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Chapter 8

Claiming Roots: Politics of Racial Ancestry in the Finnish American Press during the 1938

New Sweden Tercentenary

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Abstract

During the summer of 1938, Swedish and Finnish Americans celebrated the 300th anniversary of the founding of New Sweden (1638–1655), the short-lived seventeenth-century Swedish colony on the Delaware River. Since some of the seventeenth-century Swedish colonists had been Finnish speaking or had originated from what later became Finland, Finnish Americans celebrated the event as the starting point of the Finnish presence in North America. This chapter examines how the politics of race informed representations of Finnishness at the 1938 Tercentenary. Finnish Americans were politically and linguistically divided, and this chapter examines how the different political actors and the Finnish- and Swedish-language press represented the question of Finnish racial ancestry. The different actors understood the question of racial ancestry as important, but often for different reasons. Drawing on contemporary debates on race and nationalism in the United States, Finland, Scandinavia, and the international communist and anti-fascist movements, the different actors constructed divergent ideas on Finnish racial ancestry and its contemporary political relevance. No simple consensus emerged as to how Finns in the United States should think about their racial ancestry, but the Tercentenary gave expression to several competing interpretations, which still shared some basic premises on race and ancestry.

Introduction

In 1938, the US government, three state governments, as well as a variety of Swedish and Finnish American organizations, organized a joint celebration to commemorate the Tercentenary of New Sweden, the short-lived Swedish colony (1638–1655) on the Delaware River. The government-sponsored organizing committee held the official celebrations in the summer of 1938 in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, with Swedish and Finnish government delegations as spe-

cial guests of honor. While the lavish celebrations were mostly focused on Swedish contributions to the United States, many ceremonial speeches also brimmed over with accolades for Finland and the Finns. In an open letter read at the ceremonies, President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself acknowledged the indispensable role that “men and women of Finnish blood” had played in the formation of the broader “American nationality.”¹ Many Finns and Finnish Americans observed with pleasure the stark contrast between these laudatory remarks and Finns’ earlier reputation in the US: “Finns are no longer treated in this great land like some inferior race, as was still the case less than a decade ago,” Rudolf Holsti, Finland’s Foreign Minister and the head of Finland’s official Tercentenary delegation, enthused in a speech for a Finnish American dinner party in Philadelphia in June, 1938.² For many Finns and Finnish Americans, the Delaware Tercentenary seemed to confirm the recognition of Finns as not only Americans but as *white* Americans.

This chapter examines the racialized imagery in Finnish and Finnish American discourse on the 1938 Delaware Tercentenary. Until 1809, for some seven centuries, Finland had been an integral part of the Swedish Kingdom. Thus, in the early seventeenth century, as Sweden extended its power in the Baltic Sea region and sought to become a colonial power in the Atlantic, residents of modern-day Finland were intimately involved in these efforts. Some government authorities involved in the Delaware endeavor of the early 1600s had been born in Eastern Sweden (contemporary Finland). Moreover, many of the colonists recruited to New Sweden were Finnish-speakers from Central and Northern Sweden, where they had moved as settlers in the sixteenth century. This integration of Finland-born and/or Finnish-speaking colonists in the Delaware endeavor gave the twentieth century Finnish and Finnish American nationalists a pretext to claim that Finland, together with Sweden, had been a constituent nation of the Delaware colony. Between 1809 and 1917, Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire, and claimed its independence after the Bolshevik Revolution. The first months of independence were marred by a bloody civil war that continued to divide the country in the interwar period. The interwar years were a period of intense nation-building, and the Delaware Tercentenary offered one venue for official Finland and Finnish nationalists to construe historical continuity for the newly-independent nation-state. These processes were also contested among Finnish Americans due to political divisions—Finnish immigrants in the United States were very politically divided. The political divide separated the conservative and liberal Finnish Americans from the radical Finns, or “Red Finns,” but

the latter were also internally divided (Kostiainen 2014). In addition to the political divide, Finns in America were also linguistically divided into Finnish and Swedish speakers (~~approximately 20 percent~~) (Roinila 2014).

The history of how European immigrants in the United States came to see themselves as white is sometimes told as a story of rather simple progression. Whiteness historians have argued that immigrants from eastern and southern Europe were often themselves seen as racially “in-between” by native-born Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As the twentieth century progressed, however, the immigrants gradually became accepted as white. This was also reflected in the self-conceptions of the immigrants. Previous national identification categories such as Italianness, Polishness, or Finnishness lost significance as immigrants embraced a supra-national and supra-ethnic identification as white Americans (e.g., Ignatiev 1995). The reality was, however, often more complex. As historian Eric L. Goldstein (2006, 4) has argued, the story of European immigrants and race is not a story of “a fairly uncomplicated embrace of whiteness by immigrant groups” but, rather, a history of much more complicated, multifaceted processes. Competing racial identifications, such as Jewishness or Irishness, were not suddenly swept aside in the interwar or postwar periods, but “continued to disrupt, confound, or inflict the immigrants’ understanding of themselves as white” (Goldstein 2006, 4; see also Bayor 2009). Furthermore, immigrants were never a homogeneous group. They were deeply divided along social and political lines, which also affected their approaches to racial matters. While it is true that many European immigrants were quick to socialize into the culture of racism in the US, it was also the case that these expressions of racial animosity co-existed with, for example, a radical immigrant press that remained a harsh critic of US racism well into the postwar period (Carnevale 2014, 539).

The 1938 Delaware Jubilee has been studied from the perspective of identity construction, especially from a Swedish and Swedish American perspective (Blanck 1988; Hjorthen 2015). Daron W. Olson (2014) has studied the Norwegian American press’s efforts to frame the 1938 Tercenary as an all-Scandinavian affair. Historians of Finnish immigration history have studied Finnish and Finnish American participation in the event. Max Engman’s (1990) account of the transnational planning process in Sweden, the United States, and Finland remains unsurpassed in its

detail. Auvo Kostiainen (1990) has examined how Finnish Americans sought to use Delaware history in their identity construction. He argues that participation in the Delaware Tercentenary in 1938 and the positive coverage Finnish Americans received in US media heightened Finnish American self-esteem and was an important factor in the community's achievement of recognition from wider society. The usage of this Delaware history allowed Finnish Americans to claim belonging to the United States by representing themselves as forerunners of democracy, freedom, and other quintessential US values. Finnish Americans could claim that their roots in the country preceded the late-nineteenth century waves of immigration; that they were, in fact, among the original pioneers of the country (Kostiainen 1990).

As Holsti's dinner talk and Roosevelt's references to "Finnish blood" suggest, the symbolism of the Delaware Tercentenary was also intimately intertwined with thinking on racial belonging. By claiming their place in North American colonial history, Finnish Americans could distance themselves from racial ambiguity and claim a firmer belonging to whiteness. Still, the intertwinement of racial ideas and representations of Finnishness at the Delaware Tercentenary should not be reduced to a question of purportedly unified Finnish Americans claiming a white identity in unison. Finnish Americans were not a homogenous group, but a politically, socially, linguistically, and geographically diverse mix of people. Indeed, they shared no uniform understanding of Finnishness or its roots. The "Delaware issue"—the planning for and participation in the 1938 Tercentenary—was time and again represented as an issue that for the first time united all American Finns regardless of their political affiliation or linguistic background. Yet, the existing tensions and interpretative differences regarding Finnishness could not be easily brushed aside. This chapter draws on Finnish and Finnish American press coverage of the 1938 Tercentenary. It also discusses cultural artifacts—a stamp, a statue, and a history book (Wuorinen 1938)—that were produced in connection with the jubilee. Readers interested in a more in-depth reading of the Finnish American labor press coverage of the 1938 event are instructed to consult my 2017 dissertation (Huhta 2017, 280–304).

The Delaware Tercentenary Celebration in 1938

New Sweden had been a short-lived Swedish colony on the Delaware River, established in 1638. The colony had been a part of the Swedish Kingdom's efforts to extend its political and economic influence on the Atlantic and make Sweden into an authentic colonial power. Sweden recruited a few hundred colonists from its realm to move to Delaware, many of whom were Finnish-speaking peasants from Central and Northern Sweden. A few came from the Swedish-speaking coastal areas of Ostrobothnia in what would later become Finland. The colony never lived up to the expectations of its rulers, and Sweden was forced to cede the colony to the Dutch as early as 1655. The Swedish and Finnish-speaking colonists soon assimilated into the surrounding Dutch and English population (Fur 2006; 2009). Despite the limited political, economic, and demographic significance of the colony, the establishment of New Sweden was celebrated in 1938 as a major historical event.

The New Sweden celebrations in 1938 have been described as "a typical example of invented tradition" (Engman 1991, 187). Max Engman has argued that the discussions on colonial history that the jubilee gave rise to had little to do with "historical truth" as such. Rather, they were examples of how historical narratives were constructed to fit the political intentions of contemporary actors (see also Hjorthén 2015). Swedish and Finnish governments and especially Swedish economic and industrial actors wanted to use the celebrations as an opportunity to elevate the self-image of the Nordic nations in the United States. Swedish and Finnish Americans alike wanted to emphasize the significance of their own group through construing heroic narratives of their continuing presence in North America since the colonial times. Initially, the planning for the 1938 celebrations had been an exclusively Swedish affair. Yet, for years, Finnish American organizations and community activists had been arguing that Finns in the United States should celebrate the Tercentenary either separately or together with the Swedish American organizations. They argued that as Finland had been a part of Sweden in the seventeenth century, and, as many of the settlers of New Sweden had been considered as "Finns," it was only appropriate that Finns, too, take part in the celebrations. In 1936, a committee planning for Finnish participation in the event had been formed. The American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee was founded by a group of upper-middle class men. The main actors were the Columbia University historian John Wuorinen, pastor and amateur historian Salomon Ilmonen, Professor J.B. Olli, attorney Eero K. Djerf, and the Democratic Party pollster Emil Hurja (Kostiainen 1990; Engman 1991). The

preparations for the Finnish participation started in full swing only in 1937 when Finland received an official invitation to the jubilee (Engman 1991).

In Finland, the press jubilated the news of the US Congress' decision to invite Finland to celebrate the Delaware colony's anniversary. The flattering words on Finland in discussions in the US House of Representatives were reprinted in many newspapers, accompanied with elated editorial comments. In November 1937, the Finnish government appointed a committee to direct the preparation of Finland's participation in the Delaware celebration. The committee asked the sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen to design a commemorative statue for Delaware Finns that would be presented as a gift to the United States. The committee also decided to issue a commemorative stamp to mark the occasion. It also appointed the members of Finland's official delegation, which was composed mostly of politicians. It was headed by Foreign Minister Rudolf Holsti and included five other politicians from different parties, the editor-in-chief of *Hufvudstadsbladet* Amos Andersson as a representative of the Swedish speakers, and Sigfrid Sirenus as the representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (Engman 1991).

Throughout the spring and summer of 1938, state committees of the American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee organized events to celebrate the 300th-year anniversary of the Delaware colony. The main event of the Tercentenary was organized in late June and early July in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and in New Jersey. On 27 June, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Delaware's Governor Richard McMullen welcomed the delegations of Sweden and Finland in Wilmington, Delaware, on the shore where the Swedish and Finnish colonists had arrived 300 years earlier. Most of the celebrations were centered on Swedish and Swedish American participation, as their organizations had controlled much of the event's planning. The influence of Finland and Finnish Americans on the official celebrations of the Delaware Tercentenary was thus limited (Hjorthén 2015, 306). The most significant event for the Finnish delegation and the Finnish American planning committee was the so-called Finnish Day on 29 June. This day was dedicated to the celebration of the Finnish settlers of Delaware, and it culminated with the unveiling of the Finnish commemorative monument in Chester, Pennsylvania (Engman 1991). Despite this circumscribed agency, however, Finnish Americans sought to do their utmost to influence representations of Delaware and its population.

Nordic or Finnish Ancestry?

New Sweden had been an object for historical contestation at least since the late nineteenth century. Swedish Americans had commemorated the seventeenth-century colony already in 1888 and used its history as a “homemaking myth” (Hjorthén 2015; Øverland 2000). The history of New Sweden as a “homemaking myth” connected Swedish presence in the United States to the country’s foundational history and legitimated Swedish American claims to civic and cultural belonging in the country. This mythology was constructed, as Adam Hjorthén has observed, by conflating histories of colonialism and immigration. By claiming the seventeenth-century colonists as their immigrant predecessors, Swedish Americans could establish an unbreakable continuum of Swedish presence in North America from the dawn of the Colonial Era to the present. This conflation effectively blurred the distinctions between the two different historical processes and marked the Swedes as one of the foundational peoples of the United States. By using metaphors of blood and family, they tied Swedish Americans racially to the familial community of white Americans (Hjorthén 2015; on Swedes’ relatively privileged position in US ethnoracial hierarchies, see Blanck 2014; Jackson 2019).

This kind of conflation between New Sweden and the later immigrant community was harder for Finnish American immigrant activists than it was for the Swedes. After all, the seventeenth-century colony had been established by Sweden, it bore the name “New Sweden,” and its settlers were all marked as Swedish subjects in official documents. In the seventeenth century, the area that would later become Finland was an integral part of the Swedish Kingdom, and the state made no consequential distinctions between its Swedish- and Finnish-speaking subjects. Indeed, the Swedish and Swedish American actors seized upon this lack of an apparent stately continuum between New Sweden and Finland in 1937 when they criticized the decision to invite Finland and Finnish Americans to the Delaware Tercentenary (Engman 1991). Without any seemingly apparent governmental or societal continuum to point to, Finnish American leaders faced an uphill battle in establishing a legitimate connection between themselves and their purported seventeenth-century brethren.

The Finnish position in racial classifications had been historically more ambiguous. Daron Olson has noted that the Norwegian American press's coverage regarding the role of the Finns in the Delaware Tercentenary was fraught with certain tensions. These were tied to Finland's ambiguous position with regard to other Nordic countries. On the one hand, the Norwegian American press highlighted Finnish participation in the celebrations as a way to undermine the idea that the Delaware colony had been a solely Swedish affair. On the other hand, the press's coverage of Finnish contributions was spotty and overshadowed by exaltation of Swedish glory. Olson notes how Norwegian American press's weariness or disinterest in covering Finnish contributions was related to many Norwegian Americans' view of Finns as culturally or racially non-Nordic (Olson 2014). Indeed, racial theories of the early twentieth century both in the United States and the Nordic countries had remained ambivalent on the racial classification of the Finns. In the early twentieth century, racial theories in the United States divided white Europeans into several sub-races, with Finns often occupying a position between the European whites and Asiatic races (Kivisto and Leinonen 2011). In Finland, racial theories that depicted Finns as an Asiatic race became increasingly regarded as disparaging in the 1920s and 1930s. This was largely due to the increased willingness of Finnish political and cultural elites to construct an image of Finnishness that was "purified" of all allusions to Russianness, the Eastern "Other," against which notions of ideal Finnishness were constructed (Kemiläinen 1998).

As the Delaware Tercentenary approached, there emerged a small debate on the issue in the Finnish American press. Most Finnish American organizations were enthusiastic about the joint Finnish-Swedish jubilee, but there was a section of conservative Finnish Americans who saw collaboration with Sweden as anathema. These attitudes drew on the language debate in contemporary Finland where a right-wing ethnonationalistic movement, the Patriotic League of Finland, fought against Finland's bilingual constitution and its Nordic orientation in foreign policy. The conflict was especially centered on the bilingual University of Helsinki and its language(s) of instruction and administration. By the late 1930s, the language conflict had already passed its most heated period, but it remained an issue of contention at the right-wing end of the Finnish political spectrum (Meinander 2017). These views also had resonance in the right-wing press of Finnish America. In the spring of 1938, the conservative nationalist daily *New Yorkin Uutiset* published letters from readers who lamented the dominance of Sweden and the Swedish language in the Delaware

celebrations.³ These views remained a minority view. On its editorial page, even the conservative *New Yorkin Uutiset* argued that there was nothing wrong with Finns celebrating together with Sweden, especially as it guaranteed Finns more media exposure.⁴ Yet the discontented celebrators illustrate that Finnish ancestry remained a politicized issue.

Most commentators in the Finnish American press hoped that the Tercentenary would elevate the Finns' standing in the United States. Prominent leaders of Finnish American cultural and religious organizations, journalists, and other men and women who saw themselves as representatives of Finnish Americans regarded the celebration as a way to associate Finnishness in the United States more strongly with other Nordic nations and the "original" white population on the continent. The Delaware Tercentenary allowed Finnish Americans to impress the US people with the fact "that the Finnish people are not merely of recent immigration," John Saari, a New York lawyer and a member of the American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee, argued, "but that their blood has coursed in the veins of the American people since the earliest days of American history." By using botanical metaphors, Saari stressed the significance of the Tercentenary celebrations for Finnish Americans who had been "estranged from our forefathers in Finland" and whose "family roots in the American soil are still on the surface." Finnish Americans had, then, lacked "the sense of historical continuity and ancestral anchorage." This sense of lack of tradition had made Finnish Americans feel that there was a hiatus or a gap in their historical sequence; "that we don't belong in Finland, nor are we yet really of the soil and soul of this land." While feeling themselves proud Americans "in heart and spirit," Finnish Americans had lacked the same "homey feeling" of an Englishman for example, in the United States. No matter how recently an Englishman had arrived in the United States, Saari remarked, "he feels and boasts that this is his country" since his people had "originally settled and developed this land." By reason of this kinship bond, then, even the most recent English arrival could claim that he was an American and not a foreigner.⁵ Saari lamented that Finnish immigrants to the US had met "boastful and patriotic spirits" who had insinuated that Finns were foreigners and not Americans. "These invidious insinuations have often been depressing, especially to the youth, who are more sensitive," Saari lamented. Yet, there had been nothing Finnish immigrants ~~who~~ could say in their defense. He reminded his readers that the English had colonized most of the continent, their descendants

had helped to found the Republic, and they had helped to develop the country, which had earned even the most recently arrived Englishman the right to claim belonging to the United States.⁶

Rather than challenge the nativist logic of the “boastful and patriotic spirits,” who had called Finnish belonging to the United States into question because of their “foreignness,” Saari enthused that the Delaware Tercentenary finally gave Finnish Americans a chance to join the privileged club. “[T]he historic evidence [...] fundamentally changes our position in American history,” he remarked. By inviting the Government of Finland to the Tercentenary, the United States government had “declared by legal action that the Finns, the people of our nationality, are one of the original colonizers of this country, and that their descendants have participated in the founding of this Republic and in the development of this land since the earliest days of American history.” Returning to the sanguinary metaphor, Saari explained that

We now know that the blood of our people has flown [sic] in the veins of the American people since the dawn of the countrys [sic] civilization; that the roots of the Finnish people penetrate to the deepest strata of the American soil and, therefore, our anchorage is secure; and that our historical background in America is unbroken, running back as far as the early colonial period. We can now read and study the history of our country with the same exultation, the same spirit and feeling of pride of belonging as any other people; for we know that the history of this country is, in part, the history of our own people, and that we are no more foreigners than any other people that make up this great nation. This is the meaning of the Delaware Tercentenary Celebration to Finnish Americans.⁷

This improved position of the Finns in the United States was marked time and again in newspaper articles and speeches during the Delaware Tercentenary in the spring and summer of 1938. When addressing a group of Finnish Americans at a dinner in Philadelphia after the Finnish Day ceremony on 30 June 1938, Foreign Minister Rudolf Holsti dwelled on this change at length in his speech. He extended an especial gratitude to the Finnish American community. By conducting themselves uprightly and respectably, they had dispelled the tainted reputation that Finns had once had in the United States. “Finns are no longer treated in this great land like some inferior race (*alempana kansanrotuna*), as was still the case less than a decade ago,” Holsti remarked,

pointing to a personal experience. He recounted a story of his trip to Stanford University a few years back when his wife, who had accompanied him on his lecture tour, had been deemed as belonging to a “less desirable nationality” by the immigration authorities. “Today we are not in such an excluded position, thank God,” Holsti sighed in relief to an appreciative crowd of Finnish American dinner guests.⁸ Newspapers in Finland and the Finnish American immigrant press in North America expressed similar sentiments. In addition to the uprightness of Finnish immigrants, many mentioned Finland’s alacrity in its debt payments and Finnish sports achievements as major reasons for the purported change in perceptions of Finns in the United States.⁹ In Finland, the celebration was seen as a way to solidify relations to Sweden and other Nordic countries as Finland was aiming to orient its foreign policy to the Nordic countries in the 1930s. This Nordic orientation faced internal criticism from right-wing ethnonationalists, which made the Tercentenary an ~~importune~~ opportune occasion to strengthen the government’s foreign policy position with regard to its opposition.

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The Scandinavian framework of the Delaware jubilee appealed to Norwegians, as well. In his discussion of the Norwegian American press’s reception of the New Sweden Tercentenary, Daron Olson (2014, 13–15) has argued that many Norwegian American writers framed the Swedish celebration as a broader celebration of Scandinavians. Olson writes that the Delaware Tercentenary effectively became “not just a Swedish accomplishment, but a victory for all Scandinavians, including Norwegians.” The Swedish-language press in Finland and Finnish America, too, were adamant in their interpretation of the Tercentenary as an all-Nordic celebration. The Swedish-language Finnish American newspaper *Norden* was equally wary of both overtly “Finnish” and “Swedish” interpretations of the Tercentenary since both would have excluded the Swedish-speaking Finlanders.¹⁰ The Swedes and Finlanders were a “brotherly people” (*ett broderfolk*), the editors explained in an editorial critical of Swedish American wariness towards Finnish participation in the Tercentenary. The two peoples had for centuries “fought and bled side by side during wartime and built a culture admired by the whole world during peacetime.” The Tercentenary should be a celebration of this common cultural heritage and its importation into the New World in the 1600s. This emphasis on the shared culture “would only improve our standing in the eyes of the others,” the editors maintained.¹¹ In a way, then, the Delaware settlers were represented as

kinds of proto-Scandinavianists who could be invoked as a historical reference point for contemporary political appeals.

The Finnish American communists represented the Delaware Finns as both proto-national Finns and as proto-internationalists. This was in line with the Communist Party's Popular Front strategy that emphasized the use of nationalist rhetoric to serve the building of a broad-based anti-fascist movement against Nazi Germany and its fascist allies (Huhta 2017, 280–304). While the communist press used the rhetoric of nationalism, it connected this nationalist rhetoric to internationalism. For example, when debates about the depth of the Finnish–Swedish co-operation in the planning for the Tercentenary emerged in the spring of 1937, the communist press was sharply critical of what it saw as “Finnish chauvinism” and anti-Swedish tendencies. The Delaware Tercentenary was supposed to be a celebration of national co-operation, not a celebration of national chauvinism, the communists argued. In an editorial, the communist daily *Eteenpäin* noted that the Delaware celebrations must not become “celebrations of destructive chauvinism” and that they should instead “build and strengthen fraternity between different nations.” It accused a conservative Finnish American paper of fueling “Finnish chauvinism” and of making “blatant attacks against the Swedes.” This was an attempt to render the Delaware celebrations into “a quarrel where Finnish and Swedish people could not work together.” Finnish people were not interested in this kind of chauvinistic boasting, the editors assured, but wanted only that their contributions in history be rightfully recognized and that all nations involved in founding New Sweden could celebrate their achievements together.¹²

Frontier Imagery

The question of Finnish racial ancestry became, then, a contested issue in the planning of the Delaware Tercentenary. The official rhetoric of the American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee emphasized the narrative of Finns as the fourth nationality—alongside the English, the Dutch, and the Swedes—to establish permanent white settlements in North America. Finnish American actors emphasized how Finnish “blood” had constituted one of the four tributaries that had formed the general white American population. In this way, they could dispel imagery that associated them with eastern and southern European immigrants who had arrived [in to](#) the Unit-

ed States later and were more readily considered as “foreigners.” For many Finnish actors, the Tercentenary presented a possibility to emphasize Finland’s cultural and historical links to Sweden and other Nordic countries. For the Finnish government, these historical linkages gave grounding to contemporary political aspirations, as Finland was aiming for a Nordic orientation in its foreign policy (on the Scandinavian orientation in Finnish foreign policy, see, e.g., Soikkanen 1996). The leftist Finnish Americans, especially the communists, presented the Tercentenary as a celebration of working-class internationalism, seeing the co-operation of poor Finnish and Swedish settlers in New Sweden as a precedent of internationalist Popular Front organizing.

Official representations of Finnish participation at the Tercentenary, organized by the American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee, made much use of the frontier imagery: hardy white settlers battling against the unforgiving conditions of the North American wilderness. This imagery drew on US national mythologies but also on contemporary Finnish notions of ideal nationalism and masculinity. Those Finnish American writers most articulate in American historical mythologies made much use of this frontier imagery in their depictions of Delaware Finns. In his short history on the Delaware Finns published in the spring of 1938, John H. Wuorinen, Columbia University historian and the Executive Secretary of the American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee, represented the Finnish colonists as hardy settlers, who cleared wilderness for civilization. Wuorinen stressed that the Finnish settlers of Delaware had struggled with nature already before their arrival to North America. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the so-called Forest Finns had cleared the impenetrable forests of Central Scandinavia for agriculture. Wuorinen referred to the Central Scandinavian forests as a “frontier” and to the Finnish migrants clearing the forests as “frontiersmen,” “pioneers” and “homesteaders” (Wuorinen 1938, 15; 18–19). “In what had been a wilderness,” he recounted, “roads, churches, and settled communities appeared. [...] In this pioneering, the settlers from Finland and their descendants played an important part” (Wuorinen 1938, 21). In Wuorinen’s portrayal, the Finns had not merely become settlers and pioneers in North America, but had become hardened strugglers against wilderness already on the Scandinavian frontier. Indeed, when Sweden had started to look for suitable candidates to populate its far-flung colony across the Atlantic, it was only natural that the authorities

had set their eyes on the realm's homespun "frontier pioneers" in the forests of Värmland and Dalsland (Wuorinen 1938, 55).

In Delaware, the Finnish settlers had brought their skills in forestry to bear on the new terrain. "To the task of forcing the soil to yield harvests, without which life would have been impossible, the Finns and the Swedes brought techniques familiar to them in the homeland," Wuorinen described. They had also adapted to the new environment by incorporating the techniques of their Indian neighbors, since these were often more suitable "to the needs of primitive existence in which the struggle against forest, swamp, and a climate as yet unfamiliar played a large part." The sophisticated farming methods the Finns had brought with them from the Scandinavian frontier had to be taken down a notch due to "the necessities of a simpler agriculture and, in general, of a more primitive civilization" (Wuorinen 1938, 99–100).

This imagery of the frontier was also prevalent in the performance of the commemorative events. In his speech at the unveiling ceremony of Aaltonen's statue in Chester on 30 June, 1938, Finnish Foreign Minister Rudolf Holsti connected Finnish and American historical experiences through imagery of struggle against nature. He began his speech by noting how history did not "tell us merely of struggles between nations, but, above all, of a perpetual struggle against nature. The more nature has been subjugated to serve the purposes of man, the more civilization has gone ahead." In this historical struggle to conquer the wilderness for civilization, Finns had been at the forefront for a long time, due to the harsh conditions of their northern native land. The entire history of the Finns had been a struggle against nature to conquer barren land for cultivation and settlement. This struggle for basic existence had left deep traces on the Finnish national character. Upon arrival to the New World these people, already hardened by northern climes and a perpetual struggle for existence, had taken up agriculture despite the unforgivingly hostile conditions of the North American wilderness, ultimately settling in every part of the North American continent. By stressing the similarities in their willingness to master nature, Holsti made a connection between the national characters of the Finns and the Americans. Both had been conditioned to rugged individualism, freedom, and fairness by their experiences with the harsh wilderness:

Peoples and individuals who come in constant contact with the ever-creative forces of nature are bound to become individualists and, so to you Americans as well as to us Finns, freedom as such becomes as precious a principle as the respect for justice in general. We democrats on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, do not want to live merely for the sake of existing [but feel rather] that our most sacred duty is to serve with the loftiest ideals of nations and individuals ever before us.¹³

The nationalist sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen's statue that was unveiled at the ceremony also drew on Finnish nationalist imagery. The choice of Aaltonen to design the statue was telling. In Finland, Aaltonen had become famous in the 1920s for his sculptures that often drew on the physical style of modern classicism. In discussing the sculptures that he designed for a bridge in Tampere in 1929, Derek Fewster has argued that his naked and athletic sculptures of males were built on a "timeless" image of an inherent and strong Finnishness." His statues exemplified "the new masculine/militaristic view on the distant past" that had become popular in Finland in the 1920s. "Wäinö Aaltonen's Finns were more racial than cultural," Fewster remarks of the Tampere statues (Fewster 2006, 329–330). That Aaltonen was chosen to design the statue speaks to the willingness of Finland's planning committee to attach the Tercentenary with themes of Finnish nationalism.

In the statue that he designed for the Delaware Tercentenary Aaltonen made much use of Finnish nationalist imagery. According to Hjorthén, the Finnish statue was not contextualized in particular histories of New Sweden, which was in contrast to the Swedish commemorative statue designed by Carl Milles. Milles's statue referenced key historical events and personalities in the colony's history. Aaltonen's statue depicted on one side men rowing a boat and leaving behind women in tears; on the other side, it featured a man working with an axe, feeding cows, and a man, woman, and child standing by. The text on the statue framed the men as "sons of Kaleva" who had crossed the ocean, established new homes, and cleared forests for agriculture and dwelling. Aaltonen's statue was heavily invested in Finnish national mythology, emphasizing the pioneer and frontier aspects of Finnish settlement in Delaware (Hjorthén 2015, 125).

Similar imagery of national mythology was also evident in other commemorative items produced as part of the Tercentenary celebrations. The official stamp of the Delaware Tercentenary that was issued by the Finnish government and designed by the nationalist author and painter Aarno Karimo made this case most obviously. The stamp featured an image of two men struggling with a tree stump in the process of clearing land. In the lower left corner of the stamp, there was a profile of a stern-faced Indian chief. The Indian was wearing a “traditional” war bonnet usually associated with the Plains Indians, not with the Lenape of Delaware with whom the settlers had actually been in contact. The legend in the lower section of the stamp read: “Colonization of Delaware. Suomi–Finland. 1638–1938” (on the issuance of the stamp and other commemorative gestures, see Englam 1991, 208–209).

The stamp design can be read as appropriating both the imagery of American frontier and Finnish nationalist mythology. The image of the stern-faced Indian coupled with two white men struggling to clear land for agriculture clearly had resonance with frontier imagery in the United States. The fact that the design of the American Indian made no effort toward historical specificity, but rather made use of the stereotypical image of “the Indian” in Western popular culture, is a testament to this heavy investment in a rather crude brand of frontier mythology. However, the stamp’s design was also clearly grounded in the militaristic and masculinist Finnish national mythology of the Interwar Period. This was, of course, not a coincidence considering the credentials of the designer. Karimo had been a central figure in the interwar artistic current that used prehistoric and medieval imagery to create a nationalist consciousness for newly independent Finland. This “militant medievalism,” as Derek Fewster has branded it, emerged in a situation where the political and cultural elite of White Finland became convinced of a need to create a strong military force to defend Finland against the Eastern “Other,” or Soviet Russia. Nationalist artists—authors, painters, sculptors, poets—made extensive use of historical themes in creating a sense of militaristic urgency and of male duty to defend the nation (Fewster 2006, 320; see also Ahlbäck 2014). Karimo’s stamp design was very much a part of this general ideological current; it depicted two Finnish men struggling against nature and, by way of allusion, the Native population inhabiting that wilderness.

Karimo's brand of nationalist art did not go uncontested in contemporary Finland and the stamp design also received criticism. Karimo's fellow painter Viljo Kojo criticized the design as ugly and bungled. In the United States, the design received mixed opinions. Its overtly nationalist design was criticized in the Swedish-language *Norden*, which understood the stamp as an attempt to export a toxic brand of Finnish chauvinistic nationalism abroad. The design was hostage to an ideological obsession that plagued the Finnish-speaking Finland more generally: "namely, the idea that everything should be made as Finnish as possible".¹⁴

According to Gunlög Fur and Adam Hjorthén, the narrative of Swedish–Indian friendship was an important aspect of the New Sweden Tercentenary's historical representations. It was a recurring trope in the 1938 celebrations of the Delaware colony's tercentenary. When Gustaf Adolf, the Crown Prince of Sweden, described relationships between Swedish colonists and the indigenous Lenape in his Tercentenary speech, he reiterated this common narrative: "The relations of the Swedish colonists to the Indians were always friendly. By treating the native tribes in a humane manner they won their friendship, and I think this explains why the Delaware Valley did not have the sanguinary Indian wars experienced in other colonies" (Fur 2013, 27). The narrative allowed Swedish and Swedish American actors to represent themselves as exceptionally benevolent in their colonialism, a view that has lingered on for a long time in Nordic perceptions of colonialism. As Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin (2013, 4) have noted, "the most widespread view among academics, the general public and politicians is [...] an opinion that Scandinavian participation in colonial politics was benign and their interactions with the encountered people in Africa, Asia and America were gentler and based on collaboration rather than extortion and subjugation."

The representations of Finnish–Indian relationships mirror in many ways those of Swedish–Indian relationships. Finnish American actors, too, emphasized the uniquely benevolent and friendly relationships between the Finns and the American Indians. These representations had been present in earlier Finnish American constructions of Delaware history. In his 1919 history of the Finnish Americans, amateur historian Salomon Ilmonen described Finns and Swedes as the initiators of friendship between Europeans and the Native Americans. Theirs had been a benign form of colonialism, Ilmonen insisted. While William Penn was often congratulated for his cor-

dial relations with the Native Americans, this was in fact an approach developed by the Finns and the Swedes, Ilmonen argued. They, not Penn, had “introduced and practiced the spirit of fairness and conciliation in dealing with the Indians. Ilmonen described how some Finnish settlers had acted as interpreters between Penn and the Indians (Ilmonen 1919).

This imagery was also a part of the Finnish Tercentenary celebrations in 1938. This trope was on display, for example, in the Tercentenary celebration in Brooklyn, Connecticut, where a local chapter of the American Finnish Delaware Tercentenary Committee organized a two-day jubilee in June 1938. One of the guest speakers was Chief Harold A. Tantaquidgeon, a leader of Connecticut’s Mohegan tribe. Chief Tantaquidgeon spoke on the centuries-long friendship between Finns and the Mohegan and he invited the chief organizer of the local Tercentenary celebration, Pastor Reino Hiironen, as an honorary member of the Mohegan tribe. He handed Hiironen a feathered Mohegan skullcap as a token of respect and named him “Ean Ni Ya Wegan,” or “Man of Good Will.” This was a gesture “the Indians extend only to those white people they especially like,” a reporter for a Finnish American newspaper explained. The gesture symbolized, the journalist went on to elaborate, “the centuries-long friendship between the Indians and the Finns.” The audience welcomed Tantaquidgeon’s gesture and his speech on Finnish–Indian friendship with “a roaring round of applause.” The official brochure of the event featured an image of Hiironen and Chief Tantaquidgeon shaking hands with the caption “Peace, 1638–1938” (Delaware Festival 1938).¹⁵

The emphasis on Finnish and Indian friendship had its potential problems for many Finnish American leaders since it might reinforce cultural association between Finns and Native Americans. According to Peter Kivisto and Johanna Leinonen (2011), US racial imagery of the Finns especially in the Midwest in the late 1800s and early 1900s connected the Finns with the American Indians, since both peoples were considered close to nature, preoccupied with magical thinking, predisposed to radicalism, and strong drinkers. Finnish immigrants and Ojibwe Indians had also formed marital relationships in many Minnesota and Michigan locales, further reinforcing cultural associations between the two peoples (Kivisto and Leinonen 2011). This association was ~~importune~~ opportune for those Finnish American cultural leaders who sought to solidify the standing of Finnish Americans as respectable white citizens. There was, then, a certain tension

Commented [AK2]: ?

regarding Finnish American leaders' representations of the indigenous population. While they on the one hand emphasized their historically cordial relationships with the Native population, they on the other hand took a certain distance to ideas of Finnish–Indian proximity. These tensions were evident, for example, in Salomon Ilmonen's 1919 history of Finnish Americans. While he framed Finns as friends of the Lenape in Delaware, he was noticeably anxious about later proximity between Finns and Native peoples. Discussing Finnish immigrants in Alaska, he argued that intermarriage between Finnish men and Alaskan native women had "brought down the level of Finnish civilization considerably" (Ilmonen 1919).

These tensions were not as evident during the tercentenary, which is also a testament to the improved social position of Finnish American leaders. Few Finnish Americans were seriously worried that native-born white Americans might "mistake" them for Indians, Mongols, or other non-white peoples in any socially consequential manner. Historical friendship between Finns and American Indians could be celebrated without it arousing too awkward insinuations about the cultural or racial proximity of the two peoples.

Communists, too, made much of the frontier imagery in their writings on the Delaware colony. In 1938, the Communist Party-affiliated Finnish Workers' Federation published its own historical account of the Delaware settlement. Instead of framing the settler experience as a testament to Finnish ingenuity, the account emphasized the social exploitation that the early settlers, both Finnish and Swedish, had to endure and the common struggles they fought against the barbaric rulers of the colony. The communist account of the Delaware history treated European-Indian relations in Delaware as mostly cordial and based on a shared experience of oppression. Just as the poor Swedish and Finnish settlers were oppressed by the ruling elite of the colony, an anonymous Finnish American communist historian argued, the poor Lenape Indians of Delaware were oppressed by the Iroquois Federation (Delaware Albumi 1938). The communists, then, sought to frame the story of Delaware as a story of class conflict and social exploitation.

Conclusions

Whiteness historiography has often equated European immigrants' development of racial thought with their Americanization. "'Becoming white' and 'becoming American' were intertwined at every turn," David Roediger and James Barrett (1997, 8), for example, have described the process of European immigrants' racial socialization. This connection between whiteness and Americanization was evident in Finnish American leaders' representations of Delaware history during the Tercentenary celebrations in 1938. They used the Delaware Tercentenary to build connections between Finnish Americans and the foundational history of the United States. This gave them a chance to emphasize their belonging to the original settler population of white North America and to contest nativist claims of their "foreignness" or even their racial inferiority.

But the representation of Finnish racial ancestry was not all about building narratives of Finnish belonging in the United States. It also reflected contemporary divisions and tensions within the Finnish American community and in Finland. Racial imagery of "Finnish blood" was contested by some actors. The Swedish-language press in Finland and Finnish America wanted the tercentenary to emphasize Finnish cultural and racial connections with broader Scandinavia. A section of the conservative Finnish nationalists sought to invest the tercentenary imagery with more "purely" Finnish meanings. Frontier imagery used in commemorative items, speeches, and writings also drew on various intellectual currents. On the one hand, it appropriated imagery of US notions of the frontier, but it also incorporated representations from the militaristic and masculinist notions of contemporary Finnish nationalism.

This chapter qualifies, then, the notion that becoming white was almost synonymous with becoming US American. While the racial thinking of European immigrants and their descendants did draw heavily on US notions of race, their ideas were not confined to the context of the nation state. Rather, the debates on race were interconnected with people and ideas outside of that context as well.

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Notes

¹ "10,000 personer övervar avtäckningen av monumentet i Chester" *Norden*, July 7, 1938; "President Rooseveltin persoonallinen tervehdyssanoma suomalaisille" *Amerikan Suometar*, July 2, 1938; "Presidentti Roosevelt tervehtii ja onnittelee suomalaisia", *Viikkolehti* June 30, 1938.

² "Ministeri Holstin puhe Amerikan suomalaisille Philadelphiassa" *New Yorkin Uutiset* July 7, 1938.

³ New Yorkin kansallismielisiä suomalaisia: "Avoin kysymys Delaware-juhlia järjestävälle toimikunnalle" *NYU* March 13, 1938; Amerikan suomalainen: "Delaware-juhlille saapuva Suomen edustus ruotsalaisella pohjalla" *New Yorkin Uutiset* March 29, 1938.

⁴ "Delaware-juhlille saapuva Suomen edustus", *New Yorkin Uutiset* April 5, 1938.

⁵ John Saari, "The Meaning of the Delaware Tercentenary Celebration to Finnish Americans" *Lännen Suometar*, November 30, 1937.

⁶ John Saari, "The Meaning of the Delaware Tercentenary Celebration to Finnish Americans."

⁷ Saari, "The Meaning of the Delaware Tercentenary Celebration to Finnish Americans."

⁸ "Ministeri Holstin puhe Amerikan suomalaisille Philadelphiassa" *New Yorkin Uutiset* 7.7.1938.

⁹ See, e.g., Saari "The Meaning of the Delaware Tercentenary Celebration."

¹⁰ The newspaper, like the Swedish-language press in Finland, used the term *finländarna* to refer to the people of Finland. This form included both the Finnish and Swedish-speaking Finns, whereas the term *finnarna* would have referred only to Finnish-speakers. The two concepts were politicized in the 1930s Finland and, to a lesser degree, amid Finnish Americans, which makes it important to keep them separate. To make this distinction clear, I have here translated the term *finländarna* as "Finlanders".

¹¹ "Finländare, svenskar och 300-årsjubileet." *Norden* May 12, 1938.

¹² "Hajottavaa esiintymistä." *Eteenpäin*, January 7 1938. See also "Ruotsalaisen vähemmistökansallisuuden oikeudet Suomessa." *Eteenpäin*, January 21 1938.

¹³ "10,000 personer övervar avtäckningen av monumentet i Chester" *Norden*, July 7 1938.

¹⁴ "Berättigad kritik" *Norden* April 14, 1938.

¹⁵ *Delaware Festival Commemorating the First Finnish Settlers of the Delaware River Valley in 1638. Historical Program. June 18th and 19th, 1938 at the Historic Fair Grounds, Brooklyn – Connecticut.* [s.a.] [1938]; "Hyvin onnistunut ja yleisörikas uudisraivaajien 2-päiväinen muistojuhla Brooklynissa, Conn." *New Yorkin Uutiset*, June 21, 1938; B.L.: "Valtavat Delaware-juhlat Brooklynissa, Conn." *Minnesotan Uutiset*, June 25, 1938.