Mennonites and the "Power of Whiteness": Race and Ambivalence in Anabaptist Newspapers

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In his essay "Witness and Revolutionary Movements," Vincent Harding (1967) wrote the following to the readers of *Mennonite Life*: "Sometimes, though, we clearly control the power, subtle power, like the power of Mennonite prestige, the power of middleclass respectability, the power of whiteness. Can we recommend the way of powerlessness while we dwell comfortably among the powerful?" (p. 164). Harding's words direct the reader towards the ways in which Anabaptists have been subject to, and have reproduced, the "subtle power" of cultural processes that reify categories of Blackness and Whiteness, and to the ways Anabaptists have benefitted from these formations. In this paper, I will explore how Anabaptist periodicals and newspapers reflected and contributed to processes of racialization among their publishers, writers, and readers through representations of Blackness and Whiteness. Newspapers have been identified by anthropologists and sociologists as key sources for understanding the formation of identities, including racial stereotypes (Schram, 2019). Benedict Anderson (1983) writes of the role of the newspaper in creating "an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers" that incorporate identities of "nation'" and "race" (p. 62). The "imagined community" of Anabaptist newspapers drew readers, writers, and publishers together to form

a common ethnoreligious identity, and in doing so also created and reinforced exclusionary boundaries. This article examines print media and racialization through a discussion of the ways in which four Mennonite newspapers constructed, represented, and reified categories of race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The moral tales, commentaries, essays, and letters of correspondence in these papers positioned Mennonites in terms of Whiteness,[1] while at the same time exemplifying what sociologist Meghan Burke (2012) has termed "racial ambivalence," vacillating between condemnations of slavery and injustice towards Black populations in North America, but continuously positioning the Black person as "other."

Mennonite Identity

Challenging the notion of identity as a fixed form of representation, Stuart Hall (1990) writes: "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact . . . we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). Since at least the 1980s, writing on Anabaptist identity and history has also increasingly focused on processes of identification, requiring "a more differentiated and multi-faceted understanding," since "all treatises of Anabaptism are produced by scholars with particular interests and motivations associated with specific temporal contexts" (Miller, 1985, p. 251). Rather than homogeneous and static, Anabaptist histories reflect the positioning of their writers and tellers in terms of culture, gender, race, and other aspects of identity. In his study on Mennonites and the formation of White racial identity, Tobin Miller Shearer (2012) uses the phrase "whitening conflicts" to indicate both the process and situation of Mennonite identity formation within a "highly conflictual historical process involving multiple racial communities that has led to the social dominance of one racial group over others" (p. 270). Such conflicts have been well documented in terms of the formation of Latino Mennonite identity in the US (Hinojosa, 2014), the experiences of young Mennonite voluntary service workers in African American communities (Stoltzfus, 2017) and the experiences of Mennonites in Germany under Hitler's Third Reich (Goossen, 2017b). Mennonites and members of other Anabaptist groups also underwent processes of "whitening" through their own immigration experiences and as they encountered dominant discourses on race in North America. Personal and group identities were reformulated and reshaped in

relation to assumptions and stereotypes of race, as presented within broader Anglo-Saxon Protestant discourse on Blackness. Categories of Whiteness and Blackness were then reproduced and reified through patterns of daily living and communication, including the publication and reader consumption of newspapers, while concealing the processes of their formulation. Anabaptist immigrants were not the only group subject to these processes of racialization, as Vellon's recent study of Italians and Whiteness demonstrates (Vellon, 2014; Roediger, 2018).

The racialization of Anabaptists did not occur in the form of a simple White/Black binary, but rather in the forms of multiple intersections of social class, gender, race, wealth, and power (Gollner, 2016). A social hierarchy of Whiteness developed, with members of some groups deemed more or less desirable than others. An example of this is found in the order-in-council passed by Sir Robert Borden's government on May 1, 1919, that prohibited the immigration to Canada of eastern European groups including Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Mennonites on the basis of lifeways and property holdings deemed suspect by authorities, and an assumption that these groups would not adapt or assimilate as easily to dominant "Canadian" norms and values (Kroeger, 2007).

Anabaptists were not only subject to these changes, but also encouraged assimilation to a White North America, especially within the broader context of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. While some Anabaptists participated in the Underground Railroad, there are also references in the literature to a few Mennonites as slave-owners (Schlabach, 1988). Newspapers emerged in North America during the nineteenth century as important venues for communicating with, and connecting, new immigrant populations as "imagined communities," and thus disseminated ideas of race and formulated Anabaptist racial and ethno-religious identities. For Mennonites, this sense of belonging was "not the spatial community of village or colony but one based on shared theological understandings and experiences" (Dueck, 2002, p. 181). However, the resulting boundaries of these communities served for both inclusion and exclusion.

The analysis of the representation of race, Blackness and Whiteness, pursued here is based on four Mennonite publications: the *Herald of Truth*, *The Mennonite*, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, and *Gospel Witness*. My study stretches from the first issue of *Herald of Truth*, in 1864, until 1908, which was the year in which *Herald of Truth* and *Gospel Witness* ceased publication. However, I will focus more specifically on material from these papers beginning in the mid-1880s, as this period featured an increased attention to matters of race in the form of lengthy essays and correspondence. My

discussion is based on both archival research at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Canadian Mennonite University) and on-line research through the Digital Mennonite Periodicals collection on the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary website. After describing the origins, intended audience, and purpose of these publications, I will analyze excerpts from these papers in terms of moral tales, articles, commentaries, and correspondence, focusing on themes of Whiteness, Blackness, and racial ambivalence.

Anabaptist Newspapers

By the late nineteenth century, many religious groups in North America had established periodicals to serve the needs of their members. At least ten Mennonite periodicals had appeared by 1880, which "helped immigrants learn the ways of their adopted country, connect with fellow immigrants while remaining in touch with events in their homelands, and maintain familiar traditions, including religious beliefs, practices, and affiliations" (Loewen & Urry, 2012, p. 177).

The *Herald of Truth*, established by John F. Funk, was published by the Mennonite Church from 1864 to 1908. Founded one year after the end of the Civil War, the paper's content has been described as follows:

> The *Herald of Truth* carried a diversity of content that appealed to several types of readers. . . . Notices of conferences and conference reports, obituaries, accounts of tragic accidents, warnings concerning swindlers, and other subjects were topics of editorial interest. There were series of discussion questions and always a steady flow of fundamental doctrinal subjects. The editor solicited news articles from congregations and Mennonite communities. . . . The editor also solicited written sermons. (Hostetler, 1958, p. 46)

Through the paper Funk "achieved in his readers a strong sense of denominational consciousness" (Hostetler, 1958, p. 47). First published in Chicago, the paper's readership by the end of its first year of publication totaled approximately 1,200 people (Mishler, 1996). Funk also published the paper's German counterpart, *Herold der Wahrheit*, and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau.* He also founded the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana, together with his brother Abram.

The *Gospel Witness*, published from 1905 to 1908 as a weekly Mennonite Church journal, was "established because of widespread dissatisfaction with the *Herald of Truth*" (Bender, 1956, para. 1).

The journal was published by the Gospel Witness Company, which appeared as a competitor to the Mennonite Publishing Company, along with the Mennonite Book and Tract Society. Established by "nine brethren" under the leadership of Aaron Loucks and his father Jacob S. Loucks, and A. D. Martin, the paper appears to have emerged as a challenge to Funk and the private ownership of the Mennonite Publishing Company (MPC), in that the *Gospel Witness* was to be a "church organ," which would not engage in "pulling down" the *Herald of Truth*, and that its publishers and readers would "rejoice when the MPC sees the folly of its course and makes an honest effort to put its affairs into the hands of the church" (Hostetler, 1958, p. 73). The *Gospel Witness* was based in Scottdale, Pennsylvania, and directed at Mennonite families who did not subscribe to the *Herald*, those who would subscribe to both papers, and to "non-Mennonite families as can be interested in the *Gospel Witness*" (Hostetler, 1958, p. 73). In 1908, the *Gospel Witness* and *Herald of Truth* merged to become the *Gospel Herald*, apparently at the request of Funk himself (Hostetler, 1958, p. 61).

The Mennonite, founded by Nathaniel B. Grubb and first published by the Eastern District Conference in 1885, was adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1893 as an English-language periodical with the purpose of aiding in city pastoral work, and connecting the denomination's younger members. The paper's German-language counterpart was the *Christlicher Bundesbote*. Smucker and Shelly (1957) note:

> The paper was devoted to the interest of the Mennonite church, and the cause of Christ in general. Its basic content consisted of devotional articles, general articles of information and inspiration, news of General Conference activities, including missions and relief work, and news of General Conference congregations and schools. (para. 6)

Die Mennonitische Rundschau (Mennonite Review), "the oldest Mennonite periodical published continuously under one name" (Bender & Thiessen, 2007, para. 1), was first printed on June 5, 1880. Initially targeting Russian Mennonites in Nebraska, it was eventually read by both Mennonites and other German-speaking people outside of Nebraska (Loewen & Urry, 2012, p. 184). Later published in Winnipeg, Manitoba, this was the most "cosmopolitan" of the Mennonite papers. *Rundschau* was preceded by the *Nebraska Ansiedler*, which also had an international readership (Hostetler, 1958, p. 208). The paper played a significant role in connecting Mennonites in the German language and was at first supported by a US railway as part of its efforts to introduce agricultural products (Hostetler, 1958, p. 227). The paper also demonstrated an "inter-

Mennonite character" (its first editor, John F. Harms, was a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church). Loewen and Urry (2012) note that "the publication of history and memoirs was part of a larger Russländer culture-building exercise" (p. 190). In doing so, the paper exercised a strong role in assisting Mennonites in North American and Europe to maintain a strong sense of peoplehood and identity. However, these papers also played a formative role in shaping the perceptions of readers not only in terms of religion, but also race and social class.

Each of these papers served an important function in connecting their readers with others both nationally and internationally, and in this way aided in the development of "imagined communities" of readers, writers, and publishers. This was a community within which concepts of race, particularly Blackness and Whiteness, would be reflected and reproduced.

Racial Ambivalence

In his article on Mennonites and Whiteness in late nineteenth-century Chicago, Philipp Gollner (2016) situates the tension between the zeal and racial assumptions of young Mennonite activists within the broader context of benevolent Anglo-Saxon Protestant movements that reinforced racial divisions and hierarchies in the United States while arguing for the importance of outreach to Black populations. Anabaptist newspapers reflected this tension in their declarations of the abundance of God's love as knowing no boundaries of race or class, while at the same time reproducing racial tropes of Blackness in the form of caricatures of Black people as simple-minded, lazy, often criminal by nature, and as obstacles to Anabaptist progress. At times sentiments of the universality of the Gospel and racial hierarchy appeared in the same sentence: "The law of Christ is a universal law. It is applicable alike to the naked savage of Africa and to the inhabitant of Alaska; to the prince in his palace and to the maid behind the mill" (Schrock, 1897, p. 91). Similarly, a statement of White supremacy by A. D. Wenger (1899)—"the mighty empires of Germany, England and America have been built up and peopled by a superior race" (p. 226)—was followed within the same issue by a message of Christian unity: "He [Christ] took captivity captive, and between Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, rich and poor, the middle wall of preference or advantage is taken away" (Benner, 1899, p. 234).

These statements reflect a broader bifurcated Whiteness which informed mission work and relations across lines of race in both

"foreign missions" and in the depiction of Blackness in North America. While many Anabaptists acted (or wrote) out of an ostensible position of benevolence, they also contributed to a broader project of "white religion," and to "the Anglo-Protestant struggle to maintain a culturally white nation" (Gollner, 2016, p. 168). In doing so, Anabaptist denominational newspapers contributed to a racial hierarchy in North America and provided a template for Black/White relations. White writers would continually assume positions of racial superiority by evaluating Blackness in North America during the years following the Emancipation Declaration (January 1, 1863), which are the focus of this paper.

Moral Tales

A primary venue for expressions of racial ambivalence in Anabaptist newspapers was the "moral tale." Moral tales are "stories with characters (in this case Black people) through which desirable morals are exemplified," but which also "reinforce racial hierarchies and power relations . . . by "depict[ing] Black people as servants, porters, and apple-sellers in naturalized social positions while failing to challenge the structures of inequality that these roles represented" (Epp, 2019, p. 228). This form of writing appears most often in *Herald of Truth* (26 times) and *The Mennonite* (27 times), and twice in *Gospel Witness.* My research has not revealed any instances of moral tales in *Rundschau*, perhaps reflecting the more "confessional" nature of the other newspapers in contrast to the emphasis on news in *Rundschau.* While the central characters in moral tales may be of either male or female gender, males (39) were featured as central characters three times more often than females (13). Black characters in moral tales were often portrayed as "old" (28) and/or "poor" (16), reflecting the racial trope of charity. While moral tales were often reprints of material from other periodicals, or even from the same periodical, some bore the names of individual authors including J. D. Burkholder, John F. Funk, David Burkholder, and S. M. Musselman, the latter a Mennonite preacher. Sources of reprints included the following periodicals: *Herald and Presbyter*, *Our Dumb Animals*, *Richmond Christian Advocate*, *The Common People*, and the *S.S. Journal*.[2] Some were simply identified as reprints by the term "Selected."

One of the more common moral tales features "an old negro woman" and her encounter with "a rough sailor," and appears within *The Mennonite*'s regular "Christian Education" feature on June 28, 1906:

> A worthy old colored woman was walking quietly along a street in New York, carrying a basket of apples, when a mischievous sailor, seeing her, stumbled against her, and upset her basket, and then stood to hear her fret at his trick, and enjoy a laugh at her expense. But what was his astonishment when she meekly picked up the apples without any resentment in her manner, and giving him a dignified look of mingled sorrow, kindness and pity, said "God forgive you, my son, as I do!" That touched a tender chord in the heart of the rude jack-tar. He felt ashamed, self-condemned, and repentant. The tear started in his eye, he felt that he must make some reparation. So, heartily confessing his error, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, and pulling out a lot of loose "change," He forced it upon the wondering old Black women, exclaiming, "God bless you kind mother! I'll never do so again!" (Smissen, 1906, p. 5)

In the three versions of this tale[3] which have come to my attention, the authorship is always "anonymous" or "selected," and the setting is always New York, but in this version the sailor is British ("jack-tar"). The characters of the woman and sailor form a dichotomy of good and evil that is aligned with racial identities. The woman is always presented as morally superior to the sailor, and it is she who leads him to moral and spiritual transformation ("God bless you"). The term "worthy" here reflects the racial trope of "respectability," in which the Black person must be raised above their racial identity through certain acts or postures such as forgiveness.[4] A few other things are notable in this tale. It is only the woman who is identified by gender, age, and in one version religion ("Christian"). The sailor is simply referred to as "mischievous," "rough," or "a rude jack-tar." The woman's identity traits position her as "other" to the sailor, who is presumed to be of younger age ("mother"), and assumed to be other than Black by lack of reference to skin colour. As Suchet (2004) notes, "whiteness becomes an unmarked and invisible term, while a racialized subjectivity is carried by those with darker skins" (p. 432). The sailor's religious identity is not mentioned, but his actions contrast sharply with the woman's "worthy," "meek," or "Christian" behaviour, which includes an act of forgiveness.[5] In one version of this tale the woman is selling the apples, suggesting that she may be reliant upon this activity for her livelihood, adding to the significance of the sailor's actions towards her. The woman's response to the sailor, "a dignified look of mingled sorrow, kindness and pity" is in one version accompanied by the following statement: "forgiveness is an attitude and heart-changing power" (Newell, 2014, p. 64). While this moral tale reveals the woman as possessing agency and morality, her identity also positions her as "other" to the reader, thus situating the reader within

"a dominant social dichotomy of Black/White relations" (Epp, 2019, p. 229).

Moral tales also appeared within the pages of *The Mennonite*. The following tale, entitled "Falling from Grace," appeared as a reprint from *The Common People* in the "Pastor Peaceful's Letters" column in September 1900:

> A colored brother was once preaching a doctrinal sermon to his congregation. He felt it necessary to illustrate the doctrine of apostasy in a manner clear to their understanding. He did it in this way. He began by telling them to their utter astonishment that he believed in falling from grace. "But," said he, "I 'lusrate it in dis way: One time massa had some bacon hanging up under a scaffold to smoke. I thought I would go out one night and steal one of those hams. So I got a barrel and climbed up on it, and reached out over to get on, but just as my hand got within a foot of dat ham, de barrel tilted, and down we came. Sure 'nuff brethren, I fell from dat dar ham, and dat's de way people fall from grace. Dey never had any to fall with." His illustration is surely orthodox as well as original. (p. 91)

This tale is notable for the presentation of a central Black character in the role of a pastor, presumably in a Black church. While he provides a valuable lesson for his congregation, the tale also suggests the trope of savagery in the form of the Black criminal, deterred only by clumsiness or fate. The man's speech, and presumably that of his congregation, again distances these characters from both the narrator and the reader and thus positions them as "other."

Finally, the following provides an example from the southern United States. In this instance, the moral tale is found in an article reprinted in *Herald of Truth* authored by C. G. Finney (1885), entitled "Victory over the World through Faith." The story itself came to Finney from "a minister of the gospel," and involved a "worldly and a most ungodly man," an owner of multiple slaves who was addicted to horse-racing (p. 372). When one day he became deathly ill, his wife and family suggested calling someone to pray for the man. However, the dying man declines seeing the minister, whom he describes as a fellow gambler, and instead calls for his slave "Tom" who is serving the man as a "hostler." Tom is identified by the dying man as a person of prayer:

> I have often overheard him praying and I know he can pray; besides I have watched his life and his temper, and I never saw anything in him inconsistent with Christian character; call him in, I should be glad to hear him pray. (p. 372)

When Tom enters the room, "modestly and slowly," leaving his hat at the door, and is requested by the dying man firstly to pray and secondly to forgive his master, Tom immediately replies: "'O yes, massa, with all my heart;' and drops on his knees and pours out a prayer for his soul" (p. 372). Finney concludes:

> Now the moral of this story is obvious. Place the skeptic on his dying bed, let that solemn hour arrive, and the inner convictions of his heart be revealed, and he knows of at least one man who is a Christian. He knows one man whose prayers he values more than all the friendship of his former associates. (p. 372)

Again, Tom (Christian, prayerful, modest, instantly forgiving) stands in stark contrast to his "worldly and ungodly" master, who only turns to Tom during that critical hour on his deathbed. However, Tom's speech positions him as "other" to both his master and to the reader and exemplifies yet another trope in the depiction of Blackness: "The implication is that most black people do not have the capacity to engage in articulate speech, when white people are automatically assumed to be articulate" (Michael Eric Dyson in Clemetson, 2007). The tale says nothing of Tom's situation, or any potential changes to his life now that he has acquiesced to his master's dying wish.

While the moral tales found in Anabaptist periodicals may have presented Black people in more positive light than often found in other forms of nineteenth-century literature, these accounts fail to challenge the oppression of their subjects. While framed in terms of benevolence, moral tales reproduced racial tropes of Blackness and charity, respectability, and inarticulate speech. While exemplifying characteristics of humility, bravery, piety, forgiveness, and prayerfulness, slaves remain slaves, Black women remain in poverty, systems of oppression remain unchallenged, and the characters of the tales remain as "other" to the reader.

News Reports and Commentaries

Anabaptist periodicals such as the *Rundschau*, *The Mennonite*, and *Herald of Truth* carried news columns. The articles which appeared in these columns reflected an editorial process of selecting the most newsworthy articles, and the ones which editors may have felt would be most interesting for their readers. The *Rundschau* also featured commentaries on current events. While some of the articles are supportive of reforms to relieve the suffering of Black people and improve their lives, others focus on the criminality of Black

populations. Accolades for the performances of Black musicians were found in the same paper as accounts of violence as perpetrated by "negroes." In this way, both the selection of news articles and the commentaries again demonstrate a sense of both ambivalence and control over the depictions of Black people. For example, in 1905 *The Mennonite*'s "News of the Week" section carried reports that reproduced racial divisions and stereotypes of Blackness in the form of "objective" news reporting: a mining disaster at Birmingham, Alabama, in which many of the victims "are so badly bruised and twisted and discolored that negroes cannot be told from white men"; the death sentence of Mrs. W. G. Danz, who killed her husband with the help of a "colored voodoo doctor"; the recruitment of "colored people" during the Chicago strike; and an account of "Black cannibals" in the article "Grewsome [*sic*] stories of the South Sea." These accounts appeared in contrast to news of efforts to educate and Christianize Black populations such as reports of the National Christian Association's efforts to bring a Sunday School curriculum to "negroes" in the South.

Commentaries in the *Rundschau* included a report in 1886 on "Negro Wanderings," which focused on the Exoduster movement of Blacks out of southern states to Kansas, following the removal of federal troops from the South, leaving Blacks without civil or political rights in the face of racist organizations like the KKK and general White animosity ("Neger=Wanderungen," 1886).[6] While the article demonstrated some sympathy towards these migrants, it was most sympathetic towards their southern farm employers: "one would think that the white landowners should do everything in their power to keep their renters and their workers" (p. 3). The article depicts Black migrants as dreamers who arrive in Kansas expecting "40 acres, a mule and Paradise," only to find high land rents and shattered dreams (p. 3). The article suggests that the migration is misguided, as "there is also much fertile land in the states they are leaving" (p. 3). Racial violence in the South is not discussed, Black people are depicted as foolish, and wisdom and rationality remain the privilege of White farmers. This line of thought would serve to inform Mennonite colonization plans, as I will discuss later in this article.

However, to their credit, Anabaptist newspapers were also critical of violence against Blacks, commenting on the cruelty of punishments for "negroes" convicted of relatively minor crimes: "In most of the southern states the rule of law that no one is guilty until proven does not apply to the colored folks" ("Neue Negersclaven im Sueden," 1886, p. 2). The following editorial statement appeared on the front page of the August 6, 1903, issue of the *Herald*:

> Judging from the lynchings and burnings of negroes, the daily records of other crimes, mob violence, strikes, riots, race feuds, etc., etc., it is evident that this country is yet far from civilized. ("Editorial Notes," 1903, p. 249)

Essays

Anabaptist newspapers also featured lengthy pieces, approximately one full newspaper page or more, most often with a single author. Among these can be found essays that present depictions of Black character and its "elevation," and characterizations of Black people as obstacles to a Mennonite colony initiative. Both themes position White Anabaptist writers as rational judges and evaluators of Blackness, reproducing the trope of Black people defined in terms of their "usefulness" to White progress (Mueller, 2019).

Several essays in the *Herald* examined and evaluated the character of "the negro," assuming that Black people shared characteristics or even personalities. These profiles provided a forum for the writer to judge and evaluate their subjects. However, once again the paper demonstrated some ambivalence. Several of these essays discussed Black people as being pure of heart (see the section on moral tales) or incredibly brave ("negroes frequently exhibit a wonderful heroism in times of danger"; "Humble Heroism," 1896, p. 333), while others depicted "negroes" as prone to crime and debauchery.

Other accounts reflected the "Sambo" trope of Black people as simple-minded (Boskin, 1986). In an account titled "The Happy Negro," Ambrose Serle (1891) tells of meeting a "negro" on a trip to the United States. When the man begins talking about the Bible, Serle decides to put him to the test: "Being rather more acquainted with doctrinal truths and the analogy of the Bible than he had been, or in his situation could easily be," Serle tests the man by asking him about "the merit of works, the justification of a sinner, the power of grace, and the like" (p. 21). Serle notes that this "poor excellent creature" provided answers which delighted Serle "with the sweet spirit and simplicity of his answers, with the heavenly wisdom that God had put into the mind of this negro" (p. 21) Serle seems to be surprised by the "negro's" knowledge, which he assumes to be a result of teaching by the man's slave master. The assumption here is clear: any demonstration of knowledge which White people find acceptable has to come from a source other than the Black person who expresses this knowledge.

The trope of simple-mindedness is also reflected in "The Virginia Negro Preacher"[7] (1894) which describes an "old Negro preacher" from Africa who gave thanks for arriving in Virginia:

> Comparing their [African] superstitious practices and degraded condition with the privileges enjoyed under the Christian system, he has often been heard devoutly to thank God, that he had been brought to America. "For," he would say, "coming to the white man's country as a slave, was the means of making me free in Christ Jesus." (p. 326)

Described as a person of "humility," and "lowliness of mind," the man's primary source of suffering in life is identified as his own wife, "who was in no proper sense a help meet for him", and his family, which was "profligate and idle" (p. 326). The man's "lowliness of mind" apparently extends to the following comment: "Alluding, on one occasion to these trials, he said 'I am such a *hard headed*, disobedient child, that I need a whipping every day'" (p. 326).

The association between Blackness and morality and criminality appears in two *Herald of Truth* articles authored by David Wenger. In the first, titled "The Ethiopian or Black Race," Wenger (1899a) begins by arguing for the salvation of the "Black race," as "their black skin . . . is no hindrance to prevent them from being saved, because there is no respect of persons with God" (p. 119). He proceeds to "name the races" of human history as Ethiopian/Black, Turanian/Yellow, and Caucasian/White, noting: "We find of all the races, the white has reached the greatest perfection—physically, intellectually, and, above, all, morally. Does this mean that we must consider ourselves better than the black race? No, we must not" (p. 119). The author then draws attention to the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission in Pennsylvania as one example of a successful way to "elevate" Black people. According to Wenger, the Mission was established in part to address the "criminal element" amongst the local Black population which was bothering the "good people" of the area: "The black people found on these mountains have for years been a great annoyance to the white people living in the valley; in that they were given to stealing" (p. 119). The Mission, which was described in the pages of these early Anabaptist newspapers as a blessing and benefit to all in the area through the engagement of "negroes" in manual labour, has since been critiqued as a company town which did not trust African Americans to their own economic well-being and paid them in scrip from the company store (Bechler, 1986).

In "The Negro," Wenger (1899b) again promotes the "elevation" of Black people. Characterizing Abraham Lincoln as "an instrument

in God's hand to set the negro free in 1863" (p. 219), he reminds the reader that the "negro" still does not have full freedom in the United States. But, Wenger argues,

> he does not need this freedom. What we want him to have is, the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Has he this freedom? We are aware that he has. He also has the privilege of becoming educated, and both the North and South are aiding him. (pp. 219–220)

However, "the negro today is yet of a rough nature, being harsh in his manners and roving in disposition" (p. 220). Wenger refers to the number of crimes involving "negroes," and concludes that

> there is much to do to change the negro's manner to a more Godlike character. Have these efforts been put forth? We know that they have to a certain extent. But more may be done for raising the moral character of the negro, and great will be the reward to the nation or individual through whom it may be done. (p. 220)

The calling is clear for White Anabaptists: caring for Black people means bringing them to salvation through White mission work. Such thinking informed the development not only of Welsh Mountain, but also of other missions including the Western Children's Mission outreach to the Shiloh community in Saskatchewan (Penner, 1987; L. Lane, founder of the Shiloh Baptist Church and Cemetery Restoration Society, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

While supporting "improvement of the race," some writers identified the attitudes of Black people themselves as the cause of their own lack of progress. In "The Nature of Education," C. E. Bender (1904) writes: "It is said that the savages of our race remain savages, not because they have not original faculties as other individuals, capable of improvement, but because they have no desire for improvement" (p. 319).

This interest in "improvement" informed the support demonstrated for Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institute found in the pages of the *Herald of Truth*, *Gospel Witness*, and *The Mennonite.* Viewed by many American White Protestants as an answer to the nation's "negro problem" (Mueller, 2019), discussions of Washington's work found their way into columns on Christian education, such as this excerpt from *The Mennonite*:

> That some of the negroes, perhaps a larger percentage than that of white people, are shiftless, unreliable, sensual is true, yet if we consider their former moral and spiritual condition we can only wonder at the progress made, especially in the last 25 years. Booker T. Washington, of Tuskegee

> Institute, is the benefactor of his race, and he and his many friends have, by the grace of God, been instruments to make the negroes of this country what they are. (Smissen, 1907, p. 5)

While Anabaptists may have had hearts of compassion for their Black neighbours, the means of "elevating" Blacks also maintained racial inequalities.

Labour and Colony

The trope of Black "improvement" and the obstacles of perceived Black character also informed at least one account of Mennonite colonization, that of A. B. (Abram) Kolb and the Lithia Springs, Georgia, initiative. Kolb was born near Berlin, Ontario, to parents Jacob Z. and Maria Kolb. His adopted brother Charlie was perhaps the only "Black Mennonite" in nineteenth-century Canada, and was baptized into First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario (Good, 1988). When he was around twenty, Abram joined the Waterloo District Conference, along with his brothers Charlie and Elias, "under the influence of [John S.] Coffman's preaching on his 1882 visit to the area" (Good, 1988, p. 99). Seven years later, Abram had moved to Elkhart, Indiana, to become second assistant editor at the *Herald of Truth*. In that same year, he wrote and published one of the most significant articles on race that has appeared in any Anabaptist newspaper during the late nineteenth and century. Entitled "The Race Troubles," the article begins with the following statement:

> The condition of the negroes in the South is, to say the least, not an enviable one. While they are nominally free, nevertheless the prejudices and feelings of the whites against their colored neighbors is the same, and the influence which this prejudice exerts over the colored people at large, prevents them from receiving the opportunities for enlightenment which they should, as free citizens of the United States, receive. (Kolb, 1889, p. 341)

Responding to common assumptions that "the negro race" was in need of improvement through Christianization and education, Kolb (1889) writes: "The man of color, be he ever so refined and educated and pious, is almost universally placed at a disadvantage" (p. 341). The article proceeds to discuss the "deplorable" working conditions of Black labourers, including pittance wages and whippings, and draws on the "White Saviour" trope by reminding White readers of their duty to "lift them out of the estate in which fate has placed them and help them to assume the responsibilities of citizenship" (p.

342). However, the author notes that in spite of many "colored people" becoming spiritually enlightened, they too "receive the same treatment as the most ignorant" (pp. 341–342). Referring to several cases of violence against Black people, Kolb writes that "the value of a negro's life is placed at a very low estimate" and help from authorities is minimal (p. 342). Kolb then refers to a resolution passed by the National Baptist Colored Convention after one of its delegations had been beaten and forced to leave a train they were on by "a dozen rough-looking men" (p. 342). The resolution includes the words "News comes to us from some of the Southern states that our people are being shot down like dogs or wild beasts at their homes, in their fields and other places without there being any redress for outrages and wrongs perpetrated" (p. 342). Kolb concludes by saying:

> There is one God who rejoices over all, and all nations are his. He lets all races inhabit the same earth, and in his sights the souls of men are of equal value, whether they are encompassed with bodies whose skins are white, black, bronze or yellow; and although for many reasons the races should not intermarry, yet, as children of the same common Father, as heirs of the same salvation, as believers in the same faith and as pilgrims of the same heaven, where all shall be equal, why should not all be equal and enjoy the same privileges which God has ordained for all? (p. 343)

Kolb's critique of the treatment of Black people was not received well by all readers. On March 1, 1890, the *Herald of Truth* published a letter authored by seven representatives from the Harrisonburg, Virginia, area (D. A. Heatwole, John Brunk Sr., Eli Brunk, P. S. Hartman, Wm. H. Rhodes, A. D. Weaver, and S. M. Burkholder) in response to Kolb's statements, as they

> felt convinced that such an article was uncalled for—out of place—and ought not to have been published in a paper claimed to be a religious one; especially when an article contains sentiments of a political character that cannot be sustained by facts. (p. 74)

The authors counter Kolb's concerns about the treatment of Black people in the South: "and here we state most emphatically, that as far as we know the aim of the whites of the South is to educate and improve the condition of the blacks" (p. 74). The authors continue by identifying the source of the problem as outside of the Southern context; "race troubles" will only continue "so long as the people of the North and West continue to incense the blacks against the whites" (p. 74). Shifting blame to Black people themselves, the authors note that their brethren in Virginia, "who were of course

always opposed to slavery," had themselves sent reports from their travels throughout the South, providing information as to the character of Black people: "They tell us they never saw as much insolence and impudence as was manifested by the negroes of the South" (p. 74). The authors implied that Kolb's article had been abusive towards Christians of the South, and that it had "soiled" the pages of the paper (p. 75). The implication here was that the purity of the *Herald of Truth,* whose authorship and readership were primarily White, relied on suppressing discussion of the suffering of African Americans.

The letter from the Virginia Mennonites was followed on the same page of the paper with a counter-response by "C.," presumably John S. Coffman, assistant editor of the *Herald* (Heatwole et al., 1890).[8] Referring to the Virginia correspondents as "our highly esteemed brethren, who are among our most earnest and zealous workers in the church in Virginia," Coffman writes that the *Herald* is pleased to publish their letter "in order to do justice to our brethren in the South," but notes that "if he ['the negro'] believes, follows Christ in the regeneration, and is saved he is our brother, if we have done as such, and should be treated as such" (p. 75). Coffman notes that Kolb relied on reports whose truth he could not ascertain, that "he was led to make statements that he would not now make after more deliberate consideration," that Kolb does not have any way of knowing which of the statements were true, and that if his writing was "true at all," it must reflect the situation only in "remote" areas, and that "the wrongs described may not be sanctioned by the better class of citizens" (p. 75). Coffman ends his reply by stating that neither can the Virginia correspondents judge the situation of "the negro" in the South by that within their own locations and that "they have as little means of knowing his true condition in the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana as the people of the North and West" (p. 75).

Kolb also wrote a reply in the April 1, 1890, issue of the *Herald*, admitting his error, "since I have never thought that our brethren in the South would misuse or abuse any man because of the color of his skin" (p. 106). However, Kolb does reaffirm his statements about the abuse of "negroes" in at least some situations, as they come from the observations in Kingston, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, of "an eye-witness whose word I do not for a moment doubt," and that the treatment of Black people in those locations "was sufficient to sicken northern instincts and feelings" (p. 106). While Kolb acknowledges that Blacks may not be treated in this way by the Virginia correspondents, the areas where abuse did occur "were pretty large and not at all distant from each other" (p. 106). Agreeing that

the *Herald* should "be kept free and unsoiled of politics" and other unsavory topics, Kolb states "for this reason I refrain from quoting anything from letters which their letter in the Herald called forth" (p. 106).[9]

These exchanges were followed up with a series of reports by representatives of the Mennonite Publishing Company, who provided accounts of their travels to the southern states. The reports often identified Blacks as obstacles to White progress. One report described the Blacks of the South as "indifferent . . . [they] know nothing of economy," and are "religious . . . but religion and morality do not always go hand in hand with him" (Horsch, 1895, p. 106). Daniel Shenk's 1897 travel account echoes Horsch in describing "negroes" as ineffective farmers, as the rich soil of the area "has been farmed ever since the war by negroes and almost exclusively to corn without any manure, fertilizer or clover, with only an occasional 'rest' for a year or two, allowing it to grow up to weeds. The farming has also been poorly done in most cases" (p. 101). However, the land is described as resilient and with great potential.

Attention to the South acquired a note of urgency in the first segment of a six-part series in the *Herald* entitled "The Southland," authored by Kolb. The Mennonite denomination had been losing young people as high land prices drove them to the city. At stake were not only young people, but the future of the denomination itself. Kolb (1897a) notes that

> negro labor in the South is cheap and good, and hence that class still performs nearly all the manual labor. It seems to us however that for this very reason the negro stands more or less directly in the way of the development of the South by the South, because his home and sinew can be hired more cheaply than that of the white man, and hence the common white laborer is greatly handicapped by the South. (p. 293)

The author, together with five other Mennonite leaders, set out "with the idea of finding some locality suitable for planting a colony of our people, similar to those so successfully planted in Canada" (p. 293).[10] The reports from this team pejoratively compared the Blacks they observed in their travels to watermelon-eating children, "easily offended at one another and easily reconciled. We wondered why so many of them wore bandages on hands, arms, heads, faces, etc. until told that '[n-word] fights' among themselves were very common, especially in some communities" (Kolb, 1897b, p. 306). These words again reflect the trope of Blackness as simple-mindedness and savagery and stand in stark contrast to Kolb's (1897c) description of Philadelphia as "a truly *civilized* community" (p. 321).

Kolb and party finally arrived at Lithia Springs, in Douglas County, Georgia, with its "exceptionally fine" mineral springs, attracting "invalids" from all over the United States, many of whom go away "entirely cured." He writes,

> the land there is productive and cheap, but the negroes are an *objectionable feature*, as they greatly outnumber the whites, and are, as a class, more *ignorant and impudent* than at any other place we had been. In fact it is not uncommon for a negro to be *put out of the way* for *beastly crimes* of which they are accused. Less than ten miles from West Lake a negro had been fearfully tortured and finally hung by a mob, less than a week before our visit there . . . *Nearly all of the convicts are negroes*, and some are rather harshly treated and poorly fed, so much so in fact that the state instituted an inquiry into the matter with the result that some shocking disclosures were made, showing the utter depravity of some of the officials in charge of these "chain gangs." Proper officers would have an excellent opportunity to exert a *corrective and elevating influence* upon these poor fellows, many of whom *no doubt are densely ignorant*, but not so viciously inclined naturally as some of the guards who have charge of them [emphasis added]. (Kolb, 1898a, p. 2)

While Kolb admits that some guards were vicious in their actions towards Black people, his description of "negroes" as ignorant and impudent criminals appears in stark contrast to the beauty and purity of Lithia Springs.

In the concluding segment, which features the party's return trip through New Orleans, Kolb (1898b) describes the old slave market, using the term "poor victims" three times:

> Thank God, never again will this hall resound with the blows of the slave auctioneer's hammer, or to the cruel comments on the chattel he sold; nor will it again hear the sound of the slave driver's lash, or the cries and moans of the poor victims of man's greed and cruelty. (p. 18)

His words carry the assumption that violence against Blacks is a thing of the past. Yet Fulton County, which bordered Douglas County where Lithia Springs was located, was to gain infamy as the county with the most lynchings in Georgia between 1877 and 1950; at least three Black men had been lynched in the decade prior to Kolb's writing, and at least five more would be lynched in 1899, during the time of greatest advertising for Mennonite colonization in the area.[11] Either Kolb ignored these incidents of violence, or decided they were not worthy of mention in his description of the area. The series concludes with directions to interested travellers in terms of railroad contacts.

A year later, the January 15, 1899, *Herald* carried the editorial piece "Our Mennonite Colony in Georgia," announcing: "We are now ready for active business," as the area of Sweet Water Valley in Georgia is being "gradually filled up with northerners" (p. 29). The author comments on the excellent peaches grown in the area, and on the establishment of the "Georgia Immigration & Improvement Co., located at Elkhart, IN," which has "bought all the desirable lands and building sites around the world-renowned Bowden Lithia Springs, the great summer resort of the Southern states" (p. 29). Referring to potential immigrants to the South as "our colonists," it declared:

> There will certainly be a grand success if our friends will unite with us in the enterprise. All persons desiring to have a share in these lands and building sites, can have the same benefit as the Company . . . The object of the Company is to plot out the land that adjoins the Springs, and open streets, avenues, and boulevards, and clean up and beautify this entire property with *cheap colored labor* [emphasis added]. (p. 29)

The article ended by requesting those who were interested to contact J. S. Lehman, General Manager, Georgia Immigration & Improvement Co., Elkhart, Indiana. In the ensuing flurry of attention which these papers gave to the Lithia Springs colonization project, little mention was made of the continued violence against African Americans in the same area.

Correspondence

Similar to the travel accounts, publication of letters offered the readers of these papers a more personal connection through eyewitness reports of situations and locations across the country. Letters from the Sweetwater Valley brought reports of productive land and the successful establishment of the Mennonite colony at Lithia Springs. F. J. Lantz (1899a) wrote to the *Herald*:

> I saw as good corn there as there is any in Champaign or Logan county; sorghum and cow peas the biggest yield I ever saw and these big crops were not raised by a "darkey and a mule" but by a "farmer and a team." . . . The Mennonites have a church started there and for the short time that they have been there are doing well. (p. 265)

Lantz (1899b) submitted a second letter a month later, indicating the interest of readers in his account of the situation in Georgia. He notes that

> the colored people of the South were more sociable and hospitable than here at home; it is nevertheless true that there has been trouble, but it has been further south and close to the cities, where the rough and low-lived element is always found. (p. 298)

The statement seems to imply that "colored people" were the cause of these "troubles" due to their "rough and low" nature.

A. B. Kolb wrote a letter to the *Rundschau* describing the situation in Georgia to his northern readers. In it, he describes the Black population of Georgia as lazy, disease-prone, and without ambition: "when they are not watched, they don't amount to much." In response, farmers in the South have become disillusioned with their workers. Kolb (1906) provides a dire warning:

> One of these beautiful mornings the Southern Negro will awaken and discover that as a result of his fate, he has lost his place as a worker in the South and will never regain it because others have taken over and will keep it. (p. 5)

Kolb concludes: "no race or class will be worth as much as the immigration of 20,000 German farmers. I believe the South will get them once they discover the opportunities that await them" (p. 5).[12] Apparently for Kolb, the "worth" of a people lay in their potential contributions to the project of White development and expansion. While statements as bold as this were relatively rare in Anabaptist denominational newspapers, the tropes exemplified in this study suggest that these sentiments were close to the surface for writers and editors of these papers, and perhaps for their readers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Anabaptist newspapers in North America were instrumental in creating connections and bonds between readers in the United States and Canada, and in Europe. In this way, "imagined communities" of readers, writers, and editors were formed, as newspapers contributed to the formulation and shaping of a transnational Anabaptist identity. Individual and collective Anabaptist identities were reshaped and positioned in terms of Whiteness, demonstrating a bifurcated approach to Blackness, and most often positioning Black people as outsiders to this community. On the one hand, the papers proclaimed the universal Gospel of Christ, extending across lines of race, colour, and creed. As A. K. Kurtz (1908) wrote in "The New Birth," published in the *Herald of Truth*, "We have become brethren and sisters in God's great family, whether rich or poor, white or

colored, learned or unlearned, without respect to denominational names, rank or station in life" (p. 60). However, at the same time these papers recreated and reinforced structures of racialized inequality. Moral tales, while identifying elements of purity, faithfulness, and forgiveness in their Black characters, did so without challenging the systemic structure of racial inequality and injustice in North America, leaving Black people in these accounts as "other" to their White counterparts and to their readers. The social conditions in which these characters survived thus remained unchallenged, and race relations appear to be only a matter of interpersonal understanding, not of systemic oppression. In these tales, the characters of Black people are both constructed and assessed by White Anabaptist editors, writers, and readers, reflecting the broader context of White religious benevolence.

While some writers drew attention to the oppression and suffering of African American populations, commentaries and news articles also reaffirmed tropes of Black deviance in terms of mind, body, and behaviour. Commentaries on news items may have "normalized" the inclusion of Black people within a range of social roles (including that of social leader Booker T. Washington), but the selection and presentation of these news items also reinforced stereotypes of Blacks as misguided wanderers or even as criminals. The account of the Lithia Springs initiative positions Blackness as a threat to Anabaptist goals of colonization and progress, while using "cheap colored labor" to achieve these goals.

Essays explored the character of the "negro" and argued for increased opportunities for Black people in terms of education, religion, and industry. However, the conditions for these "advances" were often established by Whites, with the exception of Washington's work at Tuskegee, although even in that case there seems to be a sense of "pleasing" the writers of these papers in terms of "negro progress." Furthermore, any sense of concern for the well-being of Black people is at least counter-balanced by a sense of urgency in the establishment of the Lithia Springs Mennonite colony, contrasting the portrayal of Blackness as laziness and simple-mindedness with that of Germans as having expertise.

Following Gollner (2016), I propose that situating Anabaptist writing and missions within the larger context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestantism provides some insight into the inspiration for these depictions and assessments of race. This is evidenced in the reprinting of articles and moral tales from mainline Protestant newspapers, including the reproduction of dominant racial tropes. However, some pertinent questions remain. How did writers such as A. B. Kolb radically change their

perspectives on Blackness, from drawing attention to the oppression of African Americans to assessing Black people as lazy and worthless? One possible explanation is that the writers of such statements had little actual contact with Black people. In her account of the Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland, Regina Shands Stoltzfus (2017) notes how the eyes of young White voluntary service workers were opened to racial division through their encounters with African Americans. This does not, however, account for Kolb's relationship with his adopted brother Charlie Jones, and the fact that not all encounters were equally eye-opening and benevolent. Perhaps further archival research will shed light on the experiences of Kolb and the reasons for his growing resentment towards Black people.

The year 2020 has revealed deep division and tension between people along lines of race and inequality, suggesting that we do not yet understand these dynamics and their implications for our lives. Following the words of Hubert Brown (1976), if we are to make any progress in terms of racial relations today, we must take an honest appraisal of our past. In the words of Mennonite historian Ben Goossen (2017a), Mennonites must recognize and attend to "the ways in which we are privileged by our whiteness," at the same time acknowledging that "there is no easy answer, only a path of discernment and faith" (p. 23). Finally, the words of Tobin Miller Shearer (2020) echo those of Hubert Brown, only forty-four years later: "Until we recognize our full collusion with the racism of this country, we will be blocked from full participation across racial lines simply by virtue of the fact that we are in denial" (p. 16).

Notes

1 Here I borrow the definition of "Whiteness" according to recent anthropological discourse on the topic, as "a racial formation that changes spatially and temporally and confers race privilege" (Frohlick, Migliardi, and Mohamed, 2018, p. 182; see also Low, 2009; Durington, 2009; Frankenberg, 1993). While recognizing continued discussion and debate surrounding the capitalization of "White" and "Whiteness," in this article I am following APA and Chicago style guidelines (https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities; https://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/06/22/black-and-white-a-matter-of-capitalization/) in recognition of the social construction of both "Blackness" and "Whiteness."

2 The borrowing of these tales from other Protestant papers also suggests an integration with broader Anglo-Saxon Protestantism in North America.

3 One of these alternate versions is found in the *Evangelical Visitor*, the other in *Life to the Full* by Reverend Cecil A. Newell (2014).

4 For an engaging discussion of "respectability politics," see Mueller, 2019.

[5] At one of my presentations of this research, an African-American woman remarked in frustration "it seems that Blacks are always expected to be forgiving" (Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies Conference, University of Winnipeg, October 25–26, 2019).

[6] For an account of the Exoduster movement, see Painter, 1992.

[7] Reprinted from the *Richmond Watchman*.

[8] Who was himself originally from Virginia.

[9] I suggest that further archival work needs to address this correspondence.

[10] *The Mennonite* published notice of this expedition in its June 1897 issue: "A movement is on foot to form a Mennonite Settlement in the state of Georgia. Brother J. S. Lehman, Manager of the Mennonite Publication Company, at Elkhart, Indiana, some time ago paid a visit to this southern country and reports the same as favorable for the raising of cotton, corn, wheat, oats, barley, hops, rye, turnips, potatoes, grass, clover, peaches, pears, apples, plums, cherries, quinces, grapes, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, and all varieties of vegetables . . . Good farm land can be bought from four to ten dollars per acre." In April 1897, the *Herald* began posting advertisements for "Home Seekers" tours to Georgia in most issues of the paper.

[11] The Lynching Project: Fulton County, https://digihum.libs.uga.edu/exhibits/show/the-lynching-project--murder-a/georgia-historic-overview/fulton-county.

[12] These statements appear particularly curious when considering Kolb's adopted Black brother and his first treatise on the topic of racial relations years prior.

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