

# “In a Few Years the Red Man Will Live Only in Legend and in Cooper’s Charming Accounts”: Portrayals of American Indians in Danish Travel Literature in the Mid- and Late Nineteenth Century

**Jørn Brøndal**

University of Southern Denmark

***Abstract:** During the middle and late nineteenth century, a number of Danish travel writers visited the United States with a view to narrating about the New World to their readers back home. Four of the most prominent writers were Hans Peter Christian Hansen, Vilhelm C.S. Topsøe, Robert Watt, and Henrik Cavling. Among the many topics covered by these writers was that of American Indians. Establishing a narrative of the “vanishing Indian,” the writers endeavored to tie the Indians to a receding landscape of the past and—for the most part—to establish a contradiction between Indians and white “civilization.” Likewise displaying an interest in Scandinavian immigrants, the travel writers sometimes attempted to create links between the Indians and Scandinavian settlers. With no clear Danish interest in celebrating American exceptionalism in the shape of classical U.S. “Manifest Destiny,” the travel writers were nevertheless involved in processes of bonding with the dominant population element of the United States through their common “civilization” and whiteness.*

***Keywords:** American Indians, Denmark, Scandinavian immigrants, Travel narratives, Whiteness*

## The Writers

The “white” side of the history of encounters between Scandinavians and Indians during the colonization and settlement of the American West in the second half of the nineteenth century has usually been told from the perspective of the immigrant. It is a tale, we may add, that has been pursued more vigorously by chroniclers of Norwegian and Swedish than Danish immigration, with no studies of Danish-Indian relations thus far matching the works of Karen Hansen, Gunlög Fur, or Betty Bergland.<sup>1</sup> Even though the recent digitization of the entire surviving Danish-American press alongside many Danish immigrant letters and manuscripts opens up exciting new vistas for the further exploration of ethnoracial boundary maintenance among Danish immigrants and their surroundings, the aim of the present article is not to pursue that line of research just yet but, rather, to shift the focus: the immigrants were not the only people of Danish background to encounter Indians during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Another group also confronted them and generally proved far more willing to write about them than their immigrant counterparts: the Danish travel writers.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Karen V. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Gunlög Fur, *Colonialism in the Margins: Cultural Encounters in New Sweden and Lapland* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers), 2006; Fur, *A Nation of Women: Gender and Colonial Encounters Among the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Of Bergland’s several works may be mentioned “Norwegian Immigrants and ‘Indianerne’ in the Landtaking, 1838-1862,” *Norwegian-American Studies* 35 (2000): 319-50; “Settler Colonists, ‘Christian Citizenship,’ and the Women’s Missionary Federation at the Bethany Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin, 1884-1934,” in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation and the Protestant Empire*, eds. Kathryn K. Sklar, Barbara Reeves-Ellington, and Connie Shemo (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 162-194; Betty A. Bergland and Lori Ann Lahlum, eds., *Norwegian American Women: Migration, Communities, and Identities* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2011). Studies on Danish-Indian relations include Nancy Mitchell, “Danes in Kansas: Paradise or Disaster?,” in Birgit Flemming Larsen and Henning Bender, eds., *Danish Emigration to the U.S.A.* (Aalborg: Danes Worldwide Archives, 1992), 142-156; John Mark Nielsen, “Our Mission to the Indians: An Account of a Danish Immigrant Church’s Mission to the Cherokee Indians in 1892,” *The Bridge: The Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1983, 5-17; Joanna Cohan Scherer, *Benedicte Wrensted’s Indian Photographs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 2006.
- 2 The digitization of the Danish-American Press took place in a collaborative effort between the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa, and the Danish American Archive and Library in Blair, Nebraska, leading to the creation of the website <http://box2.nmtvault.com/DanishIM/>; the digitization of vast amounts of letters and manuscripts has been undertaken by the Danish Emigration Archives in Aalborg, Denmark, leading to the creation of the website <http://www.udvanderarkivet.dk/soegeside/>.
- 3 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

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of Danish travel writers—like so many of their European colleagues—journeyed to the United States to explore the young nation and narrate about it to readers back home. Four stand out. Writing under the pseudonym of “Axel Felix,” Hans Peter Christian Hansen (1817-65) published his three-volume *Langtfra Danmark* (*Far from Denmark*) in the first half of the 1850s, that is, before the Civil War and the Sioux Uprising in Minnesota of 1862. Hansen’s work was based on his visit to the United States 1846-1852, when he also edited the short-lived *Skandinavia* of New York City (1847). Returning home destitute after another transatlantic journey, he died in a charity hospital in Brussels in 1865.<sup>4</sup> As Hansen himself noted, “...God knows that I never in my life idolized the golden calf—regrettably, I might say.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1871—the same year that the United States terminated treaty-making with the Indians, and five years before George Armstrong Custer’s defeat to a combination of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians at Little Bighorn—two more Danish travel writers toured America. Reporter and writer Vilhelm C.S. Topsøe (1840-81), the later chief editor of the conservative paper *Dagbladet* who today is considered a pioneering figure within Danish realist fiction, traveled across the United States that spring and summer, publishing *Fra Amerika* (*From America*) the following year. His book was so successful that a second edition came out in 1876. His life was cut short when at age forty he contracted diphtheria.<sup>6</sup> The other writer to journey to America in 1871 was Robert Watt (1837-94), of Scottish ancestry and a well-known reporter who pioneered the use of the American interview technique in Danish journalism. A globe trotter, he had earlier published accounts on Australia and Egypt, as well as European destinations. In 1867, he acted as Hans Christian Andersen’s guide to Paris. Watt likewise translated Twain, Poe, and Harte into Danish. In 1886, he was appointed director

Gruyter, 2009), 79-85; Gunlög Fur, “Indians and Immigrants—Entangled Histories,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 33, 3 (Spring 2014): 68.

4 Hans Peter Christian Hansen (“Axel Felix”), *Langtfra Danmark*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: Høsts Forlag, 1852-55); Marion Tuttle Marzolf, *The Danish-Language Press in America* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 29-30; Nicolai Bøgh, “Hansen, Hans Peter Christian,” in C. F. Bricka, ed., *Dansk biografisk Lexikon, tillige omfattende Norge for Tidsrummet 1537-1814*, vol. 6, *Gerson – H. Hansen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1887-1905), 633-634.

5 Hansen 1852-55 I, 151.

6 Vilhelm C. S. Topsøe, *Fra Amerika* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1872); Steffen Elmer Jørgensen, “Ideal or Counterimage? Aspects of the American Cultural Impact on Denmark, 1776-1995,” in *Images of America in Scandinavia*, eds. Poul Houe and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 57.

of the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. His three-volume *Hinsides Atlanterhavet* (*Beyond the Atlantic*) was published 1872-74.<sup>7</sup>

In 1897—ten years after passage of the Dawes Severalty Act, the high point in the federal government's attempts to "assimilate" the Indians by breaking up their tribal lands into individual farming units (and incidentally selling off the surplus to white farmers), and seven years after the massacre of Lakota Indians at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890—Henrik Cavling (1858-1933) published the two-volume *Fra Amerika* (*From America*). This was his second travel book, having previously written about the Danish West Indies (Virgin Isles); later, he would write accounts of Asia, as well as London and Paris. As reporter for and later chief editor of the influential *Politiken*, Cavling reinvented Danish journalism, drawing inspiration from the United States. In 1945 the Cavling Prize, today the most prestigious award in Danish journalism, was instituted in his name. Based on Cavling's trips to the United States in 1888 and 1895, *Fra Amerika* quickly replaced Topsøe's similarly entitled work as the standard Danish-language travel account on the United States.<sup>8</sup>

In writing their narratives, the writers touched upon a welter of themes. Typically beginning with a description of the port of arrival—almost invariably New York City—they guided the reader westward in a movement from "civilization" to harsher and more primitive conditions. Sometimes the narrative also included a trip down south. Dwelling on many topics and several

7 Robert Watt, *Hinsides Atlanterhavet*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: P. Bloch and F. W. Christern, 1872-74); Hans Boll-Johansen, *De danske og de franske: Frankofiliens metamorfoser* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2007), 62; Jørgensen, "Ideal or Counterimage?," 58; Emil Elberling, "Watt, Robert," in Bricka, *Dansk Biografisk Lexikon*, vol. 18, *Ubbe-Wimpffen*, 278-279; John Christian Jørgensen, *Kommer De som ven eller som interviewer? Interviewets historie i Danmark* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2010), 62. Two less well-known travel accounts of the 1870s were A.C.L. Grove-Rasmussen, "En Rejse i Amerika," *Nordisk Månedsskrift for folkelig og kristelig Oplysning* (Odense: Milo'ske Bogtrykkeri, 1871), 241-293; and P. Beder, *Reise-erindringer fra et Besøg i Amerika* (Copenhagen: Fr. Wøldikes Forlag, 1877).

8 Henrik Cavling, *Fra Amerika*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1897); Sven Ove Gade, *Journalisten: En biografi om Henrik Cavling* (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 2009), 118; Sven Hakon Rossel, "The Image of the United States in Danish Literature: A Survey with Scandinavian Perspectives," in Houe and Rossel 1998, 13; Steffen Elmer Jørgensen, "Ideal or Counterimage? Aspects of the American Cultural Impact on Denmark, 1776-1995," in Houe and Rossel 1998, 52; Christian Rimestad, "Cavling, Henrik," *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* 3, 209-212 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1979), third edition, ed. Svend Cedergreen Bech. I also consulted a few travel narratives written after 1890: Anton Nielsen, *En Sommer i Amerika* (Odense: Milo'ske Bogtrykkeri, 1891); Marcus Kierulf, *Erindringer fra en Rejse til Amerika i Sommeren 1893* (Odense: Milo'ske Bogtrykkeri, 1894); C.J. Hagemann, *En Amerikarejse* (Rønne: Colbergs Boghandels Forlag, 1908); H.C. Vedsted, *Amerika-Skildringer* (Copenhagen: H. Hagerups Forlag, 1911).

“scenes,” the writers attempted to convey an impression not only of the furious pace of life in the United States but also of its population groups: white native-born men and women, immigrants—not least Scandinavian immigrants—, African Americans, and Indians.<sup>9</sup> The overall aim was to entertain readers at home with exciting tales about life in the brave New World—sometimes, to be sure, by adding colorful details designed more for dramatic effect than historical veracity, yet still conveying descriptions remaining within the boundaries of the plausible.<sup>10</sup>

### The Vanishing Indian

It is the travel writers’ discussion of Indians that is the focus of the present article: their reports of encounters with them at or near the western limits of white expansion; their descriptions of Indians’ adjustments to new life circumstances within the circumference of white settlement; and their evaluation of the Scandinavian settlers’ role in driving out the Indians. Even though each author contributed with his own unique perspective, together they painted an almost timeless picture of Native Americans that fed into prevalent notions of the “vanishing Indian” doomed to extinction.<sup>11</sup>

Even from his early vantage point of the late 1840s and early 1850s, Hans Peter Christian Hansen did not doubt that the Indians would ultimately die out, even though they still could be found in large numbers at or near the western frontier, and notwithstanding that one might pass one on Broadway: “But the Indian is [already] way past us, he has disappeared from our view, and, unfortunately, in more than one sense this disappear-

9 Jørn Brøndal, “Woman’s Place in a New World: Scandinavian Visions, c. 1850-1900,” in *Transnational America: Contours of U.S. Culture*, eds. Russell Duncan and Clara Juncker (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004), 152-164; Brøndal, “An Early American Dilemma? Scandinavian Travel Writers’ Reflections on the Founding Ideals of the United States and the Condition of African Americans, ca. 1850-1900,” in Marie Bolton and Marie-Elisabeth Baudoin, eds., *Constitutions: On-Going Revolutions in the U.S. and Europe* (forthcoming 2015).

10 For a complaint of Cavling’s lack of veracity in describing a local community in Wyoming, compare the reader letter by H. Dalgas of Rock Springs, Wyoming, in *Den Danske Pioneer*, May 13, 1897, with Cavling 1897 I, 366-367.

11 On the theory of the “vanishing Indian” see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994, 64-70; Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, xi-xv; Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2004, 4-5, 9, and 58.

ance is characteristic of his whole race—even at the outermost borders of the Union—and in a few years the red man will live only in legend and in [James Fenimore] Cooper’s charming accounts.”<sup>12</sup>

In what seemed almost like an answer to Hansen, some twenty years later Robert Watt observed, “Cooper’s Indians have not become extinct; probably you won’t meet them in the streets of New York; instead, you have to travel out to the great western prairies to see them...”<sup>13</sup> Even though Watt thus granted their continued existence, in visiting Chicago he dwelled on how “all these terrible warriors have completely disappeared from the vicinity,” even though just forty years earlier their presence had been clear.<sup>14</sup>

Visiting America simultaneously with Watt, Vilhelm Topsøe likewise placed America’s original population in a narrative of extinction. Brushing all moral scruples aside and invoking what seemed almost like a secularized version of Manifest Destiny, he suggested, “The Indian seems destined to die out; you cannot keep him alive by tightly trammeling a society of such enormous consequence to the development of the whole of mankind as the American. It has a greater right to the land than does a people requiring such enormous swathes of territory because it cannot lead an organized life.” But if the Indians must vanish, Topsøe argued, their end should come about leniently.<sup>15</sup>

Writing in the 1890s, Henrik Cavling’s voice echoed Topsøe’s. Visiting a group of Indians on the Columbia River in Oregon—he did not name the tribe—Cavling expressed some regret at the way in which the Indians had been decimated and pushed steadily further west toward the Pacific, “chased by the noisy locomotive.” Yet that was the price of progress: “There are now somewhat more than 300,000 Indians left, and to enable them to live their original lives one would have to grant them an area the size of France. For such extravagance there is no room in the modern world economy. The Indians are weak, and since they seem to be of no use to productive business life, they must perish.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the four travel writers agreed on the basic outline: the Indians were in the process of disappearing from the face of the earth. Only in the early

12 Hansen 1852-55 I, 20-21.

13 Watt, 1872-74 I, 229-230.

14 Watt 1872-74 I, 75-76 and 97.

15 Topsøe 1872, 359.

16 Cavling 1897 I, 407.

twentieth century did other opinions emerge. Writing in 1911—more than twenty years after the last instance of armed conflict, and a near quarter-century after the Dawes Act—H.C. Vedsted suggested, “It is true that some of the tribes have been exterminated; but more are experiencing steady growth.”<sup>17</sup> And yet even that same year the Danish author O.C. Molbech wrote a book entitled *Indian Life: The Saga of a Dying People (Indianerliv: Et døende Folks Saga)*, based on the work of a number of American historians, not his own travels.<sup>18</sup>

### The Encounter

In grappling with Indians as their subject matter, a dramatic high point in the writers’ descriptions was their encounter with them in their purportedly “natural” state at or near the boundaries of white settlement. Here the time factor differentiated the respective geographical outlooks of the authors significantly: around 1850, the farthest west that Hansen traveled was Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Some twenty years later, Watt ventured to Utah, whereas Topsøe journeyed all the way to California. Around 1890, Cavling traveled up and down the American west coast. Their encounters with the “uncivilized” Indians inspired each to write narratives placing their subject matter in ethnographic spectacles that contrasted sharply with the economic growth and “progress” they viewed as the hallmarks of the United States.

To Hansen, writing shortly after the gold rush of 1848, the idea of traveling to California seemed far-fetched, not only because he and his friends in New York City lacked the necessary funds for such a cumbersome journey but also, as he added jokingly, because “we held our lives too dearly to risk being exposed to an Indian scalping.”<sup>19</sup> Still, explaining how the lives of the Indians had “always fascinated me,” he did apparently travel to Indian Territory in Oklahoma in February of 1847. Near Honey Creek in present-day Delaware County, he visited the Seneca whom he categorized as one of the “uncivilized tribes” for not having adopted the Christian faith. There

17 Vedsted 1911, 58. According to another late work, Hagemann 1908, 37, to the extent that the Indian was not dying out the federal government’s annuities were responsible.

18 O.C. Molbech, *Indianerliv: Et døende Folks Saga* (Copenhagen: Kunstforlaget “Danmark,” 1911), iii-v. See also Molbech, *Skovens Helte: Skildringer af de nordamerikanske Indianeres Uafhængighedskamp* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912), iii-iv; Molbech, *Kampen om Prærien: Skildring af en moderne Folkevandring* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1915), iii-iv.

19 Hansen 1852-55 I, 151.

he had the opportunity—along with other whites and some Cherokee—to witness their sacrificial dance. Realizing that he might be the first writer ever to report about their religious rites, Hansen devoted twenty pages to describing what he saw.<sup>20</sup>

Despite definitely demonstrating some sympathy for the Seneca, and concluding that “true sincerity may be found even in the religion most at variance with our own,” Hansen acknowledged a certain lack of comprehension of what he saw. When the drumming and dancing of the Seneca commenced, he described the scene in terms of the “utterly wild gestures” of the Indians and the “comical positions” of some boys participating in the dance; he also explained how the appearance around midnight of a number of tribal “wizards” (“Troldmænd”) at first created a terrifying impression; “but taking a closer look at them, you had to laugh.”<sup>21</sup> Condescension aside, this protracted ceremony put Hansen in a sentimental mood. Taking a lone walk in the starry night, he pondered, “How long will it take before the last Seneca will have sung his last war song, before he will have disappeared from human view?”<sup>22</sup>

In experiencing the “wild” Indian, Hansen clearly believed he was witnessing a phenomenon soon to become a relic of the past. The Indian in his authentic state was too strange—and just a bit too laughable—to have any place within the emerging new white world. Reporting some twenty years later, Robert Watt displayed less interest in meeting Indians in their “savage” state, declining an invitation to go see “the last of the Huron Indians” near Quebec.<sup>23</sup> Traveling west to Salt Lake City on board the first transcontinental railroad, which had been completed just two years earlier, he reported that one of his fellow passengers was a soldier headed for Arizona to fight the Apaches, and that one of the railroad company’s conductors had survived a scalping a couple of years ago. He added that Indians “instinctively hate all railroads as the means by which the white man is quickly approaching the lands of their fathers...,” an observation echoing one Hansen had made two decades earlier about Indians and river steamboats.<sup>24</sup>

Watt reportedly encountered “wild” Indians in the Red River Valley of Minnesota. Traveling by a newly completed railway to the frontier town of

20 Hansen 1852-55 II, 71-90.

21 Hansen 1852-55 II, 73-75 and 78.

22 Hansen 1852-55 II, 79-80.

23 Watt 1872-74 I, 35.

24 Watt 1872-74 III, 22-23; Hansen 1852-55 I, 246. See also Vedsted 1911, 70-71.



Breckenridge and now and again rushing past ox-drawn caravans of settlers hauling west, “we saw something white move on the horizon, and the cry, “Sioux Indians” rang through the wagons.” The train screeched to a halt. As it turned out, “The red warriors were not painted... so they were not on the warpath.” Even so, their guns and scalping knives were visible. On their small unsaddled horses they sat “motionless like bronze statues until the “fire wagon” began moving; but then it is also part of Indian custom never to reveal any sign of surprise or pain...”<sup>25</sup>

Whether or not Watt really experienced this encounter nine years after the 1862 Sioux Uprising cannot be verified; but his generalizations once again pointed to the incompatibility of the Indian with white civilization. Traveling to California on board the transcontinental railroad around that same time, Vilhelm Topsøe shared Watt’s view. With Topsøe some fascination with Indians mixed with notes of fear: “You get your own special view of the Indian question, however, when you sit on board the Pacific train one evening and listen to people talking about the possibility of being attacked.”<sup>26</sup> While staying for some nights in California at an inn near Mariposa Grove in present-day Yosemite National Park, Topsøe reportedly encountered Native Americans. One evening, about a dozen Indians lit a camp fire near the inn, and Topsøe and some of the other guests stepped outside to observe them. Lounging by the fire, some of the Indians wore “Indian clothes, others European rags,” and their English was hard to understand. Topsøe asked who their chief was. “Raising his head for a moment, one of them answered, “Here you see the man,” in so melancholy a voice that it was impossible not to feel moved by at least a trace of sympathy—as little as such feelings otherwise remain with you for the Indians—and when we were back in the house, ideas of the sad remnants of something once happy, cheerful, and poetic mixed with a certain uncanniness over the prospect of having such a ragged and wild band lie just outside your bedroom window.”<sup>27</sup>

From his perspective of the late 1880s and early 1890s, traveling west from Chicago to Washington State and then on to Oregon and California Henrik Cavling did not—as had Watt and Topsøe in 1871—ponder the risks of an Indian attack. He did note the presence of some cowboys on

25 Watt 1872-74 I, 252-253.

26 Topsøe 1872, 357.

27 Topsøe 1872, 472 and 488.

the plateaus of Montana but mentioned no Indians. When contemplating the dangers of driving west he turned instead to the disturbing number of railroad accidents in the United States.<sup>28</sup> Still, Cavling made a conscious effort to meet “uncivilized” Indians, apparently finding what he looked for in Oregon. In a narrative that turned tragedy into absurd comedy, Cavling reported how, sailing down the Columbia River by steamboat, he got off at a tiny landing not far from Mount St. Helens. Hoping to find an Indian interpreter, he was told that this person had drowned eight days earlier. Renting a horse and finding the near-by Indian camp, he introduced himself, smoked a peace pipe with the chief—“a quite ordinary English wooden pipe with a metal mouthpiece”—and presented the latter with some twenty cigars while also offering a cone full of tin buttons to the children and three pairs of men’s suspenders with brass buckles to the women: “In my hurry I hadn’t been able to find other things before leaving Portland.” He hoped to see the Indians perform a sun dance.<sup>29</sup>

With the children purportedly beginning to chew the tin buttons and a young Indian woman hanging a pair of suspenders around her neck, Cavling made his request for a sun dance in Danish, a language “that the chief seemed to know better than any other language that I know.” To illustrate, Cavling made a few dancing steps. This led several members of the tribe to sit down in a half-circle expecting to be entertained. Cavling never saw the sun dance—hardly a realistic hope this far west of the Great Plains. Later that day, when an Indian began chanting, Cavling intoned the Danish song, “Denmark Loveliest Field and Fen” (“Danmark dejligst vang og vænge”), which, as he noted, “presumably had never been sung to Indians before.”<sup>30</sup>

Peering into their eyes made Cavling feel as if “I were staring into past millennia, into the quiet lives of the ancient tribes; the procession of the bands through the valleys; the hunt of the roaming tribes for buffalo herds; their navigation in canoes on the broad, strange rivers.” In Cavling’s view, the wild Indian was now mostly a relic of the past: “It was as if I were inside an ethnographic museum where the exhibited figures had suddenly sprung

28 Cavling 1897 I, 374, 388-389, and 394-396.

29 Cavling 1897 I, 401-402.

30 Cavling 1897 I, 402-403 and 405-406; Erna Gunther, “The Westward Movement of Some Plains Traits,” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 52, no. 2 (April-June 1950), 179.

to life...”<sup>31</sup> To Cavling the distance between Indians and modern civilization was simply too great, leading to absurd encounters, with communication turning into farce. In the main, however, he was simply telling the same tale of incompatibility between the “wild” Indian and modern civilization that Hansen, Watt, and Topsøe had already related.

The main difference between Cavling and his predecessors had to do with geography and military force. As Cavling observed, by the time of his writing the Indians, “fearful of the onslaught of civilization, have fled to the edge of the great ocean.” Moreover, at this point in time—in the aftermath of the massacre of Wounded Knee (which he did not mention)—visiting Indians “is not associated with danger.”<sup>32</sup> That very defenselessness allowed Cavling to employ absurd comedy in his portrayal of the wild savage rather than the sentimental, if uncomprehending and somewhat mirthful sympathy of Hansen, the condescending detachment of Watt, and the fearful hostility of Topsøe.

### **Indians inside the Boundaries of “Civilization”**

Even as the writers purported to describe Native Americans in their “natural” or “wild” state, elements of “white” influence crept into their descriptions. Hansen watched the Seneca dance on Oklahoma *reservation* land and was not the only white spectator. Watt noted how the Sioux he encountered carried guns. Topsøe commented on the European rags and broken English of some the Indians he met in California. And the peace pipe that Cavling smoked was English-made. Still, in their “natural” state the Indians retained some of their assumed authenticity, with three of the writers observing their “melancholy”—doomed—air.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, those Indians remaining within the bounds of expanding white civilization came across as particularly misplaced.

The problem was that with a few notable exceptions—which had a certain destabilizing impact on the main narrative, to be sure—the Indians were seen as part and parcel of a passing landscape transformed by the axe and the plow. Identifying the Indians with America’s original landscape, the writers concluded mistakenly that as the settlers transformed the forests

31 Cavling 1897 I, 403-404 and 406.

32 Cavling 1897 I, 401 and 407.

33 Hansen 1852-55 II, 44 and 79; Topsøe 1872, 488; Cavling 1897 I, 403 and 407.

and prairies into tilled fields and towns and cities, the Indians would vanish. As Watt noted, “In the same way that the imported trees rapidly and assuredly will cause the bur oak and other original plants to disappear through the mere act of planting them alongside each other, it also seems as if the mere presence of the white man is sufficient to cause the old masters of the forests to die out.”<sup>34</sup>

For this reason, the travel writers usually—but not always—portrayed Indians as misfits within or near the urban environment or simply in contrast to it. From his vantage point of the late 1840s and early 1850s, Hansen reported visiting an Indian settlement near Bangor, Maine, where the inhabitants lived in small one-story houses that were “stinking and unclean.” Granting that some men were “clad like gentlemen”—and that a couple of families had moved to the city proper—the women mostly were “more or less dirty, ugly, and raw.” As Hansen, concluded, “We came there with Cooper’s accounts in our heads but it was impossible to find a type to match his description of the ‘red man.’”<sup>35</sup>

Some twenty years later, Topsøe commented on the presence of Indians inside the boundaries of white “civilization.” Driving through Nebraska’s prairie landscape on board a train in an area dotted with several minor station towns, he saw small groups of shabby tents with ragged-looking Indians lingering near them, not unlike the camps back in Denmark of the beggars and outcasts known as the “night people” (*Natmandsfolkene*) residing on the heaths of Jutland. In his view, these Indians were “the personification of shabbiness, filth, and ugliness.”<sup>36</sup> In a more neutral vein he observed that in Omaha, Nebraska, “you see Indians in the streets... as often as you see people from [the island of] Amager in Copenhagen.”<sup>37</sup>

Still, Topsøe also related an episode when Winnebago Indians visiting Washington, D.C., had seen a sculptured decoration over the northern entrance of the Capitol building of Daniel Boone fighting against Indians—undoubtedly Enrico Causici’s “Conflict of Daniel Boone and the Indians” (1826-27). The Winnebago were gripped by this scene, “and instinctively they all raised their war cry. But when these yells—usually heard only from below the treetops of the primeval forests and on the wide prairies—echoed

34 Watt 1872-74 I, 97. For other reflections on a landscape’s Indian past, see Beder 1877, 67.

35 Hansen 1852-55 I, 226-227.

36 Topsøe 1872, 355.

37 Topsøe 1872, 330.

through the magnificent marble hall, apparently they themselves were terrified by this, and they fled the building in a wild haste.”<sup>38</sup>

When Robert Watt purportedly experienced the Chicago Fire of 1871 personally, its very destruction made him juxtapose its recent splendor with earlier times when Indians had resided in the area: “along the river that flows into Lake Michigan, [the area] now looks more deserted than during those days when the Indians roamed the swampy plains, because back then nature simply rested in solitude whereas now your eye impatiently hovers across a scene so terrifying, so oppressive, so vast in all its monotony as may never before have befallen man to see.”<sup>39</sup> To Watt, the Indian obviously represented the opposite of urban civilization.

Cavling, finally, pondered the absurdity of tobacco shops in New York City using man-size wooden signs shaped and painted like Indians. As Cavling saw it, the historical connection between urban areas and the Indian was virtually non-existent: “Incidentally, the wooden Indian is about all that reminds the American of the nation’s past, and it is quite suggestive that since the Indian so lacks his historical foundation, by some misunderstanding he has been turned into a tobacco sign.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, with just a few exceptions that we shall return to, the travel writers not only portrayed the Indians simply as an aspect of a receding natural landscape bound to give way to the force of white expansion; they also painted them as misplaced within white “civilization.”

### **The Scandinavian Immigrant and the Indian**

In thus drawing a connection between the transformation of the land and the disappearance of the Indian, what role did the travel writers assign the Scandinavian settlers in the Indian tragedy? After all, after mid-century many Scandinavian immigrants participated in the westward movement, and some even founded their own enclaves on the prairie and in the woods. As it turns out, even though each of the writers did in fact briefly discuss a connection between immigrant and Indian, they did not draw any truly negative inferences about the Scandinavian part in the dispossession of the Indians. Instead, they placed the settlers within foundation narratives close-

38 Topsøe 1872, 193-194.

39 Watt 1872-74 I, 156-157.

40 Cavling 1897 I, 39; see also Nielsen 1891, 143.

ly related to what Orm Øverland aptly has dubbed “homemaking myths,” tales by the immigrants themselves of how through their own past deeds they could legitimately claim America as their home.<sup>41</sup>

The myths were frequently created on the basis of stories of land clearance and settlement by doughty Scandinavian farmers. Those tales, in turn, often served as immigrant counterparts to what David Nye has called the “narrative of the axe,” an American tale of settlement that “always ignored the original inhabitants of North America.”<sup>42</sup> In the case of the immigrant Danes, Indians actually figured in such accounts, if usually as vanishing savages. To name just one example, writing in the early twentieth century the Danish-American Lutheran pastor A. Bobjerg observed of the West Denmark settlement in Polk county, Wisconsin, “Here the first cabins were built, and logging begun with much trouble from the Indians, since they did not yet understand that the whites had appropriated the land.”<sup>43</sup>

From his perspective of the late 1840s and early 1850s, Hansen had little to say about Danish settlers, since mass migration from that country took off only in the late 1860s.<sup>44</sup> Still, he did touch upon Norwegian immigrants, not only visiting a retired captain living outside Bangor, Maine—the state whose landscape in Hansen’s view resembled Norway the most—but also traveling to Niagara Falls on a west-bound train with hundreds of immigrants on board, including “a not inconsiderable number of Norwegians who with wives and children and only a few dollars [*Specier*] in their pockets have left behind the mountains back home in order to begin a new life in the New World far away in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan...”<sup>45</sup> Even

41 Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 8.

42 David Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003), 87–88.

43 A. Bobjerg, “Danskerne i Polk County, Wis.,” *Danske i Amerika* 2, 181. Other examples in volume 2 of *Danske i Amerika* include Julius Johnsen, “De Danske ved Øvre Wall Nut Creek, Marshall Co., Kansas,” 21; Rasmus Paulson, “De Danske i Pleasant Valley, St. Croix Co., Wis.,” 55; G.S. Strandvold, “Illinois,” 58; Peter Ebbesen, “Historisk Omrids af Danske Kolonier i Howard County, Nebr.,” 82; n.a., “En Pioneerpræst i Michigan,” 228; n.a., “Minnesota: The North Star State,” 268; P.N. Christensen, “Det danske Settlement i Nasonville, Wood Co., Wisconsin,” 365–366; Chr. Falck, “Danske ved Nelson, Douglas County, Minn.,” 385; J.L. Nygaard, “Den danske Koloni i Denmark, Lincoln Co., Kansas,” 396; n.a., “De Danske i Kingsbury County, S. Dakota,” 440–441 and 444; n.a., “Danske i og ved Rosholt, Portage Co., Wis.,” 460; n.a., “De danske Kolonier i Lincoln, Lyon og Pipestone Countier, Minnesota,” 473–474 and 506.

44 Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika eller Drivkræfter i masseudvandringen fra Danmark 1868/1914* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus), 1971, 80–81.

45 Hansen, *Langtfra Danmark* I, 224, 233–249, and 257. A “Specie” was a coin “Daler,” a Danish currency

though Hansen did not mention America's original population here, in pondering the fate of the Indians he did engage in a fairly sympathetic version of the narrative of the axe: "Almost in vain does civilization attempt to introduce the wild people living in the northern and western territories to its benefits; he avoids the few smiling settlements in the vicinity of his hunting district, and he escapes in terror at the sound from afar of the axe in the dark forests, when the hard-working emigrant cuts down trees for his cottage or log cabin." Hansen added that the Indians' behavior actually made sense, for they had reason to escape the disastrous influence of the white man's alcohol. In Hansen's view, the Indians were "the true original inhabitants of the grand republic" but were being destroyed by means "that you would be ashamed to use against the wild animals of the forest."<sup>46</sup>

In passing the Loup Fork River not far from Columbus, Nebraska, in 1871, Robert Watt reportedly saw a Danish enclave from his train window. Undoubtedly, he was referring to the Dannebrog settlement which had been established there that same spring.<sup>47</sup> Watt likewise noted the nearby presence of a Pawnee reservation, observing that since hunting had become more difficult in recent years, the Indians had resorted to farming. On this occasion he did not suggest any link between these two presences in the same locality.<sup>48</sup> Traveling with a Swedish guide in a horse drawn carriage in frontier territory near Litchfield and Wilmar in south central Minnesota, however, Watt made that connection. Drinking "Swedish punch" with locals in the hamlet of Swede Grove, he reflected on the blood spilled there during the Sioux Uprising of 1862, when "a large share of our brothers of the North were the first whom the wild enemies swung their scalping knives over."<sup>49</sup>

Onward by rail from Wilmar to Breckenridge on the Red River where Watt had been invited by the president of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company to participate in the celebration of that track's completion, the latter purportedly saw several dignitaries onboard the train, including ex-Gov-

that no longer exists.

46 Hansen, *Langt fra Danmark* I, 122-123; II, 55-56.

47 Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, *Dannebrog på den amerikanske prairie: Et dansk koloniprojekt i 1870'erne landkøb, bygrundlæggelse og integration* (Odense: Odense Bys Museer 2000), 131-132.

48 Watt 1872-74 III, 21. Jeppesen 2000, 70-71, 106, 112, and 117-120, briefly deals with the Pawnee—and Sioux—presence at the Loup River, noting Danish immigrants' worries over possible Indian hostilities and explaining how some of the first Danes there made use of a Pawnee driver to guide them through the area.

49 Watt 1872-74 I, 243-245 and 249.

ernor Henry H. Sibley, a veteran of the 1862 campaign against the Sioux, and also several old settlers. Their presence, along with his aforementioned encounter with Sioux, made Watt reflect on the bloodshed. One young man of French heritage even offered to show Watt an Indian scalp that he kept near his home in St. Paul (his wife wouldn't permit him to store it inside the house). He claimed to have taken the scalp while its owner was beheading a ten-year-old Norwegian boy. The scalp had only one ear attached. The other had been offered to a defeated Indian chieftain instead of that piece of tobacco his captors had pretended to give him.

Notwithstanding his description of such cruelty on both sides, Watt did not deviate from his main narrative of the necessity of pushing out the Indians as Scandinavian immigrants built their settlements. As he noted, the presence of the old settlers on board the train and at the celebration "made it clear to me just how much the later immigrants have them to thank for." No wonder that the Minnesota state flag depicted "a man plowing his field with his gun at his side while a mounted Indian escapes west."<sup>50</sup>

Traveling in the Midwest around the same time, Topsøe's observations complemented Watt's. He emphasized how "loyal" to the Indians treaty-making over land in Iowa had been and also noted that the early Norwegian settlers in Christiania, Jackson County, Minnesota, had "lived side by side with the Indians." He did point out that Indian land cessions in Minnesota had involved "a sad postlude" but did not assign any blame on either side for that. He further noted that Scandinavian immigrants in Dakota Territory had suffered badly due to "the Indians, the drought, and the grasshoppers."<sup>51</sup>

Visiting Hartland in Waukesha county, Wisconsin—the oldest Danish settlement in America, founded 1846-47—he reflected on how this idyllic spot had changed since the pioneer days. The first settler was still alive, and his house looked nice and quaint, surrounded by a flower garden. Hartland "looks different now than back then when he [the first settler] anxiously listened for the sound of the Indians' cry, when the wind blew in the trees that then surrounded his cottage."<sup>52</sup>

50 Watt 1872-74 I, 250-257; on Sibley, see also Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An History of the American West*, New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2000 (originally published 1970), 49-64.

51 Topsøe 1872 293-294. Hansen 1852-55 II, 62, likewise characterized the Indian land cessions as "fair" but added, "or so it is claimed, at least."

52 Topsøe 1872, 298-299; P.S. Vig, "Efterretninger om nogle af de første danske Nybyggere i Wisconsin," in *Danske i Amerika*, I, part 1, 252-253; Thomas P. Christensen, "Danish Settlement in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 12, 1 (September 1928): 25.



Writing in the 1890s, Henrik Cavling's observations rounded out those of his forebears, empathizing first of all with the immigrants. Having spoken with a Danish-American Mormon apostate about the trek of Danish Mormons to Salt Lake City in the 1850s, Cavling described the harsh conditions the immigrants confronted as they crossed the prairies and mountains. Not only were they forced to endure burning hot days and cold nights and severe thundershowers. They also "fought against Indians and snowstorms..."<sup>53</sup> Visiting the Danish settlement of Dannebrog—the same locality in Nebraska that Topsøe had passed by train some twenty years earlier—Cavling noted that the first Danish settlers there had walked through areas "that probably no human foot save those of the Indians" had stepped on before. A later caravan of Danes arriving to the area had been halted by bloody conflict between American soldiers and Indians. The Danes at Dannebrog, however—so claimed Cavling with a touch of humor—established good relations with local Indians: the Danish leader "King" Niels smoked a peace pipe with Indian Chief Tail of the Red Eagle and entered into an agreement on the future of the land. "The peace accords, which were oral, were carefully observed by both sides—which is the more remarkable since King Niels did not speak the Indian language, any more than Tail of the Red Eagle spoke Danish, and neither spoke English. Yet it seemed as if the redskins had great trust in these large white men."<sup>54</sup>

Inscribing the Indians into a landscape of the past that, regrettably, was receding westward before the inexorable forces of "progress," these travel writers took the Scandinavian settlers off the hook morally by making them agents of this new beginning—what David Nye calls a "second creation"—celebrating their doughtiness along the way. As the less well-known writer Anton Nielsen put it in 1891, "Now take a look at this land! ... Thirty years ago it was inhabited by Indians and covered by forest. Now, however, you see all these fields and meadows that feed an array of families. ... And hardly ever was there a farmer, Danish or American, who had anything with which to start out."<sup>55</sup>

Even though the travel writers spanned a period of more than four decades, and despite Hansen having less to tell about Scandinavian immigrants than his later counterparts, still, when it came to their discussion of

53 Cavling 1897 I, 441.

54 Cavling 1897 I, 337-338.

55 Nielsen 1891, 33; Nye 2003.

the interaction between immigrant and Indian, each told seemingly timeless tales of Indian withdrawal and demise and immigrant conquest without guilt. In that sense, the travel writers were placing the Scandinavian settlers into an oddly Danish version of Manifest Destiny, celebrating them as participants in a New World expansionary mission but with no obvious “American” patriotic motive at stake among the writers themselves.

### **Race, Assimilation, Whiteness**

The Indians that the travel writers reported home about were creatures of Danish minds confronting the American environment while processing romantic descriptions from the works of James Fenimore Cooper and to some extent Henry Wadsworth Longfellow whose “Song of Hiawatha” (1855) at least Watt mentioned and quoted (indeed, he even visited Longfellow in his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, presenting him with a letter of recommendation from Hans Christian Andersen).<sup>56</sup>

When discussing the situation of the Indians, however, only Cooper was invoked openly by the writers. Three of them made explicit comparisons between the people they observed and those they had learned about from Cooper. Hansen doubted that “Cooper in his otherwise masterful accounts has given us any true picture ... of the North American wild person” but did still grant that “something romantic” attached to “even the wildest and cruelest tribes.”<sup>57</sup> Topsøe was equally skeptical, noting that “[t]he Indian question does overall look quite different when you travel in the “Far West” than when you read Cooper’s novels,” and further observing how hostile whites were to Indians in this region, quite unlike whites in New York.<sup>58</sup>

Watt was more enthusiastic. Devoting an entire chapter to his visit to Cooper’s grave in Cooperstown, New York, he wrote that almost all the author’s works had been translated into Danish, even listing the translators

56 Watt 1872-74 I, 268; II, 307-319. Volume III of Hansen 1852-55 was published the same year as “Song of Hiawatha,” so he did not refer to it. Still, Hansen discussed Longfellow’s wide knowledge of Scandinavian literature, cf. Hansen I, 131-132. Topsøe did not mention Longfellow. Some twenty years later, Cavling reported visiting the now deceased Longfellow’s old house near Boston, cf. Cavling 1897 I, 195-196. According to Trachtenberg 2004, 16, Cooper and Longfellow “created pictures of the Indian that most nonnative Americans came to believe were true.”

57 Hansen 1852-55 II, 62. On the importance of both Cooper and Longfellow to the idea of the vanishing Indian, see Trachtenberg 2004, 5, 16, 58, 95, and 192.

58 Topsøe 1872, 354-355.

in a footnote. Cooper, Watt insisted, was an inspiration to many Danes both young and old. Dismissing American critics who scoffed at Cooper's Indian descriptions, Watt defended Cooper and insisted that the author's Indians could still be found on the western prairies.<sup>59</sup> The only of the four writers not to openly invoke Cooper when discussing Indians was Cavling who mentioned him in another connection, however.<sup>60</sup> Still, Cavling's assertion that soon "the "redskins" will probably not be found in other places than the ethnographic museums and the novels" sounded much like an echo of Hansen's aforementioned prediction that "in a few years, the red man will live only in legend and in Cooper's delightful accounts."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, although the travel writers did not reach identical conclusions about Cooper's accuracy, he did contribute to establishing the overall framework for their respective portrayals of the vanishing Indian. They agreed on the basic premise that the Indians were tied to the landscape, and that they were disappearing; also, three of them grappled with questions of whether or not their subject matter equaled Cooper's proud, brave Indians. In that sense, Cooper set the mood.

A few apparently "racial" traits added to this somewhat rigid—but not totally inflexible—image of Indians as unwilling or unable to adapt to white "progress." Those traits remained ill-defined, however, with the term "race" being associated not only with physical appearance and behavioral patterns but also with concepts such as "nation" and "people."<sup>62</sup> Hansen suggested that the Indians had "protruding sharp cheek bones, piercing brown eyes, and wild black hair." Invoking the Bible and a dose of environmentalist thought, he added that they were descendants of Shem—one of Noah's three sons—but that "the climate and circumstances—these grand influences on the human character—have had their usual impact, presenting through the North American wild man a human race not at all of Ishmael's

59 Watt 1872-74 I, 229-230; II, 291-306 (especially 298-299). On the translation of Cooper's works into Danish in more than 200 booklets 1828-61, see Rossel, "The Image of the United States in Danish Literature," 13.

60 Cavling 1897 I, 179-180.

61 Cavling 1897 I, 407.

62 For examples of race-as-nation usage among the travel writers, see Hansen 1852-55 III, 46-47; Topsøe 1872, 124, 153, 166, 176, and 331; Watt 1872-74 I, 315; Cavling 1897 I, 29, 62, 198, and 269; Vedsted 1911, 17. On the imprecise use of these different varieties of the concept of "race" among American—including Scandinavian-American—romantically inspired commentators, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 133-134; Brøndal 2014, 5-9.

stock,” a person guided by his “instinct,” moreover, in his slapdash sense of time.<sup>63</sup> Topsøe, Watt, and Cavling expended less energy on the Indians’ supposed racial traits. As related earlier, Topsøe did note that when some Indians raised their war cry at the northern entrance of the U.S. Capitol, they did so “instinctively.” Also, describing a local guide in Kentucky of mixed blood he noted that “despite his Indian blood” he had been blessed with ample doses of “the right European leadership traits.”<sup>64</sup>

Traveling to America onboard an ocean liner, his seasick fellow passengers made Watt ponder that Indians might truly call these people “palefaces.”<sup>65</sup> He also noted how interested European travelers were in meeting “other representatives of the race than the sorry parodies of the red warrior that he may find hanging around the train stations or attempting to peddle curiosities in the streets of a few of the cities in the west.”<sup>66</sup> In Cavling’s view, Indians had “long, black Eskimo hair in beardless faces that in their color, if not in the shape of the skull, reminded so strongly of Asia’s Mongolian races.” Adding a behavioral touch, Cavling suggested, “The nose protrudes and is vigilant, the eyes small, deep-lying and with no expression.”<sup>67</sup>

These impressionistic musings on the racial traits of the Indians stand in contrast to the writers’ harsher descriptions of African Americans. Even as he expressed his disgust with slavery, Hansen pondered the incompatibility of the emancipation of the slaves with the well-being of the Union and marveled at mechanical stacking devices on New Orleans’ docks that “even the dumbest nigger” could handle. Visiting the Five Points slums in New York City, Topsøe drew back at African Americans with “physiognomies that are completely animal-like.” Watt, in turn, claimed that there was “usually something peculiarly grotesque about the “black portion” of American society” and further suggested that “Sambo’s whole appearance” on the public stage might be touching, causing whites to “smile through tears,” but could “never be impressive, uplifting, or exhilarating.” Cavling, finally, commented on one black waiter’s “flat, white-worn ape hands.”<sup>68</sup>

63 Hansen 1852-55 I, 229; II, 55 and 57-58. According to the Old Testament, Ishmael was the illegitimate son of Abraham, himself a descendant of Shem.

64 Topsøe 1872, 271.

65 Watt 1872-74 I, 19.

66 Watt 1872-744 I, 272-273.

67 Cavling 1897 I, 403.

68 Hansen 1852-55 II, 122, and III,100-101; Topsøe 1872, 150; Watt 1872-74 III, 231-232; Cavling 1897 I,

With the Indians, if apparently not with the African Americans, three of the four travel writers left room for some kind of assimilation to “civilized” standards, destabilizing somewhat the overall narrative of the vanishing Indian. Claiming somewhat improbably to have met the Choctaw Chief Pitchlynn—whom Charles Dickens had previously reported about in *American Notes* (1842)—Hans Peter Christian Hansen asserted that the chief spoke to him about the decline of the Choctaw: “‘It is their own fault! ...; they deserve their fate, because they are weak, miserable creatures! Only few of them bow to civilization’s progress and amalgamate with whites and become useful and honorable members of society—the plurality persevere in their animal lust, and if brandy is to continue to exist, then the red man will cease to exist!’”<sup>69</sup>

Hansen’s idea was clearly that it was up to Native Americans themselves to assimilate. Likewise, Hansen found it “strange that Indians in Peru and Mexico are so different from those in North America, even though they all belong to the same race.” Among the latter, “almost all are civilized” in that they “live together in quaint villages,” leading sedentary lives and practicing agriculture.<sup>70</sup> Even with some Indians inside the United States, Hansen reported “surprising progress,” praising the Cherokee who had recently been relocated to Oklahoma. Incidentally, rather than presenting their tragedy as a trail of tears, Hansen insisted that they had been offered “good terms and more land than they [already] possessed.” Still, he remained in doubt as to whether the Indians would survive.<sup>71</sup>

Watt was somewhat friendlier in his assessment of Native Americans than Hansen, assigning at least some of the blame for their supposed lack of civilization on whites: with most Indians by now stuck on reservations, “usually they learn nothing; the white man does nothing to civilize them.”<sup>72</sup> When it came to warfare, Watt noted that whereas military strongholds like

176; for an explicit comparison of Indians and blacks that especially denigrates the latter, see Kierulf 1894, 68. See also Brøndal, “An Early American Dilemma?” (forthcoming).

69 Hansen 1852-55 II, 43-44; Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1842), 109-11. Dickens described Pitchlynn’s point of view somewhat less dramatically: “[Pitchlynn] said several times that unless they tried to assimilate themselves to their conquerors, they must be swept away before the strides of civilised society.” *Ibid.*, 111. Hansen acknowledged that he had read Dickens and granted that his description of the prison system in Pennsylvania was based on *American Notes*, cf. Hansen 1852-55 II, 18.

70 Hansen 1852-55 II, 57.

71 Hansen 1852-55 II, 62-64.

72 Watt 1872-74 I, 292.

Fort Snelling in Minnesota might serve well against the Indians, they would be of no use in “civilized war;” in a sense, Watt was right: whites often waged uncivilized campaigns of extermination against Indians.<sup>73</sup>

Watt likewise reported instances of Indians appearing quite “civilized,” including some descendants of the Huron.<sup>74</sup> He even claimed to have met a man in St. Paul who was the result of a marriage between a woman of mixed-blood Chippewa background and a Dr. Borup, one of Minnesota’s first Danish settlers: the son “spoke about Denmark that he had never seen... and uttered a great desire to some day visit the country that his father had so often told him about. In his whole appearance was something that reminded you of a sturdy Norseman, at the same time that the oriental quality imbuing him made you think of the great Chippewa chiefs who maybe once had raised their teepees on the spot where his solid and well-supplied store now stood.”<sup>75</sup>

Vilhelm Topsøe expressed more doubt about the assimilative potential of Indians. Claiming that during the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant, “a Quaker-inspired peace policy toward the Indians” had failed utterly in that “the Indians continued to remain the same,” the writer opined that overall they were impossible to civilize. Even so, he did note a few instances when it had proven feasible to have Indians live as farmers, yet insisted that “these are the few and crude exceptions.”<sup>76</sup> Only Cavling—the sole author to write his work when assimilation was the official policy of the United States—did not grapple with the question of assimilability. To be sure, he did distinguish between completely “savage,” “uncivilized but not hostile,” and “good-natured” tribes. For none of them did he reserve the label “civilized,” however.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, not even Cavling used quite as harsh language when portraying the Indian population as when discussing African Americans.

The main point here is not that Indians overall were portrayed in a friendlier light than African Americans by Hansen, Watt, Topsøe, and Cavling.

73 Watt 1872-74 I, 265. On white campaigns of extermination against Indians, see John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2, 221, and 224.

74 Watt 1872-74 I, 34, 256, and 281.

75 Watt 1872-74 I, 263.

76 Topsøe 1872, 358-359.

77 Cavling 1897 I, 396-397. The lesser-known Nielsen 1891, 143, claimed that Indians were “wedded to inevitable destruction” because they were “impervious to culture.”

Rather, it is to argue that with at least three of them, musings on the Indians' ability to assimilate and become "civilized" crept into and to some extent undermined the main narrative of the vanishing Indian. That narrative connected the Indians irrevocably with the receding landscape of the past; for the most part set up a contradiction between Indians and white "civilization"; and mythologized the Scandinavian immigrants, cleansing them of any semblance of guilt in taking the land that had once belonged to the Indians. Even as the four Danish visitors to the United States had no clear interest in furthering U.S. patriotism—in subscribing to the American exceptionalist myth of "Manifest Destiny"—they were still clearly engaged in a process of bonding with America's dominant white element. What bound the travel writers together with that group, of course, was not national identity. It was their "civilization" and common whiteness. With the writers engaged in processes of othering America's original population, their seemingly timeless odes to whiteness traveled across the Atlantic, found a ready audience in Denmark, and reverberated across the cultural landscape for generations to come.