

Black German Speakers In Texas: Biographies, Causes and Interethnic Dynamics

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Anecdotes of rural Black Texans speaking German and Czech can be found in newspapers, scholarly work and oral history throughout the last 170 years. Yet, the phenomenon has only been systematically studied more recently. Geographic distributions in the 20th century and census data from the 19th century suggest this type of second language acquisition and language crossing was a rather common phenomenon. Direct interviews are seldom possible because most speakers have passed, and the remaining speakers have not used the language in many decades. But personal narratives, family interviews as well as ancestry research provide insights into why African Americans learned and used German and Czech—even when English was available as a common language. The complex answers depend on the regional economy, the character of immigration and assimilation into white supremacy, as well as political and cultural interethnic dynamics. This presentation will provide glimpses into the lives of Black German and Czech speakers in various parts of Central Texas. The varying reasons and motives they had for acquiring German or Czech will be illustrated with help of selected cases in three geographically distinct areas.

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