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## Guide to the Helene Everly Collection

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## Guide to the Helene Everly Collection

### Collection number: MS148

African American Museum & Library at Oakland  
Oakland, California

Processed by:

Sean Dickerson

Date Completed:

2017-05-24

Encoded by:

Sean Dickerson

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Helene Everly Collection

**Dates:** 1995-1996

**Collection number:** MS 148

**Creator:** Everly, Helene. African American Museum & Library at Oakland.

**Collection Size:** .25 linear foot(1 box)

**Repository:** African American Museum & Library at Oakland (Oakland, Calif.)  
Oakland, CA 94612

**Abstract:** Helene Everly (b. 1928), Afro-German émigré who grew up in Nazi Germany, was born Helene Brell in Munich, Germany on March 18, 1928. The Helene Everly Collection consists of four audiocassettes containing oral history interviews with Helene Everly conducted by Robert L. Haynes, seven photographs depicting WWII scenes and portraits of Helene Everly and her cousin Max Brell, and copies of the article "A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany" by Nicole Atkinson.

**Languages:** Languages represented in the collection: English

### Access

No access restrictions. Collection is open to the public.

### Access Restrictions

Materials are for use in-library only, non-circulating.

### Publication Rights

Permission to publish must be obtained from the African American Museum & Library at Oakland.

### Preferred Citation

Helene Everly Collection, MS 148, African American Museum & Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library. Oakland, California.

### Processing Information

Processed by Sean Dickerson.

### Biography / Administrative History

Helene Everly (b. 1928), Black German émigré who grew up in Nazi Germany, was born Helene Brell in Munich, Germany on March 18, 1928. Her mother Helene Brell met her father, who was from Cameroon, Africa, in 1927. Everly was raised by foster parents and her foster father was a union organizer and Social Democrat.

Everly was five years old when Adolph Hitler came to power. When she was eight or nine years old, Everly went to visit a former neighbor who lived across the street from the only vegetarian restaurant in Munich. Everly, who was with her foster mother at the time, recalled Hitler arriving to dine at the restaurant and catching a look "straight in the eye," saying "[h]e looked surprised because it was obvious that I was black. But that was all he did, was look. He just kept going."

During the war Everly remained with her family and was also sent for a year in the country as a nanny. Afterwards, as a teenager during the occupation, Everly encountered African American soldiers stationed in Munich and began to go out to G.I. clubs to socialize. As an English speaker, Everly would assist with interpreting. In April 1946, Everly graduated from

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high school and was approached to work as a secretary for a military unit performing clerical work. In the autumn of 1947 she met George Alan Everly, a Chicago-born musician and football player under temporary duty assignment, while working on a U.S. military base. In October of 1948 the couple was married.

Leaving Germany in December 1948, the couple arrived in New York. The couple spent 11 days at then segregated Camp Kilmar, in New Jersey, before going on to Chicago, Illinois. Everly's first job was in an Illinois Bell building at a drugstore counter, and then later she became a maid at the Pershing Hotel. By 1954 she had started working at the hospital at the University of Illinois. Everly's mother came to live with and assist the family beginning in 1954 and together with her mother, Everly opened a neighborhood store. During this period, Everly also organized an interracial social organization for German war brides in Chicago.

During the 1960s, Everly worked at the University of Chicago, first as an acquisition clerk in the University of Chicago Library from 1960-1964, and then from 1964-1967 as administrative secretary to professor of urban sociology Donald J. Bogue. Dr. Bogue had founded Demography, the official journal of the Population Association of America (PAA), and Everly served as secretary during his tenure as President of the PAA. During this time, Dr. Bogue's work focused on programs to provide contraception to Chicago residents. Everly became aware of the beginning of civil rights actions and sit-ins on campus. She actively participated with various civil rights groups throughout the decade, including marching in the September 4, 1966, Cicero march during the Chicago Freedom Movement.

Divorcing her husband in 1969, Everly moved to Oakland, California, and worked as departmental secretary for the Bank of California, where she remained for nine years. She later got her real estate license and worked as an agent and property owner until her retirement in 1990.

*Biographical notes compiled from oral history interviews and Nicole Atkinson's "A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany."*

#### **Scope and Content of Collection**

The Helene Everly Collection consists of four audiocassettes containing oral history interviews with Helene Everly conducted by Robert L. Haynes, three photographs of portraits of Helene Everly and her cousin Max Brell, and copies of the two-part article "A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany." The collection is arranged in three series: Series I. Oral history interviews, Series II. Photographs, and Series III. A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany

#### **Arrangement**

Series I. Oral history interviews Series II. Photographs Series III. A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany

#### **Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Blacks--Germany--History--20th century.

Munich (Germany)--1930-1950.

Munich (Germany)--Ethnic relations.

War brides--United States--Interviews.

World War, 1939-1945--Blacks--Germany.

World War, 1939-1945--Social aspects--Germany--Munich.

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### **Oral history interviews 1996**

#### **Series Scope and Content Summary**

Includes four audiocassettes containing oral history interviews with Helene Everly conducted in her Oakland home, May 28, 1996, by Robert L. Haynes. The oral history interviews were used to write the second installment of the African American Museum & Library at Oakland *From the Archives* newsletter article "A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany," by Nicole Atkinson, published in 1996. The interviews produced for this and the preceding volume of *From the Archives* were organized for the 1995 symposium Bittersweet triumph: The African American experience in WWII.

Box 1

#### **Oral history interview with Helene Everly 1996-05-28**

**Physical Description:** 4 audiocassette(s)

**Photographs 1996**

**Series Scope and Content Summary**

Includes duplications of three portraits of Helene Everly and her cousin Max Brell. The photographs were reproduced in the second installment of the *From the Archives* newsletter article "A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany," by Nicole Atkinson, published in 1996.

**Arrangement**

Arranged by photographic identification number.

Box 2

**Max Brell, Everly's cousin, in uniform, circa 1941 [001] 1996**

Box 2

**Portrait of Helene Brell, reverse: 'having come of age with the horrors of the war behind her, she now began to experience her first interactions with African Americans,' circa 1945 [002] 1996**

Box 2

**Helene Everly portrait, reverse: 'today' [003] 1996**

**A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany 1995-1996**

**Series Scope and Content Summary**

Includes copies of the two-part *From the Archives* article "A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany," by Nicole Atkinson, published in 1996. The interviews produced for these two issues of *From the Archives* were organized for the 1995 symposium Bittersweet triumph: The African American experience in WWII.

**Arrangement**

Arranged chronologically.

Box 3

**Atkinson, Nicole. A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany. *From the Archives* : Newsletter of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland Fall 1995 /Winter 1996: 6, 3**

Box 3

**Atkinson, Nicole. A Black Woman's Experience in Hitler's Germany. *From the Archives* : Newsletter of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland Summer/Fall 1996: 7, 1**