Blackness, Whiteness, and the Anabaptist Imagined Community in Print and Mission

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Abstract

This article examines how Black and White identities were constructed and negotiated in coverage of the Welsh Mountain Mission in Pennsylvania by three late 19th and early-20th century denominational newspapers: *Herald of Truth*, *The Mennonite*, and *Gospel Herald*. The author employs racial formation theory and the concepts of 'racial projects,' 'imagined community,' and "Whiteness" in focusing on how these publications reflected and reproduced racial tropes of the period. The article concludes with suggestions for applying the analysis to current discussions on race and social justice in North America, and calls for Mennonites to learn from the past in order to navigate the present and future effectively.

I

David Wenger, writing in the *Herald of Truth* issue of July 15, 1899, penned these words:

> 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.[1]

Wenger's comments reflect the growth of Anabaptist outreach initiatives to African-American populations in the United States during

[1] David Wenger, "The Ethiopian or Black Race," *Herald of Truth*. 36, no. 8 (August 1, 1899), 119.

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the late 19th century, as exemplified by the founding of two Mennonite missions: one in Chicago in 1893, the other at Welsh Mountain in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1898. Driven by the evangelical fervor of a much wider White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, these initiatives were most often described in terms of the benevolence of White missionaries towards Black souls in peril. However, such a racial dichotomy conceals the processes of racialization and the social construction of Whiteness and Blackness at work in mission encounters and printed accounts.

This paper examines how Black and White identities were constructed and negotiated by writers, editors, and readers as depicted in coverage of the Welsh Mountain Mission's work by three denominational newspapers of the late 19th and early-20th century: *Herald of Truth*, *The Mennonite*, and *Gospel Herald*.[2] It is primarily based on a content analysis of these publications.[3] I focus on how they reflect and reproduce broader racial tropes in North America at the time, and I argue that their coverage drew upon tropes of Blackness while at the same time constructing the Whiteness of Protestantism and of mission workers. Before launching into the analysis, I provide theoretical foundations for it by citing Michael Omi and Howard Winant's discussion of racial formation theory and 'racial projects,' Benedict Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community,' and Kelly Brown Douglas's account of Whiteness. I conclude with suggestions for applying my findings to current discussions on race and social justice in North America, urging Mennonites to take lessons from the past in order to navigate the present and future.

While I draw on a range of sources, authors, and disciplines, my own racial identity as a White male inevitably shapes my analysis. For example,

[2] For an account of the construction of Whiteness at the Chicago mission, see Philipp Gollner, "How Mennonites Became White: Religious Activism, Cultural Power, and the City," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90 (2016): 165-93.

[3] I accessed digitized copies of each on the website for the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and searched for references to the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission. I narrowed the date range to 1898-1924 in order to coincide with its operating dates. After selecting relevant articles and references, I identified themes in the depiction of Blackness and Whiteness, focusing on descriptions of mission workers and the African-American population ('negro' and/or 'colored' were the terms most commonly used). I then analyzed these references and themes through the lens of Racial Formation Theory.

I have not personally experienced the suffering and injustice that many racialized individuals and communities face on a daily basis. My Whiteness and the ways I engage in its formation on a daily basis often remain invisible to me. As I continue on a path of learning about these processes, I am deeply grateful to the scholars whose work informs this paper.

Racial Formation Theory

In his discussion of cultural identity, social theorist Stuart Hall suggests that "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."[4] This perspective has informed much of the writing on race for the past several decades. Michael Omi and Howard Winant define race as "an unstable and "decentered" complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle and as "a concept, which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies."[5] Rather than viewing race as either 'essence' or 'illusion,' they argue that processes of racial formation are central to both the structure of society and patterns of cultural representation, and are driven by "historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized."[6] These 'racial projects' represent and provide a rationale for racial dynamics, reorganize society and its resources along lines of race, and are most often characterized by conflict and crisis.[7]

African-American theologians, including Kelly Brown Douglas, have also identified Whiteness[8] as inherently conflictual: "Whatever the specific

[4] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, and Difference,* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

[5] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1994), 55.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Tobin Miller Shearer uses the phrase 'whitening conflicts' to describe the ways by which Mennonite Central Committee workers negotiated their identities in working with African-American populations in the 1960s: "Conflicting Identities: White Racial Formation among Mennonites, 1960-1985," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 19, no. 3 (2012): 268-84.

[8] Here I draw on recent anthropological discussion of Whiteness as "a racial formation that changes spatially and temporally and confers race privilege." See, for example, Susan Frohlick,

twists and turns on the path to constructing Whiteness, the construction was done in opposition to blackness."[9] Douglas writes that the lives of new immigrants to 19th-century North America were "riddled with contradictions" as they navigated and negotiated their identities of both 'foreign' and 'American,' while maintaining the identity of 'not black.' She asserts that "even if these immigrants were not, as some have suggested, 'white on arrival,' it did not take them long to become so."[10] Print culture, including newspapers, and mission work both provided avenues for the formation of community and for the 'whitening' of Anabaptists.

Imagined Community

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson states that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community."[11] Within this community, members of the nation identify with common symbols and a strong sense of affiliation: "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[12] Anderson observes that such communities became possible because of print capitalism, and he devotes attention to newspapers as a key mode for forming and strengthening a sense of community.

In the 19th century, many Protestant groups in the United States began to publish denominational newspapers. By 1880, Anabaptists were publishing at least nine such papers, and several had international readership.[13] These publications conveyed messages of inspiration, evangelism, and news from

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Paula Migliardi, and Adey Mohamed, "Mostly with White Girls: Settlement, Spatiality, and Emergent Interracial Sexualities in a Canadian Prairie City," *City and Society* 30, no. 2 (2018): 165-85.

[9] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 36.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

[12] Ibid.

[13] 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.

around the world. They also played a critical role in shaping Anabaptist ethno-religious identity in North America and in creating "a strong sense of denominational consciousness"[14] through offering conference reports, obituaries, Sunday school lessons, and news of national and international importance. Lessons accompanied by discussion questions, letters columns, and invitations to readers interested in becoming writers encouraged participation by the constituencies. The merging of *Herald of Truth* and *Gospel Witness* to form the *Gospel Herald* in 1909 resulted in "a unified official church organ . . . a mouthpiece for the church" carrying "free-lance materials from constituent writers" and "editorials which reflect to a large extent the mind of the church."[15]

Each of these papers provided a forum not only to connect readers, writers, and editors in the formation of an 'imagined community' but to identify outsiders to that community. In their pages, Blackness was most often identified as 'other' to White readers, in turn reflecting, reproducing, and at times challenging tropes of Blackness and Whiteness. Newspapers thus served as a significant site for racial formation in North America, especially as these publications introduced their readers to perspectives from a much broader White Protestantism.

II

The Protestant Context

Anabaptists have often been identified as unique within the spectrum of Christian denominations, in terms of their identities as 'peace churches' and in respect of their practices such as believer's baptism. However, the social history of Anabaptism in North America must also be analyzed within the larger sphere of White Protestantism and its approaches to race. Critiques of Protestant Whiteness have been voiced at least since the 1920s,[16] and more recent studies informed by scholarship in postcolonial and critical race

[14] John A. Hostetler, *God Uses Ink: The Heritage and Mission of the Mennonite Publishing House after Fifty Years* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1958), 47.
[15] Ibid., 72, 135.
[16] Theron F. Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel: Mission and the Mennonite Church, 1863-1944* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1980.

theory[17] have explored the social and historical construction of Blackness and Whiteness within Protestantism.[18] Historically, Mennonites were also influenced by, and began to borrow from, the ideologies and practices of other White Protestant groups in their new homeland, as witnessed by the myriad essays and articles authored by their leading spokespersons.

While such sharing of ideas and perspectives is still common practice, problems can arise "when this happens thoughtlessly, when people do not ask whether the method is consistent with biblical mission or is merely a reflection of the prevailing culture. Surely this is true in the case of racism."[19] Within the context of White Protestantism, fueled by ideologies of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, Mennonites had to decide "what to do with those nonwhite persons in their very midst, those who were in dire need of being civilized by means of Anglo-Saxon customs and practices."[20] Mission work provided one answer, combining the twin agendas of salvation and civilization. In his study of the Mennonite mission in Chicago (1893-1920s), Philipp Gollner describes how Mennonite immigrants shifted from a 'tribalist' and ethnic religion towards "the privilege and power of historic white American Protestantism," negotiating "postures of benevolence and universalism" to become recognized as "good, white Protestants."[21]

The study of mission work provides valuable insight into processes of racial formation, because "unlike racial theorists and policymakers of the time," the workers "dealt with natives on a daily basis, recording their own actions and attitudes towards natives along with their perceptions of native

[17] 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).

[18] Jennifer Harvey, "White way to Justice? Reconciliation, Reparations, and the Problem of Whiteness in US Protestantism," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 57-77; Edward J. Blum, Tracy Fessenden, Prema Kurien, Judith Weisenfeld, "Forum," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation.* 19, no. 1 (2009): 1-35; Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

[19] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Introduction," in Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel: Mission and the Mennonite Church, 1863-1944*, 11.

[20] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 101.

[21] Gollner, "How Mennonites Became White," 169.

attitudes, culture, and societies."[22] However, their accounts were subsumed under the overarching goals of transforming local populations in the name of nation and religion. The Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission emphasized the restoration of social order and financial well-being to the 'good White people' of the local area, and the reshaping of the local Black population in terms of work, educational and home practices, and Christian worship to the standards of the White missionaries. In turn, missionaries represented "a complex institutional structure that included the sponsoring missionary societies who had chosen them, the publishing groups associated with the missionary societies, and a fundraising and fiscal infrastructure that supported them."[23] The structure of the Protestant church and its mission activities were also informed by, and reproduced, dominant North American assumptions about race and religion.

Let me offer a personal memory that relates to these assumptions. As a child I was introduced to images and messages of a White Christ through Daily Vacation Bible School and Sunday School in the forms of picture-books and activities. The song "Jesus Loves the Little Children"[24] ostensibly directed our attention to the unity of everyone under Christ, but in doing so it also divided the world by skin color, providing a salient example of the 'racial ambivalence'[25] which Protestants including Anabaptists have, at least until recently, taken towards matters of race. While proclaiming the Gospel to all nations, racialized populations were often identified in terms of undesirable characteristics, including criminality, "heathenism," and idleness. These racial tropes were reflected in the words and actions of those who organized and worked at missions.

> Proselytization, catechisms, and other religious performances functioned as acts of white racialization—attempts to contour the boundaries of white flesh while prescribing the boundaries

[22] C.L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, & Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2000), 2.
[23] Ibid., 13.
[24] "Jesus loves the little children/All the children of the world/Red and yellow, Black and white/ All are precious in his sight." George Frederick Root, "Jesus Loves the Little Children," 1864.
[25] Meghan A. Burke, Burke, *Racial Ambivalence in Diverse Communities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012).

of non-white souls.[26]

It is important to note that Black Protestant churches had also emerged by this time. Some scholars have identified 'whitening' processes even in these congregations. Although James H. Cone identifies the early Black church in North America as "born in protest" and notes that "its reality stemmed from the eschatological recognition that freedom and equality are at the essence of humanity, and thus segregation and slavery are diametrically opposed to Christianity," he observes that the post-Civil War Black church "adopted, for the most part, the theology of the white missionaries and taught blacks to forget the present and look to the future." Black ministers "serv[ed] the dual function of assuring whites that all is well in the black community, dampening the spirit of freedom among his people." [27] Meanwhile, missionaries reaped the benefits of Whiteness in their identities and status as agents of benevolence as "a sort of public and psychological wage,"[28] as reflected in Wenger's reference to the "reward to the nation or the individual"[29] for the transformation of Black hearts and souls. The purpose of mission work to racialized populations, while ostensibly for their benefit, was also to solidify the Whiteness and authority of the White Christian church, and thereby "to determine what is or is not acceptable in the eyes of God—put simply, what is Christian and what is not."[30]

From this perspective, encounters between Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries and African-American populations reflected the structure of organized religion and its ideologies in late-19th-century North America, and in turn re-enforced and reproduced cultural representations of Blackness and Whiteness. Race becomes common sense in social interaction and in the depictions of Whiteness and Blackness in denominational newspapers, as Black populations become target populations in the Home Mission field.

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[26] Alexis Wells-Oghoghomeh, "Race and Religion in the Afterlife of Protestant Supremacy," *Church History* 88, no. 3 (September 2019): 769.

[27] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 66, 72.

[28] W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 700.

[29] Wenger, "The Ethiopian or Black Race," 119.

[30] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 43.

III

Three Tropes of Blackness

Here I want to consider the negotiation of racial identity in terms of tropes of Blackness found in the denominational newspapers already named, tropes that persist in 21st-century media. On the first page of its initial issue in 1885, editors of *The Mennonite* wrote of the "Unity of the Bond of Peace":

> For to this end was the Holy Spirit given, that he might unite those who are separated by race and diversity of habits: old and young, rich and poor, child, youth and man, male and female, and every soul become in a manner one, and more entirely so than if they were of one body.[31]

From its inception and continuing for some years, statements of unity appeared about once a year in *The Mennonite*. In the June 2, 1904 issue the editors declared: "We venture to believe there will be no race prejudice, or color line in heaven."[32] While including all perceived colors of humanity within the purview of God's love, Whiteness and Blackness were most often presented as polar opposites. This was not merely a matter of terminology but a process of assigning values and qualities to racial categories. In an essay "Education of Negroes in the German African Colonies and in America," the unnamed author considers the innate characteristics of 'negers' ('negroes'), in sharp contrast to the 'civilizing' influence of German colonial powers:

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

[31] "Unity in the Bond of Peace," *The Mennonite* 1, no. 1 (October 1885), 1.
[32] "Editorial Scraps," *The Mennonite* 9, no. 26 (June 2, 1904), 4.

made to counteract this dangerous inclination.[33]

As Anabaptists began to develop Home Missions initiatives, similar attitudes were applied to racialized populations in North America. While Blackness was often associated with sin, Whiteness was often mentioned in relation to purity. While the Gospel was for all people, not everyone was perceived as equal. This sense of racial ambivalence[34] was repeated throughout the pages of Anabaptist newspapers.

1. Blackness as Criminal

In their study of the criminalization of unarmed Black males in the United States, Calvin Smiley and David Fakunle contend that the image of Black men "as brutes in society has a long legacy that begins with the social construction of race and brings us to the current period of mass incarceration."[35] The authors point out that current assumptions of Blackness and criminality, as revealed by the Black Lives Matter movement, have deep social and historical roots, and are reflected today in policies and practices such as Stand-your-ground laws.[36] The closely-related trope of Blackness as savagery informed not only the actions and policies of generations of US presidents—among them Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Teddy Roosevelt—but the pages of Anabaptist newspapers as well. For instance, in his essay "The Negro," David M. Wenger writes:

> In looking over the daily news, we often see that negroes are charged with great crimes. From this we may infer that there is much to do to change the negro's manner to a more Godlike character.[37]

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[33] "Negerschulung in den Deutsch-Afrikanischen Kolonien und in America," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, August 3, 1898, 2.

[34] On racial ambivalence, see M.A. Burke's *Racial Ambivalence in Diverse Communities: Whiteness and the Power of Color-Blind Ideologies* (Minneapolis, MN: Lexington Books, 2012).

[35] Calvin John Smiley and David Fakunle, "From 'brute' to 'thug:' the demonization and criminalization of unarmed Black male victims in America," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 26, no. 3-4 (2016): 354.

[36] Douglas provides a thorough and extensive discussion on these laws and Black bodies in *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God.*

[37] David M. Wenger, "The Negro," *Herald of Truth* 36, no. 14 (July 15, 1899), 219.

Reports in denominational newspapers of "horrific crimes" by racialized populations received little analysis or interpretation, as was noted by A.B. Kolb in his essay "The Race Troubles."[38] While these papers denounced lynching as sinful, they rarely considered the possibility of the accused's innocence. Blackness was also associated with criminality in the form of "the negro problem." For example, African-American people were blamed for both increased rates of crime and alcoholism:

> Here and there the negro problem has forced the liquor problem to the front, and to protect the wives and daughters of the white men from one form of crime it has been found necessary to do another that gives rise to it.[39]

By applying Omi and Winant's concept of 'racial projects,' we can obtain a nuanced understanding of these cultural depictions, as Black Codes and Jim Crow laws served to criminalize the black body.[40] Douglas writes that "these laws assured that the black body would be viewed as a criminal body within the collective imagination. They literally made a criminal out of black people. All the black person had to do was be black."[41] Depictions of Black offenders in denominational newspapers rarely paid attention to the circumstances of their criminalization. In addition, news media and medical journals depicted Black males as aggressively hypersexualized and therefore as threats to White women.[42]

2. Blackness as Heathen

In commenting on Blackness and religion in 19th-century America, humanities scholar Sylvester Johnson cautions that "One should keep in mind that Euro-Americans imagined themselves to be historical Israel. . . . It was generally assumed that the people of God described in biblical narratives were whites."[43] Conversely, denominational newspapers most often

[38] A.B. Kolb, "Race Troubles," *Herald of Truth* 26, no. 22 (November 15, 1889), 341-43.
[39] "The Saloon in the South" (reprint from *Institute Tie*), *The Mennonite* 22, no. 42 (October 24, 1907), 1.
[40] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 77ff.
[41] Ibid., 79.
[42] Ibid., 70.
[43] Sylvester Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity* (London:

associated Blackness with sin [44] and with those deemed lost or unsaved.[45] While the term 'heathen' was most often used to describe populations in Africa and the need for mission work in that continent, the trope of Blackness as spiritual destitution was replicated and extended in home missions to African-American and Indigenous populations. One example is the words of Rev. M. M. Horsch, writing from one of the "Indian Missions" in Arapahoe, Oklahoma: "In looking over our missionfield we find a dark heathenism staring at us from all sides."[46] This sentiment was also reflected in *Herald of Truth's* Home Missions column of March 1, 1901: "God loves the heathen as well as He loves us. *Even if they are black* [emphasis mine] they have a soul either to be saved or lost."[47] Although missionaries argued that Christ's salvation was for all peoples,[48] saving Black souls was depicted as relying on White intervention.

3. Blackness as Idleness

Compounding the perception of Blackness as criminal and heathen was the assumption that Black people were lazy and lacked the necessary drive to lift themselves out of idleness and vice. This trope coincided with a more general concern for industrial mission work: "Missions, wherever they are carried on, endeavor to help the whole man," proclaimed *The Mennonite*, adding that "The idle person is hardly likely to become the kind of a Christian who is to do himself or any one else very much good."[49] However, idleness was often portrayed as uniquely true of Black people. This perspective informed Christian Education Lessons in this publication —"That some of the negroes,

Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 57.

[44] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 43.

[45] It is important to note that Black people were at times described in terms of purity and simplicity in their relation to God. Gerbner in *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* provides an interesting discussion of the historical construction of "Christian" as "non- slave."

[46] M.M. Horsch, "From Arapahoe, Oklahoma," *The Mennonite* 13, No. 2 (November 1897), 2. Reports from several of these missions identify the presence of 'negroes,' presumably Indigenous Freedmen.

[47] A.J. Heinrichs, "Home Missions," *Herald of Truth* 38, no. 5 (March 1, 1901), 71.

[48] Fanny Rupp, "Missionary Interests," *Herald of Truth* 42, no. 28 (July 13, 1905), 221.

[49] "C.E. Topic Industrial Missions at Home and Abroad," *The Mennonite* 38, no. 28, July 19, 1923.

perhaps a larger percentage than that of white people, are shiftless, unreliable, sensual is true"[50]—and in essays such as "The Nature of Education" by C. E. Bender —"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."[51] The prevalence of such stereotypes can be explained this way:

> Many of the stereotypes created during the height of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade were used to help commodify black bodies and justify the business of slavery. For instance, an enslaved person, forced under violence to work from sunrise to sunset, could hardly be described as lazy. Yet laziness, as well as characteristics of submissiveness, backwardness, lewdness, treachery, and dishonesty, historically became stereotypes assigned to African Americans.[52]

In contrast, German people were described as "ever industrious—gorgeous (sic) characteristics and virtues distinguish them." This blatant conflation of physical appearance and morality was followed by a query for readers: "We need to ask ourselves why we are in such a hurry to educate the black and less gifted race."[53] According to the unnamed author, there was little hope for 'colored people' except through White intervention. From the perspective of Racial Formation Theory, perceptions of idleness also served the needs of colonizing powers and must be considered in relation to the 'racial projects' of White society, such as vagrancy laws that served to punish African-American men unable to find work due to racial discrimination.[54] Blackness was equated with laziness and a need for elevation to the status of a 'useful' citizen.

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[50] C.V.D. Smissen, "Our C.E. Topic," *The Mennonite* 22, no. 12 (March 21, 1907), 5.
[51] C.E. Bender, "The Nature of Education," *Herald of Truth* 41, no. 40 (September 29, 1904), 319.
[52] "Popular and Pervasive Stereotypes of African Americans," Smithsonian: National Museum of African American History & Culture, https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-african-americans, accessed June 11, 2021.
[53] "Negerschulung in den Deutsch-Afrikanischen Kolonien und in America," 2.
[54] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, 78.

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While Blackness was associated with criminality, heathenism, and idleness, denominational newspapers associated Whiteness with purity and holiness:

> [E]arly American Anglo-Saxons . . . came to believe that they essentially had divinity running through their veins . . . the further removed one may be from the Anglo-Saxon family tree, the further one is removed from God.[55]

The elevated status of White people was also informed by Social Darwinism, as reflected in *Herald of Truth*: "We find of all the races, the white has reached the greatest perfection— physically, intellectually, and, above, all, morally."[56] These beliefs informed discussions around outreach to African-American populations, and the call to Anabaptists was clear. Their duty was to "lift them ['negroes'] out of the estate in which fate has placed them and help them to assume the responsibilities of citizenship."[57] The salvation and civilization of Black people was the burden of White missionaries.

IV

Imagined Community—in Mission: Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission

Although Anabaptists at times demonstrated interest in, and even concern for, questions of slavery and racial injustice, mission outreach to African-American populations only began in the late 19th century, almost thirty years after Emancipation. The Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission first appears as a challenge from John R. Buckwalter in the pages of *Herald of Truth* in 1895.[58] He called on Lancaster-area Mennonites to look past the comforts of their homes to the Pequea valley to the north and its "powerful Mennonite

[55] Ibid., 42.

[56] Wenger, "The Ethiopian or Black Race," 119.

[57] Kolb, 341. For more recent examples of this trope, see Katherine M. Bell, "Raising Africa?: Celebrity and the rhetoric of the white savior," *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 2013): 1-24; Matthew W. Hughey, "Racializing Redemption, Reproducing Racism: The odyssey of magical negroes and white saviors," *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 9 (September 2012): 751-67.

[58] Buckwalter would later serve as the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors at Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission.

church: strong in numbers and strong in means," to the Conestoga valley to the north with its "equally strong Mennonite church, both as to numbers and wealth," and finally towards the east and the 'wild' Welsh Mountain, that was

> peopled to our certain knowledge with hundreds of persons of whom it can be as truly said as the Lord said of the Ninevites, that they cannot discern between their right hand and their left. And what have we as a church done to save them? Practically nothing.[59]

The Mission first arose in response to a call from a "regular ordained colored Presbyterian minister,"[60] M.H. Hagler, who sought to help his congregants find productive work and move away from lives of idleness or crime.[61] Hagler spoke at the quarterly meeting of the Mennonite Sunday School Mission on Thursday, July 22, 1897, providing "a brief account of his life, and his present work among the colored people of the Welsh mountains."[62] He had moved to there about six months prior to the meeting in order to devote himself to "the people of his own race . . . living among the stumps and stones of the hill[63] in order that he may devote himself to raising his brethren from the slough of ignorance, laziness and vice in which they are resting."[64] Secretary Amos Ressler noted that Hagler's work was

[59] "Mission Work from a Bible View," *Herald of Truth* 32, no. 4 (February 15, 1895), 60.

[60] S.H. Musselman, et al., "What the Brethren in Lancaster Co., Pa., are Doing," *Herald of Truth* 35, no. 6 (March 15, 1898), 91. The narrative of Welsh Mountain is most often presented in terms of a White/Colored (Black) dichotomy. However, according to one source, Melford H. Hagler was "born in either Texas or Alabama…the son of a white father and a black mother." Hagler's wife, hailing from Welsh Mountain, was "part Indian. Her great-grandmother, in fact, was a full-blooded Susquehannock who stood six feet tall" (https://www.newspapers.com/clip/11766861/nancy-hagler/). Hagler's first name appeared in *Herald of Truth* as Milton, Malford, and Melford.

[61] These are the words of the Mission's organizers, not of Hagler himself, who is never quoted in the newspapers.

[62] Amos A. Ressler, Sec., "Report of the Quarterly Meeting of the Mennonite S.S. Mission, held at Paradise, Lancaster Co., Pa., on Thursday, July 22, 1897," *Herald of Truth* 34, no. 16 (August 15, 1897), 250.

[63] Descriptions of the local ecological context ("stumps and stones") coincide with descriptions of the local populace as rough and uncivilized.

[64] Again, it's unclear whether these words belong to Hagler or to Ressler. The wildness of the Welsh Mountain area contrasts with the comforts of 'society' and 'civilization:' The use of the

progressing rather slowly "but he feels the need to press on, trusting of Him who has made of one blood, all nations of the earth, and who gave Himself to redeem us." Local Mennonites were generally impressed by Hagler, as *Herald of Truth* described his character in glowing terms on the basis of his education, work ethic, and attitude of self-sacrifice:

> He is a graduate of Lincoln University, is a hard worker, and to all appearances, a consecrated Christian. His character has undergone the closest scrutiny, and has not been found wanting. [65] He left a salaried position as Sunday School Missionary for his work here where he gets what he earns, with a little outside help. He is apparently doing a good work here, and we believe is worthy of our warmest sympathy and support.[66]

With Hagler's worthiness affirmed, the Mennonite Church formed a committee to investigate conditions on Welsh Mountain and to develop a plan to improve the condition of its "dependent people."[67] Having appointed a twelve-person Board of Directors, the plan for the mission was unveiled. Its first goal was to purchase "some of the better sprout land" for the local population to clear and to grow vegetables and fruits. They would also grow corn for making brooms and "any other work our experience with them may suggest as advantageous." In addition, women were to be instructed in washing and sewing. Note the words used to describe these "improvements":

> Help them to fix up their homes, and clean and *decently* dress their children, so they are in a *fit condition* to attend the day schools, Sunday-school and church. It is hard to expect children half clad in rags to attend these *institutions of improvement*. Soon as the boys and girls *become efficient and trustworthy workers*, the Mission Board will help them to situations where they can earn something outside the Mission for themselves. All

term 'slough' recalls the Slough of Despond in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.*

[65] This is an interesting statement, as Hagler was already an ordained minister by the time he met the Mennonites.

[66] Jacob H. Mellinger, "The Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission," *Herald of Truth* 35, no. 13 (July 1, 1898), 199.

[67] Ressler, "Report of the Quarterly Meeting of the S.S. Mission, held at Kinzer, Lancaster Co., Pa., on Saturday, Jan. 15, 1898," *The Herald of Truth* 35, no. 5 (March 15, 1898), 75.

> their work at the Mission will be paid for in the necessities of life. Sunday-school and church services will be held regularly under the direction of Milton H. Hagler.[68] [emphasis mine]

This passage testifies to the social control that organizers exercised over the workers, who were viewed as unfit, inefficient, and untrustworthy without intervention by White missionaries. The Mission's purpose was not to work alongside Black people but rather to *do for* them. Its express goal was to transform workers and families into "a fit condition," instilling in them the values of White missionaries. Control was exercised over their physical, social, and spiritual aspects.

While some of the instruction may have been welcomed by the local populace, the Mission's strategy reflects that of a company town, as all the work performed by the people was to be paid for in the "necessities of life" or in scrip as provided by the Mission's store. The rationale for this was also framed in moralistic tones and embodied assumptions about Blackness and self-control: "because many of them do not know how to use money to good advantage, and are liable to spend it for drink."[69]

Although Hagler would remain significant in the work that developed on Welsh Mountain, including taking the position of storekeeper, "looking after the spiritual interests of the colored people," teaching Sunday School, on occasion providing scripture reading and prayer at meetings, presiding over at least one wedding ceremony, and deterring the "people of the valley" from supporting "begging habits," the narrative of the Mission downplayed his role in favor of emphasizing White missionaries rescuing an African-American community. Black voices were notably absent in both reports from the Mission itself and essays others wrote about it.

Within the year following the announcement of the calling and plan, the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission had become a regular and prominent feature in several newspapers, crossing denominational lines and appearing to interest many Anabaptists. However, the most extensive coverage by far was within *Herald of Truth* and then later in *Gospel Herald*, as both the Mission and these papers operated under the auspices of the Mennonite

[68] Musselman et al., "What the Brethren in Lancaster Co., Pa., are Doing," 91.
[69] Ressler, "Report of the Quarterly Meeting of the Mennonite S.S. Mission, held at Paradise, Lancaster Co., Pa., April 14, 1898," *Herald of Truth* 35, no. 13 (July 1, 1898), 203.

Church. In these papers, the Mission's work and well-being was featured in regular reports by missionaries and mission staff; monthly audited financial statements; reports on the activities of organizers, including their travels and pastoral responsibilities such as sermons and regular reports at the Quarterly Meeting of the Mennonite Sunday School Mission; comments by the editors of *Herald of Truth*, and correspondence by visitors to the Mission. The Mission also received attention in editorial comments and the Christian Education section in *The Mennonite*.

These various formats also reveal a distance between the authors and their subjects, with missionaries providing a first-hand account of Mission activities and others supplying essays or lessons based on second-hand knowledge. As a result, comments by missionaries and those in charge are often markedly distinct from comments in by others. While reports from the Mission rarely provided much detail on the lives of Black workers, other writers offered more pointed and often negative comments. For example, the editors of *Herald of Truth* asserted the following agenda:

> To rid the surrounding country of a very undesirable class of people inhabiting Welsh Mountain, not by driving them out, but by giving them a fair opportunity of making an honest living, and to bring them into a better condition spiritually by establishing Sunday schools and church services among them.[70]

With this background established, we can now consider how the Mission's work not only displayed and reproduced the tropes of Whiteness and Blackness already described but clearly revealed that "the peasant-and-burgher Lancasterians, whatever their symbols of cultural separation, were very much in tune with some basic attitudes in U.S. life."[71]

4. Blackness as Criminal

Criminal activity in the Welsh Mountain area crossed the lines of race

[70] "The Welsh Mountain Mission," *Herald of Truth* 36, no. 5 (March 1, 1899), 71.
[71] Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel*, 74.

and color,[72] as exemplified by the notorious Buzzard gang.[73] However, the dominant narrative of the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission emphasized the transformation of 'colored people' from living a life of crime to the elevated status of living as honest and productive citizens, Christianized and civilized through the "self-denying labors of the brethren"[74] and "every honest means possible."[75]

Referred to in biblical terms as 'Samaritans'[76] or 'Ninevites',[77] Black people were destined to become "efficient and trustworthy workers" as they worked in the Mission's shirt and broom factories, fields, and gardens.[78]

The Mission's Board of Directors demonstrated a sense of racial ambivalence by identifying the root of criminal behavior in the institution of slavery, yet at the same time locating the area's current problem in the perceived criminality and idleness of Black people themselves:

> Let us remember, that while the negro is noted as a petty thief and beggar, there is one kind of stealing he will never have to answer for. Had his white brother never kidnapped him and stolen him from his native home, and shipped him across the great deep to be sold and used as a slave, it is extremely doubtful whether they would be here to bother us.[79]

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[72] Two Christian Education lessons suggested that the intersection of race and social class was at the root of Welsh Mountain criminal activity: "The people living there, composed of whites and blacks of the lowest class, intermarried and lived in filth and many of them were confirmed criminals." "The C.E. Topic: Inspiring Stories from the Home Mission Field," *The Mennonite* 35, no 45 (November 11, 1920), 5; "Some years ago there existed a community in the upper end of Lancaster County, Penna., that was noted for its lawlessness, and immorality, blacks and whites lived together and together followed criminal careers" ("C.E. Topic Industrial Missions at Home and Abroad," *The Mennonite* 38, no. 28, July 19, 1923).

[73] "Welsh Mountain Thieves Released," *Herald of Truth* 38, no. 17, 270.

[74] Editors, "Items of News and Comment," *The Mennonite* 17, no. 7 (January 23, 1902), 1.

[75] Musselman et al., "What the Brethren in Lancaster Co., Pa., are Doing," 91.

[76] "New Holland Pa. Welsh Industrial Mission," *Gospel Herald* 12, no. 49 (March 4, 1920), 940.

[77] "Mission Work from a Bible View," *Herald of Truth* 32, no. 4 (February 15, 1895), 60.

[78] Musselman et al., "What the Brethren in Lancaster Co., Pa., are Doing," 91.

[79] Ibid. The ambivalence is also reflected in this comment: "Jesus shed his blood just as much for the yellow, brown or black-faced heathen as he did for the 'respectable' American of Anglo-Saxon descent."—Oliver T. Yoder, "LOOK! PRAY! GO!", *Herald of Truth* 43, no. 32 (January 11, 1906), 294.

The narrative of Black criminality appears most starkly not in the reports of missionaries but in the articles and columns written about the Mission by others not directly involved in its operations. These pieces tended to appropriate and reshape the narrative of the Mission as a story of Black criminality and White salvation. For example, Wenger writes that "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."[80] Similarly, *Herald of Truth* editors justify the need for the Mission in terms of social order and, perhaps more significantly, in terms of financial costs levied by 'colored people' on the 'good people' of the area:

> These people, on account of the many crimes they commit, entail a continuous expense on the county that must be met by taxation. . . . With horses and wagons they scour the whole county, begging or stealing, and it is hoped by means of an Industrial Mission to educate and Christianize the rising generation so they may be useful citizens.[81]

The perceived savagery of the people was mirrored in the terrain of the mountain itself. With its 'stumps and stones,'[82] it represented wilderness described in a local paper as "the hideousness of an uncloaked giant,"[83] the antithesis of 'society'.

> The mountain, which for half a century was a tangle of briars, weeds and brush, isolated as it were from mankind, where all sorts of wickedness could be carried on unknown to the outside world, is now rapidly becoming a blooming garden. Once it was almost a visit of one's life to go there, now it is a pleasure to visit the place, and note the scenes of activity, and the air of thrift among the people.[84]

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[80] Wenger, "The Ethiopian or Black Race," 119.
[81] "The Welsh Mountain Mission," *Herald of Truth* 36, no. 5 (March 1, 1899), 71.
[82] Ressler, "Report of the Quarterly Meeting of the Mennonite S.S. Mission, held at Paradise, Lancaster Co., Pa., on Thursday, July 22, 1897," *Gospel Herald* 34, no. 16 (August 15, 1897), 250.
[83] "'Mystery Land,' Once Home of Desperadoes is Now Quite Tranquil," *Lancaster Daily Intelligencer* (January 13, 1917), 12.
[84] "Welsh Mountain Mission" (from the Reading, Pa. Eagle), *Herald of Truth* 39, no. 14 (July

From the perspective of this writer, the Mission activities had transformed not only the people and their values (from 'wickedness' to 'thrift'), but the land itself (from 'a tangle of briars' to 'a blooming garden'). However, this passage also situates the local populace as separate from the larger world—and, worse, even from humanity.

5. Blackness as Heathen

In his first report on activity at the Mission, Jacob Mellinger (who was to become Assistant Superintendent and keeper of the store) identifies it as "a charitable institution in a business garb."[85] Within the past year, land had been cleared and "many warm supporters" had donated money to the cause. It had been a challenge to communicate the Mission's purpose to the local population, resulting in "the greatest excitement" and "the most ridiculous stories," but a significant change had already been noted among the male laborers, who now saw their future as "honest work" rather than crime. However, he notes that what is missing from these men is "the grace of God in their Hearts." What was needed was a church structure similar to that with which he was familiar. While the workers are like "the colored man mentioned in Acts 8 . . . susceptible to religious feelings," and in spite of the fact that Hagler was leading "regular preaching and Sunday services," there was no 'organized church.'[86] From his perspective, the work at Welsh Mountain was truly a "mission to the lost."[87]

This apparent lack of structure and accompanying lack of religious experience had been touched on earlier in the same issue by the *Herald of Truth* editors but to a more extreme degree, describing the people as "nearly heathen as it is possible to find them outside of the foreign mission field."[88] This view of collective spiritual destitution is apparent in the fact that the names of workers other than Hagler only began to be mentioned on the first

15, 1902), 218.

[85] Jacob H. Mellinger, "The Welsh Mountain Mission," *Herald of Truth* 38, no. 6 (March 15, 1901), 86.

[86] This theme of organization also appears in the missionary's concerns for the state of clothing of Black children, the cleanliness of their homes, and the orderliness of their singing.

[87] A.T.M., "New Holland, Pa. Welsh Mt. Industrial Mission," *Gospel Herald* 13, no. 28 (October 7, 1920), 558.

[88] "Editorial Notes," *Herald of Truth* 35, no. 13 (July 1, 1898), 193.

baptism of a 'colored' person in 1917, Elmer Boots. In contrast, the names of missionaries and staff became well known in the publication's pages. Mennonite leader and future bishop Noah H. Mack, for instance, was often reported as performing sermons and services at area locations and identified as "of the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission."

In contrast to the workers and their perceived proclivity to debauchery, missionaries were often portrayed as selfless suffering servants. In her correspondence from the Mission, Sarah Kurtz writes: "We feel to thank (sic) the Lord for the blessings He has bestowed upon us, for it is alone through him that we receive strength to labor in His vineyard."[89] Missionaries were described as having left the comforts of home behind in order to serve the population on the Mountain. However, while most may have lived in humble quarters, the description of a visitor from the Lancaster area depicts the superintendent's residence as starkly contrasting to the laborers' huts:

> A beautiful and substantial dwelling is erected which he uses as both a dwelling and a store. Here he enjoys life as well as anyone under the circumstances, and it would require a most advantageous offer to entice him away from his work.[90]

While the Mission's purpose was ostensibly to benefit the local populace, the writer describes this "substantial dwelling"" as the logical profit of Mission work—a sort of 'wage of Whiteness.'[91]

6. Blackness as Idleness

In addition to criminality, reports from the Mission assert that Blacks have a propensity for idleness and that the Mission's purpose is to "educate and Christianize the rising generation so they may be useful citizens."[92] Schlabach compares the Mission to the work of educator and reformer Booker T. Washington, [93] who emphasized education and self-help through labor as the paths to 'racial uplift' and received strong criticism for failing

[89] Sarah Kurtz, "Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission," *Herald of Truth* 40, no. 12 (March 19, 1903), 94.
[90] "Welsh Mountain Mission," 218.
[91] See Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, *1860-1880*.
[92] Musselman et al., "What the Brethren in Lancaster Co., Pa., are Doing," 91.
[93] Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel*, 74.

to offer what was really needed to improve the lives of African-Americans. What is significant here is that Washington was lauded in the Anabaptist denominational newspapers, praise that served to reproduce stereotypes of Black idleness: "the blacks must first be taught to love their work and be convinced that their efforts will have positive results"[94] Two reports from Welsh Mountain missionaries employ this trope:

The workers in the shirt factory have resumed their duties, after having been idle a few days.[95]

> Wood cutting has begun and there is no just reason for idleness. "I am tired of loafing," said one as he applied for work. He was given a stone fork and a wheel barrow and sent to a needy spot.[96]

The second statement contrasts this person's initiative with the idleness pervasive among the local population. However, idleness in both these statements must be understood as lack of engagement in tasks that the Mission had determined appropriate for their betterment. Failure to complete these tasks was presented as a general characteristic of Black people, regardless of their own perspectives on the usefulness and meaningfulness of the assigned work. Missionaries' reports seldom provided much detail about the lives of the 'colored' workers. Instead, their reports listed the number of shirts and brooms produced, noting at times that the workers were "doing nicely."[97] Any disputes or problems among the workers received only brief mention, although the title of "Problems of the Welsh Mt. Industrial Mission—Solved and Unsolved" suggests that these may not have been entirely dealt with.[98]

Whiteness and Salvation

At this point I must turn to an important element of the Welsh Mountain Mission's self-understanding and its operations that calls for attention.

[94] "Negerschulung in den Deutsch-Afrikanischen Kolonien und in America," 2.
[95] Kurtz, "Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission," 94.
[96] J.S. Musselman, "Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission," *Gospel Herald* 4, no. 38 (Dec. 21, 1911), 601.
[97] Lizzie M. Wenger, "Welsh Mountain Mission," *Herald of Truth* 38, no. 18 (September 15, 1901), 278.
[98] Ressler, "Quarterly Meeting of the Mennonite S.S. Mission," *Herald of Truth* 38, no. 15 (May 15, 1901), 153.

Although founded on the premise of self-improvement through industrial labor, the Mission gradually increased its emphasis on spiritual transformation in the early 20th century, especially when its population declined as laborers found employment in the surrounding communities. The Mission opened a Sunday school program in 1914. However, aside from some continued spiritual care by Hagler, the Mission's Whiteness was reflected in the composition of its staff and Board of Directors and in its goal of elevating these "benighted, despised and rejected men and women" by making them "useful":

> There seems to be a spiritual awakening among the colored people here, and they are apparently reaching after better things. During a series of meetings at the A.M.E. church, quite a number signified a willingness to lead a better life. But they have many discouragements which we do not have, and it is for us to help them over their temptations and their discouragements, and as the grace of God can save to the uttermost, there is no reason why they should not, through time, become useful as Christians and as citizens.[99]

The "better things" undoubtedly refers to work habits inculcated by the Mission and the educational goals described earlier. But it also refers to the much greater 'racial project' of civilization as reflected in the structure of Christian churches and their mission work. By 1902, the Mission was identified as having "performed miracles"[100] in the surrounding community in terms of crime rates and productivity.

> Mennonites were among the first to advocate the emancipation of the southern slaves. And the Mennonites of Lancaster county were the first to make a consistent effort to elevate the degraded population of the Welsh Mountain.[101]

Missionaries were portrayed as the means to salvation in terms of both spirituality and industriousness, agents in transforming workers into useful

[99] Mellinger, "The Welsh Mountain Mission," 86.
[100] Editors, "Items of News and Comment," *The Mennonite* 17, no. 7 (January 23, 1902), 1.
[101] Ressler, "Quarterly Meeting of the Mennonite Sunday School Mission," *Herald of Truth* 36, no. 10 (May 15, 1899), 151.

citizens and baptized Christians. However, several passages also suggest that the missionaries' perspectives were changing; they were now offering ositive and affirming comments on the workers' spiritual engagement. For example, Lizzie M. Wenger wrote this in one of her reports:

> I must say these colored people are very dear: some of them are very willing to work. I had from two to thirteen working in the shirt factory. They can sew very nicely and it made me rejoice to hear them while they were sewing sing such songs as "More about Jesus," "The Haven of Rest," I must tell Jesus," "O Beulah Land," "At the Cross," etc.[102]

Another missionary, Sarah Kurtz, enjoyed the intermingling of voices at the Mission:

> "We rejoice to see so many come into these meetings and mingle their voices with ours in singing the beautiful songs of Zion." [103]

In 1917, the Mission celebrated the baptism of the first 'negro' congregant, Elmer Boots, who was received as a full member of the Mennonite Church.[104] By 1920 he and his co-workers were given increased responsibilities: "the industrial work is now practically carried on by colored brethren, namely, Bro. Elmer Boots, broom making, and Bro. William Bohyer farming and general outdoor labor." [105] After more than twenty years, missionaries and staff were now recorded as referring to those who received baptism and church membership as 'brethren' and 'sisters.'[106] In September 1921, a mission report noted:

> We also notice an increasing interest on the part of the colored people in our work. On Sunday evening, the 28th, another precious soul was received into our fellowship by water baptism.

[102] Lizzie M. Wenger, "From the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission," 6. However, her positive response may simply indicate that she knew these hymns.
[103] Kurtz, "Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission," 94.
[104] Arthur T. Moyer, "New Holland, Pa.," *Gospel Herald* 10, no. 7 (May 17, 1917), 116.
[105] A.T.M., "New Holland, Pa. (Welsh Mt. Industrial Mission," *Gospel Herald* 13, no. 28 (October 7, 1920), 558.
[106] Sister Bolyer was baptized on November 14, 1921, Henry Hershey, "Intercourse, Pa.," *Gospel Herald* 13, no. 35 (November 25, 1920), 683.

> Our membership at present is four in number and others are counting the cost.[107]

The next year, the Mission reported two additional baptisms, emphasizing the role of these new converts in the salvation of other workers:

> Pray for the few at this place that the Lord may preserve them faithful and use them in bringing others to the Savior.[108]

However, these developments did not mean that dominant attitudes were completely replaced, as Theron Schlabach has noted:

> The form had changed. Meantime the attitudes by which mission-minded Mennonites judged Blacks and the work changed a degree, but not entirely.… Condescension and the attitude of moral uplift had by no means ended by the 1920s.[109]

Let me now bring this wide-ranging discussion to a tentative conclusion that takes into account where we are today in regard to the issues raised and suggests how we might proceed into the future, both as a society and as the Christian church.

V

Conclusion: Whiteness and Social Power

Theron Schlabach's observation is compelling, particularly if we consider the role of race today, in the 21st century. The Black Lives Matter movement reveals that attitudes towards race have not changed significantly over the past century, and that whether cloaked in the guise of mission work or expressed in overt violence against marginalized populations, the social power of Whiteness continues to inform both social action and social structure.

In an essay titled "The Peace Witness and Revolutionary Movements," the African-American historian Vincent Harding wrote of Mennonites and Whiteness:

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[107] Arthur T. Moyer, "New Holland, Pa.," *Gospel Herald* 14, no. 24 (September 15, 1921), 469.
[108] Arthur T. Moyer, "New Holland, Pa.," *Gospel Herald* 15, no. 9 (June 1, 1922), 165.
[109] Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel*, 77.

> Sometimes, . . . 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?[110]

In spite of Harding's challenge—made more than fifty years ago—scholarly attention to the relationship of religion and social power, and more specifically to Anabaptism and Whiteness, is a body of literature still in a developmental stage.[111]

In this article, which seeks to advance that development, I have drawn heavily on the concepts of imagined community, racial formation, and racial projects in order to understand how missionaries at Welsh Mountain, while acting on the premise of delivering God's word of salvation, engaged in and contributed to racial formations of Whiteness and Blackness through their writing and work. By conflating White expectations of social order with the message of the Gospel, and through narratives of the Mission's work in the pages of denominational newspapers, missionaries came to be seen as miracle-workers successful at reducing crime, lowering taxes, and restoring a sense of order to the area. In stark contrast, Blackness was associated with sin, criminality, and idleness, and deemed in need of transformation by White missionaries.

The missionaries' interests were coupled with a drive to civilize the local populace, through instilling orderliness in everything from singing and children's clothing to the state of people's homes. The exercise of social control by these means may not have always been intentional but probably often appeared as common sense, as it was both informed by, and reflected in, the broader tropes and structure of White Protestantism and a White North America.

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[110] Vincent Harding, "The Peace Witness and Revolutionary Movements," *Mennonite Life* 22, no. 4 (October 1967). In 1955 Harding had written that "[W]e have loudly preached nonconformity to the ways of the world, and yet we have so often been slavishly and silently conformed to the American attitudes on race and segregation."—Vincent Harding, as quoted in Tobin Miller Shearer, "A Prophet Pushed Out: Vincent Harding and the Mennonites," *Mennonite Life* 25(69): https://mla.bethelks.edu/ml-archive/2015/a-prophet-pushed-out-vincent-harding-and-the-menno.php.

[111] Gollner, "How Mennonites Became White,"167.

> [I]t is not that Mennonites suddenly and consciously acted as white supremacists, but that their religious practice and their outlook on the role of Christianity in public life appropriated the privilege and power of historic white American Protestantism.[112]

In this way, formations such as White mission activity, as exemplified in the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission, may indeed be understood as a racial project, often vilifying and heathenizing Black people with the goal of transforming them according to the standards of a White social structure. From this perspective, we can begin to connect this analysis to recent incidents of violence against racialized populations, particularly as revealed by the Black Lives Matter movement. While missionaries did not wield the guns and truncheons of police officers, we can identify Whiteness in the actions of both forms of authority that are in turn elements of a White North America.

In an essay on Black Lives Matter, sociologist Natalie Byfield helpfully develops the concept of "existential crime": that which "violates the racial order of a state or disrupts other structures through which state power is 'articulated.'"[113] Today, Black Lives Matter continues to reveal the consequences of transgressing the racial order in the forms of discrimination, inequality, and violence. Byfield's analysis of race and policing draws on a sacred/secular dichotomy of police versus community, in which the unquestioned authority of law enforcement masks the same Whiteness that informed slavery, mission work, and now police brutality. In its words and actions, the Black Lives Matter movement works to eradicate the same value systems that drove the atrocities of the past and are often obscured today in the business of our daily lives. The United States is not alone in these revelations, as investigations into Residential Schools in Canada equally demand recognition that race still informs both Canada's social interactions and social structure.[114]

As Christians, we have much to account for. We must begin to

[112] Ibid., 168.

[113] Natalie P. Byfield, "Blackness and Existential Crimes in the Modern Racial State." *Connecticut Law Review* 53(3), 2021: 619-43.

[114] Anthony Siegrist, "A Failure of Good Intentions," https://collegevilleinstitute.org/bearings/failure-good-intentions/, accessed June 23, 2021.

acknowledge the ways by which we have contributed to the suffering of racialized populations and to recognize their truths. In addition to having our ears, eyes, and hearts open to their perspectives and experiences, we also need to acknowledge lines of power running through our relationships, and that we have often placed ourselves on the side of the oppressor. If we are to make any progress in regard to racial relations, we must take an honest and even painful appraisal of our past and examine what has been done in the name of God. We must listen to the words of Black Lives Matter activists with both humility and courage. In the words of Mennonite historian Ben Goossen, we 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."[115]

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[115] Ben Goossen, "Mennonite Privilege," *The Mennonite* 20, no. 2 (February 2017), 21-23.