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Migration, Regionalism, and the Ethnic Other, 1840-1870

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Abstract: *This article shows accounts of Norwegian immigrants and their encounter with various ethnic groups in America including Native Americans, African-Americans, Chinese, Irish, and Yankees in the period between 1840 and 1870. The article presents several regions in the United States, namely the Upper Midwest, Texas, and California. The use of primary source material including newspapers, guidebooks and letters provide good insights into thoughts and attitudes, and not the least prejudice, among this Old immigrant group toward the ethnic "Other." The Norwegian immigrant group aimed at becoming good citizens through a negotiating process between the group, the dominant native-born American group and other ethnic groups in the United States. By characterizing several other ethnic groups based on race, Norwegian-Americans employed whiteness in a double negotiation, both tied to the creation of a Norwegian-American identity and in finding their place in the social hierarchy in America.*

Keywords: *Migration, Ethnicity, Identity, Whiteness, Race, Regionalism*

Several historical studies[1] have shown that nineteenth century immigrants to the United States went through a process of ethnicization from ethnic immigrants to becoming American in one way or another.[2] Most scholars

1 The article is based on a paper held at a conference held by the Organization of American Historians in Atlanta, Georgia April 13, 2014.

2 See for example Odd S. Lovoll. *The Promise Fulfilled: The promise of America : a history of the Norwegian-American people* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). A principal debate re-

think that ethnicity is not an inherent quality but rather consists of a process of negotiation between the immigrant and the dominant society.[3] The negotiation process was a continuous aspect of ethnicization, and it could take on various forms. One of these aspects of ethnicization is connected to whiteness studies, which developed in the United States in the late 20th century. Inspired by David Roediger's seminal study The Wages of Whiteness (1991, a variety of studies have focused on the ways in which recurring groups of immigrants remade themselves into a race-conscious part of the American working class and politics. The decades around 1900 saw the coming of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who were treated as "in-between people," i.e. neither entirely white nor entirely black, and only after they arrived in America would they eventually become "white". Integral to this process toward a white constructed identity was their ability to accept American notions of social hierarchy, placing whites above colored groups in the struggle for power, resources, and prestige. According to several whiteness scholars, these immigrants only became white over time, and the processes of becoming "white" and "becoming American" were tightly knit.[4] In juridical terms, this assertion may be traced back to the Naturalization Act of 1790 which stated that only "free white men" could be naturalized. The act created a strong bond between whiteness and citizenship.[5]

Whiteness is also intertwined with religion. The colonial charters in America display a divide between European white immigrants and the "barbarous" or "savage" native inhabitants. The political documents symbolize a dichotomy between civilization and Christianity on the one hand

garding the nature of ethnicity in America has been between primodialist and instrumentalist perspectives of ethnic groups, in other words referring to objective versus subjective approaches. For discussion on these perspectives, see Elliott R. Barkan, "Reflections on the Roots of American Ethnicity," *Norwegian-American Essays VI* (Oslo: Norwegian-American Historical Association, Norway Chapter and the Norwegian Emigrant Museum, 1996), 31-60.

3 April Schultz, "'The Pride of the Race Had Been Touched': The 1925 Norse-American Immigration Centennial and Ethnic Identity," *Norwegian-American Studies* 33 (1992), 267-308.

4 David R. Roediger, *The wages of whiteness: race and the making of the American working class* (London : Verso, 1991). The bibliography on whiteness studies contains is exhaustive, but some examples deserve mention. See for example Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., London, England: Harvard University Press, 1998); Nancy Foner, In A New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005); and Ronald H. Bayor, "Another Look at 'Whiteness': The Persistence of Ethnicity in American Life" in *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29:1 (Fall 2009): 13-30.

5 Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 22.

and "savages" and "barbarous nations" on the other hand. Furthermore, Matthew Frye Jacobson asserts that the relationship between race and religion has been a potent factor behind "Euro-American policies of conquest, Indian removal, slave-trading, and disenfranchisement" from the early 1600s to the early 1800s.[6] As religion and ethnic customs did persist, these differences continued to divide groups several decades after a geographic area was settled.[7]

The Ethnic "Other"

Scholars must take into account conditions both in the sending country and in the receiving country in order to explain how immigrants interacted with other ethnic groups. Despite continuous immigration during the first decades of the nineteenth century, Norwegian society largely remained a homogeneous society during this period as compared with other countries in Europe. Probably as much as 96-97 percent of the population majority was ethnic Norwegian in the first part of the nineteenth century. According to the 1865 population census the largest number of immigrants lived along the Oslofjord in southeastern Norway and along the coast in Northern Norway. Inland counties had a relatively lower distribution of immigrants. We must note that these same inland counties made up the majority of Norwegian emigrants to America when migration streams became regular from 1836 and onwards.[8]

Racial attitudes toward a perceived "Other" prevailed in Norway prior to the era of organized transatlantic migration. In 1814 Norway had gained its independence from Denmark and entered a personal union with Sweden. A dichotomy was inherent in the Norwegian Constitution that was drawn by the constituent assembly and passed on the Seventeenth of May the same year. On the one hand the Constitution of 1814 was liberal in terms of im-

6 Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 23, 31.

7 A study of ninety-nine small Iowa towns in 1994 states that white ethnics regard themselves not as American-Norwegian but as particular groups. Tom W. Rice and Brent Steele, "White Ethnic Diversity and Community Attachment in Small Iowa Towns," *Social Science Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (June 2001), 405, cited in Ronald H. Bayor, "Another Look at 'Whiteness': The Persistency of Ethnicity in American Life" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29:1 (Fall 2009): 18.

8 A shift in migration patterns occurred in the mid 1840s, from a country of net immigration to becoming a country of net emigration. Einar Niemi, "Regimeskifte, innvandrere og fremmede," in Einar Niemi, Jan Eivind Myhre, and Knut Kjeldstadli, *Norsk innvandringshistorie*, vol. 2 (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2003), 18-25.

migration policy and in terms of giving the right to vote to a larger portion of the population than any other country in Europe at the time. Yet racial attitudes were imbedded in the Norwegian Constitution. For example, Article A 2 in the fundamental act of that year states that the Evangelical Lutheran religion was the established Church of the Kingdom of Norway and that Jews, Jesuits and monastic orders were excluded.[9] During the nation building process that followed the passing of the Norwegian Constitution until the mid-nineteenth century official state policy toward non-Christian peoples like the Jews and the Samis became more authoritative. In earlier times Norwegian authorities gradually developed a perception of minority groups as marginal and they now took to an assimilationist stance. This increased awareness of these minority groups also shaped the population's attitudes toward minorities in Norwegian society. According to Norwegian historian Einar Niemi cultural prejudice coupled with nationalist motives were key factors behind the exclusion of the Jews.[10]

The skepticism among Norwegian authorities toward minorities can also be tied to religion. The strong connection between a Norwegian identity and religion later followed immigrants to the United States and influenced them in their portrayal of other ethnic groups. For example, the Norwegian clergy displayed their antagonism toward religious factions including Jews and Mormons as the former regarded these minority groups as non-Christian. Other religious minorities including Quakers and Haugeans, which theological leanings differed from those of the Norwegian State Church, also fell victims to the pressure. In addition to the Roman-Catholic Church, these groups proved a threat to the nation building process in Norway where the Evangelical-Lutheran Church was meant to play a significant role.[11] Therefore, it is no wonder that dissenting groups including Haugean and Quaker sympathizers were heavily represented in the first Norwegian emigrant party in 1825. Norwegian peasants, who acquired majority seats in the Norwegian parliament, the *Storting*, at the expense of Norwegian officials from the early 1830s supported the exclusion of Jews. The peasants' constitutional conservatism was an obstacle to lifting the ban exclusion.

9 Betty A. Bergland, "Norwegian Immigrants and Indianerne" in the Landtaking, 1838-1862," in *Norwegian-American Studies* no. 35 (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian- American Historical Association, 2000): 342-343.

10 Niemi, *Regimeskifte, innvandrere og fremmede*, 11-13, 25-32.

11 Niemi, *Regimeskifte, innvandrere og fremmede*, 81-82.

One of their main objectives, the ban on lay preaching, was lifted in 1842 and full religious freedom was established three years later. An increased liberalism set in about 1840 and gradually reduced the animosity toward the Jews, and the exclusion of Jews was abolished by law in 1851.[12] The racial ideology embedded in the Constitution thus was kept alive by a peasant majority in parliament for more than 35 years following the making of the constitution.

A majority of all emigrants between 1825 and the Civil War hailed from the Norwegian peasant society, and it is probable that many emigrants brought their racial ideology from Norway to the United States. Religion influenced how Norwegians and other immigrants groups from overwhelmingly Protestant states in northern and western Europe regarded Native Americans and blacks, but the relationship between whiteness and religion also made Norwegian Americans question the racial credentials of other European immigrant groups. The majority of Norwegian immigrants were Lutherans, and their religion was accepted by the native-born white Anglo-American elite in American society. Anti-Catholic sentiments prevailed among Lutherans for a long time after immigration. For example, the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America acted as a preserver of culture and tradition among Norwegian rural immigrants and effectively opposed the "Papist" doctrine of the Catholic Church. By emphasizing a common culture, a historic past and shared values and loyalties from the home country, the Norwegian Lutheran church bodies were able to establish ethnic boundaries by retaining a common faith and the use of the Norwegian language.[13]

This article aims to show to what extent Norwegian-American accounts of the ethnic "Other" in primary source material in the period 1840-1870 employed whiteness in a double negotiation, both tied to the creation of a Norwegian-American identity and in finding their place in the social hierarchy in the United States. I have employed qualitative sources including newspaper articles, guidebooks and America letters from several regions in the United States, namely the Upper Midwest, Texas, and California.

12 Niemi, *Regimeskifte, innvandrere og fremmede*, 13, 98-105.

13 For example, the Norwegian language was a significant part of a Norwegian-American ethnic identity, and pastors of the Norwegian Lutheran Church kept the language alive for several decades after the community was established. In the isolated Norwegian settlement in Bosque County, for example, Texas Norwegians formed an isolated minority group, and their religion was a minority religion. The language helped keep the Lutherans together as the church used Norwegian for seventy-five years after its founding in 1848. Martin T. Jenson, *History of Four Mile Settlement and Church* (Dallas, Texas, 1972), 44-46.

This primary source material provides good insights into thoughts and attitudes about human experiences in the past and may be representative of the encounter between an Old immigrant group, the Norwegians, and other ethnic groups in America. I will first present Norwegian characteristics primarily on the Native Americans but also on African-Americans, Chinese, Irish, and Yankees. I will later discuss the place of Norwegian immigrants in American society[14]

The Ethnic Other in early Norwegian Migration Literature

To what extent did Norwegian immigrants portray other ethnic groups in early migration literature, and how did they characterize the Ethnic Other? In the following we will study three guidebooks with an emphasis on the portrayal of Native Americans. This literature includes three guidebooks and one diary that were written in the period 1838-1867. The first volume, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America*, was written between the time of his emigration in 1837 and his death in 1838. Published in Christiania in 1838, it was the first guidebook on America that came out in Norway.[15] With its scholarly interpretation and relatively objective emphasis on facts about America, his guidebook is primarily aimed at providing practical information for Norwegian immigrants. The original thirty-nine page book lists 13 questions on topics such as geography, the nature of the land, prices and wages, religion, possible dangers, and general guiding advice. Ole Rynning, who resided in the Beaver Creek colony in Illinois, only refers to other ethnic groups in a few examples in the book. He portrays Native Americans, for example, as "savage" and that they "would not accustom themselves to a regular life and to industry."[16] Furthermore, Native Ameri-

14 Literature on "whiteness" in Norway is limited, but a few articles exist on the topic. See Orm Øverland, "Becoming White in 1881: A Norwegian Immigrant Acquires an American Identity," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23:4 (2004): 132-141; Orm Øverland, "Intruders on Native Ground: Memories of the Land-Taking in Norwegian Immigrant Letters," ed. Udo Hebel, *Transnational American Memories* (Berlin and New York: Walter DeGruyter, 2009): 79-103

15 Ole Rynning, 28 years old at the time of his emigration to America in 1837, was a pastor's son and thus made part of the class of officials in Norway. His democratic bent made him many friends, especially among the peasant class. See Theodore Blegen, "Historical Introduction," ed. Theodore Blegen, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1926), 1-22.

16 "True Account of America for the Information and Help of Peasant and Commoner," ed. Theodore Blegen, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical

cans are mentioned in a separate chapter on disease and wild animals. Rynning's juxtaposition of Indians with wild animals here underlines the "savage" nature of the native Americans. However, Rynning admits that there is no threat from Indians in the state of Illinois because they have been removed from this portion of the country to an area farther west. He even declares that "they are very good-natured, and never begin hostilities when they are not affronted."[17]

In his *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants*, published in Christiania, Norway in 1844, Johan Reinert Reiersen equally seldom makes a mention of the Native American population. A newspaper editor and promoter of emigration, Reiersen left his editorship and emigrated to America in 1843. He wrote the *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants* as a personal narrative based on his own travels in the upper Mississippi Valley and the territory that was referred to as the Republic of Texas. The book was published after Reiersen returned to Norway in the spring of 1844. The following year Reiersen emigrated with a party from Lillesand in southern Norway to establish a Norwegian colony in North America. He and his party settled in Henderson County, Texas, but he eventually relocated in Van Zandt County farther northeast in 1848.[18] In several instances, Reiersen refers to Native Americans as "wild" in his *Pathfinder*.[19] Here, he alludes to the savage nature of the group in the same manner as Rynning, although he refers to them as "harmless." For example, he refers to them as cultivators, miners, and land cessions as prerequisites to white settlement.[20] Thus there is an inconsistency in the presentation of Native Americans as "savages" on the one hand and their harmless nature on the other.[21]

Johan Schröder 's guidebook *Skandinaverne i de Forenede Stater og Canada* (*The Scandinavians in the United States and Canada*), published both in La Crosse, Wisconsin and in Christiania, Norway in 1867, includes

Association, 1926), 75.

17 *Ole Rynnings's True Account*, 90.

18 Frank G. Nelson, "Introduction" in Kenneth O. Bjork, ed., *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants by Johan Reinert Reiersen* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1981): 3-4, 43-49. Reiersen also refers to blacks, but there is no record that he questioned slavery openly or acted against the system. Op.cit., 51.

19 Johan Reinert Reiersen, *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants* in Kenneth O. Bjork, ed., *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants by Johan Reinert Reiersen* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1981), 159.

20 Op.cit., 88, 150, 172, 210.

21 "Reiersen's Foreword," ed. Kenneth O. Bjork, *Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants by Johan Reinert Reiersen* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1981), 68.

practical information that is useful for potential emigrants. Thus, the content is similar to that in the two former publications. Although the narrative is based on facts about Canada and the United States, the author also bases it on personal recollections. The author mentions one instance when he stayed with Native Americans during his travels along the Lawrence River in Lower Canada. Schröder's visit to the Indian tribe was intentional, and he relates how he acquired knowledge about their way of life through conversations based on mutual respect with tribal members.[22] I wish to include this source although Schröder's stay among the Indians took place in Canada and not in the United States. The narrative may provide some comparisons with other findings relating to the perception of Norwegian immigrants toward other groups. During his stay Schröder befriended several members of the tribe, and he sides with them in cases when they receive unfair treatment. For example, he mentions an incident where his Indian friend Joseph Watso is denied to be handed a glass of cognac during their visit to a French wine store. Schröder writes,

> I was still too young in America to perceive the privileges offered by the color of the skin; it was shameful to witness the manner in which an unimportant store clerk could address a man who had known dangers and difficulties.[23]

Schröder also responds to the great Indian scare in Europe that resulted from the Dakota conflict in 1862 as follows:

> Following the last great Indian war in Minnesota a general panic scare for the read man is prevalent. In Europe the presence of Indians is used as a means of halting emigration, and a large portion of Americans also share this scare toward them. Both the above mentioned and later encounters with Indians have taught me that where the European meets them in an open manner and treat them as equals he has nothing to fear of them in a country where the government and private corporations has not intended to betray, subdue or insult them. In this respect the Canadian government has fulfilled its promise. It has been reluctant to make treacherous treaties with the Red and it has retained the white population from displaying its ownership interests toward the Indian, so there is now a relationship based on good will between both races.[24]

22 Johan Schrøder, *Skandinaverne i de forenede Stater og Canada : med Indberetninger og Oplysninger fra 200 skandinaviske Settlementer : en Ledetraad for Emigranten fra det gamle Land og for Nybyggeren i Amerika* (La Crosse: privately published, 1867), 36-45.

23 My translation. Op.cit., 42.

24 Op.cit., 42-43.

In his narrative Schröder shows a more friendly attitude toward Native Americans as compared to the two other authors of guidebooks. Whereas Schröder knew members of an Indian tribe personally, the two other authors probably did not. We may believe that his friendship with members of the Indian tribe may account for the positive description as compared to the more distant and observing narratives offered by Rynning and Reiersen. Consequently, the attitude toward the Native Americans among Norwegian immigrants is not unanimous. In order to expand our knowledge of Norwegian-Americans' portrayal of other ethnic groups we need to investigate how other primary source material could help us shed light upon this matter. We will now turn toward the most extensive source in this presentation, namely Norwegian-American immigrant letters.

America letters

Letters and contemporary reports offer additional valuable insight into how Norwegian-Americans perceived other ethnic groups. America letters, i.e. letters written by Norwegian immigrants in the United States to acquaintances, friends, and relatives in Norway, provide interesting material for our purpose. According to Norwegian scholar Orm Øverland, "America letters form a rich and unique material in order to understand Norwegian emigration to North America and the life of immigrants in the new land."[25] All told, I have studied 221 America letters that were written in the period 1838-1870.[26] To what extent did Norwegian immigrants refer to other ethnic groups in America letters as compared to their portrayal in guidebooks?

In the mid-1850s a Norwegian immigrant, Johan G. Gasmann of Appleton, Wisconsin, wrote a letter to friends in Norway in which he stated the following:

25 Orm Øverland, "Innledning: De tidlige Amerikabrevene," *Fra Amerika til Norge, Norske utvandrerbrev 1838*-1857 I, eds. Orm Øverland and Steinar Kjærheim (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1992), 39.

26 All told I have studied 221 letters that were included in a book series of Norwegian-American immigrant letters between 1838 and 1870. I studied 128 letters in the first volume that covers the period 1838-1858, 69 letters in volume two for the period from 1858-1868, and 24 letters for the period 1869-1870. The two first volumes are published in Norway, whereas the last volume, which covers the period 1838-1870, is published in the United States. *Fra Amerika til Norge. Norske utvandrerbrev, Vol. I 1838-1857*, eds. Orm Øverland and Steinar Kjærheim (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1992); *Fra Amerika til Norge. Norsk utvandrerbrev II 1858-1868*, eds. Orm Øverland and Steinar Kjærheim (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1992); *From America to Norway: Norwegian-American Immigrant Letters 1838-1914 I: 1838-1870*, ed. Orm Øverland (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2012).

> […] I have been able to acquire knowledge about how one administers the [country]. Everything here is organized almost as in Norway, although in a freer manner and based on equal rights. […] If only real Americans populated this country, perhaps things would have been better – because they are on a higher level of civilization than the mass of people in Europe. Here one can just see the difference; one can hardly imagine more crude people than those who arrive from Ireland and some Germans; the Norwegians are also ignorant, but basically they are good and have some moral – and the Americans do not regard anyone higher than the Norwegians. Americans always say that the Norwegians makes [*sic!*] very valuable citizens – on the other hand an there is a growing animosity against the Irish and also generally against the Catholics. [27]

Here, Gasmann gives a description of Norwegians as a Scandinavian group that seems well established in American society; Norwegians are regarded as valuable citizens at the top of a constructed ethno-racial hierarchy second only to Americans. To what extent is Gasmann's description of Norwegian immigrants and their interaction with the Ethnic Otherin various regions in America in the early period of immigration between 1840 and 1880 representative? In the following we will explore some encounters between Norwegian immigrants and non-Norwegians in a transnational context.

In total, letters and reports that refer to encounters between Norwegian immigrants in the period 1840-mid 1860s are rather limited in spite of the source material studied. Most letters exclude any mention of other ethnic groups, revealing a certain disinterest in other groups. Why don't these early letters tell us more about Norwegians and their encounters with other groups? According to Øverland, early America letters in most cases were not considered private in the sense that the writer expressed personal feelings such as animosity or positive thoughts toward the ethnic group or to their family. Rather, early America letters were public and were often copied in Norway for wider distribution or they were printed in a newspaper.[28] If we accept this view, it may explain why a great number of letters include practical information relating to the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, prices of grain, livestock, and a mention of family and neighbors from the parish or region of origin in Norway. Another explanation is that a great number of

27 Letter dated December 15, 1855 (?) from Johan G. Gasmann, Appleton, Outagamie County, Wisconsin to Lt. Col. Johan Mathias Rye and his wife Christiane Elisabeth of Horten, Norway, printed in *Fra Amerika til Norge. Norske utvandrerbrev 1837-1858* I, eds. Orm Øverland and Steinar Kjærheim (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1992), 372-373.

28 In other words, according to Øverland, "an America letter was expected to be read in the hamlet or in the rural parish, and it was not unusual that copies of an America letter could wander across both parish and county boundaries." Øverland et al, *Fra Amerika til Norge*, 26-29.

America letters have not been preserved and that only a limited number of letters are available from this period. Several early Norwegian immigrants to the United States were illiterate. Training in reading was introduced in Norway in 1736 and became effective a few years later, but not until 1889 did the Norwegian state provide seven years of compulsory education.[29]

Norwegian immigration and settlement

When Johan Gasmann wrote his letter in the mid-1850s, thirty years had passed since the first organized migration from Norway. Chain migration and a strong clustering characterized Norwegian settlement patterns from the onset of emigration and formed a significant condition for the formation of Norwegian ethnic enclaves in the United States. Between 1825 and 1865 about 50,000 Norwegians emigrated to America, making Norway the largest emigrant country in Europe in proportion to its population with the exception of Ireland.[30]

Although the first immigrants settled in Upstate New York, the principal stream of Norwegian immigrants to the United States moved to the Upper Midwest in the mid-1830s. From then on, Norwegian migration to the USA became an integral part of the general westward migrant movement in the United States. At the time when Johan Gasmann wrote his letter, the mainstream of Norwegian settlers had established colonies in a fan-shape pattern stretching from Illinois to Wisconsin, Iowa, the southeastern portion of Minnesota, and in scattered locations in Texas.[31] Once a settlement area was filled up newcomers would move to a new location where they could secure cheap and good government land. Letters written to relatives and friends in settlement areas farther east, to the Norwegian press, and to their areas of origin in Norway induced more people to migrate to areas that were newly settled. Regionally defined Norwegian ethnic communities were found in areas with concentrations of immigrants from similar regions.[32]

29 See Regjeringen website (accessed Nov. 9, 2015): https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/education/school/the-norwegian-education-system/id445118/

30 Odd S. Lovoll, *En norskamerikansk historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 10-11, 15, 37-38, 104-105.

31 Carlton C. Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement in the United States* (Northfield, Minn. : Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1938, reprinted in New York: Arno Press, 1970), 63, 79, 113, 135, 165, 172, 177, 194-195.

32 For example, Norwegian immigration to Texas in two distinct phases to a large extent were organized from Norway and had a strong regional influence. In the first phase around 1850 editor Reiersen and other

Overwhelmingly rural, Norwegian immigrants were attracted by the lure of land. In this respect the pull of the Homestead Act in 1862 can not be overstated. According to historian Jon Gjerde the vast stretches of land in the American West promoted ethnic cohesiveness and segregation among ethnic and religious groups. As immigration traditions were carried westward by migration chains that linked people and cultural traditions across space, they were reformulated in the West where immigrants lived in culturally defined settlements centered on ethnic institutions.[33] Smaller contingents of Norwegian immigrants also deviated from the general westward migrant movement. Advised by enthusiastic individuals a number of Norwegians immigrated to Texas in the 1840s, whereas Norwegian migration to Utah was made up of religious converts to the faith of the Latter Days Saints or the Mormons.[34] In general, the ethnic cohesiveness created by larger concentrations of Norwegian rural immigrants served as a buffer against contact with other ethnic groups.

A similar empire-building process took place in the United States in the nineteenth century. Federal Indian policies and the cession of Indian land to the federal government in the nineteenth century were central elements in the westward territorial expansion of the nation building process in the United States. The removal of the Native American population became a significant precondition of European immigration and settlement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

influential Norwegians organized emigrant parties from several rural communities in Agder county. In the second phase from 1867 to 1915, Norwegian workers from Hedmark county were recruited as farm laborers for established Norwegian farmers in Texas. Odd Magnar Syversen and Derwood Johnson, *Norge i Texas. Et bidrag til norsk emigrasjonshistorie* (Stange: Stange historielag, 1982), 107-125. Regional settlements were also carried westward with the general migration movement. The small island of Puget Island in the Columbia River between Washington and Oregon, for example, had the largest concentration of emigrants from the region of South Helgeland in Norway. Gertrude Tingelstad, *Scandinavians in the Silverton country: their arrival and early settlement* (Corvallis, Or.: Gertrude Tingelstad, 1978), 5-12.

33 Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West, Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 1-17, 200-202.

34 Individuals such as the prominent journalist Johan Reinert Reiersen, Mrs. Elise Wärenskjold, and Cleng Peerson were instrumental in bringing Norwegian immigrants to Texas by advertising the land, the climate, and the prospects for raising livestock in Norwegian-American newspapers. Two groups from Northern Norway, the Sami and the Kvens, i.e. Finns who settled in Northern Norway and their descendants, also make part of Norwegian immigration to North America. Overseas migration for Kvens is characterized by different migration patterns. The Sami emigration from Northern Norway took place in the 1890s and is therefore outside the scope of this paper. See Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement*, 196-208; Einar Niemi, "American , Norwegian, or North American Dilemmas of Identity for Immigrants from Northern Norway in the United States, 1900-1930," ed. T.W. Nichol, *Interpreting the Promise of America, Essays in Honor of Odd Sverre Lovoll* (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2002), 149-173.

Skilling-Magazin

Letters sent by Norwegian immigrants in the early migration period rarely mention Native Americans, but in cases where they are mentioned, they are described according to racial characteristics. In this study I wish to provide complementary information on the portrayal of other ethnic groups in a publication in Norway. This information may serve as a complementary source in addition to guidebooks and America letters written by individuals who had observed conditions in America. By comparing literature on Native Americans that existed in Norway and comparing this information to portrayals of Native Americans in the United States we may find that certain attitudes and characteristics in America had been transplanted with the emigrants.

From the 1830s through the 1850s immigrants had access to an increasing wealth of travel literature, guidebooks, letters regarding conditions in North America. According to Betty Bergland, the first reports written in Norwegian during this period "established ways of thinking that were often repeated in subsequent eyewitness accounts."[35] Travel and eyewitness accounts rendered information about various ethnic groups more realistically. More important, they proved to be a counterpoint to romantic descriptions of Native Americans in literature in the immigrant's country of origin which filled readers with misleading visions of America.[36]

Such romantic accounts of Native Americans appeared in the Norwegian weekly *Skilling-Magazin* in the mid-nineteenth century. The *Skilling-Magazin* was a popular weekly that was established in Christiania, present-day Oslo, in 1834 and issued until 1891. The magazine was illustrated and aimed at spreading general beneficial knowledge.[37] I registered articles on ethnic minorities in America, especially on Native Americans, inuits and blacks. All told, 25 articles published between 1835 and 1886 relate to these groups and the United States in particular ranging from the conditions of

35 Bergland, *Norwegian immigrants*, 336.

36 Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), 146, 147-148.

37 The magazine was the first illustrated weekly ever published in Norway. Its full title was *Skilling-Magazin til almennyttige Kundskabers Utbredelse* (Skilling-Magazin for the Spread of General Beneficial Knowledge). The *Billed-Magazin* (Picture Magazine), published 1868-70, and the monthly *Skandinavisk Billed-Magazin* (Scandinavian Picture Magazine), both edited by Svein Nilsson and published in Madison, Wisconsin the same years as the *Billed-Magasin* were both influenced by the *Skilling-Magazin*. Odd S. Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land* (St. Paul, MN, 2010), 234; http://snl.no/Massemedier_i_Norge. (Accessed November 27, 2012).

blacks in Tennessee, Native American tribes in North America, and Chinese in Idaho. For example, Native Americans are mentioned ten times both in separate articles and as part of larger series in this period, The description of the land, on the other hand, in many cases is linked to the expansion of white European immigration on the North American continent and the settlement process. The great majority of articles on Native Americans appear between 1839 and 1860. There are two main approaches to the presentation of Native Americans; in relation to mental and physiological traits and in relation to the advance of civilization. In several articles natives are characterized according to their appearance. Some articles express a negative racial attitude toward the natives such as the following article that appeared in the *Skilling-Magazin* in 1839 in the "temperate zones to the North and the South":

> The race seems to resemble that of the Mongolians. Their color is red as copper, their bodies are well proportioned without disformities. The forehead is low (…) above the eyes; his nose is short and the lips are protruded. Native Americans seem to be underdeveloped in relation to the other nations, [and] even the Negroes regard them with contempt; to a great extent they are lazy, and their glance and expressions reveal the idleness of their soul, their eye look forward with a dark, almost insensitive expression which is also mixed with a certain mildness; what characterizes the Noble Savage today also applies to the Age of discovery, (…) primarily they also kept the identical national characteristic: laziness and weakness (…).[38]

The stereotypes mentioned are not the only ones found in *Skilling-Magazin*. Physiological traits among Native Americans are also prevalent in an article printed in the magazine in 1845:

> With the exception of certain tribes, who, according to the advice and fatherly admonitions of the missionaries have given up being always on the move and the miserable life that they have led until now, these Indians still possess the […] customs and practices of their forebears. Their foremost virtue is hospitality; a guest is perceived in person as a holy person. One gives him the best one has in wigwam or cabin, the most comfortable seat and the softest bed (…).[39]

Although Native Americans are generally portrayed in a more nuanced fashion than in the example from 1839, the underlying premise in the examples mentioned is consonant with the views of a dominant white civiliza-

38 *Skilling-Magazin* June 5, 1841.

39 *Skilling-Magazin* July 12, 1845.

tion. Although Native Americans in general were characterized as primitive as seen from a Norwegian point of view, the view was still that they could become more civilized through acculturation. The premise in the characterization of Native Americans is also consonant with the view of the white colonizers who regarded their own culture as superior and dominant in relation to the Native American culture. This view is closely tied to the white immigrant's attitude toward the land as a means of livelihood.

The vast expanses of the American continent exerted an influence on the reader of *Skilling-Magazin* during the entire period of its publication. The article entitled *Det nye Gebet Wisconsin i de forenede Stater* (*The new Territory of Wisconsin in the United States*) may serve as an illustration. Although the author remains anonymous the article is clearly aimed at a Norwegian audience and prospective emigrants as it relates to the first reports written in Norwegian about America, namely Ole Rynning's *True Account about America for Peasant and Common Man*. The book was published in Christiania the previous year, in 1838. Besides, the article gives a positive account of fertile soil, a sound climate, an abundance of water power, and a good mixture of wooden land and prairie. The positive accounts of Wisconsin Territory are clear: to serve as a means of attracting prospective agriculturalists.[40]

A shift in thematic focus regarding the Native Americans and America occurs in the early 1860s due to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 and the Dakota Conflict of 1862. Among others, the *Skilling-Magazine* presented detailed accounts from the Dakota War in Minnesota in the fall of 1862:

> In Minnesota the Indians continue their rebellious atrocity acts. More than 500 persons are murdered (…). It seems that several of our countrymen have suffered under the Indian attacks. An American newspaper has reported the following: "The colony at Norway Lake mostly consists of Norwegian and Swedes. Saturday evening on September [sic] 20 they were on their way to church, but on their way home they were attacked by several roaming Indian bands who killed fourteen people in all. (…) The fourteen people who were murdered on Wednesday had been mutilated in a terrible manner. The Indians had cut off the ears of some, while they had cut off the nose, the hand, or several fingers of others. Womens' cheeks and breasts were cut off and their clothing was burned. John Lomberg and Even Rensen buried thirteen bodies and put them in a grave."[41]

40 The article states that it "contains very detailed information about what emigrants would like to know, but also shows that only individuals with money and zeal for work could expect to find success there." *Skilling-Magazin* July 13, 1839; Bergland, *Norwegian immigrants*, 330.

41 *Skilling-Magazin* October 18, 1862.

Following the Dakota Conflict relations between settlers and the Indians would enter a phase of hostility and suspicion. Betty Bergland points out that "stories of this event would be told and retold, traveling back and forth across the prairies and the Atlantic Ocean for generations to come."[42]

To what extent did the Dakota War result in a more negative attitude toward Native Americans in letters written by Norwegian immigrants to America? My source material only to a limited degree reflects negative reports about Native Americans following the Dakota conflict in 1862. In addition to the information listed in *Skilling-Magazin*, Native Americans are only mentioned in negative terms in four out of 65 Norwegian-American immigrant letters between 1863 and 1870.[43] It is doubtful that a lack of reference to "wild Indians" means that Norwegian-Americans were not preoccupied with Native Americans. However, their focus was still on their daily chores and their work to make a livelihood for themselves and their family in America. For example, in a letter from 1867 Hans Nilsen Gamkinn writes:

> (…) And now I'm going to start on another house so I won't be able to do more this summer (…) They will begin the wheat harvest in a few weeks and then I'll have to help Anders Lunderengen for a few days binding wheat (…).[44]

In sum, the stereotypical information on Native Americans in the *Skilling-Magazin* in Norway is more or less consonant with the portrayal of "savages" in books and guidebooks. Although references to the group are not frequent, they made part of a larger number of articles on indigenous peoples on various continents. Apart from Native Americans these articles, which appear as series throughout a number of volumes, include for example information on Lapps in Scandinavia, Inuits on Greenland, and Australian aborigines. Native Americans thus form part of a wider scope of presenta-

42 Bergland, *Norwegian immigrants*, 344.

43 Reference to the Indian scare is mentioned in the following letters: Letter dated January 19, 1863 from Elling Ellingsen Wold, Ole Aslesen Myran, and Ingeborg Helgesdatter and Gunder Helgesen Skare, Decorah, Iowa to Helge Gundersen, Sigdal, Eggedal, Buskerud, Norway; letter dated December 26, 1864 from Hellik Olsen Lehovd, Salem, Minnesota to Ole Helgesen and Joran Paulsdatter Lehovd, Flesberg, Buskerud, Norway; letter dated April 15-30, 1867 from Elise Wærenskjold, Four Mile Prairie, Texas to Thorvald Dannevig, Lillesand, Aust-Agder, Norway; letter dated September 5, 1868 from Gunder Helgesen Skare, Minneapolis, Minnesota to Helge Gundersen Nerdrum (Skare), Eggedal, Norway. Øverland et al, *From America to Norway II*, 314-315, 328-329, 376, 408.

44 Letter dated July 26, 1867 from Hans Nilsen Gamkinn, Wiota, Wisconsin to Nils Jensen Gamkinn, Gran, Hadeland, Norway. Øverland et al, *From America to Norway II*, 383.

tions on indigenous peoples. Knowing that the aim of the magazine was to spread knowledge to the common woman and man, we may say that there is an interest in race and minority peoples in various parts of the world. More important, the information on Native Americans, for example, was made known to prospective emigrants. Consequently, Norwegian emigrants they had the opportunity to alter or adjust their presentation in their personal encounter in their new land.

An eyewitness account

In addition to America letters eyewitness accounts could both supplement and give a more nuanced picture of encounters between Norwegian immigrants and Native Americans. One account of interest is the incident in Bosque County, Texas in 1867 when Ole T. Nystel was captured by Comanche Indians and spent three months in captivity. About twenty years later he published his autobiography. A newcomer to Bosque County, Ole Nystel was 14 years old at the time of the incident. Interestingly, his remembrances are practically void of prejudice toward his captors. The style thus bears semblance to the objective style found in America letters.[45] One would think that the author would write about his captivity in a less nuanced manner. However, two factors may contribute to the opposite.

First, Ole Nystel wrote his memoirs about twenty years following the incident. The long span of time that occurred between Ole Nystel's captivity and the time when he wrote his sketch probably made him sort out his thoughts in a more nuanced and distant manner. Second, Norwegians in Texas were not affected by the Dakota rebellion or any other Native American uprising and did not experience a collective distrust and hatred toward the Native Americans.

Ole Nystel's apologetic views from captivity falls in line with Johan Schröder's narrative from about the same time period. The two have in common that they got acquainted with the Native Americans and stayed with them for a while – although under different circumstances. Although

45 Ole T. Nystel, *Lost and Found: Three Months with the Wild Indians. A Brief Sketch of the Life of Ole Nystel embracing His Experience While in Captivity with the Comanches and subsequent liberation from them* (Bosque Memorial Museum, [1888] 1994). The incident is also mentioned in Elise Wærenskjold's letter dated April 15-30, 1867 to Thorvald Dannevig in Lillesand, Aust-Agder, Norway. See Øverland et al, *From America to Norway II*, 376.

the research material is limited, the letters show that Norwegian immigrants portrayed other ethnic groups differently.

Encounters between Norwegian immigrants and other ethnic groups

Do Norwegian letter writers offer a different portrayal of other ethnic groups than Native Americans in letters as compared to guidebooks and the newspaper articles of the *Skilling-Magazin*? African-Americans in several instances were regarded with sympathy in comparison with Native Americans. Norwegian-Americans portrayed African Americans in a positive manner as in a letter written by Elise Wærenskjold in Texas to her friend in Norway in 1868:[46]

> You probably know that I lease the farm to Negroes on a share cropping basis. I would rather rent a white man during the year if I could have a Norwegian; but after the war it is not possible any more, and those Norwegians who arrive go to Bosque [County] which is presently the largest Norwegian settlement. Otherwise the Negroes behave very well, far better than white Americans.[47]

In her letter, Elise Wærenskjold refers to African Americans in a positive manner, although she writes that she would prefer renting the land to a Norwegian man. Yet her attitude does not hide the fact that she was living in a state where slavery was legal until the end of the Civil War. Mrs. Wærenskjold was an open-minded and liberal woman, which is shown in her numerous letters to family and friends in Norway. Hellek Branson of Eureka, Kansas, a Civil War veteran, indirectly echoes Mrs. Wærenskjold's positive attitudes toward African-Americans. In 1867 he states the following in his letter to his brother in Norway:

> We have been against slavery both I and my sons and that was partly the reason why I moved to Kansas. It was here that the struggle started between those in favor of slavery and the Freedom Party. But thanks God we now are the victors and slavery has been put to an end, and we truly can say that this is the Land of Freedom.[48]

46 Elise Wærenskjold , a pastor's daughter Norway, emigrated to Texas with her husband Johan M. C. W. Wærenskjold in 1847. Her numerous letters back to Norway in part resulted in a significant number of emigrants from Norway to the Lone Star state. Syversen and Johnson, *Norge i Texas*, 56-58.

47 Letter dated September 29, 1868 from Elise Wærenskjold, Prairieville in Kaufman County, Texas to Kaja Poppe, Lillesand, Norway, printed in Øverland et al, *Fra Amerika til Norge II*, 468.

48 Letter dated July 22, 1867 from Hellek Branson (Hellek Gulbrandsen Land), Eureka, Greenwood County, Alaska to Ole Gulbrandsen Lande, Flesberg, Buskerud, Norway, Øverland et al, *Fra Amerika til Norge II*, 413.

The writer of this letter mentions ideological reasons behind his move to Kansas.[49] His abolitionist sympathies are representative of the points of view of other Norwegians in the United States, even those who lived in states where slavery was considered legal. Slavery created a heated debate among many congregations that formed part of the Norwegian Synod, a transplantation of the Norwegian State Church. Influenced by the conservative Missouri Synod, the refusal of pastors in the Norwegian Synod to consider slavery a "sin" and their orthodox interpretation of the Bible alienated many Norwegian immigrants.[50]

Comments on the racial characteristics of Chinese people also appear in letters sent by Norwegians from the United States to Norway. The source material available is rather limited, but the example below may serve as an example of racial prejudice. In a letter written in Mill Valley, California in 1859 a Norwegian-born resident, Frithjof Axel Meidell, wrote to his mother about his experiences. In his description he states that the Native Americans and the Chinese in the region never agreed. Furthermore, he mocks both groups by referring to an instance when some Native Americans had "captured" a Chinese man. According to the writer, the Native Americans thought that the Chinese were a tribe of lost Indians that long since vanished. By testing the man's ability to shoot with a bow and arrow and by throwing him into a small lake to make him swim they wanted him to prove that he was one of them. In his letter Meidell refers to the Chinese as a "poor ape," revealing a powerful sense of distance between himself and the Chinese. For example, when Meidell compared the Chinese to a type of animal, he not only elevated himself above the Chinese in terms of racial supremacy but also as a human being.[51]

The sense of creating boundaries between Norwegians and other ethnic groups is especially prevalent in the case of the Irish. In his letter Johan

49 Hellek Branson supposedly moved to Eureka in 1858 and participated in "homeguard of settlers against the Indians" during the Civil War. Martin Ulvestad, *Nordmændene i Amerika, Deres Historie og Rekord* (Minneapolis, Minn.: History Book Company's Forlag, 1907), 273.

50 Lovoll, *Det løfterike landet*, 95, 117-119.

51 Letter dated December 1, 1859 from Frithjof Axel Meidell in Mill Valley, Calaveras County, California to his mother Laura Christine Catharine Meidell in Copenhagen, Denmark, see Øverland et al, *Fra Amerika til Norge* II, 111. The Chinese are also mentioned in a letter of September 27, 1869 from Christopher Jacobson, Hot Creek, Nevada to Hans Jakobsen Hilton, Kløfta, Ullensaker, Norway. Christopher Jacobson owns a share in a mine and refers to Chinese workers and their cheap labor. He writes, "If the Chinese come where I am, I'll have to make use of them one way or another and make money on their work if I can." Øverland, *From America to Norway*, 432.

Gasmann came up with supremacist attitudes toward the Irish through a combination of anti-Catholic and racist attitudes. His identification with America echoed sentiments that throve among other foreign-born Protestants.[52] Irish-Americans are mentioned in several letters, and the narratives especially describe their character.[53]

The character of the Irish is mentioned in a letter that Ole Olsen Lehovd of Madison, Wisconsin wrote to his father in Norway in 1864 describing his hard work with heavy duties on a steamboat on the Mississippi River the previous autumn:

> […] the majority of those who work on boats are Irishmen which is the worst kind of people that one can be with who only drink and fight and who live in such filth so that it is terrible to look at their dwellings. And they live mostly in cities along the railroad tracks where they erect some wooden sheds and where they during winter they fill up the outside of their houses with manure half way up to the windows. One can imagine what a lovely sight this makes around here.[54]

The racial attitudes of Irish-American workers are tied to the nationalist American nativist sentiments beginning in the 1840s. Increasingly, these sentiments became not only pejorative but also more rigidly cast in a racial typology. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson, "racialism provided a powerful frame for interpreting and explaining Irish immigrant behavior of all sorts," and thereby separating Anglo-Saxon natives from immigrant Celts.[55]

Some writers of America letters mention native-born Americans who they refer to as "Americans," "English," or "Yankees." This group seems

52 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860*-1925 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 83.

53 Negative remarks about the Irish were prevalent among Norwegian immigrants well into the end otf tje. An observer living in Decorah, Iowa described his first encounter with Irish emigrants aboard a steamer in 1883: "On the 18th [of May] the ship harbored at Queenstown, a seaport on the south shore of Ireland. Here a large number of Irishmen who also wanted to go to America came aboard, but they rather could have gone to Siberia […], and I don't think that a great many of the other emigrants would have cried if this happened." Letter dated June 12, 1883 from Anders Ødegaard, Decorah, Iowa to parents and siblings in Norway. Collection of America latters, Norwegian Emigrant Museum.

54 Letter dated December 29, 1864 from Ole Olsen Lehovd of Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin to Ole Helgesen Lehovd in Flesberg, Buskerud, Norway, Øverland et al, *Fra Amerika til Norge II* (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1992): 308. See also letter dated April 17, 1877 from Knut K. Hande, Spring Valley, Minnesota to his brother in Norway. Collection of America letters, Norwegian Emigrant Museum in Ottestad, Norway.

55 Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 39-56.

well respected among Norwegian immigrants, and there are seldom negative remarks about the Anglo-Saxon "old stock." This attitude seems to be based on respect for the group that wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. One observer in Stoughton, Wisconsin noted:

> In general the Yankees distinguish themselves – more than other nationalities in this country – by their concern for the education of their youth. They are generous when it comes to building schools, and even people of little means try to give their children as good an education as conditions permit. Their example has a beneficial influence on the European immigrant; as a whole, the inhabitants of our eastern and western states must undoubtedly be numbered among the world's best informed people.[56]

Ethnicity and race

The examples shown in this presentation echo the tendency throughout history on the part of more powerful groups to use the concept as a criterion to justify a dominant and privileged position for itself. Old-stock Americans have periodically expressed doubts as to what extent certain European immigrant groups should deserve the status of being "white."[57]

Orm Øverland asserts that a Norwegian homemaking mythology began in the late 1860s as a response to "Anglo-American exclusivity and lack of respect for (…) the significant contributions by Norwegians to Western civilization." The homemaking mythology thus refers to how Norwegian Americans and other ethnic immigrant groups claimed a special and natural right to a home in the United States.[58] Øverland claims that homemaking myths were not present in the earliest American accounts of immigration from Norway to America, but he admits that "the earliest amateur histories

56 *Billed-Magazin* June 25, 1870.

57 Alastair Bonnett asserts that the modern idea of "race" emerged from modern attitudes towards nature and politics. It is thus a result of European natural science and European colonial and imperial power. White identity has not always been European. According to Alastair Bonnett, whiteness was a valued physical attribute in both pre-modern China and the Middle East. For the last 250 years non-European white identity has been marginalized by a European and racialized white identity. This identity today "resides in social forces and categories, such as 'modernization', 'development' and 'civilization' (…)." Alastair Bonnett, *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives* (Harlow, England: Prentice Hall, 2000), 4, 14, 26.

58 Considered an American phenomenon, homemaking myths are related to the amateurish "filiopietistic" history writing due to its emphasis on the past greatness and excellence of a specific nation. Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000): 7-8, 146-173.

of Norwegian immigration may contain some expressions of ethnic pride and even ethnic prejudice." According to Øverland, a more distinct Norwegian-American homemaking mythology had its beginnings in the late 1860s, eventually leading to a more powerful ethnic rhetoric around the turn of the century.[59]

My findings in part echo Øverland's view. On the whole, a rising self-assertion and was noticeable among Norwegian-Americans in the 221 America letters studied in the period 1840-1870. In some letters individuals portray a negative attitude toward members of other groups from an early period of Norwegian immigration. A rising self-assertion is natural with the maturation of Norwegian settlements and as Norwegians became familiar with their new surroundings. They shared their Protestant faith with Anglo-Americans. This development toward a sense of being ethnic holds true for the period following the Civil War when Norwegian participation in the war had created a story of sacrifice. As a result of their participation in the Civil War, Anglo-Americans regarded Norwegian immigrants and their offspring with respect. According to Øverland, their story about sacrifice later merged with the myths that Norwegians were the true discoverers of America and because true Yankees were descendants of Norwegian Vikings in England.[60]

By 1870 the oldest Norwegian settlements in Illinois and Wisconsin had existed for more than 30 years, settlements in Texas for 25 years, while new Norwegian colonies had been in established in Iowa, Minnesota and in other states up to 1870. By 1870 a majority of the authors of America letters had resided in the United States for some time. As previously mentioned, letters in most cases focused on the same ethnic group, or, to be more precise, on the same regional group from Norway. The transplantation of cultural traits in compact settlements based on a common regional background in Norway and a combination of stable immigration patterns and a high birthrate resulted in a growing Norwegian American population. As Protestants, Norwegians posed no threats to Anglo-American in terms of religion, and we may assert that the involvement of Norwegians in the Civil War increased the respect of the Anglo-Americans toward Norwegians as a group.

I will also suggest that this acceptance by the leading social group in America in turn gave Norwegians a sense of belonging in America and the

59 Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 151-153.

60 Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 150.

development of a Norwegian-American ethnicity. The era of mass immigration in the last quarter of the nineteenth century also resulted in a reorientation of what it meant to be American. According to some historians this development resulted in the invention of a national identity that coincided with the invention of a national identity among various immigrant groups.[61]

Norwegian immigrants in general have been regarded as "invisible" immigrants in terms of physical characteristics and thus have not had the distinctive and subordinate statuses of other ethnic groups including blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians, Germans and Irish.[62] Native-born Americans regarded Norwegians and other North Europeans as "desireable" persons who were good material for citizenship. The arrival of increasing numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were often viewed as "problematic" segments and immigration from this region was ultimately curtailed with the restrictive legislation of 1924.[63]

The various narratives written in the United States that we have discussed in this presentation vary in terms of geographical distribution including the Midwest, the South, and the West. Although the number of letters is limited, the writer reveals his or her perceptions about other groups. Rural immigrants from Norway were part of an ethnically homogeneous culture, and this culture was transplanted to American soil. Norwegian immigrants established strong clustering in rural areas. According to federal census records, Norwegians were the most rural of any nineteenth-century immigrant group. In 1900 only a little more than a quarter of Norwegian born persons in the United States resided in towns with more than 25,000 inhabitants, which was the lowest percentage for any European immigrant group. No other ethnic group had a higher percentage of farmers in the second generation than Norwegian-Americans. According to the 1910 census

61 Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Veccoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity in the United States: A Perspective from the U.S.A." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12:1 (Fall 1992): 12.

62 According to Nancy Foner and George Frederickson, alongside immigration and ethnicity, "race" has existed in American society since the arrival of the colonists in the seventeenth century. Nancy Foner and George M. Frederickson, "Introduction" in Foner and Frederickson, *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 1-9.

63 Jacobson 1998: 69. See also Jørn Brøndal, "The Fairest Among the So-called White Races: Portrayals of Scandinavian Americans in the Filiopietistic and Nativist Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33:3 (Spring 2014): 5-36.

only 42 percent of first-and second generation Norwegians were urbanized, which means that they lived in towns with 2,500 or more inhabitants. The same year 46 per cent of native-born Americans in that same census lived in towns, compared to 72 per cent for all foreign-born. As late as 1940 more than half of all Norwegian-Americans in the upper Midwest lived outside of towns with more than 2,500 inhabitants.[64]

Ethnically homogeneous Norwegian settlement areas were comprised of people who spoke the Norwegian language and in many cases confessed to Norwegian Lutheranism. Norwegian settlements in various regions of the United States varied in size and in the number of ethnic Norwegian-Americans who lived there. However, the common pasts were fluid and multilayered in structure in that immigrants had complementary identities. For example, Norwegians could identify with their region of origin in Norway, but more global identifications increasingly competed with their local identities.[65]

A strong clustering of regional groups in Norwegian-American communities sharing a common culture and a sense of place were an important precondition for the retention of cultural traits among the members of the group. The numerical strength of Norwegian-Americans in certain rural areas and in small towns in various parts of the United States has put its mark on different local activities, and several of these regions may be considered as being "Norwegian" even today.

Other Caucasian ethnic groups often resided among, or in close proximity to, Norwegians. As a consequence, the Norwegian population in more or less homogeneous settlement areas were less exposed to non-caucasians and non-Europeans. The lack of points of reference related to these ethnic groups may explain the prejudice and the racist traits that appear in immigrant letters in the mid-nineteenth century. As ethnic settlement areas matured, people living in these communities tended to alter their identities from immigrants to ethnics in an ongoing process of negotiation with the

64 According to the 1900 federal census 54.3 per cent of second-generation Norwegians were farmers as compared to 44 per cent with second-generation Danes, 32.6 percent of Swedes and only 28 percent of German children of immigrants. Odd S. Lovoll, "Norwegians on the Land" in the series Historical Essays on Rural Life, (Department of History, Marshall, Minnesota: Southwest State University, 1992), 1.

65 Jon Gjerde, "'And, you know, not all Norwegians are blond…': The Process of Ethnicization in the Norwegian Settlement Communities in the American Middle West," eds. Øyvind T. Gulliksen, David C. Mauk and Dina Tolfsby, *Norwegian-American Essays* (Oslo: Norwegian-American Historical Association and The Norwegian Emigrant Museum, 1996), 78-93.

greater American society. During this long span Norwegian ethnics gradually began identifying as Norwegian-Americans.[66]

Conclusion

Norwegians' portrayal of other ethnic groups both in Norway and during the initial decades of Norwegian settlement in America in the period 1840-1870 is limited seen in light of the source material available. Does this symbolize a certain disinterest among Norwegian immigrants toward characterizing non-Norwegian groups? Rather, the lack of information on the Ethnic Other in guidebooks and letters that emigrants sent back to their homeland indicates that the immigrants stressed practical matters and struggled to establish a new livelihood. However, in narratives where Norwegians portrayed other ethnic groups, the narrator is most often a male who describes certain ethnic groups in a prejudiced matter. Native Americans were initially regarded with curiosity and later, following the Dakota Conflict of 1862, were characterized as cruel and evil; Irish Americans are portrayed as having a poor character and practicing a dubious religion; Chinese Americans are compared to animals and a group that could be exploited for cheap labor. Old-stock Americans, on the other hand, are portrayed as civilized, helpful and good.

The positive traits attributed to native-born Americans in the primary source material may be attributed to the immigrant's respect toward the dominant group in their host society. It is interesting to note that Norwegian immigrants in our source material only seldom portray the ethnic "Other" in such a manner in their narratives, and a sense of "whiteness" rarely appears as a theme in letters to relatives and friends in Norway.

Norwegian emigrants hailed from a country that was homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and where the Evangelical-Lutheran state church had a constitutional basis and dominated religious affairs. Homogeneous settlement areas based on common regional backgrounds, a strong attachment to the land and rural life, a common language, and a Lutheran faith were factors that individually or combined created a strong bond among Norwegian immigrants and their offspring in various regions of the United States. Ethnic homogeneity and an authoritarian state church created a scepticism

66 Gjerde, *The Process of Ethnicization*, 78-93.

among Norwegian immigrants in the United States toward other religions and ethnic groups that embraced these religions. Norwegian immigrants were considered white and practically indistinguishable from the dominant Old stock American group.

In their adaptation process Norwegian immigrants and their offspring aimed at becoming good citizens and find their place in the social hierarchy of their host country. This process took place through a negotiating process with the Anglo-Americans and other ethnic groups in society. By setting themselves apart from other ethnic groups and conforming to the expectations of the dominant group the Norwegians accommodated themselves and eventually could assimilate into the American white middle class.