulrich Kempski, Zwei Chefs, die ihre neue Rolle suchen, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 June 1974, p. 3; also Josef Schmidt, Hasselmann führt mit drei Metern sechzig, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 May 1974, p. 8; for examples of posters from the campaign that relied heavily on black, see ACDP, 10-008-357; ACDP, 10-008-350.

75 Eduard Neumaier, Der Sieg liegt in Reichweite, in: *ZEIT*, 7 June 1974, p. 10.

Poster, *Junge Union*, Lower Saxony 1974 (KAS, ACDP, 10-028-26)

decolonization.[76] The ›Black lady‹ or ›Black beauty‹, as the press took to calling her, was intended to associate a party led by older white men with a sexually attractive, powerful Black woman (though, tellingly, there were no attempts made to associate the party with Black men, who were perceived as more threatening).[77]

Although the poster did not identify her by name, this ›Black lady‹ was not just anybody. Her name was Linda Gaines, and she was also a vocalist in the funk and soul band *Cool Drive Union* – a name that must have been dreamt up by the advertising

76 ›Black is beautiful‹ (1974), ACDP, 10-028-26; ACDP, 10-008-359. See also Ege, *Schwarz werden* (fn 64), p. 34.

77 »Nur keinen Fatalismus aufkommen lassen«, in: *Spiegel*, 3 June 1974, pp. 22-29, here p. 23; Schmidt, Hasselmann führt (fn 74). On the confluence of *race* and gender in depictions of hip Blackness in the 1960s and 1970s, see Siegfried, White Negroes (fn 63), p. 204; on the racist myth of the Black man as a sexualized predator, which partly explains the absence of men from these campaigns, see Layne, *White Rebels in Black* (fn 65). On Christian Democrats generally campaigning with sexualized imagery of young women, see von der Goltz, *The Other '68ers* (fn 27), pp. 118-119.

Cool Drive Union's Single ›TIME FOR CHANGE‹, 1972
(KAS, ACDP, 11-001-S004)

man Brodersen, for it was a thinly disguised play on the acronym of the party it was designed to promote. In 1972, the CDU had commissioned *Cool Drive Union* to record a music single that the party distributed across Lower Saxony two years later. The cover featured the same photograph of Gaines that graced Brodersen's 1974 Christian Democratic election poster.

Linda Gaines was the sister of none other than Donna Adrian Gaines, who would go on to achieve international fame as Donna Summer. The future ›Queen of Disco‹ had been appearing on West German stages since the late 1960s, including in the musical *Hair*, but was still relatively unknown at the time. Like her sister, she recorded vocals for *Cool Drive Union*. The group even performed alongside the new CDU leader Helmut Kohl at the official Lower Saxony election campaign launch in Hanover's town hall square in the spring of 1974.[78]

78 See the photograph of the group performing in Hanover, in: *Spiegel*, 3 June 1974, p. 23.

Poster, *Junge Union*, Bavaria 1976
(KAS, ACDP, 10-001-1877-1)

Although soul music was a distinctly Black form of popular musical expression that was in many ways at odds with the more traditional tastes of core CDU voters, the English-language lyrics of *Cool Drive Union*'s 1972 single, ›TIME FOR CHANGE‹, written by Brodersen, evoked the West German political landscape of the time:

›Don't you see the tide is turning?
Don't you see the fires burn?
It's a rising frustration in the land.
So walk on over: Give me your hand!
Let's walk together hand in hand!
Let's put an end to the red fire in the land!‹

The Black soul musicians sang this in an effort to lure voters away from the traditionally ›red‹ SPD.[79] Released on the aptly named *Change* label, the lyrics, which were printed on the cover to drive home the message, can be read as an anticipation of the conservative hopes for a *Tendenzwende* – a change of direction – in German society and politics that were beginning to crystallize around this time.[80]

Cool Drive Union disappeared from view after this campaign, perhaps because its vocalists found greater success elsewhere. However, this would not remain the last time that a Black woman was chosen to promote the Christian Democrats. In 1976, the Bavarian *Junge Union* campaigned with a poster that showed a young Black woman

79 TIME FOR CHANGE, Vinyl, 7", Single, Label: Change (1972), URL: <https://www.discogs.com/release/3327307-Cool-Drive-Union-Time-For-Change>. The credits of the single's B-Side *Somethin' I'd Like To Tell You* from 1972 list Donna Summer under her stage name Pierre alongside Brodersen. In 1981, Summer released a new version of the song with less overtly political lyrics under the title *Walk Hand in Hand*. The original can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcdlPZxQ17s>. In addition to campaigning with soul music to attract young voters, the CDU featured traditional marching bands at their campaign events to satisfy the tastes of their core electorate. Schmidt, Hasselmann führt (fn 74).

80 Axel Schildt, »Die Kräfte der Gegenreform sind auf breiter Front angetreten«. Zur konservativen Tendenzwende in den Siebzigerjahren, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 44 (2004), pp. 449-479; Peter Hoeres, Von der »Tendenzwende« zur »geistig-moralischen Wende«. Konstruktion und Kritik konservativer Signaturen in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 61 (2013), pp. 93-119.

wearing shorts, an Afro, and round sunglasses with the caption ›black is beautiful‹ rendered in the multiline font that was typical of the 1970s. Underneath it said ›JU too‹.[81]

Poster, *Junge Union*, 2009
(KAS, ACDP, 10-028-414)

The party and its youth groups mostly stopped campaigning with depictions of Black women after 1976, and the slogan almost vanished from major party campaigns (although not entirely).[82] Tellingly, however, the *Junge Union* resurrected it during the Christian Democrats' next major identity crisis and period in opposition thirty years later. In the early 2000s, ›Black is beautiful‹ once again became the youth group's chief campaign slogan – and once again it was printed on all kinds of party paraphernalia (pens, key chains, T-shirts, etc.), which were still being sold until late 2023.[83] The images that accompanied the campaign featured either just the printed slogan on a black background or photographs of white women, sometimes depicted in sexualized poses.[84] Much as in the original federal campaign of 1972, the slogan was stripped of its anti-racism. The *Junge Union* simply declared that its black corporate design was meant to create a visually unified look and that black was a fitting color for a party with Christian roots, symbolizing strength and power.[85]

81 ›black is beautiful. JU auch‹, ACDP, 10-001-1877.

82 ›Black is beautiful‹, ACDP, 10-028-133; ACDP, 10-028-193; »Wäre ich Deutscher, würde ich schreien«, in: *Spiegel*, 5 January 1987, pp. 22-30, here p. 24; <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/3VOVQ6YAE223S6QYNA275BTFG5K32EG6> (condom as campaign material of the *Junge Union*, federal elections 1998).

83 See various items in the JU's online shop: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230316162623/https://www.junge-union.de/shop/black-is-beautiful/>.

84 ›Black is beautiful‹ (2009), ACDP, 10-028-414; also ›Black ist wieder in!‹, Junge Union Rheinland-Pfalz, ACDP, 10-028-134. One poster showed three young people, one of them Black: ›Black is beautiful‹ (2009), ACDP, 10-028-415.

85 Stefan Ewert, Black is black! Oder »Wir Schwarzen müssen zusammenhalten«, in: *Die Entscheidung* 52 (2004), p. 7. This special issue had a print run of 150,000 and was mailed to all members of the *Junge Union*. See further Schüler, Farben als Wegweiser in der Politik (fn 25); see also: ›Black is beautiful‹ (2009), ACDP, 10-028-415; and Mathias Hamann, »Black is beautiful«, in: Spiegel Online, 12 November 2008, URL: <https://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/innenansicht-der-jungen-union-black-is-beautiful-a-589823.html>.

5. Conclusion

So why is this (surprisingly long) history of the Christian Democrats' reliance on the slogan ›Black is beautiful‹ worth revisiting? At first glance, it might be tempting to write off the campaign as politically insignificant; after all, ›Black is beautiful‹ was just one of several slogans used in 1972 (and 1976), and the Christian Democrats lost the federal elections. Or, perhaps, the campaign could at best be considered noteworthy in retrospect. Sensibilities about cultural appropriation have, of course, changed considerably since the 1970s, especially in recent years as movements such as Black Lives Matter have highlighted the persistence of racism in many Western liberal democracies, including Germany. This has also led historians to take *race* more seriously as a viable category of analysis – one that not only produces injustice, but can also serve as a tool to expose its existence.[86] From the vantage point of the present, it certainly seems astonishing that the Christian Democrats, who only a decade after ›Black is beautiful‹ insisted that ›Germany is not a country of immigration‹, ever sought inspiration from a Black pride cultural movement. It is also easy to mock how they did it: a party dominated by older white men sought to rejuvenate its flagging image by using a slogan, imagery and musical style associated with Black liberation, and in doing so managed to completely erase the anti-racist origins and thrust of the movement. Trying to reinvent the CDU as the *Cool Drive Union* via soul music seems at best a hollow marketing ploy. At worst, linking the racial discrimination that Black people have historically faced with the political marginalization of ›black‹ Christian Democrats because of the rise of the Left in the 1970s seems highly problematic – even considering that Catholics have historically been marginalized in Germany.

And yet, as this article has shown, this Christian Democratic appropriation of ›Black is beautiful‹ was a product of the wider political, cultural, and commercial context of its time. The fact that the artist and star advertiser Charles Wilp not only helped to sell the drink Afri-Cola but also photographed a Christian Democratic parliamentary candidate surrounded by Black models, or that the future Donna Summer and her sister Linda Gaines campaigned for the CDU as part of the soul band *Cool Drive Union*, shows that popular culture – including Black popular culture – was politically more open to other ideological appropriations than its seemingly natural association with progressivism would suggest.[87] Advertisers and party strategists sought to make use of its subversive potential to subvert voters' perceptions of the Christian Democrats, particularly those of the young. Although they appeared ›old-fashioned‹ and ›reactionary‹

86 Von der Goltz, Writing the History of Post-1945 Germany from Across the Atlantic (fn 19).

87 See further Tobias Becker, Only Rock and Roll? Rock Music and Cultures of Conservatism, in: *German Yearbook of Contemporary History* 7 (2023): Cultures of Conservatism (fn 66), pp. 108-136, here p. 130; Martina Steber, ›A Very English Superstar‹: John Rutter, Popular Classical Music, and Transnational Conservatism since the 1970s, in: ibid., pp. 74-107, here p. 78; and Philipp Gassert, Die Vermarktung des Zeitgeists. Nicoles »Ein bißchen Frieden« (1982) als akustisches und visuelles Dokument, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 9 (2012), pp. 168-174.

to many voters, the Christian Democrats were part of a wider commercial-cultural formation in which Blackness functioned as a shorthand for progressivism and nonconformity.

This was the period in which ›Afro-Americanophilia‹ reached its peak. Some West Germans even ›permed their hair to approximate Afros and raised their white fists in Black Power salutes in an attempt to create a radical persona through the selective embodiment of hip Blackness‹ – a kind of ›racialized mimicry‹ that provokes consternation in the present, even though it sought to valorize rebellious Black subjects.[88] Although there had long been a Black presence in the German lands, at this point in time Black people in the Federal Republic were not yet vocal political actors demanding that politicians take their concerns and sensibilities into account. This would not change until the mid-1980s, when an organized Afro-German movement that challenged discriminatory practices began to emerge around groups such as the *Initiative Schwarzer Menschen* (ISD) and the initiators of the seminal publication *Farbe bekennen*.[89] It is quite telling that, at the time of the 1970s campaign, the entertainer Roberto Blanco, who has always insisted that he never personally experienced racism in Germany, was the only Black voice to engage the claim that the ›black‹ Christian Democrats had something in common with Black Germans – and that instead of taking offence and pushing back, he turned to humor and validated the idea when he told his Bavarian audience that ›We Blacks must stick together‹.[90]

This was a time when most West Germans were quite unaware of how racism worked in practice. Labor migrants had a significant presence in the Federal Republic, but immigration was only just beginning to be defined as a major social issue – a phenomenon that increased rapidly after the social-liberal coalition government put a stop to the recruitment of ›guest workers‹ during the 1973 oil crisis. At this point in time, there was not yet a debate about ›xenophobia‹ and ›anti-foreigner sentiment‹, and thus little political or academic interest in understanding the subtle but powerful ways in which racial knowledge structured social relations, even in a society that had officially put racism behind it after colonialism and the Holocaust.[91] This absence of an organized Black German movement on the one hand, and of academic and political discussion about racism on the other, meant that white Germans – be they advertising experts or political strategists from across the political spectrum – were free to appropriate Black popular culture to promote other agendas, including the modernization of the Christian Democrats, with little criticism or pushback.

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88 Chin/Fehrenbach, German Democracy and the Question of Difference (fn 64), p. 112.

89 Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany* (fn 19); Katharina Oguntoye/May Opitz/Dagmar Schultz (eds), *Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, Berlin 1986 (and several further editions).

90 Jean-Pierre Ziegler, Freund der Nation, in: *Spiegel*, 28 November 2020, pp. 124-127.

91 Moreover, as Maria Alexopoulou has argued, terms such as ›xenophobia‹ have done much to obscure analyses of actually occurring *racism*; see Alexopoulou, Blinde Flecken (fn 19). See also Rita Chin/Heide Fehrenbach, Introduction: What's Race Got to Do With It? Postwar German History in Context, in: Chin et al., *After the Nazi Racial State* (fn 19), pp. 1-29.

Hanover, August 2005: Members of the *Junge Union* fill black balloons for an election campaign event with CDU chairwoman Angela Merkel who was then running for chancellor. The slogan ›Black is beautiful‹ had an astonishing longevity.
(picture-alliance/dpa/dpaweb/Wolfgang Weihs)

The fact that the Christian Democrats completely stripped the message of ›Black is beautiful‹ of its anti-racism, and at best used Black women as nameless props to make the party appear vaguely vigorous and modern, showed a distinct lack of engagement with and disregard for how constructions of *race* structured social experience. While this ignorance was in many ways typical of West Germans in the 1970s, the *Junge Union*'s decision to resurrect the campaign in the 2000s and to continue using the slogan until very recently – and thus until a time when there was already far more critical awareness around these issues – is a more puzzling lapse.[92] How the Christian Democrats dealt – or did not deal – with *race* in this instance arguably reflects a more general reluctance among Germans of various stripes to recognize and confront the more subtle and varied forms that racism has taken since 1945 other than wanton and state-sanctioned discrimination.

Finally, the ›Black is beautiful‹ campaign also offers a glimpse into the Christian Democrats' complex relationship with what has come to be known as ›identity politics‹ – a phrase that captures the recent tendency in liberal democracies to build political

92 On the role of ignorance in sustaining racism in practice, see Maria Alexopoulou, Producing Ignorance: Racial Knowledge and Immigration in Germany, in: History of Knowledge Blog, DHI Washington, 25 July 2018, URL: <https://historyofknowledge.hypotheses.org/9759>.

alliances around narrow group identities (such as gender or sexual orientation) rather than around more universal or broad-based allegiances.[93] By attempting to create a corporate identity as a ›black‹ party, ›Black is beautiful‹ was meant to boost the CDU's political fortunes for the first (and, tellingly, second) time since 1949 that it found itself in parliamentary opposition. ›Black is beautiful‹ was an emphatic and affirmative slogan of self-description, designed to forge a collective sense of belonging and group identity among those who identified with it. It also had strong generational overtones. Party strategists thought carefully about how to appeal to young people at a time of rapid social and cultural change and designed their political advertising with the perceived preferences of this particular group in mind. The campaign also played with the notion that the ›black‹ Christian Democrats faced marginalization in the ›red‹ political and cultural climate of the time. At a moment when ›identity politics‹ is routinely portrayed by its liberal, conservative, and right-wing critics as a fad imported from the United States and as a mode of political mobilization that only a section of the Left engages in, revisiting the history of the Christian Democratic ›Black is beautiful‹ campaign serves as a useful reminder of its domestic and center-right manifestations.[94]

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93 Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal. After Identity Politics*, New York 2017; Francis Fukuyama, *Identity. The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, New York 2018.

94 See e.g. the conservative historian and CDU theoretician Andreas Rödder's dismissive remarks about ›wokeness‹, cited in Mariam Lau, Auf, auf in den Kulturkampf!, in: *ZEIT*, 19 January 2023, p. 4; on the history of ›identity politics‹ and its critics, see Johannes Richardt (ed.), *Die sortierte Gesellschaft. Zur Kritik der Identitätspolitik*, Frankfurt a.M. 2018; and Jens Kastner/Lea Susemichel, Zur Geschichte linker Identitätspolitik, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 69 (2019) issue 9-11, pp. 11-17.