

Introduction to *Scandinavian Immigrants and Others in America*

Jørn Brøndal

University of Southern Denmark

It is no exaggeration to claim that until recently, Scandinavian-American historiography was mainly inward-looking. Works on the history of Scandinavian-American migration and ethnicity concentrated more on the internal dynamics at work within the three main Scandinavian-American population groups than on their contacts with other groups inside the United States or elsewhere. Several important and highly regarded works were written on the migration process itself, on the building of ethnic institutions in the United States, and on the construction of Scandinavian-American identities. Yet the main orientation of these works was toward the ethnic core. The present thematic issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* proposes to change the focus, to move to the boundaries rather than the nucleus of the ethnic group, to shift the gaze in an outwardly direction. The Danish-American, Norwegian-American, Swedish-American, or simply "Scandinavian-American" immigrants and their descendants, after all, entered—and contributed to—a New World defined by its diversity, forcing Scandinavian Americans themselves to grapple with that circumstance when migrating, settling, building, and self-identifying.

In "'Drawn Together in a Blood Brotherhood': Civic Nationalism amongst Scandinavian Immigrants in the American Civil War Crucible," Anders Bo Rasmussen explores how the outbreak of the American Civil War caused ethnic elites to redirect their various attempts to build Scandinavian-American identities. A political identity constructed in partial opposition to other ethnic groups was weakened, at the same time that three identities—

which Rasmussen dubs “exclusive,” “political,” and “national” — were constructed implicitly, hand in hand with calls to enlist in the military and fight for the adopted nation. In the process, Scandinavian-American soldiers became part of a multicultural military crucible that reinforced Scandinavian-American ties to an US civic nationalist tradition.

Based on primary source material such as newspapers, guidebooks, and letters, in “Migration, Regionalism, and the Ethnic Other, 1840-1870,” Terje Mikael Hasle Joranger studies accounts of encounters between Norwegian immigrants and various ethnic “Others” inside the United States, including Native Americans, African-Americans, Chinese Americans, Irish Americans, and Yankees. Examining the racial labels employed by them in their attempts to understand and define their ethnic surroundings, Joranger finds that the Norwegian Americans engaged in a “double negotiation” in which their own perceived whiteness served both to establish Norwegian-American identity and to reinforce their position inside racialized social hierarchies in the United States.

Written in part on the basis of interviews with contemporary Danish Americans, Pernille Skovgaard Christensen’s article, “Safeguarding Danishness? Ethnicity, Religion and Acculturation among Danish Americans in Three Danish Spaces in the US,” examines and compares processes of “ethnic safeguarding” among Danish Americans across generations and in three separate locations in the Midwest. As it turns out, the degree to which endeavors to safeguard Danish-American identity vis-à-vis pressure from the ethnic surroundings succeeded has varied from place to place. Moreover, tensions based on religious differences inside the ethnic group dating all the way back to the turn of the 20th century turn out still to play a significant role in processes of self-identification and acculturation today.

Jørn Brøndal’s article, “‘In a Few Years the Red Man Will Live Only in Legend and in Cooper’s Charming Accounts’: Portrayals of American Indians in Danish Travel Literature in the Mid- and Late Nineteenth Century,” investigates how four Danish travel writers in the second half of the nineteenth century attempted to place American Indians in a narrative of “vanishing,” at the same time that they juxtaposed them with Scandinavian-American immigrants portrayed as agents of a new beginning in an exciting New World. In forming these narratives, through their perceived common “civilization” and whiteness the travel writers participated in processes of bonding with the culturally dominant Yankee population segment.

In “‘Very Welcome Home Mr. Swanson’: Swedish Americans Encounter

Homeland Swedes,” the focus shifts to Scandinavia but remains riveted on Scandinavian-American encounters, with Dag Blanck exploring the meeting in Sweden between homeland Swedes and representatives of the close to one-fifth of Swedish Americans who at some point returned to their country of birth. These returnees—representatives of a separate social and cultural community known as “Swedish America”—were seen in Sweden as a distinct group. A main aim of the article is to study the impact of these return migrants on Swedish society, as well to examine the larger significance of Swedish America and Swedish Americans for Sweden.

Spanning multiple ethnic groups, zooming in on locations in both the United States and Scandinavia, and moving across several time periods, the articles in the present issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* have one crucial quality in common: the outward gaze, the focus on encounters between Scandinavian Americans and manifold types of ethnic “Others” or, simply, between Scandinavian Americans and U.S.—and Swedish—national culture.