

Michael Kaelin

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin
mpkaelin@wisc.edu

The Vanishing Indian, Nativity, and Anti-Nativism in *Der Deutsche Pionier*

The transnational turn in German studies has led to a proliferation of scholarship examining German speakers' interactions with colonized peoples, among them North American Indians.¹ Despite Christian Feest's well-advised caution that German speakers' pretension to a "special relationship" with Native Americans has always been a one-sided construct, a historical German fascination with Native peoples and attendant claim that this sentiment is mutual seems to influence scholarship on German-Native American relations.² Even when scholars do not explicitly argue a bidirectional, positive relationship between German-speaking settlers and Indigenous Americans, the well-documented German interest in and avowed respect for Native peoples raises a thorny question: how can modern scholars square widespread nineteenth-century German revulsion at the dispossession and murder of Native Americans with the reality that German immigrants in the United States were often central actors in that process? If condemnations of US Indian policy originated solely in Europe, the answer would be simple enough, but much recent work has revealed that (with the notable exception of Karl May) the writers who shaped attitudes towards Native Americans in the German-speaking world tended to have direct experience with American Indians, if they were not themselves part of the US settler colonial project.³

This irony is not confined to the German American experience. Studies of Swedish and Norwegian immigrants in the Midwest, for example, evince,

in Orm Øverland's words, "troubling silences" about the process of "land-taking."⁴ Explanations for these silences include a desire of non-Anglo immigrants to demonstrate their moral superiority over their Anglo-American neighbors, a sense of entitlement to western lands, a reflexive embarrassment at what a recognition of their own complicity in the settler colonial project would require, or an instinct that Indians' "inevitable" disappearance rendered the conversation moot.⁵ There is certainly some amount of truth in all of these, and given the wild diversity even among European immigrants from the same countries of origin, different individuals probably took solace in different combinations of these explanations – if, indeed, they felt that they needed to salve their consciences at all.

This article takes a new approach in explaining German Americans' simultaneous participation in and discomfort with US treatment of Native Americans. Rather than viewing German-language depictions of American Indians through the lenses of settler colonialism and modern perceptions of indigeneity, it focuses on the mid-nineteenth-century question of nativity.⁶ German Americans' depictions of American Indians make sense when they are viewed not in light of German-Native relations, but in the light of German immigrants' relationship with those nativist Americans who often adopted the political label "Native American."⁷ This article contends that when German-language writers depicted American Indians, they frequently did so to undermine Anglo-American nativists' pretensions to being the rightful heirs of the North American continent. The stories they told about German-Indian interactions also served to justify a permanent German-American presence by emphasizing both the early arrival of German settlers and the relative recency of Euro-American colonialism. That these stories could sometimes serve to ease German Americans' consciences over the displacement and murder of Native Americans was an added bonus, but not the primary aim. The tension between German speakers' frequent moral revulsion at Euro-American violence and continued seizure of Native lands could never be satisfactorily resolved because this anti-nativist line of attack required that a modified version of the "Vanishing Indian" trope be true, one in which Indigenous peoples' vanishing specifically be native-born Anglo-Americans' fault.⁸ Of course, because this dialogue was held in German, it did not cross over to Anglophone Americans. It did, however, function within the German-speaking community to bolster their current and future place in American society.

In evaluating nineteenth-century German Americans' depictions of Native Americans, this article turns to *Der Deutsche Pionier*, a Cincinnati-based periodical that sought to document German contributions to the United States' expansion and development, raise ethnic consciousness, and combat

nativism.⁹ It recommends itself as a source base not simply because of its name, but also because in its efforts to catalogue early German-American presence it suggested contingent paths for past and future American expansion. Its location in Cincinnati is also significant, both because the Euro-American conquest of the region was a living, if fading, memory, and because German Americans in the Ohio River Valley could point to more recent and raw outbreaks of anti-German nativist violence.¹⁰ Despite its local character, however, the *Pionier* drew subscribers and contributors from throughout German America. It became one of the most important clearinghouses for German-American intellectuals and its prominence made it, in Rainer Sell's words, "an indispensable source for the history of Germans in the United States."¹¹

The three articles analyzed here appear in the *Pionier's* first volume, in 1869-70. They are confined to this time frame first, because the *Pionier* as yet lacked a unified editorial voice, so its contributions reflected a greater heterogeneity of German American intellectuals, and second, because despite the relative decline in anti-German nativism after the Civil War, contributors remained wary of its shadow.¹² "Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio" (Gustav Brühl, pseudonym Kara Giorg), "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern" (anonymous), and "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf" (written and edited by L.A. Wollenweber) respectively reflect three of the *Pionier's* common genres: apparently good-faith efforts at historical chronicling; putatively true stories of early German American settlers, which may or may not have been intended to be taken seriously; and historical fiction.¹³ Despite their differences in genre, the articles share four key commonalities. First, they establish that German speakers were present at the earliest stages of Euro-American settlement in various American spaces. Second, those Germans are depicted as adhering to a normative standard of respectable behavior and benevolence, acting as agents of cultural elevation and using violence only when provoked. Third, native-born Americans, who are most frequently of British descent, are depicted as untrustworthy, rapacious, and often barbaric. Finally, Native Americans themselves have little or no agency in these stories. They are foils for Euro-Americans, and their future existence is circumscribed – but, crucially, not by the inscrutable hand of destiny or biology. Instead, Anglo-Americans are specifically responsible for their destruction.

These features cumulatively suggested that if Anglo-Americans had a right to the future of the North American continent, it was not solely theirs. More importantly, Anglo-Americans' pretensions to being "native" themselves were framed as both morally bankrupt and logically inconsistent. If the descendants of British immigrants owed their preeminence in the

United States to right of conquest, German-American writers emphatically rejected that as an illegitimate basis for claiming land. If Anglo settlers grounded their claim in having preceded other European immigrant groups in settlement, stories of early German settlers put the lie to that narrative. And if they claimed to be the “natives” of the soil, accounts of their violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples underscored both the recency of their claims and ridiculed their assertions of nativity. This was an anthropogenic version of the Vanishing Indian used to censure nativist Americans, and to establish a coequal German American claim to Native lands.

Praying Indians and Paxton Boys

Inaugural editor Gustav Brühl’s serialized article on the first Euro-American settlements in Ohio is an early attempt at writing a history of the first German colonists with a degree of academic rigor, occasionally citing sources and taking other chroniclers to task over differences of interpretation.¹⁴ But in important ways his account of the Moravian Missionary Indians – the so-called “Praying Indians” – sets the tone for a formulaic depiction of German-Indian interactions that would become the norm for subsequent *Pionier* contributors. Brühl’s recounting of the Moravian “Herrnhuter” and their early experiences in North America basically conforms to accepted historical fact, and he is not entirely blinded by filial piety, depicting the Moravians as noble missionaries, but naïve to the dangers of the frontier and North America’s racial alchemy.¹⁵ This pacifist sect sought to evangelize among various Native American groups, provoking legal and social persecution in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and the pays d’en haut that culminated in the infamous 1782 Gnadenhütten Massacre at the hands of Pennsylvania militia. Brühl was not alone in his interest in the Moravians and their Native American converts; James Fenimore Cooper largely based his archetype of the “noble savage” on stories about them current in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶ But Brühl’s goal was fundamentally different from Cooper’s. Rather than a romantic lament that absolved Euro-Americans from the sins of Native dispossession, “Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio” blamed the murders on non-German settlers to attack nativist pretensions and recast a narrative of Euro-American western conquest that was intrinsically barbaric.

This recasting immediately becomes clear in Brühl’s juxtaposition between the Moravian missionaries and settlers of British descent. Moravians were “animated by the same devotion and energy as the Puritans of New England,” but were “free of their revolting fanaticism,” and “proved to be a more amiable, if less successful, cultivating element.”¹⁷ Uniquely suited to tame both the wilderness and purportedly wild people, “From the quarreling

hunter and rough warrior, they made a peace-loving farmer, and they taught him to use the plow and tools instead of the tomahawk and rifle." Enduring persecution was also to the Moravians' credit. After settling in Georgia in the early eighteenth century, they were driven to Pennsylvania because of their opposition to slavery and aversion to physical force.¹⁸ In a description calculated to appeal to midcentury German American intellectuals, Brühl wrote that "reason should rule by them, not violence."¹⁹ Except in their stout pacificism, Brühl's Moravians bore striking resemblance to what Alison Clark Efford has termed the "freedom-loving German" of the Civil War era.²⁰

The Moravians' admirable qualities stood in stark contrast to the brutality regularly inflicted by Anglo and Scotch-Irish settlers of Pennsylvania and Ohio, collectively designated the "borderers" (*Grenzler*). These individuals were animated by an "inimical spirit" against "all who had a red skin, regardless if they were friend or foe," a distinction that the borderers, blinded by a prejudice that the Moravians supposedly lacked, could not register across racial lines.²¹ Rather than "civilize" or "elevate" the Native Americans around them, the borderers exercised "a pernicious effect on the practices and character of the converted," whose "honorable customs and laws were ridiculed and trampled underfoot," particularly when they saw "alcohol insidiously smuggled into their villages, and the scourge of drunkenness run rampant."²² And if this deleterious influence was not bad enough, residence on the frontier dulled the borderers' own basic humanity; Brühl insisted that for white settlers, "the killing of an Indian was to them no more sinful than the killing of a buffalo."²³ Thanks to the brutal activities of the Paxton Boys (a Pennsylvania militia consisting of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians) and later the multi-sided character that the American Revolution took on in Ohio, Moravian Indians found themselves caught between "the raw violence of the wild barbarians and the cold greed [*Gewinnsucht*] of self-interested whites," with the result that "the fruits of years of diligence [were] destroyed."²⁴ In this framing, borderers were both regressing on their own civilizational level and actively undermining the noble work of German missionaries.

This trend culminated in the massacre of nearly one hundred Moravian Indians at the mission village of Gnadenhütten, Ohio.²⁵ The *Pionier* article seems to draw most directly from the testimony of Moravians Johann Heckewelder, Georg Heinrich Loskiel, and David Zeisberger, and lays the blame mostly at the feet of militia Colonel David Williamson, "an ambitious wimp."²⁶ In a manner as cowardly as it was appalling, upon entering Gnadenhütten the militiamen divided the Moravian Indian men and women into two houses and informed them that they would be executed the next morning. The "innocent victims spent the long, terrible night amid songs and prayer."²⁷ Rather than actively resisting, "with the stoic equanimity of

savages [*Wilden*] and the faithful heroism of the Christian martyrs simultaneously, they awaited their irrevocable fate.” The next morning, the militiamen took sixty-two adults and thirty-four children from their huts one by one and murdered each with a copper hammer. The militiamen burned the huts before departing, completing the destruction of the German missionaries’ work and their alternative vision of Native-white relations.²⁸

The Gnadenhütten Massacre – the “darkest page in the history of the American frontier,” as Brühl put it – is an episode onto which writers have projected their own visions of westward settlement and white-Native relations.²⁹ In Brühl’s morality play, Native Americans themselves are passive objects. Their extermination is due, however, not to the inscrutable hand of destiny, but to the specific actions of British-descended settlers who could not bear the Moravians’ contingent colonial path. The *Pionier* article depicts the militiamen as so close to unanimous in their decision to massacre the converts as to make no difference: “from one and hundred forty-four throats rang out the call for their scalps. What use was it, that sixteen of the humanely-minded energetically protested against it?”³⁰ Yet the decision to kill the Moravian Indians was more drawn out than Brühl let on, and the number of militiamen who did the actual killing more limited than he described – and given that both of those facts were available from widely circulated accounts of the massacre in the nineteenth century, it is quite likely that Brühl himself knew that.³¹ In order for the moral of the story to come across as Brühl intended, however, he needed to depict the militia’s decision as essentially single-minded, and needed to maintain that German Americans were not among the murderers. This is why he took aim at Cincinnati chronicler Emil Klauprecht for attributing the opening murder at Gnadenhütten to a German settler named Charles Builderback. While Klauprecht was normally a diligent historian, Brühl grouched that “We owe him little thanks... that he suggested the despicable murderer was the offspring of a German, merely being misled by the sound of his name. In history mere conjecture should never be elevated to the level of positive certainty.”³²

Of course, in order to undermine the uniqueness of British-descended claims to the continent, Brühl needed to argue that German settlers were among the first Europeans in Ohio, and here he demonstrated no reservation about conjecture, or with qualifying definitions to establish a qualitative difference in German settlement. Thus while it was undeniable that French and English adventurers had been in Ohio for centuries, “it was precisely Germans who founded the first *lasting settlements* in Ohio.”³³ He contradicts himself at the end of the article’s final installment, eulogizing Gnadenhütten by writing that “Only the stone foundations of the houses, a few fruit trees planted by the diligent hands of the murdered brothers, and hardly visible

traces of the burned slaughterhouses in which the unfortunates fell victim to the fanaticism of the borderers are the only, meager traces of the first settlements of Ohio,” hardly a description of a “lasting” settlement.³⁴ But this only underscores his broader argument that Anglo-American colonization was fundamentally destructive, while German colonization was fundamentally generative. For this reason, too, he advances as fact the unverifiable claim that Johanna Maria Heckewelder was the first white female child, and perhaps the first white child of either sex, born in Ohio.³⁵ Her gender perhaps represented a domestication of the rough-and-tumble male world of the frontier, an interpretation bolstered by Brühl’s summary of her later life. After having survived the Moravian dislocations as a small child, she was sent to school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and after completing her own education spent over fifty years teaching at a girl’s school, passing away less than a year before the article was published.³⁶

At first glance, the disparate elements of “Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio” – stories of the Moravians in Europe and Georgia, the Gnadenhütten Massacre, assorted English and Anglo-American barbarities, and the account of Johanna Maria Heckewelder’s life – are a disorganized grab bag of anecdotes that do not actually add up to permanent Euro-American settlement in Ohio. However, they combine into a coherent argument about the nature of German American settlement and the relative brutality and coarseness of Anglo-American colonization. Brühl’s narrative does not neatly map onto the famous and almost-contemporaneous depiction of Manifest Destiny, John Gast’s painting *American Progress*. Instead, he uses depictions of Native Americans and their interactions with different groups of Euro-American settlers to stake a temporal, geographical, and moral claim for German settlement in the post-Civil War era. That the Moravians were a tiny minority of German-speaking settlers, or that there were certainly German colonists among the white militias that killed and dispossessed Native peoples in Ohio, is entirely beside the point because Brühl’s narrative is grounded in the anti-nativist campaign of the mid-nineteenth century, not, as it purports to be, a faithful account of “the first settlements in Ohio.”

“Laßt uns nicht rappelköpfig sein!”

In contrast to Gustav Brühl’s nominally true account of the Moravians in Ohio, “Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern,” written anonymously but pretending to be based on the experiences of an apparently well-known German Ohioan, makes little claim to believability.³⁷ The brief article takes the form of an oral history interview with Karl Dominique, a Palatinate-born doctor who settled in Columbus after stops at various medical institutions in

Europe and the United States. That his stories are not to be taken seriously is implied by their sheer absurdity (for example, getting out of his lease while a medical student in Heidelberg by falsely telling his landlady that he had given her human flesh from a medical cadaver for dinner) and frequently relating them in barely comprehensible Pfälzisch.³⁸ But read with an eye for argument about German American colonization relative to other Euro-American settlement, it, too, makes a serious, if not literal, argument for the relative moral bankruptcy of non-German colonization, as well as inserting Germans into early settlement. Much as in the story of the Moravian missionaries and their converts, German speakers are also suggested to have a special relationship with Native peoples that enables them to exert a civilizing influence over both Indians and their non-German neighbors.

In the article, Dominique claims to have served a stint in the French Foreign Legion, before joining the United States Army and serving against the Seminole in Florida. The army is depicted as utterly hapless, accidentally fighting a pitched battle among itself in the dark after a false alarm and nervously mistaking a wandering cow for a raiding party. Dominique himself somehow loses his gunpowder in a boiling pot of coffee, ruining the taste for his messmates and earning disciplinary sanction. It is at this point that “*Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern*” takes a turn for the fantastical. One evening while standing watch at an isolated outpost as part of his punishment, he is captured by a Seminole war band and taken to their encampment. Unlike the noble depiction of the Moravian Indians, Dominique’s Native Americans are barbaric caricatures, and “danced as if possessed in circles with terrible caprioles and leapfroggings, and with jubilant grimaces.”³⁹ Tied to a spit and prepared to be cooked and eaten, Dominique is shocked when he hears the Seminoles break into the first verse of the old German student song “*Cä Cä, Geschmauset*.”⁴⁰ As they are about to set him alight, Dominique, resigned to his fate, joins in, and stuns the Indians by continuing with later verses that the Seminole do not know.⁴¹ Concluding that Dominique must be kin to the person who had taught them the song, his captors fetch a young white man who appears wearing a student cap of the Corps Franconia Jena.

Astonishingly for the narrator, but predictably for the story, this is an old friend of Dominique’s by the name of Grube. Grube’s backstory quickly establishes his middle-class, German-American liberal credentials. As Grube relates to Dominique upon freeing him, after besting a Prussian Guards lieutenant in a duel over an affair of honor, the young student was pressured to flee the country.⁴² He leveraged his fencing skills into a position as an instructor for a Georgia plantation owner of Spanish descent, but was so appalled by the institution of slavery and the owner’s particular cruelty that he helped

enslaved people flee the plantation and accompanied them to Florida, where one continued to serve him voluntarily as his batman. Falling in with a group of Seminole, the band made him their chief.

In this story, Grube has an almost mystical ability to calm the agitated Seminole with simple commands that they instantaneously obey. There is an implication that this is through sheer force of a particularly German moral authority, although there are no details given about how Grube supposedly came to earn his position. It is clear that German identity could be a foundation for solidarity with Native Americans in a way that a generic white American identity could not be, however; Grube reports sadly that he had only taught the Seminole the beginning of “Ça Ça, Geschmauset” because upon singing it “the chaps *got too wild* – and if they got their hands on a Yankee, they would always burn him at the stake.”⁴³ Grube finds the practice so distasteful that he retires to his tent when he senses the Seminole are going to cannibalize another victim. That tent, too, reflects the limits of German-Native integration, for although it is “decorated with weapons of all sorts,” it also includes “student association ribbons hanging around a small mirror, which the Indians acquired from a trader.”⁴⁴

Thus surrounding himself with mementoes of his *Bildung* and able to reaffirm his white identity daily in the mirror, Grube does not slide into barbaric practices. Consciously or unconsciously, Grube makes a point to maintain the color line, enjoying a position of power relative to the Seminoles, keeping the formerly enslaved black man as his personal servant, and, most importantly, rejecting miscegenation: as Dominique reports, “A squaw was not to be found in the tent. Grube had vowed his faithfulness to a beautiful girl in Thuringia and had maintained his promise.”⁴⁵ Final confirmation of Grube’s durable Germanness comes from the article’s postscript, which claims that he did eventually manage to return to white society, but unfortunately died en route back from the Baltimore Sängerkunstfest in 1868. Although unwilling to return to Euro-American society before the abolition of slavery for fear of legal prosecution, he did what he could to maintain his civilized character – a uniquely German ability, if compared to the brutality of the Spanish-descended slaveowner and the uncouthness of the soldiers Dominique served alongside, who over the first half of the nineteenth century repeatedly failed to subdue the Seminole. It is worth emphasizing that the Native Americans depicted in this story are obviously caricatures, but function to illustrate the supremacy of a specifically German form of colonization in North America. This was one that employed moral force and, if not able to convert Native Americans, was at least able to tame them in a way that the armed force of the federal government could not.

Revolutionary Memories

The first installments of L.A. Wollenweber's serialized novella on Peter Mühlenberg and German American participation in the Revolutionary War begin by examining the career of the historical Indian interpreter Conrad Weiser. A Württemberger whose family fled war in Germany to Britain, and then poverty in Britain to the American colonies, his story best exemplifies the ways alleged differences in German-Indian versus Anglo-Indian relations could be leveraged to argue for German belonging in the mid-nineteenth-century United States. In Wollenweber's mythologized account of his life, the chief obstacles are English callousness and duplicity directed at German settlers and Native Americans alike. Once again, Native peoples themselves are objects, rather than subjects, whose interactions with German speakers simultaneously serve to demonstrate German virtue and normalize their presence in North America.

English unfaithfulness dominates the narrative. Weiser's widowed father and thousands of other German refugees flee to London at the invitation of Queen Anne, but find themselves crammed into wretched suburban quarters, where "sickness, hunger, and homelessness decimated the Germans terribly, and many gave themselves up to death in despair."⁴⁶ Despite this, Weiser's father manages to cobble together meager savings, until one day "There appeared, as if sent from heaven, Colonel Nicholson, Peter Schuyler, and six Indian chiefs from New York," who had traveled to London to strategize against French Canada in the ongoing War of Spanish Succession. In this telling, Weiser and his fellow German refugees are invited to settle in modern upstate New York at the specific invitation of Native peoples, who "were very eager to see all portions of London... and so came also to the quarter in which the poor Germans resided." The Indians are so moved with sympathy that they petition Queen Anne to grant the Germans a tract of land in the Schoharie Valley "as a gift, if they [the government] would transport the needy Germans there, [and] the country should remain a homeland [*Heimath*] for the same in perpetuity." Thus framed, the Weiser family and one hundred fifty others had a unique and unimpeachable claim to settle in upstate New York, given that it came at the initiative of Native Americans who were not under duress and went through the proper legal channels.

In Wollenweber's telling, the newly arrived Germans immediately grasp the importance of open and honest communication with Native Americans, and locate fruitful tracts of land by sending an advance delegation upstate to meet with Native leaders. Now a young man, Conrad Weiser learns English, and after encountering a veteran German-speaking trader named Meyderten realizes the benefits of fair trading with Indians. Through Meyderten, Weiser

meets a Mohawk chief named Quagnant and lives with him while learning Iroquoian languages and customs.⁴⁷ A diligent and respectful student, Weiser also soon discovers that despite being shown great hospitality “the savages [*Wilden*] frequently were not to be trusted and that in the nearby villages lived many who bore an implacable hatred for the whites.” Weiser was consequently “many times in danger of coming into closer acquaintance with the tomahawk, or more than once of becoming the target of their arrows,” but is protected by his acquaintance with Quagnant. The mutual respect he engendered “were of great usefulness to his new fatherland and certainly sometimes prevented against murder, burning, and plundering” on the Indian side. For years, Weiser’s work as an interpreter keeps the peace and provides the German settlers with material security, particularly during times of bad harvest.

Wollenweber’s Native Americans bear a distrust of white settlers that is not entirely unreasonable, but is misdirected towards Germans, rather than British colonial authorities. The Germans’ and Iroquois’ mutual enemies are New York colonial officials, who reveal their perfidy by unilaterally claiming possession of the German settlements. “Like a bolt from the blue” comes the news that the governor had sold the Schoharie lands to seven prominent merchants under the pretense that the settlers had not paid their required taxes, and as the merchants had paid the tax instead, they were entitled to the land, its improvements, and the settlers’ property thereon.⁴⁸ The colonists send a delegation, among them Weiser’s father, to petition London. But they are set upon by pirates soon after sailing from Philadelphia, robbed of the funds collected to support their stay and lobbying efforts in London, and arrive to find Queen Anne deceased and that “they were slandered by the New York land-stealers as base rebels and no heed would be paid to their petitions.”⁴⁹ The elder Weiser and another of the deputies are thrown into an English debtors’ prison for four years before the Schoharie colonists manage to secure their release.⁵⁰ The injustice and dishonesty of this land seizure was, in Wollenweber’s telling, on par with any dispossession Native Americans faced.

Meanwhile, Conrad Weiser’s skills as an interpreter remain in great demand. Many of the German settlers move to Pennsylvania “and met there with peaceful Indians, with whom they lived for a long time without discord.”⁵¹ Weiser belatedly follows this group, learns the local Indians’ language, and soon “came many red skins [*Rothhäute*] to him and bade him to be a mediating judge in difficulties with the pale faces [*Bleichgesichtern*].”⁵² This practically lays the basis of an alternative colonial government, because “since he mostly settled them to the satisfaction of both parties, it was natural that he soon received visits from various savage [*Wilden*] chiefs and gained their friendship and confidence.” In addition to prominent Native American leaders, “influential whites, who partially lived in Reading, partially in Phila-

delphia, and had heard of Weiser's good reputation," come to his residence along Tulehocken Creek. In Wollenweber's narrative, Weiser's reputed ability to straddle two worlds in the borderlands – a process and a physical space that Richard White famously dubbed the "middle ground" – offers, however fleetingly, an alternative mode of colonization in which "the critical element is mediation" that the German settlers, by virtue of their liminal status in an English colony, are uniquely equipped to pursue.⁵³ Realizing this, the Pennsylvania government employs Weiser as an interpreter, but his loyalties remain, in order, to the German settler community, Native allies, and the colonial government.

If Weiser is not himself a formally educated and cultivated individual, Wollenweber at least depicts him as lending his talents to those who are, crediting him with aiding local Lutheran pastors and the Moravian missionaries whose deeds are celebrated in "Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio."⁵⁴ This, in the novella's telling, was a lasting and honorable form of colonialism, commemorated by the fact that in Heidelberg, Pennsylvania, "Even today stands a church on the same spot but instead of wood, it is built of stone."⁵⁵ When a group of German Jews also attempted to create a community nearby, "Weiser shared with them the best advice and assured them of his sincerest friendship, because he was far from being bigoted." And like Grube in "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," Weiser is depicted as being able to adopt enough of the trappings of Indian culture to facilitate intercultural communication without transgressing racial boundaries, especially sexual ones.⁵⁶ While Weiser is employed as a translator in the negotiations of multiple treaties that resulted in land cessions, Wollenweber depicts his participation as upright and honest.⁵⁷ And according to the novella, if Native Americans were forced to leave their land, that was the fault of land-hungry Anglo-American governors, rather than the German settlers who were given Native lands freely, happily lived alongside them, and earned their trust as honest brokers. In Wollenweber's literary reconstruction, the disappearance of Native peoples was neither inevitable nor especially desirable. Unlike in the previous two accounts, they do have agency, but just enough agency to surrender it, and to once again underscore the moral superiority of German settlers over British ones. Wollenweber's account of Weiser's life is not bound by the requirements of factual and interpretive accuracy, being avowedly a work of historical fiction. But it carries with it the tone and many of the trappings of contemporaneous historical writing, and in its contrasting of virtuous German settlers with perfidious Anglo-Americans, grounding of long claims to German presence in North America, and depictions of flat Native American characters, it is of a piece with other works in the *Pionier*.

Conclusion

In the articles discussed above, each of the authors engage to a greater or lesser degree in common literary tropes and stereotypes common to the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁸ Their writing was surely influenced by the standards of the time, and each author exhibits a certain amount of racism, even as they decry native dispossession, slavery, and antisemitism. They condemn Anglo-American greed and uncouthness and hold up German and German-American culture as worthy of celebration and emulation. But their condemnations of Anglo-Americans' violence and praise for German speakers eschewing the same are not nostalgic whitewashing or laments for the modern world, as several scholars investigating "Indianthusiasm" have concluded of many manifestations of German interest in Native Americans.⁵⁹ *Pionier* authors depicted American Indians to make a contemporary argument about nativism and nativity, not about Native Americans or indigeneity. Insofar as they believed Germans and Indians had a "special relationship," it was to demonstrate the inferiority or unworthiness of other Euro-Americans.

In the mid-nineteenth century, nativist claims to the North American continent asserted a specific Anglo-Saxon right to inherit the land, one that depended on casting newer immigrants as foreign and on Indians as disappearing. German Americans responded by saying, in essence, that these claims relied on a process that was not natural, but man-made. If the *Vanishing Indian* was anthropogenic, then Anglo-American conceptions of Manifest Destiny were morally bankrupt. There was no contradiction in German Americans simultaneously decrying the dispossession and murder of Native peoples while occupying their lands because their argument was never about settler colonialism in and of itself being a bad thing. Rather, they rejected right of conquest when that conquest was clearly secured by murder and duplicity, and when the conquerors backslid into what they considered barbarism, rather than advancing civilization. They countered with a vision of settler colonialism that argued – from a modern perspective, perhaps more insidiously – that Germans would have been more humane and civilized colonizers, and therefore had earned their permanent place in the ongoing expansion of the United States.

Notes

1. For the transnational turn in relation to formal and informal German colonial relationships, see Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

2004); and Eric Ames et al., eds., *Germany's Colonial Pasts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). On German-Native American interactions, see among others Colin G. Calloway et al., eds., *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); and H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

2. Christian F. Feest, "Germany's Indians in a European Perspective," in Calloway et al., *Germans and Indians*, 25-46. For examples of the latter phenomenon, see Rowena McClinton, "Converging Spiritualities: Observations of Anna Rosina Gambold, Moravian Missionary to the Cherokees, 1805 to 1821," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 45 (2010): 61-76; Corinna Dally-Starna and William A. Starna, "American Indians and Moravians in Southern New England" in Calloway et al., *Germans and Indians*, 83-96; Penny, *Kindred by Choice*, chps. 4-8; and H. Glenn Penny, "Not Playing Indian: Surrogate Indigeneity and the German Hobbyist Scene," in Laura R. Graham and H. Glenn Penny, eds., *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 169-205.

3. This paradox is frequently noted in studies of German speakers' interactions with Native Americans, among many other places Bernd Fischer, "Baumwolle und Indianer: Zu Charles Sealsfields *Der Legitime und die Republikaner*," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 19 (1984): 85-96; George Newtown, "James Fenimore Cooper, Frontier Mythology, and the New Ulm Apologists," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 21 (1986): 97-106; Irene S. Di Maio, "Borders of Culture: The Native American in Friedrich Gerstäcker's North American Narratives," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 28 (1993): 53-75; Penny, *Kindred By Choice*, 20, 43, 56, and especially 69-95; Kaisa Philippa Niehusen, "Scharmann's Overland Journey to California: A German-American Travelogue," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 54 (2019): 15-36; and Matthew Babcock, "German-Comanche Diplomacy on the Texas Frontier: Assessing the Meusebach-Comanche Treaty of 1847," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 56 (2021): 57-71.

4. Orm Øverland, "Intruders on Native Ground: Troubling Silences and Memories of the Land-Taking in Norwegian Immigrant Letters," in Udo Hebel, ed., *Transnational American Memories* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2009), 79-104; and Gunlög Fur, "Colonial Fantasies: American Indians, Indigenous Peoples, and a Swedish Discourse of Innocence, National Identities 18 (2016): 11-33.

5. See respectively Penny, *Kindred by Choice*, 69-95; Newtown, "James Fenimore Cooper," 104; and Øverland, "Intruders on Native Ground," 79 & 84.

6. Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassell, 1999); A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn, 2008); Bernard Perley, "Living Traditions: A Manifesto for Critical Indigeneity," in Graham & Penny, *Performing Indigeneity*, 22-54; J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A Structure, Not an Event: Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5.1 (Spring 2016): n.p.

7. Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 59 fn 18.

8. Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), particularly chapters 1-4.

9. Rainer Sell, "Der Deutsche Pionier-Verein von Cincinnati, Heinrich Armin Rattermann, and Der Deutsche Pionier: A Nucleus of Nineteenth-Century German-America," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 20 (1985): 49-50.

10. Most infamously in 1855 in both Louisville and Cincinnati. Charles E. Deusner, "The Know Nothing Riots in Louisville," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 61 no. 2 (April 1963): 122-147.

11. Sell, "Der Deutsche Pionier," 49.

12. Sell, "Der Deutsche Pionier," 54-58. This was also a period of increasing German American self-confidence, but was not yet complicated by German unification. Alison Clark Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge, 2013), 115-142.

13. Brühl's pseudonym per Sell, "Der Deutsche Pionier," 52. Kara Giorg [Gustav Brühl], "Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio," *Deutsche Pionier* vol 1 no. 3 (May 1869): 65-74; Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio," *Deutsche Pionier* vol 1 no. 4 (June 1869): 102-108; Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen in Ohio," *Deutsche Pionier* vol 1 no. 5 (July 1869): 133-138; "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," vol 1 no 5 (July 1869): 152-159; L.A. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," vol 1 no. 11 (Jan 1870): 343-347; L.A. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," vol 1 no. 12 (Feb 1870) 378-383.

14. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 65-66.

15. William E. Petig, "The First Moravian Missions in the Midwest," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 42 (2007): 39-52.

16. Newtown, "James Fenimore Cooper," 97-98.

17. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 65-66.

18. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 67.

19. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 66.

20. Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship*, 54.

21. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 102.

22. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 138.

23. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 66.

24. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 68-69 & 104.

25. Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 85-88. Dowd and Brühl both put the death toll at 96.

26. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 105.

27. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 106.

28. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 106.

29. Rob Harper, "Looking the Other Way: The Gnadenhütten Massacre and the Contextual Interpretation of Violence," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 no. 3 (July 2007): 622-624. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 105.
30. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 106.
31. Harper, "Looking the Other Way," 629-632.
32. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 106-107.
33. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 65. Emphasis original.
34. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 139.
35. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 73-74.
36. Giorg, "Die ersten Niederlassungen," 74.
37. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," vol 1 no 5 (July 1869): 152-159.
38. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 153.
39. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 155.
40. The author has found no evidence of any such practices among the Seminole.
41. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 155-156.
42. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 156-157.
43. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 156.
44. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 157.
45. "Deutsche Studenten unter den Indianern," 157.
46. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 344.
47. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 344-345.
48. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 346.
49. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 379.
50. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 380.
51. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 380. Wollenweber's novella "reproduces" the text of a letter sent to Weiser inviting him to join the new settlement. As this serialized story is avowedly a work of historical fiction, it is unclear if he ever meant for it to be taken as a genuine historical document, or if he claimed otherwise elsewhere, but at least one researcher made the effort to debunk its authenticity. Frank E. Lichtenhaeler, "The Unaccountable Weiser Letter," *Berks History Center*, accessed July 29, 2025, <https://berkshistory.org/article/the-unaccountable-weiser-letter/>.
52. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 380.
53. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, rev. ed. (New York: Cambridge, 2011), XII.
54. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 381 & 383.

55. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 381.

56. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 343-344.

57. Wollenweber, ed., "General Peter Mühlenberg und seine deutsche Soldaten im amerikianischen Freiheitskampf," 382.

58. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), especially 38-94.

59. See especially H. Glenn Penny's criticism of this body of literature in Penny, "Not Playing Indian."

