

## Vance Hall

In 1912, the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina named this section of a three-part dormitory building to honor Zebulon Baird Vance, who attended UNC in 1851 to read law with Judge William H. Battle. Vance served as governor during the Civil War and again in the late 1870s, the time of North Carolina's so-called redemption from Reconstruction. The other two sections were named for Kemp P. Battle, class of 1849, and J. Johnston Pettigrew, class of 1847. Battle was a signatory of North Carolina's ordinance of secession from the United States of America, and, as a leader in the university, opposed equal citizenship for Blacks. Pettigrew graduated from UNC in 1847, made his career as a lawyer and state legislator in South Carolina, rose to the rank of brigadier general in the Confederate army, and died in 1863 at the Battle of Gettysburg.<sup>1</sup>

Nine months after the dormitories opened, the university dedicated a Confederate monument opposite them in McCorkle Place.<sup>2</sup> The four structures created a Confederate memorial space at the north end of campus and stood as a statement of the university's allegiance to Confederate principles: white supremacy and Black subjugation.

Vance:

- **Enslaved Black men, women, and children**
- **Committed treason against the United States of America by his service as an officer in the Confederate army and as North Carolina's two-term Civil War governor**
- **Used his positions of influence to perpetuate and sustain systems of racial oppression – first, slavery, and then the regime of Jim Crow**
- **Espoused white supremacist principles throughout his political career and lifetime**

Zebulon Baird Vance (known as Zeb by family and friends) was born in Buncombe County in 1830, the third of eight surviving children in the household of David Vance Jr. and Margaret Mira Baird Vance. The extended family was one of the wealthiest in the region. Zeb's paternal grandfather, David Sr., was a farmer and surveyor who had served in the state legislature in 1791 when Buncombe was established. At the time, the new county encompassed

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<sup>1</sup> "Opening Session of University," *Tar Heel*, September 18, 1912; "The New Dormitories," *Alumni Review* 1 (December 1912), 55-56; minutes, January 28, 1913, oversize volume 11, Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina Records, 1789-1932, #40001, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; John G. Barrett, "Zebulon Baird Vance," in Williams S. Powel, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 6 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 85-87; W. Conrad Gass, "Kemp Plummer Battle," in William S. Powell, ed., vol. 1, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 114-15; Clyde [N.] Wilson, "James Johnston Pettigrew," in William S. Powell, ed., vol. 5, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 77-79. In 1908, the university purchased land at the northwest corner of campus, with plans to demolish the hotel that was located there and to replace it with the new residence halls. Work on the project was recorded in the Board of Trustees volume above, minutes for January 22, May 31, and October 26, 1909; February 3 and 9, 1910; February 2 and 24, and June 3, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> James Leloudis and Cecelia Moore, "Silent Sam" digital exhibit, <https://silentsam.online>.

most of western North Carolina between the state's borders with South Carolina and Tennessee. David Sr. owned nearly nine hundred acres of expropriated Cherokee land, much it acquired with warrants that North Carolina authorities, acting under a Congressional directive, granted to him and other veterans of the Revolutionary War. On the eve of his death in 1813, he also enslaved sixteen Black men, women, and children who made his fields and woodlands productive. Zeb's maternal grandfather and namesake, Zebulon Baird, was similarly situated. He was a slave owner, merchant, and land speculator who played a leading role in establishing the city of Asheville. As one of Buncombe County's most affluent and influential citizens, he won multiple elections to the state legislature between 1800 and 1822.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime around 1833, David and Mira Vance moved their family from the farm they had inherited from David Sr. to present-day Marshall, a settlement twenty-one miles north of Asheville, where they took advantage of a new economic opportunity. Work on the Buncombe Turnpike, a public road that cut across the Blue Ridge Mountains from Tennessee to South Carolina, had been completed in 1827. Soon, farmers were using the route to move large herds of animals – mostly pigs, but sometimes cattle and geese as well – to market in the burgeoning plantation districts of central South Carolina and Georgia. All along the turnpike, enterprising operators set up inns for the drovers and holding pens to feed and shelter their stock. The Vances opened one of these way stations and operated it with the forced labor of twelve slaves, most or all of whom they brought with them from their farm. The business was brisk and lucrative; David Jr. reported that in a single month, up to ninety thousand swine could move through his stock lots.<sup>4</sup>

At age thirteen, Zeb left home to enroll at Washington College, a Presbyterian school in east Tennessee, but his studies were cut short in 1844, when his father suffered a serious injury and died. Mira sold her husband's land and all but five or six of his enslaved laborers to pay off debts, and then moved her household to Asheville. There, she appears to have lived on the earnings of her children, supplemented, perhaps, by hiring out the people she held in bondage. Zeb continued his education in Asheville, and in 1851 moved to Chapel Hill, where he read law with state supreme court justice William H. Battle and cultivated the connections that would sustain a future career in politics.<sup>5</sup>

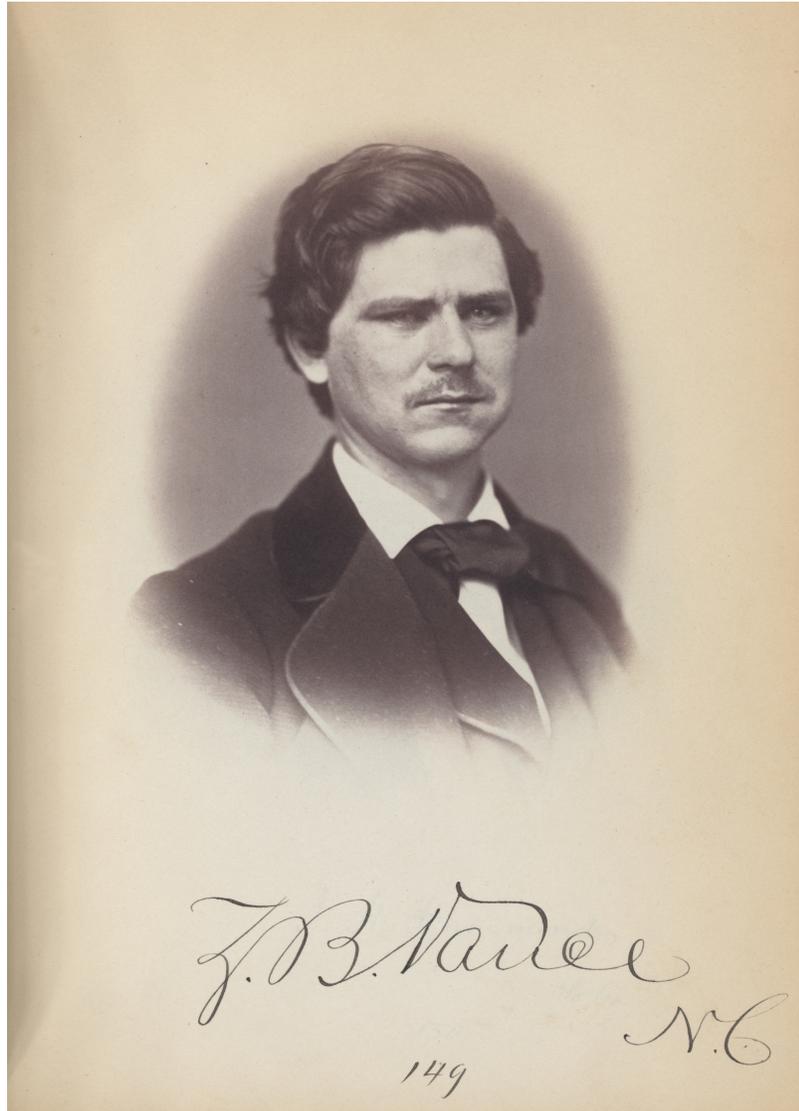
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<sup>3</sup> Barrett, "Zebulon Baird Vance"; Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7-8; Frontis W. Johnston, ed., vol. 1, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1963), xviii; David Vance, North Carolina and Tennessee, U.S., Revolutionary War Land Warrants, 1783-1843, Ancestry.com; Doris Cline Ward and Charles D. Biddix, eds., *The Heritage of Old Buncombe County*, vol. 1 (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company, 1981), 143; General Assemblies Identified with Years, Carolana.com, <https://bit.ly/2OudxmZ>; 1810 and 1820 Federal Censuses, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Ancestry.com.

<sup>4</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 7-8; Johnston, ed., vol. 1, *Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, xviii; 1830 and 1840 Federal Censuses, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Ancestry.com; F. A. Sondley, *A History of Buncombe County, North Carolina*, vol. 2 (Asheville: Advocate Printing Company, 1930), 619-21. On the Buncombe Turnpike, see Ora Blackmun, *Western North Carolina: Its Mountains and Its People to 1880* (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1977), 215-20; Mark Essig, "The Great Appalachian Hog Drives," *Atlas Obscura*, <https://bit.ly/38LAHMi>.

<sup>5</sup> Johnston, ed., vol. 1, *Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, xxi-xxvi; McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 12-13, 16-27, 31-64; Zebulon B. Vance Birthplace, North Carolina Historic Sites, <https://bit.ly/30NesBl>.

Vance was admitted to the bar in 1852 and married his first wife, Harriette Espy, the next year. They made their home in Asheville, where they enslaved two Black adults and three Black children who maintained their household. Vance won election to represent Buncombe County in the North Carolina legislature in 1854, and from 1859 to 1861, he served in the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>6</sup>



Zebulon B. Vance, 1859  
Library of Congress

In 1860, as the nation hurtled toward civil war, Congressman Vance distinguished himself as an ardent defender of racial slavery. From the floor of the House of Representatives, he challenged abolitionists and their Republican allies on three counts. First, he mocked their argument "that property in man does not and cannot exist of natural right." In point of fact,

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<sup>6</sup> Barrett, "Zebulon Baird Vance"; 1860 Federal Census, Slave Schedule, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Ancestry.com.

Vance countered, there was but "one natural law" established by "the great Author of all – the principle of *superiority* (all emphasis here and below in the original)." Accordingly, God gave mankind "dominion over the inferior animals" and likewise instituted "the dominion of man over *man*, in the relation of master and servant." Second, Vance insisted that claims to the contrary not only amounted to blasphemy but also threatened economic ruin. He argued, as have latter-day historians, that slavery was the foundation upon which capitalism in the modern Atlantic world was built. Without the benefit of forced labor, the South would not produce an abundance of cotton, Vance reasoned, and without southern cotton, factories and railroads, banks and trading houses – in England as well as America – would soon be shuttered. "We have now upwards of four million slaves, who cultivate our fields, sleep under our roofs, and are so interwoven and ramified into the fabric of our society," Vance exclaimed, "that a blow aimed at their *status* strikes with vital force the whole system." Finally, he pointed to the existential threat posed by Black freedom. Loosed from their chains, Vance claimed, Black men would demand "'white wives.'" They would pollute white blood "with the putrid stream of African barbarism," and, in the process, biologically dissolve the white race.<sup>7</sup>

"What, then, is best and right to be done with our slaves?" Vance asked. His answer seemed self-evident. "Plainly and unequivocally," he asserted, "the interest of the master, of the United States, of the world, nay, of humanity itself, says, *keep the slave in his bondage . . .* for that is his normal condition." Only in this way could the will of God be served, and the American republic kept whole.<sup>8</sup>

Soon, the tide of events swept away Vance's hopes for preserving the Union. Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election in November 1860; by early February 1861, seven southern states had seceded and established a new nation, the Confederate States of America; and in April and May, after Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter, a federal outpost in Charleston harbor, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee joined the rebellion. War was to hand, and there was no option but to choose sides. Years later, Vance recalled his decision to take up arms for the Confederacy: "I preferred to be with my own people; if we had to shed blood, I preferred to shed Northern rather than Southern blood; if we had to slay, I had rather slay strangers than my own kindred and neighbors."<sup>9</sup>

Vance enlisted at once in the Confederate army and rose quickly to the rank of colonel in the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina regiment. He enjoyed some early success as an officer, but in March 1862 his men and other Confederate troops suffered a disastrous defeat. They lost the strategically vital port of New Bern to occupation by United States forces. Soon afterward, Vance turned his attention back to politics. He put the best face on events in New Bern by playing to press coverage that cast him as a hero, singularly responsible for his regiment's safe

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<sup>7</sup> Speech by Zebulon Vance, *Congressional Globe* 36 (1860), 1159-63.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Boston Globe*, December 9, 1886, quoted in Franklin Ray Shirley, "The Rhetoric of Zebulon B. Vance: Tar Heel Spokesman" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1959), 86. On North Carolina's slow road to secession, see Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 32-36.

retreat. In 1862, Vance rode that adulation to victory as the Conservative Party's candidate for governor. Two years later, in a particularly bitter contest, he secured a second term by defeating peace candidate William W. Holden.<sup>10</sup>

In his first inaugural address, Vance spoke directly to the cause that drove the white South to war. "Fellow citizens," he exclaimed, "we have but one great and all-absorbing theme": victory over the "fierce and fanatical enemies of slavery" who threatened to rob white men of their property, deprive them of their "liberty," and reduce them to "vassalage and . . . subjugation." As historian W.E. B. Du Bois astutely observed, white men "fought to be free in order that another people should not be free."<sup>11</sup>

Vance also laid out a soaring vision of the Confederate States of America as a transcontinental slaveholding nation that would find its place among the world's great powers. "The boundaries of our young Republic, as we hope to see them established," Vance explained, "embrace the fairest and noblest portions of the temperate zone. Innumerable miles of great inland navigable waters; a mighty sweep of sea coast, indented with magnificent bays and harbors; the unrivalled production of [cotton], the leading commercial staple of the earth as a basis of public credit; a soil adapted to the successful cultivation of almost every article necessary to the comfort and convenience of man, embraced in an area of 950,000 square miles, abounding with materials for a great navy, commercial and warlike; inexhaustible mines of iron, copper, coal, and all the valuable metals; unbounded facilities for building up great manufactories on the streams of our mountains; a brave, intelligent, and virtuous population, numbering eight millions, *with near four million slaves, a source of wealth incalculable* (emphasis added); these constitute the unmistakable elements of a great nation." As historian Matthew Karp has noted, slaveholders like Vance and the men he represented "may have been pushed out of the Union by politics, but they were also pulled into the Confederacy by their ravenous ambition" to establish a "vast southern empire" that would stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific and rival those of Britain, France, and Spain. In each of these imperial projects, conquest took the form of racial domination and was "justified by [a] code of racial superiority." To quote Du Bois once more, white empire builders predicated "the rise of one race" on the "ruin" of others.<sup>12</sup>

Vance's service to the Confederacy as a military officer and high-ranking civilian official amounted to treason, which the Constitution defines as the act of "levying War against [the United States]" or giving "Aid and Comfort" to the nation's enemies. For a time, it seemed that he might be prosecuted for that crime. In mid-May 1865, a month after Confederate general Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, a company of U.S. cavalrymen troops arrested Vance

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<sup>10</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, chaps. 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> "Inaugural Address of Gov. Z. B. Vance, Delivered in Front of the Capitol, in Raleigh, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1862," Document 18, Executive and Legislative Documents (Raleigh: W. W. Holden, 1863); W. E. B. Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization," baccalaureate speech, Harvard University, June 1890, series 2, speeches, 1888-1962, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 1803-1999, MS 312, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts – Amherst.

<sup>12</sup> "Inaugural Address of Gov. Z. B. Vance"; Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 233, 253; Du Bois, "Jefferson Davis."

at his Statesville home and transported him under guard to the Old Capital Prison in Washington, D.C. But federal officials never pressed charges against Vance. In early July, President Andrew Johnson paroled him, so that he could return to North Carolina to care for his sick wife.<sup>13</sup>

The President granted Vance a full pardon in March 1867, but under the terms of legislation passed by Congress in that same month, he continued to be banned from voting and from holding political office. Vance's anger over these restrictions thrust him to the forefront of Conservatives' efforts resist the reconstruction of North Carolina on the basis of equal citizenship and political rights for Blacks they had once claimed to own as human chattel. A newspaper reporter offered a succinct statement of the ex-governor's position: "If there is any man in the state, outside of the Insane Asylum, who needed any argument to convince him that the white man must rule the country, life was too short for [Vance] to waste his breath on him."<sup>14</sup>

In 1868, Vance and fellow Conservatives waged a fierce campaign against ratification of a revised state constitution that would grant all adult men the right to vote. But their appeals to race hatred and warnings against the purported evils of "negro rule" failed to secure support from a sufficient number of whites who had crossed the race line to make common cause with Blacks in the state's newly established Republican Party. On Election Day, voters ratified the constitution and sent William Holden, Vance's old nemesis, to the governor's office. During the campaign, Holden had charged his rival with "raving like a mad wolf . . . doing Devil work; fomenting sedition, stirring up strife between the races and inciting another WAR."<sup>15</sup>

Vance would not have contested the charge. Scalded by the election outcome, he and other Conservative leaders turned to what his chief biographer, Grady McKinney, has described as "terrorist methods" of resisting racial equality. They organized and unleashed the fury of the Ku Klux Klan. "Since [Vance] was identified by friend and foe alike as the leading figure in the Conservative Party," McKinney writes, "he bears the greatest responsibility for this baneful development." There is no evidence that Vance actually joined the Klan. As a matter of political expediency, he and most other Conservative leaders avoided direct involvement in Klan activities, but there is no doubt that they encouraged racial violence and applauded its effect.<sup>16</sup>

By 1870, Klan violence had become so threatening in Orange, Alamance, and Caswell Counties that Governor Holden declared martial law and mobilized the state militia to suppress the organization. That crackdown infuriated Conservatives and gave them the issue they needed in the upcoming election. They "raise[d] a fierce howl" against Holden as a race traitor and tyrant, "the vilest man that ever held a public office." Vance's contribution to the campaign was to urge white voters in western North Carolina to rally to the rescue of their brethren in

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Constitution, Article 3, Section 3; McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, chapt. 17.

<sup>14</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 266-73; *Raleigh Sentinel*, February 7, 1868, quoted in Shirley, "Rhetoric of Zebulon B. Vance," 192.

<sup>15</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 274-75; "Vance," *Daily Standard* (Raleigh, N.C.), March 25, 1868. For an overview of the 1868 campaign, its background, and the issues at stake, see Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 110-45.

<sup>16</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 275-79.

the east who purportedly suffered under the weight of Black domination. The *Asheville News* promoted his speaking tour with enthusiasm. "If you want to see [Republicans'] hide taken off, tanned and cut into strings," the paper's editor exclaimed, "then this is your opportunity."<sup>17</sup>

On Election Day, Conservatives (who by now were also calling themselves Democrats) took control of the legislature, and in the months that followed, they acted quickly to impeach William Holden and remove him from office. The new majority also rewarded Vance for his leadership in the campaign by electing him to fill one of North Carolina's seats in the U.S. Senate (senators were not chosen by popular vote until ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1913). But there was a problem: Vance was still banned from holding office under terms of both the Military Reconstruction Act of 1867 and Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868. Republicans in Congress immediately raised objections to seating Vance, while opponents back home charged that his election had been "brought about by systemic violence and bloodshed." To make matters worse, Congress had launched an investigation of the Klan, which was likely to expose Vance's complicity in its crimes. To avert that risk, the would-be-senator issued a public statement, claiming to have "opposed the Ku Klux Klan from the start." Historians, like Vance's critics, have described that move as "disingenuous at best." They note that Vance chose his words carefully. He explained that he objected to the Klan because it was a "secret organization," but said nothing to acknowledge or condemn its atrocities. The ploy was half-way effective. It convinced a majority in Congress to lift Vance's political disability in 1872, but in the meantime, he lost the senate seat to a less tainted candidate.<sup>18</sup>

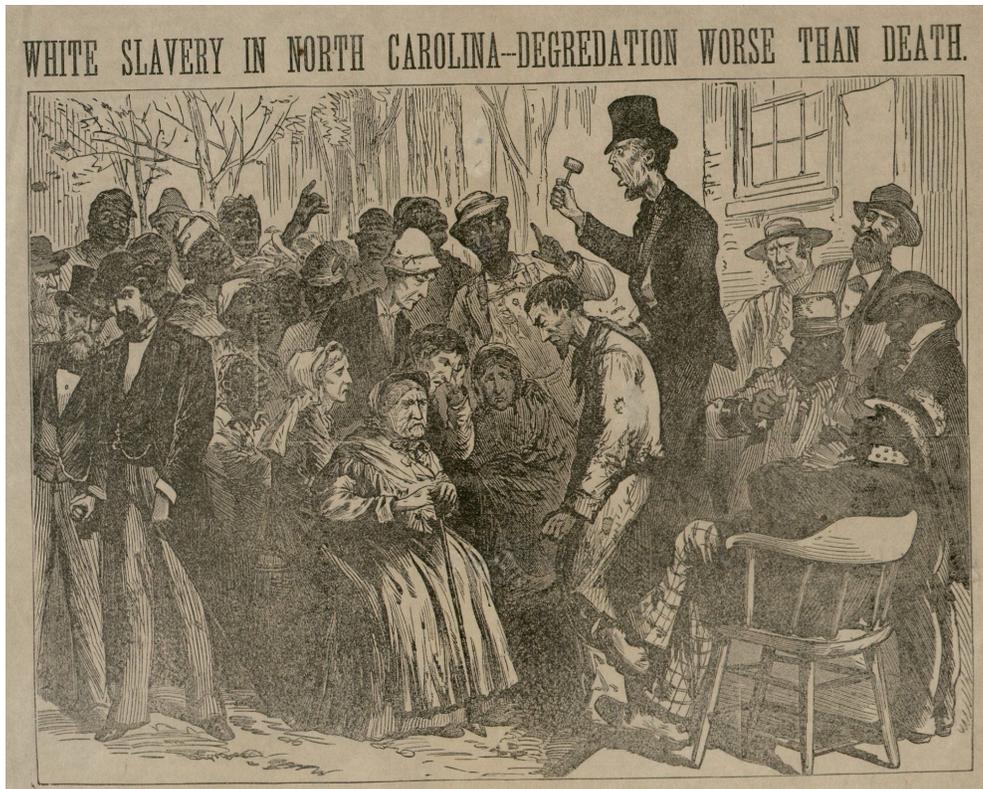
After the senate debacle, Vance stepped back from the public fray. He bided his time, cultivated his relationships with key powerbrokers, and in 1876 re-emerged as Democrats' gubernatorial nominee. Vance ran a vitriolic campaign against Republican Thomas Settle Jr., a staunch defender of Black political rights. He played to the anger of his white base, charging Settle with the "crime" of attempting "to degrade [the] good old Anglo-Saxon race beneath the African race."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 163; *Tarboro Southerner*, August 11, 1870, quoted in Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina's Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 199; McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 281; untiled notice of the *Asheville News*, *Charlotte Democrat*, July 26, 1870. On the Klan in North Carolina, see Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971), chaps. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Raper, *William W. Holden*, chapt. 9; McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, chapt. 19, quotations at 287. On the controversy over Vance's election to the Senate, see "The Election Case of Joseph C. Abbott v. Zebulon B. Vance and Matt W. Ransom of North Carolina (1872)," United States Senate, <https://bit.ly/3f8tjyv>. On the removal of Vance's disabilities, see "Removal of Disabilities," *Congressional Globe* 42 (1872), 4399; "The Late Senatorial Election," *Sentinel* (Raleigh, N.C.), December 20, 1872.

<sup>19</sup> "Vance and Settle," *Raleigh News*, July 28, and November 7, 1876. For a comprehensive account of the 1876 election, see McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, chapt. 20.



1876 Democratic Party broadside  
David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University

As proof of that charge, Vance and other Democratic leaders pointed to Black-majority counties in the eastern section of the state, where, they claimed, "gizzard footed negroes" had seized control of local government and were actively auctioning off white widows and paupers as indentured servants to Black buyers. "White Slavery in North Carolina," a Democratic handbill screamed. "Degradation Worse Than Death." Vance supporters used such trumped-up outrages to rally voters. In the run-up to Election Day, the editor of the *Raleigh News*, a fervidly Democratic paper, exhorted readers to vote their racial loyalty: "Be a white man," he exclaimed, "in deed as well as the color of your skin." Vance won the election by a margin of fifty-three to forty-seven percent of votes cast.<sup>20</sup>

That victory afforded Vance "infinite satisfaction." During his first two terms as governor, he had waged war to defend the institution of racial slavery. Now, he was returning to preside over the effective end of Reconstruction. On inauguration day, Vance described his election as "retribution" for the hardships that whites had suffered at the hands of Black Republicans, and in their coverage of the festivities, Democratic newspapers crowed of a state "redeemed" from misrule. "No event in the history of North Carolina has given her white citizens such unfeigned pleasure," exclaimed the Oxford *Torch-Light*. "It has been a long fight

<sup>20</sup> "White Men and Women, the Sick and Afflicted Paupers of Jones County Hired Out by the Negro Radical Board of County Commissioners, to Negroes," *Weekly Economist* (Elizabeth City, N.C.), August 23, 1876; "White Slavery in North Carolina," 1876 Democratic Party broadside, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

and a hard fight," added the Raleigh *Observer*, "but thank God the end has come and . . . the curtain [has fallen] upon the last scene of the last act of the great Reconstruction Drama."<sup>21</sup>

In his inaugural address, Vance assured Black North Carolinians that "their former masters [were], and naturally should be, their best friends." "We not only intend [Blacks] no wrong," he declared, "but we earnestly desire their prosperity and happiness." At the end of a decade of turmoil and terror, many Black citizens must have found a measure of hope, perhaps even comfort, in those words. But more often than not, the governor's actions belied his pronouncements. That was particularly true of his role in the westward extension of the North Carolina Railroad, the infrastructure project that was the signal achievement of his third administration. By the time that Vance took office, the line had reached Old Fort, at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. From there, it would climb more than one thousand feet to Swannanoa, and then snake on to Asheville. Merchants, investors, and timber barons in western North Carolina were eager to see the work completed. The rail line would connect them to lucrative new markets across the South and throughout the Midwest and Northeast. The project was also a priority for Vance, who saw it as an opportunity to reward allies who backed his political ambitions. He promised that the railroad would reach Asheville within two years. But there was a problem: the state's tax revenues were insufficient to finance such an ambitious undertaking. Vance's solution – announced in his inaugural address – was to tap the state's majority-Black prison population as a source of cheap, forced labor. That exploitation amounted to what historian Douglas Blackmon has called "slavery by another name."<sup>22</sup>

By July 1877, prison officials had sent more than six hundred convicts to railroad labor camps. One eyewitness reported that the mountainsides "swarmed with . . . wretched blacks in striped yellow convict garb." There, ill-fed and poorly housed, they performed back-breaking labor, often in extreme weather conditions. The work was dangerous, the risk of landslides and cave-ins, ever-present. Camp discipline was also harsh. When the pace of construction lagged in the early winter of 1877, Vance intervened personally to urge use of the whip and its frightful associations with slavery to drive work crews onward. Corporal punishment, he declared, was "absolutely essential." These conditions took a devastating toll. By 1879, when the line reached Swannanoa, 139 prisoners had died. Some were shot and killed by guards when they tried to escape; the vast majority lost their lives to accidents, sickness, and hunger. Others came home from the labor camps with lifetime disabilities. A state official reported that many convicts who worked "in the Swannanoa and other tunnels of the Western North Carolina Railway" returned

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<sup>21</sup> "Inauguration Day," *Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), January 2, 1877; "The Inauguration," *Torch-Light* (Oxford, N.C.), January 9, 1877.

<sup>22</sup> "Inauguration Day," *Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), January 2, 1877; McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 332-33; Homer S. Carson III, "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad, 1875-1892," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 11 (Spring-Fall 2005), 205-25; Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

with "shattered constitutions and their physical strength entirely gone, so that [even with] the most skillful medical treatment . . . it was impossible for them to recuperate."<sup>23</sup>



Convict laborers near Swannanoa, late 1870s  
Asheville photographer T. H. Lindsey, original in author's possession

In this "new" slavery that Vance endorsed and exploited, Black lives were even more expendable than in the old. A southern official made that point with crude frankness at a meeting of the National Prison Association. "Before the war," he said, "we owned the negroes. If a man had a good nigger, he could afford to keep him: if he was sick, get a doctor. He might even put gold plugs in his teeth. But these convicts, we don't own 'em. One dies, get another."<sup>24</sup>

Vance did not linger in the governor's office. In 1878, with two years left to serve, he resigned in order to accept the prize that he had long coveted – a seat in the United States Senate. Vance took the oath of office in March of the following year and served until his death in 1894. During all that time, as one biographer has noted, "no constructive enactment . . . was associated with his name." That record fit the purpose of Vance's political aspirations. He was known to friends and foes alike as an "opposition senator" who devoted himself to defending the interests of white men of his class who reserved for themselves the right to rule the South. Vance rose to that task for the last time on January 30, 1890. Republican President Benjamin Harrison had made election law reform an issue in his 1888 campaign, and there was talk in

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<sup>23</sup> Carson, "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad"; McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 333-37. See also Stephen R. Little, *Tunnels, Nitro, and Convicts: Building the Railroad that Couldn't be Built* (Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 2-3.

Congress of legislation that would safeguard Black voting rights in the South. Vance was determined that such a law would never see the light of day. He took command of the Senate chamber for more than an hour, exhorting his Republican colleagues to concede defeat in their long campaign to enforce Black equality. That cause had been misguided from the outset, Vance declared; it had violated the fundamental "principle of natural law, as old as man himself, that the stronger will rule without limit." The only remedy was retreat – to surrender the fate of former slaves and their descendants to "the wiser control of the whites." "My solution of the [race] problem is simply, 'Hands off,'" said Vance. "Let no man be afraid that if the Northern people cease their interference the negro will be driven to the wall. On the contrary, it is [outside] interference that causes or aggravates whatever of the trouble is inflicted upon them."<sup>25</sup>

In June, Republican Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge introduced the reform bill that Vance had anticipated. The legislation would have allowed national authorities to monitor all aspects of federal elections, from voter registration to the certification of results, effectively limiting the capacity of state officials in the South to compromise Black citizens' access to the ballot box. The measure won approval by a narrow margin in the House of Representatives but eventually died in the Senate. There, western Republicans – persuaded, in part, by the objections of Vance and other southerners – joined Democrats in a week-long filibuster that killed the bill in February 1891.<sup>26</sup>

That victory helped to clear a path for Vance's protégé, Charles Brantley Aycock, UNC class of 1877, who won election to the governor's office in 1900. He did so as a self-styled white supremacy candidate who backed an amendment to the state constitution that disenfranchised Black men by means of a literacy test and a poll tax. The amendment was the cornerstone of a regime of law and custom that would come to be known as Jim Crow. The human toll of that regime is incalculable. For more than half a century, Jim Crow denied Black North Carolinians equal justice and the fundamental rights of citizenship. The regime also burdened them with poverty, sickness, hunger, and the ever-present threat of racial violence.<sup>27</sup>

Vance did not live long enough to witness Aycock's triumph. His health declined rapidly after the removal of an eye in 1889, and he died five years later of a stroke. But the names Vance and Aycock would be spoken together for decades to come. Throughout much of the twentieth century, white politicians, civic leaders, and scholars celebrated these men as the founding fathers of a "redeemed" North Carolina that stood upon a foundation of white rule and Black subjugation. In Chapel Hill, the trustees of their alma mater lifted them up for emulation by attaching their names to campus buildings. Monuments also honor Vance and

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<sup>25</sup> Barrett, "Zebulon Baird Vance"; *Congressional Record* 21 (Part 1, March 4, 1889 - February 3, 1890), 966-71.

<sup>26</sup> "Legislative Interests," *Black Americans in Congress, The Negroes' Temporary Farewell*, History, Art, and Archives, United States House of Representatives, <https://bit.ly/3fanwsd>; McKinney, Zeb Vance, 394.

<sup>27</sup> Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), chapt. 13; Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley Wadlington, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2019), chapt. 7.

Aycock on the state capitol grounds in Raleigh, and though Aycock's statue is scheduled for removal in the near future, the two men stand together still as North Carolina heroes in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall.<sup>28</sup>

Taking the measure of these things, biographer Grady McKinney offers a frank assessment of Vance's political life and legacy. He was "an avowed racist," McKinney writes, "who firmly believed in the . . . inferiority of African Americans and never deviated from that belief." Vance lived through a time in which longstanding assumptions about race, democracy, and citizenship were sharply contested. He "had the option to adopt different attitudes and change his public stands," but unlike more principled men of his generation, "he chose not to do so." As others "tried to adjust to Emancipation and Black citizenship, [Vance] sought to limit African American access to political power. He used negative stereotypes of African Americans in political campaigns, in congressional speeches, and in his public and private writings. All of this material helped to shape the public dialogue about race relations in North Carolina to the detriment of the new Black citizens." In the end, Vance's "estimation of African Americans' potential would never change," and "his overt racism would remain a part of his public persona."<sup>29</sup>

On the basis of evidence presented in this dossier, the Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward recommends that Zebulon B. Vance's name be removed from the building to which it was attached in 1912. Doing so will not erase history, as some may fear. Vance will always occupy a prominent place in the story of UNC's past; that is an indelible fact. The more important question is whether Vance should have a continuing claim on our esteem. We believe not. The values and principles that Vance espoused are antithetical to those of our *public* university, an institution that affirms the dignity of all humankind.

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On March 23, 2021, the Asheville City Council voted six-to-one to remove the Zebulon B. Vance memorial, a seventy-five-foot-tall stone obelisk, from Pack Square.<sup>30</sup> The site in downtown Asheville is believed to have served as a slave market in the early nineteenth century. The council's decision followed the recommendation of a joint Asheville-Buncombe County Vance Monument Task Force, which delivered its final report in February. The task force offered this rationale for removal:

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<sup>28</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 382, 397-405, 407-8; "Zebulon Vance Statue," <https://unc.live/3riqGww>, and "Charles Brantley Aycock Statue," <https://unc.live/31e9Jc7>, Commemorative Landscapes, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina Libraries; "Statues of Confederate Officer and a White Supremacist Represent N.C. in U.S. Capitol (for Now)," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), August 21, 2017; "Awaiting Billy Graham Statue, Congressman Calls for 'Prompt' Removal of Gov. Aycock Statue in U.S. Capitol," *Spectrum News*, June 19, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3lJlJukg>. Until 2011, the state Democratic Party celebrated the two governors at the Vance-Aycock Dinner, an annual gala and fundraising event. See "Dems to Drop Controversial Leaders' Names from Signature Dinner," *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 1, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, xi, 237-38, 414.

<sup>30</sup> "Asheville City Council Approves Vance Monument Removal, Visioning Process for Future of the Site," City of Asheville, <https://bit.ly/2OTBzbb>. For the history of the monument, see McKinney, *Zeb Vance*, 406-07.

- If the monument were left in place, it would "continue to serve as a symbol of white supremacy."
- If the monument were removed, it would "make way for a new, inclusive, and uplifting piece of public art created by Black artists as a gift to the Black community. This would be one small piece of [a] more comprehensive plan to move toward equity and racial justice."
- During virtual town halls, "members of the Vance family . . . expressed a desire that the monument be removed due to the damage it [had] not only caused in the Black community, but to their family as well. The Vance family expressed their solidarity with the Black community in their call for removal."

The monument was dismantled at the end of May 2021. On June 4, the North Carolina Court of Appeals ordered Buncombe County and the City of Asheville to halt the work of final removal, pending resolution of a complaint brought by the Society for the Historical Preservation of the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Troops. At the time of this writing, the court had not scheduled a date to hear the case.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Vance Monument Task Force, "Final Report, February 2021," <https://bit.ly/3d0Vo8h>; "Vance Monument Removed in Full From Asheville After Standing for More than 120 Years," WLOS 13, <https://bit.ly/2R9TVFN>; "Is It Too Late: Removal of Vance Monument Halted by N.C. Court of Appeals Decision," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 5, 2021.