

Why Black Deaf Studies Matter: Black Deaf American Experience in Germany

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Center for Black Deaf Studies Symposium

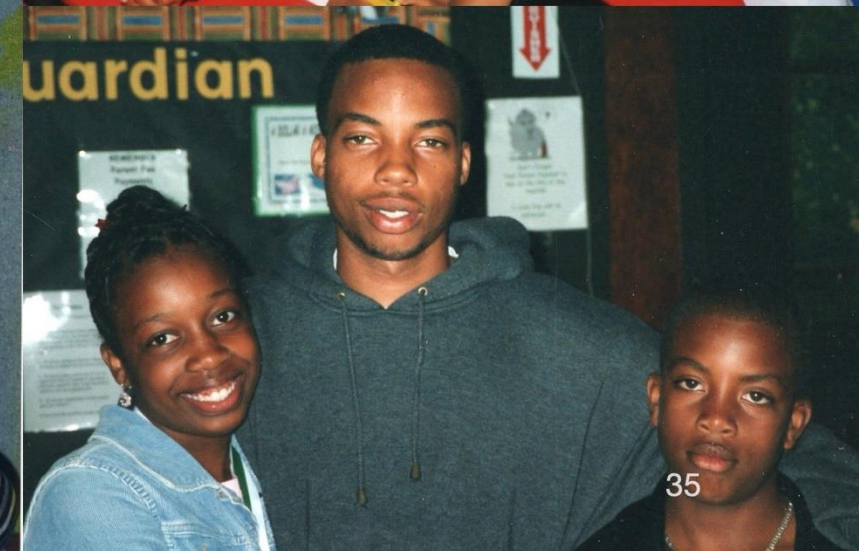
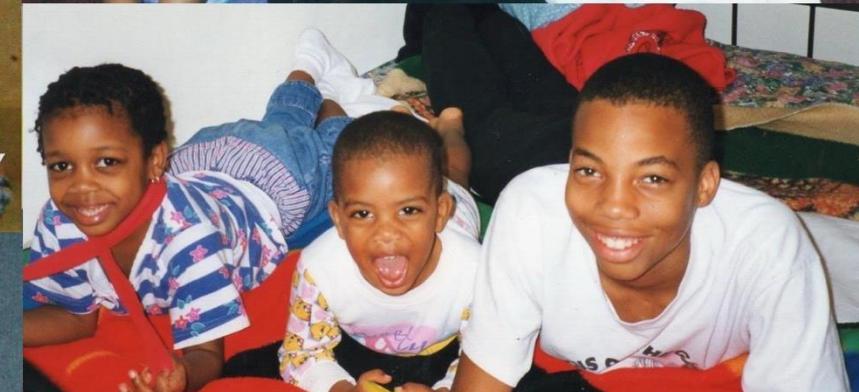
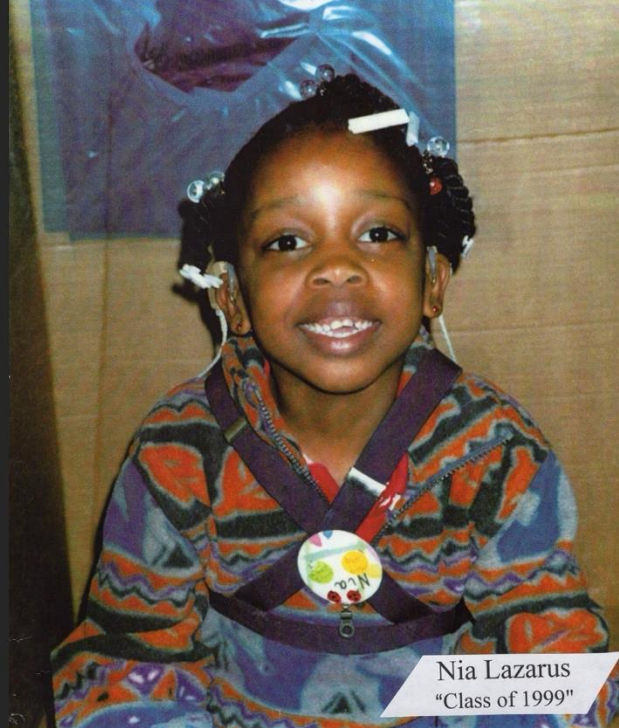
Intro

- Born and raised in Oakland, CA
- PhD researcher in sign language linguistics at the University of Cologne in Germany
- Elementary teacher before starting PhD in summer 2020



Growing up Black and Deaf

- Hearing family learned to sign for me when I became deaf at 11 months old
- Mother made sure I was exposed to the Black Deaf community and Black Deaf role models
- Language access facilitates identity development
 - Communicating with my mother in ASL allowed me to learn about my Black culture, the Black community in which I lived, discuss race and racism, and to be well-equipped with the tools to identify and navigate a racialized society



Racism knows no borders

Similarities between German and American Deaf communities

- Whiteness framed as the norm in the Deaf community
First thought that comes to mind when reading “Deaf Community”?
- Colorblindness
- Lack of representation of Black people
- Black people’s abilities and experience are undermined and dismissed in school, work and everyday life
- *“We couldn’t find enough BIPOC, they didn’t want to join”*
- A lot of discussions around Deaf identity, preservation of sign language, and resistance of oppression from audism, but not racism

Life in Germany as a Black Deaf American

Differences in my experience in Germany vs. the US

- No associations like the NBDA to refer to in Germany
- No Black Deaf PhDs ever in Germany
- Only at least two Black Deaf people in Germany who are well-known
- Challenging to find Black Deaf community and solidarity with other Black Deaf people who don't have strong Black identity in Germany (and Europe)
 - Black identity often replaced by national identity out of desire to assimilate (*"My parents are from [country] but I'm just German"*)
 - Lack of conversations about race and racism in schools and society leads to lack of critical understanding of race
 - Isolation of Black Deaf people around the country leads to fewer opportunities for solidarity and conversations about Black culture and navigating anti-blackness

“To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time”

James Baldwin

Current efforts in Germany

- A BIPOC focus group affiliated with Germany's NAD for youth (18-26) — active
- A Black Deaf organization — currently in development
- A group of BIPOC interpreters — seemingly inactive

Why does Germany need Black Deaf Studies?

- The African diaspora is global, the black experience is global, racism is global
 - Black Deaf people everywhere deserve to have our stories and history be highlighted, documented, and celebrated
- To establish a foundation for holding conversations on race and anti-racism in Germany
- To protect the Black Deaf Community, hold space for Black Deaf people, and preserve Black Deaf history in Germany

Black Deaf Germans deserve to feel the same protection, warmth and joy seeing and knowing the value of their Black Deaf culture and community as I always have growing up

How can I define this moment?

- Continue to encourage and inspire Black Deaf people to get involved in research and education
- Advocate for solidarity and unification of Black Deaf community on a global level



Thank you

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