

Ulrike Wiethaus, Wake Forest University

*Citizens of the World? The Moravian Mission to the Cherokee in the Early Nineteenth Century as Cosmopolitan Hub and Politico-Theological Crossways*

Geographically located at the periphery of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church yet close to the center of the Cherokee nation and directly adjacent to a major federal road, the Moravian mission station in Cherokee country grew into a cosmopolitan hub within a few years of its founding.

The limitations of site-specific cosmopolitan values and practices become visible, however, as exclusivist and parochial practices and ideologies encroach onto the pluralist hub to assert White supremacy and US expansionism. Under relentless pressure, cosmopolitan networks fractured and gave way to gendered hierarchical and ethnocentric social formations based on Othering.

While professing the brotherhood and sisterhood of all peoples in Christ, Moravian missionaries to the Cherokee such as John Gambold began to embrace a biblically argued exclusionary race theory centering on Genesis 9, 20-27 (the so-called Curse of Ham) and 2 Kings 17:6 (the origin of the Ten Lost Tribes myth).

Cherokee and African descent interlocutors actively engaged in and reflected on biblically argued missionary theological pronouncements undermining cosmopolitanism. Considering the existential threats to Cherokee sovereignty and the devastation of enslavement, doing theology from a Black and Indigenous perspective carried an unprecedented historical weight.