

Moral Tales, Essays, and Letters from Georgia: Representations of Blackness in Three Anabaptist Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers have historically served important roles in the shaping of ethno-religious identity among immigrant populations. This article explores the portrayal of race and racialized minorities in three Anabaptist newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: *Zionsbote*, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, and *Evangelical Visitor*. Drawing on recent studies of Mennonite identity and whiteness, I propose that these portrayals contributed to the racialization of Anabaptist readers, reflecting and re-enforcing distinctions between blackness and whiteness within Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ populations.

Introduction

Newspapers have been established by many groups in North America, including those with a religious foundation. Harry Loewen and James Urry note that many religious groups in North America as well as Europe “took advantage of increasingly affordable printing technology in the nineteenth century to publish magazines and newspapers and distribute them to increasingly literate communities through improved communication networks.”¹ By 1880, Anabaptist groups were publishing at least nine religious newspapers in the United States. These papers conveyed inspirational messages, evangelical fervor, and news of the world. They also contributed to the construction of an “imagined community.” While Benedict Anderson

¹ Harry Loewen and James Urry, “A Tale of Two Newspapers: *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (1880-2007) and *Der Bote* (1924-2008),” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 86, no. 2 (April 2012): 176.

originally used this term to refer to the nation itself,² the “imagined community” of the Anabaptist newspaper was “not the spatial community of village or colony but one based on shared theological understandings and experiences.”³ It was also a community with insiders and outsiders.

In this article I will discuss the boundaries of this community in terms of race, specifically in regard to representations of blackness, in late 19th- and early 20th-century issues of *Zionsbote*, *Evangelical Visitor*, and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (hereafter *Rundschau*). I will begin by describing the origins, audience, and purpose of each paper. I argue that the ‘moral tales’ in *Zionsbote* and the *Evangelical Visitor* present Black people as exemplifying positive social value while remaining as ‘other’ to the reader. I also analyze letters and articles in *Rundschau* that express ambivalence in their depictions of blackness, alternating between challenging the violence perpetrated against Blacks and contributing to racist stereotypes and tropes. My findings suggest that these depictions reflect the approach of their respective denominations and the purpose of the respective paper, whether to provide a forum for mission work or to present news from the larger world. For example, references to “negroes” and “colored people” in the context of moral tales and travelogues corresponded with the missional approach of the *Evangelical Visitor* and *Zionsbote*. In contrast, discussion of race in the *Rundschau* took the form of commentaries on world events, essays on slavery and post-emancipation America, and letters from readers. In conclusion, I will argue that Anabaptist papers often served to reinforce a sense of “whiteness” among readers.⁴

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2016).

³ Dora Dueck, “Images of the City in the Mennonite Brethren *Zionsbote* 1890-1940,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 20 (2002): 181.

⁴ The results of this study are based on a review of the indexes to *Rundschau* and *Zionsbote* found in the archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Search terms included ‘negro’, ‘Black’, ‘African American’, ‘colored’, and ‘slavery’. Pertinent articles from *Rundschau* and *Zionsbote* were then scanned and professionally translated. Results from the *Evangelical Visitor* are based on a careful review of this newspaper in hard copy format at the Be in Christ Church Archives in Oakville, Ontario (now located in Port Colborne, Ontario). This review was conducted together with Nathan Brink and Emily Mott, student research assistants from Redeemer University College.

These papers represent the period between 1880 and 1910⁵ and provide insight into their perspectives on racial relations in the United States in the post-emancipation era. While recent scholarly work has explored relations between Mennonites of European descent and Blacks during the Civil Rights Movement, the period covered in the present study has not received the same attention. This study contributes to the sociological-historical understanding of the shaping of Anabaptist identity in North America, particularly in regard to race and racialization. In doing so, it addresses the call made by Hubert Brown in *Black and Mennonite*:

To be brothers and sisters in the Lord we must understand the dynamics of black/white relations and its implications in Christian faith. An examination of the historical nature and development of black/white relations is necessary for understanding the status and reality of their relation today.⁶

Mennonite Identity

Recent literature has paid much attention to challenging the portrayal of Mennonite identity as homogeneous or fixed,⁷ revealing the dynamics of identity formation and negotiation throughout Anabaptist history. Beginning at least in the 1980s with the work of such scholars as Rodney Sawatsky,⁸ Mennonite history has been recognized as requiring a “a more differentiated and multi-faceted understanding,”⁹ since “all treatises of Anabaptism are produced by scholars with particular interests and motivations associated

⁵ I include the article by Herbert Beck from 1924 (see footnote 61) as a later example reflecting general attitudes towards Black people found in my sample.

⁶ Hubert Brown, *Black and Mennonite: A Search for Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1976), 98.

⁷ Elmer S. Miller, “Marking Mennonite Identity: A Structuralist Approach to Separation,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 252.

⁸ Rodney J. Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: the Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987); Rodney J. Sawatsky, *History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition through History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005).

⁹ Karl Koop, “Anabaptist and Mennonite Identity: Permeable Boundaries and Expanding Definitions,” *Religion Compass* 8, no. 6 (June 2014): 201.

with specific temporal contexts.”¹⁰ As Donald Kraybill writes,

Mennonite identity consists of socially constructed images which Mennonites hold of themselves. Mennonite identity is externalized or molded by the group’s historical experiences, social interaction with other groups, self-designated labels, ideological influences, storytelling, historical reconstructions of the group’s legacy in later generations and current experience.¹¹

Social scientists have exemplified this approach in their analysis of Mennonite identity within Canadian and American contexts,¹² including attention to the formative processes of immigration and racialization and their implications for personal and group identity. Drawing on postcolonial studies and critical race theory,¹³ these studies have addressed the social construction of race, as whiteness and blackness are revealed to be reified categories, concealing processes of racialization informed by (and informing) relations of power and dominance. For example, the experience of immigrating and assimilating to North America often included a reconfiguration of personal and group identity in alignment with the dominant discourse on race. This process was informed partly by presumptions and stereotypes of black and white identities and relationships expressed through print media, as exemplified by Peter Vellon’s recent study on Italian immigrants to the US.¹⁴ Immigrant groups such as Italians and Mennonites found that they were situated within a social hierarchy

¹⁰ Miller, “Marking Mennonite Identity,” 251.

¹¹ Donald B. Kraybill, “Modernity and Identity: The Transformation of Mennonite Ethnicity,” in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Calvin Wall Redekop and Samuel J. eds. (Lanham, MD : University Press of America; Waterloo, ON: Institute for Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1988), 158.

¹² Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); James Urry, *Mennonite Politics and Peoplehood: 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg, MB: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2006).

¹³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1994); Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, Matt Wray, eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Peter G. Vellon, *A Great Conspiracy against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early 20th Century* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014).

of whiteness, with some groups deemed to be more desirable than others. This was made clear to Doukhobor, Hutterite, and Mennonite immigrants to Canada. On May 1, 1919, an order-in-council was passed by Sir Robert Borden's government to prohibit their immigration on the basis of their "peculiar" lifeways and property holding practices, and an assumption that they would neither assimilate easily into Canadian society nor readily assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizens.¹⁵

Mennonites themselves have also played significant roles in encouraging cultural assimilation to a white America.¹⁶ While some Anabaptists participated in the Underground Railroad, aiding Blacks fleeing slavery in the 19th century, there are occasional references to Mennonites owning slaves.¹⁷ One man of Mennonite origin even established a white supremacist church in the US.¹⁸ However, the whiteness of Mennonites has most often remained unproblematized, often assumed to be a neutral viewpoint from which to discuss race.¹⁹ The news media provided one channel of power and dominance in shaping and disseminating racial stereotypes.²⁰ Newspapers played a critical role in shaping Mennonite ethno-religious identity in North America, as identified by James Juhnke: "Mennonite immigrant newspapers became very important for working across congregational and conference lines to integrate the sacred and

¹⁵ Arthur Kroeger, *Hard Passage* (Edmonton, AB: Univ. of Alberta Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Philipp Gollner, "How Mennonites Became White: Religious Activism, Cultural Power, and the City," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 2 (April 2016): 165-93.

¹⁷ Daniel R. Lehman, *Mennonites of the Washington County, Maryland and Franklin County, Pennsylvania Conference* (Lititz, PA: Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church and Related Areas, 1990).

¹⁸ Dave Jackson and Neta Jackson, *No Random Act: Behind the Murder of Ricky Birdsong* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002).

¹⁹ I recognize the importance of situating my own identity within the framework of North American race relations. As a middle-class, white, Russian Mennonite, I realize that my usage of racial terminology is informed by a long history of inequality and privilege in North America. My intent here is to explore the social construction of race and racism among Mennonites, but I also recognize that in doing so I may inadvertently contribute to the dominant discourse on this topic.

²⁰ Christopher P. Campbell, *Race, Myth and the News* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995); John M. Coward, *Indians Illustrated: The Image of Native Americans in the Pictorial Press* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2016).

the secular, and the ethnic and the American.”²¹ Below I will address the newspapers’ role in contributing to and reproducing dominant discussions on race—and also contributing to the racialization of their readers.

Anabaptist Newspapers

Die Mennonitische Rundschau (roughly, “Mennonite Review”) is reportedly “the oldest Mennonite periodical published continuously under one name.”²² First produced on June 5, 1880 by the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana, the *Rundschau* was the successor to the *Nebraska Ansiedler*. The *Ansiedler* had been published primarily for Russian Mennonites living in Nebraska but was available to Mennonites in other states. Providing a Christian interpretation of the news, it carried articles on agricultural, educational, foreign, and economic affairs. The *Rundschau* expanded the readership by directing itself to Russian Mennonite communities on the American and Canadian prairies. It remained a four-page semi-monthly publication until the end of 1882, when it became a weekly. In 1883, circulation increased to include Europe and Asia (in a semi-monthly edition). It was significant in providing a way for Mennonites around the world to communicate with each other: “In an era where long distance communication was difficult, the *Rundschau* became a primary means of sharing information and passing on encouragement.”²³ Publication shifted to Mennonite Publishing House in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania in 1908, and then to Rundschau Publishing House in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1923, which became Christian Press in 1940. The move to Winnipeg reflected the location of the paper’s German-speaking readership at that time.²⁴ In 1945, the paper was purchased by the Mennonite Brethren Church. The final issue was published in January 2007, completing a run of almost 127 years.

²¹ James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1989).

²² Harold S. Bender and Richard D. Thiessen, “Mennonitische Rundschau, Die (Periodical).” (June 2007). [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonitische_Rundschau,_Die_\(Periodical\)&oldid=142804](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonitische_Rundschau,_Die_(Periodical)&oldid=142804), accessed November 16, 2018.

²³ *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, Centre of Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, MB. <https://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/publications/mennonitische-rundschau-die/>, accessed November 15, 2018.

²⁴ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 417.

Zionsbote (roughly “Zion’s Messenger”) was the newspaper of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. First published in the autumn of 1884, it was originally a four-page quarterly selling for 24 cents per year. It became a semi-monthly in 1886 and increased to eight pages in 1889. By 1904 it was a weekly with 16 pages. Like the *Rundschau*, *Zionsbote* was first published by the Mennonite Publishing Company at Elkhart, Indiana, but shifted locations several times and by 1913 was located in Hillsboro, Kansas. *Zionsbote* was established “to acquaint the churches with the work in the field of evangelism and church polity in order to stimulate the church life,”²⁵ and featured reports from mission fields and from individual congregations, primarily in the US. The paper eventually had an international readership, with churches in Russia carrying it until 1914. Dora Dueck describes the content of *Zionsbote* this way:

The *Zionsbote* relied on its readers, usually members of MB churches, for content, though material was also “borrowed” from other periodicals when needed to fill the pages. Ministers contributed theological writings, members shared experiences or devotional thoughts or news, and “correspondents” sent regular reports from the congregations. The paper had an epistolary feel to it. While the *Zionsbote’s* purpose was to serve spiritual goals and communicate matters pertaining to church life, other information was also communicated—health, weather, crops, visits, moves, deaths, weddings and births. Travel reports and conversion stories were popular topics.²⁶

The *Evangelical Visitor* was established by the Brethren in Christ church in 1887 as a “useful medium for evangelism and the spread of new ideas,”²⁷ with the two goals of spreading evangelical truths and unifying the church.²⁸ In his bicentennial history of the Brethren in Christ in Canada, E.

²⁵ P.H. Berg, “Zionsbote (Periodical).” (1959). [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zionsbote_\(Periodical\)&oldid=123142](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zionsbote_(Periodical)&oldid=123142), accessed November 16, 2018.

²⁶ Dueck, “Images of the City,” 180-81.

²⁷ C. Hostetter, E. Morris Sider and Sam Steiner, “Brethren in Christ Church.” (September 2018). http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Brethren_in_Christ_Church&oldid=161484, accessed November 16, 2018.

²⁸ Micah B. Brickner, “One of God’s Avenues of Progress: Exploring the Outcomes of the

Morris Sider writes that

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Brethren in Christ, over several decades, accepted a series of new activities and institutions that would modify the nature of their church life and doctrine, most significantly in the direction of a greater emphasis on the experiential, pietistic element in their heritage.²⁹

Sider notes that this paper's influence "as a vehicle for change on both sides of the border cannot be overstated . . . it became the most widely used of all the ways in which new ideas were spread."³⁰

Moral Tales

Some of my own first impressions of race and racial relations were formed at my grandmother's house in Saskatchewan. I remember her baby doll with skin darker than my own, but my most salient memory is of *Der Struwwelpeter*, a famous 1845 children's book by Heinrich Hoffmann. Amid images of the title character with his incredibly long fingernails, the scissor-man, and *bösen Friedrich* (wicked Frederick), who tormented both animals and humans, was *Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben*, the story of "the black boys." In this story, a "wooly-headed black-a-moor"³¹ out for a summer's day stroll is plagued with teasing by three boys on account of his skin color, which they describe as "black as ink." Saint Nicholas, seeing this harassment, reminds the boys that "Blacky" couldn't change his skin color if he tried, and tells them to leave the "poor fellow" alone. When the teasing continues, St. Nicholas takes the three boys and dips them in ink as punishment for teasing "harmless" Blacky. The story aims to evoke pity for its main character, and in doing so it also distances readers from Blacky and situates them in a position

Evangelical Visitor," *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 50, No. 3 (December 2017): 322-34, <https://bic-history.org/journal-articles/one-of-gods-avenues-of-progress-exploring-the-outcomes-of-the-evangelical-visitor/>, accessed November 16, 2018.

²⁹ E. Morris Sider, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada: Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1988), 103

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ The term 'black-a-moor' is a reference to the enslavement and subservience of Africans, as Princess Michael of Kent recently learned. See Bethan Holt, "Princess Michael of Kent prompts controversy after wearing 'racist' 'blackamoor' brooch to lunch with Meghan Markle," *The Daily Telegraph* (London), December 22, 2017.

of moral superiority. The actions of Saint Nicholas (a powerful symbol of whiteness and purity) are portrayed as benevolent and protective; however, they also rob the central character of any sense of agency or personhood. Blacky remains a passive victim, both offended against and saved by white characters, in a lesson directed to white readers.

Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren newspapers didn't feature cautionary tales as much as what I call 'moral tales'—stories with characters (in this case Black people) through which desirable morals are exemplified. On May 1, 1890 the *Evangelical Visitor* published the following story, entitled "An Example of Forgiveness":

An old colored Christian woman was going along the streets of New York with a basket of apples that she had for sale. A rough sailor ran against her and upset the basket, and stood back expecting to hear her scold frightfully; but she stooped down and picked up the apples, and said "God forgive you, my son, as I do." The sailor saw the meanness of what he had done, felt in his pocket for his money, and insisted that she should take it all. Though she was colored, he called her mother, and said, "Forgive me mother; I will never do anything so mean again."³²

The article is anonymously authored, but its "selected" designation suggests that it is a reprint from another source. Several things should be noted about this piece. First, only the first character is identified as to age, skin color, religion, and gender. The other is simply "a rough sailor." Second, each of the woman's identity traits positions her as "other" to the sailor. The sailor is male (although this isn't stated immediately, and the reader must make this assumption), and relatively young (he eventually refers to the woman as "mother"). His religion is not identified, but his behavior runs counter to that of the Christian woman. Finally, he is not identified by his skin color, but the phrase "though she was colored" positions him as other than Black. In this way "whiteness becomes an unmarked and invisible term, while a racialized subjectivity is carried by those with darker skins."³³ The

³² "An Example of Forgiveness," *Evangelical Visitor*, May 1, 1890.

³³ Melanie Suchet, "A Relational Encounter with Race," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 14, no. 4 (2004): 432.

basket of apples furthermore suggests that the woman may rely on this simple product for her livelihood, which adds to the frailty of her existence. Unlike the story in *Struwwelpeter*, here the woman is depicted as having agency, as in her response to the sailor. In spite of her positioning as the vulnerable person, her response of forgiveness reveals her inner strength and provides a turning point, an opportunity for the sailor to change his ways.³⁴ However, the location of racial difference in the woman as “other” also situates the reader in a dominant social dichotomy of black/white relations.³⁵

The second moral tale from the *Evangelical Visitor* was published on June 15, 1892, authored by Sister N. Baker, under the title “From Phoenix, Arizona.” This time the tale is told as a personal account of Sister Baker, who received the story from ‘a lady’.

I heard a lady tell lately of boarding at a place where the Mrs. had five children and she kept a colored cook and the cook had a poor delicate little child. The lady boarder was often annoyed with the land lady’s five children jumping in the rooms, quarrelling and things so very disagreeable, and the mother never reprovved or spoke a word of correction; but one day to the boarder’s surprise, the house lady said she was near crazy with the noise of the cook’s child. The boarder said she could not understand how that could be—for a mother that could overlook five romping, quarrelling, disagreeable children because they were her own and allow herself to get crazed with a cry for want of perhaps proper care from its busy mother. It was a poor little fatherless child. Oh how ready we are by nature to justify our own, but this

³⁴ I recently presented this study at an academic conference; an African American woman in attendance remarked with some frustration, “It seems that Blacks are always expected to be forgiving.”

³⁵ This story has been retold in various forms. One recent variation appears in *Life to the Full* by the Reverend Cecil A. Newell (see lulu.com, 2014). Here the setting is New York, and the “old Negro woman” is not identified as Christian (but presumed to be, as she forgives the sailor). The rationale for her act of forgiveness is provided: “if she had given off and cursed him it would only have made him more eager to find pleasure at her expense.” When she forgives the man, she gives him “a look of mingled pity and sorrow and kindness.” This version ends by stating that “forgiveness is an attitude and heart-changing power.”

must be very evil in the sight of God.³⁶

Here the central character is identified in terms of gender (female), profession (cook), and the role of parent (single mother). While her gender isn't mentioned until near the end, the roles of both cook and parent leave the reader to assume that the character is female. The story focuses even more attention on the cook's child, whose gender is unknown. The child is described in terms of pity—"a poor delicate little child" and "a poor little fatherless child"—in stark contrast to the landlady's children, twice described as "disagreeable." The reason for the Black child's pitiable state is the absence of its father and the lack of "proper care from its busy mother." The dark-skinned characters are again positioned as "other," this time in contrast to societal ideals of wealth and family. The racial trope of charity re-enforces assumptions of white power and privilege, as the reader identifies with the lady in expressing annoyance towards the house mother and pity towards the colored cook and her child.

Sister Baker also wrote a travel letter in February of the same year, in which she describes her trip to Arizona:

There were several families on our car, some for Tempe, others for Phoenix, others for California. They were all very sociable. We engaged in pleasant chats, sometimes in singing; even the colored porters joined us in singing, and I will remark one aged gentleman had retired for the night, but he was so overjoyed with the singing he arose and came to our end of the car, and joined us. . . . Tuesday evening. It is now tea time, the porter comes around and puts down our tables. We spread out our linen, Louisa bakes the potatoes while each one hurries up and down the aisle with coffee and tea pitcher. We just enjoyed our supper more than a little; had all the luxuries necessary. When we had that all put aside the porter came around again and let down our beds and fixed them all ready for us—each family had their own berth, then drew the curtains and we retired for the night and had a good night's rest.³⁷

³⁶ Sister N. Baker, "From Phoenix, Arizona," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 15, 1892, 186-87.

³⁷ Sister N. Baker, "Our Trip to Arizona," *Evangelical Visitor* February 1, 1892, 44.

The “colored” people are again identified in terms of their jobs, this time as railroad porters.³⁸ The word “even” distinguishes the narrator and traveling companions from Blacks. The travelers are “very sociable,” engaging in “pleasant chats” and savoring their supper, while the porters automatically perform their appointed tasks, providing the stage on which the white travelers enjoy their trek, leaving the racial hierarchy of black/white relations unchallenged, except for the occasional bout of singing.³⁹

The one other reference to a Black person in the *Evangelical Visitor* during the period covered in this study is an obituary from 1905 written by Asa Bearss, originally of Quaker origin and a leader in the Brethren in Christ church. Bearss describes Henry Shield, the deceased, as “a black American born in Maryland who had come to Canada some fifty years earlier . . . very honest and upright man and a good neighbour, and like our African race, of a *pure type* [italics are my own].”⁴⁰ This reference to “pure type” seems to reflect pseudo-scientific beliefs about clearly defined racial categories and the dangers of miscegenation, often promoted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (and still today by white supremacist groups).⁴¹

Zionsbote published two moral tales considerably longer than those in the *Evangelical Visitor*. The first, from November 11, 1903, is entitled “A Negro’s Loyalty.” Roger Jerrit, the title character, is an “old trustworthy servant” concerned for the well-being of his “massa,” Judge Puliver. Puliver has been unable to pay his mortgage, and Colonel Lane who holds it is eager

³⁸ Given the racial situation at the time, the porters, and perhaps Louisa the cook, may have been the only Blacks on “White” railroad cars. See the University of Nebraska-Lincoln web page “Railroads and the Making of Modern America: The Origins of Segregation”: railroads.unl.edu/topics/segregation/php.

³⁹ The role of the Black porter exemplified racial segregation in North America, but also provided an opportunity for social and political advancement for men. See Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Asa Bearss, “Obituary,” *Evangelical Visitor*, May 15, 1905, 16. While social scientists have for many years critiqued and deconstructed categorical racism, this way of thinking remains prevalent in society. See Michael Yudell, *Race Unmasked: Biology and Race in the 20th Century* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014), and Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014).

⁴¹ See Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2002).

to cast Puliver off his plantation. Jerrit is so frustrated that he has “tears streaming down his cheeks.” In contrast, Colonel Lane is a “tough guy” with a “powerful voice.” When horses bolt with Lane’s wife in the carriage, Jerrit rides after her to save her. He appears as an unlikely hero in this story. Lane, failing to recognize him, calls out, “Who are you, courageous one?” Jerrit answers and Lane offers him a reward. Jerrit refuses to take anything but presses Lane to forgive Judge Puliver’s mortgage. Lane eventually relents and hands the mortgage to Jerrit.

“Roger,” said the colonel, gently putting his hand on the Negro’s shoulder while his eyes welled up with tears. “Roger, you think I am a tough man – I was that, yes, but I do have a soft spot, and you have found it. Here – take this envelope – now Mr. Puliver is once again free and the sole owner of his home. Here, he will understand.”⁴²

That Jerrit has helped Lane find his “soft spot” recalls the story of the “old colored Christian woman” from the *Evangelical Visitor*. The hierarchy of colonel/judge/servant remains intact. At the end of the story, Jerrit’s reward from Puliver is a long handshake. Although blackness is associated with courage and forgiveness, and leads to the humbling of tough sailors and colonels, the social status of Black people remains the same.

The second moral tale from *Zionsbote*, “Two Noble Negroes,” was published on August 17, 1910. The setting is in the Indian Ocean, between Reunion Island and the coast of Madagascar, and then at a Mediterranean resort. The main characters are Madame Lascelles and her four-year-old son, and two men described as “negroes” from Senegal. As the French ship *St. Ives* was returning home to Madagascar, carrying its captain, sailors, and the mother and child (on their way home to Lyon, presumably from a Reunion Island resort), it encountered “a raging storm” that threatened to sink it. When Madame Lascelles and her son emerged on deck, the captain directed them to their only hope of survival, a lifeboat “dancing like an empty shell on the wild waves.”

“We have to go in there?” the poor woman cried out in horror, clutching her child to her breast. “The waves will swallow us

⁴² “Eines Negers Treue,” *Zionsbote*, November 11, 1903, 3.

before we can even enter the boat!”⁴³

Two men suddenly appear beside Madame Lascelles and her son, their composure appearing in stark contrast to the mother’s pale face and sense of horror.⁴⁴

“Have no fear, madam!” Exclaimed a sturdy negro beside her. “My brother, Achill and I will bring you safely to the boat.” He took the boy in his arms while Achill helped Madame Lascelles. Although fearful for their lives, they soon reached the boat. They had barely left the ship when the roaring waves devoured it.

However, a new danger develops as the lifeboat fills with water. The sailors cast angry glances at the mother and child, whom they consider to be expendable, and begin to murmur about tossing them off the boat. Again, the brothers come to the rescue.

“If you want to lighten the load,” called Achill, “blacks are heavier than Madame. Swear that you will let Madame and her child live, and my brother and I will jump into the ocean.” It took only a minute, and as soon as they had received the promise from the astonished sailors, the two negroes sprang overboard and disappeared into the roaring waves. The lighter boat was much easier to handle, the storm gradually died down, and the shipwrecked were rescued by an English ship three days later.

The story concludes at a Mediterranean resort, as Madame Lascelles and her family are “relaxing on the beach.” She overhears a conversation about “two black fellows” washed up on the shore “just south of the Cape of Good Hope.” Refusing to return to their home in Senegal, they were determined to go to France “to look for their owner,” whom they had identified as Madame Lascelles. A happy reunion ensues.

A few minutes later the two negroes, having miraculously escaped death, ran toward her and hugged the little boy with cries of joy. From that day on there were no happier, but also no better cared for servants than these two in all of Southern France.

⁴³ “Zwei Edle Neger,” *Zionsbote*, August 17, 1910, 7.

⁴⁴ The contrast between the brothers and Madame also suggests a divide based on social class.

Perhaps the Senegalese men saw an opportunity to better their lives by taking on the roles of servants to the French family. What the story makes clear is that the values of compassion and courage once again are found in Black people, although it also reinforces the roles of master and servant. In doing so, the author implies that Black people are to be commended for their acts of courage and compassion, but that these acts are also to be expected of them.

In summary, the moral tales found in the *Evangelical Visitor* and in *Zionsbote*, while perhaps appearing as relatively positive portrayals of blackness in contrast to those found in other literature of the late 19th- and early 20th-century,⁴⁵ nonetheless also served to reinforce racial hierarchies and power relations. These tales depicted Black people as servants, porters, and apple-sellers in naturalized social positions while failing to challenge the structures of inequality that these roles represented. While these men and women were identified as characterizing qualities of compassion and courage, and while these qualities were transformative in the lives of others (most often Whites), their own situations of poverty and servanthood were treated as a matter-of-fact. Readers were encouraged to find moral qualities in the “other,” to express compassion and pity towards Black characters, and to identify with them but at the same time to maintain boundaries of gender, age, and race.

Commentaries

The *Rundschau* also conveyed representations of blackness, and often expressed ambivalence towards the Blacks’ social situation. At times the paper was very critical of Black people, but at other times it critiqued the treatment of Blacks by Whites, albeit often from a stance of pity. References to blackness appeared most often in commentaries on world events, full-length articles on Blacks and issues of race, and letters from readers. As in the

⁴⁵ Black people were often portrayed in early postcards, film, and literature as violent beasts. See Wayne Martin Mellinger, “Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line: Images of African Americans in Popular Culture 1893-1917,” *Symbolic Interaction* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 413-33; W. D. Griffiths, *Birth of a Nation* [film], 1914. They were also portrayed as intellectually subnormal in both popular literature and scientific documentation. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

Evangelical Visitor and *Zionsbote*, the authors were most often anonymous,⁴⁶ and the articles appear at least in some cases to be reprints from other papers.

Commentaries on national events expressed ambivalence about the situation facing Blacks and the appropriate response to their suffering. On June 9, 1886 the *Rundschau* featured an anonymous⁴⁷ article entitled “Negro Wanderings,”⁴⁸ focusing on the Exoduster movement of Blacks from southern states to Kansas,⁴⁹ with people fleeing from racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, from oppressive laws known as the “Black Codes,” and from general anti-emancipation sentiment.

The article was somewhat sympathetic to the plight of the migrants, reporting that the “Negroes” were arriving “in the most deplorable conditions, and were dependent on welfare.” However, the author tends to be most sympathetic towards southern farmers who employed Blacks: “one would think that the white landowners should do everything in their power to keep their renters and their workers.” In contrast, Black people and their migration are depicted as subject to unfounded rumors. Arriving with the expectation of “40 acres, a mule and Paradise,” many Blacks experienced disappointment upon their arrival. The article suggests that they may have been better off in the South.

The Negroes complain that land rental is too high and the laws of the land are so unfavorable toward them that it is impossible for them to earn enough for even the basic necessities never mind putting aside any savings. They have heard that land rental is cheaper in the West and the Negro is more humanely treated by the whites. Perhaps, like all wanderers, they will experience some disappointments. However, they should be able to find

⁴⁶ My assumption is that it may have been commonplace to reprint anonymous essays from other newspapers. This practice may have distanced the paper from the author of an essay, thus relieving it of some responsibility for its content.

⁴⁷ While letters and articles may often reflect contrasting perspectives on a topic, in this study both types of documents express similar sentiments towards Black people. However, the sample is quite small.

⁴⁸ “Neger = Wanderungen,” *Rundschau*, June 9, 1886, 3.

⁴⁹ Bryan M. Jack, *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters* (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2007); Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992).

fertile land. However, there is also much fertile land in the states they are leaving.

Identifying Blacks as “wanderers” takes away from the immediacy of the oppression they faced. The migration is instead depicted as a misguided effort, with negative implications for white landowners, including Mennonites.

On April 9, 1902, the *Rundschau* reprinted an anonymous article from *Weltbote*—another German-language newspaper, published in Allentown, Pennsylvania—entitled “The Negro Race in the United States.” The article provided statistics on an increase to “Negro” populations in northern states, corresponding to a decrease of this population in the South. While appearing at first to be filing an objective report, the author employs language that suggests an underlying concern about this migration.

This wandering and dispersing of the colored race, which will probably continue is seen by those who are studying the Negro question as a movement which will contribute toward providing a solution to the present difficulties.⁵⁰

To its credit, the *Rundschau* was critical of violence against Blacks. In September 1886, it reprinted an article from the *Westliche Post*, a German-language daily published in St. Louis, Missouri, about “criminal slavery in the Southern States.”⁵¹ Entitled “New Negro Slaves in the South,” the article identifies punishment for “Negros” charged with insignificant crimes as “cruel”: “In most of the southern states the rule of law that no one is guilty until proven does not apply to the colored folks.” Black offenders must pay for their own criminal trials, lengthening their sentences. They are “badly fed and clothed and when they fall ill they are completely neglected. This, together with unsanitary conditions explains the high rate of mortality that exists among these inmates.” In a commentary on this article, the *Rundschau*

⁵⁰ “Die Negerasse in den Vereinigten Staaten,” *Rundschau*, April 9, 1902, 15. While some incidents of racial violence occurred in northern states at the turn of the century, here the reference to “present difficulties” may reflect both the incidence of poverty and destitution among Black migrants, and the competition for jobs, particularly on the railroad, between Black people and recent European immigrants. See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008).

⁵¹ “Neue Negersclaven im Sueden,” *Rundschau*, September 1, 1886, 2.

editor observes that “even if only half of what is reported proves to be true, these circumstances are more shocking than previously thought.” Perhaps some Mennonites were becoming aware of the injustices and hardships faced by Black people in post-slavery America.

However, one of the most horrific accounts of racial violence expresses a sense of ambivalence. An article headed “Burned at the Stake”⁵² in the November 21, 1900 issue covered the execution of Preston Porter Jr., who is identified as the murderer of an eleven-year-old white girl in Limon, Colorado. His punishment, at the hands of a mob led by the girl’s father, was to be burned at the stake. The article described his death this way: “the torture suffered by the black one as the flames licked at his flesh, [was] evident in the terrible grimaces of his face and the cries and moans that he emitted from time to time.”⁵³

While the author of this commentary does not question Porter’s guilt, he identifies the townspeople as a “mob” and violence against Blacks as a “cancer that has invaded our rich and beautiful country.”

Has the negro become better by being slowly roasted to death?
Have the poor parents been compensated for the loss of their
daughter? Has humanity as a whole improved by one hair due
to this terrible trial by lynching? No. Instead of one murderer
we now have 300.

Although the article expresses considerable sympathy for Porter, it also categorically identifies Blacks as in need of correction—but not by fire. Instead they are to be transformed into “respectable” human beings:

The Negro plays an exceptional role in the life of the American people. It has cost enormous sums of money and thousands of human lives to civilize our black brother by educating him to become a full fledged citizen of our country. We Americans are extreme. Every travelling salesman, every circus, every theatre

⁵² While in the context of a Mennonite newspaper this may at first suggest an identification between Anabaptist persecution and the fate of Preston Porter Jr., here it seems rather to reflect the headlines in other newspapers. For example, the article in the *Leadville Herald Democrat*, November 17, 1900, was entitled “Porter Burned at Stake.”

⁵³ “Auf dem Scheiterhaufen Verbrannt,” *Rundschau*, November 21, 1900, 6-7.

troupe has its Negro. It seems the American cannot help himself without his Negro. He either makes him into a little private idol or he lynches him. The first is foolish, but the other is sinful. Isn't it about time that the government of the United States goes to work in a thorough fashion to make the Negro of the South into a person, and if at all possible, into a Christian?

References to “our country” and “we Americans” serve to align the reader with the author. While the Negro is identified as “our black brother,” he needs transformation. The article leaves the impression that without the benevolence of white people, including the Anabaptist reader, the “Negro” will remain uncivilized—neither American, nor a person, nor a Christian.

The *Rundschau* was also critical of political reform threatening to restrict the voting rights of Blacks in Oklahoma and Georgia. On July 24, 1907, a news article reported on the promises of recently-elected Governor Hoke Smith that would restrict the vote in Georgia:

The majority of the Negroes will lose their voting rights due to the last three conditions. All under the pretense of rights—but in reality, only injustice and arbitrariness. When it comes to questions of race it is difficult to preach common sense and fairness.⁵⁴

On February 5, 1908, the *Rundschau* printed a similar critique of a recent bill proposed by Senator C.T. Taylor to deprive those unable to read of their right to vote, with the exception of any whose ancestors held voting rights. In essence, illiterate Whites could still vote but many Blacks would not be able to. “It is obvious that this regulation is the most effective in depriving the Negro of his rights,” observed the paper, “because it would be most difficult to find anyone other than a Negro whose grandfather did not possess the right to vote.”⁵⁵ Yet even here the challenge is not to the social structure of inequality itself but to the means of upholding it: “It is understandable that those in the South do not want to be ruled by Negroes, but to avoid this is sometimes quite problematic.”⁵⁶ Even if condemning the

⁵⁴ “Zeitereignisse,” *Rundschau*, July 24, 1907, 13-16.

⁵⁵ “Zeitereignisse,” *Rundschau*, February 5, 1908, 14.

⁵⁶ “Zeitereignisse,” *Rundschau*, July 24, 1907, 13-16.

harshest of punishments for those defying the color line, such commentaries also maintained the prevailing racial division.

Essays

The *Rundschau* also featured several full-length articles, or essays, on topics pertaining to Black people in the US and abroad. The first of these, “The African Slave Trade,” was published on January 23, 1889. It may be another reprint, as it is based on a lecture given by “Dr. Buettner, of the Central Club for Geography and Trade in Berlin.”⁵⁷ The article discusses practices of patriarchal hierarchy among the “black tribes” of South West Africa, noting that the practice of slavery is foreign to these tribes, and that “as soon as a person becomes something to be bought or sold the patriarchal relationship which gives the rules and the servant equal rights and obligations is disturbed. Stealing people seems to be foreign to the African.” The article identifies English attempts to stop the slave trade but concludes with a warning: “Unless the blacks arm themselves, it will be impossible to stop this hunt [for slaves] in the interior of Africa. Individual crusades and individual Europeans achieve nothing.”

The second essay, published in the August 3, 1898 issue, was entitled “Education of Negroes in the German African Colonies and in America.” A reprint from the German-language newspaper *Der Westen*, it describes what its author considers the innate qualities of Black people and the inevitable failure of educational programs for this population. While referring to German colonization of Africa as “civilizing” and fueled by “philanthropical zeal,” the article describes Africans as follows:

With a few exceptions, their mental capacity is comparable to that of a child. Their animalistic instincts⁵⁸ and almost uncontrollable sensuality rule their behaviour. Their character also displays conspicuous contradictions—although they are

⁵⁷ “Der Afrikanische Slavenhandel,” *Rundschau*, January 23, 1889, 2.

⁵⁸ The comparison of humans to animals, a racist trope with a long history, continues to demonstrate staying power. See Wulf D. Hund and Charles W. Mills, “Comparing black people to monkeys has a long, dark simian history,” *The Conversation*, February 28, 2016, <http://theconversation.com/comparing-black-people-to-monkeys-has-a-long-dark-simian-history-55102>, accessed January 24, 2019.

jovial and light-hearted, they also display a manifold cruelty toward people and animals that is simply outrageous. They have an undeniable inclination toward laziness and this seems to be the main reason for the darker side of their way of life. The old saying “laziness is the beginning of every vice” totally applies to them. For this reason, all efforts in educating them should be made to counteract this dangerous inclination.⁵⁹

Drawing on Booker T. Washington’s argument for *industrial* education for Blacks, the article contends that “the blacks must first be taught to love their work and be convinced that their efforts will have positive results.” In contrast, education for the sake of knowledge is misguided, as “those Negroes who have remained simple and uneducated workers are not only the most useful and the most industrious, but also the most prosperous and the happiest.” Early childhood education must therefore establish the virtues of “industriousness, love of order, cleanliness, and proper behaviour.” Younger Black people who gain an education become “unhappy” and “unreliable in their work.” They “push for positions in the cities, use their education to swindle and provoke their fellow tribesman to riot and to reject the social order.” That they become a burden to society is the result of an imbalance between cognitive development, “their heart culture,” and their “physical capabilities.”

The decision regarding providing high schools for the colored youth can be quite calmly left to the future. If one provides a classical upbringing to them in the condition in which they find themselves at this time, it is similar to giving stones to those who are asking for bread.

In stark contrast, the article presents the German people as ever “industrious—gorgeous characteristics and virtues distinguish them.” In that light, “We need to ask ourselves why we are in such a hurry to educate the black and less gifted race.”

A third essay on race appeared that year, in the November 30 issue. Once again, it is anonymous. Entitled “Racial Wars in our Southern States,”

⁵⁹ “Negerschulung in den Deutsch-Afrikanischen Kolonien und in America,” *Rundschau*, August 3, 1898, 2.

it begins by referring to “the Negro problem,” specifically in regard to events in Wilmington, North Carolina, where Blacks had been the subjects of racial violence, including several shootings. Although the article identifies their “crime” as having “insisted on their rights as citizens,” it concedes that “of course, we cannot blame the whites in the South, chafing under the corrupt leadership of the coloreds, that they want to take things into their own hands.”⁶⁰ The article nevertheless argues that the “powerful and murderous drive of the whites against the colored” must be stopped, as “these racial wars make a mockery of our free institutions. The lawless drifting, manifested in the latter days in several of the southern states in the slaughtering, dispersing and mocking of the colored population must come to an end.”

Finally, the December 24, 1924 issue of the paper (by then based in Winnipeg) included an article entitled “How Long Will the White Race Continue to Dominate?” Author Herbert Beck claimed the “greatest danger” was the “population increase of the colored,” noting that Black people (from Africa) had doubled their population within 40 years:

Is there, then, a method of keeping the dominion of the whites in place? Above all, it is in fostering the means and abilities that this dominion has provided. Only by way of their independence and by freely fighting to develop the superiority of their abilities; only by testifying to the solidarity of the white population, like the yellows have done with their highly successful propaganda, will this happen. Given the disunity of the whites, (quite obvious by their engagement in a world war) it is highly unlikely.⁶¹

Beck seems to have been a resident of Switzerland, but the publication of this article in the *Rundschau* in the 1920s suggests something of the paper’s general approach to issues of race at that time.

While challenging the cruelty of the slave trade, these essays provide negative depictions of African culture and of Black people, who are considered dangerous, deficient in intelligence and work ethic, and a threat to the civilized world. The reader may be left with a sense of injustice and

⁶⁰ “Rassenkampfe in unseren Sud-staaten,” *Rundschau*, November 30, 1898, 2.

⁶¹ Herbert Beck, “Wie lange dauert noch die Herrschaft der weissen Rasse?,” *Rundschau*, December 24, 1924, 5.

concern, but stereotypes of the “other” and the other’s inferiority remain intact.

Letters

Two letters published in the *Rundschau* in 1906 dealt with relations between Mennonites and local people and Blacks in Georgia. It is noteworthy that this Mennonite presence in Georgia predates other records of Mennonite activity in that state. These letters may have had particular significance as first-person accounts from the mission field.

The first letter was written by A.B. Kolb, who may be the child of Jacob Z. and Maria Kolb of Berlin, Ontario (now Kitchener). Jacob and Maria either adopted or raised another young man, Charlie Jones. Charlie joined the Waterloo District Conference by being baptized at First Mennonite Church in Berlin. In William Uttley’s local history, Charlie is referred to as “a Negro [. . .] who had been raised by the Kolb family and could talk Pennsylvania Dutch like a streak.”⁶² According to Uttley, Charlie worked on an inter-racial threshing team.

A.B. Kolb had moved to the United States as a young man, and became a teacher of students including Orville and Wilbur Wright. By 1886, he was assistant editor at the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana. He worked there until shortly before his death. A biography by Sam Steiner identifies Kolb as

a leader when the Mennonite Church began to build mission and educational institutions. He was an early promoter of Sunday school conferences, and served as President of the Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board.⁶³

Steiner notes that Kolb served as “an important link between US and Canadian Mennonites within the Mennonite Church.” We should keep these elements of Kolb’s life in mind as we consider his letter, in regard to the weight readers may have accorded to his account.

Writing from Elkhart, Kolb begins by addressing readers: “I have

⁶² William Velores Uttley, *A History of Kitchener, Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: The Chronicle Press, 1937), 338.

⁶³ Sam Steiner, “Kolb, Abram B. (1862-1925).” (January 2002). [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Kolb,_Abram_B._\(1862-1925\)&oldid=143301](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Kolb,_Abram_B._(1862-1925)&oldid=143301). accessed November 16, 2018.

mentioned previously that I would try to write something about the Negro question for the 'Rundschau.' What I have to say stems only from what I have experienced or observed."⁶⁴ He refers to an article he had authored in 1892 in an "English" paper, in which he had apparently portrayed Blacks in a relatively positive light and for which he had been "taken to task by our dear brothers in Virginia." After careful thought, Kolb had travelled to Georgia to study the "Negro question" for a year. His research grew to include interracial relations "simply because the blacks imitate the whites in so many ways." He then recounts his findings. First, "one drop of Negro blood makes a Negro. His skin may be lily white but he will always be classified as a Negro." He later reiterates this point: "under black one naturally includes all that are not completely white." Kolb warns a Black who tries to pass as White that "the least he will get is an invitation, with threat included, to make himself scarce as quickly as possible." He identifies Blacks as having "very low moral standards" and as part of an "ever increasing evil."

For Kolb, the Black population in Georgia was characterized by laziness, rampant disease including syphilis and tuberculosis, and lack of ambition: "when they are not watched, they don't amount to much." Although he argues against the "inhumane punishments and brutal treatment" of Blacks, he warns that they are undisciplined and lack "proper upbringing and training"—especially "the young ones." Laziness is characterized by vice, and academic education only serves to worsen the situation, as they "live under the illusion that they can now live their lives without working. . . . [They] become a worthless group because they not only despise other Negroes, but also Whites who work on the land." Farmers have become disillusioned with their Black workers, says Kolb, and have replaced them with other immigrants, often Italians.

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.

He concludes with these words: "no race or class will be worth as much as the immigration of 20,000 German farmers. I believe the South will

⁶⁴ A.B. Kolb, "Vereinigete Staaten: Elkhart, Indiana," *Rundschau*, June 13, 1906, 4-5.

get them once they discover the opportunities that await them.”

The second letter, written by A. Hiebert, comes from Pinia, Georgia—a community on the Dooly Southern Railway according to maps from 1895, 1899, and 1904,⁶⁵ but also referred to as Penia Station on an 1899 map. Writing from “the very bottom” of the United States, Herbert notes that “all of the Germans” are happy and in good health. However, “our harvest was weaker this year than what we normally anticipate.” Then he begins to address “the race issue.” He refers to articles in German papers from “northern states” that have featured “insightful articles on this issue.”⁶⁶ He goes on to say that “the northern citizens in general are much too positive in their assessment of the Negroes.” He notes that he speaks for Germans in general in that “our sympathy for the Negroes has strongly diminished.” This is the result of the “mistake” of granting Blacks “full freedom”: “on the average, [they are] even less are suited to full freedom as citizens than the Russians were to the Republic.”

Hiebert distinguishes between Northern and Southern “Negroes,” with those in the South being “less raw.” He states that attempts to make progress with Negroes in the North have been only partially successful, and that neither the South nor the North wants to receive them “in mass.” He encourages individual Blacks to move North, as northerners “feel that they have been called to regard them as their protégé.” However, he expresses ambivalence about his subject, since by the end of the letter he has committed to employing “a dozen or more of them part time again next year. Finally, they have to have something to eat and the pastor has to have a place to live, and there has to be something so they can ‘frolic’ and finally, a little bit of work.”

Letters from the mission field undoubtedly had an impact on the Anabaptist readers, conveying a first-person account of racial relations in Georgia. As missionaries in the field, both Kolb and Hiebert presumably enjoyed some status within the church, and their words would have been influential in forming racial attitudes and identities among readers.

⁶⁵ “Georgia Place Names—Dooly County,” <https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/doolycopn.htm>, accessed November 15, 2018.

⁶⁶ A. Hiebert, “Vereinigte Staaten: Pinia, Georgia,” *Rundschau*, December 19, 1906, 5.

Conclusion

The newspapers discussed here contributed to a sense of community among their readers in the spheres of language, religion, and culture. However, the papers also contributed to the social construction of the “other,” in this case the Black person, and to the racialization of readers in terms of black/white relations. Although the moral tales in *Zionsbote* and *Evangelical Visitor* identified Black people as possessing positive values of courage and loyalty, little attention was given to the realities of their daily lives, including oppression at the hands of Whites. Instead, the message seems to be that Blacks exemplified these positive characteristics *in spite of* their racial identities. Although commentaries, articles, and letters in the *Rundschau* at times challenged the violence and oppression perpetrated against Black people, they also drew on racial tropes of blackness to the extent of viewing “the colored race” as a threat to Whites. Statements contrasting the character of Blacks with the virtues of German people appear particularly ominous today, in light of recent scholarship on the historical relationship between Mennonites and German nationalism.⁶⁷ Even in the moral tales, Black people were presented as marginalized in their socioeconomic status. In a sense, many Anabaptists straddled the boundaries between being “outsiders” themselves and being part of the dominant society. Moral tales, letters, and essays as printed in these newspapers provided avenues for Anabaptist readers to become “insiders” in terms of discourse on racial relations.

The material presented here suggests that if these papers encouraged readers to be concerned for their “black brother,” they nevertheless also influenced readers to identify with a dominant white society. With the readers’ “white” racial identity assumed, these papers permitted Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ readers to distance themselves from their Black neighbors, characterizing them in ways that reinforced racial stereotypes and that may have contributed to their suffering.

Following Hubert Brown, cited at the outset of this article, if we Mennonites are to make any progress in racial relations today, we must make an honest appraisal of our past. We must recognize and attend to “the ways in

⁶⁷ Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017).

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.”⁶⁸

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⁶⁸ Ben Goossen, “Mennonite Privilege,” *The Mennonite*, March 9, 2017. <https://themennonite.org/feature/mennonite-privilege/>, accessed January 24, 2019.