

Old and New World Liberty

A “very severe epidemic” raged through Muskego during the winter months of 1844.¹ According to Sören Bache, somewhere between seventy and eighty men, women, and children were carried “to their graves,” and Claus Clausen’s role in the community was thus highlighted in tragic fashion as he conducted more than fifty funerals in a community of 600 people within his first five months in the United States.²

The heartbreak led several immigrants to send what Bache described as “ill-considered letters” to family and friends back in Norway portraying life in the United States unfavorably and complicating the early settlers’ hopes of creating a steadily growing and thriving community in Wisconsin. To counteract the negative stories, the Muskego settlement leaders jointly wrote an open letter which appeared in the Norwegian *Morgenbladet* (Morning Paper) on April 1, 1845. According to the settlers’ religiously infused worldview, the current hardship was God’s will,

¹ Clarence A. Clausen and Andreas Elviken, eds., *The Chronicle of Old Muskego: The Diary of Soren Bache, 1839–1847* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1951), 141. The epidemic may well have been cholera, as Rasmus B. Anderson describes recurring outbreaks in the late 1840s and early 1850s; see Rasmus B. Anderson, *The First Chapter of Norwegian Migration, Its Causes and Results*, second ed. (Madison: Published by the author, 1896), 274.

² Albert O. Barton, “The Most Historic Norwegian Colony,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 21, no. 2 (1937): 134. See also Enok Mortensen, *The Danish Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1967), 30. Also Johannes W. C. Dietrichson, *Pastor J. W. C. Dietrichsons Reise Blandt De Norske Emigranter i “De Forenede Nordamerikanske Fristater.” Paany Udgiven Af Rasmus B. Anderson [Pastor J. W. C. Dietrichson’s Travels among the Norwegian Emigrants in “the United North American States.” Reprinted by Rasmus B. Anderson]* (Madison, WI: Amerika’s Bogtrykkeri, 1896).

but the Lord also gave reason for optimism:³ “God has made it more convenient to produce human food in America than perhaps in any other nation in the world,” the authors noted.⁴ Moreover, foundational American ideas set the New World apart from Scandinavia. “We make no pretense about acquiring riches, but we are subjects under a liberal government in a bountiful country where freedom and equality rules in religious and civic matters.”⁵

Liberal government, freedom of religion, equality in societal matters: such ideas had resonated in Scandinavian communities for years and would continue to do so for decades. To Scandinavian immigrants, the concepts of liberty and equality, closely tied to ideas of American citizenship and prospect of landownership, were simple and alluring at a time when Old World opportunities seemed increasingly precarious due to population growth (which kept wages down), large landholding estates, emerging industrialization, and few opportunities for political influence to alter socio-economic conditions.⁶

Thus, America’s relatively cheap and seemingly abundant land, secular ethnic newspapers free of censorship, freedom to support non-state-church pastors, and concrete civic participation through voting or eventually running for office, were significant factors for Scandinavians contemplating emigration in the antebellum era.⁷

³ Setlementet Muskigo, “Beretning Fra Nordamerika [Account from North America],” *Morgenbladet*, April 1, 1845.

⁴ *Ibid.* ⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850–2000. En Demografisk, Social Og Kulturgeografisk Undersøgelse Af De Danske Immigranter Og Deres Efterkommere* [Danes in the United States 1850–2000. A Demographic, Social and Cultural Geographic Study of the Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants] (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), 28–30. Even by the 1860s and 1870s, as Jørn Brøndal has noted, “only an estimated 52.4 percent of Danish males above the age of twenty could vote in parliamentary elections, and then only for the lower house, *Folketinget*, along with just 38.1 percent of their Norwegian, and, after the introduction of the bicameral *Riksdag* in 1866, a bare 20.4 percent of their Swedish brethren. Women, of course, were denied suffrage.” See Jørn Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics: Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890–1914* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 32.

⁷ Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics: Scandinavian Americans and the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890–1914*, 18. In his study of Danish emigration after 1868, Kristian Hvidt also points to the primacy of economic explanations, while acknowledging political and religious grievances as secondary factors; see Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten Til Amerika, Eller Drivkræfter i Masseudvandringen Fra Danmark 1868–1914* [Flight to America or Driving Forces in the Mass Emigration from Denmark 1868–1914] (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus, 1971), 263–264.

“Everything is designed to maintain the natural liberty and equality of men,” Ole Rynning had written in his *True Account of America* from 1838.⁸ In Rynning’s text, the allure of “liberty and equality” and the accompanying opportunities were central, but the author also made clear that important regional differences guided economic prospects. American democratic ideals were undermined by “the disgraceful slave traffic.”⁹ Slavery, according to Rynning, constituted a “vile contrast” in a country which could otherwise rightfully be proud of its foundational values.¹⁰ Rynning’s subtitle specifically indicated that he wrote for “peasants and commoners,” and the Norwegian author thus described conditions in the South in terms legible to readers who had likely never seen nonwhite people outside of Norway.¹¹ In the South, Rynning wrote, “a race of black people with woolly hair on the head called negroes” suffered from their masters’ violence, and slavery was driving a wedge between the North and the South, which could likely soon lead to “a separation between the northern and southern states, or else bloody civil disputes.”¹²

Rynning’s argument for settling in the Midwest rested partly on morality, but there was an implicit economic argument about immigrant prospects in the North as opposed to the South as well. As Ole Rasmussen Dahl later noted in a letter to his brother in Norway, the American experience had shown that “a free laborer” could never sustain himself “among slaves.”¹³ Dahl’s description was somewhat hyperbolic, but opportunities for economic uplift, as Keri Leigh Merritt has demonstrated, were indeed scarcer in the South, as “wage rates were lower in areas where slavery thrived.”¹⁴ Where New England farm laborers in 1850 “could expect to earn \$12.98 per month,” similar work in Georgia would yield \$9.03 and even less in South and North Carolina.¹⁵

Other Scandinavian travel writers, whether recommending Wisconsin, Missouri, Louisiana, or even Texas, also grappled with the difference between North and South, but all connected landownership to a sense

⁸ Theodore C. Blegen, *Ole Rynning’s True Account of America* (Minneapolis, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Society, 1921), 87. Blegen’s translation.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 48. Blegen’s translation. ¹⁰ *Ibid.* Blegen’s translation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25, 61. Blegen’s translation.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47–50, 88. “The slave trade is still permitted in Missouri; but it is strictly forbidden and despised in Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin Territory.” Blegen’s translation.

¹³ Olaf Yderstad, “Et Amerikabrev Fra 1863,” *Årsskrift for Nordmøre historielag* (1931): 30.

¹⁴ Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 73.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of liberty uniquely attainable in America.¹⁶ In a lengthy guidebook and letters to Norwegian newspapers, Johan Reymert Reiersen, for example, explicitly argued for landownership as a natural and religious right for civilized, white people such as Scandinavians.¹⁷ In Reiersen's view, "the red man" was monopolizing more land than consistent with humankind's general welfare, and he therefore supported "civilized" settlers taking land from "barbarians" until the nation was linked from coast to coast.¹⁸

The paradox between landownership as a natural right for humankind, in Reiersen's view equated with civilized, white people, and American Indians' lack of right to the land they inhabited was maintained by most Scandinavian writers through a belief in white superiority. While Reiersen admitted that "negro slavery exists in Texas," he did not reflect on its economic implications for immigrants but mainly presented slavery as a source of regional conflict over expansion and political power: "Liberty seems absorbed with the mother's milk and appears as indispensable for every citizen of the United States as the air he breathes," Reiersen claimed.¹⁹ In this manner, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish settlers, along with other European immigrants, were able to take advantage of American citizenship, enter into politics, and in the process, according to Jon Gjerde, "became among the most vociferous advocates of a *herrenvolk* republic."²⁰ Racial ideology and economic opportunity were closely linked to land claims.

¹⁶ Blegen, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America*, 56–57. After Ole Rynning's death, a slightly revised 1839 version of his book appeared. In this edition, based on recommendations from the early Norwegian immigrant Kleng Peerson, Norwegian immigrants were introduced to the slave state Missouri as a fruitful future home.

¹⁷ A letter by Reiersen dated March 19, 1844, published in *Christianssandsposten* and *Morgenbladet* back in Norway in July 1844, did not mention human bondage in a single word. Johan Reymert Reiersen, "Cincinnati, Ohio Den 19de Marts 1844," in *J. R. Reiersen Papers*. P0325 (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1844).

¹⁸ Reiersen, *Veiviser for Norske Emigranter Til De Forenede Nordamerikanske Stater Og Texas [Guide for Norwegian Emigrants to the North American States and Texas]* (Christiania: G. Reiersens Forlag, 1844), 135. As Stephen Kantrowitz has shown, such arguments were also part of the American political mainstream after the Civil War. See Kantrowitz, "White Supremacy, Settler Colonialism, and the Two Citizenships of the Fourteenth Amendment," 44.

¹⁹ Reiersen, *Veiviser for Norske Emigranter Til De Forenede Nordamerikanske Stater Og Texas [Guide for Norwegian Emigrants to the North American States and Texas]*, 134, 49. On American people, Reiersen argued that they recognized "no moral right for any class of individuals to monopolize the soil" and "halt the progress of industry, civilization, and Christianity."

²⁰ Jon Gjerde, "'Here in America There Is Neither King nor Tyrant': European Encounters with Race, 'Freedom,' and Their European Pasts," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (1999): 673–690.

In his guidebook, Reiersen – articulating central elements of the threshold principle – expressed admiration for the United States’ ability to grow both population and territory without succumbing to the small-state rivalries that had often characterized the European continent. “[The country] has maintained its political unity, multiplied its population, expanded its trade to all corners of the world, continued its system of domestic improvements and opened a wide, almost limitless field for individual enterprise,” Reiersen marveled.²¹ Hence, prospective Scandinavian immigrants in the 1840s had a choice between the newly admitted nonslaveholding states in the Midwest, the slaveholding state of Missouri, which was popular among German immigrants, and the deep South.²²

For Claus and Matha Clausen, the choice rested on personal relationships, religion, and economic prospects. The couple arrived in Muskego, an important Scandinavian social hub and stepping stone, on August 8, 1843.²³ After receiving his ordination, Clausen preached first on colony leader Even Heg’s farm, known as “Heg hotel,” and later in a log church before relocating in 1846 to accommodate Johannes W. C. Dietrichson, an “official representative of the Church of Norway.”²⁴

Claus and Martha Clausen moved to Rock Prairie in the southern part of Wisconsin in 1845. The couple, who had lost a newborn son in the spring of 1844, welcomed another son into the world in the spring of 1846, but shortly thereafter tragedy struck again.²⁵ Martha Clausen, “well and cheerful” when Claus Clausen left to visit a neighboring

²¹ Reiersen, *Veiviser for Norske Emigranter Til De Forenede Nordamerikanske Stater Og Texas [Guide for Norwegian Emigrants to the North American States and Texas]*, 125. Also William Notz, “Frederick List in America,” *American Economic Review* 16, no. 2 (1926): 265.

²² When the 1850 census was taken, 44,352 German-born immigrants lived in Missouri; see Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850–2000. En Demografisk, Social Og Kulturgeografisk Undersogelse Af De Danske Immigranter Og Deres Efterkommere [Danes in the United States 1850–2000. A Demographic, Social and Cultural Geographic Study of the Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants]*, 86. For southern Democrats’ support for the annexation of Texas, see Kevin Waite, “Jefferson Davis and Proslavery Visions of Empire in the Far West,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 4 (2016): 545.

²³ Barton, “The Most Historic Norwegian Colony,” 131–134. According to Barton, Muskego served as a “gateway through which hundreds of immigrants passed in their westward quest for homes.”

²⁴ Mortensen, *The Danish Lutheran Church in America*, 31.

²⁵ Rasmus Andersen, *Pastor Claus Laurits Clausen – Banebryder for Den Norske Og Danske Kirke i Amerika. Første Skandinavisk Feltpræst. [Pastor Claus Laurits Clausen: Trailblazer for the Norwegian and Danish Church in America. First Scandinavian Chaplain]* (Blair, NE: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1921), 93–94.

congregation on November 7, became critically ill with pneumonia, and her husband only barely made it back for a final goodbye early on Sunday, November 15.²⁶ In a letter dated December 7, 1846, demonstrating the close transnational ties maintained even three years into their migration, Claus Clausen described the heartbreak to Martha's brother in Denmark, and the relatives stayed in touch subsequently.²⁷ Less than a year after Martha's death, her brother and other community members from the island of Langeland wrote to Claus Clausen asking him to elaborate on conditions in America and perhaps nuance some of the ideas about liberty and equality appearing in Old World emigration pamphlets.²⁸

The prospective emigrants' inspiration came from at least two sources published in 1847. Laurits J. Fribert's ninety-six-page *Haandbog for Emigranter til Amerikas Vest* (Handbook for Emigrants to America's West) served as a source for a shorter, widely circulated, second pamphlet, published by Rasmus Sørensen in Denmark later that same year.²⁹

During his time in the United States, Fribert, who settled among Swedish immigrants in Wisconsin in 1843, researched American citizenship requirements that he, based on the 1802 naturalization act, explained as the ability to demonstrate "good moral character" and adhere to the "principles of the Constitution."³⁰ Fribert clearly did not have to worry about his skin color and instead emphasized the importance of immigrants renouncing any "hereditary title" and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94–100. See also Mathilde Rasmussen, *Martha Rasmussen* (Little Library of Lutheran Biography, 1945), 22.

²⁷ Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850–2000. En Demografisk, Social Og Kulturgeografisk Undersøgelse Af De Danske Immigranter Og Deres Efterkommere [Danes in the United States 1850–2000. A Demographic, Social and Cultural Geographic Study of The Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants]*, 230. See also Peter Sørensen Vig, *Danske i Amerika [Danes in America]*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: C. Rasmussen Company, 1907), 259. As the chain migration initiated from Martha's place of birth to Wisconsin after her death demonstrates, Clausen's letters "were eagerly read" back home.

²⁸ C. L. Clausen, "Luther Valley, Rock County, Beloit-Post-Office, Wisconsin Territory, North-Amerika, Den 6. Septbr. 1847," *Fyns Stifts*, November 26 (Friday morning), 1847. Martha Clausen's brother, Peder Rasmussen, wrote to Claus Clausen on June 30, 1847, with nine specific questions (the first about the quality of land) and received an answer on September 6 which was then published in November.

²⁹ William J. Orr, "Rasmus Sørensen and the Beginning of Danish Settlement in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 65, no. 3 (1982): 200.

³⁰ L. J. Fribert, *Haandbog for Emigranter Til Amerikas Vest [Handbook for Emigrants to America's West]* (Christiania [Oslo]: Forlaget af Johan Dahl, 1847), 95–96; Pia Viscor, "Danish Immigration to Racine County, Wisconsin: A Case Study of the Pull Effect in Nineteenth-Century Migration," *The Bridge* 31, no. 2 (2008): 13.

concluded by detailing the differences between state citizenship and national citizenship:

Only according to the above-mentioned conditions can complete American citizenship be attained according to the laws of Congress, but this does not prevent individual states from conferring citizenship in said state on less strict conditions . . . In Wisconsin, which is a territory and not yet a state, and therefore cannot make its own provisions in this regard, the above-mentioned general laws of the United States apply.³¹

Fribert's notes on emigration and citizenship sparked Sørensen's pamphlet which also offered its own ideas of citizenship's rights and duties.³² Sørensen recognized the discontent among landless laborers and tied these to much larger European discussions in the years leading up to the 1848 revolutions.³³ According to Sørensen, Scandinavian farm workers faced many of the same issues that had led to "the large English, German, and France emigrations to America."³⁴

In a three-page introduction, Sørensen argued that "the fatherland" had to provide material goods necessary for sustenance for all or risk seeing its younger generations emigrate. If all that was left for landless children, after their parents' estate had been settled, were the duties associated with subjecthood of a Scandinavian monarch and none of the basic economic rights, a house and land to obtain sustenance from, then everyone – king, country, and prospective emigrant – were better off by letting young people explore opportunities across the Atlantic. The highest expression of one's affection for the fatherland, even higher than nationality, language, faith, and self-sacrifice in wartime, was the love of

³¹ Fribert, *Haandbog for Emigranter Til Amerikas Vest* [*Handbook for Emigrants to America's West*], 196.

³² Rasmus Sørensen, *Om De Udvandrede Nordmaends Tilstand i Nordamerika: Og Hvorfor Det Vilde Vaere Gavnligt, Om Endeel Danske Bønder Og Handvaerker Udvandrede Ligeledes, Og Bosatte Sig Sammesteds* [*On the Condition of Emigrated Norwegians in North America: And Why it Would be Beneficial if Some Danish Peasants and Artisans Emigrated and Settled There as Well*] (Copenhagen: Niskenske Bogtrykkeri, 1847), 4.

³³ Morten Nordhagen Ottosen, "Folkenes Vår: De Europeiske Revolusjonene 1848–1851 [The People's Spring: The European Revolutions 1848–1851]," in *Demokratiet: Historien Og Ideerne*, edited by Raino Malnes and Dag Einar Thorsen (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2014), 222; Sørensen, *Om De Udvandrede Nordmaends Tilstand i Nordamerika: Og Hvorfor Det Vilde Vaere Gavnligt, Om Endeel Danske Bønder Og Handvaerker Udvandrede Ligeledes, Og Bosatte Sig Sammesteds*, 3.

³⁴ Sørensen, *Om De Udvandrede Nordmaends Tilstand i Nordamerika: Og Hvorfor Det Vilde Vaere Gavnligt, Om Endeel Danske Bønder Og Handvaerker Udvandrede Ligeledes, Og Bosatte Sig Sammesteds*, 3.

fellow man, Sørensen proclaimed.³⁵ This love had to be expressed by “allowing and affording one’s neighbor the same worldly goods as one, under similar circumstances, would want allowed and afforded by him.”³⁶

Fribert and Sørensen both had concrete experience with the small Danish islands where Clausen and his wife had lived before emigrating and therefore knew firsthand about the recurring issues regarding lack of land availability. Their writings therefore resonated with a wide swath of smallholders.³⁷

Rasmus Sørensen’s publication “inspired several” members from Martha Clausen’s childhood community to travel to “this Canaan’s land,” and as a consequence her brother wrote to Clausen asking about conditions in America.³⁸ Perhaps still grieving, Clausen’s response was gloomy. “Seldom have I seen more misleading nonsense,” the widowed husband replied in response to the emigration pamphlets.³⁹ Clausen was upset that Fribert and Sørensen, in his view, had provided too rosy a picture with their information on travel costs, harvest yields, and disease.⁴⁰ The Danish-born pastor worried that these descriptions now roused the America fever in Scandinavia and might “entice people to injudiciously initiate such an important step as emigration.”⁴¹ Not all which “glistens in America” is gold, warned Clausen.⁴²

Clausen went on to offer advice on climate, land, and emigration practicalities in such detail that his response took up the majority of two newspaper issues. Toward the end of his letter, Clausen did concede,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1–3. ³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Viscor, “Danish Immigration to Racine County, Wisconsin: A Case Study of the Pull Effect in Nineteenth-Century Migration,” 12–14.

³⁸ “Mr. Editor,” Martha’s brother wrote to the local newspaper after having heard from his brother-in-law, “In the year 1843, Mr. C. L. Clausen travelled . . . to North America and settled in the territory of Wisconsin among Norwegian emigrants, where he [Clausen], who had received seminary training, was hired as pastor and teacher for several parishes. Through his continual travels in the district he has gained a quite exact knowledge of the countryside’s character and the people’s condition.” See C. L. Clausen, “Luther Valley, Rock County, Beloit-Post-Office, Wisconsin Territory, North-Amerika, Den 6. Septbr. 1847,” *Fyns Stifts*, November 26 (Friday morning), 1847.

³⁹ *Ibid.* See also Orr, “Rasmus Sørensen and the Beginning of Danish Settlement in Wisconsin,” 201.

⁴⁰ Clausen, “Luther Valley, Rock County, Beloit-Post-Office, Wisconsin Territory, North-Amerika, Den 6. Septbr. 1847.” See also Orr, “Rasmus Sørensen and the Beginning of Danish Settlement in Wisconsin,” 201.

⁴¹ Clausen, “Luther Valley, Rock County, Beloit-Post-Office, Wisconsin Territory, North-Amerika, Den 6. Septbr. 1847.”

⁴² *Ibid.*

however, that there was no shortage of “good laws or sufficient civic order and safety for the quiet, honest, and diligent citizen in all things regarding his worldly welfare.”⁴³

Clausen’s letter was revealing as it demonstrated Scandinavian emigrants’ concern with landownership and the Danish-born pastor’s concrete knowledge of these concerns.⁴⁴ Additionally, Clausen, albeit without reflecting on whiteness’s importance, equated productive citizenship in the United States with honesty and hard work that in turn could lead to socioeconomic progress for younger Scandinavian men and women.⁴⁵ The latter point was also made by Danish-born Peter C. Lütken of Racine, Wisconsin, when he in March 1847 wrote a piece on the connection between landownership and freedom that was published in a trade journal in Denmark the following year.

The truth remains that the soil here rewards its faithful cultivator and that one in all essentials enjoys the full fruit of one’s labor; for taxes do not oppress, and if a man is here in possession of his property free of debt, then no one on earth can be more independent and more free than him.⁴⁶

Liberty and equality were recurrent themes, both implicitly and explicitly, in the emigration literature. Fribert, for example, in a section titled “Everyone should go to Wisconsin” pointed out that because of slavery, with its important implications for labor relations and pay, it was “not as honorable to work for the white man, whom many wealthy men will not regard higher than a black man.”⁴⁷ In short, economic concerns, landownership, and the institution of slavery remained the most important reasons for settling north of the Mason–Dixon line. Settlement patterns

⁴³ C. L. Clausen, “Slutningen Af Brevet Fra Nordamerika; See Morgenavisen! [The Conclusion of the Letter from North America; See the Morning Edition!],” *Fyens Stifts*, November 26 (Friday evening), 1847.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Clausen, “Luther Valley, Rock County, Beloet-Post-Office, Wisconsin Territory, North-Amerika, Den 6. Septbr. 1847.”

⁴⁶ P. C. Lütken, “Noticer Vedkommende Agerdyrkningsvæsenet Og Landboforholdene i Territoriet Wisconsin i Nord-Amerika [Notices Regarding Agriculture and Farming in the Wisconsin Territory in North America],” *Tidsskrift for Landoekonomie* 9 (1848): 427.

⁴⁷ Fribert, *Haandbog for Emigranter Til Amerikas Vest* [*Handbook for Emigrants to America’s West*], 10. Fribert warned against settling in the South, where a prospective immigrant – on top of difficulties in the labor market – might encounter a climate “way too hot for a Scandinavian,” as well as yellow fever, poisonous snakes, and alligators. On Southern fear of immigrant influence, see Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, 73–75, 191.

reflected the emigration pamphlets' advice. When the 1850 census was taken, only 202 Scandinavian-born immigrants were counted in Texas and just 247 in Missouri, while 12,516 Scandinavian-born immigrants lived in Wisconsin and Illinois.⁴⁸

In the Midwest, emigrants found the added security of living among fellow Scandinavians, and, starting in the late 1840s, thousands of young, white, Protestant Scandinavians (their average age was around thirty) pursued the promise of equality through landownership close to the Great Lakes.⁴⁹ Yet, Midwestern landownership, as most Scandinavian-born immigrants at least tacitly admitted, was predicated on the fact that the "Indian hordes" through "deceit and force" had been removed.⁵⁰

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The first newspaper published in Wisconsin by Scandinavian immigrants was *Nordlyset* (The Northern Light).⁵¹ In the inaugural issue on July 29, 1847, *Nordlyset's* editors emphasized their attempted neutrality in political and religious matters and stated the newspaper's aim as elevating "ourselves, in regards to our nationality, among our surroundings," by enlightening and guiding its readership in order to achieve equality at the level of fellow citizens. The first step to achieving political enlightenment among the Scandinavian readers was a translation of the Declaration of

⁴⁸ Theodore C. Blegen, "Cleng Peerson and Norwegian Immigration," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 7, no. 4 (1921): 321. According to Blegen, most Norwegian immigrants who were attracted to Missouri by Peerson soon after moved to Iowa, where 611 Scandinavian-born immigrants lived by 1850. See also Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850–2000. En Demografisk, Social Og Kulturgeografisk Undersøgelse Af De Danske Immigranter Og Deres Efterkommere* [Danes in the United States 1850–2000. A Demographic, Social and Cultural Geographic Study of the Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants], 86.

⁴⁹ Fribert, *Haandbog for Emigranter Til Amerikas Vest* [Handbook for Emigrants to America's West], 13. "Where men of the three Scandinavian nations come together, they always regard each other as countrymen and help each other as brothers and the harmony and good faith that is not being worked on between the three kingdoms has already been realized in America that also in this respect is hastening ahead of Europe." See also Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850–2000. En Demografisk, Social Og Kulturgeografisk Undersøgelse Af De Danske Immigranter Og Deres Efterkommere* [Danes in the United States 1850–2000. A Demographic, Social and Cultural Geographic Study of the Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants], 130.

⁵⁰ Dietrichson, *Pastor J. W. C. Dietrichsons Reise Blandt De Norske Emigranter i "De Forenede Nordamerikanske Fristater."* Paany Udgiven Af Rasmus B. Anderson, 25.

⁵¹ Barton, "The Most Historic Norwegian Colony," 134–135. The printing shop for *Nordlyset* was located on Even Heg's farm in Muskego and thus underscored the community's importance in defining early Scandinavian notions of American citizenship.

Independence.⁵² From a Scandinavian immigrant perspective, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights provided the vision and legal foundation to ensure economic opportunities in the New World. Thus, in addition to the implicit and explicit recognition of citizenship's importance, it was pointed out, again and again, in the pamphlets and letters flowing back to Scandinavia that "the United States has no king."⁵³

When adopted on February 1, 1848, the first two sections of Wisconsin's State Constitution echoed the Declaration of Independence and specifically outlawed slavery as well as "involuntary servitude." Moreover, in section 14, feudal tenures were prohibited, and section 15 specifically ensured that "no distinction shall ever be made by law between resident aliens and citizens, in reference to the possession, enjoyment or descent of property."⁵⁴

Thus, with the Wisconsin Constitution in hand, immigrants in the early Scandinavian enclaves could distance themselves from Old World feudalism and pursue their dream of landownership, confident in its legality and ties to ideals of liberty and equality.⁵⁵ As such, Scandinavian immigrants were quickly able to enjoy the fruits of American citizenship, and in the process they generally supported an

⁵² "Til Vore Landsmænd [To Our Countrymen]," *Nordlyset*, July 29, 1847. See also "Den Enstemmige Erklæring Af De Tretten Forenede Stater Af America [The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America]," *Nordlyset*, July 29, 1847.

⁵³ Gjerde, "Here in America There Is Neither King nor Tyrant": European Encounters with Race, 'Freedom,' and Their European Pasts," 682. As Jon Gjerde has noted, "Americans in the mid-nineteenth century celebrated the many ways in which their Republic improved upon the tired systems of the old European States. As they invented an American nationality that allegedly reflected these advancements, they stressed the conviction that their nation was structured according to abstract notions of freedom, equality, and self-government." See *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917*, 54-55. See also Linda K. Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *Journal of American History* 84, no. 3 (1997): 841. See also Blegen, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America*, 87.

⁵⁴ Wisconsin Constitutional Convention, *Constitution of the State of Wisconsin* (Madison: Beriah Brown, 1848), online facsimile at www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1627.

⁵⁵ Barton, "The Most Historic Norwegian Colony," 129. See also Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, *Dannebrog På Den Amerikanske Prærie [Dannebrog on the American Prairie]* (Odense: Odense University Press, 2000), 41. Lastly, see Fritz W. Rasmussen, "History of the Town of New Denmark, Brown County, Wisconsin! Both Politically and Privately," in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Correspondence, 1834-1942. Green Bay Mss 4. Box no. 1* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1876).

expansion of American territory, especially if the population therein was mainly white.⁵⁶

In the midst of the American war against Mexico between 1846 and 1848, *Nordlyset*, under Norwegian-born editor James D. Reymert, initially expressed support for manifest destiny by declaring that “a strong United States was probably destined to annex the enemy’s territory.”⁵⁷ Under its second editor, Even Heg, however, *Nordlyset* nuanced its position on territorial expansion based on ethnic considerations and on March 10, 1848, deemed it inadvisable to annex any further territory from Mexico as this would mean incorporating additional “half-civilized inhabitants” into the United States.⁵⁸ The same hesitation to annex Cuba, based on a sense “that a people of mixed blood, mainly Negro and Spanish, could not readily be assimilated,” was expressed by American politicians and the Norwegian immigrant papers in the 1850s and appeared again in the following decade.⁵⁹

Heg’s quote, and the sentiments expressed in subsequent ethnic newspapers, underscored the importance of whiteness among Scandinavian immigrants. Importantly, both Reymert and Heg – by settling in Wisconsin, on land formerly occupied by Native people – were actively partaking in the expansion of American boundaries.

In the Midwest, as Stephen Kantrowitz has shown, “Wisconsin’s 1848 constitution” and those of other Midwestern states encouraged the dissolution of American Indians’ collective affiliation, and white settlers, whether in Wisconsin, Kansas, Michigan, or elsewhere, “quickly abetted outright dispossession, aided by unequal tax policies and official tolerance of white squatting.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Gjerde, “‘Here in America There Is Neither King nor Tyrant’: European Encounters with Race, ‘Freedom,’ and Their European Pasts,” 674. Gjerde rightly points out that “there are shadings of freedom and unfreedom, white and nonwhite that clearly complicate the story,” but Scandinavian-born immigrants generally expressed a sense of freedom soon after arrival.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Arlow William Andersen, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847–1872* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1953), 34.

⁵⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion, 210–212*. See also Andersen, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847–1872*, 39.

⁶⁰ Stephen Kantrowitz, “‘Not Quite Constitutionalized’: The Meaning of ‘Civilization’ and the Limits of Native American Citizenship,” in *The World the Civil War Made*, ed. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 77–78.

As Scandinavian editors started to voice their opinion on American public matters for their fellow countrymen in the ethnic press, it became increasingly clear that they, along with other European immigrants, were solid supporters of a “white man’s republic.”⁶¹

Andreas Frederiksen Herslev, who arrived in the United States in 1847 and adopted the name Andrew Frederickson, wrote home in 1849 and assessed the Mexican War’s consequences. According to Frederickson, the American military, based on volunteerism, tied into broader societal ideals where “the poor” had greater opportunity for equality and could “attain justice more or less as well as the rich.”⁶² Still, some were more equal than others based on skin color, as exemplified by Frederickson’s ideas about land and the opportunities war service could provide.

Around the time Casper and I arrived, the government issued posters that able-bodied soldiers could receive 7 dollars a month and 160 acres of land which could be surveyed anywhere in the United States where there were unsold sections.⁶³

After the war, Frederickson bought two land warrants from Mexican War veterans and used the certificates to claim what he termed “free land” in Brown County, Wisconsin.⁶⁴ As was the case with Frederickson, Scandinavian immigrants often did not reflect explicitly on their role in the American expansion through land acquisition. Scandinavian immigrants did, however, often arrive in the United States with preconceived notions of American Indians partly due to literary texts. As Gunlög Fur has noted, James Fenimore Cooper’s “books were translated into Swedish

⁶¹ See Gjerde, “‘Here in America There Is Neither King nor Tyrant’: European Encounters with Race, ‘Freedom,’ and Their European Pasts,” 690.

⁶² Andreas Frederiksen, “Milvaukii Wisconsin Den 24de November 1849,” in *Afskrift af 22 breve til Frederik Nielsen, Herlev DK fra A.F. Wilmington Ill. og West Denmark og Neenah Wisc. (1847–1872)* (Aalborg: Det Danske Udvandrerarkiv, 1849). Also “Wilmington Ill, Den 28 Juli 1850.”

⁶³ “Milvaukii Wisconsin Den 24de November 1849.”

⁶⁴ Ibid. See also Red., “Et Par Ord Om De Norskes Representation i Legislaturen [A Few Words on the the Norwegians’ Representation in the Legislature],” *Emigranten*, October 15, 1852. See also Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 809–810. As Howe notes, “counting Texas, Oregon, California, and New Mexico, James K. Polk extended the domain of the United States more than any other president even Thomas Jefferson or Andrew Johnson (who acquired Alaska),” but in the process also brought land into the United States that had previously belonged to Mexican subjects or indigenous nations. “The state of California placed heavy burdens of legal proof on the owners of Mexican land grants to validate their titles, in violation of the spirit if not the letter of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo . . . California did not recognize Mexican Americans as citizens until a decision by the state supreme court in 1870.”

and, already published in the 1820s, they became readily available for a reading audience to such an extent that Fredrika Bremer regarded him as one of ‘the first to make us in Sweden somewhat at home in America.’⁶⁵

In 1847, Norwegian-born lawyer Ole Munch Ræder, observing a forest fire in the Mississippi Valley, wondered if the local indigenous warriors would interpret the smoke as a “huge peace pipe of their great father in Washington or as war signals and spirits of revenge from the land of their fathers which they had to leave in disgrace to give place to the ‘pale faces.’”⁶⁶ Ræder quickly added, “This expression by the way, I use only out of respect for Cooper’s novels; it is claimed that no Indian has ever called the whites by such a name,” but in the darkness the Norwegian traveller could not help his mind from wandering and imagining an encounter with an Indian “fully equipped with tomahawk and other paraphernalia, and of course on the watch for someone to scalp.”⁶⁷

Back in Wisconsin, Ræder encountered bands of Pottawatomie returning from Green Bay, “where they had received the annual payment provided for in their treaty with the United States government,” and described their “features and their clothing” as somewhat akin to “our Lapps, although they were taller, more dignified, and also more cleanly” than the indigenous people living in northern Sweden, Norway, and Finland to which he compared them.⁶⁸

Still, the problem with the American Indians, according to Ræder, was that they had “lost their old reputation for honesty,” which was part of the reason that people “generally despise and hate the Indians.” People in the western part of the United States, which Ræder considered Wisconsin part of, “find it a great nuisance that the Indians never seem to accustom themselves to the fact that the country no longer belongs to them.”⁶⁹

Such tropes of American Indian presence and practice echoed regularly among Scandinavian-American writers. In 1845, the residents of Muskego praised the pioneers who “fought wild animals and Indians,” and Ræder, while acknowledging that American Indians were subjected to “injustice” and that the laws passed for their protection were “never

⁶⁵ Fur, “Indians and Immigrants – Entangled Histories,” 59–60.

⁶⁶ Gunnar Malmin, ed., *America in the Forties: The Letters of Ole Munch Ræder* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), 133.

⁶⁷ Ibid. See also Betty Bergland, “Norwegian Immigrants and ‘Indianerne’ in the Landtaking, 1838–1862,” *Norwegian-American Studies* 35 (2000): 331–333.

⁶⁸ Malmin, *America in the Forties: The Letters of Ole Munch Ræder*, 142.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 143–145.

enforced,” nevertheless took it for granted that their Midwestern removal was just a matter of time.⁷⁰

Describing a treaty between the Chippewa and local Indian commissioners in August 1847, Räder wrote: “It is specified in the treaty that certain lands west of Wisconsin are to be abandoned in favor of a new territory, Minnesota, which is to be established there. To begin with, the Winnebago are to be placed there.”⁷¹

In a different example, Hans Mattson depicted his first encounters with “Sioux Indians” positively but also wrote about a “war dance” that “in lurid savageness” exceeded anything he ever saw.⁷² Moreover, Mattson’s countryman, Pastor Gustaf Unonius, who had founded the Swedish Pine Lake settlement in Wisconsin, described the Winnebago tribe as “the wildest and most hostile tribe of all the tribes that are still in this area.”⁷³ Unonius’ description was one of several that pointed to American Indians as uncivilized and thereby unfit for a place in American society. Within a decade, however, Scandinavian immigrants also settled in Minnesota and shortly thereafter on American Indian land in the Dakota territory. Thereby, Scandinavian immigrants often embraced the notion of independence, through fruitful contributions as land cultivators not wholly unlike Jefferson’s ideal of an economically and morally independent yeoman farmer, while maintaining support for a sizeable nation-state predicated on territorial expansion and Indian removal.⁷⁴

The Scandinavian definition of citizenship, closely tied to the dream of landownership, was fueled throughout Scandinavia by Räder, Rynning, Friberg, and Rasmus Sørensen’s descriptions of American liberty in the antebellum era.

⁷⁰ Muskigo, “Beretning Fra Nordamerika [Account from North America].” See also Malmin, *America in the Forties: The Letters of Ole Munch Ræder*, 146–147.

⁷¹ *America in the Forties: The Letters of Ole Munch Ræder*, 146–147.

⁷² Hans Mattson, *Reminiscences: The Story of an Emigrant* (Saint Paul, MN: D. D. Merrill Company, 1891), 43.

⁷³ Gustaf Unonius, *Minnen Från En Sjuttonårig Vistelse i Nordvestra Amerika I-II [Memories from a Seventeen-Year-Long Stay in the American Northwest I-II]* (Uppsala, 1862), 188.

⁷⁴ Reiersen, *Veiviser for Norske Emigranter Til De Forenede Nordamerikanske Stater Og Texas [Guide for Norwegian Emigrants to the North American States and Texas]*, 135. Also Lisi Krall, “Thomas Jefferson’s Agrarian Vision and the Changing Nature of Property,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 36, no. 1 (2002): 131–132. See also Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, first Vintage ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 144–145. Smith notes that Jefferson “saw the cultivator of the earth, the husbandman who tilled his own acres, as the rock upon which the American republic must stand.”

While emigration pamphlets and America letters were secondary to political and economic conditions on the ground, they did, however, effectively juxtapose Old and New World conditions and opened new opportunities and concrete roadmaps to families seeking a new life across the Atlantic.⁷⁵ The “America fever” brought on by the emigration pamphlets and social conditions set off a chain migration to Wisconsin, where ideas of free soil and free labor soon became powerful political rallying cries among Scandinavian immigrants.⁷⁶ After 1847, first hundreds then thousands of Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes poured into the Midwest. By 1860, a total of 72,576 Scandinavians lived in the United States, with almost a third claiming Wisconsin as their home.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Sørensen’s writings also inspired emigrants in the northern part of Denmark. See, for example, Celius Christiansen, *En Pioneers Historie (Erindringer Fra Krigen Mellem Nord- Og Sydstatene)* [*A Pioneer’s Story: Memoirs from the War between North and South*] (Aalborg: Eget forlag, 1909), 5. Christiansen, along with two brothers, emigrated to America in 1853 and cited Rasmus Sørensen’s writings as the direct cause due its portrayal of brighter prospects across the Atlantic.

⁷⁶ The way some of the first settlers in Wisconsin from Langeland, the island where Claus Clausen’s wife was born, remembered it, Rasmus Sørensen had indeed served as one of the key inspirational sources for emigration. Fritz W. Rasmussen, “New Denmark, Brown Co. Wis. January 3rd, 1900,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers, 1834–1942*. *Green Bay Mss 4. Box 1* (Green Bay: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1900).

⁷⁷ Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850–2000. En Demografisk, Social Og Kulturgeografisk Undersøgelse Af De Danske Immigranter Og Deres Efterkommere* [*Danes in the United States 1850–2000. A Demographic, Social and Cultural Geographic Study of The Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants*], 131.