

An Afro-Caribbean in the Nazi Era



Colloquium: Black Presence in Mauthausen

Presented by
Prof. Dr. Walter Sauer

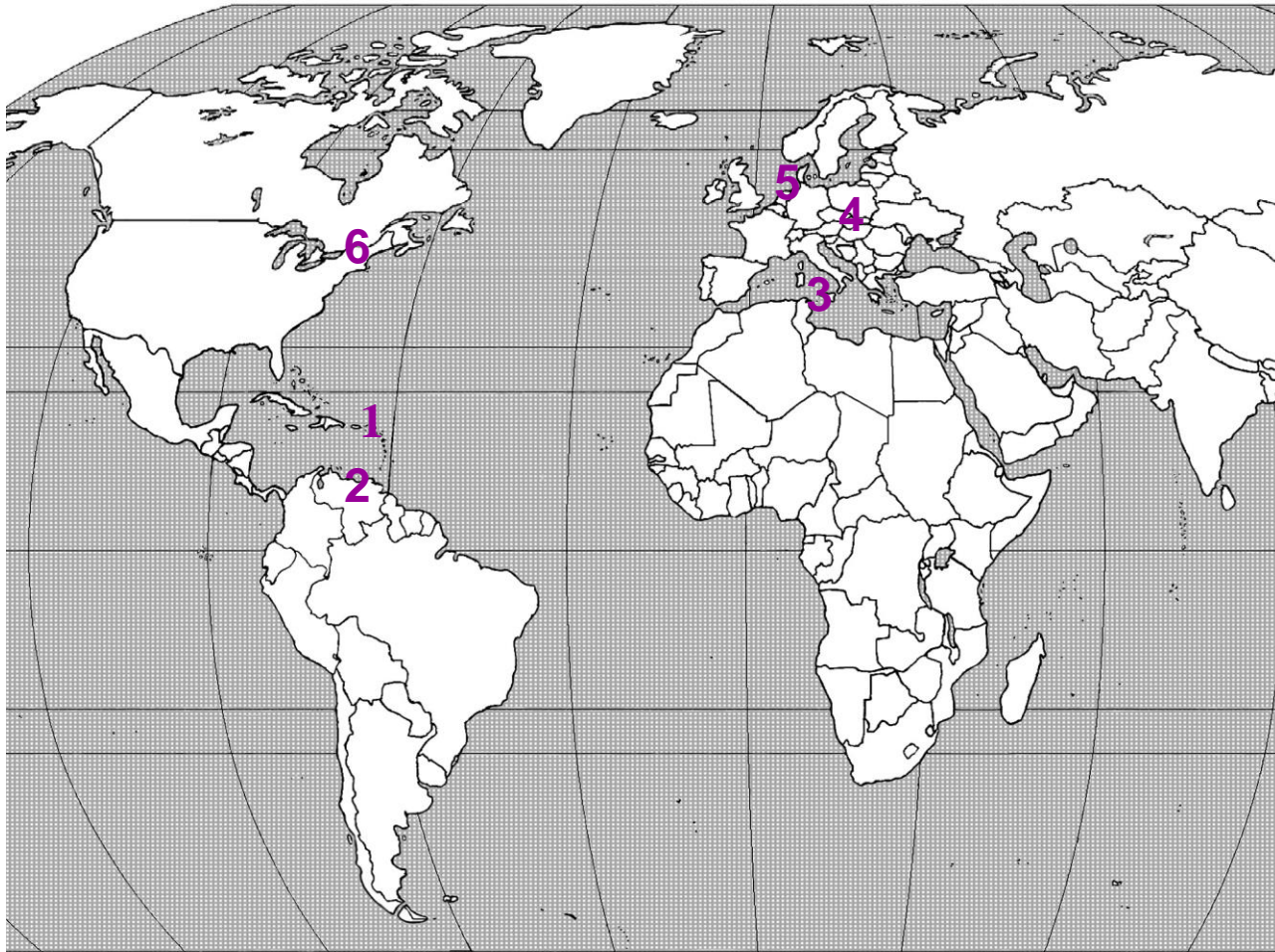
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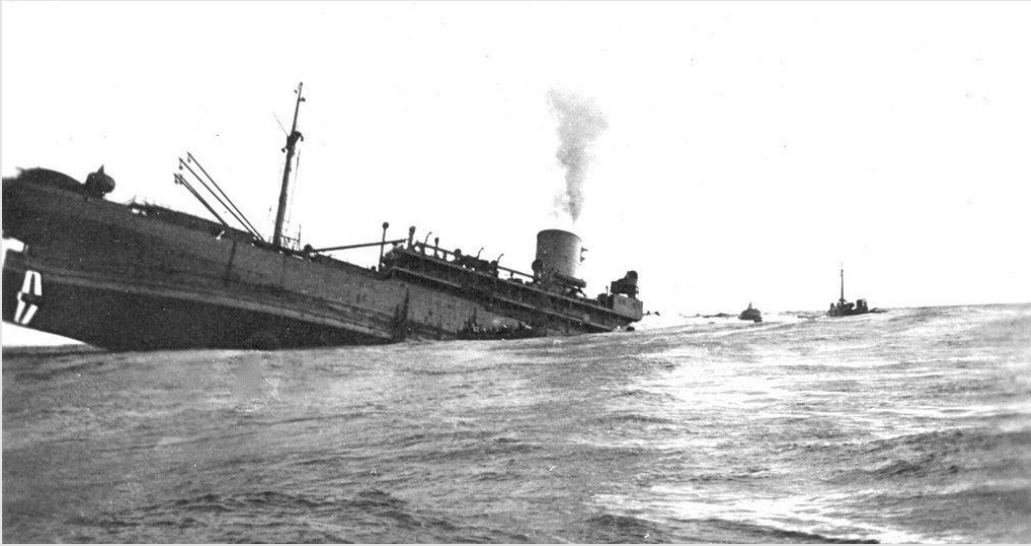
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Overview

- **Where and when
Lionel Romney lived**
- **Lionel Romney in WW II**
- **Oral history:
his own words**
- **Survival**
- **Trauma and healing**
- **Trauma and history**
- **Why I wrote my book**

Lionel Romney 1912 – 2004





<https://mfame.guru/a-sailors-worst-nightmare-surviving-a-sinking-ship/>

Lionel Romney's World War II Experience

- Was a civilian
- Mediterranean;
SS Makis in
June 1940
- Ship was mined
and sank



<https://www.mapsof.net/austria/italy-and-austria-map?image=full>

Lionel Romney's World War II Experience

- **Political prisoner
in Italy
1940 – 1944**
- **Deported to
Mauthausen in
June 1944**
- **Liberated by
U.S. Army in
May 1945**



Lionel Romney's Mauthausen experience in his own words:

On December 30, 1989,
after over 40 years of
virtual silence

An excerpt:

Mauthausen

Oral history December 30, 1989 an excerpt:



- **Mary Romney:** . . . So then after the war . . . where were you when the war ended?
- **Lionel Romney:** I was in a camp, a camp in Austria.
- **MR:** In Austria? Not in Germany?
- **LR:** No. . . In Austria. We came in from Italy. They took us to Austria.
- **MR:** By train?
- **LR:** Well, cattle cars. . . . Everybody was bundled in there.
- **MR:** And where in Austria?
- **LR:** I was up in a place. It's near to Graz. A concentration camp. One of those notorious concentration camps. Mauthausen. It's up on a hill. And they had the crematoriums, and the camps, you know, the barracks-like thing, you know. So many people in a barracks. We were liberated in 1945. The 10th of May. . . . About a couple of days after . . . before Hitler died.





- MR: Oh really?
-
- LR: We were liberated by the Fifth Army. The American Fifth Army.
-
- MR: Were you ever in . . . what kind of danger would you say you were in during that time?
- LR: . . . Every day was dangerous. There wasn't a day that wasn't. Sometimes I said "How the hell I going to get out of here?" And then we heard . . . different things of the atrocities that the Germans was committing in the camps, like before they leave, they kill everybody . . . you see, if they had to run away. But . . . the place in Austria where we were was close to the Czechoslovakian border. . . . You can hear the Russians, . . . and you can hear the concussion from the artillery.

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source: Entry registers of the political department (Y/36)

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source: Registers of the postroom (Y/43)

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source: Entry registers of the protective custody camp commando (Y/44)

**“But how
did you
survive?”**

- Not in the quarry / lumberjack
- Strength
- Language skills
 - English
 - Dutch
 - **German**
 - **Papiamentu**
 - Spanish
 - Italian

Trauma

Healing

- **Oral history:**

Catharsis for my father

“In the absence of words, the survivor perpetually endures past trauma as present experience. . . . But words allow [him] to relegate the past to its proper place . . . Words bring him to a safe space.”

- **Visit to Mauthausen:**

Peace for me

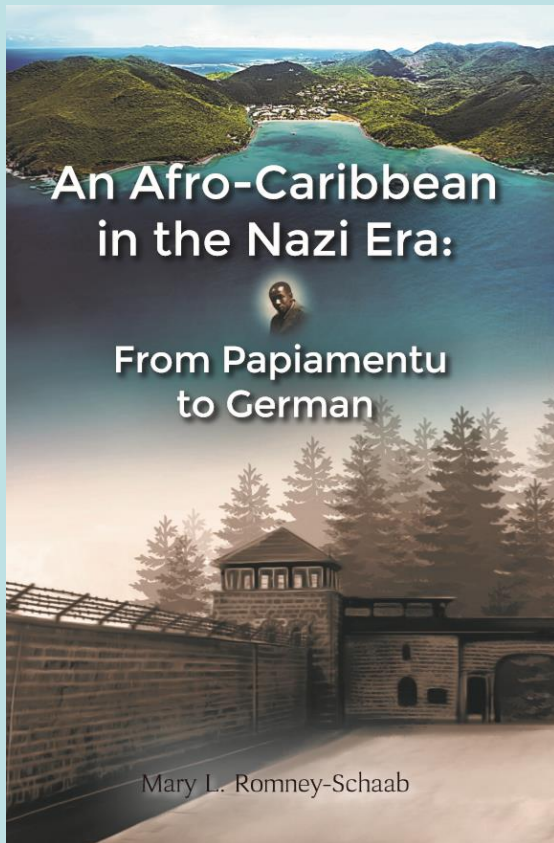
“ . . . Visiting [Mauthausen] finally brought me to a place of peace with my father’s experience there. . . . I have never seen my father as a WWII hero, but rather as a victor. Although he was a victim of the Nazis, he was also a victor. His victory was in his survival. Knowing this, I can gratefully be at peace.”

History and Healing

*History, despite its wrenching
pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived
again.*

– Maya Angelou,
“On the Pulse of Morning”

Why I wrote my book



- **African Diaspora history**
- **Everyone has witnessed history**
- **To encourage others**



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From Papiamentu
to German

Mary L. Romney-Schaab