

Primary Source#1: Richard Manga Bell as a Foreman in Germany (1912)

Source: Article “Blacks as the Managers of Whites,” *The German Colonial Newspaper*, Vol. 29 (1912): 647-48. [“Schwarze als Vorgesetzte Weißer”, *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 29/1912, pp. 647-648]

Link to the source and more information:
<https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1850-1914/letter-carl-becker-to-governor-schuckmann-1909/>

Context: The Bell families were Cameroonian royalty. Leading Cameroon both before colonization and after it was transformed into a German colony, the Duala people, headed by Manga Bell, signed the first treaties with Germans and became close allies in trade and colonial administration. In exchange for Duala support and cooperation, German authorities sent the Bell and other elite Duala children to Germany to receive an education. In 1912 Richard Manga Bell was staying in Berlin, and working as a foreman in a timber firm in Großlichterfelde. The fact that Manga Bell was actually in charge of white workers led to a scandal in which some media attacked the firm and Manga Bell as acting against the current “racial feeling”.

Begin Document Excerpts:

PART A. The Managing Director defends Manga Bell:

“... it is not the practice in our business to judge a human being by his outward appearance, his skin color, his “whitewashed” politeness and culture, but by his intrinsic values, his character. And that the character of our colored prince is superior to quite a many whites with a very “black” heart that has been shown by sad experiences which we had with our “civilized” whites. . . .”

PART B. B. Manga Bell speaks for himself:

“I don’t see why a colored person should not occupy a position as a senior employee especially after previously various representatives of the white race turned out to be useless and even dishonest. . . . The complainant seems to believe – wrongly, I may add – that I come straight from the deepest African bush. Just to reassure him I can tell him that I graduated without a hitch from a royal Prussian grammar-school at Berlin . . . If, however, “friend H.” [the complainant] thinks that the sole inability is in my dark skin color, I would like to advise him after all to try just once by himself to occupy such a position. If the firm I am working with had reason to be dissatisfied with me, surely long ago it would have ousted me from my position. According to H.’s view a Negro should be continuously put down in his professional career just because he is not white, even if he has proven his qualification to fill the position he was given.”

“By way of example I would like to turn Herr H.’s attention to the fact – if he doesn’t know – that it was after all His Majesty the German Emperor who enlisted a colored person as non-commissioned officer in the musical corps – thus as a superior – of the Prussian military in Potsdam. I am very much suggesting to Herr H. not to broadcast such a trivial and personal complaint to the public, who hardly will have an interest in this, but to direct himself to the proper address, viz. myself, or if he is unaware of [my address], to the firm in question. Such would be the behavior among civilized people. I am always readily available for a personal exchange of views.”

Printed in Arthur J. Knoll and Hermann J. Hiery, Eds., *The German Colonial Experience: Select Documents on German Rule in Africa, China, and the Pacific, 1884-1914* (UPA, March 2010).

Primary Source#2 Letter, Carl Becker to Governor Schuckman (1909)

Primary Source: Carl Becker to Governor Schuckmann, September 1, 1909, as an attachment to Schuckman's letter to the Colonial Office, no. 2071, Berlin Federal Archives: Reichskolonialamt/signature 2058.

Context: *Carl Becker was a German farmer married to a Rehobother woman in the German settler colony of German Southwest Africa. The Rehobothers were historically descended from relationships between Afrikaners and Nama. Together the couple had five children. At the time of writing marriages between white settlers and indigenous population groups had been banned since 1905. Several dozen marriages carried out before this date, such as that of Becker and his partner, had been retrospectively annulled. This letter to the Governor of the colony, Bruno von Schuckmann, gives a glimpse into the social and legal effects that these measures had on those involved. In addition, as part of the Constitution of the Landesrat (the Territorial Council in GSWAf), introduced in 1909, Paragraph 17f took away the civil rights of all settlers who had an indigenous partner (as well as the rights of their children).*

Source: <https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1850-1914/letter-carl-becker-to-governor-schuckmann-1909/>

BEGIN

Vaalgras, 1st September 1909

Your Excellency!

Permit me to renew my request for a restoration of my rights as a citizen. I am convinced that when Your Excellency reflects upon my statements in a benovolent and just way that he will not hesitate to satisfy my plea.

As a result of Section 17f of the communal ordinance I, as the husband of a Bastard woman, lose my right to vote. Section 17f originates in the idea that Southwest Africa is white man's country; thus as a white man I won't say anything since the white man now has the power and the final source of law is power. In an investigation of Prussian history one finds however that this state in its many annexations always proceeded with great regard and care for historical tradition. And it knew what it was

doing! I believe that the application of this tried and true principle would be appropriate here. My marriage originated through the assistance of the moral and legal agencies of the state before Section 17f even appeared. It is my firm belief that I cannot be deprived of my rights through the appearance of retrospective legislation.

The results of Section 17f are frankly crushing for me.

For my five children, of whom two are in Germany, I pay annually 5,000 marks to educate them. A man with the same number of children, but with a white wife, receives an annual contribution from the government of 1,500 marks in the form of pension supplements. I receive nothing.

If I want to have a farm, a building plot, or a license, these will be denied on the basis of Section 17f.

If I build a dam, I do this with my own money while other people receive a subsidy.

If I arrive with my wife, who is practically white (a picture of my family is included) and who may with confidence be measured against any totally white woman in the colony in terms of morality and intellect, I will have to be prepared for unpleasantness.

All of this happens to me although I maintain 32,000 acres of farmland in model condition, although I carry the burdens associated with this, and although I willingly shoulder the taxes and fees associated with a household of eight whites and forty natives. That's the thanks that I receive for having been a former soldier who helped Germany acquire and secure this[...].

The poet once said: "One should despise the wicked man who never considers the results of his actions." Your Excellency, I don't want to be a bad man. I want to know for whom I work. Will my children, who are all being raised as Germans, be my heirs? Will my boys become soldiers and later exercise their right to vote? These are the

questions which I must have answered affirmatively if my lust for life and work are not to disappear.

Nevertheless no power in the world should force me to separate from my wife who has been a true companion for the past twelve years.

If my rights as a citizen continue to be denied and if my marriage is not recognized in law, then my joy and interest in this country, in which for years I have given my all, will be extinguished.

Thus, Your Excellency, I renew my urgent plea to speak the saving word for me. Begin the most intense investigation of me and my wife and if we would have the honor of your visit you would see with your own eyes how progressive my farming is. You would also be aware here[...].

In anticipation of a favorable response, I remain

Respectfully yours,

Carl Becker, Farmer.

END

Printed in Arthur J. Knoll and Hermann J. Hiery, Eds., *The German Colonial Experience: Select Documents on German Rule in Africa, China, and the Pacific, 1884-1914* (UPA, March 2010).

Primary Source#3: Lene Haase, A German Woman in Cameroon

Primary Source: Lene Haase, *Through Unknown Cameroon: Contributions to German Civilizing Work in Africa* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1915), pp. 28-29, 65-66.

[Lene Haase, *Durchs unbekannte Kamerun. Beiträge zur deutschen Kulturarbeit in Afrika* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1915), pp. 28-29, 65-66.]

BEGIN EXCERPT

The brave soldiers became quite rigid as I moved up to take part in target practice. A white 'Mami' . . . who took trips through the bush in breeches hadn't appeared in this area before. Also one who wanted to shoot a gun, which was a man thing, – they just couldn't believe it.

When one thinks about the place of the indigenous woman, who gets bought, sold, and traded like a household pet, one can't hold it against the blacks when they put a white lady in about the same position.

I didn't hold it against the young soldiers when they grinned as I took my place to shoot. Also I didn't blame the sergeant who fought under the German flag for fifteen years when he handed me the carbine, model 98, and cartridges with a very sour face. Surely he was feeling that it was a humiliation for him that he had to serve a woman.

When the first bull's eye appeared, the faces became long and astonished. Suddenly the sergeant handed me the cartridges with an eagerness which showed an awakened interest. . . .

As the chief of police finally counted up the number of hits, I beat even the best of the marksmen, the sergeant. I never experienced such happiness and such pride as when the two soldiers on the target waved the red hats which signified a bulls eye or i.e. a head shot. . . .

After I finished writing letters, I did some practice with my Browning (pistol) on a target which I had quickly made for me out of a piece of colored tree bark. The Browning created quite a sensation in Otong. Other than the rifles of the black soldiers, the people had never seen any other firearms. . . .

In spite of all of my efforts, I wasn't successful in convincing the mountain people that I am a woman. Although in the lowlands I was recognized immediately as 'Mami', and I was bewildered as such, the mountain people laughingly rejected this assertion. A woman who shot guns, commanded (and men obeyed) – this couldn't exist; it would be impossible. We were trying to kid them.

My aspiration to lift the prestige of the white lady, that had been so successful in the low lands, could be regarded as an utter failure up here in the mountains! The long hair, the female clothes, and the clearer voice – all this did not make any impression at all. I was just a hitherto not seen version of the white man, but a woman I was not.

END EXCERPT

Printed in Arthur J. Knoll and Hermann J. Hiery, Eds., *The German Colonial Experience: Select Documents on German Rule in Africa, China, and the Pacific, 1884-1914* (UPA, March 2010).