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In January of 1928, Ernst Correll, a German sociologist, recent immigrant, and collaborator with Harold S. Bender in the early years of this journal, published the "The Value of Family History for Mennonite History," the first article in a three-part series. Drawing on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century archival sources related to the Nafziger family, Correll defended genealogical research as having value that went far beyond mere family pride. "Mennonite families," Correll wrote, "were the crux and core of the history of the Mennonite Church." "Described on a documentary basis," he continued, "family histories . . . present nothing less than landmarks in the history of the Mennonite people in general. . . . Mennonite history would gain a good deal if such research was taken up systematically."

In the years since then, the production of Mennonite genealogies and family histories has expanded exponentially, second only to cookbooks or, possibly, Amish-themed romance novels. Yet, as **Benjamin Goossen** argues in the opening essay in this issue of *MQR*, Mennonite interest in genealogy has a complex history, particularly in light of its dubious link to ethnicity and racial identity in Nazi Germany. It was no accident, argues Goossen, that the growing interest in Mennonite genealogy in Germany paralleled the rise of Aryan claims to racial supremacy. In the early 1940s, Mennonites—especially those who had preserved a distinct cultural identity as "folk Germans" (*Volksdeutsche*) in south Russia—became exemplary National Socialists, a perfect fusion of racial purity and ethnic homogeneity. Indeed, for many German Mennonites, genealogy provided safety and status amid the systematic violence of the Third Reich. But the story became even more complex in 1947 when Mennonite Central Committee appealed to very similar racialized arguments, this time to insist that these same Mennonites were not of German but of *Dutch* ancestry. The (partially true) argument was effective, not least because it enabled thousands of German-speaking Russian Mennonites to flee to South America and Canada, thereby escaping repatriation to the gulags of the Soviet Union. But the strategy also covered up Mennonite complicity with National Socialism and allowed some church members to avoid trial as Nazi war criminals. And, not least, it helped to reinforce racialized understandings of Mennonite identity, supported by genealogical studies, that have now become embedded in contemporary notions of "ethnic Mennonites."

Philipp Gollner, a Ph.D. student at the University of Notre Dame, raises similarly complex questions about Mennonite racial identity in the U.S. in the twentieth century. Race, Gollner argues, has less to do with skin

color than with culturally contingent perceptions. Like most immigrants to the U.S. in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mennonites did not arrive as culturally-privileged white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Instead, Mennonites became "white" only through a process of cultural assimilation, marked especially by their eagerness to become relevant, socially-engaged, progressive activists who renounced their sectarian past and ethnic tribalism. According to Gollner, the emergence of the Chicago Home Mission during the 1890s marked a crucial step in this transformation. In their earnest efforts to provide social and spiritual services to newly-arrived immigrants—thereby joining with the progressive cause of "improving the world"—Mennonites claimed a new status as white Protestants, including the racial privileges that accompanied that identity.

In a recent speech presented as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day commemorations at Goshen College, **Sofia Samatar**, a professor of English and a prize-winning novelist, addressed contemporary realities of racism. Taking as her starting point several recent incidents of police violence against African-Americans, Samatar reflects on the brutal facts of racism today and, more broadly, on the power of art and imagination to create the possibility of "living otherwise." Though Samatar's reflections mark a departure from our usual genre, her words aptly engage the themes raised by Goossen and Gollner.

Finally, we conclude this issue with an essay by **Devin Manzullo-Thomas**, a Ph.D. student in American history at Temple University, that traces the path by which leaders and laypeople in the Brethren in Christ Church both constructed and adopted an evangelical identity during the second half of the twentieth century. In the late 1940s, Brethren in Christ leaders consciously engaged with the evangelical movement as a means of drawing the group out of its ethnic isolation and entering the American mainstream. In contrast to Gollner, however, Manzullo-Thomas tells this story of acculturation as a moment of renewal rather than declension. Indeed, he argues that the Brethren in Christ creatively reframed traditional Anabaptist values of nonresistance, simplicity, and humility in an evangelical key and even sought to promote these distinctive motifs in evangelical circles. It would be fascinating to have Gollner and Manzullo-Thomas critique each other's essays.

Careful readers will note that the three featured essays in this issue were all written by doctoral students. It is always a delight to introduce *MQR* readers to promising young scholars; their contributions suggest a bright future for Anabaptist-Mennonite studies.

– John D. Roth, editor