University Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward
Meeting Agenda and Approved Minutes
Virtual Meeting – streamed on HRWF YouTube Channel

Thursday, September 10, 2020

3:30-3:40PM Call to Order
• Welcome
• Roll Call
• Approval of Minutes, July 10 Meeting

Jim Leloudis & Pat Parker, Co-Chairs

3:40-4:30PM Update on Removal of Names and Presentations on Specific Sites
• Presentation on Thomas Ruffin Jr. (Amendment to original dossier, July 10 Full Commission Mtg.)
  Roll Call vote to submit recommendation for removal of name to Chancellor Guskiewicz

• Presentation on Robert Hall Bingham

• Presentation & Commission Discussion, Barbee Cemetery in Meadowmont
  Collaboration with Kenan-Flagler Business School on historical marker development, public engagement and memorialization

Jim Leloudis & Pat Parker, Co-Chairs

4:30PM-4:55PM Subcommittee Reports
• Archives, History, Research, and Curation
• Curriculum Development and Teaching
• Engagement, Ethics, and Reckoning

Various Commission Members

4:55-5:00PM Next Steps

Led by Co-Chairs

5:00PM Adjourn
Commission on History, Race, and A Way Forward (September 10, 2020)
Approved Minutes

Present:  Commission Members: Jim Leloudis, Patricia Parker, Josmell Perez, Larry Chavis, Graham Watkins, Seth Kotch, Kenneth Janken, Nicholas Graham, Danita Mason-Hogans, Ronald Harris, Dawna Jones, Delores Bailey, Danita Horton, Amy Locklear-Hertel

I. Welcome and Introduction

Commission Co-Chair Patricia Parker welcomed Commission members to the meeting and completed the roll call.
Minutes. Minutes of the July 10th meeting were approved at 3:34 PM.

II. Update on Removal of Names and Presentations on Specific Sites

Co-Chair Jim Leloudis discussed the process for removal of the names from the landscape as discussed with Chancellor Guskiewicz.
- Chancellor refers request to the Commission on History, Race and a Way Forward to evaluate the request
- Commission makes formal recommendation back to the Chancellor on how to proceed with the request
- If the request is recommended by the Commission to move forward, the request goes to a pan-University committee which makes a recommendation to the Chancellor
- Chancellor then decides whether to send the recommendation forward to the Board of Trustees

Co-Chair Leloudis presented the revised Thomas Ruffin Jr. dossier and Ruffin Jr.'s involvement in the perpetuation of racial violence. Dawna Jones made a motion to approve this dossier and make a recommendation to the Chancellor for the removal of this name from Ruffin Residence Hall. This motion was seconded by Seth Kotch. Kenneth Janken called the question and Co-Chairs Jim Leloudis and Patricia Parker completed a roll-call voice vote. The motion to recommend to the Chancellor to remove the name of Thomas Ruffin Jr. from Ruffin Residence Hall was approved.

Co-Chair Leloudis discussed the letter and formal request from Emily Bingham regarding the removal of the name of Robert Hall Bingham. Leloudis suggested a discussion of the dossier and completion of an email vote due to new evidence coming to light which confirmed Bingham’s involvement in the Ku Klux Klan as not only a member but an organizer. Discussion arose from commission members regarding the delay in submission of this proposal, the history of names added to buildings during the University’s early history, appreciation for Emily Bingham’s efforts to address this history, and renaming buildings.

Dawna Jones moved to submit the dossier in support of a recommendation to remove Bingham’s name with the knowledge that the dossier will be updated with the new information received by Co-Chair Leloudis. Danita Mason-Hogans seconded the motion. Co-Chair Parker re-stated the motion and a unanimous vote carried the motion
Co-Chair Leloudis mentioned a new Commission website and funding for a research assistant who will work with Nicholas Graham to digitize research materials. Co-Chair Parker expressed her gratitude for the University libraries’ partnership in the Commission’s scholarly work. Nicholas Graham discussed that the library has engaged in scholarly work regarding the University’s history for a while and expressed their eagerness to continue doing this work and working with the Commission.

Co-Chair Leloudis discussed the Barbee Cemetery which is one of the known University owned cemeteries that contains the graves of enslaved people. He mentioned that conversations are ongoing with the Kenan-Flagler Business School and University Facilities regarding working toward replacing the signage at the Barbee Cemetery to tell a fuller and richer story. Leloudis also mentioned an interest in bringing in Professor Brandon Bayne who has done research on the Barbee Family. Danita Mason-Hogans engaged the Commission in discussion about ideas regarding honoring these enslaved peoples and connecting with their descendants.

III. Subcommittee Reports

Larry Chavis led the subcommittee review for the Curriculum, Development and Teaching subcommittee. He discussed the following items that are being addressed by the committee:

- Review of the Chancellor’s charge
- Identification of two main areas of focus that are consistent with the Chancellor’s charge to the commission and aligned with the truth, racial healing and transformation framework
  - Developing tools for critical thinking, teaching and learning about race
  - Teaching and providing access to the hidden or erased histories discovered through the commission’s work
- Engaging with the other sub-committees and new avenues for community engagement
- Action Items:
  - Identifying overlaps between the work of the Commission and the new curriculum
  - Hearing perspectives from faculty, staff, and students about how they have learned about UNC’s history
  - Researching how other institutions including HBCUs are teaching the history of their respective institutions

Dawna Jones led the subcommittee review for the Engagement, Ethics and Reckoning subcommittee. She discussed the following items that are being addressed by the committee:

- Creating a plan for community engagement that cultivates a culture of remembrance
- Exploring Ella Baker’s philosophy of community-based leadership which could be used as a model for engagement
- Convening a series of community conversations with some key stakeholders including but not limited to some unity groups, faculty, staff, clerical, housekeeping, groundskeeping, students and alumni

Co-Chair Leloudis opened up a space for the discussion of new business. Ronald Harris mentioned an online exhibit (https://www.bullcity150.org/) that serves as a model for a digital
platform to present the Commission’s research and engage the community in the telling of this narrative.

Kenneth Janken returned to an earlier comment about community members who might disapprove of the Commission’s work. Co-Chairs Leloudis and Parker discussed how transformative education can be and the fact that the community is interested in this information. Delores Bailey reminded the Commission of the importance of staying aware of the fact that there still are people who aren’t in favor of the work of the Commission. Co-Chair Leloudis offered a reading suggestion to the Commission that could elucidate strategies for the Commission’s work. Graham Watkins brought up the Hamilton request and Leloudis and Nicholas Graham provided updates.

IV.     Concluding

Co-Chair Parker recognized that Amy Locklear Hertel joined and thanked Anna Rose Medley and Miriam Chisholm for their support for the Commission. Hertel remarked on the wonderful work coming up for the Commission. Co-Chair Leloudis thanked Hertel for her work.

Meeting adjourned at 4:56 pm

Attachments:   Meeting Presentation/PowerPoint, 09.10.2020
                Dossier on Thomas Ruffin Jr.
                Dossier on Robert Hall Bingham
I. Update on Removal of Names and Presentations on Specific Sites
   i. Presentation on Thomas Ruffin Jr.
      Amendment to original dossier, July 10 Full Commission Mtg.
      ➢ Roll Call vote, recommendation to Chancellor Guskiewicz
   ii. Presentation on Robert Hall Bingham
   iii. Presentation & Commission Discussion, Barbee Cemetery in Meadowmont
      Collaboration with Kenan Flagler Business School on historical marker development, public engagement and memorialization

II. Reports from Subcommittees
   i. Archives, History, Research, and Curation – Jim Leloudis
   ii. Engagement, Ethics, and Reckoning – Dawna Jones
   iii. Curriculum Development and Teaching – Larry Chavis
FOR REMOVAL OF NAMES FROM THE LANDSCAPE

- Request for name removal is submitted to the Chancellor

- Chancellor asks the Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward to make a recommendation from the submitted request
  - Commission completes an evaluation of the request including, but not limited to, production of a dossier and discussion at a full Commission meeting
  - Final proposal brought before the Commission for discussion and vote
  - Following vote, recommendation sent back to the Chancellor

- Committee (per BOT policy) created by the Chancellor will evaluate proposals for removal and make a final recommendation to the Chancellor.
Thomas Ruffin Jr.:
- In a purposefully public act, advocated amnesty for the Klansmen who murdered Black Republican leader Wyatt Outlaw in Alamance County, February 1870
- In doing so, declared his allegiance to white supremacy, even when it was enforced by murder and other terrorist acts
- Urged pardon and forgiveness for vigilante violence, despite his sworn duty as an attorney to serve as an officer of the court and guardian of the law
- At no time in his later life indicated a change of heart

*NOTE – THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES VOTED ON JULY 29, 2020 TO REMOVE THE ELDER RUFFIN’S NAME FROM RUFFIN RESIDENCE HALL.*
ROBERT HALL BINGHAM
THE BOT NAMED THIS BUILDING IN 1929 TO HONOR BINGHAM, CLASS OF 1857

• Lobbied for increased public investments in education at all levels and played a significant supporting role in elevating UNC’s stature in the early twentieth century
• Promoted racial Anglo-Saxonism, a blood-and soil strain of white supremacist ideology
• Educated generations of white men to celebrate racist violence as a civilizing force and instrument of order – social, economic, and political – both at home and on a global scale
BARBEE CEMETERY

• Barbee family donated part of the land on which the university was sited
• An archeological study found 120 graves
• We can be reasonably certain that a number of enslaved people are buried there
• Kenan-Flagler Business School is prepared to play a leadership role in marking and contextualizing the site appropriately

Barbee Cemetery located near the DuBose House in Meadowmont
A Preliminary Archeological Survey and Assessment of the Meadowmont Property, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

By I. Randolph Daniel, Jr.

Technical Report 23
Research Laboratories of Anthropology
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
May 1996

Figure 2. Barbee cemetery.
Thomas Ruffin Jr. (1824 – 1889)

This document supplements supporting materials that accompanied the July 10, 2020, recommendation from the Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward that the names of Thomas Ruffin and Thomas Ruffin Jr. be removed from Ruffin Residence Hall. It reflects the discovery of new historical evidence in the time since that submission.

Thomas Ruffin Jr.:

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As noted in the commission’s prior report, Thomas Ruffin Jr. was the son of Thomas Ruffin, Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court from 1833 to 1852, and later from 1858 to 1859. The younger Ruffin graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1844; was a one-term member of the North Carolina House of Commons (1850-1851); fought for the Confederacy as a colonel in the North Carolina infantry; served as a Confederate military judge and, after the Civil War, as a state solicitor; and from 1881 to 1883 sat on the state supreme court as an associate justice. The Board of Trustees named Ruffin Residence Hall for him and for his father in 1922.

Ruffin Jr.’s peers regarded him as a capable and accomplished attorney, but he otherwise left no distinctive mark on his profession. One biographer – a contemporary and fellow Confederate veteran – noted that he was often “compared favorably with his father, the great chief justice . . . but was on the bench too short a time” to distinguish himself “as a writer of jurisprudence.”

Ruffin Jr. had no record of service to the University of North Carolina. He appears only occasionally in Kemp P. Battle’s exhaustive history of the institution: as a graduate in the bottom rank of his class, as a lawyer who helped to convict and impose a death sentence on a group of Black men and a white accomplice who were charged with burglary in Chapel Hill, and as the recipient of an honorary degree in 1881, the year of his appointment to the state supreme court. Of the nine other individuals for whom campus buildings were named in 1922, only two had not served as either a university trustee or member of the faculty: Bryan Grimes, class of 1848 and Major-General in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, and Willie Preston Mangum, a non-graduating member of the class of 1859 killed at the first Battle of Manassas, the only son of Willie Person Mangum, who served for forty-three years as a trustee.

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and represented North Carolina as both a U.S. Senator and member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Though the trustees left no detailed account of their reasons for naming a building for the Ruffins, it seems safe to assume that the primary intent was to celebrate the father’s reputation, burnished by the accomplishments of his son.²

Ruffin Jr. left behind no significant collection of personal or professional papers, and because he lived little of his life as a public figure, there are few clues that offer more than general insight into his thinking about Emancipation, Black citizenship, and post-Civil War efforts by men of his class to restore white rule. But one incident does stand out. It is rooted in the Ku Klux Klan’s campaign of terror, which between 1868 and 1870 was most intense in Caswell County and in neighboring Alamance County, where Ruffin Jr. lived until the outbreak of violence. Both counties were sites of political assassination.

On February 26, 1870, a group of hooded nightriders lynched Wyatt Outlaw, a prominent Black official in Graham, the seat of Alamance County. Outlaw was a local leader of the Republican Party, which represented an alliance of Blacks, most of them recently emancipated from slavery, and dissenting whites, many of whom had been Union sympathizers during the Civil War. Both groups were committed to building a multiracial democracy from the ashes of the Confederacy. Mike Scott, a North Carolina attorney, told the story of Outlaw’s life and horrific death in a recent open letter to county commissioners who have pledged to defend the Alamance Confederate monument against calls for its removal. The monument stands at the unmarked site of Outlaw’s murder. Scott’s account is worthy of quotation at length.³

Wyatt Outlaw was the child of a slave and a slave owner. In the five years between his Union Army service and his murder, he became a small business owner, founding

² Kemp P. Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, vol. 1 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1907), 485, 812, and vol. 2 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1912), 150-51, 238; Minutes, June 13, 1922, oversize volume 12, Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina Records, 1789-1932, #40001, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The trustees named Mangum Hall for Willie Person Mangum, Willie Preston Mangum, and Rev. Adolphus Williamson Mangum (Willie Person’s second cousin). The naming citation in the trustees’ minutes describes Willie Preston Mangum incorrectly as a member of the class of 1860. He, in fact, matriculated with the class of 1859. See Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, vol. 1, 651, 812.

church trustee, school builder, community leader, police officer, and commissioner for the Town of Graham who “stood at the head of a political organization of hundreds of assertive and well-organized [Black] men with resources [who] stood poised to directly influence municipal and county politics in Alamance County.” A Klansman testified that “Outlaw was hung because he was a politician. He had been appointed commissioner by [Republican] Gov. [William] Holden. He had been a leader of the negroes, and had been elected once. There was no other crime alleged.”

Outlaw was a widower and lived with his mother and sons on the ground floor of his woodworking shop just north of Courthouse Square, where the First Baptist Church of Graham stands today. He was asleep in his home on a Saturday night . . . when twenty Klansmen broke down his door carrying pistols, swords, and torches. They gave Outlaw only enough time to put on pants before forcing him outside, his young boys screaming, men stomping the head and breast of his seventy-three-year-old mother while threatening to shoot her, decapitate her, and burn down the house. As many as a hundred men in hoods surrounded Outlaw in the street. His mother later testified that they were shouting “like geese” and carrying so many torches that “it was all bright” at midnight.

The Klan marched Outlaw four hundred yards from his home to an elm tree next to the old County Courthouse, where they tied a bed cord to a branch pointing to the courthouse door. Some claim the men sliced Outlaw’s mouth at the corners. They pinned a

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sign to his body for those who would pass it Sunday morning: “Beware ye guilty, both white and black.” Outlaw’s corpse was still hanging two and a half feet from the ground at 11:00 a.m. People feared the Klan’s punishment if they cut it down.6

Three months later, on May 21, Klansmen in nearby Caswell County carried out a similar assassination. Their victim was John Walter Stephens, a white Republican state senator. Stephens had been observing a Democratic Party meeting at the county courthouse. Frank Wiley, a former sheriff whom Stephens had been urging to defect and become a Republican, lured him into the building’s basement. There, a group of Klansmen stabbed Stephens to death and left his body atop a pile of firewood. The details of the murder and names of the conspirators came to light only in 1935, when state officials made public a sealed confession by former Confederate army captain John Lea.7

In response to these outrages, Governor Holden declared martial law in Alamance and Caswell Counties and mobilized the state militia under the command of George W. Kirk, a former Union cavalry officer, to suppress the Klan. Kirk and his troops arrested more than one hundred Klansmen, but when federal officials withdrew their support, most of the prisoners were released. In the 1870 election, white supremacist Democrats vilified Holden as a tyrant intent of establishing Black rule, used “terror and coercion” to suppress the Republican vote, and won control of the state legislature. Then, in early 1871, they impeached Holden and removed him from office. But in Alamance County, a superior court judge, determined that Wyatt Outlaw’s murderers not go unpunished, secured grand jury indictments of eighteen Klansmen. They were never brought to trial. In 1873, state lawmakers approved a bill that granted amnesty for criminal acts committed by members of secret societies and political organizations during the time of the Klan insurgency, with exceptions for “rape, deliberate and willful murder, arson, and burglary.” The law made specific reference to the “White Brotherhood, Invisible Empire, and Ku Klux Klan.” A year later, in a second amnesty bill, lawmakers lifted the exceptions for burglary, arson, and – most significantly – murder.8

6 Trial of William W. Holden, 1133, 1187; Nelson, Iron Confederacies, 113; Report on the Alleged Outrages in the Southern States, CXII, 6, 32; U.S. Army Lieutenant Paul Hambrick reported that on “the morning after [Outlaw’s] murder (Sunday) his body was cut down by Sheriff Murray, taken to the court-house for inquest, and while there, in presence of this officer, indignities were offered the dead man by parties proffering the dead body a cigar.” Sherriff Murray was a member of the Klan and made no attempt to find Outlaw’s killers. See Mark L. Bradley, Bluecoats and Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), chap. 9.


Ruffin Jr. played a prominent role in advancing the 1874 amnesty law. In December 1873, he helped to orchestrate a chain of correspondence that was published in Democratic newspapers statewide. Editors urged “favorable consideration” of the letters by local authorities and, most especially, the state legislature in Raleigh. In his own missive, Ruffin argued that “prosecutions now pending . . . against parties for acts committed during the Ku Klux excitement should be stopped.” He noted that he had been “for a long time a neighbor and friend” of the indicted Klansmen but claimed not to be swayed by that familiarity. “My solemn conviction,” he declared, “is that the humane policy of putting an end to all prosecutions . . . will have the effect, not only to quiet the public mind, but to make good, law-abiding citizens of the parties themselves, all of whom are young men, and may therefore be expected, according to the course of nature, to have many years to spend either conducing to the public good or wasting them as fugitives from our State.” James E. Boyd, a former Klansman and Graham attorney, concurred. He noted in his letter that “the utmost quietness and peace” had settled upon Alamance County since the 1870 troubles, and he advised the victims of Klan violence to abandon their demands for justice and “Let the dead past bury its dead” (emphasis in the original). The message from Ruffin and Boyd – that a settlement on white men’s terms offered the only path to “peace and good order” – could not have been less humane or more at odds with principles of democratic governance and constitutional guarantees of equal citizenship and equal protection of the laws. Even so, Democratic legislators enshrined it in the amnesty bills.9

In this purposefully public act, Thomas Ruffin Jr. declared his allegiance to white supremacy, even when it was enforced by murder and other terrorist acts. This he did on the strength of his family name and despite his sworn duty as an attorney to serve as an officer of the court and guardian of the law. At no time in his later life did Ruffin Jr. indicate a change of heart.

UNC Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward – July 30, 2020

Bingham Hall

The Board of Trustees named this building in 1929 to honor Robert Hall Bingham, who graduated from UNC in 1857. The building originally housed the university’s School of Commerce and was later home to the Department of English and the Department of Speech (now Communication).

Bingham:

- Lobbied for increased public investments in education and played a significant supporting role in elevating UNC’s stature in the early twentieth century
- Promoted racial Anglo-Saxonism, a blood-and-soil strain of white supremacist ideology
- Educated generations of white men to celebrate racist violence as a civilizing force and instrument of order – social, economic, and political – both at home and on a global scale

Robert Hall Bingham was born in Hillsborough in 1838, the fourth child of William J. and Elizabeth N. Bingham. He graduated from UNC with first honors in 1857, served as a captain in the Confederate army, and for nearly a year was held as a military prisoner by United States forces. After the Civil War, Bingham made a distinguished career as an educator. He taught at the private academy for boys that his grandfather had founded in 1793, took the helm as its headmaster in 1873, reformed its military curriculum, and in 1891 moved what was by then known as the Bingham School to Asheville, where it remained in operation until shortly after his death in 1927.

The school was widely admired as one of the best of its kind in the South. That reputation gave Bingham standing to lobby, in Raleigh and in Washington, for increased expenditures on public education and establishment of both the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now North Carolina State University) and the North Carolina State Normal and Industrial School, a teachers college for white women (now the University of North Carolina at

1 Minutes, June 11, 1928, oversize volume 13, Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina Records, 1789-1932, #40001, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The minutes include no explanation of the decision to name the building for Bingham.

Greensboro). Racial concerns were never far removed from this advocacy. In 1884, for example, Bingham campaigned for federal aid to education as a matter of justice for southern whites, who after Emancipation, he said, were burdened with the responsibility of educating former slaves and their children. “We of the South,” he argued, “are paying the heaviest war tax in proportion to our means which a people ever paid, to educate the children of another race, for whose presence among us we are not responsible, who were thrust into our citizenship without our consent, and for whose education we are doing so much, that when our children cry to us for bread we have to give them a stone.”

Bingham was also a dedicated UNC alumnus. He made his most significant contribution to the university when he helped to establish the Kenan Professorship Fund. In November 1916, his son, Robert W. Bingham, a lawyer and later a newspaper publisher in Louisville, Kentucky, married Mary Lily Kenan Flagler. Mary Lily was the daughter of William Rand Kenan – an influential businessman and political figure in Wilmington, who also served as a university trustee – and the widow of Henry M. Flagler, a cofounder of the Standard Oil Company with John D. Rockefeller and, at the turn of the century, the leading developer of Florida east-coast real estate. The Binghams, father and son, encouraged Mary Lily to specify in her will that the professorship fund be endowed with a portion of the $100 million fortune she inherited from Flagler. She complied, and then died suddenly in July 1917. When a lengthy legal battle over her estate was finally resolved five years later, UNC received a windfall that would transform the institution. The Kenan fund paid an annual dividend of $75,000, a figure that in early years exceeded the value of the university’s entire faculty payroll. The money helped to elevate UNC to the upper ranks of American higher education. It “placed the university in the enviable position of being able to establish a number of distinguished professorships,” one contemporary explained, “and to compete successfully in the national market for scholars of note.”

3 Steelman, “Robert Bingham,” 158; Robert Bingham, reprint, The New South: An Address Delivered by Maj. Robert Bingham, of Bingham School, N.C., in the Interest of National Aid to Education, February 15, 1884, and July 16, 1884, 16, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. On the history and standing of the Bingham School, see also The Successful Training of Southern Youths for More than a Century, reprinted from the News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), 1905, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The newspaper’s feature story noted that the Bingham School enjoyed a reputation that was “equalled by but few institutions of learning of any grade in the United States, and approached by no other school in the South.” U.S. Army officials regarded the Bingham School “as one of the four or five military institutions of first rank in the country.” See Ashe, “Robert Bingham,” 85.

Robert the elder was a white supremacist to the core. There is good reason to believe that like his older brother, William, he belonged to the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan. William was arrested in 1870, when Governor William W. Holden mobilized the state militia under the command of George W. Kirk to suppress Klan violence in Alamance and Caswell Counties. There, nightriders had lynched Wyatt Outlaw, a Black constable and town commissioner in Graham, and assassinated white state senator John W. Stephens, an ally of local Black politicians, in the basement of the Caswell County courthouse. Robert was not among the Klansmen rounded up and jailed, but he took pride in the fact that he, too, “was hunted with blood hounds by Kirk’s raiders.” His namesake son disclosed that family lore in an admiring letter written in 1937 to Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*. The younger Bingham also shared a vividly frightful childhood story. “My earliest memory,” he recalled, “is of clutching my mother’s skirts in terror at a hooded apparition, and having my father raise his mask to relieve me. Then he went out in command of the Ku Klux in our district.”

The cruelty of white men’s determination to rule marked Robert Bingham for life. As an educator and influential public figure, he advocated the doctrine of racial Anglo-Saxonism, a blood-and-soil strain of white supremacist ideology advanced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by British and American intellectuals. It was a mythical concoction that glorified “race war” as the driving force of civilization; it excused the violent destruction of indigenous societies on a global scale and sanctified white dominion over all the peoples of the world as the dictate of Nature and the will of God.

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5 Robert W. Bingham to Margaret Mitchell, February 16, 1937, Box 18, Robert Worth Bingham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Ellis, *Robert Worth Bingham and the Southern Mystique*, 6-7. William Bingham appears in accounts of the Klan arrests that were submitted as evidence in the impeachment trial of Governor Holden. See *Trial of William W. Holden, Governor of North Carolina, Before the Senate of North Carolina, On Impeachment by the House of Representatives, for High Crimes and Misdemeanors*, vol. 1 (Raleigh: Sentinel Printing Company, 1871), 9, 584-608. See also vol. 3, 2277, 2294, 2538. Robert W. Bingham was born in 1871, a year after Governor Holden’s effort to suppress the Klan. His memory of his father in a Klansman’s hood, therefore, comes from later in the decade.

In Bingham’s time, such thinking found expression in scholarship, politics, and popular culture alike. Woodrow Wilson’s five-volume History of the American People was a publishing sensation in 1902. In its pages, Wilson—who held a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University and occupied the president’s office at Princeton—praised the Anglo-Saxon virtues of the white settler colonies that, over the course of three centuries, spread inexorably, and with deadly consequence, across the North American continent. One of his graduate school colleagues, a North Carolinian named Thomas F. Dixon Jr., lifted up the same white nationalist ideals in a series of novels—The Leopard’s Spots (1902), The Clansman (1905), and The Traitor (1907)—that celebrated Ku Klux Klan violence in the post-Civil War years. With Dixon’s assistance, movie director D.W. Griffith, turned those works into the 1915 blockbuster, “The Birth of a Nation.” Wilson, now resident in the White House, so admired the film that he had it screened for members of his cabinet. It was, he said, “like writing history with lightning.” Wilson embraced Dixon and Griffith because they championed the white supremacist values that defined his presidency as the most racially repressive since the end of Reconstruction. He had already used his executive authority to impose Jim Crow segregation on the federal bureaucracy in Washington, D.C., and in the aftermath of World War I, would promote a peace that rejected colonized people’s demands for democracy and self-determination. A century later, in June 2020, Princeton officials concluded that Wilson’s record of “racist thinking and policies” was so repugnant that his name should be removed from one of the university’s residential colleges and its acclaimed school of public and international affairs.7

Bingham laid out his own conception of racial Anglo-Saxonism most elaborately in “An Ex-Slaveholder’s View of the Negro Question in the South,”8 an essay he published in July 1900


8 On the eve of the Civil War, Robert lived with his parents, William and Elizabeth, who enslaved fourteen people: four women, four men, four girls, and two boys. See 1860 U.S. Federal Census, Slave Schedules, Orange County, North Carolina, Ancestry.com. We have a vivid account of William’s use of violence to enforce the mastery of white over Black. It comes from Elizabeth Keckley, who published her autobiography in 1868. In the late 1830s, Robert Burwell, a Presbyterian minister, moved to Hillsborough to take charge of a local church. He brought young Keckley along as a house servant. Bingham’s parents were members of Burwell’s congregation, and his father visited the parsonage often. At the request of Burwell’s wife, William set out to break Keckley’s “stubborn pride.” Keckley wrote at length about the beatings she received from Bingham, whom she described as a “cruel, hard man.” In the first instance, Bingham led her into an empty room, shut the door, “and in his blunt way remarked: ‘Lizzie, I am going to flog you . . . so take down your dress this instant.’” “Recollect,” Keckley advised her readers, “I was eighteen years of age, was a woman fully developed, and yet this man coolly bade me take down my dress. I
in the European edition of *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* and circulated widely among newspaper editors, politicians, and civic leaders across the South. With other true believers, he contended that modern white men had inherited from ancient Teutonic (German) tribes a fierce warrior spirit and passion for liberty. The tale of that heritage began with the fall of the Roman Empire. “What our race-history was in prehistoric times we can only guess at,” Bingham wrote, “but History teaches us that the Roman, who subjugated and absorbed so many other races, failed in all his attempts on the Teuton... And History [also] teaches very clearly that the race characteristics of the Angles and the Saxons are more distinct and more permanent than those of any other of [the] Teutonic tribes who overwhelmed the Roman Empire. The other Teutonic invaders of Southern and Western Europe lost their language and race identity and were themselves absorbed by their subjects.” But not the “Angles and Saxons,” who landed in the British Isles in the mid fifth century. There, they went about “exterminating the Celt.” In doing so, Bingham explained, they “changed Britain to Angle-land, and it has been England ever since.”

Over the next 1,300 years, white men soaked the soil of Britain and North America with blood as they struggled for individual liberty and self-government. The Magna Carta, the Church of England, and the Declaration of Independence – “every step towards the highest freedom was won in the best blood of our race,” Bingham wrote. And as white men carried the purported blessings of liberty around the globe, even more blood flowed. “Anglo-Americans” encountered “the Red Man,” Bingham noted, “and the Red man vanished away.” A similar fate befell the aboriginal peoples of Australia; on the Indian sub-continent, the British ruled tens of millions of dark-skinned imperial subjects; and in Cuba, Hawaii, and the Philippines, the United States asserted its dominion over the “Brown men and Yellow men” of the Caribbean and the Pacific, thousands of whom “perished under the methods of ‘benevolent assimilation’ practiced there.”

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Bingham surveyed these conquests approvingly, and declared, “We are Teutons, God’s kings of men.”

By Bingham’s account, only “the Black man” of Africa, enslaved in the American South, had escaped the misfortune of other “colored races.” There, munificent slaveholders Christianized the “savage” and “developed [him] in the arts of civilization.” But that work was soon undone. Sentimental abolitionists in the North persuaded themselves that the slave was “an Anglo-Saxon in a black skin,” Bingham declared, and on that basis drove the American republic to war with itself. Then came what he described as the “horrors of Reconstruction.” White radicals in the North and race traitors in the South granted former slaves political and social equality with men who had formerly been their masters. It was, Bingham remarked, “the first time since the beginning of time that a white race undertook to put the feet of a colored race on the necks of the men and women of their own blood and breed.”

In Bingham’s view, the consequences were dire: cut free from slavery’s discipline, Blacks retrogressed toward barbarism. “We delivered the African man over to the nation in 1865 orderly, fairly industrious, without vices, without disease, without crime,” Bingham wrote. Then, “in the hands of the nation he became disorderly, idle, vicious, diseased; three times more criminal than the native white and one and a half times more criminal that the foreign white consisting largely of the scum of Europe.” Worst of all, Bingham claimed, emancipation unleashed Black men’s bestial sexuality, resulting in a supposed epidemic of rape, which whites answered with the blood lust of lynching. That made Blacks doubly guilty, first for the crime, and second for drawing out the savage within white men, dragging them down into lawlessness and compelling them to brutalize themselves by dispensing the rough justice of the mob.

These beliefs placed Bingham squarely within the ranks of thinkers described by historian Joel Williamson as “Radical racists” – whites who were “ready for a vengeance that matched the cruelty suffered in slavery.” Radicals “offered up an immediate and great crisis, requiring quick, dramatic, and valiant action.” The effect was “electric,” Williamson observed, particularly for young men like those who were educated in the military curriculum at Bingham’s school. They grew up with tales of Confederate valor but had “no chance at war” themselves. The struggle for white supremacy relieved their longing. It offered an opportunity

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11 Bingham, “Ex-Slaveholder’s View,” 5.

12 Bingham, “Ex-Slaveholder’s View,” 5, 9; “The Horrors of Reconstruction,” News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), October 16, 1908; The Fifty Years Between 1857 and 1907, and Beyond, an Address at the University of North Carolina, June 3, 1907, on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Graduation of the Class of 1857, 7, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The commencement address was “reprinted as published” and widely distributed by the Asheville Citizen, the News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), and the Charlotte Observer. On Reconstruction, see also Response by Col. R. Bingham, at the Annual Banquet of the New York Southern Society, 10.

to join “the peerage of the courageous men” who had fought for the Confederacy and, after the war, defended the white race from beneath a Klansmen’s hood.14

Bingham hewed closely to these themes. He argued that there was but one way to address the crisis posed by the “Race Question”: white men of a “New North, New South, New East, and New West” must treat “the negro [as] a dead issue,” set aside sectional antagonism, and forge a “NEW NATIONAL AMERICA.” In this diagnosis, Black freedom was the disease, white nationalism, the cure.15

What future did this portend for Blacks, who made up a third of the South’s population? Bingham addressed that question in a speech he delivered in Chapel Hill on University Day, October 12, 1905. Newspapers described the address as “strong and vigorous,” and on the race issue, “pessimistic.” Bingham pledged that he and like-minded white men would continue their efforts to educate and uplift “the negro, as long as he submits.” But even so, the outcome was uncertain. In Bingham’s estimation, it was as likely as not that Blacks would meet the same end as “the Celt and the Red man” – in a word, “extermination.”16

Robert Bingham, who spoke from a seat of learning and addressed the world through the pages of the popular press, was no mere man of his times, nor were his words simply ugly and distasteful. On the public stage, he proclaimed the homicidal doctrine of white supremacy, and in the classrooms of his school, he planted its principles in the minds of successive generations of students who, in later life, put them into practice as jurists and lawmakers, teachers, preachers, and ordinary citizens. Bingham’s racial fantasies gave legitimacy to the regime of Jim Crow and sentenced Blacks to abject poverty, sickness, illiteracy, and the ever-present threat of violent death – all accompanied by psychological trauma on an incalculable scale. Such teachings, and such a man, despite his deep fidelity to alma mater, deserve no place of honor at a university that pledges itself to light and learning, and to the betterment of all humankind.


16 “Bold and Thoughtful Speech of Col. Bingham,” News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), October 13, 1905; “University Anniversary,” Morning Post (Raleigh, N.C.), October 13, 1905; Bingham, “Ex-Slaveholder’s View,” 7. On the necessity of black submission, see also Response by Col. R. Bingham, at the Annual Banquet of the New York Southern Society, 15. Bingham believed that through “earth-writing” at the time of creation, God had arranged mountains, oceans, and deserts to separate racial groups. Once that order had been violated, race war and the ascendency of Anglo-Saxons was inevitable. See Bingham, reprint, The New South, 5-6; Response by Col. R. Bingham, at the Annual Banquet of the New York Southern Society in the Waldorf Astoria, December 14, 1904, to the Toast, The Status of the South in the Past; the Decadence of that Status; Its Restoration (Asheville, N.C.: Pen and Plate Club, 1905), 6-11.