



Black German Heritage & Research Association

Recognition and Redress

Black German adoptees, postwar family separation, and the right to repair

BGHRA | English edition | October 20, 2026

BGHRA advocates for recognition, truth, accountability, and meaningful redress for Black German people affected by postwar adoption, family separation, and racial discrimination. Our advocacy includes people adopted abroad and those who remained in Germany, including people who never lived in an orphanage or children's home.

Where someone grew up should not determine whether their suffering is heard, their history investigated, or their need for repair taken seriously.

Different childhoods. A shared call for recognition.

Black German postwar histories include international and domestic adoption, foster care, institutional care, and childhoods with mothers, grandparents, or other relatives. Some people were separated from both parents; others grew up with one parent while being denied knowledge of, contact with, or recognition by the other side of their family. Remaining in Germany did not necessarily mean access to paternal relatives, family history, or a supportive Black community.

Our advocacy includes adoptees, people separated from parents or siblings without adoption, and those who experienced racial exclusion while remaining with family. It also recognizes the experiences of mothers, fathers, siblings, and subsequent generations. These histories differ, and people must be able to describe them in their own words.

Research by [Sabine Lee](#) and [Julia Roos](#) helps situate these experiences within the wider history of family separation, stigmatization, and racism. The historical terms “occupation children” and “brown babies” appear in some sources; they do not replace people's own identities.

What meaningful redress should include

BGHRA calls for an approach shaped by affected people, with attention to the specific harm each person experienced:

- **Recognition and investigation:** public acknowledgment, independent historical inquiry, and accountability for documented discriminatory or coercive practices.
- **Truth and records:** preservation of adoption, welfare, civil, immigration, and military records; accessible searches, explanations of missing files, and affordable copies and translations.
- **Family connections:** funded tracing and reunion support, interpretation, and voluntary DNA assistance with informed consent and privacy protections.
- **Identity and nationality:** help resolving names, parentage, citizenship, and documentation problems through individual assessment.
- **Care and material repair:** culturally informed counseling, peer support, and meaningful financial redress for documented harms.
- **Lasting participation:** affected people involved in research, public remembrance, education, and the design of remedies.

Citizenship recognition can be an important part of belonging. Broader redress must also address the circumstances of separation and its lasting consequences.

International human rights framework

The [2022 joint statement by UN human rights experts](#) identifies rights and state responsibilities concerning illegal intercountry adoption. It is an important reference for truth and reparation; its specific scope should not be treated as a legal finding about every adoption or family separation.

Finding fathers: the War Babes agreement

In *War Babes v. Wilson*, 770 F. Supp. 1 (D.D.C. 1990), British adult children of U.S. servicemen sought information to locate their fathers. The litigation concerned children of American servicemen broadly, including a context relevant to children of African American GIs; it was not limited to Black children.

The resulting court-approved 1990 agreement remains the basis of the National Archives' **War Babe request process**. NARA describes its scope as foreign children fathered by American servicemen during overseas service. The published description is not restricted to Britain, adoption, or institutional upbringing, making it relevant to eligible people born in Germany.

The agreement requires searches when complete or precise identifying details are unavailable. It provides access to specified additional information, including date of birth, marital status, dependents, and certain address information. It does not guarantee an entire unrestricted personnel file or establish paternity.

Were you told the records burned?

The July 1973 National Personnel Records Center fire destroyed millions of personnel files, including an estimated 80% of Army files for people discharged between November 1912 and January 1960. Some damaged files survived. Alternative sources, including final pay vouchers and organizational records, may help reconstruct basic service information.

A past fire-related response may warrant a renewed request asking which surviving, damaged, and alternative records were searched. Recovery depends on the individual case.

[Request a War Babe search](#)

Use the request sheet linked on NARA's page and provide as much information as possible. NARA currently lists warbabes@nara.gov for completed requests. See also the [1990 court opinion](#), [official account of the fire](#), and [alternative record sources](#).

Learning from recognition efforts elsewhere

Other countries offer examples of acknowledgment, records access, and repair. Each has its own history and eligibility rules; these examples do not establish an entitlement under German or U.S. law.

Belgium: Métis recognition and family history

The 2018 parliamentary resolution and 2019 federal apology addressed segregation and injustice affecting Métis people from Belgian colonial Central Africa. Archival research supports reconstruction of individual and family histories. [Read the Belgian government's account](#) and visit the [State Archives Métis project](#).

Switzerland: recognition beyond institutions

The federal framework for compulsory social measures and placements before 1981 includes qualifying serious harms in foster families as well as institutions, and parents forced to relinquish children. It shows why examining the harm matters beyond the setting where a child lived. [Read the Federal Office of Justice guidance](#).

Australia and England: forced adoption apologies

Australia's 2013 national apology and support services, and the UK Government's July 2026 apology for historic forced adoption practices in England, recognize lasting harm to adopted people, parents, and families. [Australia: apology and support](#) · [England: acknowledgment and support](#).

Advocacy and community resources

- [InterCountry Adoptee Voices \(ICAV\)](#): advocacy and education grounded in intercountry adoptees' lived experience.
- [Movement for an Adoption Apology](#): recognition and justice for parents and adult adoptees affected by historic adoption practices.
- [Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland \(ISD\)](#): Black community organizing, empowerment, and political participation in Germany.
- [ADEFRA - Black Women* in Germany](#): a Black feminist and queer political forum for community, knowledge, and advocacy.
- [Métis associations and the Belgian State Archives project](#): a resource for learning about Métis recognition efforts, including Métis de Belgique/Metissen van België.

These organizations are listed for their relevant work. Inclusion does not imply a formal partnership or endorsement of this BGHRA statement.

Germany and Namibia: acknowledgment and the unfinished work of repair

In 2021, Germany acknowledged the genocide committed against the Ovaherero and Nama peoples under German colonial rule between 1904 and 1908. Acknowledgment has not resolved demands for reparations: affected communities have challenged the proposed reconciliation framework, including their participation in negotiations and the distinction between development funding and reparations.

For BGHRA, this offers a relevant lesson: recognition must be accompanied by meaningful participation and measures that address lasting harm. These histories are distinct; this comparison does not equate genocide with postwar adoption or establish the same legal remedies.

[Germany's acknowledgment](#) · [Unresolved demands for reparations](#)

Namibian children raised in East Germany: separation and belonging

A separate history concerns Namibian children brought to the GDR from 1979 onward during Namibia's liberation struggle and returned to Namibia in 1990. In her Goethe-Institut account, Nangula Costa recalls a happy childhood in the GDR but describes the abrupt return to an unfamiliar country and family, without psychological support, as traumatic.

Her account raises questions relevant to BGHRA's work: who defines home, how family connections are sustained, and what support should follow state-organized childhood transfers. Participants' experiences differ and should be represented in their own words. This educational and refuge program should not be described as an adoption program.

[Read Nangula Costa's account](#)

South Korea: apology, truth-finding, and support for return

On October 2, 2025, President Lee Jae Myung apologized on behalf of South Korea to people adopted overseas and their birth and adoptive families for failures to protect adoptees' rights. The apology followed findings of human rights violations in intercountry adoption by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

[Read coverage of the apology](#) · [Commission's English-language report](#)

Korea also provides practical forms of connection and return. The National Center for the Rights of the Child (NCRC) lists adoption-record preservation, information disclosure, birth-family searches, DNA registration support, cultural connection, and support for overseas adoptees living in Korea. In July 2025, NCRC announced a program supporting visits to Korea and reunions with birth families through its operating partner, Nest Korea.

[NCRC adoption services](#) · [Return and reunion program](#)

For BGHRA, this offers a practical comparison: acknowledgment can be accompanied by help recovering records, reconnecting with relatives, and building relationships with a country of origin. An apology does not itself settle compensation claims or guarantee a successful reunion. Program eligibility and available assistance must be checked individually; the Korean example does not establish an automatic entitlement in Germany.

Related BGHRA resources

- [German citizenship and transatlantic possibilities](#)
- [U.S. citizenship through an American parent](#)
- [Black German postwar adoption history](#)
- [RCTA-TRACE: adoption, culture, and belonging](#)
- [Tracing families separated in postwar Germany](#)

[Read the redress webpage](#)

Historical research and sources

[Sabine Lee \(2011\)](#). A Forgotten Legacy of the Second World War: GI children in post-war Britain and Germany. *Contemporary European History* 20(2), 157-181.

[Julia Roos \(2022\)](#). Die „farbigen Besatzungskinder“ der zwei Weltkriege. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Federal Agency for Civic Education. The historical terminology appears in the source title.

The government guidance, court opinion, and organizations linked throughout this document provide the sources for its practical information and international examples. Underlined titles are clickable.

About this statement

This English edition presents the content of BGHRA's redress webpage, combining our advocacy with historical sources and practical research routes.

BGHRA advocacy statement and research resource. Updated October 20, 2026. This page provides general information; individual legal claims and record access depend on the facts and applicable rules.